

Cutting Through Time



Cressida Campbell, Margaret Preston,
and the Japanese Print

Large Print Labels

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Cutting Through Time—Cressida Campbell, Margaret Preston, and the Japanese Print

Cutting Through Time—Cressida Campbell, Margaret Preston, and the Japanese Print examines the influence of ukiyo-e (Japanese woodblock prints) on the famed contemporary Australian painter and printmaker Cressida Campbell, and on the groundbreaking modernist painter and printmaker Margaret Preston.

Preston was one of Australia's most recognised and experimental printmakers of the early twentieth century, and, like many Western artists of the era, her paintings and prints were profoundly influenced by the traditions and aesthetics of Japanese ukiyo-e woodcuts. Similarly, the exquisite painting and printmaking of Campbell reveals her fascination with the colour, patterning, and compositions of ukiyo-e, to the point that we see in her painted woodblocks and woodcut prints renditions of Japanese works from her personal, cherished collection of ukiyo-e.

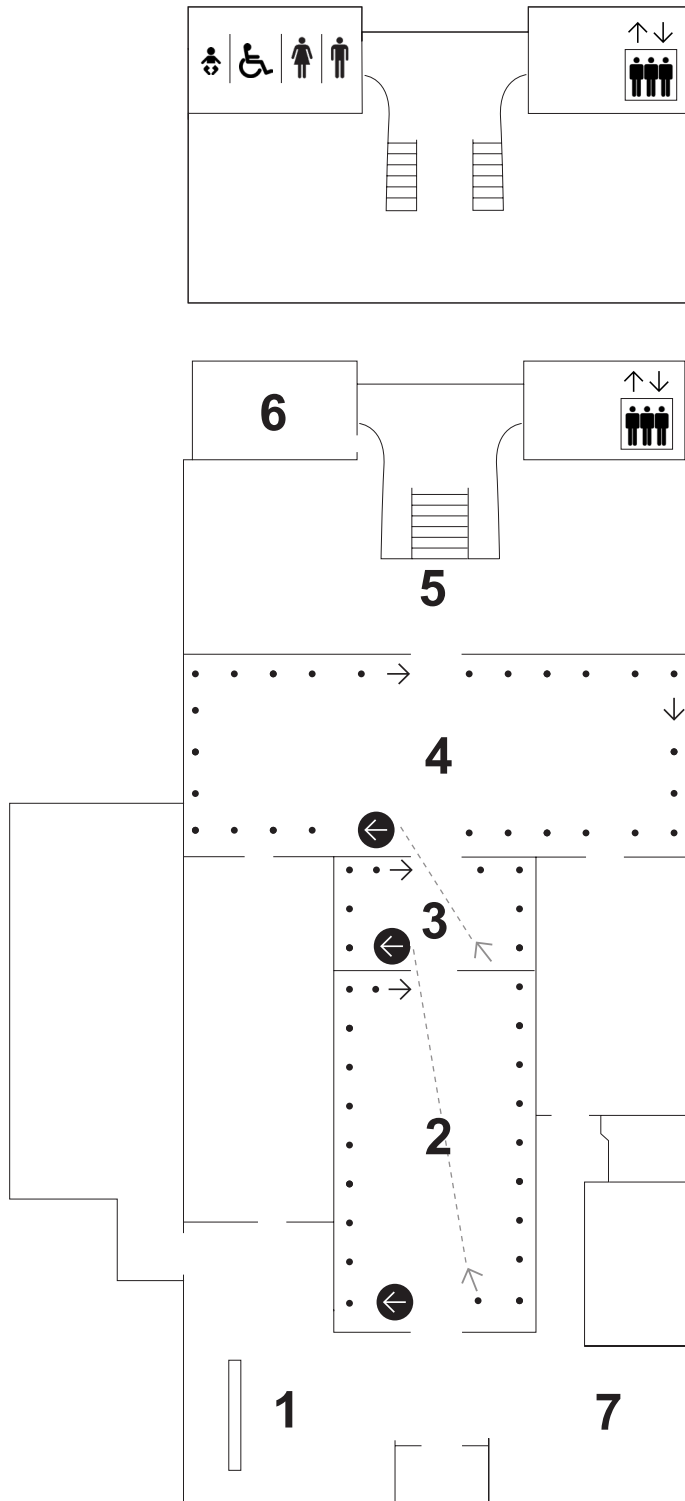
In this exhibition works by Campbell and Preston are presented in separate galleries, each of which flanks a central room displaying ukiyo-e prints by some of the most influential historical Japanese artists. Such an exhibition design asserts a centrality of historical Japanese woodcuts to the distinctly different creative practices of Campbell and Preston, but also enables us to literally cut through time

to see how each has adopted and adapted technical and compositional aspects of ukiyo-e. The richness, intriguing beauty, and diversity of ukiyo-e printmaking is but one of numerous artistic influences and cultural contexts that shapes the work of Preston and Campbell.

Spanning centuries of artistic production, the works here provide an opportunity to evaluate creatively and critically some of the connections across time between culturally and socially specific art practices. They propose thought-provoking, new interpretive frameworks through which we might consider historical and contemporary artistic production as a fascinating yet complex continuum.

Navigating the Exhibition

The large print labels correspond to paintings beginning at the left-side of each Gallery and continue clockwise around the room.



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Cressida Campbell

Cressida Campbell developed an early childhood interest in Japanese woodblock prints after seeing works by Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige. In the late 1970s as a first-year art student she created a woodcut print in 'the Japanese manner' using a separate woodblock for each colour.

In 1985 Campbell completed a printmaking workshop at the Yoshida Hanga Academy in Tokyo, learning and then quickly modifying traditional Japanese woodblock cutting and printing techniques to develop her distinct practice. Campbell incises and paints a single woodblock in layers of watercolour, and then takes from that block one single print. Both the unique print and the painted woodblock are displayed and are of equal significance.

The works in this room span four decades, dating from Campbell's early adoption of some of the compositional and technical aspects of Japanese ukiyo-e printmaking applied to domestic environments and vistas of inner-city Sydney and its Harbour; treed landscapes and close studies of native flora; still life arrangements; and painted tondi—circular portals that invite us as viewers into Campbell's own materially and aesthetically diverse domestic interior.

Campbell's personal collection of ukiyo-e includes remarkable works by Kitagawa Utamaro, Utagawa Kunisada, Hokusai and Hiroshige, among others.

We see some of these treasured historical ukiyo-e prints reproduced in her compositions and displayed in the central Gallery.

Campbell has also considered the influence of Margaret Preston on some of her subject matter. In 1980, she visited the exhibition *The Art of Margaret Preston* (at the Art Gallery of New South Wales). Many years later, she reflected on that exhibition, including Preston's:

... brilliant coloured woodcuts, which at the time were a revelation ... They were inspiring and definitely influenced my early woodcuts, in addition to the Japanese ukiyo-e prints that I was more familiar with.

The Australian plants in her images were also plants I loved, and it was exciting to see them depicted in such a dramatic way.

[*Cressida Campbell*, ex. cat., National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2022]



All works in the McPhillimy Gallery are by Cressida Campbell (Australian, born 1960).

Photograph: Warren Macris *Black room with objects* 2022, colour photograph, © Warren Macris

Geelong Gallery acknowledges the assistance of Cressida Campbell's representative galleries in securing works for exhibition (as noted in the following pages): * Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane; ** Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne

Pittosporum 1995

woodcuts, printed in watercolour (triptych)

Private collection*

Gumnuts 2008

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection*

Black kangaroo paw 2008

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection*

Eucalypt forest 2000

woodcut, printed in watercolour

Private collection*

The path with rocks 1989

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection

Pink gum blossom 2009

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection

Glebe 1985

woodblock, painted in watercolour
Collection of Bruce Goold

Breakfast at Armidale 1988

woodcuts, printed in watercolour (triptych)
Private collection**

Pyrmont 1984

woodcut, printed in watercolour
Collection of Cressida Campbell

Campbell's earliest works in the exhibition date to her formative studies of Japanese printmaking: *Pyrmont* 1984, *Glebe* 1985 and *Through the windscreen* 1986. In each of these works, the interior world is conflated with the exterior world: a concept that could be likened to a Japanese design principle in which the outside world is brought inside.

In this work, closed balcony doors frame the composition and obstruct the view from an interior room to the suburban landscape beyond. The compositional device of the 'obstructed view' is similarly employed in Torii Kiyonaga's *The third month, cherry blossom viewing at Mt Asuka* (*Sangatsu Asukayama no hanam*) 1784 (exhibited in the adjacent gallery).

Through the windscreen 1986

woodcut, printed in watercolour

Collection of Cressida Campbell

In *Through the windscreen* 1986, the vista across Sydney Harbour is tightly composed via the windscreen frame of a Volkswagen. A rear-view mirror reflects the vehicle's red interior, radically shifting our view from a distant light-industrial horizon to an abstracted close-up.

The Ebro, Gore Bay 1988

woodcut, printed in watercolour

Private collection

Gore Bay, Sydney 1992

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection**

Parsley Bay, Sydney 1992

woodcut, printed in watercolour

Private collection

Cropping and mirroring are cleverly used by Campbell to ensure compositional complexity.

Parsley Bay, Sydney 1992 evokes carefully framed Japanese ukiyo-e landscapes: a dynamic interplay between the winding path, overhanging rock face, wooden bridge, and harbour, is created within the picture's portrait format.

A similar compositional approach is evident in Margaret Preston's *Mosman Bridge* c. 1927.

Black room with yellow chrysanthemums 2022

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection, Sydney*

In *Black room with yellow chrysanthemums* 2022, a centrally placed high Chinese bar stool, vase and floral arrangement modify our view of the room's contents.

In relation to complex compositions such as this Campbell has said: 'I always think making a picture is like a scientific experiment or a recipe; you've got to keep moving things around or putting ingredients together until the eye is completely satisfied.'

Japanese print and clivias 2013

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection**

Campbell's interest in cropping and mirroring is evident in *Japanese print and clivias 2013*. Here, a long scroll-like painting is reflected in an adjacent mirror, the original image recomposed within the wooden frame.

The ukiyo-e print referred to in this work's title, is a contemporary reproduction of an historical work depicting a female Japanese abalone diver (thought to be by Katsushika Hokusai or Kitagawa Utamaro).

Gingko 2017

woodcut, printed in watercolour

Private collection, Sydney*

Bamboo with clivias 2018

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection

Courtesy of Smith & Singer Fine Art

Still life with ukiyo-e print 2008

woodcut, printed in watercolour

Private collection*

Many of the ukiyo-e prints that appear in Campbell's pictures have been acquired during her travels or at auction.

In a recent reflection on her 1985 studies in Japan she stated:

The most enthralling aspect of being in Japan was having the opportunity of seeing high-quality ukiyo-e exhibitions held on the top floors of glamorous department stores. I was also intrigued by Japanese design and elegant graphic skill across all aspects of life.

The ukiyo-e print reproduced in Campbell's work is Toshusai Sharaku's 1794 woodblock *Actor Segawa Tomisaburô II as Yadorigi, Wife of Ôgishi Kurando*, hanging alongside an ikebana style arrangement of Japanese allspice, and gum blossoms.

Journey around my room 2019

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection

Interior with Chinese lantern 2018

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection

Campbell's painted tondi let us zoom in on her collecting and cultural interests. We see walls hung salon-style with paintings, drawings, and prints; carefully arranged Japanese and Chinese ceramics; richly patterned fabrics and decorative rugs.

In their formal brilliance and conceptual ingenuity, Campbell's carved and painted woodblocks simultaneously pay homage to the creativity and breathtaking ability of artists and craftspeople of earlier times and cultures.

As Campbell has stated in relation to her tondo works: 'I find the format of a circle interesting—compositionally, and in the way it creates a voyeuristic tension when you look through it to an interior of any subject'.

Glass with bowls and magnolia 2017

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection*

Shelf still life 2012

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection

In *Shelf still life 2012* a simple wine glass overflowing with nasturtiums forms part of a still life arrangement comprising fruit and ceramic bowls and vases, with a cropped ukiyo-e print on the wall behind (a work by Utagawa Kunisada, displayed in the next room).

The nasturtium tendrils unite the composition, their vibrant forms mirrored across the table's surface.

Japanese hydrangeas 2005

woodcut, printed in watercolour

Private collection*

Rock lilies 1999

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection*

Poppies 2005

woodblock, painted in watercolour

Private collection

Mirroring is fundamental to Campbell's practice as an artist who simultaneously exhibits a unique print and the painted matrix (or block) from which that print was taken.

This duality is illustrated through *Poppies 2005*, with the display of this woodblock painted in watercolour and the subsequent unique print alongside. In this pairing the unique textural qualities of the respective formats is evident.

Poppies 2005

woodcut, printed in watercolour

From the estate of Beth Morton*

Campbell has stated:

My technique suits me as I have always painted and drawn. Using one block I don't have the restriction of registration difficulties. It allows me the freedom of painting with any number of colours but using a contemplative method in the completion of each separate step of drawing, carving, and painting.

Unlike the Japanese technique where artists print with ink, the thick watercolour paint I use creates a chalk-like fresco effect. After I have taken the print off the woodblock, I then add quite a lot of watercolour paint to its surface, depending how much I think is needed and the same goes for the woodblock.

The Japanese Print

Ukiyo-e means pictures (e) of the floating world (ukiyo).

Originally, ukiyo was a term used to convey the transient, fleeting nature of existence. In the Edo period (1603–1868) the term had another connotation, being used to refer to a prevailing attitude of living for the moment. The ‘floating world’ referred to life in urban entertainment districts that encompassed the activities of courtesans and the popular kabuki theatre. ‘Ukiyo’ also suggested being modern, affluent, chic and fashionable. Although they were officially social outcasts, the courtesans and kabuki actors we see in these prints were admired for their beauty and splendid clothes and were the trend-setters of society.

Their widespread influence in defining fashion and style was largely due to the publishing industry, which was flourishing in Japan by the end of the seventeenth century. And the newly emerging print medium—widely available to the public—had adopted the glamorous entertainers of the floating world as its most popular subjects.

The most significant artists of the era are represented in this room, and it is important to note that the works span centuries and reflect the evolution of ukiyo-e as an artform over time. Collectively they reflect some of the predominating themes and popular compositions of ukiyo-e printmaking: domestic interiors (pictures within pictures);

still life; landscapes; portraits and figure studies of kabuki actors, courtesans, and samurai. These key ukiyo-e artists were featured in many of the publications acquired by Margaret Preston and their works have been collected by Cressida Campbell.

Despite their emphasis on the fleeting moment and transience, historical ukiyo-e prints continue to inspire. The works in this exhibition illustrate a rich dialogue spanning centuries of artistic production, and the wide cultural, technical, compositional, and aesthetic reference points that artists such as Campbell and Preston have drawn from.

Utagawa KUNISADA

Japanese, 1786–1865

[Memorial print for actor Seki Sanjûrô] n.d.

colour woodblock print

Collection of Cressida Campbell

Cressida Campbell:

I bought this print in Tokyo the first time I went to Japan in 1985 to study the traditional Japanese woodblock printing technique. Kunisada often depicted actors, and men dressed as women acting in plays, however I think this man looks like a scholar.

I love the black table and the trail of smoke. I have included this image in quite a few of my works as it adds a quiet, stylish mood to a background of an interior or a still life.

Hishikawa MORONOBU

Japanese, 1625–1694

Takesai talking with servant (page from album with text) c. 1680

woodblock print

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Purchased 1992. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

In the catalogue for the 1913 exhibition *Japanese Colour Prints* at the Victoria & Albert Museum (which Margaret Preston is thought to have visited), curator Edward Strange described Hishikawa Moronobu as the ‘real founder of the Ukiyoye [sic] or Popular School of Painting in Japan’.

In her 1930 article ‘Wood-blocking as a craft’, published in *Art in Australia*, Preston similarly singled out Moronobu as the ‘great Japanese wood colour blocker’.

His subtly hand-coloured prints were prized for the quality of their line.

Utagawa HIROSHIGE

Japanese, 1797–1858

Stage 26. Nissaka c. 1850

colour woodblock print

Geelong Gallery

JH McPhillimy Bequest Fund, 1955

Utagawa HIROSHIGE

Japanese, 1797–1858

Waka Bay in Kii Province 1855

from the *Famous views of the sixty odd provinces* series

colour woodblock print

National Gallery of Victoria

Presented by Mrs J Ringland Anderson, 1972

Utagawa HIROSHIGE

Japanese, 1797–1858

Distant View of Moon Mountain from Mogami River, Dewa Province (Dewa mogamikawa gassan enbō 出羽最上川月山遠望) 1853–56

from the *Famous views of the sixty odd provinces (Rokuju yoshu meisho zue 六十余州名所図会)* series

colour woodblock print

National Gallery of Victoria

Felton Bequest, 1910

Utagawa HIROSHIGE

Japanese, 1797–1858

Kasumigaseki 1835–39

from the *Famous Places in the Eastern Capital* series

colour woodblock print

Collection of Cressida Campbell

Cressida Campbell:

I was given this triptych by artist Martin Sharp who bought it in Paris in the 1970s. I love the view looking straight up the street with the roofs creating horizontal lines and the action of the people getting on with their daily business.

During a residency at the Armidale regional gallery [NERAM], my husband Peter Crayford and I stayed in a Federation house: it had a stage-like wooden veranda with a Japanese feeling. I was inspired to do a triptych with the veranda framing the outlook (*Breakfast at Armidale* 1988).

Katsushika HOKUSAI

Japanese, 1760–1849

Poem by Tenchi Tennō c. 1835–36

from the *One hundred poems explained by the nurse* series

colour woodblock print

National Gallery of Victoria

Felton Bequest, 1909

Katsushika HOKUSAI

Japanese, 1760–1849

Peonies and butterfly c. 1832

colour woodblock print

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1996

Torii KIYONAGA

Japanese, 1752–1815

The third month, cherry blossom viewing at Mt Asuka (Sangatsu Asukayama no hanami 三月飛鳥山の花見) 1784

from the *Twelve beautiful views of the south* 美南見十二候 series

colour woodblock print

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased 1941

Through the work of artists such as Torii Kiyonaga, Kitagawa Utamaro, and Utagawa Toyokuni, Victoria & Albert Museum curator Edward Strange considered ‘the process of colour printing [to have] arrived at its greatest technical level’. In their works, he continued, ‘we find the full possibilities of line, colour, and massed black, combined with rare judgement and taste’.

Here, Kiyonaga employs the compositional device of the ‘obstructed view’: a sinuous tree trunk dominates the foreground, dividing the pictorial space to privilege Nature and heighten an element of intrigue in the narrative.

Utagawa KUNISADA

Japanese, 1786–1865

Actor with fire-fly cage c. 1848–52

colour woodblock print

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Purchased 1992. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

Utagawa KUNIYOSHI

Japanese, 1797–1861

[Samurai in coat with swallow design]

c. 1847–52

colour woodblock print

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Gift of Dr James Hayes, 2003

Utagawa KUNIYOSHI

Japanese, 1797–1861

Big house. Nice time c. 1830–42

colour woodblock print

Geelong Gallery

JH McPhillimy Bequest Fund, 1955

Toshusai SHARAKU (after)

Japanese, active 1794–95

Actor Otani Oniji as Edohei (no. 15 from a set of twenty-five reprints) 1794/1955

colour woodblock print

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Gift of Emeritus Professor Joyce Ackroyd OBE, 1990

Chokosai EISHO

Japanese, 1726–1801

Beautiful courtesan with flower fan 1790s

colour woodblock print with mica

Geelong Gallery

Gift of Sir Thomas Maltby, 1964

Kikugawa EIZAN (attributed to)

Japanese, 1787–1876

Evening snow at Hira 1814–29

from the *Fashionable eight views of Ōmi* series

colour woodblock print

National Gallery of Victoria

Felton Bequest, 1909

Utagawa KUNISADA

Japanese, 1786–1865

Life in Yoshiwara. Courtesan thinking of her love on a rainy evening c. 1825

from the *Yoshiwara Tokei Nihen Mitate Hakkei* series colour woodblock print on laid Oriental paper

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
Purchased 1971

As this work by Utagawa Kunisada and the adjacent work attributed to Kikugawa Eizan illustrate, ukiyo-e compositions often included images of paintings and prints decorating domestic settings.

This concept flows through to Margaret Preston's views on decorating the home, recorded in publications such as *Art in Australia* and *The Home*. Preston advocated the suitability of woodblock prints for the domestic setting: they were works that 'flat dwellers, could afford ... to make our homes more Australian in atmosphere.'

Similarly, Cressida Campbell's 'pictures within pictures' draw the viewer into her domestic realm.

Suzuki HARUNOBU

Japanese, c. 1725–1770

Poem by Chosui (Chōsui no shi 長水の詩) 1768

from the *Elegant versions of ink in five colours* (*Fuyo goshiki-zumi* 風流五色墨) series

colour woodblock print

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased 1945

The following description of the prints of Suzuki Harunobu by curator Edward Strange was included in the 1913 Victoria & Albert Museum catalogue:

... delicate half-tones and light colours, curiously harmonised, the strong use of masses of black, and the straight lines and right angles of domestic architecture, used cunningly to contrast with the lithe, supple bodies of the graceful figures. Colours—apple green, brick-red, vermilion, orange, light brown are of great beauty.

Utagawa TOYOKUNI

Japanese, 1769–1825

Geisha with shamisen c. 1815

colour woodblock print

Geelong Gallery

JH McPhillimy Bequest Fund, 1955

Kitagawa UTAMARO

Japanese, 1753–1806

Hiding a letter (Fumi-kakushi)

c. 1801–04

colour woodblock print

Collection of Cressida Campbell

Cressida Campbell:

Utamaro and Hokusai are my favourite ukiyo-e artists. Utamaro for his brilliant drawings of women and Hokusai for his bold, originally composed landscapes as well as his humble working figures.

I bought this in a shop in Kyoto in 2007. A print scholar and shop seller sat cross-legged in a small room on a raised wooden flat shelf covered in a Tatami mat. He brought out many ukiyo-e prints to show us. Utamaro prints are very rare: we bought this print and an image of a woman with a dish.

Kitagawa UTAMARO

Japanese, 1753–1806

[Woman with dish] c. 1801–04

colour woodblock print

Collection of Cressida Campbell

In the adjacent gallery

Kitagawa UTAMARO

Japanese, 1753–1806

Iris and aquatic candock (Kohone) c. 1800–05

Peach blossom and suisen in bucket-shaped vases c. 1800–05

Cherry blossom in a two-handled bronze vase c. 1800–05

woodblock prints

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Gift of Edmund Vardy, 2001

Margaret Preston

Margaret Preston studied printmaking in Japan in 1934, but her interest in Japanese art can be traced back to the early 1900s. While travelling overseas from 1904 to 1906 Preston saw the influence of Japanese aesthetics and Orientalism on the work of European artists including Vincent van Gogh, James McNeill Whistler, Odilon Redon and Henri Matisse among others. During her second period of travel in Europe from 1912, Preston studied Japanese ukiyo-e prints at the Musée Guimet in Paris.

Preston was in London in late 1913 and given her interest, it is likely she saw the influential exhibition *Japanese Colour Prints* at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Preston also began collecting significant publications on Japanese printmaking, and a small selection from her personal library is exhibited here.

Preston returned to Australia in 1920, and the prints completed soon after are influenced by compositional and technical elements of the ukiyo-e works she studied. In relation to these and subsequent works, she was described as having 'put Sydney's urban environment through a Japanese sieve'. In 1938 she reflected that 'a lover of art cannot do better than study Japanese woodcuts if [s]he wants to know something about design, they are famous for this quality and yet they are never "empty".'

Woodblocking was Preston's preferred printmaking technique, though as we see in this exhibition Masonite cuts and colour stencils from the late 1940s and early 1950s attest to her enduringly experimental approach to printmaking. Preston considered the woodblock a highly democratic and egalitarian medium, writing in *Art in Australia* in 1930 that:

Woodblocking is one of the easiest of all the crafts in the way of materials. Anyone can have them. A piece of wood, a knife, some ink, and a sheet of paper ... It is a comfortable kind of craft ... [and] a friendly little craft ...

Preston's woodcut prints are carefully delineated designs alive with energy and dynamism. Her sense of the 'ease' with which a woodcut print could be made is powerfully counterpointed by the long apprenticeship and intensive training undertaken by Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock cutters and printmakers in their years-long mastery of their painstaking techniques and exquisite art.



All works in the Douglass Gallery are by Margaret Preston (Australian, 1875–1963), unless otherwise stated.

Principal Loan Partner: National Gallery of Australia

Image on central screen: FJ Halmarick *Margaret Preston woodblock printing in Berowra* c. 1937, copy print of a gelatin silver photograph, Margaret Preston archive, Gift of William Preston 1963, Art Gallery of New South Wales—National Art Archive, Image © Art Gallery of New South Wales

Still life and flowers 1916–19

woodcut, printed in colour in gouache in the Japanese manner, from multiple blocks; undesignated impression

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1987

This work is one of a very small number printed in, as Preston herself described, ‘the Japanese manner’ during her years abroad. It reveals her early experimentation with this method: the solid black outline, restrained colouration, flattened perspective, and vertical signature block echo particularly some elements in the hand-coloured prints by Hishikawa Moronobu who, more than a decade later, Preston was to single out as the ‘great Japanese wood colour blocker’ in her 1930 article ‘Wood-blocking as a craft’, published in *Art in Australia*.

Mosman Bay 1920

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured; undesignated impression

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1987

In her 1930 *Art in Australia* article ‘Wood-blocking as a craft’, Preston outlined the process for colour printing using a key block with registration marks: ‘the way the Japanese did it, is to cut a cross at the top and at the bottom of the key block’.

In prints completed soon after she returned to Australia and settled in the harbour-side suburb of Mosman with husband Bill Preston, such as *Mosman Bay* 1920 and *The boat, Sydney Harbour* c. 1920, small black crosses are visible in the upper and lower centre of the compositions.

These registration marks suggest the prints were intended to be multiple block colour works, however they were hand-coloured by Preston: the primary technique for works in her extensive colour woodblock oeuvre.

The boat, Sydney Harbour c. 1920

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured;
undesigned impression

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 2004

Preston has been described as having 'put Sydney's urban environment through a Japanese sieve'. *The boat, Sydney Harbour* c. 1920 exemplifies her absorption of ukiyo-e compositions.

The Harbour's zig-zag configuration leading the eye towards a mountain-like cloud formation, the representation of rocky outcrops, sailing vessels, and flowing water, and the colour palette echo an earlier work by Utagawa Hiroshige, *Distant view of Moon Mountain from Mogami River, Dewa Province (Dewa mogamikawa gassan enbō)* 1853–56 (exhibited in the adjacent gallery).

Circular Quay 1920

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured; undesigned impression

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 2004

Red cross fete, Mosman c. 1920

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured;
undesigned impression

National Gallery of Australia
Purchased 1978

Black swans, Wallis Lake, NSW 1923

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block; undesigned
impression

National Gallery of Australia
Purchased 1973

In what could be described as a form of cross-cultural reciprocity Preston also applied an Australian lens to the material culture of Japan. For example, in this work Preston takes inspiration from Japanese artist Kōyetsu's carved wood panel depicting wild geese: a seventeenth century work reproduced in her copy of Marcus B Huish's publication *Japan and its Art*, 1912.

In Preston's black and white woodblock print, Kōyetsu's wild geese are transformed into black swans of the north coast of New South Wales.

Flannel flowers 1929

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured in watercolour; edition 4/unknown

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1972

Christmas bells 1925

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured in gouache; edition 17/50

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1984

Protea 1925

hand-coloured woodcut; 7th proof from an edition of 25

Private collection

Anemones 1925

woodcut, printed in black ink, hand-coloured with gouache on ivory laid Japanese paper; edition 14/50

Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of Mrs Alison Brown, 1968

Anemones 1925 was reproduced in the special Margaret Preston number of *Art in Australia* in December 1927 (Third Series, No. 22).

In this focused edition, artist Thea Proctor wrote in her article 'An artist's appreciation of Margaret Preston': 'Her gay and vivid woodcuts of native flowers, original and beautiful in design, are an ideal wall decoration for the simply furnished house.'

Preston similarly advocated the suitability of woodblock prints for the domestic setting suggesting that they were works that 'flat dwellers, could afford ... to make our homes more Australian in atmosphere.'

This aligns with ukiyo-e's decorative origins, and as prints in the adjacent room by Utagawa Kunisada and Kikugawa Eizan demonstrate, ukiyo-e compositions also included images of paintings and prints decorating domestic settings.

Fuchsia and balsam 1928

hand-coloured woodcut

Geelong Gallery

Purchased 1982

Geelong Gallery's version of Preston's dazzlingly beautiful *Fuchsia and balsam* is the first proof of a proposed edition of fifty.

The work was reproduced in *Art in Australia* and *The Home* in 1928, and on the cover of *Woman's World* magazine in March 1929. This latter publication also included the article 'How to frame your woodcuts' by Marjorie Pryor.

Bird of paradise 1925

hand-coloured woodcut on brown paper

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased 1942

This is one of Preston's most famously decorative woodblock prints: the rhythmic composition and heightened palette in *Bird of paradise* demonstrates her predisposition to subjugate reality to suit design and schematic imperatives.

Preston's decorative approach reflects her early reading of Arthur Wesley Dow's *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* published in 1899, in which he elaborated his theory that a painting 'is essentially a rhythmic harmony of coloured spaces'.

Of added relevance to this exhibition (and to the distinct practice of contemporary artist Cressida Campbell), is the display of Preston's *Bird of paradise* woodblock in a joint exhibition she staged in Sydney and Melbourne with artist Thea Proctor in 1925. A Melbourne review stated: 'The woodblock for a bird of paradise is on view and from it one is able to grasp something of the processes required to produce these amazing things.'

[*Australasian*, Melbourne, 28 November 1925]

Wheelflower c. 1929

woodcut, black ink hand-coloured with gouache on buff laid Japanese paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Bequest of WG Preston, the artist's widower, 1977

Publishing was integral to the distribution and popularity of ukiyo-e printmaking. Similarly, it was a fundamental part of Preston's practice. With the support of publisher Sydney Ure Smith reproductions of Preston's prints and paintings appeared regularly from 1923 in journals and magazines including *Art in Australia* and *The Home*. Her opinions on topics as diverse as what might constitute a 'national art' and the formal and aesthetic considerations in flower arranging and interior design, were also widely published.

Wheelflower c. 1929 was featured on the cover of *Art in Australia* in September 1929. Preston considered it one of her best prints, keeping this edition that was eventually bequeathed to the AGNSW by Bill Preston.

Waratahs 1925

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured; edition 5/50

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1976

Illawarra lilies and waratahs 1929

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured in gouache; edition 3/unknown

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1968

West Australian banksia c. 1929

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured in gouache; edition 10/unknown

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1985

Mosman Bay c. 1927

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured
in gouache; edition 15/15

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1976

Mosman Bridge c. 1927

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured in gouache; undesignated impression

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1978

This tightly cropped view of the timber footbridge across Mosman Bay and the surrounding landscape recalls Japanese ukiyo-e compositions, such as portrait-format landscapes by Hiroshige. It can also be seen as a precursor to Cressida Campbell's 1992 woodcut print *Parsley Bay, Sydney*; a similarly tightly framed view of a rocky path, vegetation, a wooden footbridge, and Harbour waters.

In this work and the adjacent *Sydney Bridge c. 1932*—dating to the opening of the iconic structure—Preston's engagement with the built urban environment firmly positions her as a modernist printmaker.

Sydney Bridge c. 1932

woodcut, printed in black ink, hand-coloured with gouache on cream Japanese laid paper; unknown edition

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1964

Tea-tree and Hakea petiolaris 1936

woodcut, printed in black ink, from one block, hand-coloured in gouache; undesignated impression

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1986

Begonia c. 1935

woodcut, printed in black ink on thin ivory laid Japanese paper, hand-coloured; unknown edition

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1964

Beyond the collected books in her extensive library (several of which are exhibited in the display case), Preston experienced Japanese culture firsthand on two visits: a brief stopover in 1926, and a second trip in 1934 to study printmaking in Kyoto with a descendant of Hiroshige—the impact of which is evident in *Begonia* c. 1935 and *Tea-tree and Hakea petiolaris* 1936.

Printed in black ink (on thin Japanese paper in the case of *Begonia*), the subtle hand colouring of these works recalls Hishikawa Moronubu's technical approach, while the spatial openness and rhythm of the compositions echo Katsushika Hokusai's *Peonies and butterfly* c. 1832 (exhibited in the adjacent gallery).

Australian rock lily c. 1933

woodcut, printed in black ink, hand-coloured with gouache on off-white Japanese paper; 1st proof from an edition of 12
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased 1964

Aboriginal design, with Sturt's pea 1943

Masonite cut, printed in colour, hand-coloured in gouache on buff wove paper; unknown edition
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased 1943

Preston's ambition to create a national art was realised, in part, through her focus on native flora in still life paintings and prints, and through her engagement with, and appropriation of the imagery and designs of First Nations people (an engagement which existed simultaneously with her interest in diverse international cultures such as that of Japan).

Preston's aspiration for a national art is visually expressed in works such as the early woodcut *Anemones* 1925, and Masonite cuts *Aboriginal design, with Sturt's pea* 1943 and *Waratah* etc 1943. These Masonite cuts and stencil works of the late 1940s and early 1950s—materials and techniques adopted by the artist late in her career due to the physical demands of woodcutting—reveal her enduringly experimental approach to printmaking.

Waratah etc 1943

Masonite cut, printed in colour on buff laid Japanese paper;
unknown edition

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1943

Native flowers 1949

colour stencil, gouache printed on thin black card;
from an edition of 3

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1964

Manly pines 1953

colour stencil, gouache on thin black card with gouache
hand colouring; unknown edition

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Gift of Howard Sherrard, 1975

Rock lily 1953

stencil, printed in colour inks, from one hand-cut paper stencil; undesigned impression

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1984

Painted woodblock for **Native flowers of Australia 1957**

oil on incised, laminated plywood

Private collection

Roger Butler's *The Prints of Margaret Preston: A Catalogue Raisonné* (2005) lists over four hundred prints made by the artist between 1916 and the late 1950s. In addition to her complementary painting practice, Preston worked in the printmaking techniques of etching, woodblock prints, Masonite cuts, monotypes, screenprints, and stencil prints.

In June 1941 she wrote in correspondence: 'I am not doing any more wood blocks as they are very trying on the hand—pulling the thumbs quite out of shape—and being very painful'.

Preston did, however, continue to make woodcut prints in the latter years of her career—albeit in smaller number—as this 1957 painted woodblock confirms (made when Preston was in her early 80s). Butler notes that from 1957 Preston frequently painted and framed her woodblocks after printing.

Display cases

Case 1

These publications on Japanese art and ukiyo-e printmaking, by some of the key Western authorities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were owned by Margaret Preston (with the exception of the Victoria & Albert Museum exhibition catalogue). They informed her understanding of the technical and compositional elements of the artform. Reproductions of works by significant ukiyo-e artists were used by Preston to test compositions for her still life paintings, as seen in pencil sketches.

Edward F Strange, *Japanese Illustration: A History of the Arts of Wood-Cutting and Colour Printing in Japan*, 2nd edition, George Bell, London, 1904
Art Gallery of New South Wales — National Art Archive,
Gift of William Preston, 1963

Preston's copy of this publication was gifted on her 40th birthday by artist Gladys Reynell; this 1915 gift confirms Preston's early interest in Japanese printmaking.

In Preston's compositional sketch, the key individuals responsible for the engraving, printing, and selling of Hokusai's work are reduced to radically simplified forms.

Edward F Strange, *Japanese Colour Prints*, 2nd edition,
Victoria and Albert Museum. Dept. of Engraving, Illustration
and Design, London, 1908

Art Gallery of New South Wales – National Art Archive
Gift of William Preston, 1963

Marcus B Huish, *Japan and its Art*, 3rd edition,
BT Batsford, London, 1912

Art Gallery of New South Wales – National Art Archive
Gift of William Preston, 1963

Edward F Strange, *The Colour Prints of Japan: An
Appreciation and History*, A Siegle, London, 1904

Art Gallery of New South Wales – National Art Archive
Gift of William Preston, 1963

Edward F Strange, *Japanese Colour Prints: Lent by R Leicester Harmsworth, Esq., MP, November 1913 to March 1914*, Victoria and Albert Museum. Dept. of Engraving, Illustration and Design, London, 1913
Art Gallery of New South Wales

Although undocumented, it is likely that Preston visited this exhibition of Japanese printmaking in 1913–14 given her burgeoning interest in the subject. Over 350 prints were displayed by key ukiyo-e artists including Hishikawa Moronobu, Suzuki Harunobu, Torii Kiyonaga, Kitagawa Utamaro, Utagawa Toyokuni, Toshusai Sharaku, Utagawa Hiroshige, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Katsushika Hokusai, and Utagawa Kunisada (each represented in this current exhibition).

Edward F Strange, *Hokusai: The Old Man Mad With Painting*, Siegle Hill, London, 1906
Art Gallery of New South Wales – National Art Archive
Gift of William Preston, 1963

Case 2

Art in Australia, Sydney, Third Series, Number Thirty-Four,
October–November 1930
Heide Museum of Modern Art Archive

[2 copies]

Art in Australia, Sydney, Margaret Preston Number, Third
Series, Number Twenty-Two, December 1927
Heide Museum of Modern Art Archive

In her 1927 article 'From eggs to Electrolux', published in this special edition, Preston reflected that her earlier studies of Japanese ukiyo-e prints at Paris' Musée Guimet

... let her learn slowly that there is more than one vision in art. That a picture could have more than eye realism. That there was such a thing as aesthetic feeling. That a picture that is meant to fill a certain space should decorate that space ... Starting off again she tries to add another quality to her realism—that of decoration.

Manuscripts: A Miscellany of Art and Letters, Melbourne,
No. 12, February 1935
Colin Holden Collection

While travelling in 1934 Preston experienced Japanese theatre which she recalled in her article 'The puppet show of Osaka' published in *Manuscripts: A Miscellany of Art and Letters* the following year.

This was one of several contributions Preston made to *Manuscripts*: a quarterly magazine to promote arts and letters published in Geelong (then Melbourne) in the early 1930s.

Manuscripts: A Miscellany of Art and Letters,
Geelong, No. 7, November 1933
Colin Holden Collection

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Exhibition Catalogue

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Cutting Through Time—Cressida Campbell, Margaret Preston, and the Japanese Print

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