

50 YEARS OF THE CANBERRA
SPINNERS AND WEAVERS



28 OCT 2017 - 18 MAR 2018



Susan WEISSER
Scarf, c2004, hand-woven, rayon and cotton
Private collection

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

It is an honour for Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG) to host an exhibition which samples 50-years' work from members of one of our region's most creative and enduring arts organisations - the Canberra Spinners and Weavers (CSW).

Public and private collections across Australia are enriched with the work of artists whose careers have been both nurtured and sustained by their association with this outstanding organisation.

The exhibition provides an insight not only into the important educational and professional support role of CSW, but also into the consistently inspiring work its members have created spanning half a century.

One of the great joys for me as Director of CMAG is the regular opportunity I have to see collections that were previously dispersed across our community - and often across the country - brought together and arranged in one place. Our Open Collections gallery provides a space where the stories these collections hold can be told. These exhibitions often reveal compelling linkages between local practices and wider national and global movements, and *Crossing threads* does this well. Collectively, the work displayed in *Crossing threads* also reveals the way that our creativity can draw us together as a community and support us to achieve a shared purpose.

Great thanks are due to the very many spinners and weavers who have contributed to CSW over the decades, and to the individuals and institutions who have kept members' work with such care and have made loans to the exhibition. Exhibition curator Meredith Hinchliffe and CMAG's own Senior Curator of Visual Arts, Deborah Clark, who has assisted Meredith, have created an exhibition worthy of this important milestone in the life of CSW. We all owe the hundreds of CSW members, current and past, a huge thank you for their contribution to the arts in the Canberra region and beyond.



50 YEARS OF THE CANBERRA
SPINNERS AND WEAVERS

Shane Breynard

Director, Canberra Museum and Gallery

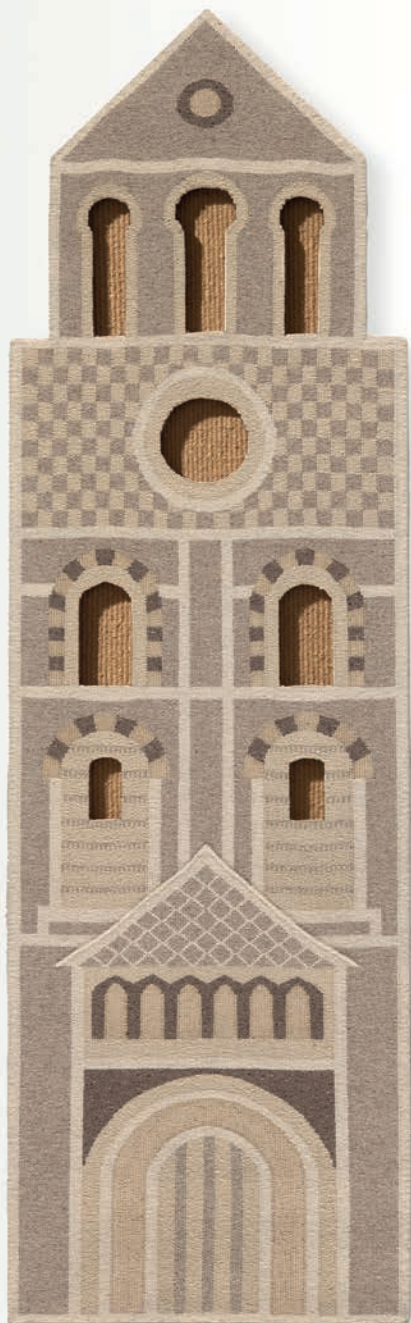
CROSSING THREADS

50 YEARS OF THE CANBERRA SPINNERS AND WEAVERS

The years between 1954 and 1980 have been called 'the transforming years' for Canberra. In 1957 the Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies, established the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), giving it the responsibility for planning, developing and constructing the city of Canberra. Menzies, a great supporter of the nation's capital, centralised all Commonwealth departments in Canberra and, with the appointment in 1958 of John Overall (later Sir John) as the first Commissioner of the NCDC, a considerable number of talented planners, engineers, architects, and public servants experienced in local government and community liaison were brought to the city.

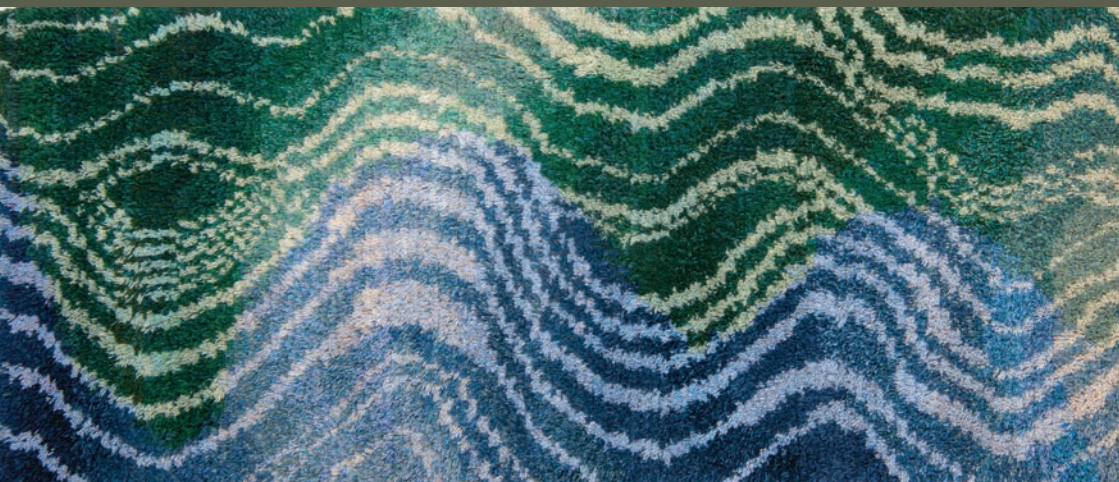
At the same time the Australian National University (ANU) was drawing academics to Canberra and many of them, like the incoming public servants and other professional people, brought partners who also threw themselves into community organisations, including cultural groups. These immigrants – international and Australian – were passionate about Canberra and wanted to develop the city as a stimulating and comfortable place for families and communities to live and thrive. Perhaps remarkably, amongst those early contributors to the cultural life of Canberra were several professional and experienced weavers.

By the 1960s the burgeoning capital had several art clubs and musical and performing groups. The Artists Society of Canberra (ASOC) had been founded in 1927 and



Belinda RAMSON

Kelso, 1975, wool, linen, cotton, wood frame, tapestry-woven, woven jute backing, jute support. National Gallery of Australia, Crafts Board Collection, donated by the Australia Council

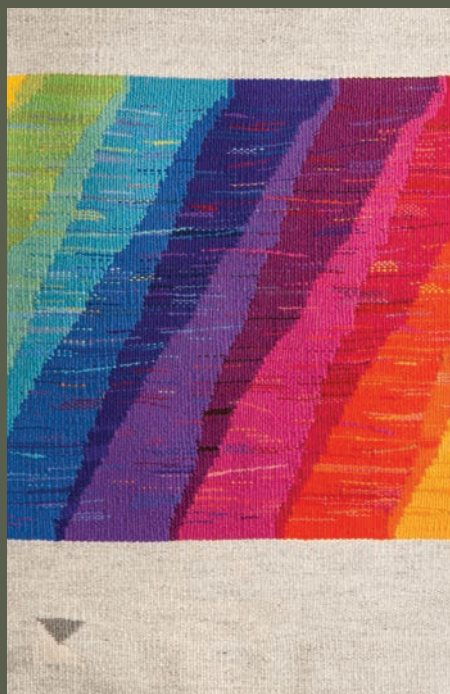


Solvig BAAS BECKING

Tidal energy, 2004, linen warp, wool weft. Canberra Museum and Gallery, gift of the artist 2008

regularly held exhibitions of members' work. While ASOC supported artists who practised various crafts, the professional weavers did not feel their skills were sufficiently recognised by the Canberra art community and some felt the need to establish their own organisation to provide more focussed opportunities for practitioners.

In this optimistic environment the Canberra Spinners and Weavers (CSW) was created. Solvig Baas Becking and Susan Beresford convened a meeting of interested people on 6 August 1966 and there was an 'unexpectedly large attendance'. Beresford, a weaver, had been living in Hall (a small village in the north of the Australian Capital Territory) for many years, occasionally teaching while practising her craft, and had long dreamed of establishing an organisation to support the small cohort of local practitioners. Baas Becking, a trained weaver from Europe, had established a studio in Canberra in 1964 and was passionate about expanding the professionalism of her craft in Australia. At this inaugural CSW meeting Beresford was elected its President, Kusha Bolt its Treasurer, and Baas Becking became a committee member. Further meetings followed quickly and a buying



Kusha BOLT

Indigo wave, 1981 (from the Rainbow series), cotton warp, wool weft, tapestry weaving. Collection of Tonique Bolt



Pam McDOUGALL
Bag, c1967, wool warp and weft, fabric lined, twill weave
commercial wooden handle. Private collection



Fay SKYRING
Prayer shawl, early to mid-1990s, plain weave, fine
Australian wool. Private collection

committee was appointed to look into the possibility of purchasing 50 pound (25 kilo) lots of wool from Sydney Woollen Mills. The group decided to become a branch of the Handweavers & Spinners Guild of Australia.

The first CSW Annual General Meeting was held on 8 July 1967. A constitution was adopted; there were 32 members and \$18.62 in the bank.

Even at this early stage there was informal discussion about the CSW exhibiting as a group at the forthcoming annual exhibition of the Canberra Art Club (which was less traditional and more inclusive than ASOC). Two selections were to be made, one by the CSW Committee, the other by the Art Club Committee. In 1969 CSW members exhibited at the Art Club sale, which was well supported with a 'very high standard of weaving from several members'.

Around late 1967/early 1968, the CSW Committee had begun discussions about accommodation within the Griffin Centre, a building on the corner of Bunda and Genge Streets in Civic, which was run under the auspices of the newly-formed ACT Council of Cultural Societies. In that lively hub the Spinners and Weavers became part of the fabric of Canberra's cultural life, alongside the city's many cultural clubs, which included various music societies and other craft groups.

The first CSW quarterly newsletter was produced in 1967 and was soon published monthly. From August 1973 many issues included weaving, spinning and dye samples, all stapled into each newsletter, and all with explanatory notes. This commendable exchange of knowledge was characteristic of the organisation's ethos.

Education always played an important role within the Canberra Spinners and Weavers, and early on members ran their own classes, several taught by Baas Becking, who set a high standard of work (and would no doubt be thrilled to see the quality of current members' work). By 1972 CSW members were advocating for formal tuition in spinning and weaving at educational bodies. Pam McDougall was an early student in the CSW classes, and was taught by Solvig. In turn McDougall taught Fay Skyring, an important figure in the history of weaving in the Canberra region. Skyring taught many classes at Dickson College (a north Canberra public senior secondary school), and those pioneer CSW members all tutored many of the current members. From its early days the CSW had a library, a very important resource (which has been capably run by Alexis Yeadon for the past 20 years).

In 1973 the CSW committee requested that a competition section for Spinning and Handweaving be included in the Royal Canberra Show, and the organisation has run this section since; in 2016 it won 'First Prize for a Demonstration' at the show - a fitting reward to celebrate its fiftieth year.

The organisation held its first annual exhibition in February 1979, and in her opening speech Solvig Baas Becking noted that there had been a steady growth of members since the first meeting and that 'the spirit and emphasis in this Group is on good will, helping, sharing, aware of a social role and place and task in the community, as well as doing as much weaving (as their busy lives allowed)'.

By 1992 the organisation had 100 members, and a 'Fun with Fibre' event was held September that year at Narrabundah College, which demonstrated the richness of the textile



Nathalie QUINLIVAN

Dyed samples, early 1990s, wool and silk samples from dye workshop. Private collection



Wendy SEDLMAIER
The Brindabellas, c1985, cotton warp, wool weft, Old Sydney
Wool Mill yarns. Private collection

crafts to the local community; it was highly successful, and was subsequently run – by Nathalie Quinlivan and others – over several years. Members discussed a small travelling exhibition of items to be shown in venues around Canberra and also encouraged the National Library of Australia to purchase books about spinning, weaving and dyeing.

Meanwhile the organisation was negotiating with the ACT Government to obtain sole use accommodation, with then President Helen Hamilton leading the discussion. At the November 1992 CSW committee meeting, available space at Majura Oval, Ainslie was discussed, and on 19 June 1993 the small ex-works depot there was officially opened as the new CSW home, named Kurrajong. By then, there were 182 members. Several working bees were held to make the place comfortable, a \$10 donation bought a chair and a mug, and a garden was established, which was formally designed and planted with many plants for natural dyeing.

Hamilton played an important part in the ongoing development of the CSW. In the

early 1990s she suggested the members have a networking weekend away at Birrigai in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. Members brought their work, held a mini-workshop and a show-and-tell, which morphed into a fashion parade, and 60 people attended that first year. Members from similar organisations around the country – in particular Victoria and New South Wales – came and over the years friendships developed nationwide. The first CSW event after the 2003 Canberra bushfires was held at Greenhills, a bush setting in Canberra's south, and had a fantastic response; the Greenhills weekend is now a fixture on the organisation's calendar.

In 1994 Helen Hamilton suggested a national exchange of scarves be organised, based on an international model which involved 3 participants, each preparing fibre for another to craft and in turn crafting the fibre passed to them. This initiative attracted 421 entries from more than 50 Guilds in Australia and New Zealand, and a bus brought members from the Newcastle Guild, which took up the project the following year.

CSW and its members continued to be active in the Canberra community and in a national context in the ensuing years. In 1998 the (then) Canberra School of Art (now ANU School of Art and Design) introduced the Emerging Artists Assistance Scheme (EASS) and CSW became a patron, awarding an outstanding graduate a year's membership and an opportunity to exhibit with CSW. This has made a significant contribution to supporting graduates – and the craft – since.

The membership of the Canberra Spinners and Weavers maintains a healthy level, with younger people joining and participating in the organisation's activities. This year CSW moved to new joint premises with Canberra Region Feltmakers at the community hub housed in the old Chifley Primary School.

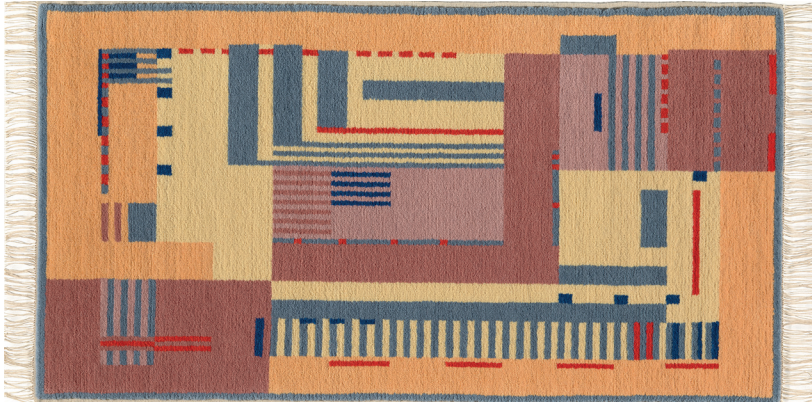
Those who join community-based organisations such as the CSW do so for many reasons, primarily for the camaraderie of people who share the same passion. Many members have told me of the long-lasting and valuable friendships they made through sharing their craft, friendships that endure even with members who are no longer practitioners.

This celebratory exhibition represents an extensive range of textile creation in the work of many early and current members of the Canberra Spinners and Weavers: Solvig Baas Becking, Kusha Bolt, Pam McDougall, Belinda Ramson and Fay Skyring, representing the early years; and others who have played a vital part, including Glenys Eggleton, Judy Richmond, Wendy Sedlmaier, Monique van Nieuwland and Susan Weisser. Fifty years is a significant milestone, and this exhibition at the Canberra Museum and Gallery is an appropriate and welcome acknowledgement of a half century of spinning and weaving in the nation's capital.

Meredith Hinchliffe
Curator



Monique van NIEUWLAND
1915 – *Henrietta's cupboard*,
Cato's linen, 2009, wool warp,
hand-dyed silk weft, hand-
woven Jacquard satin weaves.
Private collection



Mo WEDD-BUCHHOLZ

from a design by Eric BUCHHOLZ, *Homage to Eric Buchholz*, design 1923-24, woven 1983-84, cotton warp, wool weft, woven, cut-pile. National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1987

Deidre BROCKLEBANK

Views of Canberra (dress with postcard back), 1982, bodice hand-picture knitted and crocheted commercial cotton with commercial dyes; skirt hand-woven commercial cotton warp and weft with commercial dyes [detail]. Canberra Museum and Gallery, purchased 2016

Lea CLUES

Vest, 1987, cotton warp and weft Private collection



Sandra von SNEIDERN

The rapids, 1998, linen warp, recycled fabric weft. Private collection

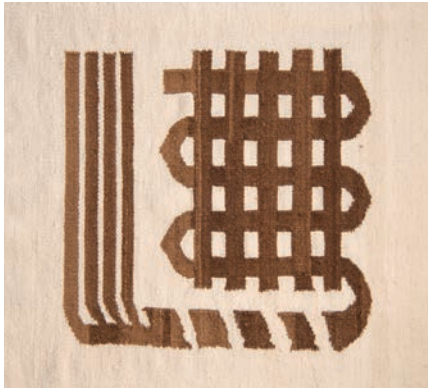
Miriam NAUENBURG >

Gudrun - a Viking farmer's wife, 2005 [left] and Anna Hendrika - a Finnish farmer's wife, 2007 [right]
hand-spun, hand-dyed, and hand-woven wool, linen and silk, leather, hand-made wire jewellery, commercial dolls, key and shears, based on clothing found in Viking burials c 850-1000 AD. Private collection



Pauline LYGÅ

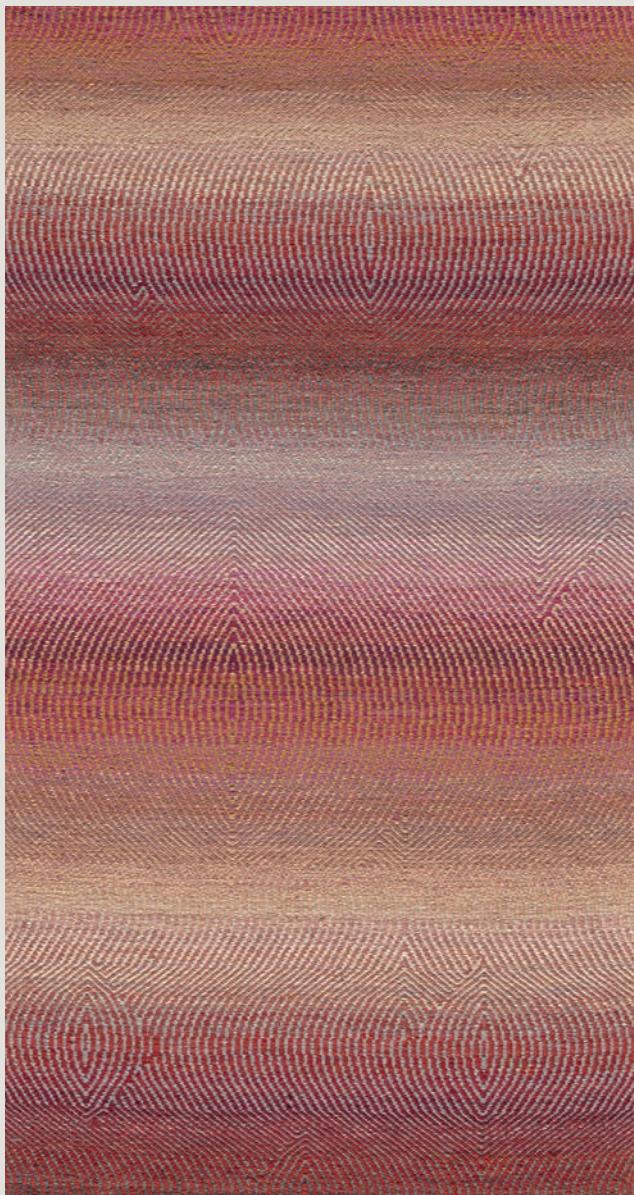
Purple flowers, mid-2000s, cotton warp and weft, damask (drawloom). Collection Göste and Ellen Lyngå



Canberra Spinners and Weavers joint project, Logo banner, mid-1970s, tapestry weaving, natural hand-spun wool. Collection of Canberra Spinners and Weavers



Canberra Spinners and Weavers joint project led by Pauline LYGÅ, *Native plant*, c2006, damask weave, hand-spun silk [[detail]. Collection of Canberra Spinners and Weavers



Solvig BAAS BECKING

New bark, 1982, linen warp, wool weft, woven twill on opposites with shaft-switching [detail]. National Gallery of Australia, purchased 2011



The Canberra Spinners and Weavers demonstrating their crafts at the 10th Anniversary Festival of the Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Canberra City, August 1976. Photo courtesy of the ACT Council of Cultural and Community Organisations.

LIST OF ARTISTS IN CROSSING THREADS

Leonie ANDREWS
 Solvig BAAS BECKING
 Kusha BOLT
 Deidre BROCKLEBANK
 Canberra Spinners
 and Weavers
 (joint projects)
 Margaret CARR
 Leigh CASLEY
 Lea CLUES
 Patricia CURNOW
 Nina de CARITAT
 Rosemarie EBERHARDT
 Glenys EGGLETON
 Audrey FORD
 Kerry GARLAND

Helen HAMILTON
 Betty HUDSON
 Sheena JACK
 Catherine K
 Maryke KLOOSTERMAN
 Jean LOMBARD
 Pauline LYNGÅ
 Dorothy McCABE
 Pam McDOUGALL
 Evelyn MICHELL
 Lisa MOLVIG
 Miriam NAUENBURG
 Kathleen PHILLIPS
 Nathalie QUINLIVAN

Belinda RAMSON
 Judy RICHMOND
 Wendy SEDLMAIER
 Fay SKYRING
 Fay SKYRING & Sarah KENT
 Fay SKYRING &
 Di LANSDOWN
 Barbara STANILEWICZ
 Monique van NIEUWLAND
 Sandra von SNEIDERN
 Mo WEDD-BUCHHOLZ
 Susan WEISSER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Guest curator: Meredith Hinchliffe

CMAG curator: Deborah Clark, Senior Curator, Visual Arts

Assistant curator: Catherine Webb, Intern, ANU Art History and Curatorship

Exhibition and catalogue design: Shaya Dashtinezhad, Graphic Designer

and Marketing Assistant, CMAG

Photography: Rob Little, RLDI

Curator's thanks

Thanks to members of the Canberra Spinners and Weavers, all the artists who made the work on exhibition, the lenders, Victoria Pearce at Endangered Heritage, and the permanent and casual staff at CMAG.

CMAG curator's thanks

My thanks go to the artists of the works in this exhibition, the Canberra Spinners and Weavers, Meredith Hinchliffe for her dedicated advocacy of the organisation and its work, the institutional and private lenders to *Crossing threads*, Victoria Pearce at Endangered Heritage for conservation work, and Rob and Sandie Little of RLDI for photography. At the Australian National University I would like to thank Terence Maloon and David Boon of the ANU Drill Hall Gallery; at the National Gallery of Australia, I am grateful to Gerard Vaughan, Kirsten Paisley, Micheline Ford, Carmela Mollica and Thea Van Veen; thanks also to Pam Brown and Bridget Guthrie at Tamworth Regional Gallery, and to Monique van Nieuwland, CSW President.

At CMAG my heartfelt thanks go to Catherine Webb, Intern from ANU Art History and Curatorship for her tremendous professional work on this exhibition; thanks to my colleagues Mark Bayly, Sophie Chessell, Claire Conti, Karen Cromwell, Tamara Gervasoni, Cath Moran, Fernando Pino, Gary Smith, Graeme Tie, Danyka Van Buuren and Paul Webb, and to Shane Breynard, Director. Special thanks to Shaya Dashtinezhad for her beautiful exhibition design.



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