

HARRY HUMMERSTON

SCREENPRINTS



CITY OF FREMANTLE ART COLLECTION GALLERY

FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE | 20 SEPTEMBER – 10 NOVEMBER 2019

“I very much enjoy putting into my prints something that is jarring or challenging or lying in wait for unsuspecting audiences. If there is a chance to put a hook into a work I will.”¹

This exhibition presents a survey of the screenprints by senior WA artist Harry Hummerston. It brings together for the first time the bulk of the artist’s catalogue raisonné drawn from editions produced during his early career 1981–88.

They were produced during his time as a student teacher at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (W.A.I.T), when print making and screenprinting in particular, was gaining prominence nationally.² Emerging in the early 1980s, when print facilities were in their infancy at W.A.I.T, Hummerston would exploit screenprinting as a preferred ‘modus operandi’, embracing the connoisseurship and technical challenges inherent in producing editions of multicoloured images from a single screen. Screenprinting for Hummerston would satisfy both the creative and economic needs of being an artist. While balancing his commitments as a full time teacher, he would find the time and resources to pursue further studies and subsequently consolidate his practice, producing images of local subjects and progressing resolution of his broader artistic concerns. Pivotal to the development of his distinctive oeuvre is Hummerston’s commitment to a progressive block out stencil technique, using a single screen. This relatively uncomplicated and versatile process involved working up drawings and attaching paper stencils directly onto a screen and produce representational images without the use of photo-stencils. Coupled with opaque solvent based inks, Hummerston

would produce his characteristic dense layers of colour and a distinctive hand tooled modulated aesthetic to his images.

Hummerston produced strong work as a student that reflected his perspectives upon life on the 'domestic front' and the geopolitical struggles being fought out in Northern Ireland and Vietnam conflicts. He would also interpret the imagery in the lyrics of U.S. singer-songwriter Tom Waits, in *Red Shoes* and *Steal a Hacksaw* 1983, each casting light upon Hummerston's apparent poetic sensibilities.

I'll take the spokes from your wheelchair
And a magpies wings
And I'll tie 'em to your shoulders and your feet
I'll steal a hacksaw from my dad
And cut the braces off your legs
And we'll bury them tonight in the cornfield³

In succeeding work, Hummerston produced iconic images imbued with humour and strains of Men at Work's popular 1984 song *Down Under*, in truncated views of iconic North Fremantle landscapes, homage to the Hills Hoist and a suite of bathing suits in *Australian Suspended Summer*, 1984. In the latter, Hummerston resolves an inherent limitation of the screen print while expanding the scope of his practice, by attaching pink cotton threads to the images, to produce perfectly attenuated points of suspension.

After 1985, Hummerston produced his best work in a number of prints. *White Gloves* 1986 and *In Search* 1988 incorporate a series of appropriated graphic texts to suggest blunt emotive triggers with multiple potential readings. *Of Swords* 1988 an edition of fourteen prints is based upon the Tarot card suite, saturated with macabre horror, suggesting disquieting narratives of grief, fear, violence and death. Hummerston draws links between superstition, religion and sacrifice, in juxtaposition of biblical text and passages from Oscar Wilde's epic poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* 1897.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves
By each let this be heard.
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word.
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!⁴

It is possible to identify in Hummerston's late screenprints the foundations of his emerging art practice, produced a decade later, long after he abandoned screenprinting altogether. His art making would ultimately trace a path from hand drawn images to photo based digital printmaking in the late 1990s, before settling upon the development his signature painted acrylic cut outs and overlays of colliding 'visual hooks' and 'image/ language' constructions after 2009.

This exhibition is made possible by the artist's generous donation of thirty-one screenprints 1979–1991 to the City of Fremantle Art Collection in 2018.

Curated by André Lipscombe

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- 1** Harry Hummerston in conversation with the Curator, August, 2019
 - 2** Screen printing and its impact in Australia would emerge in the late 60s and reach its peak in the 1980s, influenced by artists who returned to Australia following experiences working with the media overseas. Screen printing's dominance of the print culture in this country was evidenced by the volume of screenprints being produced nationally and exhibited at the Fremantle Print Award after 1979.
 - 3** *Kentucky Avenue*, lyrics by Tom Waits from the album, *Blue Valentines*, 1978
 - 4** *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* was written in exile after his release from gaol in 1897. Wilde had been incarcerated after being 'convicted' of indecency with other men and sentenced to two years hard labour in prison.

BIOGRAPHY

Harry Hummerston was born in Wagin WA, in 1952. He moved as a child with his family across regional Australia, following his father's advancement at work. He was schooled in country NSW, Geraldton and Victoria Park in WA, before graduating from Hale School in Perth. His mother had an interest in watercolour painting.

Hummerston studied to be a primary school teacher at Graylands Teachers College graduating in 1973 before completing successive higher qualifications, an Associateship in Art Teaching and BA in Fine Arts at WA Institute of Technology (W.A.I.T.) now Curtin University, in 1983. It was as a student teacher, with a strong vocational interest in art, that Hummerston was introduced to printmaking by WA printmaker Leon Pericles and subsequently developed a strong interest in screen printing. Screen printing appealed to Hummerston offering a range of processes to work up editions of colourful images economically. Hummerston had to largely find his own way with screen printing, although gained valuable support from studio technician, Vic Anderson, at a time when printmaking at W.A.I.T. was in its infancy and had few resources of its own. Encouraged by WA printmakers Helen Taylor and Ray Beattie, Hummerston would subsequently champion progressive block out screen printing techniques in creating sophisticated images from a single screen. For a decade after graduating and while working as a teacher, Hummerston would continue to produce print series and editions to a high standard before abandoning screen printing in the early 1990s, due to health risks associated with long term exposure to toxic solvent based inks.

Hummerston would complete a Master of Arts qualification at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University in 2002. His career in art education spans thirty years, and his

experience ranges from primary, secondary, TAFE and tertiary teaching, culminating in being appointed as Head of Dept. of Art at Curtin University in 2003-5. In 2006, after coordinating the RMIT Print Studio in Melbourne, Hummerston was in a position to pursue his art practice full time in WA.

Hummerston has made a significant contribution to arts practice in WA as an educator and has been involved in print organisations nationally including WA Printmakers Association. He has been recipient of numerous grants and awards and was Print Council of Australia commissioned artist in 1985. He has exhibited extensively both locally and overseas and is represented in State and National Public Collections such as AGWA, NGV, NGA, Australian War Memorial, Artbank, many Municipal Collections, including City of Fremantle and important private collections including Kerry Stokes, Janet Holmes à Court, L&E Horn and Wesfarmers Collection. Harry Hummerston is represented by Turner Galleries, Perth.

CHECKLIST

All artworks are by Harry Hummserston and from the City of Fremantle Art Collection and listed chronologically by date.
Image dimensions H x W.

**1. *Pleasure or Pain* 1981
(War series)**

colour screenprint
edition 3/10
39 x 34.5cm
no. 1477
exhibited AGWA TVW 7 Young
Artist's Award 1981

2. *Starting pts. Ending pts. An Evangelist's Dream* 1981 (War series)

colour screenprint
artist's proof
47 x 42cm
no. 1478

**3. *Signature Runes* 1982
(The Domestic Front Series)**

colour screenprint, xerox,
postage stamps
unique state
49.5 x 62cm
no. 1479
highly commended Fremantle
Print Award 1982

**4. *Red Shoes* 1983
(Blue Valentine Series No. 1)**

colour screenprint
edition 3/10
62 x 49.5cm
no. 1483

**5. *Steal a Hacksaw* 1983
(Blue Valentine Series No. 2)**

colour screenprint
artist's proof
62 x 49.5cm
no. 1484

**6. *Worry Beads* 1983
(Blue Valentine Series No. 2)**

colour screenprint
edition 6/10
62 x 49.5cm
no. 1485

**7. *Myths & Dragon Eggs I* 1983
(Myths & dragon eggs series)**

colour screenprint
edition 7/10
22 x 30cm
no. 1486

8. *Myths & Dragon Eggs II* 1983

(Myths & dragon eggs series)

colour screenprint

edition 7/10

22 x 30cm

no. 1487

9. *Myths & Dragon Eggs III* 1983

(Myths & dragon eggs series)

colour screenprint

edition 7/10

22 x 30cm

no. 1488

10. *Myths & Dragon Eggs IV*

1983 (Myths & dragon eggs series)

colour screenprint

edition 7/10

22 x 30cm

no. 1489

11. *Signals* 1983

(N Fremantle Series No. I)

colour screenprint

edition 6/10

59 x 45cm

no. 1490

12. *Port Beach* 1983

(N Fremantle Series No. II)

colour screenprint

edition 7/10

59 x 45cm

no. 1491

13. *Ship yards* 1983

(N Fremantle Series No. III)

colour screenprint

artist's proof

59 x 45cm

no. 1492

14. *Dingo Flour* 1983

(N Fremantle Series No. IV)

colour screenprint

edition 7/10

59 x 45cm

no. 1494

15. *Of Cabbage and Kings* 1984

colour screenprint

edition 4/10

60 x 46cm

no. 1502

16. *Blue Beads in a Black Bowl*

1984 (Beads in a bowl series)

colour screenprint

edition 8/10

59 x 45cm

no. 1496

17. *Sauvage Beads* 1984

(Beads in a bowl series)

colour screenprint

edition 2/10

59 x 45cm

no. 1497

**18. Staffordshire Yellow 1984
(Beads in a bowl series)**

colour screenprint

edition 9/10

59 x 45cm

no. 1498

**19. Suspended Summer 1984
(Suspended Summer Series)**

colour screenprint, cotton

artist's proof

59 x 45cm

no. 1499

**20. Pink Suspended Summer
1984 (Suspended Summer
Series)**

colour screenprint, cotton

edition 6/10

59 x 45cm

no. 1500

**21. Australian Suspended
Summer 1984 (Suspended
Summer Series)**

colour screenprint, cotton

edition 9/10

62 x 49.5cm

no. 1501

**22. The Great Australian
Monolith/homage to the Hills
Hoist 1985**

colour screenprint

artist's proof

60 x 40cm

no. 1503

23. Of Swords 1988

colour screenprint suite of 14
prints

edition 4/13

12 x 10cm

no. 1261.1-14

24. White Gloves 1988

colour screenprint

edition 2/10

57.5 x 45.5cm

no. 1504

25. In Search 1988

colour screenprint

artist's proof

63 x 45cm

no. 1505