**BIOGRAPHIES**

**LIZ JENEID**, born in Sydney, with a Master of Creative Arts degree from the University of Wollongong, trained as a weaver at Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina, USA. Setting up a weaving studio in Sydney in 1978 she trained apprentices and community arts workers, and was closely involved with the Craft Council of NSW. As an influential lecturer and senior curator in textiles at the University of Wollongong from 1983 - 2003 she initiated the teaching of artists’ books and was an innovative curator of the Long Gallery. Exhibiting widely in print, textile and sculptural installations, she has had artist residencies in Paris, in Greece and Scandinavia and on polar expeditions. Her work is held in national and international collections including the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, and the Art Gallery of NSW. She was made a Fellow of the University of Wollongong in 2008.

**DIANA WOOD CONROY**, born in Sydney (B.A. (Hons) Archaeology, University of Sydney, Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong) has parallel interests as an artist and an archaeologist. She attended the British School of Archaeology in Athens and worked on museums and excavations in Greece, Italy and England, learning tapestry weaving in London while an illustrator at the British Museum. She was co-ordinator of Tjiv Designs, Bathurst Island, Northern Territory in 1974. Since 1996 she has participated in the excavation of the Ephesos theatre, Cyprus, with the University of Sydney, resulting in a book, ‘Fabric of the Ancient Theatre: Excavation Journals from Cyprus’ Moutloum Publishing, Nicosia, Cyprus 2007. Her tapestries and drawings have been exhibited and collected across institutions and galleries in Australia and overseas. An archaeological and postcolonial approach informs her critical writing on textiles and arts practice. She is professor of Visual Arts, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong.

**STEPHEN INGHAM** has had a broad and varied career as a composer, music critic and academic. Born in London, Stephen obtained Honours degrees in both Chemistry and Music at the University of York, UK with further studies at the University of Indiana and at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg. As a Lecturer in Music at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne he established and directed the Hopkins Studio for Electroacoustic and Computer Music. Widely recognised for his innovative electronic and analogue compositions that often address visual images, in 2001 and 2003 he was a guest composer at the fifth International Forum for Contemporary Piano Music in Heilbronn, Germany, and in the following year he was appointed as a guest professor in composition at the Musikocholan in Piteå, Sweden. Since 1993, he has lived and worked in Australia, first at the University of Melbourne and since 1998, as Associate Professor in the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong.
INTRODUCTION

Two artists, linked through long appreciation of the rich histories and inventive possibilities of weaving and tapestry, of coastal and inland landscapes in Australia and Europe, and of the ebbs and flows of nature and culture over time across those spaces, present new work in Breathing Space. Not so much collaborators as friends, colleagues, partners in various ventures and adventures, Liz Jeneid and Diana Wood Conroy have worked in dialogue with each other for over 30 years. They have shared journeys to extraordinary geographical and archaeological sites, sourced inspiration in the medium of textiles, and combined the documentary with the lyrical in their explorations. Yet each has a distinctive aesthetic and finesse and this exhibition is an opportunity to observe the delicate balance between the shared and the individual that characterises their practices.

The craft movement of the 1970s, with its return to traditional techniques such as handweaving and papermaking, intersected with a feminist commitment to revaluing familiar and familial practices in textiles and personal narrative in art, forming the backdrop to Jeneid and Wood Conroy’s work. During the 1990s, both working in the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong, they were influential in the move to create a contemporary theoretical focus for craft practice—a movement which provided a renewed sense of expansion and authority for women textile artists. Field trips and group exhibitions, often with an element of cross-cultural exchange and engagement with Aboriginal culture, became fruitful ways of working.

In 1996 Wood Conroy renewed connections with her early training and experience as a classical archaeologist, joining the University of Sydney dig at the ancient theatre at Paphos in Cyprus and sharing this opportunity with many colleagues and students. The past is a living present in Wood Conroy’s work, and the scope is large: classical themes intersect with Australia’s twentieth century war history, family histories and myth run side by side, and Australia’s ancient culture is acknowledged in a new context. Drawing, tapestry and text converge in this remarkable body of work.

At the same time, Jeneid’s expertise as a leading maker of artists’ books came to the fore—the perfect medium for a world traveller. Her fine skills in observation and drawing, and in ordering series of works into the three-dimensional narrative that shapes and organisves the western plains but also a changing awareness of the self as a space for investigation, so that the delineation between subject and object is clouded. Spinifex grass scattered over the arid dunes is composed of a myriad of barbed spines that form a circular shape in maturity, enclosing an empty centre which becomes a sanctuary for small reptiles and kangauroos, safe within the impenetrable net of spines. The emptiness is a breathing space, a space to experience the restfulness of sparseness, nothingness. Her prints and books reflect intense delight in observing rare creatures. She writes: ‘Spitfire birds are such luminous, cheeky, busy birds, moving in large groups—often twelve in number, which give them their name—in and out of the shade, camouflaged in the dappled light of midday, chirping to each other.’

Looking back in time allows an understanding of such pieces in Breathing Space. Liz Jeneid and Diana Wood Conroy first met at a Sydney workshop in Japanese textile techniques of warp and weft face that weaving with Jan Tomita in 1977. Both artists were part of the exuberant re-emergence of weaving practice in the 1970s, a craft revolution in Australia that highlighted not only Bauhaus ideas of ‘truth to materials’ but also an awareness of community, including Indigenous community, and a different response to environment. Since then, tapestry and textiles in Australia have expanded and grown in multiple directions, with individual artists of great distinction and influence. Jeneid and Wood Conroy have participated in national and international exhibitions with such artists as Kay Lawrence, Sue Lindsay, Valerie Kirk, Judy Watson and Yvonne Koolmatrie. The influential Polish weaver Magdalena Abakanowicz, speaking in 1977, believed that ‘woven forms grow with a leisurely rhythm like creations of nature, and like them they are organic. . . . The movements of my hands correspond to the natural rhythm of my body, to my breath.’

The aesthetic sense is implicated in breathing. The very word ‘aesthetics’, or aesthetics (sense perceptions) goes back to the Homeric aisthèin and aisthēmæi, meaning ‘I perceive’ as well as ‘I grasp, struggle for breath,’ and aisthēmæi, aisthëti, ‘I breathe in.’
Liz Jeneid perceives that the absorption of impressions happens on the in–breath, and the image-making occurs in the space of the out-breath.

There could be a body appearing in Diana Wood Conroy’s woven tapestry *All the days* which is a mosaic of alternating light and dark ‘tesserae’ or diamond shapes. Archaeology encouraged her obsession with fragmentary memories, overlooked histories and the tiny traces of past lives held in a thread. By rubbing the worn and battered surfaces with graphite on to fine paper, mosaic floors and carved stone inscriptions and patterns can be translated into another time and place.

In order to measure time and space, archaeology uses a grid or net, a mesh to give context to the disordered and uncertain glimpses of other ways of being in the past. This grid is a conceptual tool, a linear way of measuring place and time, but also provides a section of a moment in time memorialised and held motionless. In the past, geometric designs were imagined as thresholds between the worlds of the living and the newly deceased, with particular colours and forms seen as capturing malign forces, and overcoming the difficulties of these liminal experiences.1 Liz Jeneid’s installation *Word Midden - In Every Breath*, refers to a poem by the Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), (originally in Persian), and makes reference to archaeological finds that may not be familiar, but have their own history.

The scholar Marcia Langton talks about the ‘shock of the ancient’ reverberating in postcolonial societies weary of modernist Western traditions, so that indigenous art presents a ‘new’ stark aesthetic force.2 The architect le Corbusier recorded his first sight of the Parthenon - “It is the Acropolis that made a rebel of me... Stark, stripped, economical, violent; a glamorous outcry against a landscape of grace and terror.”3 A fresh consideration of the ancient can require a radical re-thinking. The ‘shock of the ancient’ is what Diana Wood Conroy feels working with the stony remnants of structures in Paphos, Cyprus. It is a shock too to find shadows of Greek and Latin in the etymology of Australian English. In making a flickering, densely marked and textured surface she has been influenced by Aboriginal consciousness of very ancient time, a consciousness that sees the importance of a past that is simultaneously present.4

The haptic qualities of surfaces are related to sound. Using electro-acoustic composition and spatialised sound diffusion, the composer Stephen Ingham, building on a previous collaboration in ‘Sonic Architectures’ has worked with recordings of the human breath and transformed them digitally into a layered and multi-faceted soundscape, forged into a continuous loop to produce a rich sonic texture enhancing ‘Breathing Space’.5
Breath/not breath is a punctum, a point around which whole societies pivoted when one function of art was a mnemonic to recall a life despite the passing of time. All deaths are different, like all births, yet all end with the same cessation of breath. The way Diana Wood Conroy drew her father’s breath as he lay in a coma in hospital may well have come from having to keep a chart of his own flow of breath as a chronic asthmatic. The pattern of breathing never seemed to her like an involuntary action but an active willed one; she comments that sometimes when struggling for breath ‘it breathes me’ is more relevant than ‘I breathe’. She marked each breath as her father laboriously inhaled and exhaled to form an inverted V, a lambda shape, with long gaps between the last exhalation and the new inhalation; literally, she was ‘drawing breath’. The small tapestries Documents of Breath record the piercing moment when breath is about to stop.

The vibrancy of craft and art in the mid twentieth century depended on forgetting and overlooking tedious histories: it was an iconoclastic moment. By contrast, according to Emily Vermeule, some artists spend their working lives as necromancers ‘raising the dead in order to enter into their imagination and experience’. Investigating ways of resonating with almost forgotten surfaces and places through intricate processes, artists record transitions and turning points through sight, touch and sound. Jeneid and Wood Conroy, with Stephen Ingham count the breaths, draw the leaves, measure the threads, mark time, and hope to discover the breathtaking spaces known to the apostle birds.

Diana Wood Conroy and Liz Jeneid, 2010

Notes on the Composition for Breathing Space

PRANAYAMA - Surround sound electro-acoustic music for the human voice.

Students of yoga will almost certainly be familiar with the Sanskrit terms prana (life-force; specifically ‘breath’) and ayama (to suspend or restrain). The concept of pranayama is thus perhaps most widely understood as ‘breath control’, as commonly practised in the context of the hatha and raja yoga disciplines. Believed to be beneficial in treating a wide range of stress-related disorders, the four-stage process of controlled breathing provides a starting point for my electro-acoustic étude.

Movement 1: PURAKA (Inhalation)

Movement 2: ABHYANTARA KUMBHAKA (Retention - internal)

Movement 3: RECHAKA (Exhalation)

Movement 4: BAHIR KUMHAKA (Retention - external)


