




PHILIP NOAKES FIPG A Passion for Silversmithing

PHILIP NOAKES is one of the foremost silversmiths working and teaching in Australia. He is a maker of fine hollowware and exquisite jewellery who enjoys being part of the continuum of the age-old traditions of two specialised crafts.

Noakes completed the technically demanding full-time Diploma in the Design and Craftsmanship of Silversmithing at Sir John Cass College of Art London in 1972 and is a skilled



Opposite page:
Philip Noakes photo Gareth Gorman
Main photo:
Whirlpool I" centrepiece, 2017,
Britannia silver, sterling silver rim, 80 x
295mm diameter, exhibited in Masters:
Art of the Precious Metal Object in
Geelong, 2018 Photo Robert Frith
Below:
Crossover series, Neo III, 2017, fine
silver, 22ct gold, 110mm x 90mm
diameter exhibited in Masters: Art of
the Precious Metal Object in Geelong,
2018 Photo Sue Warrington

This page:
"Floating Scales" vessel, sterling silver,
80 x 350mm – a work in progress
Photo D. Erickson



in the workshop of somewhat unconventional but inspiring Louis Osman ... regularly hammering 18ct gold to give a final finish was a heady affair



Above :
4 Ring sets made and exhibited by Philip in 1976
Brooch made 1988 for the Stuart Devlin Award exhibition, sterling silver and 24ct gold, 8 x 6cm
Below:
Centennial Pavilion ring c 1987, 18ct gold, sterling silver, sapphire



exponent of traditional methods having also gained the City and Guilds of London Institute certificates in 1970 and 1971.

After graduating as a prize-winning student Philip was placed by Graham Hughes, curator of Goldsmiths' Hall, in the workshop of somewhat unconventional but inspiring Louis Osman (maker of the crown for the Prince of Wales Investiture). Regularly hammering 18ct gold to give a final



finish was a heady affair. The unusual surfaces preferred by Osman were a legacy Philip carried into his own work. In 2016 the Institute of Professional Goldsmiths in London granted him Fellowship status.

Philip finds hand raising very satisfying but having an extensive range of tools, equipment and machinery he also experiments and uses modern technology to achieve his elegant designs. Born under the sign of Gemini he has a lively mind and his output has been eclectic from delicate rings to magnificent hollowware centrepieces. Recently having awarded himself a sabbatical by taking time off each week from teaching in his private school he has researched new techniques and made a magnificent collection of work for a major survey exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Gallery in the University of Western Australia's Cultural Precinct in 2019.

In January 1975 Philip arrived for a year's adventure holiday in Western Australia and finding the place congenial with opportunities he would not have at home, elected to stay. He had arrived in the middle of a mining boom, was introduced to the energetic craft community and offered a job in the workshop of silversmith Eric Car. The gallery scene was lively with one particularly dynamic gallery, aptly named Collectors, owned by psychiatrist Rose van Toussaint. Toussaint was an avid collector and invited many painters, jewellers and smiths to show. The young graduate was invited to have a solo exhibition, which took place in 1976. He was also recruited to teach at Claremont Technical College.

Noakes' skills were in demand and soon he was persuaded to move to Sydney to work for jeweller Tony White. This led to commissions and solo exhibitions at Robin Gibson Gallery in 1978 and 1979 in Sydney followed by Bonython Gallery in Adelaide in 1980. Buoyed by this he opened his own workshop and obtained commissions to make props for the movie industry and ranges for the fashion world. His work for designer Linda Jackson led to making for Olivia Newton-John's "Koala Blue" in Los Angeles. He also taught at Sydney College of the Arts.

In 1982 artist jeweller Kate O'Sullivan joined the studio and they married the following year. Kate has a degree in art teaching and an interest in fashion and design. The studio was upgraded to a studio-gallery entitled Studio Noko and when that prospered the couple opened Studio Noko—The Contemporary Jewellery Gallery in Double Bay. Kate was front of house, co-designer and exhibition co-ordinator while Philip was the foundation and rock on which the enterprise rested making up the many commissions that came their way. The gallery was regularly featured in glossy magazines. Entering competitions won Philip a Diploma of Honour at Diamond Facets 1989. His work was also featured in exhibitions around the country and collected by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences

Right:
Silver Award winner shown in the 1999 catalogue of the International South Sea Pearl Jewelry Design Competition in Hong Kong

Below:
A collection of dress rings in 18ct gold and precious stones made for Maker's Mark galleries in Melbourne and Sydney in 2010 Photo Adrian Lambert

in Sydney, the National Gallery and the Art Gallery of Western Australia. The pieces in the Western Australian collection were exhibited in the international Design Visions at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1992.

The couple returned to Western Australia in 1992 where Philip opened his own workshop and was soon invited to join Artisans of the Sea, the new offshoot of the Kailis fishing company which owned a pearling fleet. He was the lead designer and with his team won many prizes for pearl jewellery, including the Silver Award in Hong Kong at the International South Sea Pearl Jewellery Design Awards.

Philip left the Kailis company in 2000 and set up on his own, working to commission and selling through jewellery galleries in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne. He and Kate separated and he met his present partner Robin Barrow.



Noakes ... was soon invited to join Artisans of the Sea, the new offshoot of the Kailis fishing company which owned a pearling fleet





The new Contemporary Metal studio with a guest workshop in progress in 2017. The Hammer Room is in the background with Robin's office, the canteen and display room to the left
Photo Tony Holly

Philip at work in the Eric Car workshop in 1976

In 2010 he was persuaded once again to teach. This was at the Central Institute of Technology, a new name for the old Perth Technical School. Contractions in funding and constraints on the way jewellery and silversmithing were taught to the art stream saw him resign early in 2012 to set up his own teaching institution *Contemporary Metal* aiming to maintain standards in the State. His partner in the venture was a Curtin University 3D Design, Jewellery and Silversmithing graduate Claire Townsend who had also been teaching at the 'Tech'.

The new institution was warmly received with a regular stream of students passing through its doors.

Although very busy Philip contributed to some exhibitions but a yearning was there to make a collection of largescale hollowware. When Robin and Philip acquired the rest of the teaching business in 2016 Robin resigned from her job to manage the new *Contemporary Metal*.

Philip made plans to learn about new technology that could be useful when making sculptural silver and in July and August 2016 undertook an intensive introduction to new technology arranged by his former classmate Robin Kyte, Liveryman of the Worshipful company of Goldsmiths. Philip tried out TIG, PUK and Lazer welding with prominent members of the Goldsmiths' fraternity. His peers from college soon proposed to nominate him for the Institute of Professional Goldsmiths at the Fellow level and this was granted in late 2016. As a Fellow Philip is entitled to strike his work with the Drillstock mark of the institute as well as his own mark and the quality mark.

The new *Contemporary Metal* was opened in February 2017, by Professor Ted Snell the head of the Cultural Precinct at the University of Western Australia. Dr. Robert Bell, the immediate past curator of



contemporary crafts at the National Gallery of Australia, gave the opening address.

The studio is well equipped. Five rooms are divided into an office, a display and design area and the general working areas that include a hammer room with anvils and hammers for shaping metal, a draw bench, polisher, engineers lathe, hydraulic press for metal forming and a mini sandblaster for delicate sand finishes. The largest room holds work benches for sixteen students or workers, each individually equipped with pendant drills and all hand tools for soldering, sawing filing and drilling, etc. Here Philip can work on his objects, supervise or demonstrate to students. Along the edges are also a kiln, drill press, PUK and TIG welders and a portable electric engraver. Off to one side is the forge alcove for melting and large soldering. Finished works are displayed in a large glass cabinet. There is also a small display and collections room and a canteen alcove.

With Robin running the business side it was with considerable joy Philip put aside time each week to concentrate on making for a major survey exhibition Sculptural Silver – the largest exhibition of contemporary hollowware to be seen in Perth since the



The Hammer Room with Philip's drawing and partially finished 'pitcher'. Photo Gareth Gorman

University of Western Australia Chancellor's gift "Linear Tie", 2017 in Britannia silver beside its presentation box Photo Sue Warrington

1970s. All his thoughts were focused on creating a major body of work in silver and other metals, creating forms new to his oeuvre that were the culmination of all the influences from Louis Osman through to the present.

Over forty new vessels are being made focusing on form and texture. Textures created by hammering, carving, engraving and roller printing enliven the surface of vessels in Britannia silver, sterling silver, fine silver, copper and gold.

At times exhibition work has been diverted to another cause. For instance in late 2017 Philip was chosen to



"Neo V" & "Neo IV" from the Tie series, 2017, copper and sterling silver, 150 x 110 x 100mm & 100 x 70 x 75mm, exhibited in Masters: Art of the Precious Metal Object in Geelong, 2018 Photo Sue Warrington

make the farewell gift to the outgoing Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, Dr. Michael Chaney. The vessel created is a slender silver bud vase Linear Tie. He proudly marked the work with his new hallmark awarded by the Institute of Professional Goldsmiths. Then even before he had finished working on the first of the raised Tie series made in Britannia silver, it had been purchased as a corporate gift. The purchaser said, "I chose this particularly beautiful bowl because it met all the things I was looking for: beauty, uniqueness and simplicity."

The exhibition work, although started as a series of challenges, developed a rhythm of its own as one piece led to another and experimental surface-marking techniques led into yet other avenues for inquiry. Some planned experiments were put aside while he ran with one idea only to pick them up later and develop them into different series. Experiments in raising were conducted to see how the hammer affected the different metals he proposed to use. He also



A collection of work to be shown at Lawrence Wilson Gallery in 2019 Photo Robert Frith

experimented with scale, making generous works larger than he had ever made before. Although the work was physically exhausting it was mentally very fulfilling as he mastered each challenge he had set himself.

In 2017 Philip was invited to exhibit in Masters: Art of the Precious Metal Object, to be held at the National Wool Museum in Geelong in Victoria in 2018. Philip chose a representative collection from the new work made to that time. A pair of vessels was selected from his new Neo crossover group showcasing the link in form he sees between ceramic and metal, a crossover he perceives to be happening between two types of traditional vessel makers—potters and smiths.

The works were made in 2017 as he revitalized his silversmithing techniques, developing a comfortable rhythm, something that was possible as he had quarantined time to work consistently. The surface of the crossover vessels was finished with a specially filed hammer used to fragment the surface into planes producing a crystalline finish. He had first used it on an award-winning gold brooch years before. He was pleased with the 'bright-cut' result on the larger surfaces and used it also on elegant pitchers, goblets and other vessels such as Neo III. Other works exhibited were a pair of copper vessels trimmed



A collection of experiments and maquettes for work to be made Photo D. Erickson



The finished corporate gift 'Tie III',
2017, Britannia silver; 125 x 170mm
Photo Robert Frith

with sterling silver ties, and a large Britannia silver centrepiece.

With a selection of raised forms completed, more experimental works were trialled. Philip had purchased a Lampert PUK 5 in London and fully intended to use it but as he is happiest raising by the old techniques it had minimal use in the raised vessels. The new machine came into its own when he started to construct the multi-piece works for the floating bowls he proposed for his exhibition. The task he had set himself was to make vessels evocative of lilies floating on a pond. The idea harks back to a vessel he worked on at Louis Osman's forty years before and had never had time to take further. He expects to continue to expand the series in the future.

A non-functional experiment involved a folded form that would allow him to explore a different type of surface treatment from that possible on a hammered form. In this he was considering scale and size to resolve the aesthetics of the piece that commenced as a cylinder before being pierced and deformed to give the wave-like flow of the wings. He considers that in the future this form has the possibility of developing into a large sculpture.

A collection of hollow vessels, closed containers and sculptural objects attest to Philip's creativity. Magnificent table centres, elegant vase forms, striking pitchers and airy bowls reminiscent of water lilies floating on ponds

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PN' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

have been created. His work is its own commendation. Many pieces have already made their way into national exhibitions and corporate collections. Plans are being made to tour an exhibition of his work to other states and to London. It is to be hoped he will make time to continue to follow his own star after the exhibition tour is completed.

A monograph written by Dr. Dorothy Erickson documenting Philip's life and work is to be published by the WA Museum as a celebration of the nearly fifty years of achievements of this major Australian designer maker in gold and silver.

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Dorothy Erickson

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"Ribbon II" bowl, 2018, Britannia silver; sterling silver rim, 103 x 190mm diameter Photo Robert Frith

Right: "Waves I" made in Sterling silver 216 x 110 x 70mm Photo P.Noakes

"Whirlpool I" centrepiece, 2017, Britannia silver; sterling silver rim, 80 x 295mm diameter; exhibited in Masters: Art of the Precious Metal Object in Geelong, 2018 Photo Robert Frith

