

her Mother's Daughter

RICA & DOROTHY ERICKSON
PAINTING & JEWELLERY



THE GALLERY AT ELLENBROOK
SEPTEMBER 2015

Rica Erickson

1908 – 2009

A.M. D.Litt., Cit. WA (Arts).

Rica Erickson's history follows paths common to many West Australians whose ancestors came in pursuit of gold. Her great-grandmother Phoebe Morgan migrated to Australia and settled in Bendigo in 1853. Phoebe's daughter Frederica (1870-1955) became a midwife and followed the lure of gold to Boulder in 1906 and became a local legend as Nurse Cooke.

Rica lived with her grandmother when her parents became pioneer orchardists at Kendenup and was educated at Eastern Goldfields High School. She went on to Claremont Teachers' College before being required to resign when she married Bolgart farmer Sydney Erickson. The Erickson farm at Bolgart was on the western edge of the Avon District and was a place of rolling hills and exquisite wildflowers. Rica explored it in minute detail. She had begun to paint and draw as a small child and exhibited her first painting of wildflowers at the Eastern Goldfields Art and Industrial Exhibition in Boulder when she was eight years old. She joined the WA Naturalists' Club in 1932, and with ornithologist Dom Serventy's help acquired a second-hand microscope, over the years studying many plants and animals including the Rufous Whistler and native bees and wasps, some later named for her. In 1946 she exhibited a set of paintings of orchids at the Wild Life Show in Perth and was encouraged by Dom Serventy to publish her first book *Orchids of the West*. This widened her horizons and led to extensive research, contact with botanists all over the world and the publication of *Trigger Plants* and *Plants of Prey*.

As a young teacher she had instituted 'Museum Days' for collecting local stories and soon began unearthing material about the history of the Toodyay and Victoria Plains area. Rica discovered that it was full of James Drummond's descendants, who was the state's first botanist. The *Drummonds of Hawthornden* was published in 1969.

This spurred her on, at the age of 60, to embark on her biggest project: as the state's sesqui-centenary approached she felt that people would be interested to trace their family trees back to the beginning of settlement. The *Dictionary of West Australians 1829-1914* was published in 1979 and in 1987-8 the *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1888*. She published many monographs and a vast number of contributions to other publications about both Botany and History including her 2006 autobiographical book *A Naturalist's Life*. In 1980 she was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters by UWA and was WA Citizen of the Year for her contribution to Arts and Culture. She became a Member of the Order of Australia in 1987 and in 1996 a Bush Reserve was named in her honour. Throughout her life she has been strongly connected to the development of the collections of the Battye Library of West Australian History and was listed as one of the 100 most influential people in WA history.



RICA ERICKSON
Anigozanthos flavidus
Watercolour
Private collection

Dorothy Erickson

b. 1939

PhD

As the daughter of a well known naturalist Dorothy Erickson grew up with wide knowledge of the unique flora of WA. As a child her paintings were selected for prizes and exhibitions. Like her mother she became a teacher and included Botany in her teaching degree, writing a thesis on *Drosera* which became the basis of Rica's 1968 book *Plants of Prey*. In London in the 1960s she researched Australian plants for her mother at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and in the Natural History Museum in South Kensington.

She returned to WA and resumed her teaching career while studying at night at the newly established Western Australian Institute of Technology, now Curtin University, where she enrolled in Art and Design, graduating in 1972 as an artist jeweller. In 1976 she undertook post-graduate study in Jewellery and Silversmithing. Her first solo exhibition in Perth was highly successful, and resulted in a commission from the National Gallery of Australia.

By the Whitlam years, Dorothy had become President of the West Australian Crafts Council and was an accomplished contemporary artist jeweller. In 1980 she attended the World Craft Council Conference in Vienna where she was the first Australian invited to have a solo exhibition at the prestigious Galerie am Graben, Vienna, together with the appearance of multi-coloured African sapphires, inspired her recent work based on the jewel-like paintings of the Viennese artist Klimt. Other career defining exhibitions were in the Schmuckmuseum in Pforzheim Germany in 1982, International Jewellery Art Exhibition in Tokyo in 1986, Chicago International New Art Forms Expositions in 1992, Sommerfestival at Galerie Slavik, Vienna in 2001, *Looking over my Shoulder* in the Lesley Craze Gallery in London in 2004 and at the Fine Art Palace in Malta in 2005.

For some years her career as a jeweller was severely restricted by repetitive strain injury, divorce and serious health problems but, like her mother, she was undeterred. Unable to hold the tools to make jewellery, she turned to research and writing, undertaking a PhD in Art History jointly at UWA and the Royal College of Art in London. In the late 1980s a request to take part in a TV series saw her take to the bench again, and with determination and some assistance she returned to making and exhibiting. During her substantial career she has had 36 solo exhibitions and taken part in over 350 group shows. She has worked to support young practitioners and publishes articles promoting the work of West Australian artists and craftspeople.

In the mean time she revised her thesis, transforming it into the successful *Gold and Silversmithing in Western Australia*, which was published in 2010. Other publications include *A Joy Forever: the Story of Kings Park and Light and Land: Designers and Makers in Western Australia 1829-1969*. She is truly her mother's daughter.



RICA ERICKSON
Dampiera linearis
Necklace
2012

Natural Grace

Since Europeans first set foot in this landscape they have marvelled at the botanical cornucopia that exists in south west Western Australia. At first they were astonished at the harsh environment but then began to identify the thousands of species new to science and explore the amazing diversity created by these conditions. The indigenous inhabitants had lived in harmony with this natural world, composing the great creation stories that explained its metamorphosis through mysterious time. In the Jack Hills near Meekatharra the oldest known material of terrestrial origin takes this ancient landscape back 4.4 billion years to the beginning of the Earth's existence. The endlessly weathered surface of the South West corner of WA has been unchanged by inundation or ice and isolated by desert and sea for millennia, creating a paradise for evolutionary change. Every plant or animal here has had time to adapt to the tiniest variation in its environment. And now we are the custodians of this incomparable heritage.

WA's identity was once truly 'the wildflower state'. *The Western Mail* extolled the beauty of the flowers and Edgar Dell's botanical paintings were prized possessions. Tourists bought the plate with the iconic, hand-painted spray of flowers and botanists around the world studied our flora, as they had done since Dampier collected his first specimens in 1688. European gardeners and botanists sent plant hunters to WA on whaling ships before the colony existed and Napoleon and Josephine wandered the gardens of Malmaison amongst the Kangaroo Paws and black swans.

Rica Erickson is in a long tradition of citizen scientists who have explored our flora and the complex environmental relationships, such as the native bees and wasps that are integral to the survival of many plants. Botanising has been a part of our history and she has left a legacy of over 600 botanical illustrations to the Batty Library.

She has written pioneering books, including her biography of James Drummond, the state's first botanist, going on to an astonishing output of research, books and other publications about botany and colonial history.

Her daughter Dorothy Erickson, also an accomplished scholar, chose the path of the artist and has built an international career exhibiting her superb jewellery in the most prestigious galleries around the world. She takes the natural materials of the landscape, the metals, the iron ore, the gold and the precious stones, and makes burgeoning, vegetative, plant-like forms, their structure as light and delicate as so many native plants, their fragile, weightless, wiry lines resting on air. They touch the body intimately, as if walking in the wild profusion of the bush, brushed by flowers, twigs and leaves, with the unexpected grace of nature.

Philippa O'Brien
2015



RICA ERICKSON
Caladenia (Orchids)
Watercolour
Private collection



DOROTHY ERICKSON
Banksia grandis
Necklace
2008

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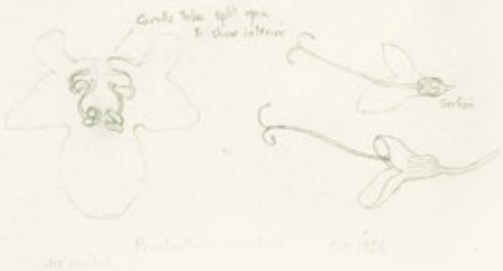
RICA ERICKSON
Prostanthera ovalifolia
Watercolour



DOROTHY ERICKSON
Brunonia australis
Necklace
2012



DOROTHY ERICKSON
Grevillea olivacea
Bracelet
2012





RICA ERICKSON
Olearia rudis
Watercolour
Private collection



RICA ERICKSON
Macropidia fuliginosa
Pastel
Private collection



RICA ERICKSON
Chorizema ilicifolium
Watercolour
Collection of the
State Library of WA



DOROTHY ERICKSON
Trachymene
(Lace Flower)
Pendent
2014



DOROTHY ERICKSON
Dampiera lindleyi
Necklace
2014



DOROTHY ERICKSON
Diplolaena augustifolium
(Yanchep Rose)
Necklace
2012



DOROTHY ERICKSON
Banksia grandis
Ring
2008



RICA ERICKSON
Hakea victoriae
Watercolour
Private collection

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We thank the State Library of Western Australia and many private collections for the loans of works by Rica Erickson. We also thank the many volunteers who have made this exhibition possible.

THE GALLERY AT ELLENBROOK

Philippa O'Brien - Curator
Carol Harris - Community Arts Manager

10am – 4pm Monday to Friday
10am – 5pm Saturday
1pm – 5pm Sunday and public holidays

FRONT COVER

Left:
Rica Erickson
Diplolaena augustifolium
Watercolour
Private collection

Right:
Dorothy Erickson
Diplolaena augustifolium
(Yanchep Rose)
Necklace
2012

DOROTHY ERICKSON
Banksia grandis
Necklace
2008

