

# Marina Shaw

china painter, sculptor, portrait painter



<sup>1</sup>  
Marina Shaw  
(Mrs W H Flynn)  
with vases she painted,  
c 1940s

## DOROTHY ERICKSON

Marina Shaw was a painter, china painter, ceramic sculptor and designer in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney (**plate 1**). Marina was born in 1903, the daughter of well-known naturalist J. B. Shaw of Kojonup in Western Australia. She was sent to boarding school in Perth for her education, later becoming an art student at the Perth Technical School under painter-silversmith James W. R. Linton<sup>1</sup> and graphic designer Archibald Webb.

Marina Shaw (1903–1996)

trained at Perth Technical School and is best known in Western Australia for her china painting, exploring repeating patterns based on Australian flora and Aboriginal motifs. Later she studied sculpture and painting in Melbourne, London and Sydney, producing small three-dimensional works that she sold through fashionable retailers such as George's in Melbourne. Her work was presented to Queen Elizabeth, and she is represented in major galleries.

In 1933 she exhibited a watercolour painting with the West Australian Society of Arts, then in 1935 watercolours and china painting – possibly the persimmon vase illustrated (**plate 2**). This was the year she became a student of Flora Landells at the Maylands School of Art where she learnt china painting.<sup>2</sup> All of these teachers reinforced her natural inclination to develop her designs from indigenous flora and fauna. Marina painted 'on-glaze' on imported blanks before the war, when there was a plentiful supply, developing a career as a china painter and a textile designer (**plate 2**).



2

Marina Shaw (1903–1996), vase painted with persimmons, 1935, Thomson collection  
 Images nos 4 onwards need to be numbered one less; there is no no. 3



3



4

Marina Shaw married Warwick H. Flynn, an aviation employee who worked on radar equipment. They lived in Greenmount, in the hills behind Perth. Here at ‘Galmarra’ she developed a native garden growing the unique Western Australian wildflowers. This was followed by time in the country at Dalwallinu before moving to suburban Nicholson Road, Subiaco in 1944, while her husband was away in the RAAF establishing radar posts in New Guinea.

Although described in 1985 as Australia’s answer to Clarice Cliff,<sup>3</sup> at the time she worked, the tone was rather more chauvinistic.

*If there is one type of person we make a bow to it is the married woman who has planned her life so that when her children have grown up she is not left in the air with nothing to do but spend her time on social fripperies. We make a bow to Marina Shaw, in private life, Mrs Warwick Flynn ...<sup>4</sup>*

Her designs for textiles and ceramics drew interest in both the USA and UK, but it is not known if she sold designs to industry in these countries. In the 1940s she won a scholarship to the Slade School of Art but was unable to take it up because of family commitments.

She painted a complete tea set on-glaze, with every piece having an individual motif based on Aboriginal legends and artwork (**plate 4**). On average each of the pieces would take two days and nights to complete. Other designs have included historic mills in Western Australia. When Marina Shaw exhibited with the Western Australian Society of Arts or the Western Australian Women’s Society of Fine Arts & Crafts her striking work, and that of her contemporary Amy Harvey, stood out.<sup>5</sup>

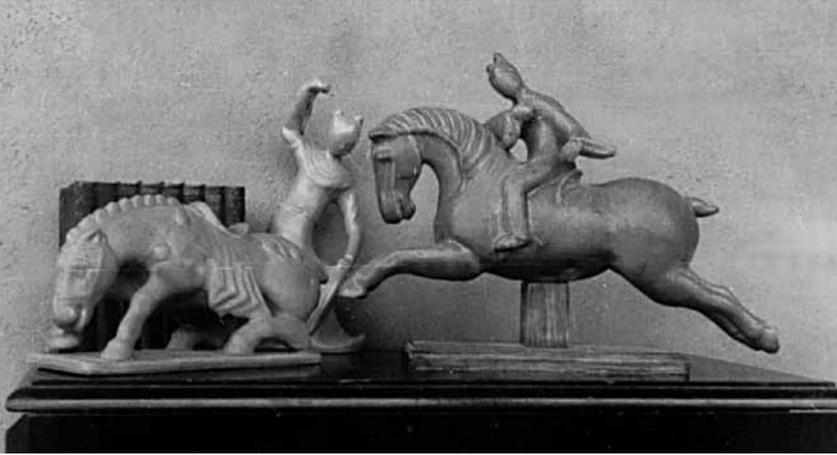
Marina Shaw said of her work: ‘Our wildflowers have such bold shapes and such rich colours that they are ideal for working into pattern designs.’ And pattern designs were a feature of much of her work. One of her most successful pieces is a plate painted with a vibrant circle of frill-necked lizards thrown in sharp relief on a red background highlighted

3

Marina Shaw (1903–1996), porcelain tea set painted with on-glaze designs based on Aboriginal designs or legends, 1944-6. Collection National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1986

4

Marina Shaw (1903–1996), Noritake porcelain plate painted on glaze with frilled lizard and eucalypts, signed and dated 1945, diam 25.4 cm. Collection National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1986



- 5  
Marina Shaw  
(1903–1996), Chinese-  
inspired horses, 1950s
- 6  
Marina Shaw (1903–  
1996), Indonesian  
dancing girls, 1950s
- 7  
Marina Shaw (1903–  
1996), Australian  
collection, 1950s

with touches of gold, the central section featuring red bugles on a blue background with a central medallion composed of the blossom of *Eucalyptus erythrocorys* (plate 5). As a pattern the design is strong with tension being added by the almost naturalistic lizards which are barely restrained on the surface of the plate.

In 1946, at the suggestion of the principal of the Calyx Porcelain Works in Perth, she began painting in the more difficult ‘under glaze’ technique on their semi-porcelain forms, assisted by the company’s chemist. Under-glaze colours available were much more limited as they had to withstand the high heat necessary to vitrify the glaze. This work lent itself to the incorporation of Aboriginal designs popular at the time and considered to be an expression of nationalism.

There is an obvious connection between the design of some of her work and that of Amy Harvey,<sup>6</sup> also a former student of Flora Landells. Similar strong colouring and design formulas were seen in designs exhibited by Perth Technical College students at much the same time, giving pause for thought that a ‘school’

style was in evidence. The strong design base of the Perth Technical School course stood Marina in good stead in her later career. In 1947 she won a competition for the design for a postage stamp – a black cockatoo entitled ‘Cocky’. Some thought the cockatoo was a caricature of the leader of the opposition Arthur ‘Cocky’ Calwell, and not used.

Like a number of other Western Australian women she sold her work through city shops such as the jewellers Caris Bros.<sup>7</sup> An article in the *West Australian* in 1948 described her work when it was on display in Caris Bros.

*Western Australian wildflowers used as a basis for design, sometimes classical and in other cases quite unconventional, give striking individuality to china painted by Mrs W. H. Flynn of Subiaco. Exhibited amongst the craftwork at the recent exhibition of the Society of Women Painters, Mrs Flynn’s work is again on view at Caris Bros, Hay Street. She has not confined her attention to the use of flora however, but has found in our native fauna much inspiration for a lively sense of design and appreciation of the limits of shape and modelling of the pieces on which she works. Her craftsmanship, apart from her designing ability, and her sense of colour values in the medium she employs, add to the distinctiveness of the work, and there is also present an awareness of the unique qualities in Australian aboriginal art.<sup>8</sup>*

Shaw and her husband left Western Australia in 1948 to live in Victoria. Here she studied ceramic sculpture for four years with George Allen at Melbourne Technical College making three-dimensional figurative works in terracotta and bronze. The course included modelling, moulding, glazing and firing. Marina had two





kilns built in the enlarged garage of their Box Hill home and her husband took a course in ceramic chemistry to assist her with the glazes.

At first her inspiration for sculpture came from Chinese work of the Tang and Ming dynasties (plate 6) but then she moved into Australian imagery of goannas and exotics such as the Bird of Paradise and Indonesian dancing girls (plate 7). An early kangaroo sculpture resembles but pre-dates the Qantas logo. The works were made in multi-part moulds and as editions, and sold in outlets such as Georges in Melbourne. Some of her Aboriginal ceramic figures were presented to Queen Elizabeth II during the royal tour of Australia in 1954.

From 1957–64 Marina Shaw lived in Sydney and studied 'Meldrum Method' painting under Albert Rydge. Following this she lived in London where she studied sculpture and portrait painting at the Slade School. She returned to Sydney in 1966, living and working as a painter and sculptor into the 1980s until she developed Alzheimer's disease. She died in 1996.

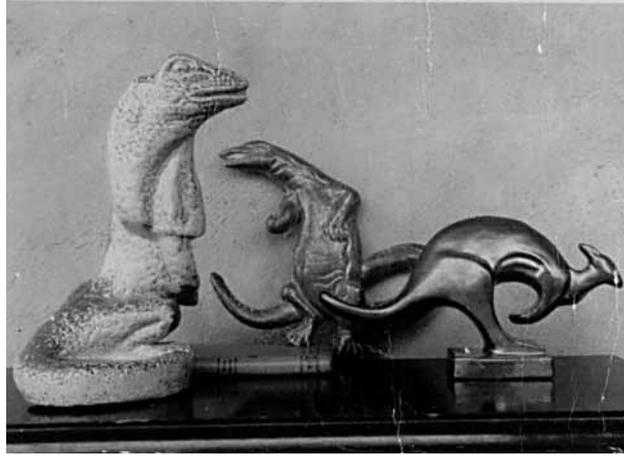
In 1986 a collection of her china painting work was bought by the National Gallery in Canberra and another acquired by the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Marina Shaw gave more examples to the NGA in 1988.

### Exhibitions

- WA Society of Arts Annual Exhibition, Newspaper House, 1933, 1935
- WA Women's Society of Fine Arts and Crafts 1936-48
- Claude Hotchin Art Galleries, Hay Street, Perth, 1947
- Caris Bros, Perth (china painting) 1945, 1948
- Georges, Melbourne, solo china and ceramic sculpture, 1950s

### Collections

Art Gallery of WA, National Gallery of Australia, Queen Elizabeth II

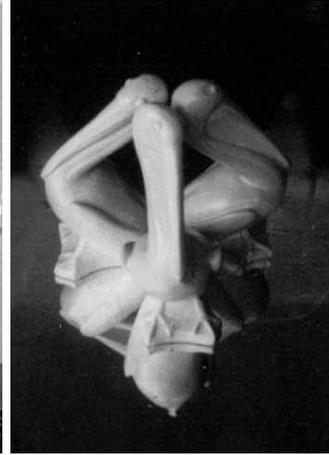


### References

- Muriel Gardells, 'Handpainted china', *Western Mail Women's Magazine Supplement* 6 June 1946, p 10
- Jan Meredith, 'Native motif for your crockery', *Australian Home Beautiful* July 1949, pp 40-41
- Peter Lyell, 'How clay comes to life', *Woman's Day and Home* April 1955, p 41
- 'Perth woman's china painting filmed', undated cutting family collection
- 'Australia's answer to Clarice Cliff', *House and Garden* 18 Feb 1985
- Dorothy Erickson, '*Inspired by light and land: designers and makers in Western Australia*' unpublished MS 2000

### Notes

- 1 *Australiana* 22 nos 1–4, 2000
- 2 *Australiana* 31 no 4 November 2009 and *Australiana* 33 no 3, August 2011
- 3 'Australia's answer to Clarice Cliff', *House and Garden* 18 Feb 1985
- 4 Undated cutting c.1940s
- 5 *Australiana* vol 26 no 2, May 2004, pp 36-37
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 E.g. *West Australian* 10 Nov 1945, p 11
- 8 *West Australian* 1948



8

Marina Shaw (1903–1996), Australiana collection, 1950s

9

Marina Shaw (1903–1996), Australiana collection, 1950s

10

Marina Shaw (1903–1996), pelicans

11

Marina Shaw (1903–1996), horses