

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY

An enduring fascination with the art and mythology of ancient Greece and a lifelong love of the sea are the primary sources of inspiration behind Glenice Lesley Matthews' outstanding works in cloisonné enamel. Text by Dr Dorothy Erickson.



Fragment of a Lost Memory Series: 'Hera', 1986, cloisonné enamel on fine silver, ht 4.5 x 2 cm



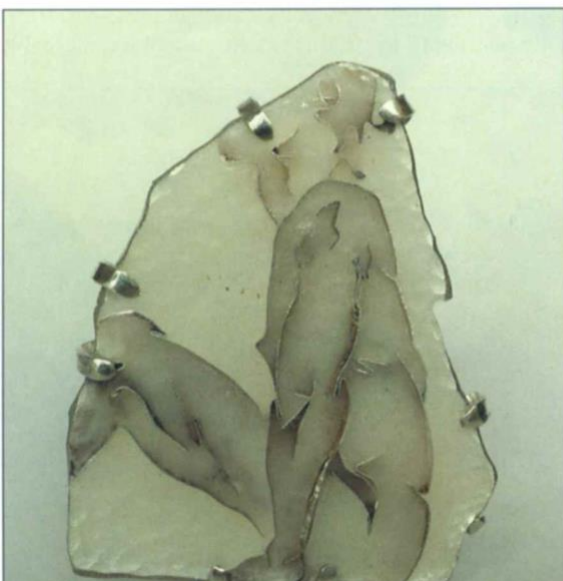
Fragment of a Lost Memory Series: 'Pheobus Apollo', 1984, cloisonné enamel on fine silver, ht 8 x 6 cm

GLENICE Lesley Matthews is fascinated by recycled objects, particularly those whose final use is vastly different from the original. She cites as examples Greek monuments, torn down by invaders, used as ballast in ships or as doorsteps only to be rediscovered, transported and revered in museums. Indeed, her mature artworks often look as if they had suffered the same fate. Few of these exquisite enamel jewels, however, have made it into glass cases, as they were commissioned by other artists or purchased hot from her enamelling kiln. Matthews is not widely known in Australia as she has spent much of her adult life in America, only returning to her native Perth in 1989. In the USA, where she had a distinguished career as adjunct professor at Wichita State and Friends Universities before becoming executive director of the Wichita Art Association Galleries, School and Theatre, she had been the recipient of a number of awards and published the informative text *Enamels, Enameling, Enamelists*, which has since gone into a third printing. Well known in enamelling circles, she was the keynote speaker at the first International Enamellers Conference held in 1987 in Cincinnati, USA. This petite Australian dynamo also served on the committees and boards of an impressive list of organisations, arranged touring exhibitions and had her own radio program.

Jewellery was not Matthews' first career. In the 1960s it was almost unknown for women to sit at the

bench. Although she is the daughter of jeweller Kenneth Matthews, whose craftsmanship she greatly admired, Glenice took the more traditional path of commercial studies to earn a living as an accountant/administrator. Her less conventional hobby was motor racing which she shared with her husband of the time, Mark Staniford.

The end of that partnership saw her enrolled in art classes during the late 1960s and early '70s, first at





From left: 'Beacon of the Sea', 1976, stg silver, moonstone, pearls and LEDs, 6 x 2.5 cm

'Minoan Memory', 1978, pitcher in pewter, 20.3 x 5.5 cm

'Niké', 1978, water pitcher in stg silver, hollow construction, 20 x 13 x 7.5 cm

'And she threw him from Olympus into the Sea', 1977, bronze nickel, brass, and stg silver, 13 x 33 x 7.5 cm



Fremantle and then Claremont technical colleges. Her father had taught metalsmithing at Fremantle and she gravitated towards metal and sculpture. Piercing, forging and enamelling were the favoured techniques in these institutions. Mature age matriculation allowed entry into Three-dimensional Design at WAIT (now Curtin University), where she broadened her technical range during 1974 and thought longingly of overseas.

A bursary from the Western Australian Arts Council enabled her to travel to Europe and the USA where, in 1975, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Fine Arts course at the University of Kansas under the distinguished pedagogue Carlyle Smith – teacher of such silversmithing luminaries as Richard Mawdsley and Robert Ebendorf. Her eclectic taste saw her studying science subjects and the classics while writing her thesis on the art of cuttlebone casting. The latter she had learnt from her father and, finding it little used in America, travelled widely demonstrating the technique, before graduating with distinction. Her work of the time consisted mostly of sculptural hollow-ware and often featured cuttlebone detail.

This was a time of considerable experimentation with techniques in American jewellery. New techno-

logy was introduced by a number of makers, the best known of whom was Mary Ann Scherr. During this period Matthews used her mechanical aptitude to provide hi-tech effects in some pieces. An articulated, cuttlebone-cast brooch of 1976 incorporated not only her trademark gems – moonstone and pearls – but also flashing lights powered by light-emitting diodes (LEDs) controlled by a circuit board that was an early type of miniature computer. The piece was later shown in an exhibition called "Art and Technology" in New Rochelle, New York. The recurrent theme in her work is derived from the sea, or that seafaring race the Greeks and this, with the wave-like rhythm of the cast texture, evokes sand, surf and seashore. The red, flashing lights are obviously warning beacons.

Even though Carlyle Smith was an influential teacher it was a workshop with Finnish silversmith Heikki Seppa that provided most of the focus for her work. His spiculum-forming technique entranced her and can be seen in much of her work from this period. It was Matthews who introduced it to Australia in a workshop held in Perth in 1980. The technique is now widely used by a number of Australian artists. Technique was all-important at this time and Matthews, fascinated by the ancient Greeks' technology, fused her work rather than soldered. Finnish and Greek technology, married to inspiration from the sea, can be seen in *Kythera the Golden*.

On graduation, Matthews was offered a scholarship to study with Seppa in Washington and worked in his program for one year, but on being awarded a lucrative Research Honours Fellowship returned to Kansas and became an instructor at the university whilst pursuing her own work towards a masters degree. Michelangelo's *David*, the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, the *Fountain of the Four Rivers* and Henry Moore's sculptures figure in her scrapbook of memories and resonate strongly in the work of the time. The master works consisted of hollow forms derived from Minoan pottery, sculpture or marine life. Greece had become a personal odyssey and her master works were exhibited as "A Personal Epic" at the Helen Foreman Spencer Museum in Lawrence, Kansas in 1979, as part of a program entitled "Musing with the Muses" and at Wichita

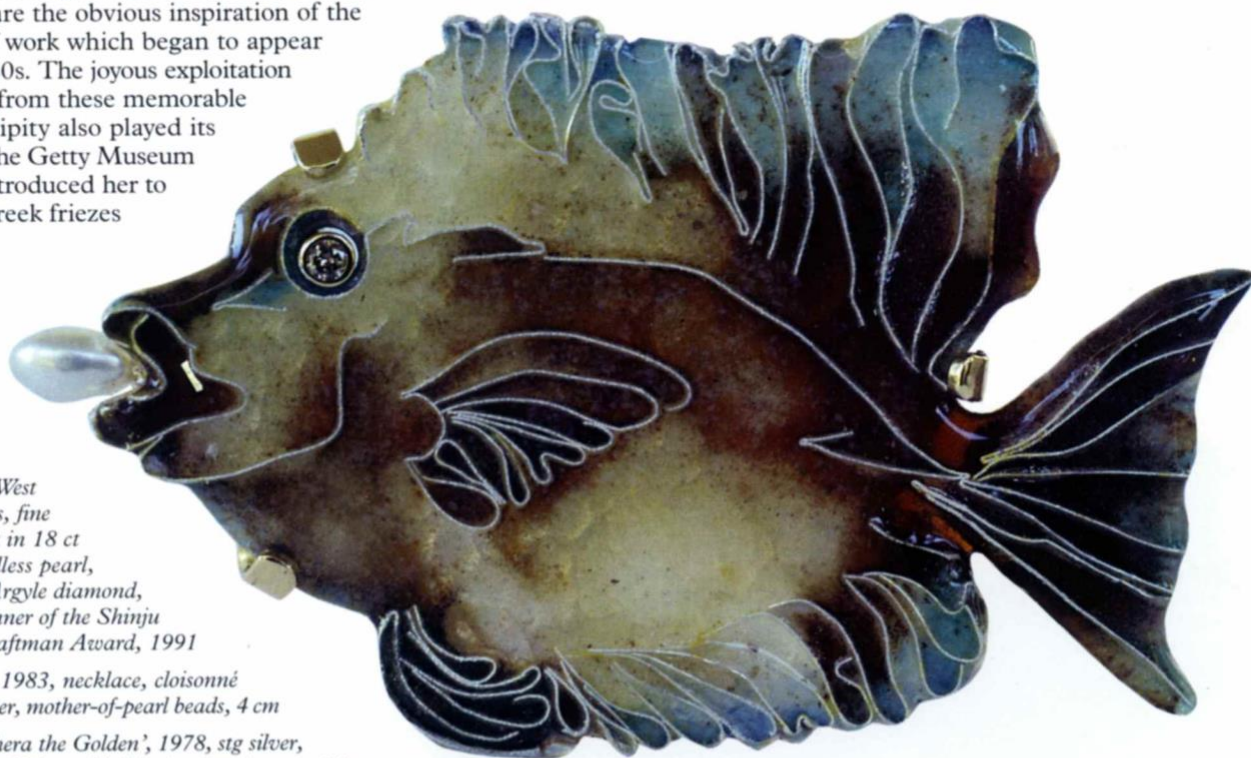


Art Museum in 1981. During the first exhibition *The Odyssey* was recited from beginning to end by a relay of staff from the Classics Department where she had been studying concurrently. After graduating with honours, Matthews began teaching at Friends University, Wichita and the Wichita State University. As one of the requirements was to teach enamelling, she renewed her interest in this technique. A mentor was the distinguished enamellist Bill Helwig, known for his subtle grisaille work. Helwig, who worked for an enamels company and had an intricate technical knowledge of the process, was an invaluable reference. The new work was a complete contrast to the sculptural pieces she had previously made; line replaced form, resulting in an early series of heads sketched against opaque white forms, entitled *Fashion Plates*. A more static flower series with delicate colouration and shading emerged as she prepared for the publication of her book in 1984. On completion of the technical exploration phase, she consolidated her interests and, turning to line as an articulation of form, embraced again her muse of the sea and things Greek.

Long northern summer holidays allowed visits to Greece, home of the heroes she had studied so laboriously. Greek ceramics and the vase painters of the black-and-white ground Attic pottery seen in the museums, are the obvious inspiration of the mature body of work which began to appear in the early 1980s. The joyous exploitation of line derives from these memorable objects. Serendipity also played its part. A visit to the Getty Museum in California introduced her to fragments of Greek friezes



'Artaki Krini – a sacred grove, from *Fragments of a Lost Memory – The Quest – Jason's Voyage series*', 1993, fine silver cloisonné set in 18 ct gold, white diamonds, 6 x 7 x 1 cm



'Surgeon Fish', 1991, from *North West Coastal Fish Series*, fine silver cloisonné set in 18 ct gold, Broome seedless pearl, and champagne Argyle diamond, 4 x 6 x 1 cm. Winner of the Shinju Matsuri Artist Craftman Award, 1991

Below: 'Caliopé', 1983, necklace, cloisonné enamel on fine silver, mother-of-pearl beads, 4 cm

Below right: 'Kythera the Golden', 1978, stg silver, fine silver, 14 ct and 24 ct gold, Mexican opal, agate, 13 cm





'Festival Fan-to-Sea', 1993, fine silver, cloisonné set in 18 ct gold, Broome pearl, Argyle Cognac diamond, 3 x 6 cm. Winner of Shinju Matusuri Artist Craftsman Award



Fragment of a Lost Memory Series: 'And she threw off her veils in delight', ht 7 cm



'To Selene' (The Moon, The Star, The Universe), 1991 Shinju maturi piece, 24 ct gold cloisonné, 18 ct gold, Broome cultured pearl and white kite-shaped diamond



'Zinnia', 1992, brooch, enamel in 24 ct gold cloisonné on fine silver in 18 ct gold, featuring a 1.57 ct zinnia-cut diamond and 32 2pt diamonds pavé set

held in simple claw-settings for display purposes. These spawned the idea to discard the bezel and set her own works as shards held by minimal silver claws, leaving the eye free to roam over the edges and complete the picture. Most are sections of bodies – subtle and almost monochromatic – with touches of colour reflected against the cloisons which sketch in the torsos or outline the limbs. The matte-finished enamel has a misty quality resembling alabaster – the connotation of marble reinforcing the ancient Greek connection.

Matthews says her artworks are a search for something missing – a quest to replace that which is lost – hence the collective title for the ongoing body of work: *Fragments of a Lost Memory*. A lost memory of a "wine-dark sea", in this case not the Aegean but the Indian Ocean of her birthplace – a common inspiration for many Western Australian artists who feel drawn to its deep blue depths. The lithe limbs are those of loved ones, not archaic gods. She has written: 'The sea is my power, my inspiration. The greatest of all mariners were the ancient Greeks. The mysteries of their mythology, and the mastery of Greek craftsmanship have interwoven and merged with my love for the ocean. Like a stream which joins a river, which in turn merges into the seas, the Greeks and the sea blend to inspire my art.'¹ Fragmented thought thus transformed are captured for posterity in titles such as *Orion*, *Helios*, *Selene*, *Hera*, *Phoebus*, *Apollo*, *Aristes*.

Her latest body of work, currently touring South-East Asia with "The Art of Adornment" exhibition, continues her search for *Fragments of a Lost Memory*. This particular series is subtitled *The Quest – Jason's Voyage* and exploits the fibula used in *Selene*. Creamy enamelled forms, evocative of Australia, even though delineating anatomy and derived from man-made marks on rocks in ancient Minoan temples on Crete, are suspended from gold fibulae. As general manager of Linneys, jewellers, Matthews does not have time to make a large body of work each year, but this is in part compensated by the opportunity to work with valuable Argyle diamonds and Broome pearls – and to travel. For instance, in 1992 she travelled to Japan as designer-in-residence in Osaka, returning to Perth where Linneys made up the work she had designed for a growing number of Japanese clients.

Her piece, entitled *Zinnia*, consisting of 24 ct gold cloisonné on fine silver set in 18 ct gold, featuring a 1.57 ct zinnia-cut diamond and 32 pavé-set diamonds, was commissioned in 1992 by de Beers for their promotion of flower cut diamonds. *Festival Fan-to-Sea* won the 1993 Artist Craftsman Award in the Shinju Matsuri pearl jewellery competition in Broome, WA. Matthews is a regular entrant and winner in this category. Her work can be seen at Linneys in Perth, at Makers Mark in Melbourne and the Perth Mint Shop in Sydney and Perth; but if you want a fragment of her lost memory you will probably have to commission it and wait for *Hermes* to deliver.

Dorothy Erickson, PhD

Dr Dorothy Erickson is a writer, art critic, curator and practising designer/jeweller based in Perth, WA. In 1994 she won the Inaugural Powerhouse Prize for published material on *Australiana*.

Glennice Lesley. Matthews can be contacted at Linneys, 37 Rokeby Road, Subiaco, Perth 6008, WA. Tel: (09) 382 4077.