



The  
**Distaff**  
of the  
**Moon**

AN EXHIBITION BY  
CAROLYN DODDS



REDLAND ART GALLERY, CLEVELAND

SUNDAY 4 DECEMBER 2011 –  
SUNDAY 29 JANUARY 2012

Dodds was formally trained in England, where she was taught etching techniques by eminent printmaker Richard Bawden. She literally fell in love with printing when she first worked in a print room – “it just felt right”, she points out, “despite it being a very challenging and labour-intensive medium”. She reminisces about the special influence of Michael Blaker, “the only artist I’d met up to that point who made a living solely from his work. He would take plates out and work directly from life, which really inspired my approach. He was a very generous mentor when I was just a young artist.” As an art student in the UK, Dodds also learned wood engraving from John Lawrence and Luther Roberts. After returning to Australia, she met artist Sheelah Mee who became a friend and mentor. She also enjoyed the influence of printmaker Tate Adams, who is widely regarded as a pioneer of the contemporary print world in Australia, and whom she lauds as an ‘eminence grise’ of printmaking. Dodds credits him with “an inspiring generosity”. Her extensive travels to India, China and Hong Kong have been driven by her desire to study art internationally and have had a profound and continuing influence.

When she was in her early forties, Dodds moved to Macleay Island, one of four islands at the southern end of Moreton Bay, a short ferry ride from the mainland. Many of her prints over the past decade have arisen from her experience of living on the island. “Macleay Island was quite isolated, so I had to look for subject matter”, she says. “This became a ritual for me – for example, I would pick a flower every time I took the dog for a walk, and then draw it when I returned home, before it wilted.” Dodds’ attraction to flowers is obvious from their prominence in many of her prints, and she articulates an admiration of traditional genre categories. In relation to her love of flowers, she explains: “I like to draw living things. I like the sense of change and decay... it gives me a sense of urgency to complete the art. And no matter how long I have been in Australia, its flora is still exotic to me”.

The frequent symbolism and ritualistic content reflected in her prints is apparent in *Full circle*, an intricate flower print featuring a vase abundant and overflowing with native flowers, including grevillea, banksia, gum blossom, and wattle – flowers that reflect all of the seasons. The table is scattered with fallen flower heads and gum nuts, conveying the passing of time, as well as a selection of creatures that are also seasonal, such as a green tree frog, a cicada, a wood lizard, a mouse, and a beetle. The title *Full circle* refers to the total lunar eclipse, another cyclical symbol that is evoked by the blanket-clad woman and girl who are looking up towards the eclipsed moon that is not visible in the artwork. “All of my artwork”, says Dodds, “is about how we exist in time – the tension between the arrested moment and the passage of time.”

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Prints like *Full circle* can take up to a year to evolve. This was partly because the preparatory drawings were based on life drawings of a number of seasonal flowers, however, the composition and cutting of the lino are also very time-consuming elements in the printmaking process.

Dodds is pedantic that her work is derived from real life rather than secondary sources and emphasises that this process is her own way of relating to the world. “The life drawing room was the first place where I felt excited by the process. The same thing happened when I went into the etching room. I felt like I belonged. If the painting is the grand novel, a print is like the poem.” This results in works that are rich with movement and expression, and in which Dodds’ subjects are captured with depth, intimacy, and compassion. Daily life constantly inspires her to draw,

and then transform these images onto linoleum, wood, or metal plates. The lino cut, ... *they were never wrong...* (quoting a poem by WH Auden) is a composition consisting of much that Dodds has enjoyed about living on Macleay Island. Each of the sections of this vividly detailed print, which reflects the interactions between people, dogs, birds, and marine life (interactions that carry on no matter what), were first sketched from real life. The piecing together of these individual components to create the final print show Dodds’ superb compositional skill, in which all parts make a very complete, thriving artwork, evoking the buzz of community life as it engages with nature.

Dodds’ focus on relief prints has been partly a pragmatic decision, based on the limited access to sophisticated studio facilities, given the remoteness of her location. She makes her prints at home using the traditional forms of woodblock and lino engraving, using a wooden spoon to create her unique prints, often on delicate rice papers. Since travelling each year to the USA she has started etching once again.

Her passion for etching and the malleability of the metal plate is demonstrated in her *eterna in mutabilitate* series – a series of intaglio prints that were a result of reusing the etching plate over and over again during a series of life classes. The first figure is a male nude, then a female figure appears on the next print, obscuring the male form, a form which can then be brought back into the print by scraping away the surface copper. The series is a playful commentary on the possibilities of how images emerge, are obscured, may then re-emerge, and may be completely concealed as another image takes over the etching plate. This also reflects the artist’s interest in reflecting the passage of time.

*The Distaff of the Moon* by award-winning artist Carolyn Dodds is lavish with skill and insight, showcasing the sacredness that exists in the very ordinary moments, experiences, and relationships in day-to-day life.

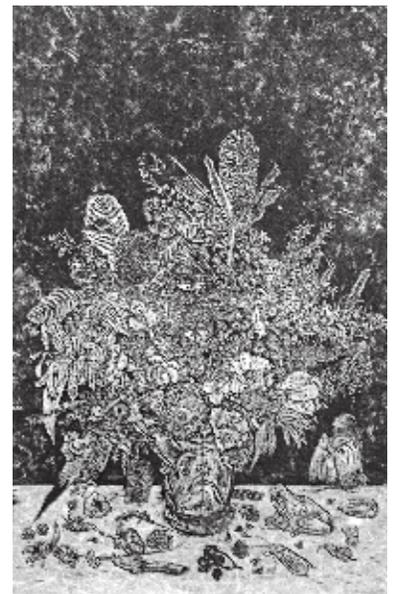
Monique Lewis  
September 2011



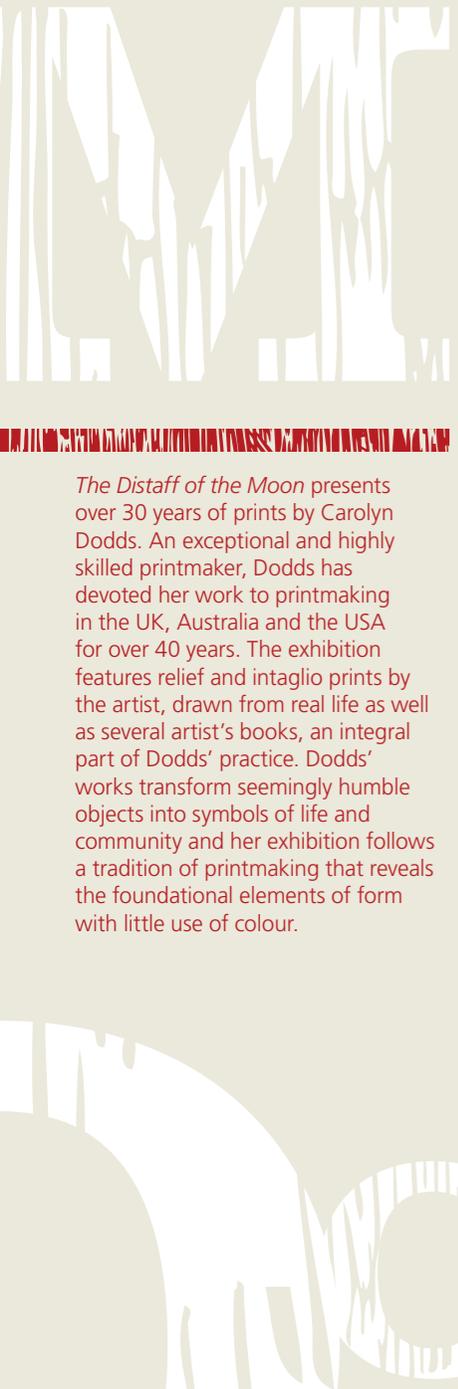
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## IMAGES

Cover: *Wild and feral flowers (walking the walk)* (detail) 2007, linocut on Chinese paper.

1. *Harmony in red and black* 2008, woodcut and linocut on Japanese paper.
2. *En famille – all together now* (detail) 2009, woodcut on Chinese paper.
3. *Full circle* (detail) 2002, linocut on Korean paper.
4. *Birds of paradise* 2008, woodcut on Chinese paper.

© Images courtesy of Carolyn Dodds.

### Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

Cnr Middle and Bloomfield Streets,  
Cleveland Q 4163

Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm

Sunday 9am – 2pm

Admission free

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Carolyn Dodds was artist in residence at Capalaba Artspace, Monday 10 January – Saturday 12 March 2011. The residency and accompanying printmaking workshops were a Redland Art Gallery project presented in partnership with Redland Libraries.



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Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland City Council, dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana