



Rosemary Opala

1923 – 2008

Moonlight and Mangroves n.d.

Scraperboard

Redland Art Gallery Collection.

Gift of the estate of Rosemary Opala, 2009.

Rosemary Opala, cartoonist, botanical illustrator, painter, journalist and short-story writer, was born in Bundaberg, 1923, one of the two daughters of Harold Fielding, a writer who published occasional pieces in the *Bulletin*. She trained as a nurse at Brisbane General Hospital during World War II and eventually became a nursing supervisor at Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane. In the late 1950s and early 1960's, she wrote popular magazine fiction but later turned her attention to non-fiction, with an emphasis on Queensland and its natural history.

Opala's earliest memory as a small toddler was drawing beside the Noosa River and this interest in art continued throughout her life. She attended art school at Brisbane's old Central Technical College but with the World War II looming she chose not to complete her studies and took up nursing as her way of contributing to the war effort. As a young woman, training as a nurse, Opala began drawing cartoons about nursing, and some of her impressions are now held by the University of Queensland, Fryer Library.

In the late 1940's she worked on Peel Island taking a nursing position working with Hansen's disease patients. Opala's great affinity with the natural marine environment and island life was further reinforced when she and her husband built a home on Coochiemudlo Island in the 1950s. Opala's botanical artworks

document her passion for the tidal salt marshes of this region. She worked with great dedication to record the seven mangrove species of Moreton Bay. She also specialised in depicting the banksias of southeast Queensland.

