

A Few Memories of Margaret

Ross Longmuir

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Margaret Grafton walked into my showroom in 2001 with a small plastic shopping bag full of her work and said that someone had suggested that I might like to see her weavings.

Glittering gems were pulled from the bag. The weavings made my eyes light up at the fabulousness of them having been produced by Margaret, who seemed grandmotherly and rather shy and awkward. How wrong I was.

Margaret went on to explain her background and we arranged a visit to her studio to see first hand some of her older works. She explained the frustration of attempting to evolve her work from woollen to metal foil weaving in the mid 1970's and that due to a lack of response to this work, she had found it frustrating to find a place for it until now. Her theory was that the medium was too challenging for fine art galleries, male dominated and only interested in paintings and sculpture.

Our first endeavour together was a retrospective exhibition, which she aptly chose to title *Deviation*. Margaret spoke of how the metal cut her hands, alluding to her enjoyment of some aspects of this pain. Margaret loved hinting at the possible kinky aspect of her work that included patination with urine. Despite all this, I felt that the real origin and relevance of her title *Deviation* was from the challenging life that she had always chosen. She chose at every step to question and look to do things in a different way. For myself this is the mark of the essence of artistic motivation, to always be operating on the fringes and to consider alternate ways that the world can be viewed.

Over the next few years we had many meetings at her studio and at the showroom as many thousands of dollars of works were sold and as press wrote articles and as clients commissioned works. Margaret struggled with the commercial dealings. Like most artists, she was motivated by an instinctual desire to create, and felt conflicting emotions in regards to her commercial success. If you got her on a good day though, we had a great time discussing philosophy and life.

I think that she was very pleased to visit England one last time, even the experience was to confirm that she had made the right decision in choosing Australia.

I remember vividly a major work hanging in her small courtyard garden developing patina just before she died. It was a copper weaving done using hot pink rope as a warp. Margaret had suspended the un-stretched work from industrial chain links and as it rolled into almost a dress like form, I felt as if the work was a suit of armour that she had made for herself, in the shape of a strappy sundress. It would have been difficult and uncomfortable to wear. Somehow though it summed up the dual aspects of her personality: a fresh girly energy combined with a determined and forceful artist.

Ross Longmuir is a furniture designer and director of planet in Crown Street, Surry Hills. Ross initiated two important exhibitions of Grafton's work: *Margaret Grafton Survey Exhibition* (2002) and *Deviation* (2001) at Planet Furniture, Sydney.