

Chips Mackinolty

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Chips Mackinolty is a Darwin-based artist and writer who has worked for Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations for more than four decades as an advocate, a researcher, journalist, graphic artist and designer. His prints and political posters have been included in more than 200 group and solo exhibitions in Australia and abroad in the past forty-five years, and his work is represented in public and private collections nationally and internationally. He was a member of the Earthworks Poster Collective (1973–1980), later establishing Green Ant Research Arts & Publishing with Peter Cooke and Therese Ritchie in Darwin in the 1990s.

Mackinolty's recent series of prints, *The Wealth of the Land*, was inspired by a two-year residency in the Vucciria district of Palermo, Italy. At first blush a moving feast of fruits and vegetables, the works celebrate the nature and culture of local community and linguistic heritage, threatened by globalised marketeering. As striking alimentary portraits, they are emblematic of their Palermitan producers and vendors: *natura viva*, rather than *nature morte*.

Anita Angel: Artists' creative spaces are usually equated with a private studio or workshop. How has this conventional definition worked for you in Darwin, and how did it play out during your residency in Palermo?

Chips Mackinolty: Until 2001 I had always worked in group spaces as a printmaker but as I shifted exclusively to digital drawing and design, my 'studio' became a table on my home verandah. The experience in Palermo was similar: I could work wherever I could take a laptop. Equally important was time spent on the streets of the historic centre of the city, in restaurants and cafés, sitting on a plastic chair in the market, or drinking beer at La Taverna Azzurra. The bar at Piazza San Domenico was dubbed 'my office' by a Sicilian friend!

Anita Angel: How did you settle on a name for this series and why the tri-lingual (Palermitan dialect/Italian/English) titles for works and catalogue text?

Chips Mackinolty: In the Vucciria, I was enmeshed in the history and contemporary culture of food and language, in a market that dates back 1100 years to Arabic times. The threat to local customs, life ways, the built heritage and local dialects or languages was apparent, and I wanted to say something about this. By contrast, I couldn't help thinking about the patent absurdity of global food production and its commercial distribution in the West – where we can buy fresh grapes from California and asparagus from Mexico almost every day of the week. It struck me that the wealth of the land, the soil if you like, is far removed from the reality of world trade and exploitation of the land. The so-called *terroni* – a disparaging word for southern Italian agricultural workers – are at the bottom of the ladder, but at the same time proud of their heritage.

The title also reflects the irony of our Australian national anthem: 'with golden soil and wealth for toil'. Apart from the Eurocentrism of 'gold' equating to 'wealth', most of the soil I am familiar with in the Northern Territory is red! Meanwhile, Woolworths and Coles have rapacious policies of purchasing from farmers in Australia designed to destroy those that seek a basic living from the soil: big companies take the wealth. They may not recognise it, but the supermarket multinationals are producing *terroni australiani*!

Diversity in language, dialect and accent is what makes us human: it's what we should celebrate. I lived for two years in a community in Palermo in which English was alien, and Italian not far behind, but in which linguistic diversity was natural. My Palermo experiences reinforced my belief in the importance of community, language and local identity – political, social and cultural issues that have been at the heart of my practice as a graphic artist in the Northern Territory for many years.

NOTES

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Chips Mackinolty, <i>U ciuru ri cucuzza/ll fiore di zucca/Pumpkin flower</i> , 2015, inkjet print on German etching paper, 45 x 45cm [image], 55 x 55cm [sheet].		Chips Mackinolty, <i>I pipareddi rrusi/ll peperoncini rossi/The red chillies</i> , 2015, inkjet print on German etching paper, 45 x 45cm [image], 55 x 55cm [sheet].		Chips Mackinolty, <i>I cacocciuliddi/ll carciofini/Baby artichokes</i> , 2015, inkjet print on German etching paper, 45 x 45cm [image], 55 x 55cm [sheet].		Chips Mackinolty, <i>I spàraci/Gli asparagi/Asparagus</i> , 2015, inkjet print on German etching paper, 45 x 45cm [image], 55 x 55cm [sheet].	



Chips Mackinolty,
Da Totò trattoria,
Palermo, Sicily, 2015.
Photo: Peter Holt.

Anita Angel: Did a particular experience at the Vucciria market inspire this series?

Chips Mackinolty: Meeting the local market stallholders evoked earlier memories, growing up in the Hills District of outer-Sydney in the 1950s. Southern European market gardeners (so-called 'New Australians') set up agricultural enterprises in the area, transforming the way we experienced buying, cooking and eating fresh produce. In late 2013, I met Pasquale Sampino, a long-time Vucciria stallholder. His beautiful *pipareddi rrusi* (red chillies) initiated this series.

Anita Angel: What about the printmaking process or techniques you deployed?

Chips Mackinolty: It's a curious combination of drawing and stencil cutting. As a screenprinter, I have cut thousands of stencils over the years, or used the same technique with materials such as Rubylith, for graphics and colour separations for offset and digital printing. This series was a process of 'drawing' with a pencil in Photoshop – the 'pencil' is 0.5 mm wide – creating hundreds of separations for different colours.

Anita Angel: You produced and published a 108-page, full-colour catalogue for this series, printed in Bologna. In an era of Kindle books, e-invites and web-based publications, why bother?

Chips Mackinolty: Have you ever caressed a Kindle? Or marvelled at the texture of paper on a web page? The printed page is still a vital part of the visual arts world.

The Wealth of the Land opened at Liber-ALAB, Palermo, on 1 April 2016 and will be showing in Australia at Nomad Art, Darwin (5-28 May 2016); The Cross Art Projects, Sydney (14 May-8 June 2016); and at Rathdowne Galleries & The Joshua McClelland Print Room, Melbourne (22 June-22 July 2016).