



mhf  
7

penny bovell

commission no.7 Penny Bovell sky/sign

Completed at mhF Workspace - White Gum Valley  
between October 2000 - July 2002 and exhibited at  
Cullity Gallery - University of W.A.

Significantly, the completion of Penny's commission coincides with the 10th year of operation of the Mark Howlett Foundation (MHF). For those of you not familiar with the history, it was Penny's partner the late Mark Howlett, who conceived the central idea of the Foundation. That is; a partnering of a number of collectors with a mid career artist whose commission is not bound by a brief.

Over the past 10 years MHF has grown and matured, firmly crystallising its identity as a sustainable not for profit organisation that promotes West Australian artists. The 10th anniversary of the Foundation was celebrated at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in late 2001 with a retrospective of the previous projects.

The past two years has been a time of reflection for the Foundation, and to a great extent Penny's commission completes the first chapter. Theo Koning has been selected as the next commissioned artist and the project has attracted many subscribers to date. In reviewing our future direction we all agree that the simple formula of partnering collectors with artists is the way forward - of-course the jury for this is yet to be born!

I would like to thank Penny for her complete dedication over the past 18 months, the subscribers for taking another punt and the current Board. Giles Hohnen has resigned from the Board after 10 years of commitment to focus on other activities. He must be commended for his profound efforts in maintaining our vision. Don Fini, the outgoing Chair, still remains as a board member. Don contributed a far reaching optimism while in the position of chair - on many occasions he packed print folios into his suitcase and spread the word about the MHF interstate. During her time on the Board, Lisa Fini made substantial headway into restructuring the financial arm of the MHF. I would like to welcome Peter Hobbs and Bill Rees as new board members.

The nature of non-profit organisations requires a huge amount of dedication and many hours of voluntary work. Giles continually insisted that the MHF is not worth doing if it isn't fun and it is the (often precarious) combination of art, business and nurtured friendship that makes the MHF an inspiring model for others to follow. Don's statement about Penny's work epitomises the pleasure that can be gained from participating as both a subscriber and a board member in the MHF.

*Penny has explored the sky, not only in Western Australia, but the world. These works have captured the romance of laying back and watching the clouds 'float' up there which, in turn, allows us to float with them, even more than ever before.*

Tasio Cokis  
Chairman  
June 2002

Thankyou to the Faculty of Architecture Landscape Architecture and Visual Arts at UWA for offering the Cullity Gallery.  
Penny Bovell is represented by Goddard de Fiddes Contemporary Art, 31 Malcolm Street, Perth, WA. Tel: 08 9324 2460. [www.goddarddefiddes.com.au](http://www.goddarddefiddes.com.au)

## **mhF Board**

Tasio Cokis

Don Fini

Peter Hobbs

Giles Hohnen

Jim Howe

Jeremy Kirwan-Ward

Eveline Kotai

Norah Ohrt

Bill Rees

Trevor Vickers



various sketches



untitled paintings: charcoal, oil on canvas, 50 x 150 cm



**sky / sign 1.**  
photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm



**sky / sign 3.**  
photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm

## reworking the weather

Penny Bovell's interest in the sky began in 1969 with a series of postcard size paintings at coastal locations from Shark Bay to Albany. Over a period of ten years, the artist recorded the weather as seen in the sky, and then juxtaposed those images against ideas of the sky as recorded in art history and philosophy. The work culminated in the *Site Project* limited edition book.

One part of the artist's purpose in beginning this investigation was to teach herself to paint. Penny had been educated initially in England in the 'who needs to paint?' era of art education, and prior to 1969 her practice had been centered on experimental art. Her concerns at that time were mainly to do with semiotics and manifested themselves as text based collections of juxtaposed icons and symbols, playing with the differences that these two systems of representation might provide for the same concept.

Her 'piece work' from 1987 and now in the collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia, builds up a record of domestic labor with rubbings and potato prints on fragments of interfacing fabric placed haphazardly like a jigsaw that doesn't work. By the late eighties, Penny's interests in conceptual and feminist ideas were expanded to include the desire to use paint and to move away from the limitations of domestic and language based concerns. However, the subject for her painting needed to be sufficiently abstract so as to allow for the free play of ideas outside of any particular historical genre.

Painting the sky allows the artist to escape the landscape cliché while at the same time concentrating on what, historically, has been understood as the main element of that genre. John Constable wrote in 1821: it would be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the keynote, the standard of scale and the chief organ of sentiment ... The sky is the source of light in nature, and governs everything, even our common observations on the weather of everyday are altogether suggested by it.

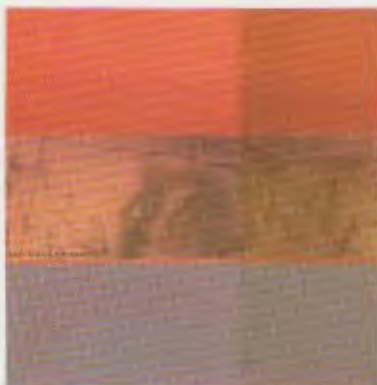
By concentrating only on the sky and leaving out all references to the land below it, Penny is forgoing the narrative role that painting the sky has traditionally played. For example, a sky of billowing rain clouds painted above an arid farmland scene tells a story of hope and relief while the same sky set above a choppy ocean with a fishing fleet of native canoes gives a completely different emotional response.



**sky / sign 2.**  
photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm



**sky / sign 4.**  
photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm



**sky / sign 5.**

photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm

Without its relationship to the land, the sky can take on different meanings, ones which are more inclined towards the spiritual or imaginative, more contemplative and inward looking. On a more practical level the signs we read in the sky relate to the weather and our bodily comfort. It is this environmental relationship, between our bodies and the weather, that the artist is trying to provoke an awareness of.

While the sky might be thought of as a 'backdrop' to our lives, the weather is the opposite. It encompasses our bodies and affects our physical and emotional state on almost an hourly basis. With the challenge of painting the weather, rather than the sky - creating a concern for weather rather than simply enjoyment of an image of the sky - the artist needed to develop new strategies. These have included using texture and hyper colour in her painting as signs of emotional value rather than naturalistic depiction. However such colour is also a reminder of semiotic strategies - red for stop/green for go - a continuation of her earlier interests in language.

Penny has used the printmaking process to emphasise the cyclical nature of weather, reverse printing alludes also to inversions, and other atmospheric phenomenon. Each of the series of prints includes not only drawn depictions of the sky and weather but also photographs of natural and man made clouds (pollution) as well as reference to meteorological maps. The print sets in their variations also allude to the range of responses we can generate with sky images through different material processes. The naturalistic yet softened photograph of billowing clouds has all the romantic comfort of a Constable, while the heavily scratched drawn image seems full of human anxiety. The meteorological or 'weather' map with those neat lines overlaying the swirling turmoil of nature gives us all another sense of comfort, this time in science and our ability to at least be warned. Images of billowing smoke stacks are just one indication that the sky is now the carrier of ecological threat as well as promise of the sublime.

This body of work, along with documentation of the process, both practical and in thought processes, is brought together in the limited edition book. The artist's words; 'I could only see the weather from a distance, the storms never came close', set out what her challenge has been. That is, to reduce the distance, bring a human experience of the weather into the materiality of paint and print, to bring the storms closer.

**Helen Hewitt**

May 2002



**sky / sign 6.**

photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm

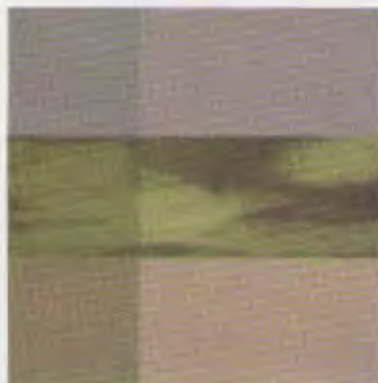
**sky / sign 7.**

photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm



**sky / sign 8.**

photo polymer intaglio & silk screen print  
on Rives BFK, 20x20cm





## sky/sign

Artists have interpreted weather conditions in many ways, varying from accurate depictions of the sky to more imaginative responses. Each era has determined new experiences and understanding. Meteorology was a growing and popular science by the mid-nineteenth century. The impact of industrialization on the sky provoked a prophetic observation by John Ruskin: "The sky is a sign, a sign of the times" and nearly fifty years before that, Luke Howard had named the various cloud formations, giving substance (through language) to something that was mainly thought of as ephemeral.

Ruskin wrote a number of books using the sky as a metaphor. He connected politics, environmentalism, autobiography, art and spirituality to air, storms, weather and sky. However the subject (sky) also had a particular influence on the way he wrote - his writing style and attitudes were open and changeable, as if the fluctuating meanings and moods of the sky constantly shifted his thinking.

This set of ideas interested me as a starting point for my commission.

My daily drive to the studio along our idyllic coastline provided me with more views to contemplate. In becoming less tolerant of the extreme heat over the years I have been thinking a lot about climate change and how environmental considerations are an inevitable part of our consciousness (almost like a mantra). As a fair skinned person in a drought prone country, it also occurred to me that in the southern hemisphere (as opposed to Ruskin's north), a clear blue sky could be read as an ominous sign.

With this in mind, I set out to make images that would use paint to conjure certain weather conditions. This resulted in a combination of the incidental and controlled application of paint, designed to evoke a sense of flux. The repetitive nature of printmaking provided a very different sort of vehicle for the exploration of these ideas.

It has been an overwhelming challenge to complete this commission. I usually work at home in the garage. Although working at home has its advantages (I am near my children, Gabby and George and I can mix parenting and work), it is often difficult to transcend the domestic. Using the MHF studio has enabled me to extend my ideas and complete a project on a much larger scale than I could otherwise have managed. It also provided the opportunity to work collaboratively and at times the space has been a busy production line and small business rather than a contemplative sanctuary.

Many people have participated in this project. I enjoyed the hospitality of Mrs Carmel Redding at Dowerin, and Dianna and David Walker at Wagin while on field trips. They provided interesting regional information. David said he watched the weather to relieve anxiety that develops as a result of farming (strange as it may sound). Carmel left her farm many years ago but still watches the weather from the windows of her house. Gemma Hohnen was my first print assistant and endured the initial phase of indecision and procrastination that learning a new medium brings. Tess Howard helped with technical experimentation for the photopolymer intaglio prints and grounded me. Sharon Barker and Robbie Jefferson assisted with the final print edition with great expertise. Alco Williams patiently helped with the graphics for the book and Deborah Robertson gave invaluable advice. It was such a pleasure to work with them all.

Many thanks to the Board members for providing hours of their valuable time, to the subscribers for enthusiastic support in underwriting the project.

Penny Bovell  
June 2002



PENNY BOYELL D.O.B. 5 AUGUST 1956

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

- 1997/8 Masters Fine Arts, U.W.A.
- 1992/3 Post Graduate Diploma - Visual Art, Curtin University of Technology
- 1979/82 Diploma of Fine Art, Byam Shaw School of Art, London
- London Diploma of Art & Design, Byam Shaw, London
- 1985 Diploma Teaching (Art) W.A.C.A.E

COMMISSIONS

- Subiaco Redevelopment Authority, Peel Health Campus, Rockingham Justice Centre, Mark Howlett Foundation Fellowship
- REPRESENTATION
- Parliament House - Canberra, Edith Cowan University, Fremantle Art Centre, Presbyterian Ladies College, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Western Mining Corporation, Royal Perth Hospital, Highway Construction, Artbank, Private Collections Perth- England.

AWARDS/SCHOLARSHIPS/GRANTS

- 1994 Dante Alighieri Society Travel Award
- 1986 Fremantle Drawing Prize (Commendation)
- W.A. Dept Art/9 - Creative Development Grant
- Printmakers Association Print Award (Commendation)
- 1984 Guy Grey Smith Travel Grant
- 1983 W.A. Arts Council & Theatre Board Australia Council - Special Project Grant
- 1982 Graeme Hamilton Drawing Prize
- 1981 Chairman's Prize, Byam Shaw School of Art
- 1981/2 Bernard Bechener Bursary (2 years study grant UK)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1998 Postcards & Visions, Verge Gallery, Perth
- 1997 Air 2, Goddard de Fiddes Gallery, Perth
- 1995 New Paintings: Air, Goddard de Fiddes, Perth
- 1986 Mixed media Drawings, Fremantle Art Centre, Fremantle
- 1983 Recent Works, Galerie Dusseldorf, Perth

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 MHF First Decade, AGWA
- 2001 Houseandpackage, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery
- 2000 Women's Expo, Burswood
- Kedumba Drawing Prize, Kedumba, NSW
- Out There - Contemporary Landscape, Cullily Gallery, UWA
- Recent Works, Goddard de Fiddes Contemporary Art
- Joondalup Art Award
- 1995 Abject Lands: Personal Horizons, University of Arizona USA
- 1987 Mine Own Executioner, Munderring Art Gallery
- 1987 Recent Acquisitions, AGWA
- 1996 West of West, Goddard de Fiddes Contemporary Art
- 1995 Drawing Out, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (Touring Exhibition)
- 1982 Work, PICA
- 1987 Albany Art Prize
- 1986 The Peace Show, Court House, AGWA
- 1985 Fremantle Drawing Prize
- 1984 New Painting, Fremantle Gallery
- 1983 Paperworks, AGWA

- 1979 Painting Show, Gallery 52 Claremont

TIME-BASED INSTALLATIONS

- 1987 Pieceworks, Praxis Gallery
- ARX B, Fremantle
- 1984 Hedged In By Habits, AGWA (Museum)
- 1983 Boundaries, Praxis Gallery

RESIDENCIES

- 1993 Abrochios Islands (ECU)
- 1980 Artist In Residence (ECU Joondalup)

TEACHING

Lecturer in Visual Art at the School of Art, Curtin University of Technology & the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Visual Arts, the University of Western Australia





**mhf** Project **7** Subscribers

Andrew Bovell & Eugenia Fragos Althea  
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and Joan London & Angela Stewart Simon  
Gauntlett & Margaret Dillon and Tasio & Shantha  
Cokis David Jackson & Judith Arrow Grant  
Johnson & Penny Bower Matthew & Kathryn  
Batchelor Rosie Barter Don Fini & Victoria Cole  
National Gallery of Australia.

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● *mark bowlett foundation*