

# LOOKING CLOSELY AT WA Women Artists

Flora Landells is one of Western Australia's best known potters and china painters. Born in Adelaide in 1888, she moved with her family to Perth at the age of eight. At sixteen, her family left Perth to work a farm but she remained in the city to pursue her art.

In 1904, Flora began art classes at the Perth Technical School under James W.R. Linton. Here she studied painting, drawing and clay modelling, exhibiting with the school at the *Perth Women's Work* exhibition in 1907 and also as a member of the Western Australian Society of Artists.

As a teacher, Flora became a role model to many. She ran art classes at the Midland Junction Technical School from 1908 until 1930 and she also taught at Methodist Ladies College from 1909 until 1949.

In 1913 Flora began china painting. However her interest turned to making pottery in the late 1920s. With her husband she established the first pottery studio in the state, *Landells Studio Pottery*.

### **Landells Studio Pottery**

In 1928, after only one lesson in throwing pottery, Flora and Reg Landells established their own pottery studio. Clay was dug from local pits and Reg made much of the equipment and glazes. The pottery they produced was usually thrown on a wheel, however some pieces were built with coils. Flora decorated the pots which



Flora Landells, *Vase*, c1945, ceramic with overglaze.

often featured incised designs of native or exotic wildflowers. After the war Reg and Flora exhibited throughout Perth and at times included Flora's watercolour paintings. Between 1930 and 1960 Flora was best known for the pottery she produced which embraced the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

### **Linton and the Arts and Crafts Movement**

James W.R. Linton was the art instructor at Perth Technical School between 1902 and 1931 and is said to be the greatest influence of any one person on the applied arts in Perth. Growing up in Britain, Linton's teaching and work method was directly influenced by the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The attitudes shared by craftspeople were essentially a reaction against the mass produced, and the belief in the aesthetics of an individual piece and its materials. They aimed to unite beauty with practicality and believed the artist should be involved in every stage of production. The use of both local materials and designs involving native flora and fauna were greatly encouraged.

### **An Influential Woman**

Flora Landells as an artist and teacher had a great influence on many West Australian artists. She was the first of several generations of strong Western Australian women ceramic artists which include Eileen Keys and Joan Campbell.

## **Women Artists and the Perth Cultural Scene**

During the early decades of the twentieth century, women's involvement in the Perth cultural scene generally depended on their position in society and their financial situation. It was a difficult time for artists in general since patrons were few, exhibition space was virtually non-existent and interest in the arts in general, minimal.

By the 1930s, women artists in Perth found themselves taking on a more prominent role. This was largely due to the formation of close-knit art societies such as the Perth Society of Artists and the West Australian Women's Society of Fine Arts and Crafts. Exhibiting with these societies enabled them to not only put their work into the public sphere, but to exhibit as a group of women for the first time.

Whilst Modernism swept the rest of the world, Perth held strongly to two dominant influences, the Arts and Crafts Movement and the romantic landscape tradition. Few women engaged in Modernism, though there were some who challenged the dominant traditions.

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Produced by the Art Gallery of Western Australia with the aim of making art more accessible for visitors

# LOOKING CLOSELY AT *Flora Landells*

The large vase is a very good example of the Arts and Crafts tradition in that it has a practical purpose, its decoration reflects an aspect of nature and the artist has been involved at every stage of its production. Craftspeople who identified with this movement were more concerned with practical, every-day objects rather than ornamental pieces.

The smaller vase was made during the 1940s. Due to its quality and symmetry, do you think the Landells has constructed this vase using the wheel rather than hand built the form? The decoration on this vase is also very different in that the design is abstract. Is it possible she was trying to capture the essence of a flower by using colour and simplified shapes?

Painted in 1921, *Kangaroo Paw Plate* is earthenware painted with an enamel overglaze. Following the ideals of the Arts and Crafts tradition artists commonly turned to nature for inspiration. Here the kangaroo paw is stylised and similar to the work of another Western Australian ceramic artist, Marina Shaw. In this example the artist purchased a blank plate on which to paint. In comparison to other pieces that she has made herself the decoration is symmetrical and rather detailed. Do you think the precision in design reflects the perfection and symmetry of the mass-produced blank?



Flora Landells, (clockwise from left)  
*Jardiniere*, c1933, ceramic with overglaze  
*Kangaroo Paw Plate*, 1921, earthenware with enamel overglaze  
*Vase*, c1945, ceramic with overglaze.

How do you think this vase was constructed? It would be virtually impossible for it to be thrown using a potters wheel. In the throwing process, the artist must place one hand on the internal face and one on the external face while drawing the clay up to form its shape. However, this would be too difficult due to its height. The vase was in fact built from coils, long sausage-like pieces of clay that were smoothed over as the coils were built up. The overall appearance of the vase is rough and organic. Do you think this is a result of constructing the vase without the use of the wheel? In comparison to the plate, the design is more random and free. Do you think the decoration of the vase reflects the quality of its construction?

The flower on the vase is an introduced species known as the poinsettia. On looking closely, it appears that the artist has used a tool to create the decoration? What type of tool, sharp, flat, blunt has she used? The colours used on this vase are very different to those on the smaller vase. Do they remind you of the earth and landscape? Do you think its rough texture helps to enhance this quality?

