

Maye River Gallery in Bluffton

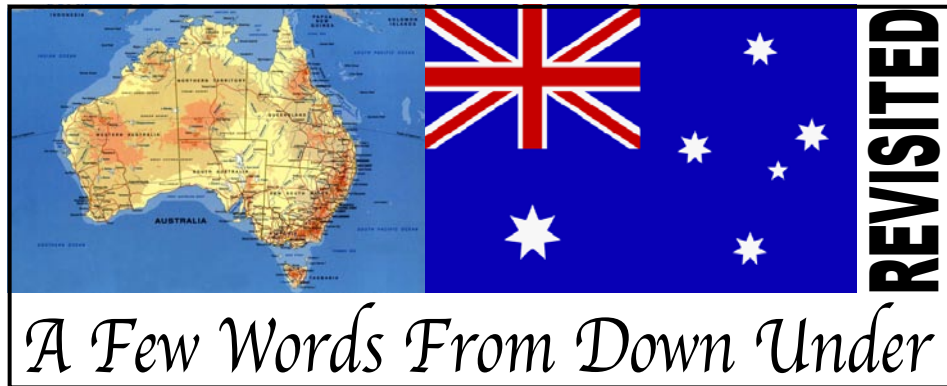
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fiber artist.

Maye River Gallery is located on Calhoun Street in Old Town Bluffton since 2008, has been home to some of the area's most talented artist, dedicated to both their individual craft as well as a love

of sharing their art. Stop by and enjoy this talented group's latest work!

For further information check our SC Commercial Gallery listings or call the gallery at 843/757-2633.



Editor's Note: Judith McGrath contributed her writings about exhibits and events taking place in Western Australia to *Carolina Arts* for about a decade. Although she was writing about events taking place thousands and thousands of miles away, they seemed relevant to what was going on here in the Carolinas. Her contributions were very popular when we first ran them and continue to be popular on our website's archives. We've decided to revisit them from time to time.

A Few Words From Down Under on Provenance

by Judith McGrath, first published in September 2008

When I read how an early work by a noted 19th century Australian artist was up for auction, I had to have a look. Although the painting was never reproduced in any art book I didn't doubt its authenticity; until I heard someone say how the reserve price seemed high considering the documentation "wasn't complete".

The comment reminded me of a lecture I once attended about the importance of Provenance; the history of an artwork from the time of its making to the present. The lecturer included a story about DaVinci's two versions of *Virgin of the Rocks*; one in the Louvre the other in The National Gallery of London, and how each institution claimed to have "an original". Experts considered it unusual for the artist to produce two nearly exact images but when both institutions could validate the history (provenance) of their acquisition and connect its work to the Master, there was no doubt each was an original Leonardo.

Provenance records the movements of an artwork through sales, auctions and bequests so each successive owner knows the pedigree of the object. It is the surest way to guarantee authenticity. Sometimes the provenance is as fascinating as the art. I once attended a touring exhibition of paintings selected from noted private collections. Not only was the art exciting to see, the glossy catalogue was a delight to read, as the provenance of many exhibits told interesting stories. For example one work by Franz Marc painted in 1900's was traded to Kandinsky for one of that artist's works. Over the years it was publicly exhibited but remained, like a friend, in the Kandinsky family collection until purchased by the current owner in the 1970's. Meanwhile, a small work by John Singer Sargent painted in 1882 listed nine different owners before entering the current collection yet it had never been publicly displayed prior to this exhibition. This kind of documentation allows no room for doubt that the works are authentic as each one's provenance provides a direct line from current owner to original artist.

Most ordinary art buyers (as opposed to serious collectors) aren't concerned about the history of an art work, assuming it's only important for public institutions or major purchases. They don't consider that "nice little piece" bought at an art school end of year exhibition or local art/craft show, could be the first step in an

Leonardo da Vinci, "Virgin of the Rocks", The National Gallery of London

artist's journey to fame. Then, when it is given as a gift, donated to a fund raiser or sold on eBay, important information is lost.

You and I may not consider ourselves collectors but whenever we buy or sell art, the dealer does. Reputable art dealers maintain records of all transactions, not only to protect themselves and their clients, but to maintain the art object's connection to its maker. When we buy an original work of art, we are a link in that chain. If purchased direct from an artist, gallery or agent, the seller records the details of the purchase (buyer's name, artist's name, title of work, and catalogue number if bought at exhibition) on the receipt and in their files. When works by well-known artists go to auction, their provenance is listed in the catalogue to prove authenticity and encourage bidding. That information should come with the purchase and include the date of sale, lot number and name of auction house. If buyers or sellers wish to be anonymous, the dealer lists 'private collector' in the published provenance but records the names in their personal records. These records are vital to curators in search of artists' early efforts held in private collections, and tracking down works that have changed hands often.

Perhaps as an ex Art History Lecturer, I'm just being finicky but then I have saved the receipts for every art work we've purchased over the years. It's a form of writing art history as well as assuring there will be no hassle if there's ever a need to sell. My only problem is accounting for the original art works that came into our collection as 'trade' for my writing catalogue essays for talented newbies. But then, I wouldn't sell any of those - they are my provenance!

Judith McGrath lives in Kalamunda, Western Australia, 25 minutes east of Perth. She received a BA in Fine Art and History from the University of Western Australia. McGrath lectured in Art History and Visual Literacy at various colleges around the Perth area, and was an art reviewer for *The Sunday Times* and *The*

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Western Review both published in the Perth area. McGrath was also a freelance writer and reviewer for various art magazines in Australia. She also co-ordinated

the web site *Art Seen in Western Australia* found at (<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/tep/25381>). McGrath is currently enjoying retirement.

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