



## Oceanic Art Society 28<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting.

**Held at Cooee ART Leven, 17 Thurlow St, Redfern, Sydney, NSW, Australia at 1830 AEDT on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023.**

- **Apologies** were received from: Geoff Carey, Warwick Majcher, JD Mittman, & Paula Latos-Valier. Eleven members of the society were present, Margaret Cassidy, Jim Elmslie, Robin Hodgson, Emma Lenyszyn, Jerry Liew, Adrian and Ann Newstead, Bill Rathmell, Nöelle Stiels, Ian Wamijo, David Welch.
- **Confirmation of Minutes of the Previous AGM.** Acceptance was proposed by Jerry Liew, seconded by Jim Elmslie.
- **President's Report.** The president's report was summarised at the meeting and is given in full below:

Last year's AGM was held on Zoom for the second time in a row, and I reported on a successful tenth Forum in Adelaide (organised by Jim Elmslie) and Sydney Oceanic Art Fair (organised by Erwin Kok) to end a year of tacking into the slowly abating wind of covid restrictions. This year began with the disappointing news that we were no longer able to use the Cell Block Theatre and the National Art School for our activities, so our temptation to hoist the spinnaker for a downwind leg had to be quickly forgotten, as we searched for a suitable new venue. The search promptly ended when Emma Lenyszyn, a recent and dynamic addition to the main Committee, was able to negotiate with her employer, the Cooee Art Leven gallery, that both our talks and the SOAF could be held in their premises in Redfern.

The only stand-alone lecture of the year was an excellent talk in mid-March by journalist and writer Hamish McDonald, who described the freebooting collecting (not to say looting) activities of Frank Hurley and Allan McCulloch – "When the "natives" talk back: a century on from Frank Hurley's last Papua expedition".

Later, we began planning for our eleventh Forum, to be held at the Melbourne Savage Club, which Michael Martin convened. The seven excellent talks (from speakers based on four continents) on the Saturday at the club were preceded by an exclusive visit to the Museums Victoria collection storage for early-bird ticket holders on the previous day. Six members of MV staff were present to guide the groups of twelve round the collection. An auction of donated pieces was conducted in a local restaurant by Alex Philips on the Friday evening and the catering and ambience of the club made for a memorable and sociable occasion on the packed second day. Thanks to Michael's hard work and Alex's auctioneering, the whole event was also highly profitable.

Erwin Kok had to step back from leadership of the SOAF sub-Committee, and Rita Uechritz had to reduce her commitment, but Warwick Majcher stepped in to lead the Fair to another successful and

profitable outcome. The gala evening on the Saturday and another auction (Alex Philips again) added greatly to the social success of the event, which seemed to attract a younger demographic than had been the case at the NAS, and all the vendors seemed satisfied with their sales in the new venue.

During this year, two events at the Chau Chak Wing Museum (University of Sydney) had strong OAS connections, thanks to the collaboration of Jude Philp, the senior curator there. The “Ömie bark cloth: Pathways of nioge” show acknowledged the involvement of our former President, the late David Baker, in developing the appreciation of this artform; there was also a workshop organised around the event. As well, a few days ago, a dozen OAS members were given a wonderful, curated tour of the “Tidal Kin: Stories from the Pacific” show at the Museum by Jude.

Conversely, over the last decade the attitude of the Australian Museum towards the OAS has moved from very supportive to indifferent (not to say hostile). Michael Mel’s departure from the Museum (where he had chaired the first day of our successful 2019 Forum) signalled the apparently terminal decline in the relationship. Rita Uechtritz’ introduction of Wylda Bayrón’s art to the Museum resulted in the outstanding “Bilas” living culture show during 2023 – co-curated by Michael. At its opening, Wylda acknowledged the contribution of OAS members to the show. Despite promises of the Museum Director in 2014 at an OAS meeting and in the Journal (“a large gallery space...installed in 2-3 years”), the recently opened “Wansolmoana” gallery of Pacific art and culture in the Museum is crammed into a small space, is visually underwhelming (especially considering the wealth of Pacific creativity that was hastily pushed into a disused bank vault in Rydalmere to make room for the Tutunkhamen no-show) and is, in part, tendentiously political.

However, Margaret Cassidy’s professional and creative editing of the expanded and improved Journal and her frequent Newsletters have given rise to a widening appeal of the Society’s offerings. There has been a steady increase in the proportion of First Nations speakers to the Society over the last few years and this is reflected in the Journal’s content which now also regularly includes reviews of contemporary First Nations art, at home and abroad. It is to be hoped that this skilful widening of the society’s scope can make more of our institutional interactions bloom again. Margaret’s appeal to a wider spectrum of Oceanic Art aficionados may not always please the traditionally-minded collectors and anthropologists – this dichotomy is reflected in the talks of the Forums in Adelaide (50% First Nations speakers), compared with Melbourne (none). Margaret has surely contributed to the steady revival of membership numbers that has occurred over the last two years.

Our dynamic Treasurer, Ian Wamijo has asked me to summarise last financial year’s Financial Report (to June 2023) on his behalf: Total Equity was \$21,994, an increase of 3.5% from the previous financial year. Net Profit for the year was \$650. During that year membership increased slowly from the low 130s to around 155, but now that Ian has effectively absorbed the role of Membership Manager as well and started to curate the database, the pace appears to be increasing somewhat at 183 fully paid-up memberships. It is worth pointing out that the Pacific Arts Association, which has a global academic reach and support, has a similar number of paid-up members. Thanks to our two very successful recent events, the Melbourne Forum and the Sydney Oceanic Art Fair, the 2023/2024 Financial Year is starting to look to be one of the OAS’ best from a financial perspective.

The Committee and the handful of very active members whose names I have mentioned have been ably and knowledgeably supported by our Public Officer David Welch, and I should also acknowledge the contribution of Andrew Drane who provides his services at mates’ rates because of his personal commitment to helping non-profit organisations that support indigenous community activities. Finally, the OAS would not have achieved many of the things it has done over the last seven years, let alone in the last hectic few months, without the incessant contribution of Noëlle Stiels as

researcher, team worker, sheepdog and soother of overworked or wounded egos; skills she learned many years ago as secretary-general of a large international medical federation.

Two names appear on the obituary list this year. Joost Daalder, whose hunt with his wife Truus for household items when they came to the Antipodes from Holland in their twenties became a passionate search for beautiful jewellery, especially Oceanic body ornaments - their 2009 book "Ethnic Jewellery and Adornment" became a classic. In July, the art world was stunned by the loss of renowned international indigenous art expert and dealer (and long-time OAS member) Tim Klingender, after a boating accident. Tim's last appearance at an OAS function was the SOAF in 2022.

As I pass the Presidency into the able hands of Jim Elmslie, the main challenge ahead for the OAS is that which I have previously highlighted in my reports: the fact that so much of the work of the OAS is done by the very small number of individuals whom I have mostly acknowledged by name, today. We desperately need someone who has the skills and the time needed to develop our digital offerings, both in social media and on-line streaming and recording of our talks. We also need some back-ups for the people who are working so hard despite having often demanding day jobs. I began this report, as I have others, with a sailing analogy, but a different analogy has sometimes seemed appropriate in the last year or two – flying a plane with an engine spluttering. Several of the small band of committed volunteers have had enormously pressing work and family commitments which have prevented them from participating as they would wish. And we have never found a secretary to replace Robin Hodgson. Will we eventually have to do a forced landing?

The President's report received the comment from Ian Wamijo that he had now taken full control of the membership records and wished that all changes should be notified or made through him in future.

- **Election of Officers and Committee members:** The following nominations have been duly received, proposed, seconded and accepted (see next page).
- The retiring President thanked all the continuing office bearers and committee members (especially any not named in the above report) for their continued contribution and support. The Treasurer presented the retiring President with a plaque recording his seven years' service to the Society, and the new President warmly thanked him for his efforts, keeping the boat afloat (or the aeroplane in the air).
- Pierre Laffont is retiring from the Committee after managing the membership lists and renewal reminders, which became a very difficult task after he returned to France to escape the Covid lockdowns two years ago. He also hosted several memorable Committee meetings at his home in Waverly and contributed in many ways to our deliberations, as well as organising an interesting tour of museums holding Oceanic art in western France, the scope and attendance of which was diminished by Covid restrictions and delays.

- Jerry Liew is stepping back after several years in which he has also contributed with goodwill and humour to the Society and supported (with others) the Facebook page and with photography at events. He also provided his home as a venue for committee meetings on several occasions also with warm hospitality after Rita Uechtritz stepped back (as I reported last year)
- **The Meeting Terminated at 1850h.** It was followed by a presentation by Karen Coote, formerly senior conservator at the Australian Museum, entitled, “Archiving in a Community” - describing her work focussed on ensuring that the Gunbalanja (Oenpelli) community can visit and profit from their original works on bark and paper, screenprints and objects made from fibre.

Office	Nominee		Proposed	Seconded	
President	Jim	Elmslie	WR	NS	
Vice-President	Crispin	Howarth	WR	GC	
Secretary					
Treasurer	Ian	Wamijo	C Boylan	NS	
Committee	Warwick	Majcher	DW	WR	SOAF s/c
Committee	David	Welch	WR	WM	Public Officer
Committee	Margaret	Cassidy	NS	JE	Journal Editor
Committee	Noëlle	Stiels	WM	PL	Website s/c
Committee	Irene	Ashburn	WM	JE	
Committee	Geoff	Carey	DW	NS	
Committee	Emma	Lenyszyn	WR	NS	
Committee	JD	Mittmann	WR	NS	
Committee	Suzanne	Pilj	WR	JL	
Committee	Bill	Rathmell	IW	NS	

(OAS166 Draft 9/12/23)