



INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc

NSW Chapter

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Dear Members,

Happy New Year! ISAA NSW held its Christmas Lunch at Barracks on Barracks on 7 December as the last event for 2023 (photo below). The first events planned for 2024 are a Work-in-Progress meeting at the State Library on 9 February (p.2) and a workshop on Modern Slavery on 19 March (pp 2-3) also at the Library. Hope to see you at one or both of these.

The Reading Groups continue to meet on alternate months. If you would like to join one of them, contact Convenors Christine Jennett for Public Affairs and Christine Yeats for the Biography Group.

If you have any contributions for the next *Bulletin*, such as scholarly book notes, notes on exhibitions, films or plays, or interesting snippets of research, please send them to me by **21 March 2024** at cjennett@ozemail.com.au.

Stay safe and well. **Christine Jennett, *Bulletin* Editor**



NSW Chapter ISAA

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Dr Ian Willis OAM

Dr Susan Steggall

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Christine Yeats

Public Events Committee:

Lesley Potter, Christine Jennett,
David Carment AM, Shirley Randell
AO, Christine Yeats

Dates for Your Diary

9 Feb: Work-in-Progress Meeting

Late Feb: Biography Reading Group

19 Mar: Modern Slavery workshop

27 Mar: Public Affairs Reading
Group

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORK IN PROGRESS

Date: 9 February

Time: 11.00–12.30 pm

(We usually follow up these meetings with lunch at Café Trim)

Venue: Flinders Room, State Library

Donation: \$5

Speaker: Dr Ian Willis OAM

Topic: *The memory landscape of the Cowpastures in memorials, monuments, and murals*

All around the community in the Macarthur region are cultural artefacts that are representations of the settler-colonial narrative of the Cowpastures, which was variously a colonial frontier, a government reserve, and a formal region.

Today, the material culture of the Cowpastures is hidden in plain sight and appears to have been ‘forgotten’ by the community. It includes roads and bridges; parks and reserves; historic sites; books, paintings and articles; conferences, seminars, and workshops; monuments, memorials and murals; community commemorations, celebrations and anniversaries; and other cultural heritage.

The presentation will examine examples of this material culture and illustrate the multi-layered nature of the Cowpastures story for a range of actors. These storytellers have re-affirmed the Cowpastures settler-colonial narrative over the last two centuries and illustrate the contested nature of the Cowpastures memory landscape.

About the Speaker:

Dr Ian Willis is an honorary fellow at the University of Wollongong and completed his PhD in Australian History at Wollongong in 2004. He was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his service to community history in 2019. His general area of research is centred on local studies in and around the Macarthur region of New South Wales, with works published in popular media through to peer-reviewed journals.



WORKSHOP

Date: 19 March 2024

Time: 2.00– 4.00 pm

(Those who wish will continue conversation over afternoon tea at Café Trim)

Venue: Flinders Room, State Library

Donation: \$5

Topic: Modern Slavery

In response to a suggestion from a member that ISAA NSW members should address the topic of Modern Slavery in some way the Committee decided to hold a workshop where five speakers would each make a short presentation focused on an aspect of slavery in the twenty-first century. All members are welcome to attend.

Speakers will speak for 15 minutes, and a brief Q & A will follow each presentation.

1. Introduction to the key legal instruments covering modern slavery in Australia/NSW – Sybil Jack
2. Rural workers – Michelle Cavanagh
3. Sex slavery – Christine Jennett
4. Cleaners – Hilary Yerbury/Christine Yeats
5. Supply chain in the fashion industry – Shirley Randell

BOOK NOTE

The subversive Simone Weil: a life in five ideas

Robert Zaretsky

The University of Chicago Press, 2021

ISBN-23:978-0-226-54933-0

The philosopher Simone Weil was born in Paris in 1909. Her parents were agnostic Jews, cultured and affluent. Very early, she exhibited a social conscience and a determination to act upon it. When she was about ten, she slipped out of her parents' apartment to join a band of striking workers marching along the street. When Weil entered *l'École normale supérieure* she was the only female philosophy student in her year. Her philosophical, social, and spiritual views derived from a formidable intellect, personal experience and a highly developed, even extreme, altruistic sense. She is exceptional in the way she refused to separate her intellect from her actions, exemplified by her statement 'philosophy is purely practical'. Her thought ranges across a very extensive range of social, political, religious and philosophical concerns, including mathematics and science. Initially a pacifist, she served with the anarchist Durruti column in the Spanish civil war and was fortunate to avoid death. A mystical experience in Assisi in 1937 had a major effect on her subsequent outlook, and she is sometimes considered to have been a mystic.

In this book, Robert Zaretsky provides an excellent and humane account of her life and thought, with successive chapters considering five ideas in the context of her life: The Force of Affliction, Paying Attention, The Varieties of Resistance, Finding Roots, and The Good, the Bad, and the Godly. Weil assigns to these words and ideas a meaning and depth going well beyond day-to-day usage. Zaretsky is not uncritical of Weil but presents her ideas and life with a sympathetic intellectual and emotional perception. Weil herself writes with a characteristic clarity and directness, but that implies neither an easy comprehension of the depth of her ideas nor an acceptance of them. Some of her ideas may seem impractical and have been often questioned, as Zaretsky does, but others strike us with great force. Exiled from France, Weil died in 1943 in Ashford, Kent. Her life and writings remain an intellectual and moral challenge and a subversion of our expectations of ourselves that continues to influence and inspire many, extending far beyond academic circles. She was little-known during her lifetime but was described by Albert Camus, upon whom she was influential, as 'the only great spirit of our time'. Her grave is now a much-visited site in Ashford. **Rodney Nillsen**



ART NOTES

Art in an Airport

Who would have imagined that an extended time in an airport would have provided the opportunity to experience a significant art collection. Vancouver airport, where I recently spent many hours, celebrates the art and culture of the peoples of British Columbia, and in such a way that it is as much part of the environment as the duty-free shops and the fast-food providers; a passenger's route through the terminals dictates what they see. My notes and the photos I took were intended only to share my experiences with my family, through WhatsApp.

An additional three hours' delay and change of departure gate gave me the opportunity to spend time exploring the Lorne Balshine Inuit Art Collection, which you can find here: <https://www.yvr.ca/en/about-yvr/art/lorne-balshine-collection>.



Reg Davidson's representation of the raven as the trickster of Haida legends introduced me to the legends of the Blind Halibut Fisherman and the Raven with a Broken Beak and the Raven stealing Beaver Lake. Dempsey Bob's sculpture of the story of Fog Woman and Raven showed me the raven being outwitted.



The *Orca Chief and the Kelp Forest* (Lyle Wilson and John Nutter) attracts a lot of attention from passengers, especially children, as it encompasses a floor to ceiling aquarium filled with kelp and brightly coloured fish, under the watchful eye of Orca Chief, ruler of the sea. (I didn't take a photo).

The collection comprises 75 sculptures that record the Inuit oral culture in the themes of wildlife, survival, traditional beliefs, family life and acculturation.

Unfortunately for me, the labels provide only the name of the artist, the title of the work and its date of creation.

Wanting to take away just one memory to cherish, I chose Jonas Faber's *Qiviuk riding giant fish*, carved in green soapstone, in 1989.

I don't know if there is a legend behind the sculpture, but it doesn't matter that I can't 'explain' the work. The rider's engagement with the fish and the expertise expressed in his face and stance, the sense of a world where such actions were possible, the representation of everyday life in the details of the clothing, all opened a window on a world that was new and wondrous. **Hilary Yerbury**



Louise Bourgeois: Has the Day Invaded the Night or Has the Night Invaded the Day?

Art Gallery of NSW, 25 November 2023–28 April 2024

The exhibition's enigmatic title – not fixed in time, form or function, like the double-edged knife and pendulum that appear in Bourgeois' oeuvre – forewarns viewers that they are in for a strange and unsettling art experience. The installation of *Maman*, a giant bronze spider (almost ten metres above the ground at its highest point, complete with egg sac), in front of the classical sandstone building of the Art Gallery of NSW, sets the scene for an extraordinary range of emotions and sensations. In artworks ranging from confronting to poignant, outsize to intimate, text-based, in fabric, stone and metal, the viewer is taken on a singular journey. One hundred and twenty artworks are installed across the spaces of the 'Sydney Modern' building, as well as in the darkly atmospheric underground Tank where traces of diesel odour blend with challenging works such as *Couple*, (2001) and *Arch of Hysteria* (1993).



Maman, 1999



Culprit Number Two, 1998

Mother, artist, daughter of tapestry weavers and repairers, for seven decades, Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), sought to unravel the mysteries of the human condition. Much of her work is autobiographical and she often worked long into the night to achieve her vision. Each work is stripped of unnecessary detail to its often-puzzling essence. I have long admired the art of Louise Bourgeois even if understanding is more emotional than reasoned.

This exhibition, like that at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (March-June 2008) reinforces my fascination with the work of this artist, her wry often cheeky smile hovering over me like so many of her perplexing artworks. It is well worth a visit to jolt one's heart and mind. **Susan Steggall**



BOOKS THAT MADE ME

See things differently

I began thinking theoretically about performance in music, theatre and dance while at a Scandinavian-American university in the Midwest. I read British theatre director Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* (1968) and, soon after, Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* (English, 1958; French, 1938), in Mary Richards' translation. Brook suggested minimalist performance settings in razed theatre interiors with only the actor, a stage and light; the French text by actor-artist-stage director-poet Artaud proposed extreme physical engagements of the actor in a 'Theatre of Cruelty' citing Balinese dance-theatre and expressionism. These books confused and inspired. I agreed to share copies with actors 'behind the Iron Curtain' by passing through Checkpoint Charlie – unaware that the Artaud book was banned in East Berlin.

My theatre scholarship began with books on East European acting which I lugged through the snow to my study room window that looked out to frozen hills and a hardwood forest. I wrote a commentary on gesture and theatricality in the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s, featuring theatre and opera productions in Petersburg and Moscow. Performances were directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold whose theories on acting and directing are detailed in *Meyerhold on Theatre*. I absorbed these essays in a 1969 translation in English by Edward Braun.

I completed an MA thesis on 20th-century French theatre, following professional actor-trainer pedagogy and *mise-en-scène* work in Paris. Jacques Lecoq, my acting mentor, published books that were important to my academic development. His verbal presence and coaching in the classroom, however, bettered all that he recorded on paper. Lecoq's *Le Corps Poétique* and *Le Théâtre du geste* are *aides-mémoires*.

The book that advanced my academic writing on theatre was *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (1985), published by my doctoral dissertation supervisor Bert O States. Collaboration with Professor States allowed me to assert an individual voice in my writing and to showcase a distinctive 'way of seeing' through words on the actor's physical form and its movement in the performance space.

Memories of the sites where I read these books—and the cities where I reread them – add layers of meaning to the texts. A sense of place, visual images and impressions from the Artaud, Brook, Meyerhold and States books are not immovable feasts; they transform as if alive and remain elucidating. All four dance in the shadows of my book *Modernist Disguise*, alongside the 21st-century cityscapes of Aix-en-Provence, Los Angeles and Sydney.

Ron Popenhagen



Verbalising Can Clarify

Do you wonder what other people might think of your ideas?

Tired of keeping them to yourself?

Want some genuine, helpful, and considered discussion of *your* work-in-progress?

If an ISAA Work-in-Progress meeting interests you, please contact:

cjennett@ozemail.com.au

Book Notes Exhibition Notes Film Notes

Research Snippets

If you have read a book, seen an exhibition or a film of substance lately or come across a snippet of interesting research that you would like to share with fellow ISAA members send in a piece (up to 300 words) containing its key insights and arguments to: cjennett@ozemail.com.au by **21 March 2024**