

**Speech by *Burnt Offerings* Guest Speaker: Maureen Sheargold**

I am so pleased to have been invited to open this exhibition, not only because it is such a unique and beautiful exhibition but also because of Cathy's long association with Maroochy Bushland Botanic Gardens and her deep understanding of what this place is about.

Cathy was the driving force behind the children's workshops for the Sculpture Symposium and in the Creative Juice, Green Art and TreeLine programs. Her great gift for nurturing the creativity of others has given a great deal to everyone who participated and to the Gardens.

In fact it was these sorts of activities that use the arts to create a greater connection and understanding of Nature that planted the seed for the Arts & Ecology Centre so it is entirely fitting and very special that Cathy has chosen to hold her first solo exhibition in the Arts and Ecology centre. It's exactly what we designed it for.

We all care deeply about what is happening to our environment and we are looking for ways to change the way we care for it. It is seldom that knowledge alone can change behavior - for change to happen there needs to be emotional attachment - we protect what we love.

I believe that seeing Nature through the eyes of an artist can change the way we see and behave. Artists see and sense things that many of us miss. They pay such intense attention especially when they are drawing that they show us what we have missed and help us interpret differently what we did see. Through their creativity we can share the deep emotional attachment to Nature that is part of their work.

And emotional attachment is the thread that runs through this exhibition.

Last year Cathy crossed le Pont des Arts in Paris and saw the thousands of "love locks" fastened to the railings of the bridge. Most of them had messages to loved ones on them but one caught her eye - it had a simple drawing of a tree. This padlock with a message of love for Nature resonated with her and became the inspiration for this body of work exploring and expressing her love of the coastal heathlands and their need for protection.

The title "Burnt Offerings" is a little unsettling. I know it alludes to the fact that the Banksia and many of our heathland plants need fire to re-generate but it also has connotations of the Biblical sacrificial offering for atonement of sins. When one looks at the rows of houses imposed on the landscape in this wall piece it is

disturbing to think of how much of our heathland we have sacrificed and how we can ever atone for that.

Cathy has combined many print techniques in this work including lino, copper dry point, stenciling and digital prints as well as carving, stitching, embossing and metalwork and her mastery of all of these is superb. But the one thing that is the foundation of all of these is the drawing. I believe that it is in drawing that the artist observes most intensely and is connected to the subject in an almost meditative way that can be felt by the viewer. Degas said "Drawing is not what one sees but what one can make others see."

Each of us will see and feel something different in this exhibition. For me I see the beauty but feel the underlying question "What do we need to do to hold on to this?"

When we look at a beautiful work of art we often think "I would love to be able to do something like this "But of course not many of us have either the ability or the commitment that it takes to master the techniques and then to use those techniques to find our own unique way of expressing our thoughts and emotions. Most of us will never produce great works of art but we can participate indirectly in the creative process by having in our homes art like this that we find beautiful, meaningful and inspiring.

A friend who is a sculptor gave me these words that she includes with her work

**"When buying from an artist you are buying more than just an object. You are buying hundreds of hours of failures and experimentation. You are buying days, weeks and months of frustration - and moments of pure joy. You aren't just buying a thing; you are buying a piece of a heart, a part of a soul, a moment of someone's life".**

Please enjoy "Burnt Offerings"