

The Art Oracle

Michael Reid

Showcasing the best of Australian art, with an eye to artistic merit and market value

Anna Eggert

Exhibits: Beaver Galleries, Canberra
(www.beavergalleries.com.au or 02-6282 5294);
Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne
(www.kwgallery.com or 03-9421 2500);
Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney (02-9319 1006).



The need to make things was bred into Anna Eggert. On her family's Croatian farm everything except sugar and salt was made by hand. These days Eggert's hands are encased in thick rubber gloves as she pummels and moulds stainless-steel and bronze mesh with river stones to make her delicate-looking sculptures of evening dresses and 18th-century costumes. Such a physically vigorous process mirrors the message of the creations: that women can be delicate and strong.

Eggert's family moved to Australia when she was 10. She studied ancient history at Sydney University and her bodyless sculptures are reminiscent of the beautiful but often maimed sculptures of antiquity. Family life and a teaching career intervened before Eggert enrolled at art school, where she learned about materials and refined her technique. Her work is popular with critics and the public alike. In 2001 she won the Waverley Art Prize for Sculpture and in 2003 she reached the finals of the National Sculpture Prize. Two years running she won the People's Choice Award for the McClelland Sculpture Award.

Eggert's work is heavily influenced by Goya's

portraits of 18th-century Spanish society, which she studied from black-and-white photocopies, her attention to detail honed from copying pictures from books as a child. As with the careful brushwork of the lace costumes of Goya's *majas*, Eggert's sculptures show each ruche and fold of the mesh dresses as they drape and surround invisible bodies. They suggest the power of clothes to constrain or liberate.

In 2005 Eggert used similar mesh to produce a series of wall pieces exploring water. As the viewer moves and the light alters, the appearance of the work shimmers and changes. This effect is achieved by heat-treating the mesh with a blowtorch. In *Miss Georgina* (75cm x 47cm x 45cm; pictured), which was recently exhibited at the Melbourne Art Fair with a price tag of \$8000, the same technique is used to add a pattern detail to the neckline, sash and hem of the dress. **GW**

Michael Reid is an art collector, author and dealer, with 20 years' experience in the art market; www.michaelreid.com.au.