

# Embracing change in print form

## Tracing the Echo

Dianne Longley

Flinders University Art Museum

Until September 8

**A**T the time Ray Bradbury wrote his futuristic novel *Fahrenheit 451* – in which firemen sought out books in order to destroy them – the perceived threat to books was the new phenomenon of television.

Half a century ago, Bradbury could not have envisioned the possibility of the disappearance of books by virtue of a digital coup d'état.

Since the early-1990s, when printmaker Dianne Longley began to incorporate digital technology into her practice, she has had a foot firmly in both worlds.

Longley's command of the traditional and contemporary printing and print-making techniques embraces intaglio, relief, stone and offset lithography, screen-printing, polymergravure and photopolymer plate printing.

## Visual Arts

The Flinders University Art Museum presents a satisfying survey of Longley's artists' books and folios from 1978 to 2001. These take a myriad of forms such as the miniature, concertinaed books *Quest* and *Pleasures*, the gouache paintings on vellum of *Theatre of Embarkation*, the flat/folded book *Love*, the delicate tracery of the relief photopolymer prints of *The Golden Rose* and the coloured digital prints of *Compass of Change*.

Such titles as the recent *Contingent Ambiguity* reveal Longley's intense interest in language – far from being an afterthought, text provides the impetus for her work.

In all, there are about 20 books and folios – and a CD-ROM – in which Longley's exploration of the big issues of life, death and love is couched in a domestic iconography, most captivatingly presented in the Lewis

Carroll-like playing cards of *Cats, Cakes, Clothes and Cups*. Longley's fascination with chance finds expression in the recurring motif of the chequerboard and the repeated references to games and "the game of life".

In *Birds screech at the moment of death*, a checked border surrounds a coffin-like form, within which a chequered forecourt appears to offer the Mallarme-like suggestion that life is a lottery. There are also excursions into a magic realist world of symbolism and mythological beasts and surprises among the wealth of detail – such as the planes, trains and motor vehicles in the floral border of *Embarkation*.

Such is Longley's obvious pleasure in the tactility of her printing process and in the materiality of a variety of papers, bindings and lettering, there seems little possibility of absolute digital domination. She views her process as a hybridisation, in which the actual nourishes the virtual and vice-versa.

Wendy Walker