

Borrowed views, notes on (*room work*) *Boatshed*

This little room with its verandah bigger than itself has intrigued me. It reminds me of the boatshed my family lived in when I was a child. Fibro with two red doors onto a verandah, it was built in the 1950s on stone piers over the water on Sydney's Middle Harbour,

Small structures in large places can both shelter and nudge you to inhabit the larger space of place. My brother and I were nudged into salt water and row boats and the idea, the myth of a 'knowing' canoe. By sail and paddle, this old cedar canoe had shown the boys who became my father and my uncle all around the bays.

Dad had no time to repair it to guide us safely along the shores again, so by the time I was fourteen, I had acquired a plywood kayak built on the Lane Cove river to teach me the bays of Middle Harbour: Sugarloaf, Bantry, Powderhulk and the rest.

The *nowey*, the canoes of the Dharug people are illustrated by colonial artists and described in 18th century journals of Watkin Tench, William Dawes and others. Light, delicately balanced craft, made of bark peeled in September from the trees that edged the waterways: swamp sheoak, stringy bark and bangalay. Deftly paddled by Dharug men and women, the *nowey* plied the bays, rivers estuaries of the Sydney region as well as the open sea. Smoldering on moist clay to protect the bark, small fires were kept ready to cook a catch of fish. The Museum of Sydney has a newly made *nowey*.

This little tacked on room was a place to escape the noise and social bustle of the busy Lewers' life of the 1950s and 60s. It was where the grandmother slept with a little vase of bright flowers to compensate for the leaky ceiling, where the children were put to bed and read stories and where 16 year old Darani withdrew to recite Macbeth for her leaving exams.

Bright patches of colour are a mystery. Are they the surplus of abstract paintings put to another use? the insides of cupboards? Was it a studio? Black and white striped curtains at the verandah doorway drew a reverie about Margo Lewers and Peggy Guggenheim, an encounter of Grande Dames. Margo didn't go to Venice and ride in a gondola on the lagoon but she did paint her venetian blinds in vibrant, colour coordinated stripes.

In this Lewers' garden of 'borrowed views', there are walls and vistas, not horizons. The painter, Fred Williams did away with horizons for Sherbrook forest and what followed. He was present, in the place, still in the picture. Perhaps a place within land that one occupies in the present doesn't have horizons either.

Neither do my memories of being in boats on estuaries and bays and mangroves. In a canoe or a kayak one glides filmically on tides close to shorelines. One can alight to a point of view. Horizons are for plains, beaches and the open sea.

In China in 1958, Margo strolled in the gardens of Suzhou, Venice of the East. Guests at husband, Jerry's birthday party collected pebbles and driftwood from the river for still life, and painted landscapes with ink and brush in the Chinese tradition.

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text refs: Margo Lewers letterspost 1958, Bennelong by Keith Vincent Smith.

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