

# Ordinary Kytherians / Extraordinary Achievements

## Marea Gazzard AM (nee, Ploumides)

*James Agapitos* for O KOSMOS, wrote: “ I have the honour of introducing to you a SUPERSTAR. *Marea Gazzard*. She is an artist and administrator with an international reputation. We met for the first time on a Saturday afternoon at an art exhibition and we cliqued. I wonder if it was our mutual Greek heritage that did the trick or my admiration of her personality and presence!

### THE EARLY YEARS

Marea’s father, *Charalambos Ploumedis* (he changed his name to Harry Medis) migrated to Brisbane from the island of *Antikythera* in 1920. He married *Christina Rudkin*, a lass of English and Scottish descent and Marea was born in 1928 when her parents moved to Surry Hills.

It was uncommon in those days for a Greek to marry a foreigner and Harry’s choice demonstrates a strong and independent personality, qualities inherited by his daughter.

The young Marea was observant, watching and learning as she grew. Another natural strength was her interest in people, having the power to mix. She was intrigued by and fraternised with her neighbours who were Chinese, Russian and an aboriginal family who lived next door.

In 1938 the family moved to Coffs Harbour and this was her opportunity to appreciate nature, the landscape and the environment.

Marea’s personality was forming and developing and probably the greatest influence on her so far was generated through her friendship with the daughter of a European family. Unlike the circle she was used to, these migrants were more



Marea Gazzard, Paddington c.1975. Photo Howard Bruce. Source: National Library Australia archive.

cultured and sophisticated and they were interested in things like books and collecting paintings.

To a girl with open eyes and a receptive mind the realisation of the existence of other traditions and practices inspired her desire to learn and to broaden her horizons. Her interest in the arts and cultural activities had become part of her developing persona.

### MAREA THE POTTER AND ACTIVIST

In 1950 she married *Donald Gazzard* and they became political activists in support of civil and intellectual freedom when the Menzies Government wanted to outlaw the Communist Party.

Her interest in the feel and substance of clay developed when she enrolled in the pottery class at the National Art School in Darlinghurst.

It was in London however where

she went for further studies that she saw for the first time Egyptian pots and works from the Greek Geometric and Cycladic periods on exhibition at the British Museum and she was stunned.

By this time she knew there was a fine line dividing art and craft and became convinced that the time had come for pottery to be recognised an art form. In a lecture at the Contemporary Art Society titled “Clay” she made a plea for the breakdown of the barriers that separated potters, sculptors and painters. Clay, she argued, could be sculpted as it had been in the past.”

Marea Gazzard studied at the National Art School in Sydney (1953-54) before moving to London, where she was described as ‘one of England’s most important ceramists in the 1950s.’

She had a love of the Australian landscape and forms from antiquity, objects that captured her

imagination during her stay in London and visits to the British Museum, Maltese idols, pre-Columbian pottery and the museum's Cycladic collection, their totemic and emblematic forms translated to Gazzard's own language.

They were defining forms that remained with her through her career, her survey exhibition *Mingarri to Ilios*, presented June this year by Utopia Art Sydney, sidled those forms alongside her iconic *Mingarri* commission and her most recent large scale work *Selini*.

It was a definitive statement about the persistence of a vision - an artist's integrity. Her objects commanded the gallery space, strong and dignified, while offering a sense of intimacy, of material revelation.

*Director of Utopia Art Sydney, Christopher Hodges said,*

*'Marea Gazzard was a true artist. She followed her own vision. She made art that was beguiling in its simplicity, elemental forms that seemed to be almost just formed and at the same captured the ageless beauty of time worn relics.'*

The exhibition coincided with the acquisition of Gazzard's *Selini 1* opposite.

An essay by writer *David Malouf* eloquently described Gazzard's practice:

*'Everything Marea Gazzard does, every move she makes into new areas of practice and reference, belongs to a single sensibility and consciousness, a single vision of what a life and a body of work, when completed and seen whole, might be.'*

In 1970 Gazzard was elected Director of the World Craft Council, in 1972 became Vice President of the World Crafts Council for Asia, and in 1973 the



Mingarri to Ilios installation view Utopia Art Sydney.

inaugural Chair of the Australia Council Crafts Board.

That same year she joined fibre artist *Mona Hessing* for an exhibition at the Victorian Art Gallery, saluting the recognition of craft within the establishment. In 1980 was elected President of the World Crafts Council, New York (USA).

It puts her iconic sculptural installation *Mingarri (1988)* into perspective. Sited within the private executive courtyard of Parliament House, where it is passed daily by the Prime Minister of Australia, Gazzard placed a sacred Indigenous reference at the heart of that seat of

power, not to mention the placement of women and craft.

*'Gazzard tries to connect people to place while also striving to incorporate a contemplative, emotional dimension that will be communicated without self-consciousness.'* said writer *Tempe Macgowan*.

Hodges added, *'It was her ability to capture the essence that ensures her sculpture in clay and bronze will endure. She was a generous and perceptive woman who will be sadly missed but very warmly remembered.'*



Gazzard's *Selini 1* which sits at the entrance of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Marea Gazzard working on Mingarri

Marea Gazzard was deeply respected as an artist and gracious woman. In 1982 was appointed to the Australian National Commission of UNESCO. She leaves a legacy of important work held within the State's major galleries and has been recognized internationally.

**VALE Marea Gazzard  
AM 1928 – 2013**

***The Australia Council  
acknowledged the  
passing on Monday 28  
October 2013 of Marea  
Gazzard AM.***

They said:- "Marea  
Gazzard was an  
influential and

of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery  
and the SH Ervine Gallery, which  
held a major retrospective in 1994.

*The Australia Council is proud to  
have funded Marea a number of  
times, including the Australia Artists  
Creative Fellowship in 1989.*

*Marea was also a leader and  
advocate for the visual arts and in  
particular the craft sector."*

**Australia Council Executive  
Director Arts Funding Frank  
Panucci** paid tribute to Marea and  
her work. "Marea Gazzard was  
a valued artist and an incredible  
advocate for the artistic community,"  
Mr Panucci said. "She will be sorely  
missed by many and The Australia  
Council acknowledges and thanks her  
for the huge contribution she made to  
the sector through her service as the  
chair of the Crafts Board."

Sources:-

- James Agapitos for O KOSMOS
- GINA FAIRLEY – artshub.com.au
- Journal of Australian Ceramics
- Art Nation (2010)
- Australian Council

*significant artist who practiced in sculpture and clay. Her works are held  
in many significant private collections as well as in Australia's leading art  
institutions, including the Art Gallery of South Australia, the Art Gallery of  
Western Australia, the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery*

Marea Gazzard, Mingarri: The Little Olgas (1984-  
1988), Executive Court,  
Parliament House, Canberra

Mingarri is a homage to the enduring nature of mountains in the landscape. Marea Gazzard draws on her fascination with The Olgas – a monolithic rock formation in central Australia – and on her observations that they appear as small hills when viewed from a distance, but as monumental boulders when nearby. The bronze forms convey the strength of these ancient rocks, which contrasts with the fragility of human life, while their simplicity exemplifies a timelessness characteristic of Marea Gazzard's sculpture. Mingarri represents a connection to the country's traditional heart and acknowledges the spiritual significance of the landscape to Aboriginal culture.



Most families who have emigrated to Australia have an extraordinary story to tell. We would like to share stories of achievements by Kytherians in Australia in our regular editorial feature, "Ordinary Kytherians / Extraordinary Achievements". If you would like to share a story please submit it to the Editor at [newsletter@kytherianassociation.com.au](mailto:newsletter@kytherianassociation.com.au)