



# education kit

salvatore zofrea: *days of summer*

a maitland regional art gallery touring exhibition  
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salvatore zofrea *days of summer*

*'Days of Summer' is a masterful achievement in Salvatore Zofrea's oeuvre, and Australian printmaking generally. One of this country's most accomplished woodcut artists has again managed to create an ambitious and all embracing body of work that marks an important development in his own art, as well as bring us another vision of that great, enduring theme of Australian art – the Australian landscape.*

Anne Ryan  
Curator, Australian Prints  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
April 2008

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## Contents

### Focus works

**Plate 1: Song of the Bellbirds (triptych)**  
Hand coloured woodcut print on paper  
179.5 x 294cm

**Plate 2: Illawarra Flame Tree and Bower Bird**  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
69 x 88.5cm

**Plate 3: Wattle and Bottlebrush over the Hawkesbury**  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
55.5 x 75.5cm

**Plate 4: Christmas Bells**  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
55 x 74.5cm

**Plate 5: Golden Wattle**  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
69 x 88.4cm

**Plate 6: Bowerbirds with Native Irises and Eggs and Bacon Pea**  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
75.3 x 55.8cm

Introduction	9
Notes on Use	9
Artist's life	10
Biography, Salvatore Zofrea (1946 - )	11
Themes and Influences	15
Methodology and Process	17
Focus Work: Song of the Bellbirds	19
Concepts for developing students' understanding	
Early Childhood and Primary students	21
Secondary and Tertiary students	24
Further Reading	27
Acknowledgements	27

Front cover image  
*Illawarra Flame Tree and Bowerbird* (detail)  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
69 x 88.5cm

Plate 1  
*Song of the Bellbirds* (triptych)  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Kozo paper.  
179.5 x 294cm





**Plate 2**

*Illawarra Flame Tree and Bowerbird*

Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
69 x 88.5cm



**Plate 3**

*Wattle and Bottlebrush over the Hawkesbury*  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
55.5 x 75.5cm



Plate 4  
*Christmas Bells*  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
55 x 74.5cm



Plate 5  
*Golden Wattle*  
Hand coloured woodcut print on Japanese Hitachi paper  
69 x 88.4cm



Plate 6

*Bowerbirds with Native Irises and Eggs and Bacon Pea*

Black and white woodcut print

75.3 x 55.8cm

## Introduction

This document has been produced by Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) as supporting education material for the touring exhibition *Salvatore Zofrea: Days of Summer*. It aims to support teachers of primary and secondary students and focuses on NSW Visual Art Syllabi for years K-6, 7-10 and 11-12.

Additionally, this resource can be utilised by public program staff, tertiary students, the general public whilst visiting the exhibition, as well as other interested parties, to give insight into Salvatore's art practice, history and the interpretation of his subtle and intriguing art. *Salvatore Zofrea: Days of Summer* is a touring exhibition presented by MRAG, showcasing in various regional galleries along the east coast of Australia from 2009 - 2012.

### Additional Exhibition resources:

- Ryan, A (2009) *Salvatore Zofrea: Days of Summer*, Goanna Print, Canberra, Australia.  
Geddes, T. and Ryan, A. 2008. *Days of Summer: recent woodcut prints by Salvatore Zofrea*. (2008) Exhibition catalogue with foreword by Tony Geddes and Essay by Anne Ryan. Mosman Art Gallery.

## Notes on Use

This education kit should be used in conjunction with a visit to the art gallery to view *Salvatore Zofrea: Days of Summer*. MRAG strongly supports experience-based learning, particularly in the area of arts and culture.

This document is divided into broad sections: *Artist's life, Biography, Salvatore Zofrea (1946 - ), Themes and Influences, Methodology and Process*, and *Focus Work: Song of the Bellbirds*. Each of these sections summarises an aspect of interest with regard to the *Days of Summer* suite of prints.

Following these sections of the education kit, some concepts for developing students' understanding have been attached. This section contains several suggestions for further study, artmaking activities and questions or concepts relating to the exhibition that could be expanded upon in the classroom. You may need to adapt these ideas to suit the specific needs of your students.

## Artist's life

1946	Salvatore Zofrea, born September 24 in Borgia, Calabria, southern Italy.	1984	Produces a suite of 12 etchings entitled <i>Days of Heaven</i> .
1949	Salvatore's father Giuseppe Zofrea and two brothers migrate to Australia.	1986	Salvatore's father, Giuseppe Zofrea, dies.
1956	Salvatore migrates to Sydney, Australia with his mother, Teresa Zofrea, and two sisters.	1986	Begins work on The Harvest, State Bank (NSW) mural commission.
1961	Salvatore leaves secondary school and begins working life.	1986	Awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study fresco painting in Italy for three months.
1963-9	Studies life drawing and painting at Julian Ashton Art School and privately with Henry Justelius.	1992	Begins work on <i>Summer of the 17th Doll</i> , Sydney Opera House fresco commission.
1967	Has first solo exhibition, at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney.	1994	Cultural exchange exhibition to Italy Un'Odissea Italo-Australiana, funded by NSW Ministry for the Arts.
1971	Travels to Europe visiting London, Paris, Madrid and Amsterdam to view the works of great artists such as Van Gogh, Goya and the great Impressionist painters.	1995	Awarded the title of 'Cavaliere' (knighthood) conferred by Italian Government for services to art in Australia.
1974	Developed renal fibrosis and underwent surgery followed by a period of recuperation.	1995	Awarded Italo-Australian Man of the Year Achievement by Italian National Day Celebration Committee.
1975	Salvatore's mother, Teresa, dies.	1997	<i>Spring Morning</i> , Star City Casino, Sydney, mural commission.
1976	Exhibits the first paintings of the <i>Psalms</i> series at Macquarie Galleries.	1998	<i>A Celebration of Life</i> , NRMA, Sydney, mural commission.
1977	Winner, the Sulman Prize with 'Woman's Life, Woman's Love', Art Gallery of New South Wales.	2000	Salvatore Zofrea: <i>Appassionata</i> woodcuts, exhibition and book, Art Gallery of New South Wales.
1979	Winner, the Sulman Prize with 'The Watertrap', Art Gallery of New South Wales.	2000	<i>Te Deum</i> , ResMed Ltd, Sydney, fresco commission.
1979	Begins work on <i>Sesqui-Centenary Celebrations</i> mural commission for Sydney Morning Herald foyer, and is able to purchase land at Kurrajong and build a studio.	2002	<i>Survey of the Psalms</i> , exhibition, Art Gallery of New South Wales.
1981	Travels to Europe, this time visiting Borgia for the first time since leaving at age nine.	2003	<i>Salvatore Zofrea: Fifty Portraits</i> exhibition, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra and travelling exhibition to regional galleries.
1982	Winner, the Sulman Prize with 'Psalm 24: In Heaven', Art Gallery of New South Wales.	2009	<i>Salvatore Zofrea: Days of Summer</i> , Touring exhibition coordinated by Maitland Regional Art Gallery.
1982	Awarded a 6 month stay at Power Bequest Studio, Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris studying painting.		

## Biography, Salvatore Zofrea (1946- )

Salvatore Zofrea was born in 1946 in Borgia, Calabria, southern Italy. His parents were hardworking landowners; much of their land was planted out with olive trees as well as wheat, lucerne and chick peas. Their family home was large, partitioned inside into separate rooms with the bedrooms upstairs. On the ground floor, the floor was rammed earth and his mother Teresa would bake the family's bread in a large oven that warmed the room and dried bed linen and clothes hanging beside them. Salvatore was born at home, his parents were in their late 30s and early 40s, two of their children had died leaving Salvatore the youngest of eight. Salvatore can recall his childhood in Calabria and recounts the emergence of his budding creativity as a young child.

*I remember going with my friends to the river near our house and collecting clay which I would bring home and spend hours trying to model into statues like the ones I'd seen at church. <sup>1</sup>*

Young Salvatore's clay figures are the precursors of a professional career of significant accomplishments spanning four decades. The suggestion of the spiritual has not left his artistic work. His early infatuation with the church and countryside of Calabria are experiences that have impacted upon much of Salvatore's ensuing artistic career.

*I have often been asked if I was interested in art as a child. I can remember that I have always been very much affected by colour – by the colours of the countryside and the wild poppies and violets that my mother and sisters used to gather in their aprons when we went to the farms to weed the wheat fields; the stained-glass windows of the churches; the pageants on Saints' Days; and the faded frescoes on the cemetery wall depicting Hell and Purgatory. <sup>2</sup>*

*When I look back on life in Borgia, I can see that the main sources of nourishment were my mother, the countryside, and the Church. My mother's loyalty, encouragement and friendship sustained me both as a child and also in later years... the Church and the countryside of Calabria repeatedly stunned me with their sensational pageants of colour. <sup>3</sup>*

In 1949 Salvatore's father, Giuseppe, two brothers and a brother-in-law migrated to Sydney, Australia, intending the rest of his family to join them as soon as possible. They did not see each other again for another 6 years, leaving three year old Salvatore to be brought up by his mother and sisters. During this time, his parents, neither of whom could read or write, maintained contact through letters written for them by friends.

When Salvatore was nine he came to Australia with his mother and two of his sisters. His first reactions to the landscape of his new home, when compared to Borgia, were unsettled.

*To a boy used to the safe, lush countryside of Calabria the landscape appeared very stark and eerie – bare, exposed sandstone cliffs and olive-green trees.<sup>4</sup>*

He attended Balgowlah Primary School and went on to Balgowlah Boys' High, but left at the end of second form at the age of 15. He worked in a variety of jobs and took evening classes at Sydney Technical College, and later studied at the Julian Ashton Art School. In classes he met Henry Justelius, a painter, who was one of the teachers at the technical college. A microbiologist by profession, Justelius was 50 years older than Salvatore, and at only 19 Salvatore's insatiable passion for painting impressed Justelius and they became friends. At this time Salvatore's work was often remarked upon, particularly by the Julian Ashton crowd, as being too 'gaudy'.<sup>5</sup> Salvatore spent much of his spare time with Justelius or practicing his painting, and just did his own thing. He approached The Macquarie Galleries, artists' representatives in Sydney, and had a solo exhibition there in 1967 at the age of 21.

*I have always been ready to listen to what people say, but in the end I must make my own moves... I knew in myself that I had to continue this way in order to get to something different, and although these people had a lot of time for me and a lot of faith in what I was doing, I felt that they were not completely in tune with what was happening.<sup>6</sup>*

The exhibition catalogue from Salvatore's exhibition at The Macquarie Galleries (written by Justelius) well describes Salvatore's approach to his art.

*It is extremely interesting to see the development of a young painter; and when a young painter shows a spontaneous delight in what he is endeavouring to say in his own words, it is refreshing.*

*One who steps carefully and painfully with his clumsy feet into the footprints of another, no matter how recently they were made or how sharp they are, is so intent on placing his feet carefully, that he misses the scenery en route. To his dismay he invariably finds at the end he didn't want to go there at all.*

*There appears no indication that this young painter is looking too closely at the ground for footprints.<sup>7</sup>*

After another few years Salvatore was still juggling a day job with his more passionate release into painting in the evenings and on weekends. His exhibitions at this time sold very well, but received mixed reviews from critics. By 1971, 25 year old Salvatore had saved enough to travel England and Europe, visiting London and Paris before going on to Spain for a few months, enjoying the scenery and weather immensely. Afterwards he visited the Netherlands and

England again before returning to Australia in February 1972.

*Of all the countries I visited, I enjoyed Spain the most – the warm Latin environment suited me.<sup>8</sup>*

Back in Australia, Salvatore went to work for David Jones Ltd in Sydney, creating their retail displays. In mid 1974, he developed renal fibrosis and underwent surgery, followed by a lengthy period of recuperation. It was during this time that Salvatore's mother, Teresa Zofrea, died.

*Her sudden death shattered our family. She had been the core of it and still, today, though no longer with us, remains at its centre. She had always been a mainstay of my life: I had lost my closest confidante and friend.<sup>9</sup>*

After reading the Psalms of the Bible while ill in hospital, Salvatore made a resolution to paint all 150 Psalms, embodying his personal reaction to each one. Today, having already accomplished over 100 Psalm paintings, the Psalms series is Salvatore's major life's work.

*There is no parallel in the history of Australian art for Zofrea's Psalm paintings; I can think of no other body of work in this country that has carried through a program of visual expression on a single text with such sustained singularity over three decades.<sup>10</sup>*

The rest of the 1970s saw Salvatore produce several exhibitions with an increased intensity and clarity in his works. His style, which previously was more expressionist using large amounts of oil paints applied thickly to the canvas, became more controlled and the forms in his paintings became more precise, with paint more carefully applied. While he was producing fewer paintings, the details were stronger and more thoughtful.

In 1977 Salvatore painted a series of three paintings entitled *Woman's life, Woman's love*, in dedication to his mother. He entered two of these paintings in the Sulman Prize, an annual painting prize held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney awarded to the best subject painting, genre painting or mural project created in that year by an Australian artist. Salvatore won the prize, and with his earnings was able to fund his father's trip to America. It helped to legitimise his artistic career to his father who struggled to bridge the gap between his own life and that of his son, which seemed so different and strange.

In 1979 Salvatore's career achieved additional heights, winning the Sulman Prize for the second time, and also achieving a commission with the Sydney Morning Herald to produce a large scale mural for the foyer of their office building in Broadway, Sydney. It was a massive project made up of 16 canvas panels; the whole project lasted three years. With the commission from the mural Salvatore was able to purchase land at Kurrajong in the foothills of the Blue Mountains and build a studio and house there. Around this time he also

met Stephanie Claire, his long term life partner.

In 1981 Salvatore travelled again to Europe, this time to Italy and France. Returning to his childhood home was a strange experience, the church of Borgia which had before seemed a cathedral, now revealed itself to Salvatore as a chapel, his family home seemed smaller – everything about the town seemed shabby, run-down and dusty compared to his memories of frescoes, festivals and family life as a nine year old.

*I could not relate to Borgia – everything seemed tiny and I felt like a science-fiction traveller hurled back in time. It seemed a dream that I had once lived here, and that these middle aged toothless women dressed in black were the girls I'd played and fought with in our street so long ago.*<sup>11</sup>

It was while travelling Europe in early 1982 Salvatore received the news that he had won the Sulman Prize for the third time.

In the 1980s Salvatore spent time expanding his skills and understanding of art in the Power Bequest Studio at Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, for six months, and also in Italy after being awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study fresco. In 1986 his father, Giuseppe Zofrea, died and Salvatore purchased his father's home. He now divides his time equally between his Kurrajong studio and the family home in Seaforth, Sydney.

In 1995 Salvatore was awarded the Italian title of Cavaliere, the Italian equivalent of Knighthood, for his contribution to the art of Australia and also won the Italo-Australian Man of the Year achievement award conferred by the Italian National Day Celebration Committee. He spent much of the following years producing several national and international commissions, and also several large scale print suites such as the *Appassionata* series (1994 – 99) and *Fifty Portraits* (2000 – 01).

Salvatore is a prolific artist, passionate and dedicated to his work. Whilst being a passionate painter, his first etchings and prints emerged in the 1970s and he has continued to print over the years using a variety of techniques. *Days of Summer* is an ambitious collection of 40 woodcut prints of varying sizes, some hand-coloured using a Japanese colouring method. *Days of Summer* is another Zofrea epic, demonstrative of his dedicated work ethic and proclivity for intense exploration of a theme.

## Themes and Influences

*Through his prolific vision the sensation of the odours, colours and textures of the bush are imparted through a close focus which fills the picture plane with highly wrought and detailed imagery, giving the viewer a sense of immersion in the subject. This visual bounty is a metaphor for what Zofrea calls 'the exuberance of life', central to his life and art.*<sup>12</sup>

*Days of Summer* is not the first large suite of woodcuts created by Salvatore. *An Odyssey* (1989) and *Appassionata* (1994-99) have come before it. Both are an autobiographical series that tell the story of Zofrea's life from his childhood in Calabria to his artistic passion and success in Australia. *Capricornia Suite* (1990) is based on the lives of Italian migrants who worked in the cane fields of Queensland after World War II.

Additionally, *Days of Summer* could be considered to be the second incarnation of prints by Salvatore in a closely related theme. In 1984 Salvatore produced a suite of landscape etchings which could be considered a forerunner to the *Days of Summer* suite. These zinc plate etchings, entitled *Days of Heaven* are a series of 12 works each representative of the months of the year, demonstrating the passing of the seasons.

By nature of their printing method, etchings often contain significantly finer detail than that of woodblock prints. The artist would start with a plate of zinc or copper, covered with an acid-proof layer of resin, or ground. Using an etching tool, the artist 'draws' onto the plate, scratching away at the ground as he goes. The plate is then placed in a bath of acid for an amount of time, which penetrates into the exposed areas and etches the design into the metal. The artist can also repeat the method to create differing depths to the plate, thereby strengthening the colour in some areas and leaving others to remain delicate. *October* from the *Days of Heaven* suite depicts a man resting in a field of long grass with the cattle he is tending. Rolling hills recede into the distance, leading the viewer's eye to a crescent moon and stars in the evening sky reminiscent of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889). In *February*, a tilled field is the central focus, framed on three sides by arable land, trees and untamed grasses while in the sky, small groups of birds drop and dive between the trees. These landscapes compared to *Days of Summer* are romantically Europeanised, and were printed in brown ink on Arches paper, the end result overtly nostalgic.

More recently than the *Days of Heaven* suite, the seeds of an idea for *Days of Summer* was sewn initially in a commissioned artwork Salvatore produced in 2005, which requested a series of mosaics inspired by the flora and fauna of north-west Sydney where ResMed Ltd, the company commissioning the work, has its headquarters. The commission compelled Salvatore to engage more deliberately with the Australian bush, something he admittedly considered 'harsh and even a bit depressing, in stark contrast to the lushness of the European

landscape of his memory'.<sup>13</sup> Salvatore undertook a series of explorations of the region which ultimately led to his discovery and appreciation of the unique qualities of light and atmosphere of the Australian bush.

Also at this time, Roger Butler, senior curator of Australian prints and drawings at the National Gallery of Australia, recalls enabling Salvatore and Stephanie to view some of the prints in the National Gallery's collection, including those by Japanese artist Munakata Shikō (1903–1975). Butler recalls: 'At the time I wondered how his enthusiasm for the Showa period artist would be reflected in his own practice'.<sup>14</sup> It would appear that Salvatore's interest in Munakata's style and method has noticeably impacted on the *Days of Summer* suite. Printed on Japanese Kozo, Mulberry and Hitachi paper, the suite is filled with delicately hand coloured prints and the pigment is applied to the reverse of the paper, a traditional Japanese technique allowing the colour to suffuse with softness and subtlety.

Salvatore was inspired by walks in the bushland area around his home and studio in Kurrajong, at the base of the Blue Mountains outside of Sydney. When viewing *Song of the Bellbirds* (plate 1), you can imagine the idyllic sounds of birdlife and constant hum of insects, the swaying of long grasses against each other and the uneven strips of sunlight stirring on a dry-leaf covered ground. The name 'Kurrajong' comes from an aboriginal word for a tree, *Brachychiton populneus*, which grows in the area.<sup>15</sup> The area has been settled since the 1790s, and was originally a farming area that produced food for the early population of Sydney. Parts of the area surrounding Kurrajong are national parkland; other parts are also world heritage areas, protecting an unusually diverse range of vegetation and animals.<sup>16</sup>

*Kurrajong provides Zofrea with the visual nourishment that has charged his most recent work with a new energy, and shifted his emphasis wholeheartedly to the Australian landscape.*<sup>17</sup>

Many of Salvatore's previous bodies of work have drawn their inspiration from his own life and experiences or from allegorical stories of the Bible, but the grand narratives of the *Psalms of Life* painting series, or the autobiographical nature of the *Appassionata* suite of prints, are not overtly present in the subtle, peacefully composed prints that comprise the *Days of Summer* exhibition. Compared to the *Appassionata* series where black ink commands much of the picture plane and the imagery contrasts sharply in bold textural movements across the paper, *Days of Summer* has been carved quite differently. His close focus studies of flowers and wildlife in works such as *Illawarra Flame Tree and Bowerbird* (plate 2) contain more subtly carved textures. The additional carving and detail reduces the amount of ink transferred from the woodblock, making for a lighter, airier composition. This is partially because of Salvatore's intention to hand colour his suite of prints, but it impacts on the nature of the prints left uncoloured, leaving the works with an uncluttered feel that quietly draws a sense of tranquillity over the composition, reminiscent of the still, dry heat of the Australian bush. Other works convey the lush riverside landscape

of the area, such as *Wattle and Bottle Brush over the Hawkesbury* (plate 3).

The carving and colouring of *Days of Summer* stands out in Salvatore's oeuvre as a new artistic direction in his work, even while the most characteristic trait of his work, remains clear. The *Days of Summer* suite is filled with prints bursting from edge to edge with life and colour, its compositions are powerfully concentrated representations of the land. In Salvatore's summery compositions, such as *Christmas Bells* (plate 4) and *Golden Wattle* (plate 5) flowers grow clustered together in perpetual full bloom. Flannel flowers and kangaroo paw grow closely intertwined, as do boronia and grevillea, daisies and wax flowers, while bowerbirds hide nestled in fields of flowers as seen in *Bowerbirds with Native Irises and Eggs and Bacon Pea* (plate 6). Occasionally flowers like the Sturt desert pea can be found in Salvatore's works, although in the climate of the Hawkesbury area the desert pea would not be found there. Looking at the works in the exhibition, it is clear that Salvatore's intention is not to reproduce a realistic representation of the Australian bush - his intention is deeper and more emotional. As Anna Waldmann commented regarding Salvatore's art style 25 years prior to the *Days of Summer* suite, '[t]raditional conceptions of realism are sacrificed in order to convey more forcibly the sensations felt by the artist.'<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Salvatore conveys to his audience the feeling of being immersed in the bush, the coloured prints help denote scents and temperatures, and the overall composition of all the works focuses our attention on flowering buds and heavy green leaves: no signs of drought; no erosion; no hidden dangers. The bush depicted within *Days of Summer* entices us with its pleasantness - like the European landscapes of great artists such as Vermeer, Rembrandt and Van Gogh, who Salvatore admires.

*These woodcut prints of the bush are joyous incursions into an abundant world teeming with life and colour, sound and movement. The picture plane is often compressed well into the foreground, further intensifying the sensation of the viewer's immersion in the subject.*<sup>19</sup>

## Methodology and Process

Even for an experienced printer, the *Days of Summer* series represents an enormous amount of effort, skill and labour, from developing the studies and preliminary drawings, creating the overall compositions, laboriously carving the 40 woodblocks and printing each work in editions of twenty, not to mention carefully hand-colouring each individual work. In order to accomplish this large body of work, Salvatore was assisted in the printing process by custom printer Trevor Riach, and also by Salvatore's partner Stephanie Claire.

To initiate the massive task of developing the *Days of Summer* suite, Salvatore began by walking around, photographing and sketching the bushland around his home and studio in Kurrajong, north-west of Sydney. Working from the photographs and drawings of his walks in the bushland, Salvatore would then develop his ideas using different mediums; sometimes pencil, ink or watercolour. Some designs would require several preliminary drawings to ensure the complementary placement of different flowers in a composition. After finalising his design he would then re-draw the image onto the woodblock. Salvatore used Jelutong wood stock cut along the grain, the prints retain a fine imprint of the grain of the wood, accentuating the subject matter.

The design on the woodblock is an overall plan but the visualisation of the final printed image is more complex in his head. It is a fluid process and the work evolves as decisions are made along the way, adding texture to allow an area to be coloured differently, or altering the placement of a flower or tree trunk to benefit the overall composition. Salvatore can check the progress of his print intermittently, by putting butcher's paper over the woodblock and rubbing with graphite. Throughout, he must remember the woodblock is a mirror image of the final print, birds carved looking to the left will emerge in prints looking to the right, and what wood he removes will become blank space where ink will not transfer to the paper. Salvatore's mind is aware, even without consciously thinking, that what he's carving is a negative version of what he wants to print.

*Zofrea enjoys the process of carving, which he likens to 'ploughing a field'. Sometimes cutting deeper than necessary, the physical sensation of gouging the wood and feeling it give way is in some ways akin to making a sculpture.<sup>20</sup>*

When finished, the woodblocks are hand printed in editions by custom printer Trevor Riach and assisted by Stephanie Claire. The ink used is a water-based black ink overlaid with a sealant, preventing the ink from smearing or blurring when the colour is later applied. Trevor and Stephanie lay a sheet of paper over a freshly inked woodblock. A thin sheet of butcher's paper is placed over the top to protect the paper. Trevor and Stephanie then use the soft curved edge of wooden spoons, and apply pressure in small round movements to transfer the ink to the page. While still wet, the paper is carefully peeled from the woodblock and laid flat to dry. In order to print several editions, the block is washed and dried thoroughly and the process repeated. The papers Salvatore opted to use are all Japanese style papers, a nod once more to the style and feel of Munakata's prints he had admired. Japanese papers (also known as

Washi paper) are known for their traditional production and materials, Hitachi paper, Kozo paper, and Mulberry paper are papers made from different tree fibres of Japan. Despite the delicate translucent nature of Washi, it is stronger than ordinary paper made from wood pulp, because the fibres of the tree are longer, and during the paper making process procedures are undertaken to minimise bacteria, which erodes the fibres. Traditionally the paper also has fewer chemicals, making it a good choice for archival prints.

Trevor and Stephanie print each of the 40 woodblocks in editions. There are 20 editions for sale, 5 artist's proofs and 1 printer's proof. Fifteen prints are chosen for colouring from each woodblock. Once the black and white woodblock print is dried in full, Salvatore turns the paper over and applies the colour to the back. The colours, or pigments, used are in powder form. Salvatore uses a wide soft hair brush to lightly wet down the entire surface of the paper, and then applies the powdered pigments, which bleed across the damp paper. The effect is muted, subtle colour, the pigment bleeds through to the front of the paper, not spoiling the black ink of the print that has been set in place by a sealant.

Other editions of each print are chosen to remain uncoloured. Salvatore enjoys the visual appeal of both prints equally; the uncoloured prints retain the look of traditional European woodblock prints, while the coloured versions enliven the prints with a more animated depiction of such naturally colourful subject matter.

*Zofrea's response to the Australian bush is above all, emotional. He sees in it transcendent manifestations of something he describes as 'god' – not in the Biblical sense - but rather an expression of the spiritual, intangible mysteries of life and common human experience.*<sup>21</sup>

### Focus Work: *Song of the Bellbirds* (plate 1)

*Song of the Bellbirds* is the largest work by far in the *Salvatore Zofrea Days of Summer* exhibition. It is a triptych, consisting of three framed panels measuring 179.5cm high and 97 cm wide. When installed together the work measures 179.5 x 294cm.

*'The sounds of nature, especially the Kurrajong Bellbirds, have been a major inspiration for Zofrea.'*<sup>22</sup>

On all three panels of *Song of the Bellbirds* the waters of the Hawkesbury can be seen flowing in the background. Wattle branches seem to sprout sporadically between banksias and pink coloured flowers. In the central panel the river recedes into the distance overhung by trees. The outer panels balance the overall composition by the similar placement of tree branches leaning towards the outer edge of the triptych. On all three panels bellbirds flit in and out of the foliage. It seems we have caught a group of birds by surprise - they dart in all directions, and still a few more sit unaware on a tree bough or two, concealed within the dense branches.

Looking closely at all the prints in the exhibition, a large array of birds can be found: pigeons, bellbirds, bowerbirds, honey eaters and a stunning lyrebird, are present. *Song of the Bellbirds* however is unique from the rest of Salvatore's prints in the suite, as it is the largest by far of the exhibition. It is also the only triptych, and by being filled with such an intense cluster of movement, it is a captured moment of surprise or excitement in amongst prints that depict considerably more tranquil moments.

The size of the artwork has forced Salvatore to stray from the standard method of approach he undertook in the rest of the suite, as it is the only work to be printed onto multiple sheets of paper. Each framed panel consists of 3 sheets of paper: each piece of paper is the print of a separate woodblock. Salvatore has had to produce nine woodblocks to create the total composition.

*Song of the Bellbirds* was additionally inspired by an incident in the far south coast of New South Wales in Mandeni near Merimbula. In late 2006 local authorities culled a bellbird population of up to 3000 birds in response to large areas of forest dying off without explanation. The theory was the soaring numbers of bellbirds in the region were causing an imbalance in the levels of insects and other species of bird life in the area.<sup>23</sup> To Salvatore, it was indicative of civilisation impacting on a natural environment where the birds had inadvertently become a hindrance to the landscape.

*Song of the Bellbirds* is an interesting addition to this suite of prints, a testimony to the delicate nuances of meaning ingrained into these works, and the artistic refinement of their maker.

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<sup>1</sup> Claire, S. and Waldmann, A. (1983) *Salvatore Zofrea*. Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, p18.

<sup>2</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p18.

<sup>3</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p18.

<sup>4</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p22.

<sup>5</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p35.

<sup>6</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p35.

<sup>7</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p33.

<sup>8</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p43.

<sup>9</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p53.

<sup>10</sup> Sayers, A. (2008) *The Psalms of Life*. Art Direction Creative, Canberra, p9.

<sup>11</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p67.

<sup>12</sup> Geddes, T. and Ryan, A. 2008. *Days of Summer: recent woodcut prints by Salvatore Zofrea*.

(2008) Exhibition catalogue with foreword by Tony Geddes and Essay by Anne Ryan. Mosman Art Gallery.

<sup>13</sup> Geddes, T. Ryan, A. 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Ryan, A. (2009) *Salvatore Zofrea Days of Summer*. Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, p15.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.kurrajong.org.au/kjhst.html> Viewed 29th April 2009

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/parkHome.aspx> Viewed 29th April 2009

<sup>17</sup> Geddes, T. Ryan, A. 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Claire and Waldmann, 1983, p75.

<sup>19</sup> Ryan, A. 2009, p21.

<sup>20</sup> Geddes, T. and Ryan, A. 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Geddes, T. and Ryan, A. 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan, A. 2009, p22.

<sup>23</sup> Woodford, J. *Cull takes toll of bellbirds, to save the forest*. Sydney Morning Herald, December 4

2006

## Concepts for developing students' understanding

### Early Childhood and Primary students

#### Art Making

- Draw your own version of flowers and trees like Salvatore has done and use pipe cleaners, coloured papers and fabrics cut out as flower petals and leaves, so that they lift away from the paper and make your drawing three-dimensional.
- Take some cuttings of flowers from your garden at home into the classroom and press them in tissue paper underneath some heavy books. Some flowers may be thin enough to run through a laminating machine to preserve.
- Using petals, grass and leaves, secure these items with a little bit of glue in a pattern to a piece of paper and paint over the top. You could paint in just one colour or paint a whole scene with different colours. While the paint is still wet, carefully remove the petals and leaves to reveal clean white paper in different natural shapes.
- Try other methods of printing. Cut flower shapes out of potatoes, or petal shapes out of cheap erasers and create your own designs. Use these designs to make postcards and birthday cards.
- Set up a still life model display consisting of elements from nature you have found in the area. Draw this still life in as many different ways as you can. Use only lead pencil, then use coloured pencils, then restrict the colours you use to only one or two shades. Try using other mediums such as pastels, oil sticks or acrylic paint. Make all your artworks the same size and turn your artworks into a book.
- Use Printing Foam or Soft Cut Carving Block (both easier to use versions of woodcut printing) and draw your own design for an artwork based on the flowers and trees that are in the gardens and grounds of the school.
- To add colour to the works in the exhibition, Salvatore turned the paper over and added colour to the back of the page. Use a piece of acetate or any sort of plastic and draw a design in black permanent marker or paint on one side, then colour in the design using non-toxic glass paints on the reverse.
- Buy Japanese or Washi papers and experiment with other forms of Asian artistry including origami and kirigami.

- Salvatore also made another suite of prints entitled *Days of Heaven*. There were 12 prints in the series each representing the 12 months of the year. Create 12 drawings showing the different months of the year in Australia.

## Art Appreciating

- Look at one print and point out all the different colours that Salvatore has used.
- Pick your favourite print in the exhibition and write a story or poem based on the print.
- Look at the works on display in the exhibition. We are looking for evidence about the artist. What sort of person might he be? What colours does he like? Do you think he was happy or sad when he made these artworks? Where might he live?
- Pick your favourite print in the exhibition. Is it daytime or night time? What season do you think it is? How do you know? Pretend you are on holidays in the Hawkesbury (the region these prints are inspired by) and write someone a postcard about the weather and the things you have seen.
- Without looking at the name of the artwork or telling anyone else, make up your own name for the artwork, and then compare what you thought with the ideas of others in the class.
- Work in small groups and pick out a few different artworks in the exhibition. Make a report about your artwork: describe what is happening in the artwork, what colours have been used, what the name of the artwork is and what different flowers or animals are present.
- Assign two to three students as reporters at a press conference and assign the teacher to play the role of Salvatore. Encourage students to ask questions about the artworks or about the artist's history.

## Links to other key learning areas

### English and Literacy

- Imagine you are a news reporter. Write a newspaper article about the exhibition.
- Create a list of spelling words based on the exhibition or the process of woodblock printing. Also ask the students to research the definitions of words and create a glossary of terms. [www.artlex.com](http://www.artlex.com) is an online dictionary of art-related terms that may assist.

## Mathematics

- Look around the exhibition. You will see a lot of different birds in the artworks. The name of the artwork will often tell you what sort of bird it is. Make a list of all the different birds you can see and then collate data on how many of each type are in all the works in the exhibition.
- List all the colours used in the exhibition. Some of these colours will be primary colours and others secondary or tertiary colours. Pick two or three examples (for example, pink) and experiment to develop ratios that explain how much white and how much red is needed to make the colour.

## Science and Technology

- Create a report for each of the seasons, and research flowers that are in bloom in Australia for each of those seasons.
- Pick a native flower that is local to your area and plant it in three different sections of the school grounds, one in full sun, another in shade, perhaps another in a sandy or overly moist area. Observe across time which plant grows most effectively.

## Human Society and its Environment

- Research the local flora and fauna of the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains National Park area and create your own fact file or book with information, photographs and your own drawings.
- Research Italy and the area of Calabria where Salvatore was born.

## Personal Development, Health and Physical Education

- Salvatore was inspired to make these artworks after taking walks through the bush to take photographs and draw sketches. Follow in his footsteps and go for a bush walk through a local area of bushland or forest.
- Use a ball as a ‘microphone’ – whichever student has the ball is able to speak. Each student passes the ball to another student after they have spoken. Ask a range of questions: get students to list the colours they have seen; the birds they have observed in each print; or their personal favourite print, for example.

## Creative Arts (music and drama)

- Find different items in the bush such as sticks and rocks. Develop a class percussion performance using these items as musical instruments.
- Read the Focus Work section of this kit. Create a dramatic performance based on the story of this artwork.

## Concepts for developing students' understanding

### Secondary and Tertiary students

#### Artist

- Read the *Biography* section of the Education Kit. In small groups make a list in order of their importance, of the influences that have shaped Salvatore as an artist, then compare your findings.
- Anne Ryan suggests that the sounds of nature have had particular impact on Salvatore whilst developing the *Days of Summer* suite. Create a soundtrack of your own and justify how the songs express moods and emotions that are present in Salvatore's work.
- Read the *Methodology and Process* section of the Education Kit. In total, 40 woodblock prints have been created for this exhibition. Each block takes several days to carve, after which each block is printed in editions of 20, plus five artist's proof editions and one printer's proof edition. What is the total number of works printed? Consider the time that each step in this process would take. What does this suggest about printmakers, and their dedication to their work? Consider also the financial implications: the initial cost of materials, and the potential for income.

#### Artmaking

Select an area of bushland and photograph the different flora and fauna available. Using these photographs, develop patterns for lino prints inspired by Salvatore's compositions of the bush.

#### Additional research

Research the woodcut prints of Australian artist Margaret Preston (1874 - 1963) and compare the similarities and differences between Margaret's and Salvatore's depiction of the Australian landscape, flora and fauna.

#### Artwork

- Read the section - *Focus Work: Song of the Bellbirds* and examine the work yourself. Consider and develop your own opinions to the following. What motives prompted the size of this work? What significance does size play when viewing a work?
- Research Salvatore's *Appassionata* (1994-99) series and develop a list of similarities and differences between this suite of woodblock prints and the *Days of Summer* suite. Include the physical aspects of the works, such as size and cutting techniques, as well as its subject matter.

- Select a work from the exhibition. Consider the composition, and positioning of the horizon in the picture plane. Is the horizon evident? How does a horizon line or lack of horizon line affect the way an audience experiences this image?

### Artmaking

Research an environmental issue within Australia that is of concern to you and create a response artwork as Salvatore has done with *Song of the Bellbirds*.

### Additional research

Research the Blue Mountains National Park and the native flora in the area and realistically compare Salvatore's depictions of the different flowers present in his work.

### World

- Consider the *Days of Summer* suite and discuss as a class the following questions. Does art have to have an evident message or serious meaning in order to be significant to the art world? If so, to what audiences?
- Research the works of Japanese artist Munakata Shikō (1903-1975). What connections can you draw between Salvatore's work and Munakata's? Sketch a work of your choice by each artist side by side and then point out their similarities and differences.

### Artmaking

Salvatore's artworks were inspired by the surroundings of his studio in Kurrajong. Create a collage of the inspirations that are present around you in your own world.

### Additional research

Research the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman annual prizes from the Art Gallery of New South Wales. What are the requirements for applying for these prizes? What other artists have won these prestigious prizes?

### Audience

- Select a work as the basis for a brief descriptive passage or poem of 4-6 lines. Compare responses with other students in the class. Do your responses differ considerably or is there some connection? What conclusions can you draw about how different audiences interpret artworks based on this activity?

- Create a role play situation with one student acting as Salvatore and other students acting the following roles: journalist for the local newspaper, environmental activist, wealthy art collector and an art critic who only appreciates realistic landscape painting. Allow students to come up with their own questions for Salvatore and discuss the differences in each person's opinions and interests afterwards.
- Consider the different interpretations of Salvatore's work. What perceptions would someone who has never visited the Australian bush have when looking at Salvatore's work?

### Artmaking

Audiences perceive artworks according to their context. Take any one of the works in the *Days of Summer* suite and contort its meaning by contextualising it in an advertisement for a cause or product of your choice. What other meanings can you produce?

### Additional research

Research Salvatore's *Psalms of Life* series of paintings. The *Psalms* paintings are part of an unfinished series that Salvatore has worked on over the years since 1976. Choose 2-3 paintings from the series and consider the different audience reactions to what is depicted and the associated Psalms in the Bible.

## Further reading

- Claire, S. and Waldmann, A. (1983) *Salvatore Zofrea*. Hale & Iremonger, Sydney
- Geddes, T. and Ryan, A. 2008. *Days of Summer: recent woodcut prints by Salvatore Zofrea*. (2008) Exhibition catalogue with foreword by Tony Geddes and Essay by Anne Ryan. Mosman Art Gallery
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- Snell, T. (1992) *Salvatore Zofrea, images from the psalms*. Craftsman House, Sydney (Italian language edition, 1993)
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### Education Kit

#### *Days of Summer: Salvatore Zofrea*

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[god.design@hotmail.com](mailto:god.design@hotmail.com)

Produced by Maitland Regional Art Gallery  
230 High St Maitland NSW 2320 Australia.

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[www.mrag.org.au](http://www.mrag.org.au)

