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Pen-and-ink universal design by Thea Proctor, 1899

The XXXIX FISAE Congress San Francisco 2022

By Andrew Peake, Adelaide

The 37th FISAE Ex Libris Congress was held in 2018 in Prague. This was a hugely successful Congress with several hundred attendees. At the Plenary Meeting of Delegates, the 38th Congress to be held in Cambridge, England, was promoted, and the 39th Congress for 2022 was awarded to San Francisco.

As it turned out, the 2020 Congress, which had been moved to London, was cancelled with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Planning for the 2022 Congress progressed.

I was the only attendee from Australia. It was held at the Waterfront Hotel, San Francisco Bay, from Sunday 11 September until Thursday 15 September. James Keenan of the American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers (ASBC&D) was the organiser, and happily the Congress coincided with the centenary of the Society. An enviable programme had been organised with two significant bookplate competitions. Unfortunately, however, COVID had not yet run its course. China, which historically sends several score collectors and designers to congresses, had entered lock-down, pursuing virus elimination; Turkey had civil unrest and the rest of Europe was hesitant to travel, let alone across the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, the attendance was to say the least, embarrassing. Just twenty, yes, you read right. Seventeen from the United States and three from overseas, and I was one of them. The others were Olli Ylönen from Finland and Gianna Alexoupoulou from Greece.

The first competition was the George Steiner Exhibition, which was sponsored by American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers, the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and the Ira Block Foundation of Cincinnati, Ohio. Bookplates had to pay tribute to George Steiner (1929–2020), a Franco-

American literary critic, essayist, philosopher, novelist, and educator. He wrote extensively about the relationship between language, literature and society, and the impact of the Holocaust. The winning bookplate was by Gianna Alexoupoulou from Greece (illustrated). The exhibition of bookplate finalists was held at the Book Club of California rooms in San Francisco.

The second competition of unique bookplates submitted to the 2022 ASBC&D and FISAE Bookplate Competition was hosted by the American Bookbinders Museum in San Francisco and sponsored by the Keith Wingrove Memorial Trust, Melbourne. The first prize went to Deborah Chapman from Canada, second prize to Marina Terauds from the US and third prize to Nurgül Arıkan from Turkey.



Winning bookplate in woodcut by Gianna Alexopoulou, 2020, for the Tribute to George Steiner International Bookplate Competition

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It is interesting that two Australasian organisations — Victoria University, NZ, and the Wingrove Trust — are in the business of sponsoring international bookplate competitions. One of the prime motivating factors is that as a sponsor you acquire a full set of all bookplates submitted for judging and the cost of sponsoring is not too great.

In summary, the ASBC&D did a very creditable job in organising the Congress, and it was unfortunate that COVID-19 kept so many people away. The venue was good, San Francisco was a great location, organised events went well, and it only lacked attendees to make the exercise worthwhile for those who did attend.

The 40th Congress will be held at Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, off Spain, in 2024.

President's report for 2022

By Mark J Ferson, Sydney

The Society's Annual General Meeting held on 15 February covered two years, 2020 and 2021, as the 2021 AGM had to be dispensed with on account of the restrictions and ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The President read his report on the key activities for the previous two years (published in *Newsletter* no. 64, March 2022), and in his capacity as Honorary Treasurer, noted the state of the finances, such that the bank balance was \$5003 on 1 January 2020 and \$4594 on 31 December 2021; the small decline was explained by the printing and publication in the period of three *Newsletter* supplements. Office bearers and committee members were elected for a further term. The meeting concluded with a discussion initiated by Queensland member Kethryn Lovejoy on her idea of a Bookplate of Australia, and by a number of Show and Tell presentations.

As we had been advised that the .org.au website domain name would be lost unless the Society gained registration with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, an application was commenced in March on the Commission's website to register as a non-profit in the 'advancing culture' category. There was a

requirement for the Society's Constitution to be updated to include some standard financial clauses and other small changes. A Special Meeting to revise the Constitution was thus held on 13 August, when those present and those who provided email votes in advance voted unanimously to adopt the proposed changes to the Constitution. It is most pleasing to report that the Society successfully gained registration in early October, and this entitles us to use the ACNC logo on our documents. A key principle of the Society's registration is that it must provide services to the general public and not just to members. The application was able to highlight that the Society makes information on bookplates available publicly via our website and social media platforms, through libraries' subscriptions to the *Newsletter* and the posting of all but the most recent issues on the website, and from time to time through public talks, demonstrations and exhibitions.

With mention of the *Newsletter*, it is noted that four issues were published in the year with a range of varied and interesting articles; thanks go as always to the many contributors, to Mary Keep for excellent design and to Sydney Design and Print for consistently high production standards.

The digitisation of the Eirene Mort Bookplate Collection, which contains roughly 1000 examples, neared completion

by the end of the year, with a little further work still required in 2023. The work has been largely undertaken by Jess Le with the ready assistance of Bronwyn Vost and Mary Keep, and it is exciting to say that these images are now publicly accessible from the Society's Flickr page at <https://flickr.com/photos/newaustralianbookplates>. Our website <http://www.bookplatesociety.org.au/> is the main location where members of the public may obtain information on the Society itself, on bookplates in general, on the history of bookplate collecting in Australia and on members who are artists and willing to undertake bookplate commissions. As previously noted, all but the most recent issues of the *Newsletter* are available and as well, an annual bibliography of works on bookplates published in Australia is maintained there. Our social media pages on Facebook and Instagram, and more recently Flickr, are used to post images of, or related to, bookplates, each accompanied by a small amount of text, depending on the particular platform. The pages of the three social media platforms are public facing and all can be found using the search term 'NewAustralianBookplates'.

Maintaining and even increasing membership is often a challenge for small specialised volunteer-run organisations, and this applies to the Society. Talks and other book related events are used to try



Speakers at BSANZ Conference 'Art of embellishment' session, 28 November 2022, l-r: Derham Groves, Mark Ferson, Simon Farley

and promote membership with some small degree of success. In other cases new members come as a result of enquiries, website and social media visits or from word of mouth recommendations. In 2022, artist-member and bookplate designer Jess Le partnered with the Society to give reduced-rate first-year membership for her clients, and we began to extend a similar promotion to other interested artist-members. In the year, we gained 25 new members, of whom 15 were from the special promotion; as at 31 December, membership stood at 105.

In March, the President gave a public lecture at Barry O’Keefe Library, Mosman, on ‘A century or more of bookplates in Australia’. In November he attended the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand (BSANZ) ‘Embellished’ conference, held at the State Library of NSW and gave an illustrated paper ‘Hand-painted manuscript bookplates: rare and unique embellishments’; although this was a BSANZ event, lectures were open to the public.

Enquiries were received during the year both from the public — through the website — and from Society members, on topics including how to find a suitable business to print adhesive bookplates, the best glue to use on bookplates, how to fill gaps in a collection, unusual bookplates and overseas notices regarding bookplate exhibitions and competitions. An attempt is made to answer these enquiries directly or alternatively to find a member who may be able to respond on behalf of the Society.

It only remains for me to acknowledge Office Bearers and Committee members, Bronwyn Vost, Mary Keep, Jess Le and Ronald Cardwell, for all the contributions they continue to make to the smooth running of the Society and its various activities. In addition, a thank you is also due to Adelaide member Andrew Peake, who represented us at the FISAE XXXIX Congress, held in San Francisco Bay in September; his report on the Congress appears in this number of the *Newsletter*. Finally, it is my particular pleasure to thank

Pat Corrigan AM for agreeing to be Patron of the Society. Pat was THE major driver of an Australian bookplate revival in the 1970s and after, and incidentally was extremely generous in inducting me into the mysteries of bookplates when I first started out.

Bibliography 2022

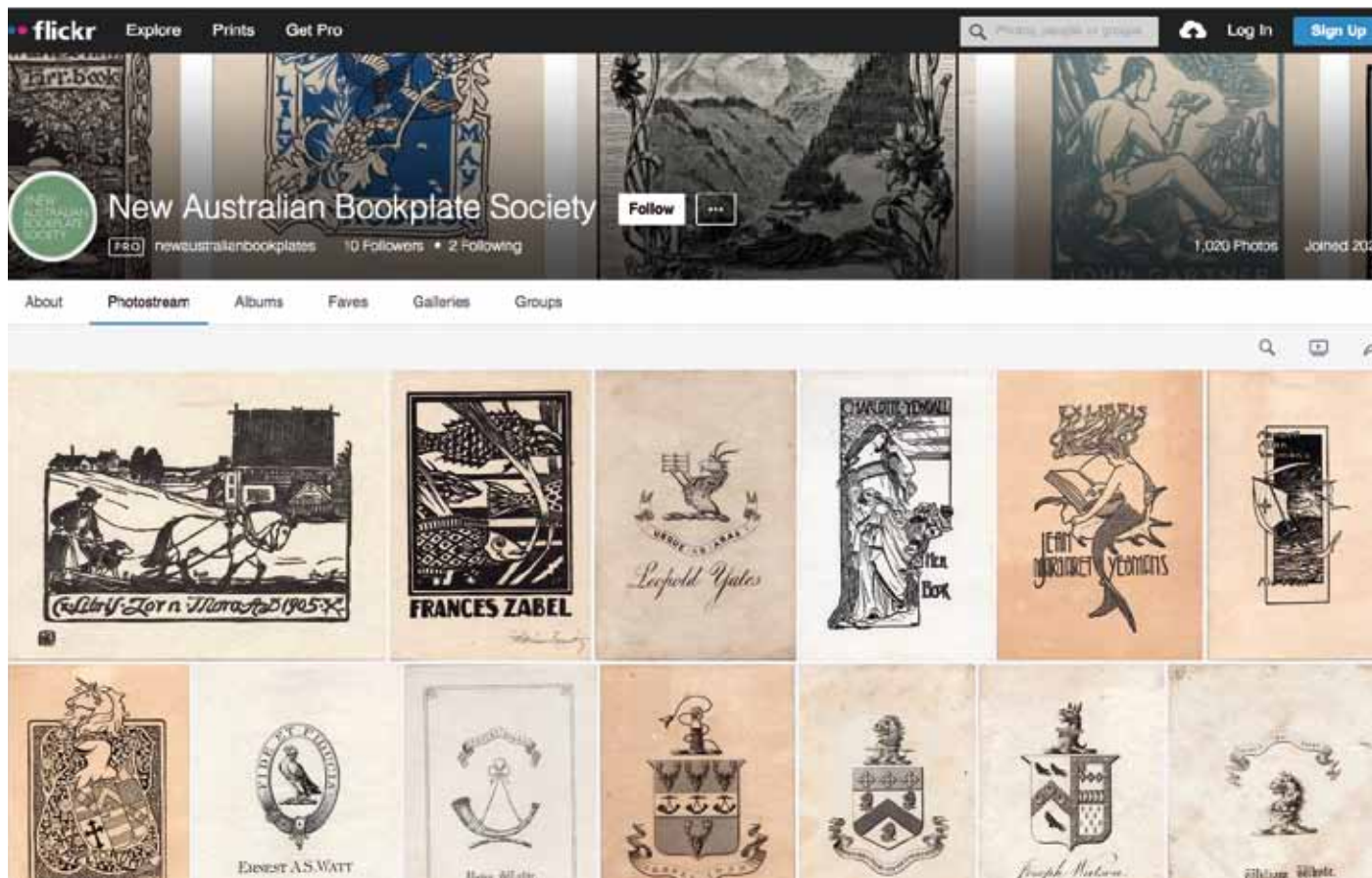
By Mark J Ferson, Sydney

DEBORAH BECK AND OTHERS. *Captive: stories from the National Art School and Darlinghurst Gaol.* Sydney: National Art School, 2022; p. 88–9

Shows pen-and-ink design in Art Deco style by Marjorie Matthew for the School’s Head of Design, Phyllis Shillito, dated 1934; includes some biographical information on Shillito.

RONALD CARDWELL. *The George Garnsey Cricket Bookplate.* Cherrybrook (Sydney): Cricket Press, 2022

Garnsey, a cricketer, amassed a very large collection of cricket-related books. He had



The Society’s Flickr page showing digitised images from the Eirene Mort Bookplate Collection

several bookplates, including one by Norman Lindsay, and an earlier one from 1908 signed JJ.

ROSS EDMONDS. Barry Humphries: book collector extraordinaire. *BibliNews and Australian Notes & Queries*, no. 413, Mar. 2022; pp. 20–3

Shows two bookplates, one by van Dongen, and a book stamp for Barry Humphries are reproduced.

MARK FERSON. Nora Geddes didn't get to Hollywood but her bookplate got to travel from Austria to Australia and back again. *BibliNews and Australian Notes & Queries*, no. 413, Mar. 2022; pp. 35–7

Describes and depicts bookplates by Austrian artist Norbertine Bresslern-Roth for Nora Austin Geddes and her brother Dr Harry Austin Brentnall.

GAVIN FRY, DAVID FREEDMAN & DAVID JACK. *Harold Freedman. The big picture.* Melbourne Mural Studio, 2017; p. 193

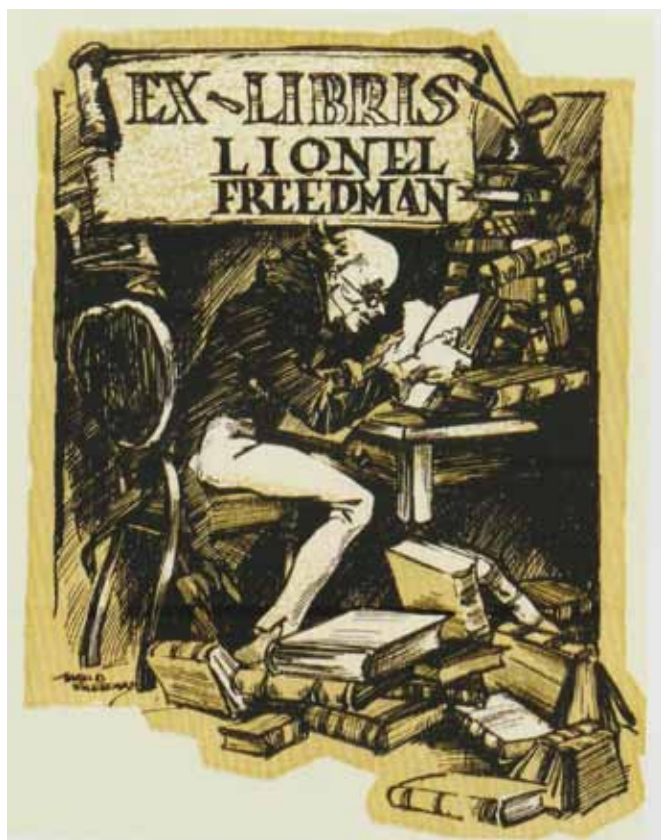
Harold Freedman, war artist, designer and illustrator, made an undated pen-and-ink bookplate for his brother Lionel Freedman (illustrated below).

MICHAEL TAFFE. Apart from the text. *BibliNews and Australian Notes & Queries*, no. 415, Sept. 2022; pp. 87–93

Books from the author's library with the bookplates of Dr Frank Hobill Cole and Launcelot Hayter, illustrated.

MIKAYLA VAN LOON. Visit Mirka Mora display. *Mount Evelyn Star Mail*, 28 June 2022; p.13

Brief description of the Montrose (Vic.) Library display, arranged by Society member Marzena Walicka, which focuses on Mora's bookplates:



Pen-and-ink design by Harold Freedman for Lionel Freedman (from *Harold Freedman. The big picture*, p.193)

'Most commonly known for her work as a painter and sculptor, her bookplates and autobiographical work are less well known.'

JOHN WADE. An American in the East. *Australiana*, vol. 44, no. 3, Aug. 2022; pp. 6–7

Article on American merchant Charles Manigault showing his bookplate engraved by convict artist Samuel Clayton on a visit to Sydney in 1820. [This bookplate was discussed in *Newsletter* no. 31, Dec. 2013, and was dated therein to 1818]

Editorial

Dear reader, kindly accept the brevity of this issue and its limited range of contributors, although it is hoped that quality has not suffered. Your Editor has been working with the dual desires, firstly, of ensuring this number of the *Newsletter* is sent out on time, and secondly, of completing the booklet on a much loved sculptor whose bookplates have been completely unknown outside of her family. The mystery will soon be revealed as, by the time you read this Editorial, the booklet will be at, or just back from, the printers.

I am grateful to Andrew Peake who, as in past years, both represented the Society at the recent FISAE XXXIX Congress in San Francisco, and provided a report of the Congress. You will see from Andrew's report that attendance was poor and that Andrew was one of only three from outside the United States. If you read between the lines, you will see that some soul searching has been prompted by this poor attendance; certainly I have not felt the necessity to pass on the spirited communications between the European ex librists and the organisers. However, on the positive side, it is clear that the events and activities that took place at the Congress were very well organised and a joy to attend.

You will note from the President's report, published within these pages, that 2022 was a good year for the Society; I can say with some pride that the Society became registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission with an object of 'advancing culture'. To be registered, an organisation has to demonstrate that it is of public benefit, not solely to its members, and so I hope this explains why the Report somewhat labours the fact that the public is admitted to many of our activities, whether virtual or actual.

We have a number of new members since the last issue, and I welcome Thomas Dixon, Caren Florance, Lachlan Hazelton, Josef Lebovic (NSW), Patrick Ball (Tas.) and Shalene Wilcock (Vic.). If I have neglected to mention you, please email me!

I have almost forgotten to celebrate March as Women's History Month, but you will spy in the masthead an important early bookplate design from 1899 by Sydney artist, teacher and tastemaker, Thea Proctor.

MF

