

Olga Sankey – *Sunday Best*

CV for *Sunday Best*

Born 1950, Adelaide. Bachelor of Arts (Hons English), Adelaide University. Bachelor of Fine Arts (Postgraduate Diploma), South Australian School of Art, Diploma in Lithography, State Institute of Art, Urbino, Italy. Has lectured in Printmaking and Honours at the South Australian School of Art since 1989. Solo exhibitions in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne and numerous group exhibitions nationally and internationally. Collections include National Gallery, Art Gallery of South Australia, National Parliament House Collection, Artbank, University of South Australia, Flinders University, Print Council of Australia, Mornington Peninsula Arts Centre, University of Western Sydney, National Museum of Modern Art, Seoul.

Media release

Olga Sankey's work in the exhibition *Sunday Best* deals with the influences of a religious upbringing and Catholic schooling. Both were instrumental in forming her particular view of the world. Notions of sin, guilt and the power of prayer to achieve absolution and more tangible, materialistic results are explored in a series of works on paper and mixed media works.

Catalogue

Growing up in the 1950's and 60's in a very Catholic home and school environment coloured my childhood and left me with a lingering sense of guilt, both for my own sins and for the Sins of the World. I was also left with a compulsive need to find religious significance in almost anything: nature, objects, events and occurrences. Pen nibs became thorns in the crown that Jesus was forced to wear, the dew on the grass became Mary's tears, thunder was God moving the furniture around in heaven to make room for new arrivals, the spots on a dappled pony became the blemishes on the soul of a sinner. Opportunities to interpret the normal and everyday as signs and messages from above continue to arise.

An interesting blend of Irish and Czech Catholicism convinced me that one could never pray too hard or too much and that one's prayers would eventually be heard. Prayers could be grouped together to increase their potency: fifty Hail Marys, five Our Fathers and Glory Be's constitute a Rosary; the same group of prayers repeated over nine days constitute a Novena. Particular clusters of prayers, recited at specific times and for specified periods carry promises of partial or plenary (full) indulgence for one's sins – an insurance policy for the hereafter.

I recited prayers in Latin – mysterious incantations, in Czech – equally mysterious, since the language of prayer bore little resemblance to the domestic, 'pass the butter' version we spoke at home, and English – either frighteningly graphic - 'Blood of my saviour, bathe me in thy tide', or peppered with what at the time were incomprehensible words and phrases such as 'hallowed' and 'trespasses' and 'fruit of thy womb' and 'perpetual succour'.

But whatever the language, the power of prayer was absolute. Through prayer one might not only shorten one's own inevitable stay in Purgatory, a transitional place between Earth and Heaven, where the residual stains of sins are heat-cleaned from the soul, but also contribute to shortening the stay of other souls serving time there. The power of prayer extended to finding lost objects, getting a pony for Christmas, healing Grandmother's broken leg, enabling me to do well in a spelling test and convincing God to remove the Communists from Czechoslovakia. If one was praying in a church, one waited for a sign that the prayers were heard. A statue might indicate that He was listening with a slight nod, wink or hand movement. Feeling faint from kneeling in prayer for a long time in the hot and stuffy Church of Christ the King one Sunday, I thought I saw the plaster hem of Mary's blue cloak twitch, but I was never quite sure.

I topped the class in spelling. I didn't get a pony but I did get a goat, which ate its way through our garden. Grandmother's leg healed but she died a couple of years later, hit by a car as she was crossing a busy street, and the Communists finally left Czechoslovakia. I'm not sure how much praying I have yet to do to avoid a stint in Purgatory. The trouble is that I keep accumulating more sins on a regular basis. Now I'm praying that one day I'll catch up with my prayers.

Olga Sankey, 2001