

State Records' new exhibition, *Natura Morta: the Scientific Illustrations of EH Zeck & Margaret Senior*, highlights the breadth of official records in New South Wales

It is not just that the format of the mounted and framed watercolours in the exhibition is different from the textual documents that bureaucracy creates in the millions. Records are created in a vast array of physical formats, many of which are not even paper-based. The fact that the Zeck and Senior works are watercolours simply reflects the method most commonly used for this type of illustration.

Nor is it just that many of these illustrations are beautiful. Beauty is not a quality possessed by most official records (whatever their other values), but there are certainly many records in the State archives collection which can be considered beautiful.

And it is not just that these are scientific records, when so many official records, among the State archives and elsewhere, are administrative in character. Official records result from, and serve to document, any process undertaken by a part of government. There are many other scientific or technical records that could equally demonstrate the breadth of our official documentary heritage.

The important, but less obvious way in which these works highlight the breadth of official records is that they are not part of the State archives collection, but are a part of the NSW Department of Primary Industries' Agricultural Scientific Collections. As such, they form part of a network of collections of scientific documentation held by government, educational and other bodies engaged in scientific research, and by archives, libraries and museums focusing on scientific heritage.

Legally the Zeck and Senior works are certainly State records: they fall within the range of materials covered by the *State Records Act 1998*. Undoubtedly, too, they are archives, since they are being preserved for their enduring value. But the framework for the archival management of State records established by the Act is flexible: it is not necessary that such materials

be taken into State Records' care for them to be part of the broader archives of the State, provided arrangements for their preservation and research use are already appropriate.

One option provided by the Act is for records of enduring value to be taken formally into the State archives collection, but to be managed by another organisation on State Records' behalf. This could be the records' creator or another third party. These arrangements are based on a 'distributed management agreement' with State Records, which specifies standards for cataloguing, storage, preservation, security and public access.

Such arrangements are the ideal means of enabling State archives of local or regional origin and significance to be kept in, or near to, the communities with which they are associated, rather than centralising them in our major archives repository in Sydney. This is the basis for the network of regional repositories around NSW, with universities and local government bodies operating as State Records' partners to manage and provide access to State archives from a wide range of public sector bodies in their respective 'catchment areas'.

These arrangements also enable organisations with established research and/or heritage collections containing State records of enduring value to keep them together and make them accessible for their primary users.

So, I am delighted that State Records, as the State's archives institution, can help present the wonderful Zeck and Senior material to a new audience in The Rocks, but our colleagues at the Department of Primary Industries need not be concerned that we will try to filch them for 'our' collection.

David Roberts
Director, State Records