

*Creative Effort* and *Our Earth* are the second releases of Facsimile Etchings from our 'Etchings in Books' series. The folio contains, as well as the two Facsimile Etchings, a brochure with details of the two books — *Creative Effort* and *Our Earth* in which the original etchings of the same titles, *Creative Effort* and *Our Earth*, are included and also the essay 'The Craft of Etching' by Norman Lindsay. *Creative Effort* had its genesis in World War I (1914–1918). From the beginning Norman had been affected by the war and depressed at the way it was changing the world. In 1916, Norman's brother Reg was killed on the Somme. In a poignant letter to Olive Hetherington, written in May 1958, Norman recalled the impact of the war years: '*At this date it is hard to convey the sense of horror that war inflicted on humanity ... one walked the streets to see half the women in black, mothers, wives, sisters in mourning for their dead ... in those times I paid frequent visits to Creswick and met many mothers mourning for their sons; some of whom were the girls I had known in my youth ...*'

For several years Norman had been wrestling with the timeless question of good versus evil and although he was not a believer in any orthodox religion, the war crystallised his belief in the survival of the spirit after death. The cataclysmic effect of the war and the death of Reg brought Norman to the belief that artistic reality freed the artist from earth into a spiritual world. The need to have some assurance that there was some form of life after death drove many grieving relatives to seek solace in spiritualism. Ouija boards, which enabled groups of people to try and communicate with the dead, became a popular pastime and under the circumstances it was hardly surprising that Norman thought that he could speak with Reg via the board.

It was this assay into the occult that gave Norman the final impetus he needed to write *Creative Effort*. He felt that a universal state of moral degeneration had led to the war and tried to put his own values into some sort of order. Years later, long after he had repudiated its message, he tried to explain how he had felt: '*As for Creative Effort — well, I suppose you'll have to read the thing as it embodies an outlook on life and art that engrossed me at the time of writing, based on the ferment of ideas with which I was infected after the 1914 war.*'

Although many of the principles found in *Creative Effort* are sound, others original and arresting, it is impossible to overlook the fact that *Creative Effort* is a confusing collection of Norman's thoughts on life, death, good, evil, truth, sex, knowledge and other associated ideas. In essence, Norman affirmed that the arts are of paramount importance. He maintained that it is in creative art, and creative art alone, that the direction of life can be found."

The original etching *Creative Effort* (1920, 15.2 x 9.3 cm) was published in 1920 in the book of the same name. The etching symbolises creative effort as a woman with a halo of light emerging triumphant over the forces of darkness.

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The original etching *Our Earth* (1936, 15.6 x 12.4 cm) was published in 1937 in an edition of 225, the largest edition illustrated with an original etching by Norman. The etching evokes an image of great beauty and contrasts it with the callous discord of mechanisation as McKenzie described.

The 1930s was the most productive decade of Mackenzie's career and began when he submitted some poems to the Endeavour Press, which led to his association with Norman. The chief aim of the Endeavour Press was to publish and promote Australian novels and poetry. Norman's friend, P. R.

Stephensen convinced Norman to be the reader for the new publishing venture and with the support of the *Bulletin*, the Endeavour Press was established in 1932. Norman read manuscripts and encouraged new writers, in the hope that the Australian market could support an adventurous publisher. Norman described his aims: *'I'm not awarding myself any moral superiority when I say that when reading for the Endeavour Press, the only objective I had in mind was to find the quality in writing and creative ingenuity in the works I read, without giving any consideration to what might be their saleable qualities.*

The timing of the venture defeated it. The effects of the Great Depression was especially harsh in Australia and the market was small. The Endeavour Press folded after only two years.

Thanks to Norman, Mackenzie was able to publish *Our Earth* as his first book of verse. The year was 1937, the Depression had officially ended but too many were still without a job. Norman's offer to illustrate the poem meant that its publication could become viable. Mackenzie was grateful and the dedication to *Our Earth* reads: 'To Norman Lindsay in sincere friendship and true esteem and gratitude'.