



# Into the Light

**Recovering Australia's lost women artists 1870–1960**

Into the Light Donor Circle acquisitions 2019

# Into the Light

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# Introduction



Women students of artist and teacher Sid Long on a *plein air* painting expedition, c 1910  
Cruthers Collection of Women's Art artist Isabel McWhannell is the fourth artist from the left

## Into the Light Donor Circle Update 2019/2020

*Into the Light: Recovering Australia's lost women artists 1870–1960* is Sheila Foundation's national research project to collect data about women artists working professionally in Australia whose work may have slipped from view.

The data will be made available to researchers, art historians, curators, artists and collectors via an online portal. We hope this will lead to research, exhibitions and publications that reconsider women's place in Australian art and allow their stories to be seen and their voices to be heard in our art museums and art histories.

In 2016–17 Sheila conducted a pilot study for *Into the Light* focusing on women artists working in NSW from 1870–1914, a time period in which women's art has been little studied. Managed by art historian Dr Juliette Peers, the pilot study uncovered a staggering 434 women artists, only a fraction of whom are on the public record.

The project's acquisition fund, supported by the *Into the Light* Donor Circle, purchases artworks by artists uncovered by the program or known to us from previous research. In time it will become a major reference collection of artworks by generations of little-known women artists.

The first purchases were made in July 2019 at an auction of the collection of David Angeloro, one of Australia's most committed long

term collectors of women's art. Among the group was a delightful self portrait by Elaine Coghlan, who studied in Sydney in the late 1910s and went on to pursue a successful career, including several times being a finalist in the Archibald Prize. Other late 19th century/early 20th century artists whose works were purchased included Aline Cusack, Annie Potter and Alice J. Muskett, and mid 20th century artists Gladys Gibbons, Edith Wall and Erica McGilchrist.

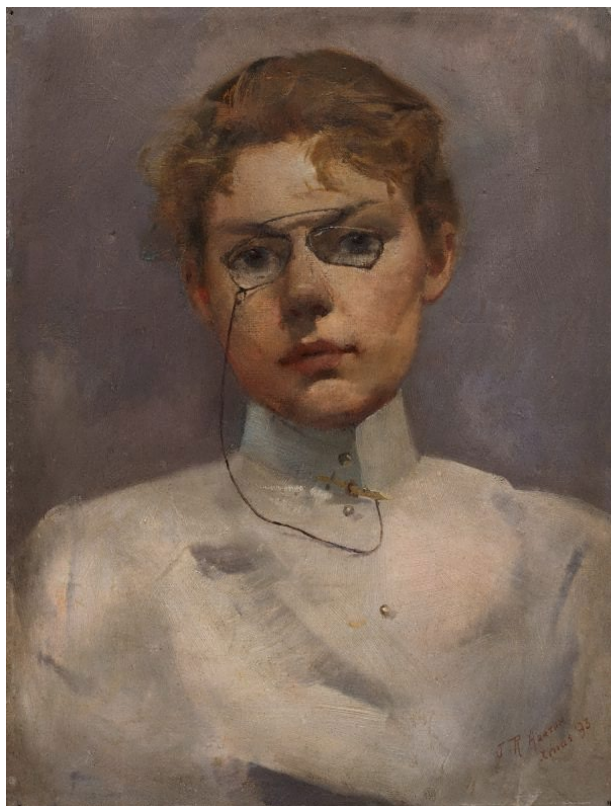
Being painted by largely unknown artists and therefore considered of little value, many of the works purchased were in poor condition and required significant conservation treatment and framing to bring them back to something like their original condition. At the same time as the artworks were undergoing treatment, Sheila Foundation intern Alexandra Mitchell researched six of the artists and prepared a biography of each and notes on the work purchased. Eminent art historian Dr Juliette Peers wrote on the seventh artist, Elaine Coghlan, and her essay is notable for its considered exploration of the issues around appraising the work of little known and outlier artists.

We are proud to present this summary of the works purchased and look forward to adding to it every year. Thank you to our inaugural *Into the Light* Donor Circle members who have enabled the acquisitions and research. We welcome more members of the Circle to help us continue this work [sheila.org.au/into-the-light-pledge/](https://sheila.org.au/into-the-light-pledge/)

# Alice J. Muskett (1869–1936)

Alice J. Muskett was a painter, illustrator and writer. She was born in Fitzroy, Melbourne to Charles Muskett and Phoebe Muskett née Charlwood. Her father, a book seller, died in 1873. Her mother continued the business in his absence. Her brother, Philip Muskett, studied medicine in Melbourne, Glasgow and Edinburgh. He returned to Australia in 1882 to work at Sydney Hospital. In 1886 her mother passed away and Muskett lived with her brother Philip until his early death in 1909. Unfortunately, Muskett herself died in 1936 at the relatively young age of 67 after suffering a stroke.

Muskett was the second student to train at Julian Ashton Art School. She was 'among the first generation of women allowed to attend life classes, with male as well as female subjects'.<sup>1</sup> It seems that Julian Ashton was a mentor to Muskett. He is quoted as saying that she had a 'fine and sensitive nature'.<sup>2</sup> Muskett also trained at Sydney Technical College from 1891–1892.<sup>3</sup> Ashton painted Muskett in his *Study of Alice Muskett* 1893. John McDonald, on Ashton's painting, states that 'the subject is the archetypal bluestocking...Ashton shows how this attractive girl would like to be judged for her achievements rather than for her feminine charms.'<sup>4</sup> Muskett endowed the Julian Ashton Art School with a prize for landscape painting in memory of her brother in 1928. The prize is still given to this day.



**Julian Ashton, *Study of Alice Muskett* 1893, oil on wood, 34.6 x 26.7 cm. Collection Art Gallery of New South Wales**

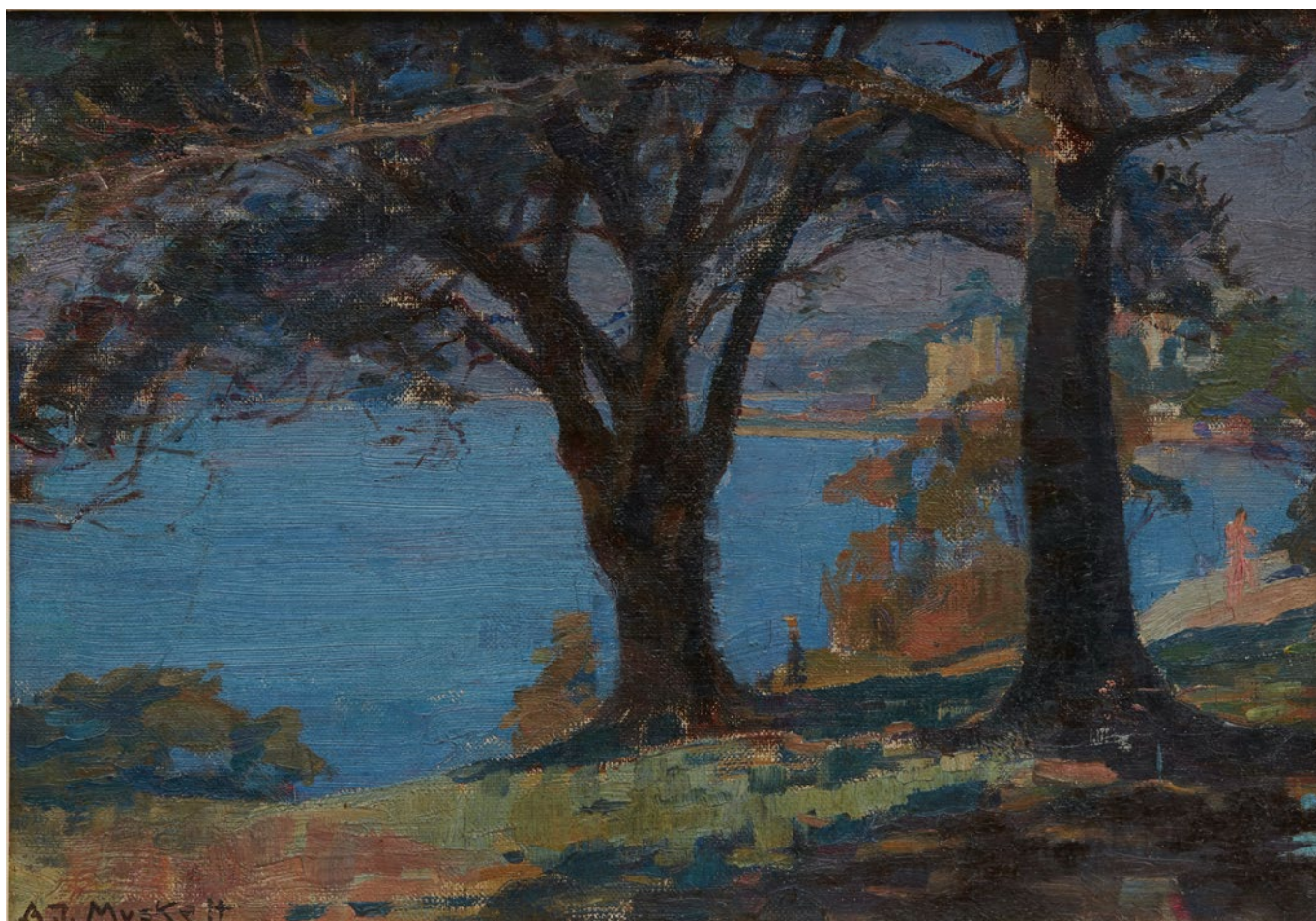
Alice Muskett was clearly a woman who wanted to be 'judged for her achievements'. She was the only female member of the Management Committee of the Society of Artists NSW, established by Julian Ashton as a professional body. From 1890, Muskett exhibited annually with the Royal Art Society of NSW.<sup>5</sup> In 1891 she was awarded the Art Gallery of NSW's First Prize for a Life-Size Portrait by a Student.<sup>6</sup> In 1893 she joined The Painting Club, an art society exclusively for women artists. Her fellow club members included Edith Cusack, Aline Cusack and Jessie Scarvell.<sup>7</sup> Muskett was on the council of the Royal Art Society of NSW from October 1894 to February 1895. She resigned to go to Paris, where she studied at Academie Colarossi from 1895–98.

Her work was exhibited in the 1895 Paris Salon and the *Australian Art in London* exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, London, 1898. Her work was shown alongside Aline Cusack and Edith Cusack as well as male artists such as Arthur Streeton and Frederick McCubbin. The National Art Gallery of NSW, now Art Gallery of NSW, purchased her work *Study of roses* in 1898 and later that year Muskett returned to Sydney. She continued to exhibit, and in 1901 her work *The day's at the dawn* was included in the *Commonwealth Exhibition of Australian Art*, and in 1907 her work was included in the important *Australian Exhibition of Women's Work* in Melbourne's Exhibition Buildings. Her work is also held in Australian collections including the Art Gallery of Ballarat and the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

Alongside her paintings, Muskett illustrated for a variety of Sydney journals and wrote verses and short stories which she illustrated. Her poem 'Aspiration', published in *The Sydney Mail* on 9 December 1908, was accompanied by a 'romantic self-portrait'.<sup>8</sup> The poem finishes with a bittersweet line, 'Yet in that hour was my life made resplendent | Am I content, though the end be the night'.<sup>9</sup>

Muskett visited London after her brother's death in 1909.<sup>10</sup> In 1911 she painted in Egypt before returning to Sydney to share a studio with Florence Rodway. At this time, she joined the Society of Women Painters, co-founded by Aline Cusack and Lady Chelmsford. In 1912 she returned to London, working at a military canteen during World War I.<sup>11</sup> She returned home to Sydney in 1921 and lived in relative poverty in Neutral Bay in the lead up to the Great Depression and her death in 1936.

In 1933 Muskett published *Among the Reeds*, under the pseudonym 'Jane Laker'. Written in 1913, it is a novel set in Sydney before World War I which meditates on the 'conditions that would make it possible for women to become serious artists'.<sup>12</sup> There are only eight copies available in Australian libraries and the book has never been reprinted. Literary historian Susan Sheridan describes it as a feminist book which in 'style and approach'<sup>13</sup> could be seen as a combination of Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen. She concludes that the book 'has great historical interest as a record of women's aspirations to independence in pre-war Sydney. It deserves to be reprinted and enjoyed as a witty and informative portrait of artistic circles and middle class life of that period and place.'<sup>14</sup>



**Alice J. Muskett**, *Sydney Harbour* n.d., oil on canvas, 23 x 33 cm.  
Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation

Muskett's small oil painting *Sydney Harbour* (undated) is a fresh, vibrant depiction of the harbour through a duo of trees. A female and a male or female figure can be seen in the mid-ground. Her brushstrokes are varied, with the grass in the foreground rendered in a bold impressionist manner. The harbour is the hero of the painting. It is vivid blue, painted with long gentle brushstrokes showing movement in the water. Some sections of the work are not fully rendered with paint, which hints at the work being painted *en plein air*. There seems to be a haze or grey cloud in the sky and on the other side of the harbour clusters of buildings and trees can be seen. Soft pinks highlight parts of the painting and direct the eye to the female figure walking up the slope toward the artist.

It is fitting that Alice Muskett is represented in the Into the Light Collection by a landscape, given that she endowed the Julian Ashton Art School with a landscape prize in honour of her late brother. From this painting we can see why one of her contemporaries described her as 'probably the most talented of our Australasian women painters'.<sup>15</sup> She was able to capture not only a scene but its feeling, allowing the viewer to imagine what it was like to be where she was.

Alexandra Mitchell

# Aline Cusack (1867–1949)

Aline Cusack, born in 1867 in New Zealand and brought up in Newcastle and Sydney, was a prominent professional Sydney-based artist who worked from the 1890s to the 1930s. Her sister Edith E. Cusack was also a successful artist and the pair were well known as the Cusack sisters. They had numerous exhibitions together of a wide range of paintings and also shared a studio at the Palings Building. Newspaper reviews from the time marvel at the talent of the pair. In 1908 *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that 'the varied talents of the exhibitors have enabled them to show figures, landscapes, flowers and animals'<sup>1</sup> and noted that over 100 works were included in the exhibition.

It is likely the Cusack sisters worked as artists in order to support their family, as their father Samuel Athanasius Cusack died of tuberculosis and left the family in poverty.<sup>2</sup> It was common for women to work as artists in order to support their families in the 1890s. There was an economic depression which put many into severe financial difficulties, and all additional means of obtaining income were important.<sup>3</sup>

The sisters' work was also included in the *Exhibition of Australian Art in London* in 1898 at the Grafton Galleries, alongside many well-known male artists including Arthur Streeton and Frederick McCubbin. In the Art Gallery of NSW collection there are two portraits of Aline Cusack made by Edith Cusack in the 1890s. *Aline*, one of the portraits, was included in the 1898 London exhibition. The catalogue of the exhibition, available online, enables us to see that Aline Cusack exhibited two works, both maritime subjects: *A grey day – Darling Harbour, Sydney* and *A rising gale*.<sup>4</sup> Other international showings of Cusack's work included an exhibition at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in 1905.

Aline Cusack, like her sister Edith, studied with and worked as an assistant art teacher for Joseph Bennett in Parramatta. She and her sister also taught art from their studio at the Palings Building and ran outdoor landscape painting classes which were popular with women artists in Sydney.<sup>5</sup> Aline also studied under Gordon Coutts at the Royal Art Society School, and in 1898 was awarded the School's President's Prize and the Hanson Prize. In 1906 she travelled to Europe to study at London's School of Animal Painting (1906–1907) under Frank Calderon,<sup>6</sup> and at Academie Colarossi in Paris.<sup>7</sup>

She was a member of the Society of Artists of NSW, the Strathfield Ladies Sketch Club and The Painting Club (a well-known club of women artists in the 1890s), and a prominent member of the Royal Art Society where she served on its Council and Exhibition Committees. In 1910 she founded the Society of Women Painters with Lady Chelmsford, which included 'virtually every woman artist of note who painted and exhibited in Sydney'.<sup>8</sup> Cusack served as the society's Vice President from 1910–12, on its Council in 1913 and as Honorary Treasurer in 1914.

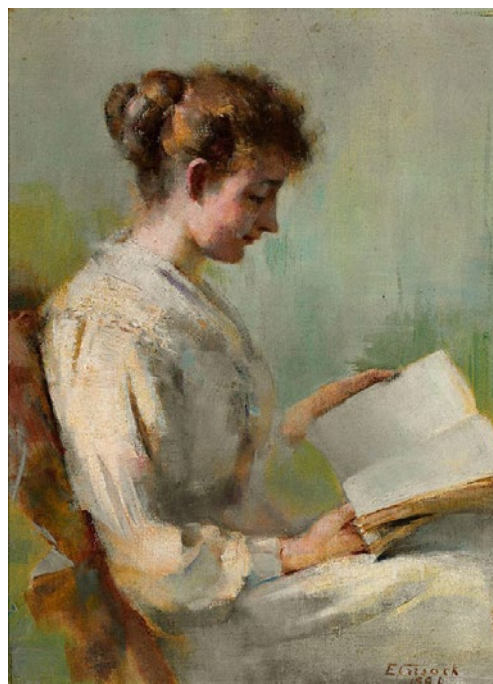
In 1914 she travelled with Edith to study art in the UK. However, the sisters arrived in London on the 6th August, two days after England had joined the war. They both assisted with the war effort in England

and France as war workers for Anzac Buffet London and as ward orderlies for the British Red Cross until the end of the war. In 1916 they ingeniously arranged for themselves and other women from a university to pick strawberries in order to assist with labour shortages due to the war, with the strawberries sold at market and their wages given to the Red Cross Society.<sup>9</sup>

Cusack's work *Moored ships, Darling Harbour*<sup>10</sup> 1895 is a work that subverts the assumed genres of women's art of the period. Neither a figure painting nor a still life, it is instead a seascape. Similar scenes of working harbours were painted by male artists such as Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin but were relatively rare for women artists. Its small physical size, 41.5 x 24 cm unframed, suggests it was probably painted *en plein air*. The work carefully documents the moored ships in Darling Harbour and gives a glimpse of the working harbour in 1895.

The painting can be seen in relation to her sister Edith Cusack's *Darling Harbour* 1896 which is held by the Newcastle Art Gallery (see page 21). It is possible the sisters created these two works together as the two paintings have similar details. Aline Cusack's painting was created when she was 28 years old and prior to her travel overseas to study art in the UK and in Europe. According to a label attached to the back of painting, Cusack had only started exhibiting art in 1894 and was 'already developing an interesting style and technique'.<sup>11</sup>

Alexandra Mitchell



**Edith Cusack, Aline Cusack** 1896, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 23 cm.  
Collection Art Gallery of New South Wales



**Aline Cusack**, *Moored ships, Darling Harbour* 1895, oil on panel, 41.5 x 24 cm.  
Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation

# Annie E. Potter (1863–1936)

Annie E. Potter, born in 1863, was a painter, printmaker and sculptor. She was an accomplished artist of her time and worked in the impressionist style in her landscapes. Until 1882 she studied art at Fort Street Model School. She then attended Sydney Technical College as one of their first art students. At the college she was taught by Lucien Henry, a French sculptor and decorative artist.<sup>1</sup>

Potter started to exhibit as a student and was commended for her drawings. As a 14-year-old student of Fort Street she showed a drawing of fruits and flowers with other New South Wales school pupils at the *Sydney International Exhibition*, 1879–1880. The Council of Education at the time is quoted as saying that her works ‘indicated the germ of superior talent’.<sup>2</sup> In 1884 she exhibited etchings at the *Juvenile Industrial Exhibition* and was awarded ‘third prize for freehand drawing from ornament in the South Kensington exams’.<sup>3</sup> She was also a pupil of Arthur Collingridge, and under his tutelage exhibited a view of the Lane Cove River at an art society exhibition in 1894.<sup>4</sup>

Potter was a member of the Royal Art Society of New South Wales from 1893–1900. She regularly exhibited work there in the 1890s, alongside *Into the Light* artist Aline Cusack and her sister Edith Cusack, whom she knew well. She also took part in artists’ camps at Mosman Bay. Her painting *Calliopsis* was purchased by the Art Gallery of NSW in 1899, a major professional achievement. However, it appears the work was later deaccessioned and sold along with other works from the same period, many by women.<sup>5</sup>

Her painting *Australian bush property* c 1890s, can be seen as a naturalist work, an attitude toward painting which was popular in the 1890s in Australia. It merged impressionist elements such as ‘bright colours, freer brushwork and atmospheric distance – with basically academic methods of careful underlying compositions and accurate drawing in the figures and foreground details’.<sup>6</sup> The subject matter of such works was focused on everyday life, often rural life. Potter’s rural scene and its mundane nature is representative of this movement. The work also showcases the ‘Australian bush’ before the federation of Australia. At this time nationalism was widespread and painters were called upon to ‘meet the artistic needs of the public and to depict the real Australia of the pastoral regions’.<sup>7</sup>

Potter’s work may record the aftermath of a storm or flood on a section of a large country property. On the left side of the painting is a large branch of a tree that has fallen on the ground, its browning leaves an indication that it has been left there for some time. Next to it are fence posts that have been knocked and bent into twisted shapes, perhaps from the impact of the falling branch. In the midground are two buildings, one that looks to be abandoned or in need of maintenance, and another that has collapsed in on itself. In front of them several white geese wander through the grass. The colouration and lush nature of the scrub in the middle distance is suggestive of a marshy, wet area which would be attractive to geese.



**Annie E. Potter**, *Australian farm scene* n.d., oil on canvas, 40 x 60 cm.  
Courtesy Davidson Auctions

Potter probably painted the scene from the road or a meeting of roads which acts like a clearing in the painting, providing its foreground. By framing her work in this way Potter makes the viewer feel as if they could be standing on the road looking out over the property, taking in the expanse of sky and land. The road snakes through the land to the property’s homestead in the distance. The sky is very much a centrepiece, making up almost half of the work and drawing attention to the blueish purple and pink range of mountains in the distance.

The same road, sky and mountains can be seen in another oil by Potter, *Australian farm scene* c 1890s, probably painted at a similar time. It appears to depict the same homestead seen in the distance in *Australian bush property*. Viewed alongside *Australian bush property* it shows Potter’s stylisation and brushwork and enables us to see that Potter had a sensitivity toward this property as she sought to capture it from a variety of angles. The property may have been somewhere Potter was staying or a place she lived. It is possible it could be a property in Richmond on the Hawkesbury River, which was a popular destination for Sydney-based artists at the time.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions that limit access to libraries and art galleries, it has been difficult to find more information on Potter as an artist. In 1921 and 1922 she could be the Annie E. Potter listed in *Dun’s gazette for New South Wales* as a boarding-house keeper.<sup>9</sup> If the Art Gallery of NSW still held her work *Calliopsis*, perhaps there would have been more information available on her career as an artist. It is unclear if she married as she seemed to retain her maiden name until death. The Boer War (1899–1902) may have impacted her life. It is unfortunate we cannot understand more about her career and life, whether she had further exhibitions and if she may have had to stop making art due to extenuating circumstances.

Alexandra Mitchell



**Annie E. Potter**, *Australian bush property*, c 1890s, oil on canvas, 41.5 x 24 cm.  
Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation

# Elaine E. Coghlan (1897–1989)

Elaine Coghlan's lively and confident small *Self-portrait at easel* c 1917 engages the viewer at once. Buoyant and direct, this charismatic artwork sits above the legions of 20th century Australian impressionist and representational paintings that, when commerce is not in a lockdown, trade monthly or weekly at auctions across the country. Yet the painting is not simply a delight for the eye: behind it stands the story of a notably successful and versatile Sydney artist, who is now unknown to all except the most dedicated researchers into obscure art histories, given that it had been in the private collection of David Angeloro, who presented it in the anthology *Heritage: The national women's art book* (1995).

In the 1920s/1930s Elaine Coghlan explored the wide range of opportunities Sydney offered emerging artists between the wars, without contributing to debates around modernism. The latter have traditionally been the frame of reference for both curators and historians to place an artist within the repertoire of public memory. Thus, Elaine Coghlan has substantially escaped the attention of art professionals focused on the emergence of modernism in Australia

Coghlan was one of the younger committee members of the Sydney Society of Women Painters in the 1920s and stayed with the group after it became the Women's Industrial Arts Society in 1935. This shift in name and profile acknowledged women's increasing participation in commercial and public life in New South Wales, a process that Coghlan stood witness to. She also showed with the Painter-Etchers Society, the Australian Art Society and the Royal Art Society, was selected for the Archibald Prize several times and held small solo exhibitions in the 1930s. She received commissions for etched bookplates, a highly popular subset of printmaking during the interwar years. In the context of art making in Sydney at that date, these were all expected benchmarks of success. Several of her surviving portraits of other well-known Edwardian and interwar Australian artists, both male and female, suggest that Coghlan's colleagues saw her as a co-professional and document her place within a network of artists. The major interwar collector of Sydney art, Howard Hinton, bought and gifted her work to the Armidale Teachers' College (now located at the New England Regional Art Museum), another clear indication of her reputation in the interwar period.

Far from being marginal, Coghlan's working life informs later generations about forgotten details of creative experience in early and mid 20th century Sydney, outside of modernist circles. Many of these artists' lives have been documented by Sheila Foundation's project *Into the Light* and Coghlan substantially shared experiences with a generation of peers. Sydney's artistic life in the period 1910–1960 was never as clearly trajectoryed as that of Adelaide or Melbourne. Whilst artists in the latter two cities enjoyed straightforward career paths, in Sydney pre 1950 there were two, later three, rival art schools, and at least six major art societies for non-contemporary work, even though commercial dealers and smaller art spaces were limited. Coghlan studied with Dattilo-Rubbo and James R. Jackson's Royal Art Society school from 1919–1923, which set up alignment with the RAS itself.

Like many women artists in early and mid 20th century Sydney (more so than Melbourne or Brisbane), Coghlan came from a socially prominent family. Her father was the NSW Attorney General, having

himself risen to gentility from humble Irish Australian origins via a stellar career in the public service. Elaine Coghlan lived and painted on the north side of the harbour, which was, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, a cluster of artists' homes and studios, and a major hub of art activity. Many of her landscapes depicted Sydney Harbour. Interwar Sydney witnessed a large cohort of academic, late impressionist landscapists and portraitists, to which Coghlan belonged. With the coming of contemporary art and the withering of many of the previously robust art societies by the 1960s, Coghlan's art became less visible in Sydney, although she was discussed in the press as late as the 1950s, after three decades of working in public.

Yet Coghlan's self-portrait offers far more than the solid-enough documented backstory of her career. Amongst the women's self-portraits in the Cruthers Collection, relatively few show women as working artists, with the exception of Alice Bale's early and authoritative vision of herself in formal Edwardian dress, standing at an easel. Most of the Cruthers Collection portraits capture a more intimate vision of the self, focused on psychological insight and self-scrutiny, even self-doubt, or the confidence of a glamorous and assured public self-projection. Coghlan's work, as does Bale's, resonates with an older, extremely important tradition of European women artists from the Renaissance onwards, using the image of themselves in the act of painting as an assertion of their professional legitimacy. These self-portraits symbolise their right to be an artist and simultaneously record their technical accomplishment. Coghlan's portrayal of herself brush in hand, seated at an easel, gazing into an invisible mirror, yet locking onto and challenging the viewer as well, directly speaks to this tradition. Edwardian art historical publications such as Walter Shaw Sparrow's *Women Painters of the World* (1905), made such images accessible in Australia.

Certainly the rise of the alternative, artist-centric value system of the avant-garde from the mid 19th century onwards increasingly rendered such public assertion superfluous. Yet rather than being a tired, belated and derivative response, the brio of Coghlan's clear enjoyment of mastering the act of painting carries the viewer with her. Coghlan's work, alongside Bale's, ports that tradition not only into the Cruthers Collection, but into the narrative of early 20th century Australian art. Equally it is a reminder of the strongly Eurocentric, Italianate thread within Sydney art-making documented through illustrations of lost works in art society catalogues and old newspapers across three decades. European art was made real and personal through the ambience of the Dattilo-Rubbo studio, where Coghlan studied. Dress and hairstyle suggests a date in the late 1910s–early 1920s, soon after World War I, during her student years.

Coghlan appears not to have followed on from this work. Her other currently known oil portraits are stiffer and more reserved in their handling, sometimes with a neo-classical austerity, sometimes more with a commercial art vibe. However both modes of portraiture were current and accepted in exhibitions in Sydney during the 1920s and 1930s and her deployment of them again indicates her synergies with other artists at that date. Only Coghlan's watercolour landscapes retain the lightness and agility of touch seen in her early self portrait. However given that currently there is no detailed first-hand commentaries from Coghlan and, even with parts of her estate



**Elaine Coghlan, *Self portrait at easel* c 1917, oil on canvas, 27 x 22 cm**  
 Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation

appearing in auctions over the past two decades, understanding of the full extent of her talent and motivation remains provisional and speculative.

Many of us remember the fictitious Ern Malley's lament that he 'had read in books that art is not easy', but equally art history is not as simple as it may seem at a superficial glance. How do we deal with an outlying artist and an outlying painting? Does the outlying painting act as a positive calibration of the artist's deserved placement in public narrative or is it a melancholy reminder of a loss of potential, a failure of will, either due to personal shortcomings or a hostile and sexist social environment? If other pictures from the same hand do not share the same qualities how does that shift any judgement? Is the painting sufficient and appealing in itself as an art historical entity, without

further debate? Do the regular templates that we use to order the art of the past unfairly devalue and marginalise an individual artwork? Should we then question both the system and those who accord with it for being more at 'fault' than the artwork, and unable to deal with variation from the norm? The writing of women's art history is neither easy nor fixed. So much of what survives or is buried in newspapers and archives falls into this liminal and uncertain zone, lacking clear peer group auspicing, where there is no authority or precedent to aid decision making and good practice may censor and suppress rather than reveal.

Dr Juliette Peers

# Gladys Gibbons (1903–1977)

Gladys Gibbons was a draughtswoman, printmaker and painter. Her father was William Walker, a restaurateur, her mother Myra Walker, née Tindall. Gibbons trained at Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School in the early 1920s. While a student she contributed to the school's paper, *Undergrowth*, including a design of two women reading in 1927. In the late 1920s she attended classes given by artist Thea Proctor who became a lifelong friend. Gibbons exhibited her work with the Society of Artists and the Contemporary Group in the late 1920s and the 1930s. She married Henry Gibbons in 1922. He was an associate of Ashton and later became the principal of Ashton's Sydney Art School. She had two children with Gibbons before they separated in 1937.

Gibbons predominantly worked in woodcuts, linocuts and watercolours. Thea Proctor commented in 1938 that 'the watercolours of Gladys Gibbons are in the tradition of English watercolour painting, or it would be more correct to call it watercolour drawing, as they are light washes of colour over pencil drawing. She paints still life and watercolour, and shows taste in selection and arrangement of her subjects.'<sup>1</sup> Helen Johnson, reflecting on Gibbons's linocut *The park* 1928, states that most of Gibbons's works showed people 'relaxing and enjoying life'.<sup>2</sup> She also states that 'more than any other of Gibbons's works, *The park* shows a mastery and appreciation of a modernist aesthetic which by 1928 was gaining sway among Sydney's more adventurous art students, mainly through the proselytising and teaching of Thea Proctor and Roland Wakelin: the distortion of perspective, simplification of form and strengthening of design and rhythm to convey mood and feeling.'<sup>3</sup>

In the late 1930s Gibbons started to teach art. She first taught at St Gabriel's School for Girls, Castle Hill, and later at Roseville (Sydney), Brighton (Melbourne) and Ravenswood Girls' School (Sydney).<sup>4</sup>

Her known exhibition history includes *Society of Artists Exhibition*, Sydney 1926; *Contemporary Group Exhibition*, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, 1933; *Contemporary Group*, Farmer's Blaxland Gallery, Sydney, 1933; *Art Deco and works from the period*, S H Ervin Gallery, Sydney, 1980; *Project 39: Women's imprint*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1982; *Trust the Women*, S H Ervin Gallery, 1995 (which toured to Broken Hill City Art Gallery); *Women hold up half the sky*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1995; *Sydney by Design: Wood and linoblock prints by Sydney women artists between the wars*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1995; *Art Deco: from Sydney cinemas and pubs to skyscrapers*, Museum of Sydney, 1999; and *Modern impressions and Australian prints from the collection*, Art Gallery of NSW, 2017. The Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Australia hold works by Gibbons in their collections.

Gibbons's work *Still life*, undated, is a bright watercolour of white lilies set against a colourful, modern, patterned background. The lilies sit in a white jug with a bright yellow bowl placed next to it. A larger green bowl full of fruit is placed on a diagonal behind the flowers. It is a very modern, vibrant work with a strong design aesthetic. On the reverse of the paper, discovered when the support was removed from the

work during conservation, is a watercolour painting of two fig trees and Sydney Harbour (see page 22). A cross over this work indicates it was not for exhibition, but it shows Gibbons working in another genre – landscape – and a slice of Sydney in the period she painted. She regularly visited the Royal Botanic Gardens and many works depict scenes from the gardens.<sup>5</sup> Likewise the still life of the lilies indicates something of her personality. The fresh way she has painted the lilies allows us to see her sense of fun and excitement.

This watercolour is a partner work, or sketch for, *Lillies*, linocut, c 1930 in the National Gallery of Australia.<sup>6</sup> The same arrangement of forms can be seen in the work. However, in the linocut Gibbons has added a small orange jug in the lower right. The colouration of the linocut is stronger and darker than the more muted use of colour in her watercolour version.

Gladys Gibbons is not widely known in Australian art history, which is unfortunate as the quality and range of her prints and watercolours and their vivid and fresh sensibility is refreshing. Her works also offer a snapshot of stylish Sydney in the 1930s. Gibbons's career changed course after her separation from her husband: her output as an artist diminished. Her focus shifted to art teaching, probably to support herself and her children. Hopefully she enjoyed teaching and found fulfilment from her work. To date there has been no survey exhibition to show the quality and range of her printmaking, nor the fresh and vivid watercolours she also made.

Alexandra Mitchell



**Gladys Gibbons, *Lillies*** c1930, linocut, printed in black ink, from one block; hand-coloured, 13.8 x 14 cm. Collection National Gallery of Australia



**Gladys Gibbons**, *Still life* n.d., watercolour, 37 x 34 cm.  
Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation

# Edith Wall (1904–2012)

Edith Wall, also known as Edith Bayne and simply 'Wall', was born in Christchurch, New Zealand to Arnold Wall and E. K. M. Curnow. She was known for her 'sophisticated style and sharp sense of humour'<sup>1</sup> and lived until 2012, reaching the impressive age of 107. The headline of one obituary indicates her personality and approach to life: 'Stylish artist with taste for red wine and chocolate.'

Wall studied art in Christchurch, Rome and at the Westminster Polytechnic in London before marrying Oscar A. Bayne, an architect, in 1933. In 1939 she came to Sydney with Bayne and their young daughter, Cosima. In 1951 the family relocated to Melbourne.

As an artist Edith Wall worked in a variety of mediums. She was a painter, printmaker, cartoonist and illustrator who made watercolours, drawings, lithographs, cartoons and mixed-media works. She was active as an artist for 74 years, working from 1925 to 1999.

Between 1940 and 1950 she worked as a cartoonist under the pseudonym 'Wall' for Ure Smith publications *Australia: A National Journal* and *Australia: Weekend Book*. Her cartoons were 'acid comments on wartime society women and businessmen',<sup>2</sup> but many of her readers believed 'Wall' was a man due to the nature of her military cartoons, which frequently satirised 'the incongruity of the soldiers and the situation'.<sup>3</sup> In 1945 her gender was revealed to readers via the publication of a photograph of her by Olive Cotton.

From 1956 to 1970 she also worked as an art teacher, illustrator and publicist, and designed 'an Australian exhibition display for Britain'.<sup>4</sup>

Edith Wall exhibited extensively in Sydney and Melbourne throughout her career, including with Sydney's Society of Artists, Victorian Artists Society and Contemporary Art Society, Melbourne. She had solo exhibitions in Melbourne in 1954, 1971 and 1996 and featured in many group exhibitions. She was a committee member of the NSW Contemporary Art Society from 1944–50, the Melbourne Contemporary Artists from 1960–64 and the Victorian Artists Society. In 1956 she won the Victorian Artists Society drawing prize and in 1971 Bendigo's Minnie Crouch Prize. Her work is included in many Australian public collections including the National Gallery of Australia; National Gallery of Victoria; Art Gallery of South Australia; Queensland Art Gallery; Art Gallery of Western Australia; Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Bendigo Art Gallery.

Edith Wall wrote in 1982 that she '...started drawing at the age of two, and so my ideals had to be invented later. I am a descriptive, not abstract, artist; I am continually hunting the adjustments between colour and space, shadow and substance, finite form and infinite ambience. Colour and line are the weapons I use to attack reality. My main object is to paint a picture that has not been seen before. This is difficult as it necessitates a many-fronted approach'.<sup>5</sup>

Wall's small painting *Want to be presented* 1956, is representative of her 'many-fronted approach' to art practice. She has used a mixture of mediums, from watercolour to oil crayon and pencil, working over a rich white chalk ground which gives texture to the work and a base to the image. She has left many spaces bare, allowing her lines to work their magic. Through this work Wall's understanding of the body

in space and awareness of the importance of image composition can clearly be seen. Colour and line have demonstrably been used to 'attack reality' in this work, in order to present on the page a droll image of a young woman awaiting her coming out.

At the time this work was made, the practice of debutante balls to present young women was becoming antiquated, finally being abandoned in the United Kingdom by the Lord Chamberlain, speaking on behalf of Queen Elizabeth, in 1958.<sup>6</sup> The young woman's expression makes the viewer wonder whether she really does 'want' to be presented. A close observer of social rituals, Wall would have been interested in the ritual of being presented, although she surely would have felt, as a working woman, that this kind of practice was quite archaic. In retrospect her choice to document this part of a woman's life records the pressures in post-war Australia to modernise and the growing independence of women.

Alexandra Mitchell



Olive Cotton's photo of Edith Wall, published in *Australia: National Journal*, June 1945, p 36. Courtesy Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW



**Edith Wall**, *Want to be presented* 1956, mixed media on board, 30 x 24.5 cm.  
Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation

# Erica McGilchrist (1926–2014)

Erica McGilchrist was an artist as well as a dancer, designer, curator, teacher, activist, feminist and humanist. She was born in Mount Gambier, South Australia to Stevenson George McGilchrist, a school headmaster, and Jean Leslie, née Mitton. She was encouraged to engage in creative activities from childhood. In all her roles McGilchrist was concerned with humanity and its welfare. In a conversation with Linda Short before her death in 2014 she confided that she hoped 'to be remembered as an activist as much as an artist'.<sup>1</sup>

McGilchrist undertook art classes from the age of 10 at SA School of Arts and Crafts, continuing to study there part-time until 1946. From 1945–46 she studied at the Adelaide Teachers College and obtained an Art Teacher's Certificate. From 1946 onwards she taught art in Adelaide and Melbourne. Prior to her artistic career McGilchrist was a dancer with Les Ballets Contemporains in Adelaide. She also choreographed dances and designed sets for the company and learnt the company's new contemporary style of dance. In 1948 she moved to Melbourne and joined Elizabet Weiner's Modern Dance Company.

In 1951 she held her first solo art exhibition at Melbourne's Book Club Gallery, and from the following year to 1955 studied art part-time at Melbourne Technical College. In 1953 she was commissioned by the Ballet Guild to work on a production and in the same year was employed, as part of the reform of psychiatric facilities in Victoria by Dr Eric Cunningham Dax, as an instructor for the first art therapy group for patients at the Kew Hospital in Melbourne. From 1960–61, after being awarded a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service and a grant from the Art Gallery of NSW's Dyason Bequest, she pursued postgraduate work at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, Germany. Her time in Germany significantly influenced her practice and moved her to create a large body of work which demonstrated her intense experience in post-Holocaust German society. As her husband and close friends had been directly impacted by the Holocaust as Polish and European Jews, her experience was deeply personal. She was also commissioned to make graphic design artworks during this time. When she returned to Australia in 1963, she continued to work in the graphic arts, as an illustrator and designing stamps for the Postmaster-General's Department (now Australia Post).

Her exhibition history is large and impressive. McGilchrist held over 30 solo exhibitions, including large retrospective exhibitions, and has been part of over 100 group exhibitions. Her work has been exhibited in Australia, Germany and London. She was awarded the 1958 Helena Rubinstein Mural Prize for a major public work for her mural in the dining room of the Women's College at the University of Melbourne. From 1968–69 she designed sets and costumes for the Australian Ballet and in 1979 the Victorian Minister of Transport and Ministry for the Arts invited her to paint a city tram. She ran a painting school for adults from 1964–1977 and also continued tutoring at tertiary institutions until 1988.<sup>2</sup> She was on the Victorian Institute of Colleges Academic Committee in Art and Design in 1977 and joined an organisation that became the Art Workers Union in 1979. She also helped to establish the Caulfield Environment Protection Society in 1972 and in 1975 she co-founded the Women's Art Register in Melbourne, working as its voluntary coordinator from 1978–1986. In 1992 she was awarded the

Order of Australia Medal for her 'many contributions to the Women's Rights Movement and visual culture in Australia'.<sup>3</sup>

Her work is held in private and public collections around Australia and overseas including the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art and Heide Museum of Modern Art, Victoria which holds an extensive collection of her work including artworks and her professional and personal papers.

Stylistically McGilchrist 'never belonged in a formal sense to one movement or kind of art, switching easily between styles and mediums'.<sup>4</sup> She supported herself through teaching and design work rather than through the art market 'in order to paint with integrity and "live left"'.<sup>5</sup> Her painting *Specialist with hobby* 1962 is a pointed work about the Cuban missile crisis which brings together an exploration of the 'origins of war and the relation of military aggression to state, church and capital'<sup>6</sup> and her ability to transform 'her rage via artmaking'.<sup>7</sup> The work is heavily symbolic and part of her major series *Uncharitable Quartet*, which was made in response to her years in Germany.

In the work the Catholic church, nature and nuclear warfare are woven together in an imaginary missile garden watered by a person dressed in Catholic cardinal garb. The symbolic oak, maple and elm tree leaves overlaid at times with religious crosses can be tied to America. As John F. Kennedy was a Catholic and the Cuban Revolution saw the Catholic church proclaimed by Castro as the 'fifth column of counterrevolution',<sup>8</sup> the use of Catholic references and religious crosses is a statement on the role of religion in the crisis and the events which lead up to it. It is clear that McGilchrist was well informed on the crisis and the multitude of issues connected to it in order to create this impactful, playful work.

In McGilchrist's own words, from her essay *For the Record*, 1985, 'There can be no holistic view of history – or of art – if the perspectives of women are omitted'.<sup>9</sup> It is crucial that Erica McGilchrist herself does not become omitted from the history of Australian art. Her perspective and impact on women's art and Australia's history are tremendously significant.

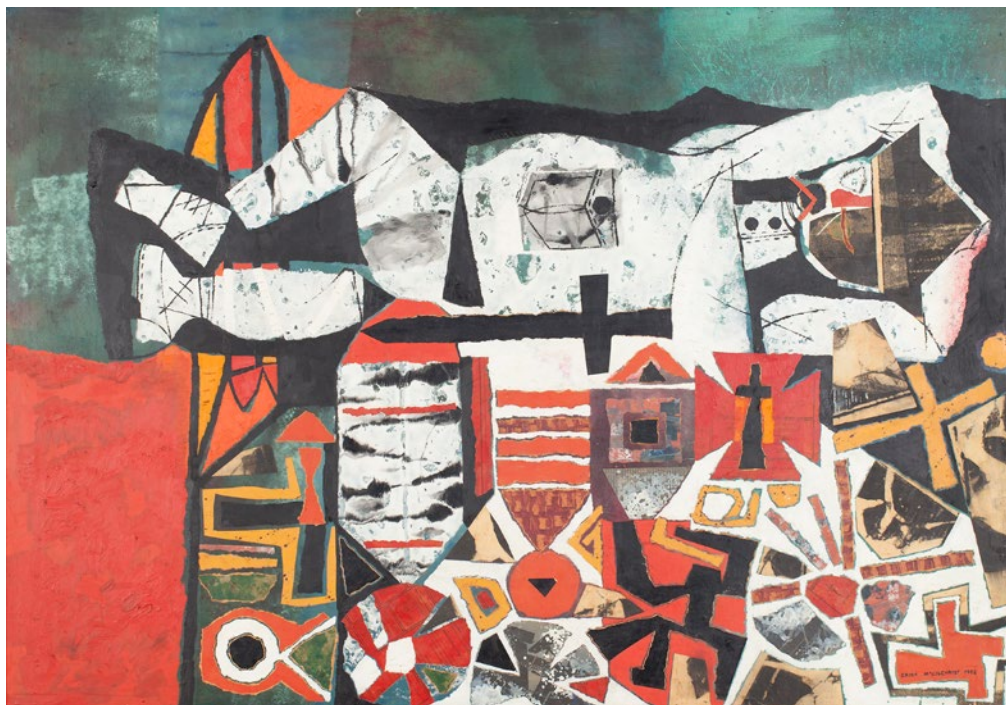
Alexandra Mitchell



Erica McGilchrist and *Specialist with hobby* at her solo exhibition, Galerie Wolfgang Gurlitt, Munich, 1963. Courtesy Erica McGilchrist Archive, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, Gift of Erica McGilchrist 2013



**Erica McGilchrist**, *Specialist with hobby* 1962, oil and collage on paper on hardboard, 92 x 129 cm.  
Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation



**Erica McGilchrist**, *Hero resting on his laurels* 1962, oil and collage on paper on hardboard, 90.2 x 130 cm.  
The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Tom Collins Bequest Fund, 1964



Erica McGilchrist's solo exhibition, Galerie Wolfgang Gurlitt, Munich, Germany, 1963.  
Courtesy Erica McGilchrist Archive, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, Gift of Erica McGilchrist 2013



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<sup>2</sup> S. Sheridan, 'Among the Reeds'. 62.

<sup>3</sup> David James Angeloro, *An Australian Woman's Impression and Its Influences: A More Complete Picture*, Excerpt of Draft Jan 2019 (Australia: David James Angeloro, 2019), 54.

<sup>4</sup> John McDonald, 'Faces in a crowd', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 4, 2012, 3:00 a.m. <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/faces-in-a-crowd-20120202-1qtvk.html>

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<sup>7</sup> David James Angeloro, *An Australian Woman's Impression*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> J. Kerr, 'Muskett, Alice Jane', in *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book*, ed. Joan Kerr (Australia: G + B Arts International Limited, 1995), 413.

<sup>9</sup> Alice Muskett, 'Aspiration', *Sydney Mail*, 9 Dec 1908, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/163229268>

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## Aline Cusack

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<sup>5</sup> Angeloro, 2019, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Angeloro, 2019, 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'The Misses Cusacks Exhibition', 25 Jul, 1908, 10. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/14991244>

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<sup>9</sup> National Archives of Australia, 'Aline M Cusack', in *Discovering Anzacs*, National Library of Australia website snapshot 30 Aug 2019, viewed on 27 April 2020, <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20190830120127/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/149144/20190830-1616/discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/person/904713.html>

<sup>10</sup> The painting has also been known as *Sydney wharves* 1895 and *Darling Harbour waterfront* 1895. A label affixed to the back of the painting labels the work *Sydney wharves* 1895. David Angeloro refers to the painting as *Darling Harbour waterfront* 1895 in *An Australian Woman's Impression and Its Influences: A More Complete Picture*, 2019. It is common for historical works to be renamed over time with varying descriptive titles. We have used *Moored ships, Darling Harbour*, 1895 as this was the painting's name at the time of purchase.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Public and Denominational School Exhibits', *Town and Country Journal*, February 14, 1880, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/70940989/5056748>

<sup>3</sup> Angeloro, *An Australian Woman's Impression*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Art Society's Exhibition: Private Views at the Studios', *Daily Telegraph*, September 15, 1894, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/236123425>

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## Edith Wall

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**Edith E. Cusack**, *Evening, Darling Harbour*, 1896, oil on board, 25.1 x 45.8 cm  
Collection Newcastle Art Gallery, Parnell Bequest



**Gladys Gibbons**, image verso *Still life* n.d., watercolour, 37 x 34cm, Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation

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Alice J. Muskett, *Sydney Harbour* n.d., oil on canvas, 23 x 33 cm.  
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Erica McGilchrist, *Specialist with hobby* 1962, oil and collage on paper on hardboard, 92 x 129 cm

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