



Into the Light

Recovering Australia's lost women artists 1870–1960

Into the Light Donor Circle Acquisitions 2020

Into the Light

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Cover: Aline Cusack, *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* 1896, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 46 cm
Into the Light Collection, Sheila Foundation



Foreword



Mary Cecil Allen and other artists outside Madge Freeman Davis' studio in William St, South Yarra 1950, black and white photograph by Frances Derham, University Library, the University of Melbourne. L to R: Nancy Grant; Madge Freeman Davis; Jean Barrett; Madeline Crump; Mary Cecil Allen (centre); our model; Gelda Pyke; George Bell; Mrs Clive Stephen (Dorothy)

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Into the Light: Recovering Australia's lost women artists 1870-1960 is Sheila'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 heard in our art museums and art histories.

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.

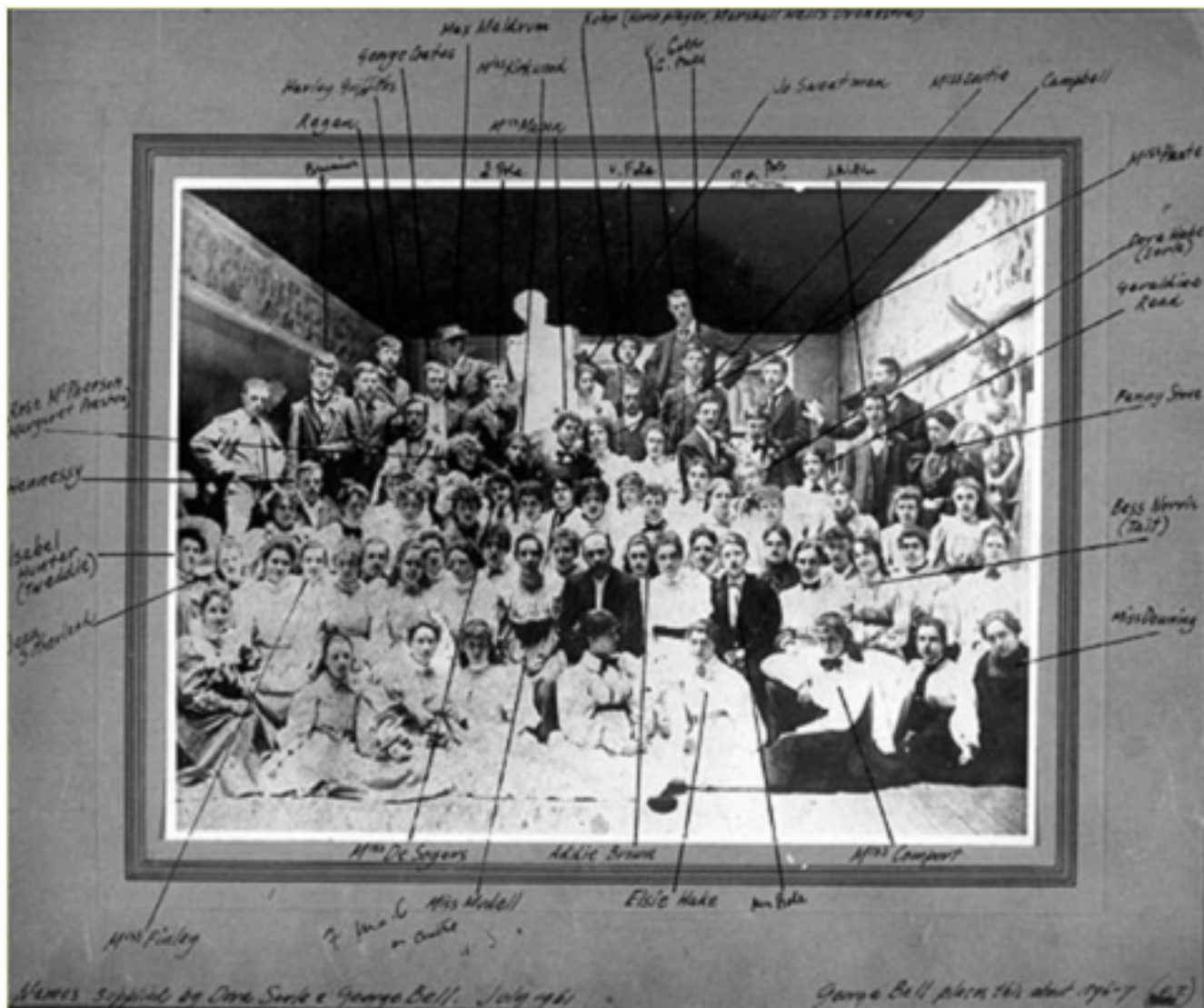
The second year of purchases includes three artworks from the 1890s - impressionist paintings by Sydney artists Jessie Scarvell and Aline Cusack and an ambitious figure painting by Elsie Barlow from Melbourne. From the 1920s is a brace of Federation landscapes by Jo Sweatman and Janie Wilkinson Whyte, and an exquisite pencil sketch of the young Sybil Craig by Bernice Edwell. The sole modernist painting is a Modigliani-inspired portrait

of a young man, *Julian*, by Melbourne artist Dorothy Stephen. Research and essays for each artist and artwork have been done by Alexandra Mitchell, Eliza Burton and Dr Juliette Peers. Juliette has also contributed an introduction to this tranche that begins mapping out the connections between generations of artists in Sydney and Melbourne.

Being painted by largely unknown artists and therefore considered of little value, many of the works purchased were in poor condition and required significant treatment by conservator Anne Gaulton and framing by David Butler to restore them to something approaching their original condition. After working on two tranches, Anne has written an insightful essay considering the neglect women artists suffered by reference to the poor physical treatment many of their artworks endured.

We're proud to present this summary of the works purchased and look forward to adding to it every year as the collection grows. If you would like to join the Into the Light Donor Circle, visit <https://sheila.org.au>.

John Cruthers



Frederick McCubbin, second row centre, with a group of students of the National Gallery School c 1896
 Victorian Artists Society papers, MS 7593 Box 587/2, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection,
 State Library of Victoria

Women students outnumbered men at the National Gallery School in the 1890s. In this photograph, with annotations by George Bell and Dora Serle in 1961, women students include Jo Sweetman, Ada Coutie, Ada Plante, Dora Serle (Hake), Geraldine Read, Fanny Stone, Bess Norris Tait, A.M.E. Bale, Elsie Hake (Barlow), Miss De Sayers, Addie Brown, Miss Mudell, Hetty (?) Finley, Jean Sutherland, Isabel Tweddle (Hunter) and Rose MacPherson (Margaret Preston)

Introduction

The Into the Light Acquisition Fund locates and identifies artworks by Australian women artists who made a significant contribution to the cultural life of their respective eras, or works by women that provide substantial, possibly unfamiliar, insights around Australian art history. The remit covers both once-renowned artists who worked at the highest levels of the arts industry and talented individuals whose art synergises with recognised art historical movements, such as impressionism and early modernism, but who have left fragmentary trails of documentation or reputation beyond their art.

This second tranche of acquisitions builds on the choices of the first tranche assembled last year, again particularly focussing on uncovering the curatorially neglected field of late Victorian and Edwardian women's art from Sydney. Once more works were sourced from the David Angeloro collection, a unique private collection which consolidated lesser known women artists' works from three decades of auctions across Australia. This year's collection expands the selection further to foreground women's contributions across a notably broad art historical sweep from the late colonial era with a pupil and friend of Louis Buvelot, Janie Wilkinson Whyte, to a crucial, but overlooked, proselytiser of modern art, Dorothy Stephen, who ran a drawing group that was the de facto meeting place of dissonant and progressive artists in Melbourne of the late 1920s - early 1930s.

Whilst the works purchased are diverse in medium, style and scale, each one is by an artist who exerted considerable agency amongst her contemporaries. None of these women were hobbyists; all worked as committed professionals. They made an impact in many fields from education to the facilitation of modernism,

from the establishment of public galleries to the defining and regulation of the "correct" way of painting via artworld politics and dogma. Most were active in the public eye for three decades or more and collectively the sum of their achievements, whilst little remembered today, extends understanding of the workings of the arts industry and professional practice, from the late 19th century into the 1950s. Each artist's biographical essay pinpoints the range of their achievements and their place amongst their peers.

Only Jessie Scarvell nearly fits the trope of an artist whose career was shattered and stifled by the social expectations for upper middle class women, as she stopped painting after her marriage. However in the decade before, between 1892-1898, Scarvell was treated as an artist of a superior talent in the highly competitive and firmly calibrated Sydney artworld hierarchy, a system that was understood and accepted by the successful and failed alike. Her works were illustrated in the catalogues of the Art Society of New South Wales' annual exhibitions and purchased for the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She served on the council of the Art Society and was a member of the Painting Club in Sydney. This group of Sydney women artists met monthly to review works painted in the weeks before, and then showed the best examples from the year's production at an annual exhibition.¹ Other members included the brilliant Alice Muskett, purchased in last year's gift, Ethel Stephens, Alice Norton, and sisters Edith and Aline Cusack, the latter purchased both this year and last for Into the Light. In 1898 Scarvell was considered important enough to be included in the prestigious Grafton Gallery exhibition of Australian art sent to London, under the sponsorship of the philanthropist and art collector Eadith Walker. The career that Jessie gave up had made an impact in less than a decade.



Jessie E. Scarvell, *The lonely margin of the sea* 1894, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 108 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of H Bush 1894

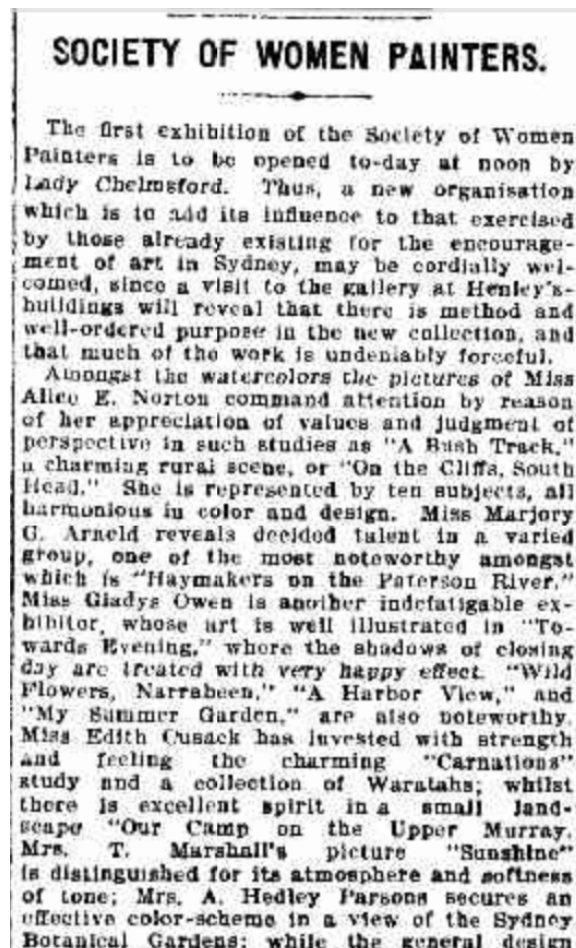
Her work remained substantially invisible for over a century, although in the intense flowering of scholarship around the Heidelberg School/Plein Air/Impressionist group in the 1980s, her *The lonely margin of the sea* attracted attention for its enigmatic, counter-intuitive power and competency. The work's uneasy status within mainstream understandings of how curating and art history worked, [why and how did a major public gallery buy an unknown, a rank outsider?], let alone in comparison to the ongoing arrival of iconic works by Streeton, Roberts, McCubbin, Conder, Withers et al, as auction houses competed to find unfamiliar works at top price, several times a year, was compounded by its maker's uncertain and contextless status. Yet it appeared alongside many icons in *Sunlight and Shadow: Australian Impressionist painters 1880-1900*, by Leigh Astbury.² This book has a unique status as the most flexible and still most successful attempt to capture a comprehensive and permeable understanding of the plein air group. It was amongst the first recent publications to feature plein air works from Brisbane, Perth and Hobart as well as the usual suspects from Melbourne and Sydney. Scarvell's work has been on display regularly since the 1990s in the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The survival of a considerable oeuvre of pleasing plein air landscapes by Jessie Scarvell hidden in two generations of family ownership, with the missing backstory of her life, is as noteworthy a benchmark of the Heidelberg story as either Streeton's neo-abstract Japoniste harbour views of the mid 1890s or the rapid transformation of the tight and dank, often vertical artworks of c 1886 to the expansive sun-filled horizontal landscapes of c 1888/9, a momentum that Jane Sutherland also kept pace with. Yet for every blighted career, for every Jessie Scarvell or Jessie Laver Evans, there is an Elsie Barlow, Emma Minnie Boyd or Margaret Baskerville whose marriages did not stop their art careers, or even a Lillie Roberts whose frame-making practice did as well as, if not better than, her husband's paintings in Edwardian London. Indeed the one generalisation one could make about historic Australian women's art is that any attempt to construct a thesis or an argument obliterates or sidelines the considerable body of evidence that does not support any chosen hypothesis. The inclusion of works by both Jessie Scarvell and Elsie Barlow, the artist whose career stopped after her marriage and the artist who kept exhibiting after marriage, in the 2020 purchases reiterates women artists' broad range of life-stories and career experiences in Australia prior to the watershed of the 1970s feminist movement.

The parameters and scale of women's art careers equally resist generalisation as this tranche proves. Bernice Edwell and Aline Cusack worked and exhibited overseas as well as in Australia for a number of years. Edwell was notably mobile for an artist of her generation and was placed at the summit of both the Sydney and Melbourne artworlds, although her career lost momentum in the 1930s, after three successful decades. Jo Sweatman, Elsie Barlow and Janie Wilkinson Whyte based themselves in Melbourne, but Barlow and Sweatman also sent works overseas, notably to the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924-5, and were featured in the London press. Likewise Sydney-based Jessie Scarvell was part of the prestigious loan exhibition of Australian art at the Grafton Galleries in London in 1898. Dorothy Stephen's exhibiting circle, most firmly documented in early 1950s Melbourne, reflects an artist who was known to be present, but hardly spoken about, in three decades of Melbourne artmaking. Although her activities are more narrowly documented than the other artists in the 2020 tranche, it is speculated that Stephen may have been in Europe c 1910-1914. Thus she may have seen

avant garde art developments first hand, a relatively rare experience for an Australian.³ A faint cross referencing support can be drawn from the claim that she was working as an army nurse in Paris c 1915 when she met her Australian husband, a doctor who had volunteered with the British Army Medical Corps. British records of births also suggests a cosmopolitan and travelled background for Stephen. Her father, although of British nationality was born in Marseille, France.

The artists within this tranche also made an impact at a more intimate and personal scale. Whilst the works were sourced individually, mostly due to their formal and historic interest, researching the artists revealed that a number of them were linked and many were friends and colleagues, who showed and worked together and socialised with one another at various artists' societies. Between the late 19th century and mid 20th century these artist groups lay at the centre of art practice. On a number of occasions these artists founded breakaway and dissonant groups to challenge the mainstream, including the Society of Women Painters in Sydney, established in 1909 in the studio of Edith Cusack, sister of Aline. This society was founded against a background of lobbying by various art groups to share the state government funding and free exhibition space enjoyed by the Royal Art Society.



An article announcing the first exhibition of the Society of Women Painters, Sydney, *The Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday July 20, 1910

The Twenty Melbourne Painters Society was founded in 1919 after very bitter public disputes amongst Melbourne artists around reputation and status, and the right to be seen as the leading phalanx in local art activities and, as in Sydney, divert public art patronage, including public gallery purchases to a particular circle of artists, who regarded themselves as most worthy of government support. This was not a quintessential moderns versus conservatives battle (or only in the minds of the Twenty Melbourne Painters and their heirs) as the adversaries on both sides shared many broad aesthetic principles and attitudes. Jo Sweatman was always a vigorous champion of the group and an ever-willing volunteer supporter for several decades. Meetings were often held in her studio. Elsie Barlow and Bernice Edwell were part of the hand-picked cohort who were invited to join at the group's foundation in 1919. For over a century the group has always remained capped at the titular twenty members and is open by invitation only.

Edwell particularly highlights the manner in which these friendship connections shaped careers and networks and provided a network of congenial support for early 20th century women artists. Tracing her various connections and collaborations also demonstrates how these women extended and consolidated their public presence by leveraging off the secure base provided by such friendships. She was a founder of the Sydney Society of Women Painters alongside other leading women artists of that city, and then was close to Sweatman and Barlow in the Twenty Melbourne Painters group. Edwell's friendship and professional networks are documented in a series of drawn and painted portraits.

These collegial bonds between the artists in this current tranche of acquisitions also extend through to high profile works already in the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art. The flamboyant Mary Edwards/Mary Edwell Burke, Bernice Edwell's half sister, and also a professional artist, is represented in the Cruthers Collection by a major self portrait. Mabel Hookey is noted for a large scale expansive view of Hobart, amongst the earliest plein air landscapes in the Cruthers Collection. Hookey also developed a friendship with Bernice Edwell. The latter travelled to Tasmania during the 1920s and 1930s and the two women often painted together. This link to Mabel Hookey was perhaps the last significant professional and creative development in the final phase of Edwell's career.

Alice Bale, represented since the earliest years of the Cruthers Collection, organised an exhibition with both Edwell and Sweatman in 1923. Sweatman and Bale worked closely together, staying at each others' homes, sharing subject matter and painting each others' portraits. Bale's homes were more formal and grandiose in fittings and style than Sweatman's in the recollections of the latter's family. Janie Wilkinson Whyte was a founding member and later, 1921-1922, President of the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors and knew most of the major women artists in Melbourne in the first two decades of the 20th century. Many of her personal friends, including Clara Southern, Janet Cumbræ-Stewart and Dora Wilson are already represented in the Cruthers Collection, as well as having a greater level of curatorial and academic recognition in the present day. All the new acquisitions enable these friendship links between women artists to be more tangibly reconstructed in the public eye, while



Mrs. AMALI COLQUHOUN.



Miss JO SWEATMAN.



Miss A. M. E. BALE.

Photo-spread from the article 'WOMAN - Her Place in Art', by A. C., *The Age Literary Supplement*, Saturday September 30, 1939

understanding these friendship links permits a more comprehensive understanding of the complex professional structures that women developed.

Jo Sweatman raises a number of central questions about public memory and women artists, particularly how women artists are framed and characterised in public narratives. Sweatman challenges many cherished stereotypes about women being victimised or pushed aside in the professional artworld. She was a robust and practical artist who could have happily adopted Gough Whitlam's principal of "crash through or crash" as her guiding star. Sweatman did not seem to acknowledge or notice those reversals and challenges that threatened to overwhelm artists such as Sutherland and Beckett, but never succeeded. Thus Sweatman, and Baskerville also, reminds both researchers and collectors that, although the examples of Clarice Beckett, Joy Hester, Rosalie Gascoigne or Emily Kame Kngwarreye may lead one to think (backed by once-current separatist belief that there is a checklist of gender-specific and gendered identifying factors in art practice) that women paint with a greater degree of emotional and creative acuity, or that women's art is generally outlying from the norms, an *a priori* "dissonance" (that word being a third wave feminist catchphrase), some women sat firmly in the mainstream and brokered a solid reputation via delivering what the centre wanted and expected. Or if Nolan receives little bad press for reading his generation's taste and expectations, there should be room to acknowledge women who also displayed that sense of knowing what their audience was looking for.

Furthermore Sweatman also demonstrates the vital importance of preserving documentation around *all* artists' careers. A more nuanced and yet firmly documented understanding of her activities can be assembled because family members compiled both well-sourced and hearsay narratives around her life and work into a written document that includes transcriptions of press accounts alongside family memories and observations and comments by Sweatman. Whilst Sweatman is important in herself, she is even more poignant for what she represents: many of the names known just as a catalogue entry or a few lines in a review could have enjoyed as active and energetic a working life as she did, or been as deeply committed to artmaking as she was, only that there were no family or friends who were motivated in capturing her life and work. As many Australian professional women artists were unmarried up to the 1950s, they often died alone and isolated, even frequently in poor health; one thinks of Ina Gregory and Bernice Edwell for example. Contents of homes and studios were thrown out or destroyed when artists went into residential care or no longer were able to maintain either their homes or themselves. Not only were many artworks lost, but so too memorabilia, writings, publications and items relating to professional colleagues, all of which would have had been a treasure trove for curators, historians, dealers and collectors in later years. The households and possessions of women who were not living in a traditional heterosexual family unit were even more vulnerable. Estates did not necessarily transfer to life partners but were claimed by family members, often distant and uninterested in the artist as either a person or a professional. Additionally, some families have often been highly sensitive about celebrating non-conformist relatives and historical material has been sacrificed to perceptions of normality. Again we should also note that Jessie Scarvell's daughter preserved her mother's works and also some important works by her mother's friends, which had been given to or exchanged with Jessie.⁴

The purchase of a work by Bernice Edwell reminds us that, historically, Australian women's achievements are singular and often beyond the narratives established by art historian Bernard Smith and which remain still substantially unchallenged. Cinderella media including watercolour, sculptures, miniatures, illustration, printmaking and craft and design often are the repository of women's achievements. Dorothy Stephen documents that even in the well researched field of women's modernism, one that is closely associated with the Cruthers Collection, there remain less familiar figures deserving further attention. Certainly Stephen is hiding in plain sight in Melbourne art history and frankly also unjustly swept aside in the constant idealisation of her husband across half a century of professional art writing. A number of accounts note that she shared and facilitated his interest in both contemporary art and ethnographic art, but offer no further explication, even whilst emphasising that the Stephen household became a hub for those seeking alternatives to official and institutional cultural practices. Simultaneously lesser known modernists can still be found particularly off the Sydney-Melbourne axis, which seems to be as crucial to Australian art history as it is to commercial aviation!⁵ If ranking media it should be understood that miniature painting was not a diminutive, twee subsidiary of the Edwardian artworld, as many later commentators assume, but reflected crucial shifts away from emphasising popular moral instruction as the key function of the public gallery or even the key function behind the making and collecting of art.

When thinking of the broader meta-narrative of public culture and its role in shaping and framing understanding of the social self and a sense of shared identity, women artists are often posited as standing apart from this central, but still real and influential, driver of white Australian culture. In some cases, as in the celebration of early modernists of the 1920s and 1930s, the demarcation of women's art from the mainstream is judged in a positive light. Women modernists are regularly regarded as transcending the limitations of concepts of Australian art imposed by a conservative patriarchal state, although in recent years they are now seen equal to conservatives as being perhaps unable to evade the more recent series of cultural-political responsibilities thrown up globally by acknowledging the process of colonisation. Yet beyond the modernists, much historic women's art is discounted even by art professionals.

In engaging with the history of pre-modernist Australian women's art, one encounters persistent and somewhat inane later myths that women's art is attenuated from a sense of reality into the mannered and formulaic irrelevancy of a suburban hobby that offers neither documentary nor cultural insights into either national life or the collective [white, settler] psyche. The painted image of Sydney on the reverse of Aline Cusack's *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* offers an eloquent and plausible pushback against powerful stereotypes. Whilst it is a skilled and effective piece of impressionist painting by an artist who is clearly more talented than her current status suggests and thus merits attention, the insights it offers are restorative as well as informative. The combination of its relative slightness and spontaneity with the maturity and competence of handling makes it the most paradigm shattering of all the 2020 tranche, a powerful punch yet ironically hidden from view. The subject is immediately recognisable and speaks to the viewer. We see of course at once how much has changed, yet the profile of the hill and some of the distinctive spires and towers still occupy the space we inhabit now, rather than some fictitious Victorian/Edwardian parlour where frigid genteel spinsters of solid means hide behind lace curtains. Cusack's tangible observation



Aline Cusack, *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney 1896 (verso)*, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 46 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation

of real life in her Sydney view is repeated in last year's purchase of her *Moored ships, Darling Harbour 1895*, both painted around the mid 1890s, a consistent and eloquent group of works that have relevance to public life and experience.

The uniqueness of the Cusack sisters' industrial and portside subjects was flagged as early as 1995 by Joanna Mendelsohn. So often one is confronted with the rhetorical "... but where are the women's *Shearing the Rams?*", and the reverse image of Cusack's *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney 1896* and other works by the sisters offers a succinct response, even if the more provocative response would be to refer the questioner to Emma Minnie Boyd's *Tea Time at the Grange 1888* or perhaps more literally Edith Cusack's *At the Florists 1902*. The Cusack sisters' work also stands as part of the distinctive scenes of proletarian and working life produced by Australian women that are not mirrored in French or American women's art of the late 19th century. The two purchases of works by Cusack across two years and the excellent impressionist landscapes by the highly significant Sydney artists Muskett and Scarvell as well as Annie Potter, whose career was transient although she was thoroughly in command of both progressive technique and avant garde aesthetic preoccupations, begin to reconstruct the vanished presence of hundreds of women artists in Victorian/Edwardian Sydney, as well as piecing together the shards of women's contribution to the plein air movement. These works – sometimes small in themselves as individual items – are collectively in current argot "game changers".

The appearance of artworks on the secondary market is never a systematic process, particularly for the work of lesser known artists. Whilst drivers of profit and prestige regularly bring popular artists' work to market, less famous artists tend to appear for sale in a far less systematic manner. Additionally the smaller oeuvres and uncertain threads and sequences of preservation around women artists' works further reduces the range of artworks on offer. From its earliest days, the Cruthers Collection has challenged the fragility of women artists' presence in public memory, yet this erratic representation of women's art has equally impacted upon the opportunities to expand the Collection. In locating works for purchase for the Into the Light Acquisition Fund, many sources and vendors are explored in a transnational search, so the dense networks of connections between many of the artists in the 2020 tranche of artworks, whilst gratifying, were partly unexpected and unplanned. The synergies emerged as the artworks were found, acquired and researched. Equally there are numerous links to works already purchased by the Cruthers family. The 2020 tranche of works presents a notably rich documentation of the professional choices and experiences that consolidated women artists' understanding of their position in the east coast artworld of the first quarter or so of the 20th century.

Dr Juliette Peers

Notes

1 *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 May 1894 p 7

2 *Sunlight and Shadow: Australian Impressionist painters 1880-1900*, by Leigh Astbury, Bay Books, Kensington 1989

3 It is also possible that she was studying art in the 1910s in Britain and/or Europe, but again this speculation remains undocumented.

4 The two works by Scarvell formerly in the David Angeloro collection appear to have survived independent of the family collection.

5 In 2018 this was declared the second most profitable air route in the world, beaten only by London-New York.

Jessie E. Scarvell (1863-1950)

Jessie Emily Scarvell was a successful artist of the Australian Impressionist school and plein air movement who worked as an artist for six years from her late 20s to mid-30s (1892-1898). She painted landscapes in watercolour and oil. Her most common subjects were coastal scenes, rivers and lakes in NSW.¹

She was born in Braidwood, New South Wales in 1863² to Edward Augustus Scarvell and Annette Frances Want. Her parents were from wealthy pastoral families and her father a solicitor and floriculturist.³ The family lived in Darlinghurst on Macleay Street. She undertook artistic training with William Lister Lister when he returned to Sydney in 1888.⁴ The development of her landscape painting skills 'en plein air' are credited to Lister.⁵

Scarvell was a member of the Art Society of New South Wales (NSW) from 1892 and was a member of the Society's Council from 1894-96 and 1898-99.⁶ In 1893 she joined The Painting Club which operated in Sydney and was the first art society for women artists in New South Wales.⁷ Members of the club included other into the light artists such as Aline Cusack and her sister Edith Cusack as well as Alice J. Muskett and Ethel A. Stephens. The club held their meetings and exhibitions at Ecclesbourne, Double Bay which was artist Alice Norton's parents' home.⁸

Scarvell had a studio at 49 Roslyn Gardens, Kings Cross in 1895.⁹ In a *Daily Telegraph* article in October 1895 she is identified as the 'moving spirit'¹⁰ behind the organisation of a concert at the Art Society of NSW's rooms in Pitt Street, Sydney which was attended by 'some of the most fashionable as well as the most artistic members of Sydney society.'¹¹ Also in 1895, Scarvell exhibited as part of the University of Sydney Women's College Exhibition.¹²

Scarvell exhibited a total of 67 works with the Art Society of NSW over a six year period. Her work *The lonely margin of the sea* 1894, oil on canvas, now held in the Art Gallery of NSW, was in the Art Society of NSW Annual Exhibition 1894. It was presented to the Art Gallery of NSW that same year and was one of five Jessie Scarvell works exhibited in the Exhibition of Australian Art in London at Grafton Gallery in April 1898. The Exhibition of Australian Art in London was a career highlight for Scarvell. She also received favourable mentions in newspaper articles that reviewed the Art Society exhibitions. They mention her 'great promise'¹³ as an artist and held her work in high esteem.

It seems that 1898 was the final year that Scarvell made art, as there is no record of any works by her after this date. She was still involved in the Art Society of NSW¹⁴ in 1899, which may mean she did continue making work but it has been lost. There may have been extenuating circumstances that caused Scarvell to stop making art. From 1899-1902 the Boer War occurred which may have had an impact on Scarvell's life and career aspirations. Her father's early death in 1883 may have meant that the family were under some financial strain by the late 1890s. There was also an economic depression in Australia in the 1890s. Additionally, she might have also felt obligated to marry due to the societal expectations on women at the time. Scarvell did not travel overseas to study art like other women artists with whom she was

associated, such as Aline Cusack. This suggests that finances or familial expectations may have been an issue for her.

In 1901 Scarvell married Charles Wyndham Bundock at St Mark's, Darling Point and became known as Jessie Bundock.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that in 1895/1896 she made a work entitled *Wyangarie, the Northern Borderland of NSW*,¹⁶ which is the same name as the Bundock family property in Kyogle, NSW. It can be presumed that Scarvell may have become associated with Charles Bundock when she was at Wyangarie or had known him prior to her visit. There may also have been a familial connection. On March 30 1905 she gave birth to a daughter, Alison Wyndham Bundock at Carisbrook, Potts Point.¹⁷ She also had a step-son, Arthur Winston Bundock, who had Aboriginal heritage.¹⁸

Charles Bundock was a grazier who bred horses. After Alison was born, the family moved to a remote 15,000-acre cattle station known as 'Kooralbyn' near Beaudesert, Queensland, close to the Scenic Rim Region.¹⁹ The name Kooralbyn is a Yugambah word and means 'The Place of the Copperhead Snake.'²⁰ Jessie Bundock and her daughter are listed on the Division of Moreton, Subdivision of Beaudesert, Queensland electoral rolls on several occasions as performing 'home duties' on the station. It seems unlikely that Jessie Bundock would have had time to make art with the work needed on a property of that scale. Charles Bundock was wealthy and active in the community. He was a member of various societies, clubs and boards in the area²¹ and Jessie Bundock became known for her garden at Kooralbyn.²² Unfortunately in 1931 Charles Bundock died suddenly at Kooralbyn after suffering from heart failure. His death was reported widely in newspapers in Queensland and New South Wales.²³

After Charles Bundock's death the next available record on Jessie Bundock places her and her daughter Alison on a ship called the *Carvalho Arajo* travelling from Lisbon, Portugal to New York, America in March 1941. The shipping record states that the Bundocks received their visas to travel in Nice, France in January 1941. Thus, it is probable that the Bundocks might have originally travelled to France from Australia and could have started their trip before World War II had begun in 1939. Unsurprisingly most of the other passengers on the ship are classified as 'Hebrew' people. Most were from places like Germany, Poland and Romania whilst some have 'no nationality' or 'stateless' written as their country of origin. There were also three 'Scandinavian' people, two of whom have the listed their occupation as 'missionary'. It is unclear when the Bundocks returned to Australia after travelling to New York as they potentially could have stayed there for some time. However, it is certain that they did return by 1950 as Jessie Bundock died in Canberra in 1950 at the great age of 87, and was buried at Woden Cemetery in Phillip, Canberra.

Jessie Bundock's story does not end with her death. In 2003 the estate of her daughter Alison Bundock gifted 38 artworks by Jessie Bundock to S. H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney, and additional artworks to the Manly Art Gallery. Unfortunately, the poor state of many of the artworks meant that only 15 artworks were able to



Jessie E. Scarvell, *Sheep grazing, Coolangatta Mountain landscape* 1895, oil on canvas, 30 x 50.5 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation



Jessie E. Scarvell, *Casuarinas, Shoalhaven River* n.d., oil on board 43.3 x 25.9 cm
S.H. Ervin Gallery, Bequest of Alison Wyndham Bundock, 2004

be conserved by the S.H. Ervin Gallery and these are now held in the gallery's collection. The collection includes three works that Scarvell/Bundock painted in the Shoalhaven region, *Shoalhaven, New South Wales* n.d., *Shoalhaven River, New South Wales* n.d. and *Casuarinas, Shoalhaven River* n.d.

The Into the Light Acquisition Fund has acquired another painting that Scarvell painted in the Shoalhaven region entitled *Sheep grazing, Coolangatta Mountain landscape* 1895. The painting has a muted colour palette with a purplish-blue hue and depicts

a flock of sheep grazing on the banks of the Shoalhaven River with Mt Coolangatta visible through a haze in the background. It seems that the Shoalhaven River area was a location in which Scarvell spent some time painting. The State Library of NSW's DX Lab Art Index,²⁴ which draws together data from the Australian Art Exhibition Catalogue Index, 1847-1900, also showcases Jessie's interest in Shoalhaven as it allows us to see that she exhibited *The South Coast, near Shoalhaven* in the Royal Art Society of NSW's 1897 exhibition.

Scarvell's work *Casuarinas, Shoalhaven* n.d., collection of the S. H. Ervin Gallery, can be compared to *Sheep grazing, Coolangatta Mountain landscape*. The purplish hue in *Sheep grazing, Coolangatta Mountain landscape* is visible in the greyish purple sky of *Casuarinas*. A crucial difference between the works is the dark browns and reds in the foreground of *Casuarinas*. Whilst there are flecks and smudges of red in the foreground of *Sheep grazing* and Scarvell has chosen to sign her work in red, the majority of the colour palette is made up of greens and blues. There is similar treatment of paint in the two paintings. In the foreground she has chosen to smudge the colours in order to flatten and combine them. In the midground she has utilised dry brushing to create texture and to direct the eye. The sky in both paintings has been carefully rendered and has a smooth, flat appearance with careful suggestion of colour in the clouds. It is clear from these works that Scarvell enjoyed painting in the Shoalhaven as she has taken care with them and has sought to capture the light and give a sense of place.

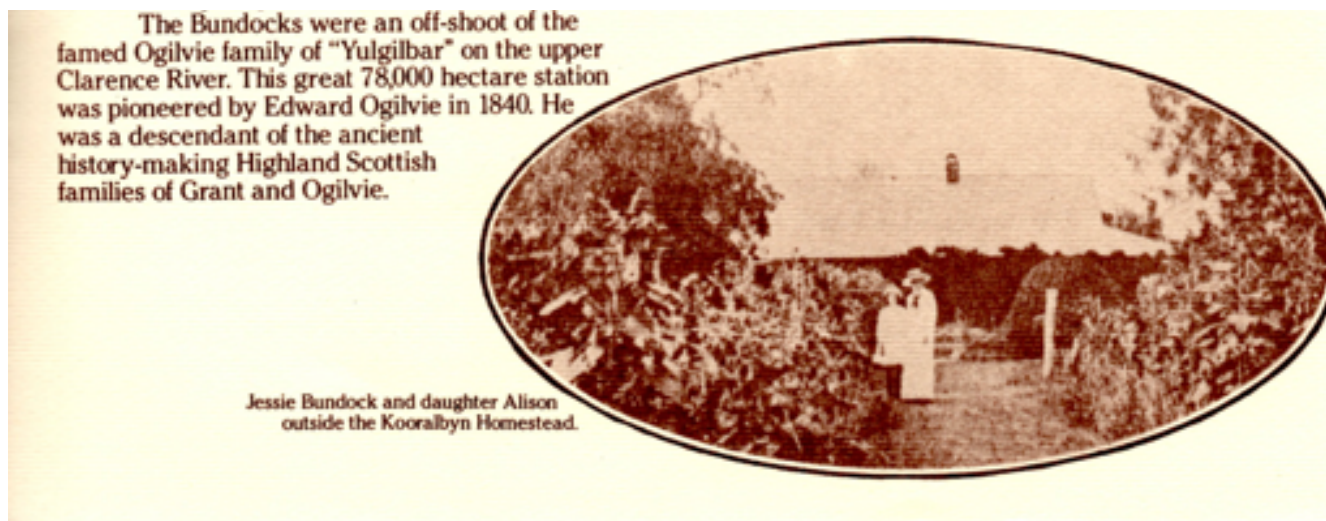
Scarvell's work can also be seen in relation to Lister's *Graham's Valley, New England, New South Wales* 1891 held in the Art Gallery of NSW as it has similar compositional elements and tonal work. The influence of Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts is also clear. Streeton and Roberts were in Sydney at the time she was developing as artist.²⁵ Edith Cusack would have also influenced Scarvell's work. Cusack studied French impressionism in Paris and came home to Sydney in 1894, the time when Scarvell was developing her skills as an artist.²⁶ As Scarvell and Cusack were both in The Painting Club and Art Society of NSW it is highly likely Cusack had an impact on her artmaking. In the DX Lab Art Index graph 'Top 50 artists by gender'²⁷ Scarvell is on par with Cusack and is listed as number 28. It is obvious from this that Scarvell made a considerable impact on the Sydney art scene during her time working.

Though brief, Scarvell's artistic career was a successful one. She was an important part of the period in which she was painting and her remaining works give us an idea of the places she visited during the time. It is fortunate her daughter bequeathed her artworks to the S.H. Ervin Gallery as it means there is more of her work available and in good condition than that of many other women artists of the same period, including many in the Into the Light Collection.

Alexandra Mitchell

Notes

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- 2 "Australia, Birth Index, 1788-1922," s.v. "Jessie Scarvell" (born 1863), Ancestry.com.
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- 4 Finucane and Stuart, *Odd Roads to be Walking*, p 40.
- 5 Finucane and Stuart, *Odd Roads to be Walking*, p 40.
- 6 "Jessie E. Scarvell," Design & Art Australia Online, published 2011, <https://www.daaao.org.au/bio/jessie-e-scarvell/biography/>.
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<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/238546021?searchTerm=jessie%20e.%20scarvell%20%2B%20grafton%20galleries>.
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- 15 "Anglican Parish Registers, 1814 - 2011" s.v. digital image "Charles Wyndham Bundock" (married September 20, 1901), Ancestry.com
- 16 "Art Society of N.S.W."
- 17 "Births," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 26, 1905,
https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.au/imageviewer/collections/9091/images/32744_B140635-00034?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pld=1376601.
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- 20 Kooralbyn Valley Chamber of Commerce, *About the Kooralbyn Valley*, 2020,
<https://www.kooralbynvalleychamberofcommerce.com.au/about>
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<https://beaudesertmuseum.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Beaudesert-Museum-Archives-Library.pdf>.
- 22 Finucane and Stuart, *Odd Roads to be Walking*, p 40.
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<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/80623593?searchTerm=natal%20downs%20AND%20charles%20w.%20bundock>.
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- 26 Angeloro, *An Australian Woman's Impression*, p 20.
- 27 "Top 50 artists by gender" (graph), State Library of NSW DX Lab Art Index, published 2021, <https://dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/art-index/>



Jessie Bundock and her daughter Alison in the garden outside the Kooralbyn Homestead, near Beaudesart, Queensland c 1915. Image from *A history of Kooralbyn*, by John White, Kooralbyn Pty Ltd 1988

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 which was a hive of artistic activity. Notably Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts also had a studio there at the time.¹ The sisters taught art from their studio and conducted outdoor landscape painting classes which were popular with women artists in Sydney.²

Aline Cusack worked as an assistant art teacher for Joseph Bennett in Parramatta. She also studied under Gordon Coutts at the Royal Art Society School. In 1898 she was awarded the School's President's Prize and the Hanson Prize and her work was included in the Exhibition of Australian Art in London at Grafton

Galleries. In 1906 she travelled to Europe to study at London's School of Animal Painting (1906–1907) under Frank Calderon, and at Academie Colarossi in Paris.

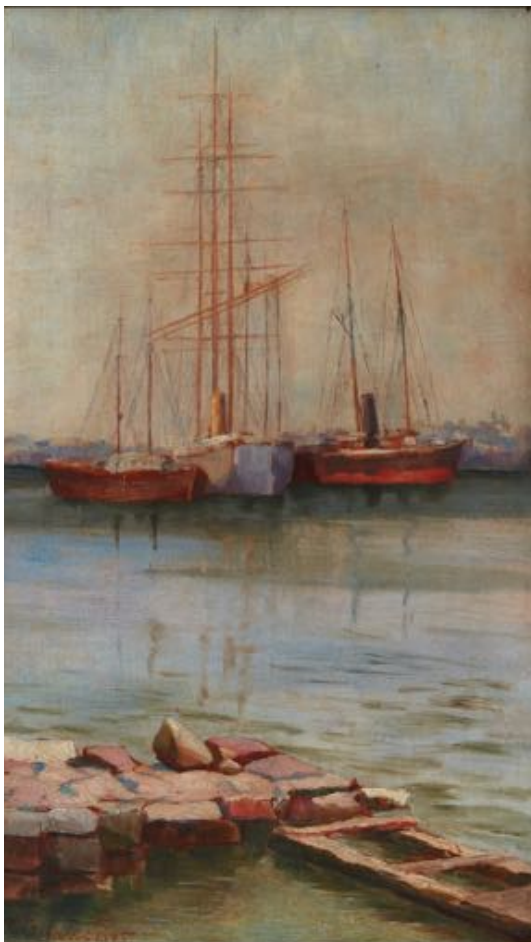
Cusack was a member of the Society of Artists of NSW, the Strathfield Ladies Sketch Club, The Painting Club, an art society exclusively for women, and the Royal Art Society where she served on its Council and Exhibition Committees. In 1910 she founded the Society of Women Painters with Lady Chelmsford. She served as the society's Vice President from 1910–12, on its Council in 1913 and as Honorary Treasurer in 1914. Later in 1914 she travelled with her sister Edith to study art in the UK. However, the sisters arrived in London on August 6th, two days after England had joined World War I. 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. The sisters returned home to Australia after the war. In 1922 Aline Cusack exhibited three works in the Society of Women Painters Annual Exhibition. In 1923 she travelled with her sister to Canada to visit their brother.

With the recent addition of *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* 1896, the Into the Light Collection has two works by Aline Cusack. In 2019 the collection purchased Cusack's *Moored ships, Darling Harbour* 1895 which depicts three ships in Darling Harbour with the haze of the city in the background. The water is a feature of the work; comprising half of the painting, it showcases Cusack's ability to depict reflections on water. The addition of *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* 1896 to the collection demonstrates Cusack's keen interest in maritime painting and the harbour over a period in the mid 1890s.

Importantly, both works are of Darling Harbour, Sydney. Cusack's studio at the Palings Building was in close proximity to Darling Harbour so it is not surprising she chose to paint it. Also, Cusack and her sister undertook regular travel by ship throughout their lives. They went to Europe and Canada, with the sea and ports constant companions. Thus, it is not surprising maritime subjects feature in Cusack's work.

In the 1890s Darling Harbour was a bustling industrial landscape. Joanna Mendelsohn notes in regard to Edith Cusack's *Evening, Darling Harbour* 1896 that 'women artists are not usually associated with industrial landscapes.... This sensitive painting of Sydney's industrial Darling Harbour is also unusual for its time, not just because it was painted by a woman.'³ Thus, Aline Cusack's paintings of the harbour are also unusual for the time. *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* 1896 showcases Cusack's skills in capturing reflections both in the painting itself and in a sketch on the verso of the canvas.

Through her depiction of the reflections, we are able to discern that Cusack must have been painting in the morning or afternoon when the shadows were at their best. The thick smoke caused by the industry around the harbour is also a feature of her works. In comparison to works by other artists such as Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts which utilise brighter blues, Cusack's harbour



Aline Cusack, *Moored ships, Darling Harbour* 1895, oil on panel, 41.5 x 24 cm
Into the Light Collection 2019, Sheila Foundation



Aline Cusack, *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* 1896, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 46 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation

is imbued with greys and subdued tones. Tom Roberts' painting (*Sydney Harbour from Milson's Point*) 1897 is an exemplar of this and gives a glimpse of industrial Sydney from afar. Roberts' use of white to highlight the break between the ships and harbour in comparison with Cusack's choice of dark blackish tones is a notable difference in their work. Cusack's works are moodier and more introspective, the shadows of the stationary ships a focus instead of the breakwater of moving boats in Roberts' work.

In a review of the Society of Women Painters 1913 annual exhibition the reviewer notes that 'another early morning picture, a cabinet view of Berry's Bay, by Miss Aline Cusack, is clever in its suggestion of the dispersal of the mists, and the treatment of the trading schooner in the middle distance.'⁴ This statement awakens the imagination to consider what the work may have been like. It also demonstrates Cusack's continuing interest in maritime subjects as her art career progressed.

Darling Harbour was popular with artists at the time. Harold Cazneaux's *Old hulk, Darling Harbour* c 1909 is compositionally similar to Cusack's painting. The photograph is from a later period of the harbour; the Pymont Power Station in the background was built in 1904. The smoke, also a feature in Cusack's paintings, is a focal point of Cazneaux's photograph. Seen in relation to each other the works reveal the changing industrial landscape of the harbour.



Old hulk, Darling Harbour, Harold Cazneaux, c 1909, silver gelatin photograph, 23.8 x 30.3 cm
Australian National Maritime Museum

In the absence of a large group of extant paintings, remaining exhibition catalogues have assisted in understanding the breadth of Cusack's work as an artist. The State Library of NSW's new DX Lab Art Index,⁵ which draws together data from the Australian Art Exhibition Catalogue Index, 1847-1900, is an invaluable resource which illustrates that Cusack exhibited 43 works in Royal Art Society of NSW exhibitions from 1893 – 1900. Her largest exhibition was 10 artworks in 1898. The index also highlights Cusack's interest in maritime landscapes. From *A breezy day*, *Coogee*

1893, *Port after stormy seas* 1895, *Sea spray* 1895/1896 and *An evening tide* 1899 to *The rising gale* 1897 and *Anchored* 1888/1897 it is clear that the sea was a focal point for Cusack. There are also many artworks that reference flowers and places of interest in Sydney. Some titles are more obscure but it is likely that they refer to paintings of land or sea, with *Reflections* 1895, *Last sunbeams* 1888/1897 and *Between the showers* 1898 evoking such scenes.

Other remaining exhibition catalogues give a further glimpse of Cusack's work. The catalogue for the Exhibition of Australian Art, Grafton Galleries, London 1898 lists *A rising gale* and *A grey day – Darling Harbour, Sydney*, both maritime subjects. The catalogue from Aline and Edith Cusack's October 1913 exhibition of Water Colors, Oil Paintings and Pastel Portraits at Anthony Hordern's Fine Art Gallery, New Palace Emporium, Brickfield Hill, Sydney showcases diverse subject matter. Aline's works include paintings of international subjects (for example *Suez Canal*), which she would have made during her study in Europe, as well as paintings of flowers, places in Sydney and maritime subjects. One work, *The Vincennes ashore at Manly*, would have been a painting of the Vincennes, a French barque that ran aground at Manly in 1906 during 'heavy seas and driving rain.'⁶ It was a popular tourist attraction at the time and Cusack's decision to paint it demonstrates her keen interest in capturing Sydney's maritime life.

The Society of Women Painters 1922 exhibition catalogue includes three works by Cusack including *Autumn, Stratford-on-Avon*, *The Avenue, Shakespeare's Church, Stratford-on-Avon* and *Fishing boats, Polperro*. These works would have been made during her second trip to the UK. The titles give a clear idea of the places she had been able to visit despite her trip coinciding with World War I. There are numerous articles in newspapers which demonstrate her popularity and success as an artist and importantly describe her work so that we may imagine it. There are also shipping records which allow us to see places she travelled to during her life. The *Roll of Individuals entitled to the Victory Medal* indicates her eligibility to receive a Victory Medal for her service in the Voluntary Aid Detachment in World War I.

Whilst it is helpful that we can access these past catalogues, articles and records to understand the artworks Aline Cusack created and the life she led, the fact remains that very few of her artworks have survived and resources on her life and career are scarce. Since 1988 only seven artworks by Cusack have come to auction, despite her making hundreds of works. Cusack's deceased estate file, which assigns her the occupation of 'Spinster', also drives home the disregard that women artists of the time were shown. On all extant shipping records Aline Cusack has given or written her occupation as 'Artist.' However, her deceased estate file nominates 'Spinster' as her career. It is fortunate that although archival records are scarce, as they are for many women artists of the time and even now, they do at least allow us to determine the seriousness with which Cusack undertook her career as a professional artist. They also clearly demonstrate she was much more than a spinster.

Alexandra Mitchell

Notes

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- 6 Lynne McNairn, "Photograph of French barque 'Vincennes' at Manly, Sydney," Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, published June 2014, <https://ma.as/28816>

The Sydney Mail, Wednesday, December 28, 1921.—Page 23



MISS EDITH CUSACK.

Women's Page

Conducted
By 'Housewife'





MISS ALINE CUSACK.

THE NEED FOR REST-ROOMS

Sydney is extremely backward in the matter of rest-rooms. There are a hundred and one delightful restaurants and amusements where the best food and best service are obtainable, but there is no place for the general public where rest and refreshment is to be found.

THE need for a big airy rest-room in Sydney would fill a want—a room where men and women could sit down for a time and have a chat without being obliged to purchase refreshments. At the present time there seems no refuge but the Botanic Gardens which are too far away for the short time at disposal. It often happens in the street that you come across a man friend whom you have not seen for some time. He invariably suggests tea. But you may have just had tea, and do not need more. If you stay at the side of the pavement you will become a nuisance to good ground. The majority of women, for the most part, leave things to chance. I have stayed in the railway districts where no attempt was even made to darken rooms or to wipe windows. By the way, that was often treacherous. There is no need to make coverings unsuitable. A few yards of hem-stitch or other fine net, prettily hemmed and embroidered, make ideal coverings to tea-trays and the like, while wire dish-covers should be used freely. The milk jugs should also have their own little covers, weighted at the sides with beads, and all sweet jars and the like should have tightly-fitting tops. These which have small holes for the spoons to be inserted are useless in the kitchen. Once you get a fly into the butter, it is no use trying to persuade it to a dish of formalin and milk if the cake or jam dish is at hand. Formalin and milk and formalin and beer are most attractive to flies, and the liquid should be placed in saucers on the tops of cupboards and shelves. So far as the lady is concerned, the care

THE Misses Cusack are two of Sydney's best-known women painters. After an absence of seven years from New South Wales they have returned, and have been showing the artistic results of their labours abroad. They left Sydney in 1914, and reached London two days after war had been declared. All their plans were at once upset, and they were fairly engaged in war work in England and France until 1919, when they once more turned their attention to their art.—(Photo: Judith Fletcher.)

where. The fly is out as dangerous as the suburban fly, while the country fly is the worst of the family. But only one in every eight suburban areas has a garbage destructor, which means sudden death to flies. For the fly menace can be reduced and got away with, as America has shown. The only method to get rid of flies is to burn everything on which a fly can breed. In Minneapolis, for every man woman and child killed the flies accounted for twenty.

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Edith Cusack and Aline Cusack featured in the Women's Page, *The Sydney Mail*, December 28, 1921, page 28. Their first exhibition since returning from London opened in Sydney on 4 December 1921

Elsie Barlow (1876-1948)

Elsie Barlow is an unfamiliar name today, but she was an active and very high profiled artist in Melbourne in the 1900-1930 period. Included in the Australian art collection at the British Empire exhibition at Wembley, London in 1924-1925, with works praised in the British press and heralded as the first Australian artist to paint effective snow scenes in William Moore's diverse and inclusive *Story of Australian Art* (which managed to commend many more artists than in the more tightly organised accounts of Smith, Gleeson and Hughes), during the 1920s Barlow was regarded as an Australian artist of the first rank. She held a number of solo exhibitions from 1906 onwards as well as exhibiting with the Victorian Artists Society, the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors and the Twenty Melbourne Painters.

Her vision of her practice and its potential social and cultural importance was always expansive. She claimed an agency and prestige for herself in Edwardian and 1920s Melbourne that was far from domestic. Major politicians including the Premier of Victoria opened her exhibitions and the press records the visit of Lady Rachel Foster, the governor general's wife, to Barlow's 1922 solo exhibition.¹ Her most lasting impact upon her contemporaries was the establishment of the Castlemaine Art Gallery, which still is in operation today. Throughout the interwar period she was acclaimed nationally as the "mother" of the Castlemaine Art Gallery² who opened up new cultural opportunities in rural Australia, offering a model for other towns to follow. "Why should we have to go to Sydney to see a good picture? Art does not

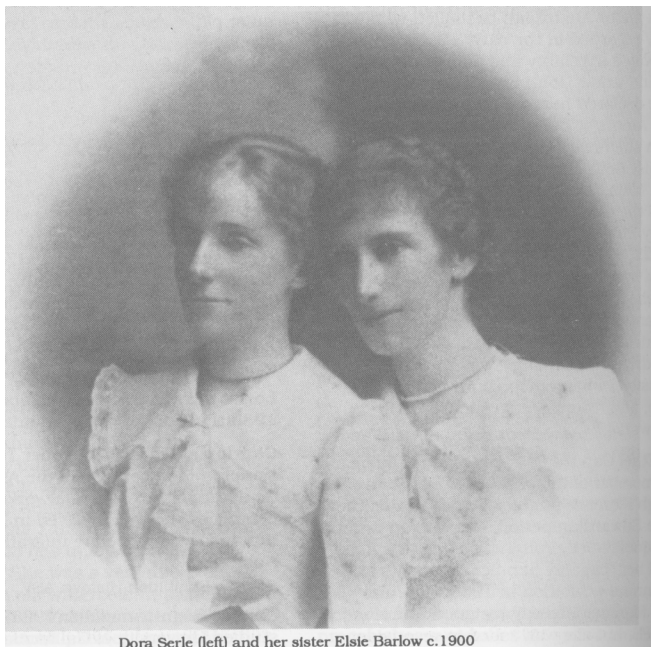
belong to the city alone — it is bred in the country."³ A successful solo exhibition by Barlow in 1912 was so popular that suggestions were made by visitors that an art display should become a permanent attraction in Castlemaine. She was also the prime mover in a large loan exhibition of art and craft works from the Castlemaine community in 1913, intended to raise funds for the future gallery from entry fees.⁴ Barlow approached various major artists (many were personal friends) to gift or at least lend artworks to assemble a collection and the gallery opened in 1914, just before the outbreak of the war. Castlemaine in the 1910s, despite being a regional city, offered Barlow a surprisingly large network of creative women including Alice Newell, who had studied art in London, (and her daughter Lucy artist, printmaker and textile designer), Nan Brotherton and the Leviny sisters. The latter family also bought works by Barlow for their collection.⁵

During World War 1 Barlow equally placed her art beyond the introspective and personal in alignment with the intensely patriotic mood of the nation. At her family's expense she designed and produced booklets of sketches of Australian landscapes with selected poems. These booklets were printed in a small scale, slight enough to be slipped into parcels of food and clothing being posted to Australian soldiers serving overseas without dramatically adding to postage costs. Featuring gumtrees and other native plants, these small booklets identify Australian flora, fauna and scenery as representing the "heart and soul" of the nation. Historians and curators frequently link the self-conscious nationalism of Edwardian landscape painting, intensely focussed upon both plants and landscape features that are highly identifiable as "Australian", with the heightened consciousness of nationhood of the Federation era which was further triggered during World War 1, and Elsie Barlow's booklets neatly crystallised these concepts in a portable and accessible format:

...a souvenir of sketches in pen and ink by [Elsie Barlow], under the title of "Australia's Message" Mrs. Barlow, formerly Miss Elsie Hake, is well known for her artistic work "The Gum Trees of Australia". "Australia's Message", which will appear this week, consists of sketches that breathe the very fragrance of the Australian bush. The kookaburra, the bush hut, the old whim,⁶ the horse team, the magpie, and the wild flowers will bring before our Australian soldiers abroad much of Australia that we love. The frontispiece consists of Australian blossoms and naval flags.⁷

Barlow's contemporaries consciously linked her to nationalist programs in Australian art and this following review from 1912 additionally offers another instance of the unequivocal endorsement offered to Jane Sutherland as an artist a century or more ago:

It is in landscape, not in genre, that Mrs Barlow's strength lies. In mastering the medium of watercolour, Mrs Barlow was practically her own teacher, but the influence of Mr McCubbin, of the National Gallery, and her former teacher, Miss Jean [sic] Sutherland, are plainly discernible to those who know those artists' work, both pioneers in the appreciation of the poetry of typical Australian scenery.⁸



Dora Serle (left) and her sister Elsie Barlow c.1900

Elsie Hake (Barlow) and her sister Dora (Serle) studied together at the National Gallery School in Melbourne under Frederick McCubbin from 1894. Courtesy Catherine Stuart and Paul Finucane



Elsie Barlow, *Girl with her doll* n.d., oil on canvas, 64 x 74 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation

Elsie Barlow demands the attention of later curators and academics on at least one further ground. Unlike some female contemporaries who either stopped painting after marriage as did Jessie Scarvell, or substantially withdrew from the artworld for many years after marriage whilst they raised their children, as did Barlow's sister Dora Serle or her contemporary Isabel Hunter Tweddle, Barlow remained visible and active as an artist after her marriage. She continued her study at the National Gallery School, entering the travelling scholarship for a second time in 1902, a year after her marriage in 1901. Possibly the portability, smaller scale and directness of the watercolour medium made it a more practical choice and, as with Emma Minnie Boyd, allowed Barlow to keep working despite family responsibilities. Her marriage to an older widower, a senior public servant with strong legal and political connections, rather than interfering with her creative life, gave her access to official circles which added both opportunities and gravitas to an already enterprising career.

Elsie Barlow's life-story beyond her creative life is thinly documented with few anecdotal embellishments. She was born in 1876, the youngest of six surviving daughters of Sidney and Charlotte Hake, who had moved from Adelaide to Melbourne.



Portrait photograph of Elsie Barlow later in life, photographer unknown. Courtesy Catherine Stuart and Paul Finucane

Jane Sutherland spotted the talent of Elsie and her elder sister Dora when teaching at the Fairlight school for girls. She invited the girls to join her classes in the city and for landscape painting, and then also encouraged them to enrol in the National Gallery School and both spent time at the school in the 1890s. Elsie was the first to enrol in 1894. She stayed longer at the school than her sister and was a little more successful in winning prizes, including free tuition, and came second in the 1902 Travelling Scholarship, the most successful female competitor to that date.⁹ The sisters shared a studio in Collins Street and sent their works to a wide range of exhibitions and competitions in Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate. In the 1900s, Elsie was consistently placed above Dora in competitive exhibitions, and frequently took out first prize for watercolours and sketching. Despite being the younger sister, Elsie pitched her practice to a more formal establishment and civic platform whereas Dora gravitated to a more personal, expressive understanding of art, and unexpectedly emerged in the 1930s as a mild post-impressionist referencing the Nabis.

Girl with a doll is a more complex and serious picture than it may seem at first glance. The style of the girl's dress suggests that it is not a sentimental picture of Elsie's own daughter Nancy, born 1906 and thus painted perhaps in 1911-1912, but a piece from the later 1890s. A contemporary discussion of Barlow's career suggests that she painted most of her oils whilst still a student,¹⁰ also confirming an early date. The lack of narrative detail in the background of a dark but warm brown, suggests that rather than telling a story, *Girl with a doll* is aligned to the idea of the subject-less, technically pure painting that Bernard Hall advocated at the National Gallery School and which was taken up in an even more extreme form by Barlow's contemporaries at the Gallery School such as Max Meldrum and AME Bale. The dramatic lighting of the central subject references the fashionability of Rembrandt's art in the 1890s, underpinned by the strong element of 17th century influence in dress also very popular in the 1890s. The doll can be identified as a Japanese Ichimatsu doll, a chubby child doll with a finely moulded and painted plaster head and a cloth body, globally popular in the late 19th century. These dolls were not solely dismissed as children's toys, but often displayed in parlours and drawing rooms as part of the fascination with Japanese art and design amongst the culturally on-trend and progressive. Overall *Girl with a doll* is a far more radical, cosmopolitan and questing work than Elsie Barlow's later watercolours of gumtrees, as seen in other public collections such as the State Library of Victoria and Buda House in Castle-maine, Victoria.

Dr Juliette Peers

Notes

1 *Australasian* 1 April 1922 p 44

2 *Bendigo Advertiser* 14 June 1915 p 2

3 Direct quote *Robertson Mail* 15 February 1924 p 2 cf *Daily Witness (Young NSW)* 16 March 1924 p 2, (similar discussions about Elise Barlow and the Castlemaine Art Gallery as potential models for cultural institutions in smaller towns were reprinted in a number of quite widely geographically dispersed regional NSW newspapers throughout early 1924) cf *The Age* 27 April 1940 p 8

4 The Victorian Railways even organised special excursion trains to bring visitors to Castlemaine to view the exhibition

5 Other artists bought by the Levinys included Margaret Preston, Maude Sherwood, Mildred Lovett and Arnold Shore.

6 In this context the word “whim” does not mean a caprice but was the term for a horse operated windlass used to remove ore and rubble from a mineshaft or to operate a pump in a mine

7 *Bendigo Independent* 7th August 1916 p 4

8 *Mount Alexander Mail* 23rd October 1912 p 2

9 The family tradition, repeated in most accounts, that she had come second to Max Meldrum in the 1899 Travelling Scholarship competition, is incorrect. Elsie entered the 1899 competition but did not win a prize in that round. She entered again and came second to Meyer Altson in the next Travelling Scholarship competition in 1902.

10 *Mount Alexander Mail* 23rd October 1912 p 2

Jo Sweatman (1872-1956)

Jo Sweatman's work is at first sight tranquil, uneventful across a long career. Yet these paintings should not be taken for granted: these humble picturesque scenes are actually highly expressive of the *realpolitik* of Melbourne art across the first four decades of the twentieth century. Jo Sweatman was an active player in the "post-Heidelberg" moves to regulate both local art practice and patronage. She is a woman placed, where by convention women artists are claimed to be invisible, in the centre of professional debate, albeit as understood about a century ago, in Melbourne. Whilst she never received the extravagant praise directed towards Streeton, Hilder or either Lionel or Norman Lindsay in the latter half of the first decade of the 20th century as the so-called first Australian art boom developed, the very unforced, humility of Sweatman's vision affirmed white Australian nationalist art making's inherent validity. If Jo Sweatman did not "need" either foreign training or foreign influences, then neither did "authentic" Australian art per se.

A major article from *The Age* by Alexander Colquhoun lays out Sweatman's historical and theoretical importance for her contemporaries and demonstrates how she resonates directly in key debates about Australian art of the early 20th century:



Miss Jo Sweatman, May and Mina Moore, c. 1910-1913, silver gelatin photograph, 19.3 x 14.9 cm
State Library of Victoria

The famous art galleries and picturesque quarters of the old world are familiar to most Australian painters of today, but not to all of them. To some the pleasures of foreign travel have been denied. The glories of the National Gallery, the Prado and the Louvre are known to them only by hearsay, or through the medium of pictured reproductions; yet it is worthy of note that, despite this deprivation, their powers of observation and expression are no whit less keenly alert than are those of their travelled contemporaries. Among these stay-at-homes might be mentioned John Shirlow, Miss Bale, Peter Newbury and ... Miss Jo. Sweatman".¹

In her own words as spoken to Colquhoun, a friend and colleague: "She does not feel that her art has in any way suffered through having missed so far the overseas trip". Whilst Robert Hughes may have mocked early 20th century nationalist art and Bernard Smith may have dissected it, a similar endorsement of both the self-sufficient agency of Australian art making, and a prioritising of local values and authorities above international trends, persists to the present in mutated forms, often repolished by the appropriation of first nations' cultural lustre.

Furthermore the tranquillity and low-keyed nature of many of Sweatman's subjects, frequently captured in the vicinity of her studio home, veils a notably successful woman artist. She kept herself economically afloat by painting and her many exhibitions repeatedly witnessed high rates of sales.² After an exhibition, Sweatman set to work again to assemble a fresh stock of landscapes for the next event. Her success was a practical feminism, if not one of feminist politics or artistic innovation. She had no male partner or patron and was one of many independent, but highly active, women artists working across the first four decades of the 20th century in Melbourne, along with such artists as Alice Bale, Cristina Asquith Baker, Dora Wilson, Nora Gurdon, Madge Freeman, Elma Roach and Janie Wilkinson Whyte. Sweatman was not a flamboyant innovator like Margaret Preston or Isabel Hunter Tweddle nor did she belong to high society like Sunday Reed, Maie Casey and Mary Alice Evatt, but she enjoyed a significant reputation in art circles. Alexander Colquhoun when writing an overview of women artists in Melbourne in 1939 for *The Age*, unashamedly placed his daughter-in-law Amalie Colquhoun and two of his close friends Alice Bale and Jo Sweatman at the pinnacle of the local hierarchy of women artists, when their portraits were featured as representative of high achieving women in the arts.³

Concurrently Jo Sweatman's disciplined concentration on regular solo exhibitions and marshalling the narrow compass of her life to prioritise painting opportunities would have also provided a useful and close at hand precedent for Clarice Beckett. Both women were associated with the Meldrum circle and the Twenty Melbourne Painters and surely knew each other as they shared friends and colleagues. Beckett took the foundation and example offered by Sweatman and transformed it into an expression of both philosophical and design complexity, adding layers of subtlety and mystery alien to Sweatman's robust and practical outlook. Unlike Beckett and other contemporaries, Sweatman seems to have ignored or brushed off any social limitations that were forced upon women, without betraying any anxiety or self doubt.



Jo Sweatman, *Landscape* c 1920, oil on canvas, 44 x 39.5 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation

Jo Sweatman was supremely confident in her social and public expression of self and remained equally sure and grounded throughout her working life as an artist. She was born in Melbourne in 1872 to parents of British origins, Marian and William Sweatman. Her East St Kilda family was genteelly well connected; an uncle, Arthur Sweatman, was the Church of England bishop of Toronto and eventually Primate of All Canada.⁴ Simultaneously her home life was mildly bohemian, an open house that hosted musical evenings, amateur performances and lively parties for art, theatrical, musical, literary, academic and educational notables in Melbourne, as well as wealthy pastoral families whom the Sweatman children met at their private schools. This blend of lively creativity and affiliations to the outer reaches of the British gentry was shared with the Sweatmans' friends who resided near at hand, also in East Saint Kilda, the Boyd family, better known in public memory. As a child, Jo, renamed by her brothers in preference to her given names of Estelle Mary,⁵ unusually for a Victorian girl joined in all the outdoor physical pranks of her brothers such as climbing trees, clambering from house to house and spying on the neighbours. The unconventionality set the tone for a life of energetic confidence; when elderly she fell off the roof whilst doing house repairs. Sweatman made many of her own picture frames and also much of the furniture and fixtures of her home, having been taught woodworking by her brothers. Even though her father's death around the time of the bank crash of 1893 forced the family to scrimp on their housekeeping and Jo's mother now worked in the kitchen in the absence of servants, throughout the 1890s the Sweatmans' parties continued to attract the highly gifted and creative of both genders.

Jo began drawing lessons as part of the expected accomplishments at a local ladies academy, Fairedlight School. Art was her favourite subject and her teacher recommended that she move to the National Gallery School.⁶ Sweatman ignored her father's wish that she prepare for entering a degree course at the University of Melbourne and transferred to art school rather than continue with formal study. Starting with Frederick McCubbin in the drawing school and Bernard Hall in the painting school, Jo retained a respect for the ability of both as teachers, implicitly agreeing with Charles Wheeler's statement that Hall was ultimately a better teacher than McCubbin.⁷ although she displayed strong political and personal loyalty to McCubbin until his death in 1917. She remained at the Gallery school between 1890 and 1898 as part of a remarkable cohort of students including A.M.E. Bale, Dora Meeson, Bess Norriss Tait, Ada Plante, Isabel Hunter Tweddle, Hugh Ramsay, Max Meldrum, Sonny Pole, George Coates, Victor Cobb, John Hennessy, J.S. Macdonald, Violet Teague, Dora Serle and Elsie Barlow. Many of these notable artists remained personal friends.

An art career was not the option that family and friends expected, as she had commenced a more conventional life trajectory for her time and class. She became engaged to Leonard Ingram, the son of a NSW pastoralist, in the late 1890s, although he died before they could marry. Her mother took Jo on extended plein air painting excursions outside Melbourne, particularly by steamer across Port Phillip Bay, as a form of distraction after that shock. At this date Jo also began leveraging off the habits of her class, taking the opportunity to be a house guest for lengthy periods at homes and rural properties of her wide range of acquaintances to find fresh subjects, a habit she retained all her life. She ventured to Sydney where her mother's sisters were established with their families and to Adelaide, where friends lived and worked. Later by the 1920s she made regular painting trips to Tasmania, where

there were relatives in northern Tasmania. Subjects from all these areas appear regularly in her exhibitions, although most currently known work are of subjects in Victoria. As well as painting interstate, she sent works to exhibitions in Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. Sweatman also had an extensive practice in still life and even took on a number of portrait commissions although fewer of either of these subjects have surfaced in the secondary art market than her landscapes.

Her life centred upon a fulltime professional career as an artist. By 1900 she found an art teaching position at Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School and took charge of her own finances, independent of her mother's support. The first of many solo exhibitions took place in 1911 presenting eighty works including scenes of both NSW and Victoria, subjects from Sydney Harbour and Warrandyte, as well as flowerpieces. Twenty one paintings sold at the opening alone, which was regarded as a most successful launch of a solo exhibition. In 1909, *The Lone Hand* declared her "'Study in White', curiously Whistlerian in style" to be "one of the best – if not the best – figure pictures" at the Victorian Artists' Society annual exhibition.⁸ Sweatman served for a number of years on the council of the Victorian Artists Society. She was an enthusiastic partisan for Frederick McCubbin as President in 1909 and when he subsequently resigned from the VAS in 1912 to found the Australian Art Association. A few years later she was equally as vocal and intense a supporter of Max Meldrum in his campaign for the VAS presidency.⁹ Meldrum was a friend from the gallery school, even though she never followed his theories of painting. After bitter disputes and accusations of rejecting works and ballot stacking at the Victorian Artists' Society in 1917, Jo Sweatman resigned in the wake of substantial



A. M. E. Bale, *Portrait of Jo Sweatman* 1922, oil on canvas, 77 x 64 cm. Castlemaine Art Gallery, gift of the artist 1949

protests against the Meldrum group favouring their friends and associates above the majority of the membership. Along with a number of other artists who had left the VAS including Alice Bale, another long standing contact from the gallery years, Sweatman founded the Twenty Melbourne Painters Society. When the group formalised its legal structure in 1922, after several years of informal association, Sweatman's studio was the meeting place for the committee and Sweatman remained a council member, alongside the secretaryship of Alice Bale.¹⁰ Bale was a particular friend, and Sweatman often stayed with Bale in Castlemaine and painted there. In 1922 Bale and Sweatman painted each other's portrait and entered them in the Archibald where they were both hung, an interesting piece of co-production that is not repeated often in the history of the prize.

After the Gallery School, the central influence on Sweatman's art practice was the established landscape artist Clara Southern, whom she met at the McCubbins' home.¹¹ Clara Southern invited both Jo Sweatman and Agnes Kirkwood out to her home in Warrandyte in the early 1900s for painting sessions.¹² Jo often walked six miles/nine km from the train station at Ringwood to the village carrying her paints, as well as taking public horse coaches and later motor busses from either Heidelberg or Ringwood. When Clara Southern moved across the Yarra River from the town side to the opposite bank, she encouraged Kirkwood to buy land adjacent to her bush cottage, and Kirkwood subdivided that land to offer a block to Sweatman who built a home there in 1910. Clara Southern's sisters Dora and Sara also had cottages very close, as too the pianist Eva Nodrum, Southern encouraged others to come to live and paint in Warrandyte, especially on the north bank of the river, including Penleigh and Edith Boyd, and was responsible for turning the mining town into an artistic hub.

Warrandyte became the centre of Sweatman's life, although she had rooms in her family home as late as the 1930s, whilst she was still teaching in Melbourne. Sweatman acted as the secretary of the informal Warrandyte artists' association which presented a number of well regarded group exhibitions in the late Penleigh Boyd's studio in the 1930s. During the Black Friday bushfires of January 1939, she was urged by Clara Southern, who had noticed the fire approaching, to evacuate. Sweatman and Southern, along with their neighbours, their neighbours' pets and even livestock spent the night standing in the Yarra River. They held wet chaff bags over their heads as the fires jumped the wide river and burnt out both sides of the town. Jo's cottage survived, Clara Southern's home had been destroyed, although her separate studio was intact. Undeterred by falling off the roof of her home when undertaking repairs in 1942,¹³ Jo continued to paint around Warrandyte into the 1950s, going out each day carrying easel, paints and a folding stool. Again this pattern of devotion to artmaking may have provided impetus to Clarice Beckett, who long predeceased her older contemporary. "[E]very season, every change in light offered new possibilities for her, again she painted the bridge and the rapids".¹⁴ As Sweatman grew older and more frail, increasingly crippled by arthritis, her subjects were confined closer and closer to her home and garden. She deplored change and modern artforms and emphatically rebutted Gino Nibbo's 1932 public criticism of the dullness of officially endorsed Australian art:

Jo Sweatman admitted that there was no doubt that modernism was a result of the times, but contended that the influence was evil, and should be suppressed - the influence of strident noises and the mad demand for speed, above all, the craving for excitement and sensationalism. Going with the times was an affectation, and affectation in art was damnation.¹⁵

Whilst she knew members of the plein air school, the mood and ambition of Jo Sweatman's paintings more clearly aligns to the formality of the Federation or Edwardian landscape painting. Even her smaller works display the sense of arrangement and careful preselection and control of templates that Ian Burn sees as typical of the generalising and formulaic tendencies of the nationalist landscape, the abstraction of "simplicity from the real".¹⁶ Her artificial and controlled handling of light marks a clear distinction from the work of slightly older women landscapists Jane Sutherland, Jane Price, Beatrix Hoile, Jessie Evans and Sydney plein airists such as Scarvell, Meston, Cusack, Florence Fuller in Western Australia and even Sweatman's neighbour and friend Clara Southern. She preferred a more "permanent" abstraction over what Burn defined as the Heidelberg and plein air search for the "poetry of the momentary effect".¹⁷ Although Sweatman does not follow Meldrum's application of paint via tonal values, her landscapes, whilst executed en plein air often look like they were painted under the intense flat yellow wash of the large electric lamps that Meldrumites favoured for their studios. Her ground glows with an even golden brown, her greens are often a dull yellow/khaki tone, and her blue skies washed out.¹⁸

Yet Sweatman's landscapes, especially those of Warrandyte and the outer north east of Melbourne, even as they are stage managed and drily and brightly lit, concurrently speak to a regionalised identity. They often show a very close focussed and localised attention to place, blended with the expressive symbolic archetypes of classical Federation era painting. The glowing clay and sandstone ridges, the scrubby trees, native grasses and



Jo Sweatman, *Clara Southern in Jo Sweatman's living room* c 1920, oil on canvas on masonite. Hamilton Art Gallery, donated through the Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

seasonal wildflowers that scatter white, pink and mauve splashes across her landscapes, survive today in remnant bushland across outer northeast Melbourne, even after a century of steady residential and commercial subdivision of the old 19th century mining grounds.

This close and limpid relationship of artist to place was often noted by Sweatman's contemporaries. Like her rejection of foreign, alien influences, Sweatman's devoted attention to her local environment was seen as indicative of a way of being in the Australian landscape and as symbolic of Australian identity that entirely reflected intellectual and cultural belief of an era before post-colonialism. This interplay between the intimacy and expert knowledge of a particular place that spoke of an authentic relationship between artist and place with more generalised forms and symbols that spoke to a wide audience as representing the nation as a whole sits at the heart of interwar Australian art as well as Sweatman's practice. Ironically Sweatman's de facto mobility, and wide range of painting locations, was not noticed at the time and is little discussed now. For several decades she made regular trips to the Victorian high country and painted scenes of the Jameson and Goulburn rivers and as noted she frequently painted outside Victoria as well.

Whilst her "non-subjects" and lack of conscious decorative and poetic inflection in comparison to either Clara Southern's plein air stylisation or the more forced histrionics of Penleigh Boyd, may also reflect again her imbrication with Meldrum's values and practices, the particular picture acquired by the Sheila Foundation captures attention for demonstrating a more ambitious and authoritative engagement with the notion of place and identity, to make it a nearly picture perfect Edwardian/Federation landscape. Burn states that "the art of the period conveys a sense of its own gravity and importance".¹⁹ This self-consciousness is seen rarely in other early paintings in the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, with the exception of Cristina Asquith Baker's vision of the Shrine of Remembrance, which shares that consciousness of national and declamatory singularity. The landscape is not just a pleasant vista and painting is not just a recreational pastime. In this case the artwork reflects Sweatman's actual agency and also demonstrates that some women artists did not feel inhibited by the enormity of the symbolic paradigms of Edwardian landscapes. One notes the very typical square format which became dominant in Melbourne landscape painting around c 1905-1920, the sublime framing device of the mountain range, to suggest the sheer scale

and importance of the Australian landscape and equally demonstrate the artist's handling of multi levels of spatiality. Many of Sweatman's landscapes have a more simple arrangement of a single spatial plane with a firm backdrop reducing any deep penetration,²⁰ again creating an image that functions more as a stage setting, although in 1939 the National Gallery of Victoria acquired another more ambitious panorama by Sweatman, *The Village*, that included a deeper spatial piercing and scale.

The closed, near-focussed settings of her landscapes could be thought to confirm the extensive theoretical discussion about the enclosed and tame landscape painting of historic women artists in Australia articulated in the 1990s, which emphasised that women were unable to experience space and landscape like men, although conversely Ian Burn suggests that all early to mid 20th century Australian landscape painting by either gender was organised and contained. This ordering and control was a defence against the horrors of both the colonial atrocities of *Terra Nullius* and the more recent atrocities of the Western Front, which exerted a less subliminal and more immediate impact on the Australian consciousness. Concurrently Ron Radford reads the same works and the same generation of artists not as defensive and in denial, but as producing a spiritual and sublime inflection in the Australian landscape which complements rather than overwrites Indigenous engagement with country.²¹ The grand and serious intent of this landscape neatly reflects the professional ambition with which Sweatman faced her working life and ratifies her important position in conservative art circles. Even as late as 1947, just as the star of Sydney Nolan was rising, Sweatman's art was accorded a highly important symbolic value. Whilst she was an advocate for conservative taste, mainstream stories rarely associate women's art with the centre of Australian nationalist ambition. During the 1940s Hilda Rix Nicholas longed for, but increasingly failed to gain, the level of nation building agency that was read in Sweatman's work:

[T]he artist is not influenced by the foreign cults and propaganda that have been disturbing the art world in recent years. Her landscapes are still clear, honest representations of Australian scenes - glimpses of winding rivers and timbered hills, of quiet little towns and country roads, painted with fine technical skill and a feeling for the beauty and charm of the countryside.²²

Dr Juliette Peers

Notes

1 *The Age* 9 May 1931 p 7

2 We know more about Jo Sweatman than many of her female contemporaries due to a unique hybrid document, an unpublished biography *Jo Sweatman, Artist* compiled substantially from memories of conversations with Jo and her sisters by her niece Margaret Stevenson and dated 1981, now in the manuscript collection of the State Library of Victoria. Much of the information for this essay comes from the biography. Additional content in the biography includes transcriptions of catalogues, newspaper commentaries and other documents. Although much of the sources for information are not cited in any detail, some are clearly first hand comments from the subject and her family. The document also errs in presenting Sweatman uncritically as head and shoulders above her contemporaries. For example Clara Southern, whom Sweatman met at Fred McCubbin's house (p 25), is described as a young woman who liked art rather than as a working professional painter and graduate of the National Gallery of Victoria School a decade earlier and an artist of greater authority and experience than Sweatman. The biography includes sales data for some of Sweatman's solo exhibitions, which suggests that much of her work sold, although she also exhibited some of her figure pieces and still lifes in repeated shows without putting them up for sale. Sweatman's precise economic status is elusive in the text, certainly her brothers recovered something of the family wealth during their lifetime and Jo stayed with her siblings and mother from time to time, but Stevenson also contrasts Alice Bale's refined and formal home with Sweatman's simple rustic shack with homemade fixtures at Warrandyte and noted that Sweatman lived frugally and independently.

3 *The Age* 30 September 1939 p 7 Alexander Colquhoun "Woman – her place in art"

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Sweatman

5 This is the account given by Stevenson p 2 noting that the name was shortened from Jo Jo, the original non-female name given to her by her brothers. A related and well known factoid in the memory of contemporaries claimed that the name Jo was taken from the ambitious and at times androgynous heroine of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, whom many thought resembled Sweatman.

6 Whilst Sweatman's teacher is not named by Stevenson p 11, exact contemporaries Dora Serle and Elsie Hake noted that the art teacher at Fairlight who likewise encouraged them to train professionally as artists was Jane Sutherland. Dora Serle was married to one of the major opponents of Max Meldrum during the 1917-1918 disputes and although she and her sister were both at Fairlight and the National Gallery of Victoria at the same time, neither Dora or Elsie appears in the memoir of Jo Sweatman.

7 Stevenson p12

8 "Art of the Year" *The Lone Hand* 1 April 1910, p 672

9 Stevenson p 39

10 Stevenson p 41

11 Stevenson p 25

12 Stevenson p 26

13 She was taken to hospital where she enraged the matron and staff by wandering the corridors and fraternising in the male wards, apparently in search of more interesting conversation than the female wards offered. Only the support and attention of fellow tonal artists Alice Bale, Edith Downing and Alma Figuerola kept Sweatman in the hospital and dissuaded her from discharging herself too early. Stevenson p 99

14 Stevenson p 107

15 Jo Sweatman quoted in *Brisbane Courier* 9 January 1932 p 16

16 Ian Burn *National life & landscapes: Australian painting, 1900-1940* Sydney: Bay Books 1990. pp 38, 58, direct quote p 90

17 Burn p 90

18 As an aside one could note that Clarice Beckett, although a Meldrum pupil, conversely never lets the lighting of the Meldrum studio seen in her figure painting and her still lives interfere with her response to the natural light and tones of the landscape.

19 Burn p 50

20 Burn p 58 sees a shallower picture plane as typical of the post-1900 landscape

21 Ron Radford *Our country: Australian federation landscapes 1900-1914* Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia 2001

22 *Argus* 27 May 1947 p 2 This passage gains even more authority when read in conjunction with Ian Burn's political readings of Australian landscape painting as a verification of both a recognisable material reality of the forms of the cultivated Australian countryside and a shared idea of what the Australian nation and character was and represented. The critic segues seamlessly from discussing the beloved physical features of rural Australia to moral characteristics - "clear" "honest" "beauty" to the political – the refusal of alien cults and propaganda.

Janie Wilkinson Whyte (1869-1953)

Janie Wilkinson Whyte demonstrates how women artists could consolidate substantial profiles amongst their contemporaries, create substantial oeuvres across half a century and more, and yet remain invisible in mainstream historical and curatorial accounts of Australian art during the second half of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century. Many of her personal friends are still well known: May Vale, Clara Southern, Janet Cumbrae-Stewart, Jessie Traill and Dora Wilson, for example. Whilst to claim her as a “forgotten genius” may be hyperbolic, her wide-ranging career outlines the myriads of options and opportunities that energetic and ambitious women artists could broker for themselves in late Victorian and Edwardian Melbourne and into the mid 20th century. Chronologically Janie Wilkinson Whyte notably sits in a unique place, linking the era of late colonial art to that of the modernist generations of women artists, herself dying in 1953, just as women artists’ public profiles were generally fading in Australia.

Janie Wilkinson Whyte grew up amongst Melbourne’s colonial elites. Her mother Jane Pullar Whyte and her father Patrick Whyte (a Master of Arts from Trinity College Dublin), were renowned as the headmaster and mistress of Melbourne’s only free public school teaching an advanced science and humanities curriculum in the 19th century and were greatly respected in cultural and academic circles of the day. The family lived in a large freestanding house on Victoria Parade, where Janie presented art exhibitions. Despite giving birth to seven children, her mother also worked full time in the Model School for three decades, and the Whyte daughters were encouraged to seek higher education, with Margaret Whyte joining the first intake of women students at the Medical School at the University of Melbourne and also part of the first fully qualified female graduating class from the University of Melbourne. She later worked as a resident at the Women’s Hospital. Nellie Whyte as Master of Arts was an early female post-graduate student at the same university. All the sisters were also strongly interested in the early feminist movement and sought a professional life outside of homemaking.

Amongst the family’s friends was Louis Buvelot, who became a mentor and teacher to the young Janie. She owned a number of his works and lectured on his life and art, regarding him as an important influence on both her own practice and on Australian art generally. Two years after Buvelot’s death she entered the National Gallery School, studying from 1890 to 1895, winning a special prize in 1892 from Bernard Hall for drawings of hands. Contemporaries at the school included Portia Geach, Jo Sweatman, Helen Peters and James Quinn. After leaving the Gallery School, she launched herself into six more decades of public artmaking. She showed with the Victorian Artists Society, the South Australian Society of Arts and the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors, and was the president of that group in 1921-1922. Her first solo exhibition was in 1898 and her last appears to have been in 1948. She also organised a number of exhibitions in the 1890s and 1900s where she presented her works alongside that of her students.

Other groups she showed with in Melbourne, the Yarra Sculptors Society and the Arts and Crafts Society, were noted for their promotion of applied art, radical at c1900, and Janie taught and exhibited woodcarving, as well as painting. As with many of her contemporaries she showed in the 1907 Exhibition of Women’s Work at the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne. Teaching in various private schools including Lowther Hall, Fintona, Melbourne Girls Grammar (in the years after Jo Sweatman retired) and Strathcona, to name some that are in still in operation, offered a secure income base for many decades.

She was both versatile and prolific, painting in oils and watercolour, landscapes, flower studies, portraits and miniatures, extending to etchings and woodcarvings. Stylistically her works varied from a picturesque late colonial style to the decorative Anglo-Japanese styling and broad brushwork of the Heidelberg circle, from decorative flower studies to urban and industrial scenes. She worked simultaneously in both impressionist and more academic styles across many decades.

In 1903 she took etching lessons from John Mather, as one of the first women in Melbourne to do so. Many of her plates were views of shipping on the Yarra and Port Phillip Bay. After her death, family members¹ destroyed a large number of figurative works with symbolist, mystical and spiritualist themes, finding the images offensive to their own more mainstream religious beliefs and also believing that the works would do little for Janie’s public reputation. However the remarkable secular and feminist allegory of women struggling against the patriarchy, *The Closed Door*, painted in a similar manner in the early 1900s, did survive.² *The Closed Door* is relatively unique amongst late 19th century-early 20th century artworks by Australian women in expressing a political content, although Whyte chose a more rhetorical and allusive approach than did her contemporary Dora Meeson. The large watercolour showed a neo classical semi-nude woman, knocking on a massive wooden door. Whyte told a number of family members that the subject represented women locked out of male-dominated institutions.

Although never a modernist, Janie Wilkinson Whyte did not reject popular modernity and its impact upon the face of Melbourne. She celebrated urban change with her scenes of industrial buildings, cranes, railways and new developments in Melbourne such as the art deco Manchester Unity Building. Wattle Park, the subject of the *Into the Light* painting by Janie Wilkinson Whyte, was another direct response to the modernism of urban life. Founded in 1917 by the Hawthorn Tramways Trust as a destination at the terminus of the Wattle Park tramline, the park had two major functions: to guarantee tram patronage on weekends and public holidays and to provide access to open space for the urban working classes for the low price of a tram fare.³ This concept of a tramway company developing attractions to attract passengers was a new idea that had emerged in the United States in the early 1900s. The name of the park had a purely Australian resonance. After years of lobbying by the Wattle League and other similar bodies, the wattle became the official floral emblem of Australia and part of the Australian coat of arms in 1913. Whereas Wattle



Janie Wilkinson Whyte, *The Patriarch, Wattle Park, Melbourne* c 1921, 42 x 52 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation

Day was originally celebrated as the official first day of the Australian spring in September, during World War I Wattle Day became synonymous with patriotic fundraising drives, when volunteers sold bunches of wattle and wattle badges. Opening in 1917, the link between wattle, the parklands and the public commemoration of war consolidated as a still-growing cluster of war memorials has been erected across the last century and this on the hilltop in the park. The first public planting in Australia of an Anzac Lone Pine, grown from a seed brought back from Turkey, has stood there for ninety years or more.

Naming her work *The Patriarch*, Janie Wilkinson Whyte responded to Wattle Park's implicit formal and ceremonial meaning. This title also touched upon the meta-narrative significance that the nationalist and federation landscape genre bestowed upon the depiction of indigenous trees and plantings as allegorical touchstone. Painted broadly in lush greens, with a glimpse of the Dandenong Ranges in the background that even today confirms the site of the painting looking eastwards from the highpoint of the undulating terrain, *The Patriarch* combines the Edwardian landscape fascination with impressive specimens of gumtrees, and a golden but clear even lighting that harks back to her early studies with Buvelot. Thus the painting stands as an unexpected link between different major eras of Australian art and points to an unacknowledged female presence at both points of the art historical timeline.

There could have been a practical as well as nationalist choice in this subject. Wattle Park was within walking distance from the home on Warrigal Road Burwood of a close colleague, Tina Gowdie, sculptor and painter, the founding President (c1902) of the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors. This society, as the oldest and longest surviving women's art society in Australia, provides one of the most tangible cross-references between Janie Wilkinson Whyte and known and recorded art narratives. Janie shared her clear response to the Anglo-Japanese aesthetic of the plein air group, as well as her marginal position in modern public memory, with many of her colleagues active in the first decade of the organisation, such as Daisy Stone, Tina Gowdie, Henrietta Maria Gulliver and Beatrix Hoile. Some of these turn of the century Melbourne artists such as Gulliver, Gowdie, Hoile, Lalla Corbett Jones, Etta Phillips and Minna Fullwood Watson were close connections of now iconic artists, who however somewhat erased these artist friends and relatives from the "official" narrative in later years.⁴ Sadly it would seem that many of the professional colleagues amongst whom Janie Wilkinson Whyte moved at openings, receptions, recitals and theatre openings, and amongst whom, if press reports are to be believed, she acted as an equal also shared this kind of professional amnesia.

Janie Wilkinson Whyte again raises questions about memory and endorsement within Australian cultural practice, particularly as she now manifests - somewhat erroneously - as unimportant or irrelevant. As documented in the present day with few works passing through auctions and only two public collection holdings, a print in the National Gallery of Australia and a decorative flower-piece at the State Library of Victoria, she would appear to be marginal. But early newspapers document an active career across six decades, and a wide range of reviews:

There was a very large attendance on the three days of exhibition. Miss J. W. Whyte, who studied for several years at the National Gallery, is particularly successful as a portrait painter. Her picture of her sister, Mrs. Martell (Dr. Margaret Whyte), is a striking likeness of the

original; the pose is easy and unconventional, and the brush work vigorous.⁵

One of the most important of the outdoor canvases is *A Bush Glade*, by Miss J. W. Whyte, in which the effect of broken sunlight on the ground is well managed.⁶

Yet three decades ago various family members had carefully preserved works, (beyond the spiritualist paintings) and documents in the face of what they saw as neglect by art professionals. They vividly remembered "a model of confidence, purpose and ethical honesty that was unmatched. Her resolute belief in the importance of art, literature and music ... Janie faced the twentieth century with a confidence and eccentricity that was all her own."⁷ Unlike so many late 19th - early 20th century Australian women artists, whose careers diminished, she stayed active throughout her life, painting outdoors, even within a few weeks of her death and still attending concerts, theatre performances and art exhibitions when she was in her eighties, often wearing dresses and accessories that she had kept since the 1880s and 1890s. Public memory is surely impoverished if she no longer occupies the very real space that was once rightly hers in Melbourne's cultural life.⁸

Dr Juliette Peers



Janie Wilkinson Whyte, *Children on a bush path* 1903, oil on board, 34 x 24 cm, courtesy Davidson Auctions, Sydney

Notes

1 Possibly her surviving sisters and sisters in law

2 Illustrated in Juliette Peers' *More than Just Gumtrees: A Personal Social and Artistic History of the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors* Melbourne: Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors and Dawn Revival Press 1993 p 173

3 <http://www.hawthorntramdepot.org.au/papers/wattlepk.htm>

4 Janie Wilkinson Whyte, as too her sisters and brothers, were also a somewhat distant family connection to Arthur Streeton. She was aware of this, but within the family often denounced his money-orientated attitude, his empire building and what she claimed was his dismissive attitude to women. It could be noted in fairness to Streeton that as an art critic he did not treat women *en bloc* as a single entity a priori inferior, and was more nuanced and receptive towards individual women artists whom he deemed as strong, than many later Australian art critics with a more radical outlook.

5 *Table Talk* 2 December 1898 p 13

6 *The Age* 2 December 1926 p 11

7 *More than Just Gumtrees* p 286

8 Further to this story of reputations and memory, the Whyte family's high cultural status and involvement with other influential and admired cultural and academic figures from the 1850s to c1900s did not survive into the mid 20th century. Janie Wilkinson Whyte was not endorsed by the Meldrum tonal school or by the classical modernists, including Daryl Lindsay, Eric Westbrook and Alan McCulloch or the by radical circles around John Reed and the Museum of Modern art who provided the strongest channels of public endorsement of art in mid 20 th century Melbourne. The State Library of New South Wales' artist list has conflated Janie Wilkinson Whyte with an older Sydney artist with a similar name, showing in Sydney in 1849 and 1872, which dates are impossible with Janie Wilkinson Whyte's 1869 date of birth. Access to catalogues outside digital transcriptions is impossible due to pandemic conditions. One work, a watercolour of passionflowers shown at the 1888 Melbourne International Exhibition, is most likely by the 19 year old Janie.

Bernice Edwell (1880-1962)

Bernice Edwell was one of a number of early 20th century Australian women artists who forged a significant reputation as miniature painters. Edwell and contemporaries including Bess Norris Tait, Justine Kong Sing and Ada Whiting, to name a few, enjoyed considerable public success, although little celebrated by the mid-20th century. Their works were shown in prestigious venues such as the Royal Academy and the Paris Salons and were purchased by both the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria during the first two decades of the 20th century.¹

Whilst miniature painting may parlay into the widespread but ill-informed arguments ratified by high profiled academics such as Angela Philp that much women's work of the past was too insipid, too bourgeois, to ever count as "real" art or deserve to be exhibited or researched by later generations – as if the only true art was cast as self-consciously and self identifiably transgressive – looking back to the artworld of a century or more ago suggests that miniature painting held a very different position from the 1890s to the 1920s. The genre was aligned with the professionalisation and codification of the curating, history, practice and dealing of art within a global Anglo-European-American culture. Miniature painting's close association with a pre-industrial aristocratic era, specifically the 18th century, assigned it profound cultural resonance, when curating and art history invoked an imagined age of civilised hauteur to proclaim its intellectual credibility and demarcate itself from the everyday, banal world of commerce and bourgeois materialism. In France during the 1860s the de Goncourt brothers - litterateurs, collectors, design theorists, curators and historians - had positioned 18th century art and design as a disjunction to the academic mainstream, according it a similar

agency that is usually associated with the progressive and radical art then being produced by the Parisian avant garde.² By the 1900s the brothers' once esoteric views had become mainstream in public and private collections across many cultures. This point of view made an impact in Australia, as demonstrated by Bernard Hall's acceptance of the Connell collection of historic decorative arts into the National Gallery of Victoria in 1914³ and indeed a strong emphasis on 18th century art and design remained central to much of the 20th century history of display and collecting at that institution.

An overview of Edwell's art in the key nationalist cultural journal *The Lone Hand* in 1917 affirmed the rigour and credibility of modern miniature painting and, by extension, Edwell's own productions and her preeminent status in the Australian artworld:

[A]s much is demanded of the modern miniaturist as is demanded of anyone else living by his or her brush. So it comes to pass that the best of our painters on ivory are artists who have more or less distinguished themselves as portrait painters on a large scale. They are, moreover, robust individuals, mentally and physically, and no amount of daintiness in their work satisfies them if strength and character is missing.

Miss Bernice Edwell is a miniaturist whose work and whose individuality bear witness to the truth of these remarks.⁴

A few years before D.H. Souter had hedged his bets by noting that Edwell also painted "impressionist landscapes with equal facility".⁵ The high status of miniature painting in Australia is demonstrated by the range of sitters attracted to the genre. As well as the expected catchment of upper class women and children, many notable early 20th century Australian personalities were painted in that format including philanthropist Alfred Felton, actor-manager Robert Brough, General Monash and other senior Australian and British army officers. A portrait of General Coxen, ADC to King George V, was shown by Edwell in her 1923 group exhibition with Alice Bale and Jo Sweatman.

Born in England in 1880, Edwell came to Sydney as a child with her family.⁶ A trip to Tasmania when she took classes with the influential Hobart plein airist Louisa Swann inspired her interest in art as a profession, and further art studies were at the Royal Art Society in New South Wales in the classes of Henry Fullwood and Frank Mahony during the 1890s. Thus she neatly falls into a double tranche of public amnesia as both a woman artist in 1890s and 1900s Sydney and as an associate of overlooked plein airists and nationalist landscapists. Like so many Sydney women artists of the late 19th and early 20th century, she also studied overseas, in Paris at the Academie Delecluse and Academie Colarossi, sharing accommodation with Bertha Merfield and another Australian woman artist.⁷ After a relatively short period of time in Paris, during which she began to specialise in miniatures, she returned to Sydney in 1904 and was immediately recognised as a leading artist and showed widely, including at the iconic 1907 exhibition of women's work at the Melbourne Exhibition Building, where she won a first prize:



Miss Bernice Edwell, *The Lone Hand*, "The Art of the Miniaturist. Miss Bernice Edwell", by Henrietta C Walker, December 1, 1917, page 9



Bernice E. Edwell, *Portrait of Sybil* c 1920, pencil on paper, 22 x 19 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation

She finds time for craft-work, too, and some of her leather repousse is in the Sydney Art Gallery. She is on the committee of the Society of Women Painters of New South Wales, and she takes a keen and practical interest in all that makes for the welfare and betterment of her fellow women workers.⁸

Working for a short period in Adelaide c 1913-14,⁹ Edwell moved from Sydney to Melbourne with her mother and the two shared a home for a number of years in South Yarra. Amongst her generation, Edwell was somewhat unique in relocating herself from the centre of the Sydney professional artworld to Melbourne, when traditionally artists tended to move in the other direction, including Roberts, Streeton, the Lindsays, Drysdale, Nolan, Adelaide Perry and Treania Smith. Edwell was respected by her Melbourne colleagues as much as she was in Sydney and served as a council member of the Victorian Artists Society 1916-18 and later was a founding member of the highly selective Twenty Melbourne Painters group in 1918, her most high profiled Melbourne alignment, apart from small solo and group shows. She exhibited into the 1930s and travelled to Tasmania to paint with plein airist Mabel Hookey in 1934.¹⁰

Although press accounts and even some interviews in the 1910-1930 period firmly document her professional reach and reputation, Edwell appears to have made little personal impact in subsequent lived memory. Few anecdotes, either admiring or malign, or oral history comments survive to record her presence. Her lack of profile ironically contrasts with her outspoken, feisty and eccentric younger half-sister Mary Edwards/Mary Edwell Burke, who was also a major artist, and equally Edwell's friends and colleagues such as Alice Bale or Jo Sweatman, all of whom emerge vividly from both official and informal historical records. In speaking to Terry Ingram for the *Australian Financial Review* four decades ago, Edwell's relatives offered a fairly bland explanation for her disappearance from cultural narratives. "Her family believed that her conversion to Catholicism made her acutely aware of the sin of pride. This awareness precluded a public display of her work, some of which she destroyed".¹¹ Perhaps Edwell's reticence was driven by distancing herself from Mary Edwards' highly controversial and divisive public life. As with Ada Whiting, Edwell increasingly abandoned miniature painting in her later career to concentrate upon regular sized work, in her case mostly watercolour. Issues with failing eyesight meant that Edwell stopped practising as an artist and retired well before her death in 1962. Like Ina Gregory she was in fragile health and needed to be cared for by family in her later years. This enforced retirement erased any tangible impact Edwell had previously made amongst fellow artists, even though she was still alive.

However something of her network of professional associations can be reconstructed via her remarkable series of portraits of other Australian women artists including Ethel Stephens, Emily Meston, Alice Norton, Florence Rodway, acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales as *The Peacock Feather*, Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, the latter now in the National Gallery of Australia, and this pencil portrait of modernist artist Sybil Craig, as a young woman of c 1920. Restrained yet confident, Edwell's drawing is one of several images of Sybil Craig by notable artists including an oil by Rupert Bunny, a pencil portrait by Constance Stokes and a slightly earlier watercolour miniature by Edwell from around 1915. The earlier image shows a more childish Sybil in a pink dress with her hair loose. The pencil sketch shows a more mature persona in dress and hairstyle; women in the first two decades of the 20th century generally "put their hair up" and wore full length skirts around the age of 16.



Studio portrait of Sybil Craig as a young woman, Broothorn Studios, Melbourne, c 1920-1925

These portraits hung in the Craig home, along with other major artworks collected by her mother, from Margaret Preston to Charles Douglas Richardson to Jessie Laver Evans. The portrait also implies a mirroring of two refined, highly cultured, multi-generational, mother-daughter households in Melbourne devoted to the fine arts and connoisseurship. A landscape painted at the Mitchell family's holdings at Cave Hill Lilydale, listed in one of Edwell's solo exhibitions, perhaps infers a connection to Nellie Melba, who cultivated friendships with a range of women artists in Melbourne in the 1910s and 1930s, and bought many women artists' works.¹² Edwell's reputation is also tangibly cross-referenced by the artists with whom she shared exhibitions including Will Rowell and Harold Parker, as well as Bale and Sweatman.

Edwell herself had no doubts about the significance of her practice or her expertise:

[A]ll that applies to portrait painting must apply to miniature painting, with the addition that the technique of miniature work is exceptionally difficult. They must both be judged by the same standards. They are not, qualitatively, a different thing.

The advice of this experienced artist to the young aspiring miniaturist is "Have a thorough grounding in an art course, for you cannot hope to achieve success in the exacting work without it. Study still life; work in oils and, most important of all, forget for the time you ever meant to do miniature work."¹³

Dr Juliette Peers

Notes

1 The National Gallery of Australia acquired works by Edwell in 1978 by purchase and in 2015 by donation.

2 Natania Meeker "Engendering Modernity: Epicurean Women from Lucretius to Rousseau" in Brooke Holmes and W. H. Shearin eds. *Dynamic Reading: Studies in the Reception of Epicureanism* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, especially pp 133-136. For the de Goncourts' use of 18th century art and design as a pushback from corporate structuralism, positivism and the didactic pedagogy of the public art museum, see Andrew McClellan "Vive l'amateur! The Goncourt house revisited", Tufts University January 2014. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283625961_Vive_l'amateur_The_Goncourt_house_revisited This is not to say that art history now is read by industry professionals and academics as synonymous with the conformity and conservative interests that the de Goncourt brothers despised. They also read Asian art, especially Japanese art, equally as a dissonance to conventional taste, and produced some of the earliest detailed European critical accounts of Japanese print making.

3 Laurelee MacMahon "John Henry Connell: the man and his collection", *Art Journal* 36, 13 Jun 2014 <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/john-henry-connell-the-man-and-his-collection/>

4 Henrietta C. Walker. "The Art of the Miniaturist. Miss Bernice Edwell", *The Lone Hand New Series* Vol. 8 No. 1 1 December 1917 p 9

5 D.H. Souter "Some Women Artists Mainly of New South Wales", *Art and Architecture: the Journal of the Institute of Architects of New South Wales* Vol. 5 No. 5 1 September - October 1908 p 181

6 John Edwell, Bernice Edwell's father, had at least one extra marital relationship. His daughter from that relationship, known variously as Maisie Edwards, Mary Edwards and Mary Edwell Burke, also was a high profiled professional artist, who studied at the Sydney Technical College and exhibited in Sydney and internationally. In 1914 Mary Edwards and her mother had been travelling overseas which suggests they had some independent means. Edwards had been studying art in Paris and in 1914 exhibited at the Salon when aged only 19 (*The Mail* 11 July 1914 p 8) and returned to Australia just before the outbreak of World War 1. Edwards later claimed to be the youngest Australian woman to have a picture at the Salon.

7 This third Australian woman sharing the apartment could possibly be Louie Riggall, who was studying at the Academie Delecluse around the same date.

8 *The Lone Hand New Series* Vol. 2 No. 12 1 November 1914 p 420

9 Bernice Edwell and her mother seem to have left Sydney for Melbourne just before or around the time that Mary Edwards and her mother returned to that city in 1914 and Edwards rapidly established herself as a notable artist in Sydney having work purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

10 *Australasian* 13 January 1934 p 11

11 *Australian Financial Review* 1 August 1980 Terry Ingram (clipping in AAA, State Library of Victoria, no page number).

12 Sadly many of these purchases from women artists including Florence Rodway and Ida Rentoul Outhwaite were deemed to be disposable in the recent high profiled auctioning of selected artworks from Melba's collection. This of course distorts Melba's choices as collector and patron, as well as diminishing the importance that she as a major collector of Australian art placed upon the women whose work she bought, and also diminishes the reputations of the artists themselves.

13 *Australian Women's Mirror* Vol. 1 No. 13 17 February 1925 p 41



Bernice E. Edwell, *Child* n.d., watercolour and opaque white on ivory, 5.3 cm diameter (circular)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1914

Dorothy Stephen (1891-1974)

Dorothy Stephen was born Dorothy Edna Hossack in 1891 in England. Little is known of her upbringing prior to her working as a nurse during WWI. Whilst stationed in Paris, she met her husband Clive Stephen, an Australian doctor working as a member of the Royal Australian Medical Corps.¹ Together they returned to Australia in 1916, stopping in Tahiti along the way. Both Dorothy and Clive had amateur interest in painting. They were inspired by the Modernist art movement taking place in Europe as well as the art of the Pacific islands they witnessed during this trip back to Australia.

In Melbourne Dorothy and Clive settled in Prahran where Clive established a medical practice and the couple continued to explore their interest in art. They began attending George Bell's Saturday afternoon classes and became long-lasting members of the social circle surrounding Bell. Bell and his associates were known for their opposition to the conservatism of the Australian Academy of Art, and Stephen was similarly interested in contemporary and modernist styles of art. In 1923 the couple began to host life drawing classes at their home in an event known as the 'Thursday Club'. These gatherings attracted established and amateur artists

to socialise and share their ideas about art, and were popular right through to the late 1930s.² Bell himself attended some of the Thursday night events.

Stephen was an active participant in the Melbourne arts social scene, frequenting exhibitions, gallery openings and social events.³ The Stephen home seems to have been an artistic and social hub, and the couple embodied a bohemian sensibility. They had assembled a large reference library on contemporary and modernist art at their home,⁴ as both had spent time in Europe and had been exposed firsthand to European Modernist art. They were also deeply interested in "primitive" art styles, and Clive collected masks and sculptures on their visit to Tahiti and later through scouring Melbourne's second-hand stores.⁵ Dorothy and Clive also explored mysticism and hypnosis. Clive undertook what he called 'automatic writing', writing long passages led by intuition rather than rationality, and their home was filled with these and other mystical writings and objects.⁶

This breadth of influences can be seen in Stephen's works, which were regularly exhibited alongside her peers throughout her lifetime. During the 1950s she took part in many Victorian Artists' Society's Spring exhibitions, exhibiting with artists including Roger Kemp, Noel Counihan, Eric Thake and Dorothy Braund.⁷ These exhibitions typified the contemporary group of artists' rejection of traditional, academic painting styles in favour of more modern experimentation influenced by European art. There are also records of Stephen exhibiting at the Herald Art Show in the Treasury Gardens in 1953 and the Melbourne Contemporary Artists exhibition in 1955.⁸ In exhibition reviews, Stephen's works are described as "command[ing] attention", and grouped with works that "play upon restrained emphasis of shape and color...". Exhibited works show she experimented in many different mediums, working across oil paint, gouache, watercolour and collage, and also show her exploring a range of subject matter, including portraiture, still life and landscape.

The oil portrait *Julian* clearly exemplifies Stephen's modernist sensibilities. The forms are sharply outlined in black and the colours used are for the most part muted, punctuated by the deep ochre orange of the subject's hair and tie. Stephen captures deep emotion in the downcast gaze of the subject, a resigned, melancholy expression that is reinforced by the muted colours, the constrictively tight tie around the neck and the stooped shoulders. The influence of Amedeo Modigliani in *Julian* in particular is striking. Many Bell School artists were influenced by Modigliani and would have had the opportunity to see his works in the contentious 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art. This exhibition provided many with novel exposure to modernist European art in Australia and was met with much controversy from proponents of traditional Australian art. J.S. MacDonald famously decried the artists represented in the exhibition as "degenerates and perverts," an example of the open hostility from many at the time to modernist art styles. One of Modigliani's exhibited works that Dorothy Stephen would have seen, *Portrait of Morgan Russell*, stands out as bearing a strong resemblance to *Julian*. Modigliani's portrait was in fact purchased from the



Portrait of Dorothy Stephen c 1930, photograph, (exhibition catalogue, *Clive Stephen Sculpture & Works on Paper including Works in oil and on paper by Dorothy Stephen*, Eastgate Galleries, 1996)



Dorothy Stephen, *Julian* n.d., oil on board, 59 x 45 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation



Amedeo Modigliani, *Portrait of Morgan Russell* 1918, oil on canvas, 99.1 x 64.8 cm, private collection

exhibition by Stephen's Bell School contemporary (and prolific collector) Mary Alice Evatt and her husband Bert,⁹ so she may have had the opportunity to see the work again after the exhibition, once in possession of the Evatts.

The influence of Modigliani in *Julian* is evident in the subject's elongated face, long neck and lowered, empty eyes. The subject's posture, with the head tilted to the side, is especially reminiscent of *Portrait of Morgan Russell*. The colour palette is similar, the dappled soft blues and greys of Stephen's sitter's cardigan

are reflected in the background of Modigliani's work. Although Julian's eyes are downcast, they have the same flat emptiness of Modigliani's figure, below the fine swooped arches of the eyebrows. Notably, like many European Modernists, Modigliani was inspired by "primitive" artwork and masks in particular, an interest the Stephens shared. This may have contributed to Dorothy Stephen's attraction to Modigliani, and her own experimentation with simplified, mask-like faces.

Stephen would have had the opportunity to see another Modigliani portrait with a suited figure at the National Gallery of Victoria, *Portrait of the painter Manuel Hubert*, purchased by the gallery in 1948. *Julian's* elongated face and tightly knotted tie also closely resemble the NGV's work, although this portrait has a darker palette and is without the soft grey blue tones and tilted gaze of the Herald exhibition portrait that bear such striking resemblance to *Julian*. The influence of Modigliani on Stephen's style demonstrates her desire to experiment with new art forms and the modernist rejection of traditional realistic representation. *Julian* exemplifies her technical and creative proficiency within this modernist framework, as she elegantly conveys the sitter's personality and emotion through a simple yet considered use of shape, line and colour.

Julian was included in a 1996 exhibition at Eastgate Gallery in Hawthorn, alongside Clive's sculptures and works on paper. After her death, Stephen's works were exhibited there on a number of occasions, including in the 1989 *Group Exhibition of Important Modern Painters from the 1930s to the Present Day*, with George Bell, Russell Drysdale and Constance Stokes. As well as Eastgate Gallery, her works were regularly displayed at Jim Alexander Gallery throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Originally named Important Women Artists, the gallery was run by Jim Alexander out of his Malvern home and had an emphasis on exhibiting forgotten or undervalued women artists of the recent past.¹⁰ Here Stephen's works were shown alongside artists such as Grace Cossington Smith, Ethel Carrick Fox and Thea Proctor.

Although closely associated with many influential women artists, it is difficult to find information on Dorothy Stephen. Despite being an important figure within Melbourne's art scene and producing an innovative artistic output, much that is written about Stephen is through the lens of her husband Clive and his career as a sculptor. In the second edition of *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, although only mentioned in Clive's entry, author Alan McCulloch nevertheless makes the point of referring to Stephen as "a painter of distinction."¹¹ Evidently her influence and skill as an artist are significant in their own right, and hopefully in the future further research can be undertaken to reveal more about her unique practice and history.

Eliza Burton

Notes

- 1 Ken Scarlett, "Clive Stephen Sculpture," *McClelland Sculpture Park + Gallery*, (2012), 12.
- 2 Scarlett, "Clive Stephen Sculpture," 13.
- 3 Various newspaper articles place Dorothy and Clive Stephen at events including openings at Hogarth Galleries, George Bell's studio, the National Gallery Society of Victoria, Stuart Coe Gallery, Riddell Galleries, and Peter Bray Galleries.
- The Argus*, "Modern Art Which is the Oldest," (Melbourne: Victoria), 8 Sep 1937, 22.
- The Age*, "People and Parties," (Melbourne: Victoria), 7 Dec 1949, 7.
- The Herald*, "Artist Opens New Studio," (Melbourne: Victoria), 5 Mar 1928, 10.
- The Age*, "People and Parties," (Melbourne: Victoria), 20 Feb 1948, 5.
- The Argus*, "Abstract Paintings," (Melbourne: Victoria), 16 Nov 1938, 6.
- The Age*, "Two Artists," (Melbourne: Victoria), 1 Jul 1952, 5.
- 4 Norman MacGeorge, *The Arts in Australia*, (F.W. Cheshire: Melbourne; London, 1948), 125.
- 5 Scarlett, "Clive Stephen Sculpture," 12, 17.
- 6 John Whiteoak and Clinton Green, "Dr. Val Stephen, a 'Gentleman Amateur' in Australian Electronic Music Experiment of the 1960s," *Musicology Australia* (2010) 32:2, 270.
- 7 Dorothy Stephen is mentioned in newspaper reviews for Victorian Artists' Society exhibitions in 1950, 1951, 1952 and 1955.
- Allen Warren, "EXCELLENT ART IN LARGEST SHOW," *The Herald* (Melbourne: Victoria), 2 Oct 1950, 8.
- The Age*, "Arts' Society's Spring Exhibition," (Melbourne: Victoria), 2 Oct 1951, 7.
- Alan McCulloch, "Grouping started a storm in a teacup," *The Herald* (Melbourne: Victoria), 30 Sep 1952, 10.
- Arnold Shore, "Prize picture is art show feature," *The Argus* (Melbourne: Victoria), 20 Sep 1955, 9.
- 8 *The Herald*, "Many women show their art," (Melbourne: Victoria), 9 Dec 1953, 25.
- Arnold Shore, "Accent on design at art shows," *The Argus* (Melbourne: Victoria), 4 Oct 1955, 8.
- 9 Melissa Boyde, "Art & Advocacy: Mary Alice Evatt in the 1930s and '40s," *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (2004) 26:2, 96.
- 10 *The Age*, "Where the emphasis is on the work of women," 9 November 1982, 21.
- 11 Alan McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art: Volume Two L-Z*, (Hutchinson: Melbourne, 1984), 1148.

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- The Herald*. "Artist Opens New Studio." Melbourne: Victoria, 5 Mar 1928, 10.
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Why you should care about the conservation of artworks by Forgotten Women Artists

It's interesting and informative for an experienced paintings conservator to have the opportunity to examine and conserve a group of artworks by a particular cohort of artists. For the Sheila Foundation's Into the Light (ITL) project to date this has been a group of largely forgotten Australian women artists whose paintings date from the 1890's onwards.

The eleven paintings conserved since 2019 for Into the Light have offered me the opportunity to evaluate what has happened to each painting in the group and also, importantly, to perceive the condition of the group of paintings as a whole. The artworks have come from a variety of private collections, largely via auction houses, so there is not one source for the paintings. They have been kept, purchased, stored, transported and displayed by a number of owners.

In terms of the physical condition of all the works, the experience of observation and examination has been unsettling. Consistently the following physical aspects appear; dirt (particularly on the verso), lack of frames, destructive attempts at lining or other structural work, overcleaning including removal of glazes, poor retouching, use of inappropriate or damaging varnishes; distortions and tears in the canvas supports. At any time poor handling can occur at home (for example during hanging of a work), during transport or at the auction house or sale room. Sometimes the painting doesn't sell and languishes in the artist's studio for too long; it is retouched or restored, painted over or cut down.

The effect of these damages on a painting is immediately apparent when it enters the conservation studio for examination; the work is hard to 'read'. It has lost that quality of legibility that allows the viewer to understand both the image and the artist's intention for it.

'Artist intention' is a broadly used term within art and one that creates heated discussions amongst contemporary art conservators for artworks where the artists are still living. For the ITL paintings it can act as a useful (and perhaps less contentious) term for discussion when considering how to address the changes to the original appearance of a work when the artist is long gone and the work has been considerably altered.

Conservators don't always act alone; if it is possible they will seek to understand the artist's concerns and vision through scholarly research from art historians and curators. The latter will write about the aesthetic and stylistic values of the artists; many go beyond the appreciation of the art object to look at its social and political production and the lives of the artists and their connections.

The work of the conservator is to understand the materials of the painting, its method of production and its changes over time. For conservators it is the material reality that assists with the comprehension of the meaning and value of the work; it gives us an idea of the intention of the artist as well as its possible appearance after conservation treatment. It guides the removal of the layers



Painting awaiting initial examination. Poor quality broken strainer, messy turnover edges, very dirty



Aline Cusack, verso, dirt from between the canvas and top stretcher bar

that others have added, including restorations by the artists themselves. Where there is a lack of material information or complete erasure has occurred (for example the complete removal of a glaze from a large area), we stop.

The merit of the painting is hidden by its long history of damages, so that after conservation work the fluency, strength and consistency of the paint layers appear. The image is returned – no longer hidden by poor restoration and lack of care – and it can show the viewer just what the artist was capable of. Glimpses of another artist's influence, a more precise view of an historical landscape, attempts at a new style of painting; these are the smaller effects that can also be carefully observed once the stains and accretions of the artwork's history are removed or reduced. The treatment must be carried out so that the conservation of the painting doesn't become a form of 'rewriting'; that we don't change the original image by means of cosmetic work or refuse to accept the ideology or symbolism of a work.

Every artwork runs the risk of mishandling, lack of care and poor restoration but there is a question that arises when one cohort or group – such as the *Into the Light* paintings – consistently show particular physical characteristics that have already been described as unsettling.

It is hard not to conclude that there is a link between the care of these artworks and their value. The perceived and real lack of financial value of the work of these women painters of the past

contributes to their poor care. It is like the Matthew effect in reverse – accumulated disadvantage. The prices of the women's works were never high to start with, the subjects were often of female interest; they may have been smaller in size. These artists never attained the popularity or received the acclaim of their male counterparts, despite belonging to the same artist societies, art schools, shows and artist groups and artist inter-relations of the period. Nor was their work recorded in the histories of Australian art which have shaped the consensus about which artists and movements are important – although revealingly many received contemporaneous reviews in the popular press, often positive.

The conservator trying to understand the material conditions of a painting when it comes into the studio looks to set up a chronological chart of events. Was the work once framed (is it the original frame); when was it lined or patched, when was it put into another newer frame, when did the cleaning occur and how many times; who performed the *marouflage*¹ from the 1970's or the glue paste lining?² Looking at the *Into the Light* paintings can seem like a sound feedback loop – one decision has begat another decision and so forth until the work has undergone a huge number of quite damaging changes in a short time frame.

The group of eleven works that have undergone conservation examination and treatment for the project only date from the 1890's onwards, and yet show consistently poor care and constant restorations that don't compare to works of similar age held in museums and secure private collections. It is this comparison that



Jessie Scarvell, Puncture to canvas, cracking of ground and paint layer

points to an unsettling social and political history 'written' onto the Into the Light paintings.

The feedback loop or the amplification of damages, the lack of perceived and real financial value, the lack of the artists' popularity after death, means that the work of these women artists has not been able to be objectively assessed. With conscientious conservation treatment and an understanding of the artist's intentions - also gained through the work of art historians and curators - the works of these forgotten women artists and their contribution to Australian cultural and social history can be re-evaluated. Working side by side with curatorial and art historical research, conservation is a primary tool for the rediscovery of the forgotten or ignored. Each artwork is shown to be valuable both by its conscientious conservation and preservation as well as by its artistic merit.

The other contemporary aspect of the return of these artworks to their proper standing is to maintain and promote their good condition. For artworks in private hands, care and handling starts at home and is easy to manage with appropriate advice and guides readily available on the internet from the Australian Conservation Institute (AICCM),³ from Australian museums and galleries and from other conservation sources overseas.

Museums and galleries are well equipped to act for the preservation of works in their care and so are our regional galleries and museums - even if conservation intervention is not always available. Where it is available, though, it can be a primary tool for the rediscovery of the forgotten and ignored. Please support it where you can.

Anne Gaulton

Notes

1 Marouflage is a term used to describe the removal or cutting off of a canvas from its stretcher or strainer and its application to a rigid support. The type of adhesive varies and after its application between the canvas and board this sandwich is subjected to heat and pressure, often using a vacuum hot table. It is generally not considered to be a useful technique.

2 Glue paste lining also involves heat and pressure but in this case a new canvas, rather than rigid support, is attached to the verso of the original support using glue. Similarly the original canvas has been cut off its stretcher or strainer before lining takes place. It has been performed by commercial restorers in Europe and the UK in the past.

3 The Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) is the professional institute for conservators in Australia: <https://aiccm.org.au/>. The website offers a wealth of advice for the care of collections, a directory of conservators, current conservation projects and many other categories of assistance as well as references to other conservation institutes.



Janie Wilkinson White, Bloom on existing varnish applied over losses. The varnish itself has undissolved varnish crystals sitting on the paint surface, suggesting amateur conservation

Notes on contributors

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexandra Mitchell is a Sydney based researcher, writer, artist, curator and program facilitator passionate about ensuring wom*n artists are given the attention and esteem they deserve. Mitchell has a Master of Curating and Cultural Leadership (2018) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours)/Arts (2016) from UNSWADA/UNSW. As Intern for Sheila Foundation in Sydney from 2019-21 she has researched and written biographies on Into the Light Collection artists including Alice Muskett, Aline Cusack, Jessie Scarvell, Annie Potter, Gladys Gibbons, Edith Wall and Erica McGilchrist.

Mitchell has curated numerous exhibitions including *Elizabeth Rankin: Pyjama Girl* at Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA). She has exhibited her work in numerous group exhibitions including at Critical Animals, The Lock Up Newcastle and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery. She is currently working towards a solo exhibition of her own work at The Cottage at Brooklyn.

Anne Gaulton

For Anne Gaulton, in her role as conservator, working with artists, curators and art historians has become an essential and most loved part of her practice. The Into the Light project offers such a wonderful opportunity (even though the artists are long gone) to discover something of their lives, artistic intentions and the arts and social fabric of the day.

In a similar role, but with living contemporary Australian artists, Anne regularly works alongside artists to assist with conservation aspects of art making, long term maintenance and installation. She sees increasingly that the conservation profession itself also has a social context, despite its valid technical and material concerns, both in terms of what is valuable enough to be conserved and who does the conserving. The art object can no longer be treated as a singular thing but must be understood in terms of its complex historical and contemporaneous relations.

Eliza Burton

Eliza has a Bachelor of Arts (English and Cultural Studies and History of Art) from the University of Western Australia and a Master of Art Curatorship from the University of Melbourne. She is passionate about the ongoing research and rediscovery of Australian women artists and completed a thesis exploring gender-focussed art collecting through the case study of the Sheila Foundation. She has also blogged for the Sheila blog.

Currently based in Melbourne, Eliza works as Front of House Manager for auction house Deutscher and Hackett. She has experience in arts writing, exhibition management and commercial operations through her work for Sculpture by the Sea and volunteer work across several Melbourne arts institutions, including Gertrude Contemporary and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

Dr Juliette Peers

Juliette Peers is a creative thinker, historian, curator and cultural producer. Her interests span classical art and design history, popular culture, feminism and cultural politics. They favour unstable, outlying, queer and feminist narratives, engage with images and mythologies of the feminine and traverse film, literature, dance, celebrities, fandoms, royalty, statues, public monuments, fashion and dolls. She taught design history at RMIT University from 1994-2019 and has worked as a curator on projects with public galleries across Australia and in Europe, Britain and North America, as well as employment at the National Gallery of Victoria and the McClelland Gallery.

Juliette has advocated for Australian women's art across three and a half decades. Feminism is central to her practice and her documentation of women artists across the period 1880-1940 is both independent from and more wide-ranging than mainstream institutional-based histories. She has worked on ground-breaking women's art curatorial projects ranging from the major touring exhibition *Completing the Picture: Women Artists and the Heidelberg Era* in 1992-93 to writing for the *Know My Name* book at the National Gallery of Australia 2020-2021. Amongst many catalogues, articles and publications, she has written two histories of the Women's Art Register, 2005, 2015, having been associated with that group since the late 1980s. Her work for the Sheila Foundation extends over a decade and includes writing for the 2012 Cruthers Collection publication *Into the Light*, blogging for the Sheila blog and locating and researching artworks from 1880-1940.

Artworks purchased and restored with funds from our donors 2020

Jessie Scarvell, *Sheep grazing, Coolangatta Mountain landscape* 1895, oil on canvas, 30 x 50.5 cm
Aline Cusack, *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* 1896, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 46 cm
Elsie Barlow, *Girl with her doll* n.d., oil on canvas, 64 x 74 cm
Jo Sweatman, *Landscape* c 1920, oil on canvas, 44 x 39.5 cm
Janie Wilkinson Whyte, *The Patriarch, Wattle Park, Melbourne* c 1921, 42 x 52 cm
Bernice Edwell, *Portrait of Sybil* c 1920, pencil on paper, 22 x 19 cm
Dorothy Stephen, *Julian* n.d., oil on board, 59 x 45 cm

Into the Light Donor Circle members and Sheila Foundation donors 2020

Katrina and Craig Burton
Marilyn Burton
John Cruthers and Elaine Baker
Marisa D'Orsogna
Jennifer Fairweather
Sue McDonald
Alexandrea Thompson

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Back cover: Aline Cusack, *Ship moored in harbour, Sydney* 1896 (verso), oil on canvas, 30.5 x 46 cm
Into the Light Collection 2020, Sheila Foundation

