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A CLOSER LOOK AT ...

NORA HEYSEN AND CONSTANCE STOKES - DRAWINGS



Nora Heysen *Seated Female Nude* c.1928
pencil on paper, 46 x 29 cm



Constance Stokes *Black Stockings* 1968
blue ink, watercolour & wash on paper, 38 x 28 cm

Our exhibition gathers together over 80 drawings from the family archives of Nora Heysen (1911 – 2003) and Constance Stokes (1906 – 1991). As Associate Professor Alison Inglis noted in her opening remarks (which can be viewed on our website) “drawing is one of the most marvellous expressive mediums that humanity has created.” The point of pencil on paper is the moment where the artist’s imagination is at the beginning of its formation as a reality. It is a meeting of the cerebral with the dexterity of the artist’s hand.

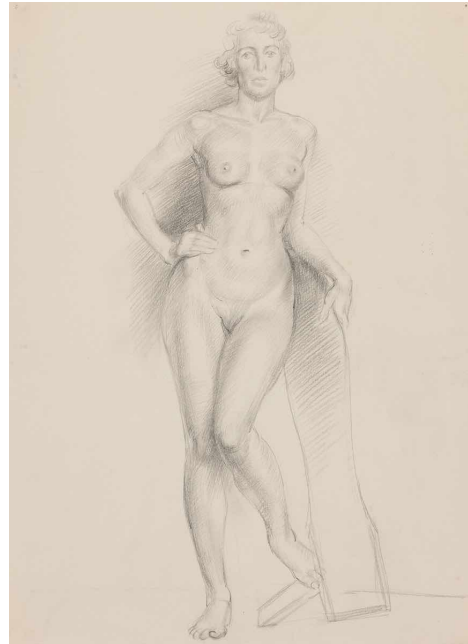
Drawing is the daily tool of the artist, a technical training task to be worked at to assist in the artistic practice. From student days, when drawing is learning about capturing a reality on the page, to exercises for building up paintings and working out elements of composition, to finished artworks in themselves. Drawings allow us an insight and an intimacy provided by the immediacy of the line on the page, and through the various notations and corrections.

Both Nora Heysen and Constance Stokes were talented, ambitious artists who furthered their artistic studies in Europe and were celebrated as successful artists in their time. Stokes was a finalist in the Archibald in 1935 and Heysen the first female winner in 1938. In more recent times, their profiles have again been lifted by the growing balance in recognising female artists in Australian art history.

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Nora Heysen *Standing Man with Pole* 1935
charcoal on paper 38.3 x 28 cm



Nora Heysen *Standing Female* 1935
pencil on paper, 38 x 28 cm

The drawings in the exhibition span each artist's career allowing us to see changes in their work and the development of their own style. There is a beautiful aesthetic in both artist's drawings; the directed gaze and sense of classicism in the figures of Heysen, usually stark upon the paper and the sensuous almost languid figures of Stokes, heightened by her use of colour and sense of the decorative beyond the figure itself.



Constance Stokes *Seated Nude* 1952
black ink and wash on paper, 37.6 x 28 cm

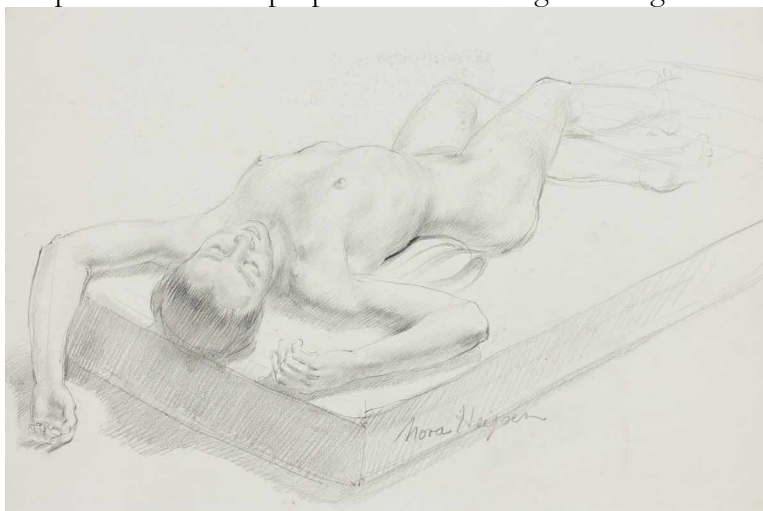


Constance Stokes *Desdemona* c.1975
sepia ink and pastel on paper, 38 x 27 cm

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Nora Heysen's talent was recognised early by her father, the acclaimed artist Hans Heysen. As he noted in a letter to Lionel Lindsay June 1927 when Nora was aged 16 :

“Did I ever tell you – we have another artist in the family! Nora has decided on the profession, and is showing remarkable aptitude. She seems to possess the natural talent and endless industry and concentration to make a success of it ... She draws quite naturally – has a splendid sense of proportion and feeling for design ...”



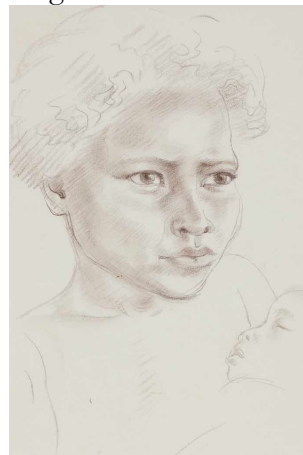
Nora Heysen *Reclining Nude* c.1956 pencil on paper 28.5 x 39.5 cm

Her skill as a draughtsperson was built through dedicated study under a disciplined, academic drawing regime, firstly at the North Adelaide School of Fine Art and later at London Central School under Bernard Meninsky and the Byam Shaw School, where drawing from the live model was a fundamental component of the training.

Her mastery of drawing the human figure is unquestionable and the works in the exhibition show her use of strong modelling and shading and graceful line. Her figures are drawn with authority and fidelity. Heysen moved to Sydney on her return to Australia and in 1943 she was appointed the first female official war artist, travelling to New Guinea where she later returned with her husband, Dr Robert Black, a specialist in tropical diseases. Her ability to capture faces and people with an appealing accuracy and individual personality is especially revealed in these drawings.



Nora Heysen *Trobriand Islander* c.1955
conte with charcoal on paper, 37.6 x 27.5 cm



Young Native Mother with Sleeping Baby, New Guinea c.1955
charcoal on paper, 41 x 25.5 cm

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Constance Stokes studied at the Gallery School at the National Gallery of Victoria under Bernard Hall, where her natural talent shone and she was awarded the Travelling Scholarship in 1929 which enabled her to continue her studies at the Royal Academy in London with Sir Walter Westley Russell and Sir Walter Thomas Monnington and in Paris with Andre Lhote. She was included in the *Twelve Australian Artists* exhibition at Burlington Galleries, London in 1953 and represented at the 1953 Venice Biennale. Her work admired by Kenneth Clark who, in 1949 considered Stokes to be “one of the finest draughtsmen in the world today.” She attended George Bell’s drawing classes, not as a student but as an opportunity to draw from the model.



Constance Stokes *Sunset* 1979 sepia ink and pastel on paper 27 x 37 cm

Many of the works in the exhibition highlight Stokes’s understanding of colour, with the simple ink line embellished with pastel, watercolour and wash. It is intriguing to also view her use of working colour notes on her drawings, showing them to be the artist’s tool.

As Stokes’ notes in her diaries:

“Drawing must show real understanding of what one is seeing – in the way a good sculptor does – an understanding of the complete subject around and through, as opposed to simple contour. ... This is no easy task and required much mental energy and discipline. ... Drawing was my great love ... I can’t help want to use it even now ... It’s so strong in me that I don’t think I’ll ever disregard it...”



Constance Stokes *The Dancer* 1959
black ink, watercolour on paper, 26.8 x 21.5 cm



Constance Stokes *Phyl Waterhouse* 1965
pencil, conte and wash on paper, 32 x 26.4 cm

5 Malakoff Street, North Caulfield, Vic, 3161
Telephone: (61 3) 9509 9855 Facsimile: (61 3) 9509 4549
Email: ausart@diggins.com.au Website: www.diggins.com.au
ABN.19006 457 101

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Indeed, both artists continued drawing throughout their life. Heysen attending life drawing classes into her nineties and Stokes reworking many of her own early drawings later in life, adding colour to build them to complete artworks.



Nora Heysen *From the Last Sketchbook* c.2002
sepia pen on paper, 38.5 x 28.3 cm



Constance Stokes *The Back* 1977
red ink, pastel and wash on paper, 38 x 28 cm

Drawing from the model from a session at age 92
with Judy Cassab, Margaret Woodward and Charles Blackman

For further information on these artists please view the video of our exhibition opening with Associate Professor Alison Inglis in conversation with Stephanie Griffiths, Nora Heysen's niece and Lucilla Wyborn d'Abrera, daughter of Constance Stokes.

The video is on our website <http://www.diggins.com.au>

The exhibition can be viewed on our website and the illustrated catalogue with essay by Dr Catherine Speck, University of Adelaide can be downloaded.

Also please see:

The Cedars: hansheysen.com.au

Lou Klepac, *Nora Heysen*, The Beagle Press, Sydney, 1989

Lucilla Wyborn d'Abrera, *Constance Stokes: Art & Life*, Hill House, Melbourne, 2015

Lucilla's book, *Constance Stokes : Art & Life* (Hill House, 2015) is available for purchase from the Gallery.

NORA HEYSEN AND CONSTANCE STOKES: DRAWINGS FROM THE ESTATES is showing at Lauraine Diggins Fine Art until 2 July 2016.