

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

## LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART

**Tribute to Lauraine Diggins by Ms Antonia Syme  
Director, Australian Tapestry Workshop**



I would like to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land the Boonwurrung and Wurunjeri people of the Kulin nation.

I wish to pay tribute to the many faceted and wonderful woman - Lauraine Diggins.

Lauraine and I served together on the Commonwealth Government's Cultural Gifts Program for a number of years – and I was deeply impressed with Lauraine's scholarship, knowledge, deep commitment to the visual arts and her fearlessness. She brought rigour, passion, insight, integrity and importantly humour, to our often lengthy deliberations.

The Department of Communications and the Arts has acknowledged Lauraine's service and the depth of experience and expertise that she brought to the Cultural Gifts Program. She contributed over 200 valuations during her involvement on the Committee.

She was committed to the best works of art going into major state and national galleries and museums, and she knew who had expertise in specific areas and who did not. She was passionate about helping to build the art collections of the nation to benefit current and future generations. Indeed it was such a privilege to serve on the Program with such talented and

committed members. The dinner banter post meetings was always fascinating – as the wine flowed so did the behind the scenes stories of the artworld – and Lauraine had many.

One enduring memory of a meeting of the Cultural Gifts Program, was when we were meeting in a building newly occupied by the Department of the Arts in Canberra. We were all assembled in a boardroom in what appeared to be a completely empty floor with partitions newly build round the open spaces. During the meeting, when a committee member felt they had a conflict of interest in considering a donation under the scheme, they would have to leave the meeting while the issue was considered. At some point, Lauraine had to leave while we looked over a gift to an art museum that had once passed through her hands. After consideration was complete, Alan Dodge - Director of the Art Gallery of Western Australia – was asked to call Lauraine back in. He poked his head out of the boardroom door to find Lauraine at the other end of the building, so he yelled out “Girl, get your ass back in here!”, and 40 heads appeared above the partitions (totally unseen before) and poor Lauraine had to slink back to the boardroom under stony surveillance. Lauraine came in and sat down quietly beside Alan, then in a low voice said, “I’ll get for that!” We were in stitches.

She was also a generous donor herself and she enriched numerous collections around Australia.

She worked very hard over many years to stake her claim in a man’s world, whether it be the arts, or Australian Football League. The upper echelons of these worlds had been dominated by men for so long and Lauraine succeeded in making her voice heard with characteristic grace, elegance, determination and a wonderful sense of humour.

She was immensely proud of being the first woman appointed to the Board of Carlton Football Club, an achievement I didn’t fully understand the importance of, until I moved to Melbourne and discovered the intensity of the religious fervour of AFL.

I also worked with Lauraine when I was director of Artbank, and we acquired a number artworks from Lauraine Diggins Fine Art for the national rental collection.

I observed how dedicated she was in promoting her artists whether indigenous or non-indigenous, and promoting artists rights. She was fearless in working towards changing the status quo to improve conditions for artists. She had no hesitation in ringing the Minister to express her views. She was very impressive and I learned so much from her.

She was very generous in sharing her knowledge with people.

She told me she was thrilled whenever she saw something special on the wall of an institution that she had helped it acquire. She felt so lucky to be able to live and work in such a wonderful environment, and to be able to give back in her way.

It is fitting that Michael, Nerida and Ruth are carrying her legacy forward in continuing Lauraine Diggins Fine Art – we trust you will continue to flourish.

I felt very privileged to be invited to the family paradise in Wonboyn on the NSW south coast. This is the family’s sacred place where they relax, fish, cook and entertain - and refresh. It is a very beautiful part of Australia, and she and Michael were so generous to share it. Lauraine was always so happy to be at Wonboyn with family, friends and of course dogs, surrounded by the bush and the ocean. I have lovely memories of Lauraine in her preferred attire of bathers and sarong playing with Luca and Camille at the beach, and preparing freshly caught fish for dinner outside under the stars with the sound of waves on the shore. Sheer heaven.

Michael, Nerida, Aidan, Luca and Camille - our thoughts and love are with you.

Vale Lauraine – you will be deeply missed but your legacy lives on, in the many collections of galleries and museums across the nation, and in Lauraine Diggins Fine Art.