



INNOVATIVE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN

2020: online and onsite

LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART



JESSIE SCARVELL 1862 - 1950

Glenalvon, Murrumbidgee NSW 1895

oil on canvas

50 x 89 cm

In the current global climate of shifting attitudes towards gender biases, the celebration and recognition of women artists is growing around the world. Such interest and support of women artists is not a new phenomenon, tending to follow the ebbs and flows parallel with general cultural trends.¹

Australian female artists have been integral to our artistic culture throughout history, with women students at art school², including a significant number of Australian artists studying in Europe³; women artists represented in national and international art exhibitions, competitions and prizes⁴; women as active members of art societies⁵; teaching art students⁶; reproduced in art publications⁷; working as professional artists, including commissioned positions such as Official War Artist⁸; and collected by major institutions as well as private collectors.

However, along the way, many female artists have not enjoyed the career growth, support and recognition of their male counterparts and have become 'lost' in time, a symptom of society's embedded gender discrimination, creating a barrier to opportunities and value. There have been concerted efforts in the past to rekindle the awareness of Australian female artists, through the important work of scholars⁹; major exhibitions¹⁰ and dedicated efforts of supporters and collectors.¹¹ Such efforts are at the forefront of the artistic world today, with numerous campaigns to

raise the profile of women artists, resulting in an increase of exhibitions highlighting female artists and seeing more of their work on the art market.¹² International movements and art collectives also reflect this trend.¹³

It is in this context, as well as a tribute to the late Lauraine Diggins OAM, that this exhibition celebrates innovative Australian women artists, showing artwork from a period of over 100 years.

Women have been a vital part of the Australian art system as career artists; students and teachers. Skillful drawings, such as the life studies by Nora Heysen, with their sense of immediacy and skilled modelling, are indicative of her dedication to a career as an artist, as seen in *Male Nude and Standing Female in Profile*. Many Australian women artists, like Heysen, travelled to Europe, particularly Paris and London, to further their studies, sometimes enabled through various art school opportunities, such as the NGV Travelling Scholarship which was first awarded to a woman in 1908 and then in secession to 1935. Travel opportunities were not without their own limitations, particularly financial, but also those more uniquely placed on women at the time, such as the expectation of a travelling companion for a single female. These artists had a broad influence on their return to Australia, helping to disseminate the ideas they had been exposed to throughout the local art scene, not only through their own work but also through



MARTHA BERKELEY 1813 - 1899

(Portrait of a Young Woman) 1848

watercolour on paper

32 x 25.5 cm irreg.



EMMA MINNIE BOYD 1858 - 1936

(Woman with a Parasol and a Girl on the Beach)

oil on canvas

51 x 68 cm



FLORENCE ADA FULLER 1867 - 1946

Whilst Yet the Days are Wintry

oil on canvas

125.5 x 101.5 cm

teaching others, invigorating Australian art with new ideas and developments. Yvonne Audette has followed her interest in abstract art throughout her career, stimulated by her extensive travels in Europe and America. She is Australia's leading abstract expressionist and continues to inspire and motivate students in Australia today. *Cantanta Giublante* painted in Australia in 2014 divulges her continuing links to Italy. Sculptor Norma Redpath also spent time in Italy, winning a scholarship to Milan in 1961 and acquiring traditional bronze casting skills whilst there.

Drawing and even painting (particularly watercolours) have long been considered appropriate pursuits for 'young ladies', exemplified through the elegant painted fan by Miriam Phillips (later Moxham), the literary inspiration a logical choice for this published poet. Women artists pushed beyond expectations and continue to practice in a wide variety of artistic fields from textiles, including the success of indigenous weavers; photography (from Olive Cotton to Tracey Moffatt); ceramics; printmaking; installation; video; decorative arts and sculpture, represented here through *Torso* by Maria Kuczynska, where the delicate folds highlighted by shimmering glaze defy the rigid porcelain material; Dianne Coulter's figurative work, instilled with social justice, and the abstract work of Norma Redpath.

Other artists who built their reputation overseas are perhaps better known outside their county of origin – including Bessie Davidson in Paris and Sheila Hawkins and Dora Meeson in London. Davidson was appointed a Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur by the French Government in 1931. *Still Life with Bowl of Fruit* makes clever use of horizontal and vertical lines and is evident of her interest in light, atmosphere and colour. Meeson became intimately connected with Chelsea's bohemian art scene, upholding a successful career, and was an integral figure in the suffragette movement. *(Waiting for the Tide)* is reminiscent of her well-known River Thames subjects, with marine settings and their links to industry, labour and poverty at the docks, conventionally a thoroughly male domain.

As well as dedication to her own career, Meeson continued to support her artist husband, George Coates, in a similar way to Ethel Carrick Fox whose paintings reflect the travels and interests of herself and her husband, Emanuel Phillips Fox. This can be seen in *Au Marche*, her salon painting of 1908, an en plein air depiction of the flower markets of Paris, with an impressionistic concern to interpret the modern world through colour and light.

Painting directly in front of a landscape was a key element of the growing Australian Impressionist movement. Desirable landscapes included coastal scenes and the area around Ricketts Point and Mentone were well represented, continuing to attract artists generations later, including Sybil Craig and Bertha Merfield. Many women artists identified with the Heidelberg School, some whose reputations have been revived, including Jane



BERTHA ELIZABETH MERFIELD 1868 - 1921

Mentone 1904

oil on board

34 x 20 cm

Acquired by City of Whitehorse

Sutherland; Florence Fuller and Jessie Laver Evans, whilst others are only coming to light, such as Jessie Scarvell. *Glenalvon, Murrurundi*, was included in the Royal Art Salon of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1895 and is reminiscent of the atmospheric paintings by her peers Charles Conder and Arthur Streeton. Whilst landscapes were an integral subject for the impressionist painters, flowers and still life paintings were themes often favoured by women artists, as an 'acceptable' subject matter and ones perhaps readily available. Rehfish's *Urn of Flowers and Geese* shows her modernist approach with a bold use of colour and unusual framing device adding complexity to the composition.

Portraits were another subject taken up by women artists, who often turned to their family and peers for ready sitters. In *a Churchyard* is a contemplative portrait by the young Constance Parkin of her soon-to-be-husband Eric Stokes, perhaps depicted waiting for his intended to return from artistic studies in Europe, which surely inspired the landscape in this work. Josephine Muntz-Adams was an acclaimed portrait artist, undertaking numerous commissions. (*Portrait of a Woman*) is a less formal work, where Muntz-Adams is able to make full use of her expressionist, loose brushwork and textured paint surface. Artists who were also mothers had an

immediate and demanding subject, as seen in the delightful Frankie Payne depiction of her child at the beach, caught in the sun glare and enjoying the sand running through fingers. After her marriage separation, Payne supported her three sons through her art career. There is an implied question for female artists - the dedication to career against the expectation of family. This gives an added dimension to Sheila Hawkins' *Gypsy Mother*, which radiates strength and power. The most available sitter for any artist is in the mirror, with a long tradition of self-portraits throughout art history. Naomi Simon presents herself as a confident young artist, locking eyes with the viewer with her brush in hand - a suitable pose for an artist hung at the Royal Academy in London.

Besides the popularity of portraits, artists turned to the world around them, inspired by landscapes, often at their doorsteps. Margery Withers followed in her famous father's footsteps, using an impressionist style to depict the streets around her home in Eltham; Isabel Tweddle's *Rooftops, Melbourne* shows

DORA MEESON 1869 - 1955

Waiting for the Tide 1907

oil on canvas on cardboard

41 x 51 cm





ETHEL CARRICK FOX 1872 - 1952

Au Marche c.1908
oil on Baltic pine panel
27 x 35 cm

us the view from her studio window in Collins Street. Clarice Beckett often ventured from her home at dawn or dusk, art materials at the ready, to record the modern world accessible to her in her tonalist style. *Horse and Rider*, *Beaumaris* exemplifies her unique vision, capturing changing suburban life, as she looked to the streets and coastal clifftops of her bayside home.

Thea Proctor moves beyond the scenery to explore modern life. *The Game* is an elegant composition of outdoor leisure pursuits, the vigorous movement captured in the dynamic shapes and strong use of pattern and colour. Contrast this with Marie Tuck's *Playful Interlude*, a sedate Edwardian interior in soft, warm tones where a woman occupies her cat's interest with a feathery fan. Landscapes, rural and urban, also provide an historical account of a particular environment.

Lina Bryans' *Exhibition Buildings* in Carlton as familiar today some seventy years after its painting; Lilla Reidy's *San Antonio Cremorne* capturing the wisteria over red rooftops against the boat filled harbor. Beyond this, painting can capture an essence; Kathleen Sauerbier's *Landscape* (possibly *Fertile Valley*) a symphony of luxuriant green and rich brown.

Indigenous women powerfully capture the spiritual connection to their landscape. Emily Kngwararray is arguably Australia's most internationally acclaimed artist and her reach and influence on the subsequent generations



MAY VALE 1862 - 1945

(Boat on the River)
oil on cardboard
8 x 13 cm

Acquired by Art Gallery of Ballarat



JESSIE LAVER EVANS 1860 - 1943

Portrait of a Young Girl

oil on canvas

46 x 40.2 cm



JANE SUTHERLAND 1853 - 1928

Portrait of Margaret Sutherland c.1905

pastel on paper

29.6 x 18.9 cm

from Utopia is easily found in the work of Elizabeth Kunoth Kngwararray and Genevieve Kemarr Loy. Senior artists Kathleen and Poly Ngal also depict their country in Utopia, a series of dots rained across their canvas indicative of food, flora and ceremony. Emily Kngwararray's *Women's Dreaming* is a delicate painting in diffused yet radiant colour, the rhythmic patterning belying the significance of the marks matching those painted on women's bodies for ceremony.

Young indigenous artists are impressing on the world's attention, inspired not only by tradition and ceremony but the reality of contemporary life in community. Artists such as Fiona Omeenyo and Samantha Hobson, whose striking *Big Fire at Pin-Pin* captures the danger and spectacle of the burning off season at Lockhart River. Similarly, Sally Gabori painted her known world, depicting the bountiful reef-laden waters around Bentinck Island and alluding to the connection between beings and place in her impressive large-scaled work *All the Fish in the Sea II*.



JESSIE LAVER EVANS 1860 - 1943

(Spring Pastures, Heidelberg) c.1910

oil on canvas

46 x 70.2 cm

Acquired by Art Gallery of Ballarat



JOSEPHINE MUNTZ-ADAMS 1862 - 1949
Portrait of a Woman
 oil on canvas
 69 x 59.5 cm



GRACE COSSINGTON SMITH 1892 - 1984
Young Girl with Bicycle 1912
 pencil, watercolour and gouache on paper
 24 x 23 cm



MIRIAM MOXHAM 1885 - 1971
Masquerade
 watercolour on paper
 24 x 51 cm irreg.



ISOBEL (ISO) RAE 1860 - 1940
A Devil Étales 1917
 charcoal, chalk and watercolour on paper
 48.2 x 40.6 cm



ELIZABETH MARY ANN (LILLA) REIDY 1858 - 1933
Alone
 oil on canvas on board
 45.5 x 35 cm

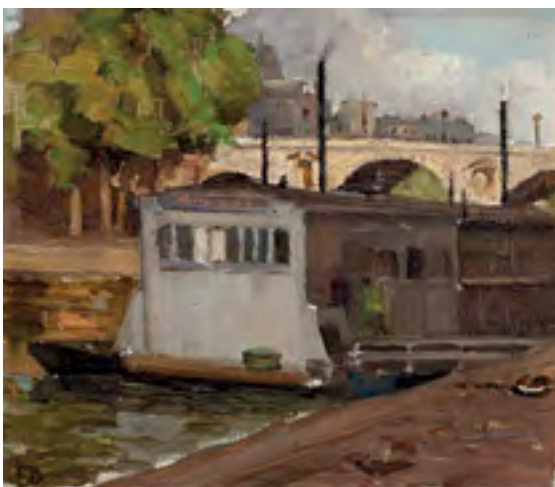


ELIZABETH MARY ANN (LILLA) REIDY 1858 - 1933

Sydney from San Antonio, Cremorne

oil on canvas

70 x 90 cm



BESSIE ELLEN DAVIDSON 1879 - 1965

The Laundry Boat on the River Seine, Paris

oil on cardboard

18 x 21 cm



BESSIE ELLEN DAVIDSON 1879 - 1965

Still Life with Bowl of Fruit

oil on cardboard

46 x 39.6 cm



BESSIE ELLEN DAVIDSON 1879 - 1965

Still Life with Pears
oil on canvasboard
52 x 45 cm



CLARICE BECKETT 1887 - 1935

(Keefer's Jetty) c.1925
oil on pulp board
29 x 42 cm



THEA PROCTOR 1879 - 1966
The Game 1926
 hand coloured woodcut on paper
 15.5 x 15.2 cm



THEA PROCTOR 1879 - 1966
The Sewing Basket
 watercolour on paper
 13.5 x 14 cm



THEA PROCTOR 1879 - 1966
The Peep Show 1928
 woodcut
 21.9 x 20.4 cm



NORA HEYSEN 1911 - 2003

Still Life with Onions 1927

oil on canvas

45.5 x 61 cm



FRANCES VIDA LAHEY

1882 - 1968

Customs House, Hobart 1929

oil on canvas laid down on

composition board

41 x 51 cm



FRANCES (FRANKIE) MALLALIEU PAYNE
1885 - 1975

Child on a Beach 1930
 oil on canvas
 27 x 21 cm



CONSTANCE STOKES 1906 - 1991

In a Churchyard 1933
 oil on canvas
 61 x 61 cm



SHEILA HAWKINS 1905 - 1999

Gypsy Mother c.1939
 oil on canvas
 60 x 49 cm



JEAN SUTHERLAND 1902 - 1978

European Scene
 oil on canvas board
 51 x 37 cm



DOROTHEA FRANCIS 1903 - 1975

(Fairy and Robin)

watercolour on paper

16 x 24 cm

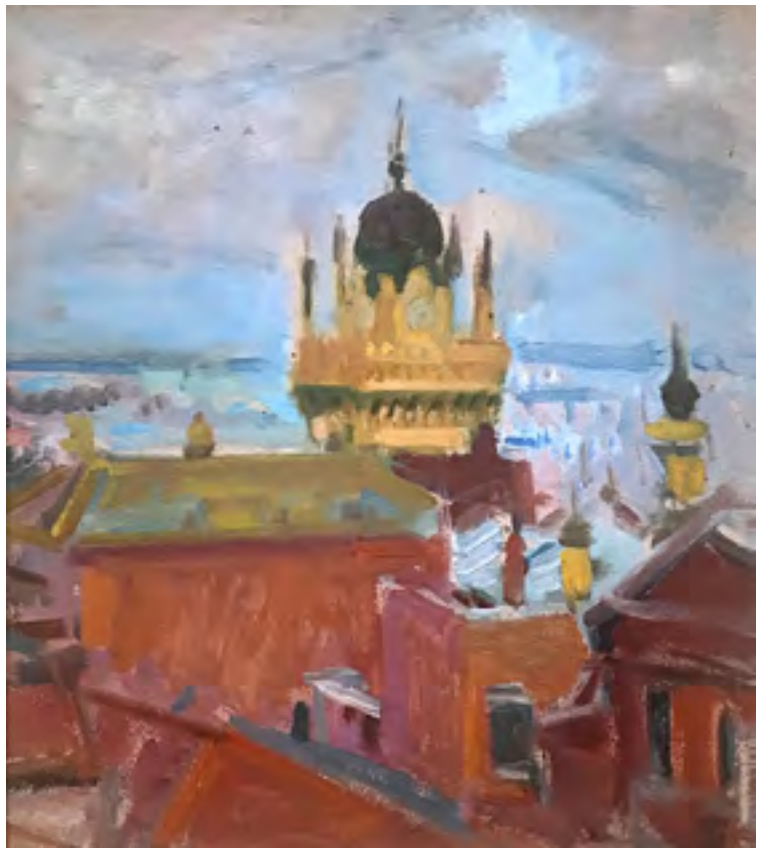


NANCY WILMOT BORLASE 1914 - 2006

Pioneers c.1939

oil on board

24.5 x 37 cm



ISABEL TWEDDLE 1875 - 1945

Rooftops, Melbourne

oil on artistboard

43 x 38 cm



**KATHLEEN SAUERBIER
1903 - 1991**

Landscape

(possibly Fertile Valley) 1935

oil on canvas on board

54 x 68 cm



ALISON BAILY REHFISCH 1900 - 1975

Urn of Flowers with Geese

oil on board

53 x 36 cm

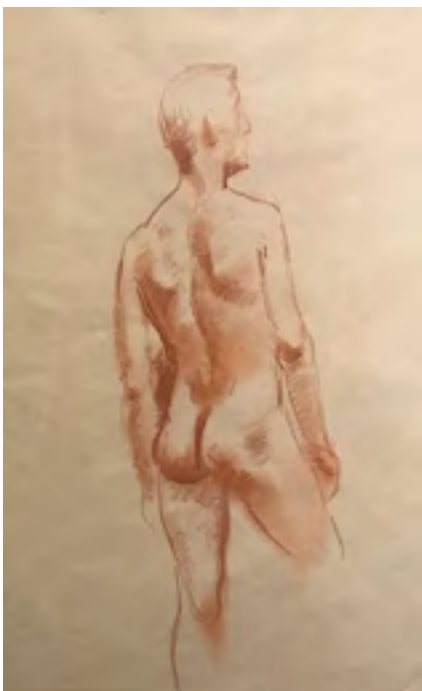


NAOMI SIMON

Portrait

oil on canvas

54 x 44 cm



NORA HEYSEN 1911 - 2003

Male Nude c.1956

conte on paper

46 x 31.5 cm



LINA BRYANS 1909 - 2000

Exhibition Buildings 1945

oil on board

50 x 60 cm



DIANNE COULTER 1948 -
Cousin Elizabeth N.T.
 ceramic, paint, cloth
 167 x 55 x 55 cm



MARIA KUCZYNSKA 1948 -
Torso
 black fired ceramic
 height: 51 cm



NORMA REDPATH 1928 - 2013
Preliminary Idea for Dawn Sentinel c.1961
 bronze, edition 4/9, posthumous cast
 25 x 8.5 x 6 cm



NORMA REDPATH 1928 - 2013
Midnight Sun 1967
 bronze, artists proof only
 8.5 x 14 cm

**AN IMAGE OF THIS IMPRESSIVE ARTWORK
 IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA SALLY GABORI c.1924 - 2015

All the Fish in the Sea II 2005
 synthetic polymer on linen
 195 x 420 cm

Due to the failure of the holders of copyright to provide consent to publish the monumental work of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda (Sally Gabori) called *All the Fish in the Sea II*, we are sadly unable to reproduce this particularly impressive work by the

artist. There are two known works of this scale in the series also painted in 2005, that are held in the National Gallery of Victoria and University of the Sunshine Coast public collections. Images of these works called [All the Fish](#) and [All the Fish in the Sea](#)

are readily available online and indeed the work from the National Gallery of Victoria's collection was extensively displayed as a digital interpretation last year on a big screen which wraps the façade of a Federation Square building.



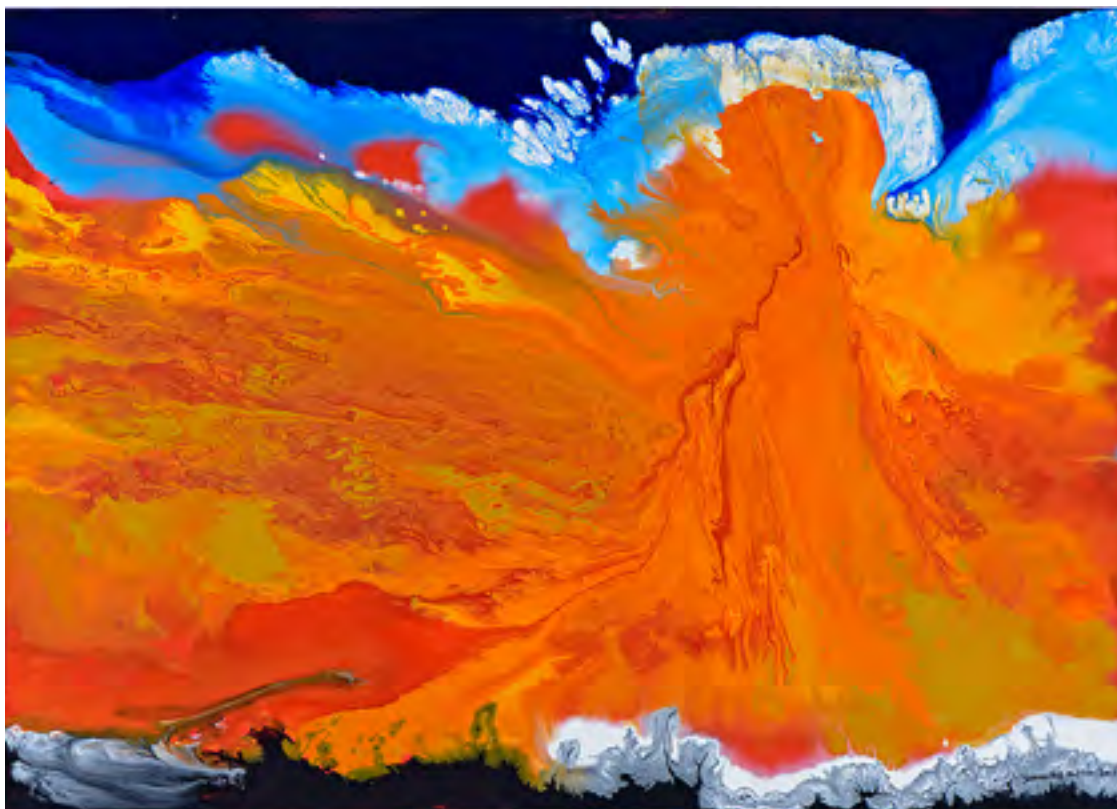
EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY c.1910 - 1996
Women's Dreaming 1993
 synthetic polymer on canvas
 179 x 105 cm



KATHLEEN PETYARRE c.1940 - 2018
Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming Sandhill
Country After Hailstorm 2003
 synthetic polymer on linen
 152 x 152 cm



YVONNE AUDETTE 1930 -
Cantata Giubilante 2014
 oil on plywood
 92 x 122 cm



SAMANTHA HOBSON 1981 -
Big Fire at Pin-Pin 2017
 synthetic polymer on canvas
 100 x 140 cm

FOOTNOTES:

1. Such as women's right to vote; the rise of feminism in the 1970s and the current global demand for women's rights, equality and balance of power.
2. By the early 1900s, women outnumbered men at the NGV School, Melbourne and Countess Report 2019 cites 75% of art school graduates are women.
3. For example, Bessie Davidson at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, Paris; Alison Rehfisch at the Grosvenor Art School, London; Constance Stokes at the Royal Academy School, London; Nora Heysen at the Central School of Art and Byam Shaw School, London; Norma Redpath at the Academia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan; Yvonne Audette at the National Academy of Design, New York;
4. Including the National Gallery of Victoria Travelling Scholarship which was awarded to a female student for the period spanning 1908 – 1935 (Constance Jenkins, 1908; (Constance) Winifred Honey, 1911; Ethel Bishop, 1914; Marion Jones, 1917; Adelaide Perry, 1920; Jean Sutherland, 1923; Nancy Guest, 1926; Constance Parkin (Stokes), 1929 and Eileen Robertson, 1932. The most famous portrait prize in Australia, the Archibald has been won by a woman ten times in its nearly 100 year history, the first being Nora Heysen in 1938; there have been ten women awarded the Wynne Prize including Gloria Petyarr in 1999. Perhaps the first significant exhibition of Australian art on the international scene was the Exhibition of Australian Art in London, held at Grafton Galleries in 1898 which included around a dozen female artists including Jessie Scarvell, Jane Sutherland and Emma Minnie Boyd. The following Australian women artists have represented Australia at the Venice Biennale: Rosalie Gascoigne, 1982; Jenny Watson, 1993; Saimryn Gill, 2013; Fiona Hall, 2015; Tracey Moffatt, 2017.
5. For example, the following women were elected to the council of the Victorian Artists Society – Jane Sutherland, Clara Southern, May Vale, Josephine Mintz-Adams. Mary Alice Evatt was the first female representative on the board of a state institution when she was appointed trustee at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1943.
6. Dorrit Black established the Modern Art Centre, Sydney in 1931, Grace Crowley promoted modern art through the Crowley-Fizelle school in the 1930s; Yvonne Audette continues to inspire students today.
7. The work of Australian women artists featured regularly in *Art & Australia* and *The Home*, including Thea Proctor's *The Rose* on the cover in 1927. Rare opportunities arose for female graphic artists through publications such as *Punch* and *The Bulletin* which featured illustrations by Ruby Lindsay.
8. Nora Heysen was appointed as the first female war artist in 1943, followed by Stella Bowen and then Sybil Craig in 1945. Wendy Sharpe was the fourth female appointed in 1999.
9. Examples include Rosalind Hollinrake's scholarship surrounding Clarice Beckett; the work of Juliet Peers over several publications including *More Than Just Gumtrees*; Janine Burke's examination of Joy Hester, as well as the exhibition and resulting publication *Australian Women Artists 1840-1940*; Joan Kerr's encyclopedia, *Heritage: The National Womens Art Book*.

10. The landmark exhibition *100 years of Australian Women Artists* in 1975 in acknowledgement of the first International Women's Year was followed by a series of exhibitions held in 1995 organised by Joan Kerr. In 1994, Jane Hylton curated *South Australian Women Artists*. The 1970s saw a number of major solo exhibitions by women artists including Grace Cossington Smith, Grace Crowley and Dorrit Black – who were little known prior to this.
11. Promotion of women's art through the National Women's Art Exhibition, 1995; the establishment of the women's art register; the ongoing work of the Cruthers, through their collection of women artists and through Sheila: A Foundation for Women in Visual Art
12. Such campaigns include *Know My Name* at the National Gallery of Australia and major exhibitions focusing on female artists (collective or individual) including: *New Woman*, Museum of Brisbane 12 Sep 2019 – 15 March 2020; *Becoming Modern Australian Women Artists 1920 – 1950*, Art Gallery of Ballarat 18 May – 4 Aug 2019; *Bessie Davidson and Sally Smart*, Bendigo Art Gallery 20 March – 26 July 2020 and on the international stage include Emily Kngwarray in New York, March 2020 and *Artemesia Gentileschi* at the National Gallery, London 2 Dec 2020 - 24 Jan 2021.
13. Women's Art Movement; the Guerrilla Girls; Feminist Art Coalition; Sheila Foundation; Countess

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- The Countess Report
- sheila.org.au
- www.awm.gov.au for information on Nora Heysen, Stella Bowen, Sybil Craig and Wendy Sharpe

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