



PICTURE: MARCO DEL GRANDI

Jenny Sages's Archibald entry, *My Jack*, is a portrait of her late husband. The Sageses together (top right) in the late 1970s, and the artist in her Double Bay studio.

Portrait of love endures in long days of loss

By ADAM FULTON

JENNY Sages has made the finals of the Archibald Prize for portraiture 19 times, but none of her paintings has meant as much to her as *My Jack*.

The renowned Sydney artist painted the portrait of her husband of 55 years before he died in October.

But even if she won the prize this year, it would be little comfort, she said. "At this stage,

when Jack's gone, I feel that everything's trivial . . . I hurt. I grieve."

Sages, 77, was reluctant to enter the painting but was persuaded by her daughter.

"That portrait means more than anything to me," she said.

Her husband helped her to become an artist.

"He facilitated everything that I did . . . Every Archibald, every Wynne [Prize], we'd have a very exciting time together—

"Wow, wacko, we're in!" I'm not joyous this time.

"Everything has changed . . . The only way I survive this is because I have my work, I continue the work. I don't want to let him down, for one. But the other one is that while I'm working, I'm peaceful."

Sages was born to Russian parents in Shanghai and came to Australia with her family in 1948. She did not become a full-time artist until her early 50s.

Her work was recently exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. She said of the Archibald: "I never think I'm going to win. That's not what I do it for."

Sages entered the Wynne art prize this year with a work that complements *My Jack*, called *There Must Be Light at the End of the Tunnel*. It did not make the finals.

Jack Sages was unwell from a progressive condition when his

wife began work on his portrait in the sun outside their home in Sydney's eastern suburbs. She had drawn him many times, she says, but never painted him.

"Jack's portrait was very easy for me to do because I knew him so well," she said. "He was sitting on the verandah because he was ill, with an oxygen thing in . . . I certainly didn't think he was going to die."

He was 85. "I'd swap anything I do to have him back."