

A brush with rejection leads to Sages advice

ART: JENNY SAGES

“TELL me I’m not useless,” artist Jenny Sages says passionately. It’s her greeting. She hasn’t even said hello.

The acclaimed Sydney painter and printmaker looks gutted. Her portrait of writer Kate Grenville has been rejected from this year’s Archibald Prize, and Sages has just found out. The finalists will be announced at the Art Gallery of NSW today.

If Sages had been on that list, it would have been her 21st time as a finalist in the prize she came within a whisker of winning last year with her self-portrait following the death of her husband Jack. *After Jack* won the People’s Choice.

Sages has been rejected from the Archibald just once before, but she dismisses that occasion with a wave of her hand. It was a bad painting,



she says. Not like the one of Grenville, which she was pleased with.

And so was Grenville. “Kate said: ‘I’ve had portraits done before. But it was like there was glass in front and it was (the artist’s) portrait, not mine. But this is my portrait,’” Sages says.

The painting, titled *Kate*, shows the writer sitting on a landing on the Hawkesbury River, the setting for her book *The Secret River*.

Sages spent the entire month of February finishing

the painting in her studio at her eastern suburbs home.

“The neighbours said: ‘What’s happening, the light is on all that time,’” Sages says.

Although Sages sees portraiture as a sideline to her abstract and landscape practice, she has twice won the Portia Geach Award for women’s portraiture.

On Saturday, a major showing of Sages’ portraits goes on view at Mosman Art Gallery in an exhibition titled *Jenny Sages, Paths To Portraiture*.

The exhibition reveals some of Sages’ process by juxtaposing her finished portraits with the relevant preparatory drawings.

ELIZABETH FORTESCUE

Jenny Sages, *Paths To Portraiture*, Mosman Art Gallery, cnr Art Gallery Way and Myahgah Rd, Mosman; March 16-May 19, free, 9978 4178, mosmanartgallery.org.au



Jenny Sages. Left, a preparatory sketch for her Archibald entry. Main picture: Phil Blatch