

From World War II to the Archibald: landscape master Guy Warren going strong at 94
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Guy Warren denies being Australia's oldest working and exhibiting artist, but he's willing to concede that he may be our best looking. At the grand age of 94, he still paints and draws several days a week in his Leichhardt studio.

"I feel 40," he says. "What the hell, age doesn't really matter."

In the past 18 months, Warren has been travelling in Ecuador, Alice Springs and remote NSW. *The Dust of Memory*, his exhibition of landscape paintings drawn from his travels, opens this weekend at Olsen Irwin Galleries.

Guy Warren with the portrait that won him an Archibald in 2004. *Photo: Adam McLean*

The Archibald winner, who was once mentored by Lloyd Rees, began seriously drawing during World War II, when he was a Digger in Bougainville, New Guinea.

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"In those colonial days, the locals would pose for me to draw them in exchange for tobacco or cigarettes." he said.

On one occasion Warren's pockets were empty so he offered the man a tin of talcum powder from his kit. The man tipped the whole tin out onto his palm and began to draw with the white powder on his black skin, decorating his body. It was then it dawned on Warren that he wanted to pursue painting the figure not as a separate entity, but as part of the landscape.

After 75 years as a practising artist of the great Australian landscape tradition, Warren has outlived most of his contemporaries; Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd, as well as those he studied with at National Art School – Robert Klippel, John Coburn and Bert Flugelman.

He is in far better shape than his painting apron, now heavy with years of paint and strung around him by threadbare ties. The Art Gallery of NSW has already requested it for their collection – once he has finished using it, of course.

Warren puts his enduring tenacity as an artist down to curiosity and self-doubt.

"It's an affliction ... and sometimes it hurts," he said. "Sometimes you wonder if one couldn't go somewhere and get rid of it, if you had a good doctor."

In the 1950s, while living in London and working with Fred Williams, Warren became disillusioned with painting London scenes ("It was too pretty") and began to paint his memories of New Guinea.

Watching a small black and white television one night, he saw a documentary on Papua New Guinea and called the BBC to ask for some photographs from which to paint. The next day Warren received a call from David Attenborough – then an unknown filmmaker – who lent him a series of photographs in return for a painting. The two have kept in touch ever since.

Warren has never been an en plein air painter, but prefers to paint from memory and experience.

"The wind blows your easel down, the mosquitos come and the flies end up in your sticky paint – I think it's for the birds," he says.

At this point in his career, he might be painting from a memory that goes back a day, a month or 70-odd years.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/from-world-war-ii-to-the-archibald-landscape-master-guy-warren-going-strong-at-94-20150920-gjq0ao.html#ixzz3mWXH4pqD>