THE 100TH YEAR GUY WARREN





FRONT Guy Warren at 99, Greenwich, NSW Photo courtesy Riste Andrievski 16 March – 10 April 2021



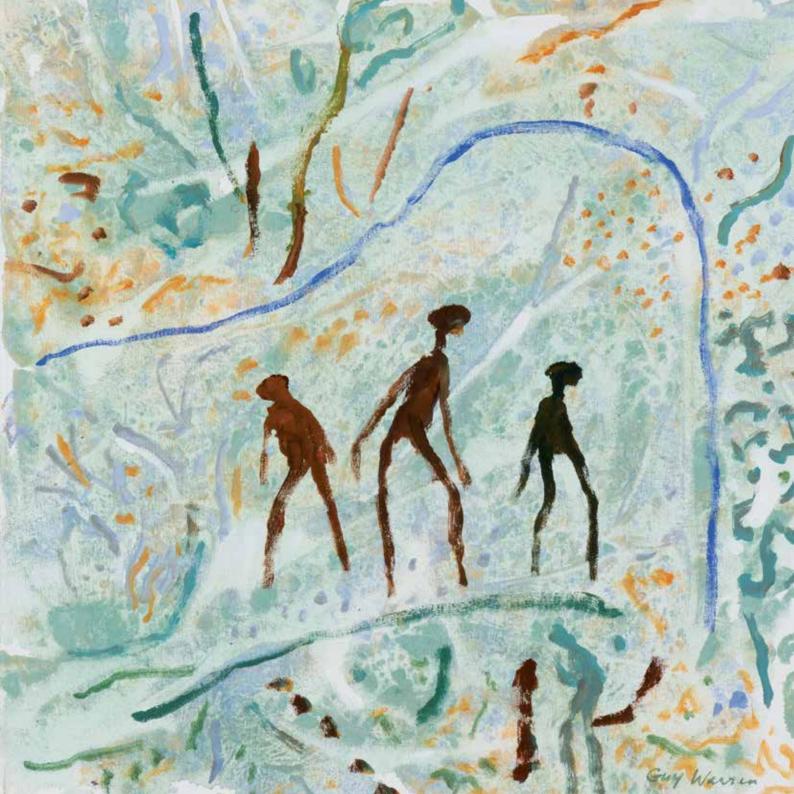


02

ABOVE

01 Guy Warren in his Greenwich studio, Sydney, 1960's Photo courtesy Jill Crossley 02 Guy Warren in his Leichhardt studio, Sydney, 2018 Photo courtesy Ella Burrett

> OPPOSITE Bush walk 2015 acrylic on canvas 60 x 60 cm



Beneath the wide skies of the open plains around Goulburn, a motor car navigates a journey of 25 miles or so along a dirt road with a four-year-old Guy Warren as a passenger. The precise circumstances are hazy, likely it was his aunt's car, one of the few such vehicles in the town in those days, but the destination remains vivid in the artist's memory. The car stops and passengers alight, and the boy is transfixed by a vast sheet of water stretching out towards a distant horizon. A wind must have come up, and ripples of white caps play across the surface of what he would be told was Lake George.

Warren's recollection of this moment of his first encounter with such a body of water - 'the white caps, the white caps!' - over 95 years later, was triggered by a recent return to that place. It speaks to a lifetime of a sensibility attuned to immersion within landscape and a willingness to be drawn physically and emotionally to attempt to represent this experience in art making.

In his one-hundredth year, Guy Warren manifests an urgent curiosity for the world and for the way of the artist to bring forward a contemporary personal and respectful response. Respectful is a tricky word in describing contemporary art practices when much of the art of the past century has been about challenging, defying, and rejecting to make 'new'; Warren's sense of respect is about listening and taking time but also being respectful to the materials of his art making. The thick wet paper or unprimed linen, the long-handled brushes with their bulbous tips that explode soft pools of luscious coloured paint, and the confidence of placing an unexpected hue against another. This process is one that respects the honesty of materiality.

With his mother and father, a violinist and pianist respectively, Warren could have taken a path into music or writing but a sense of responsibility to contribute to the household saw him leave school early. Learning a trade as a 'copy boy' within the busy office of the Bulletin at the bottom of George Street, Sydney, the teenage Warren was mentored by commercial artists and editors and encouraged to attend evening classes in life drawing at J.S. Watkins Art School in nearby Pitt Street.Such a conventional pathway into art was interrupted by the outbreak of war, which saw him firstly train in the dense sub-tropical jungle of South East Queensland and then serve, with the AIF in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.

There, at one of those moments between duties that soldiers find, he brought his early instruction in figure drawing to a group of carefully observed portraits, done on the quiet, of Japanese soldiers being held as prisoners of war, his sensitive line capturing the indifferent arrogance of one and the empty bewilderment of the other.¹ He chose not to be seduced by his own capacity for realism and instead, upon returning to post-war Sydney, took a repatriation place studying art at East Sydney Technical College.² There he was taught as much by fellow students Tony Tuckson



Guy Warren's WWII drawings, Australian War Memorial, Canberra

and Klaus Friedeberger, whose young lives were also shaped by their war experience. Tuckson as a pilot in the RAF who had been posted to Darwin, and Friedebeger as a Berlin born Jew who had escaped to Australia as a refugee on the Dunera and spent time in the intermment camp in Hay where he was taught by ex Bauhaus tutor Ludwig Hirschfled Mach. For Warren, their lived experiences of art schools, collections and museums beyond the then small art world of Sydney and their drive towards the possibilities of abstraction were crucial.

What he did not forget from his war time experience was being immersed in rainforest. Perhaps it was his early exposure to the windy wool grazing plains around Goulburn, NSW, that had been so denuded of their original eucalypt forest by the first settlers, that drew him to that lush intensity. But it was also witnessing and meeting the Highland people of PNG with their extraordinary sense of personal adomment and embellishments of brilliantly coloured feathers and markings that so directly and creatively expressed their cultural knowledge and connection to country. Warren realised that this conveyed a deep sense of how one could be in the world. This reflection returned to him when, after finally making it to London, he found himself unable to find a meaningful subject in the well-worn grey streets. It was a flash of a sequence from the PNG Highlands on a black and white television set, and a subsequent meeting and ongoing connection with the young filmmaker, David Attenborough, who had just been there, that propelled him to make his first major series.

He has gone on and sought out other such places, some remote and others becoming so familiar that it is possible for the artist to be in them, in his mind. These include: the escarpment above Wollongong, the Shoalhaven River (which he travelled by



Guy & Arthur Warren, Shoalhaven River, 1939

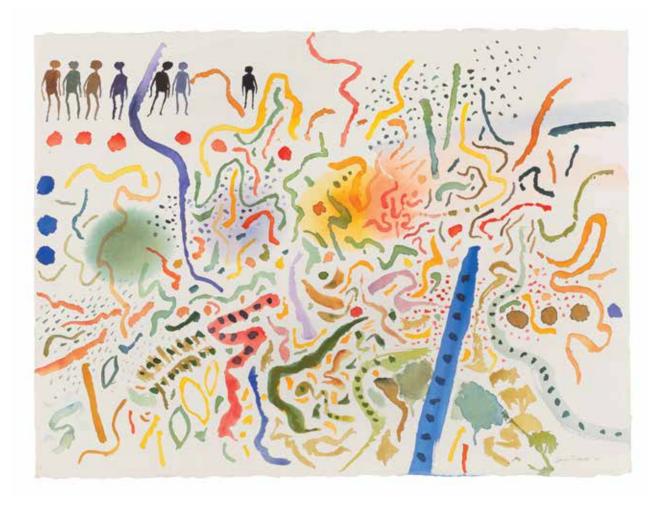
cance and camped for weeks on the eve of WWII), the central deserts of Australia, his rainforest studio at Jamberoo, NSW, and the remnant bush around Greenwich, his Sydney home of almost 60 years.

This drive to express a genuine sense of connection to the world, has continued with sketchbooks filled during the recent COVID-19 lockdown. His new series of freewheeling paintings are drawn from this life's journey, shared and vividly imagined.

Virginia Rigney

Senior Curator Visual Art, Canberra Museum and Gallery 2021

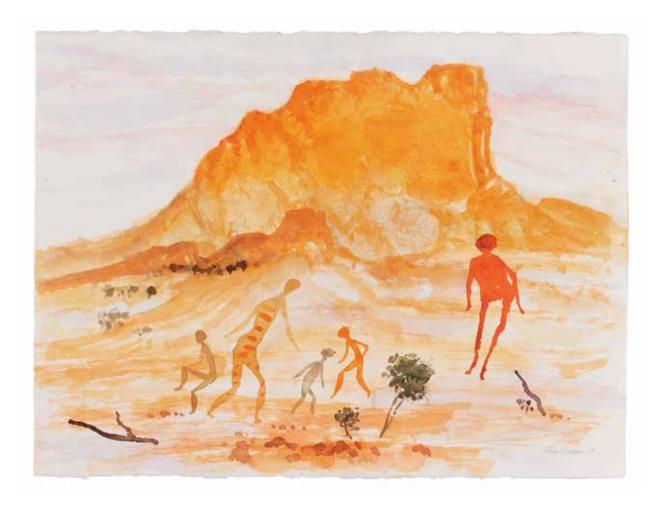
WORKS ON PAPER



Time out #1 2020 watercolour on paper 57 x 77 cm



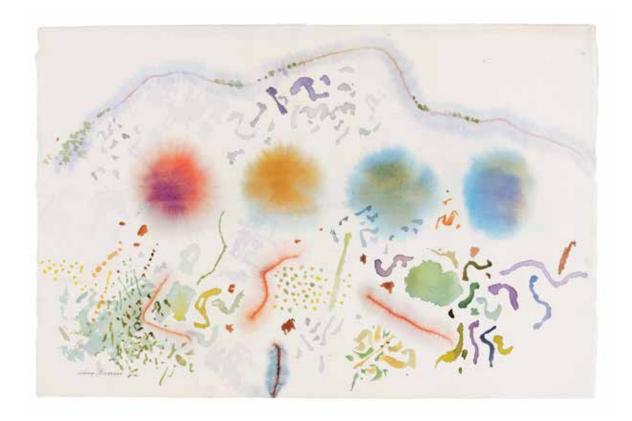
Echoes #2 2020 watercolour on paper 58 x 77 cm



Big yellow rock with figures near Alice 2020 watercolour on paper 58 x 77 cm



Bend in the track 1 2020 watercolour on paper 38 x 57 cm



Bushmarks 2020 watercolour on paper 38 x 57 cm



Strong land 2020 acrylic on paper 57 x 76 cm



Flight 2020 watercolour on paper 58 x 77 cm



Much has been written about the style of artists in old age, particularly in the cases of Titian, Michelangelo, Corot or Monet, and in Australia Lloyd Rees. There are often physical difficulties that come with age: diminishing strength or weaker eyesight, and sometimes particular afflictions, such as Poussin's shaking hand or Renoir's arthritis. But it is not only constraints that age can bring with it; there can be a kind of freedom as well, which arises from confidence and long experience, clarity about what really matters and increasing indifference to the opinions of others. The style is often lighter and sparer, more economical, meditative and sometimes elegiac.

Partly these things arise from the cumulative perspective of time. As we grow older, we see the world through the filter of our earlier experiences; we are not doing something for the first time, but for the second, the tenth or the twentieth; eventually we can feel as if we have had several successive existences, in different social roles, in various cities or countries, in the company of different partners and friends. The very young are still in their first life, discovering the world for the first time. Everything is vivid and visceral but also barely understood, lacking distance and the space for reflection. With time, things become more abstract, steeped in thought and memories. Proust imagined the very old as stilt-walkers, balanced on top of the ever-taller stilts of their past life.

Guy Warren, at the remarkable age of 100, is older than all of the artists mentioned, and has lived through several lives both as a man and as a painter. His pictures view the world with a corresponding sense of distance and perspective, and with a combination of meditative detachment and innocent wonder. The paintings are landscapes, but they are lightly brushed in, as though capturing memories or fleeting impressions. There are deserts, rocky mountains, forests and paths winding among the trees, but they are reduced to an abbreviated, almost symbolic notation, as are human artefacts such as a house or a boat.

Most intriguing are the figures that appear in nearly all of the pictures. They are distinctly characterised and expressive in their postures and movements, and yet at the same time insubstantial and weightless. Their feet are small and barely suggested, since they do not stand on the ground and their hands likewise vestigial since they do not use them to perform any tasks. There is in fact barely any ground to stand on, nor is there anything that hands could take hold of in this airy world of floating appearances. The figures themselves drift, suspended, sometimes recalling the mute silhouettes of prehistoric cave painting.



Mask 2020 acrylic on canvas 30 x 40 cm

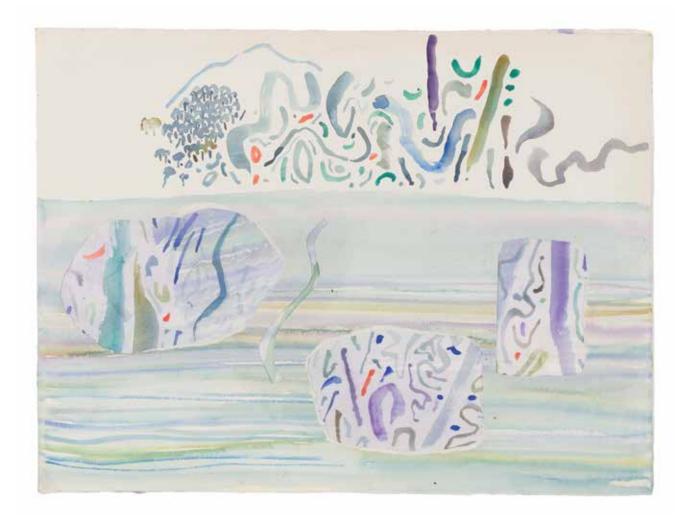
At times it seems natural to imagine Warren's figures as belonging to the past: as the traces of memory, or as ghosts dwelling in an underworld, albeit a pleasant one, like the Elysian fields in the ancient poets or in Dante: a place filled entirely with the living forms of nature and free from the alienation and suffering of the modern city. But they could also evoke a future, and be thought of as beings suspended in an existence before life and incarnation, before their subjugation to an order ruled by time, growth and wasting. Perhaps they are analogues of the ideas that are conceived in the mind of the artist before the labour of conversion into paintings; or perhaps they reflect an increasing freedom, born of a long journeying through temporality, from the world of determinate form, and a willingness to dwell in the indeterminate potential of being.

Christopher Allen

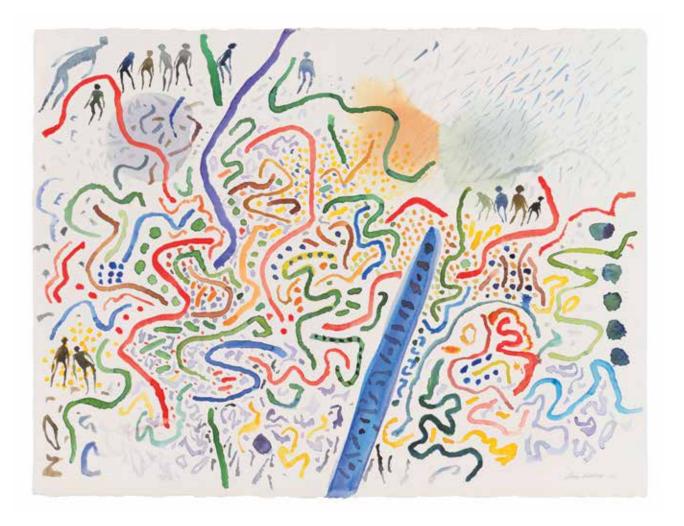
National Art Critic, *The Australian* 2021



Guy Warren's studio wall, Greenwich, 2020



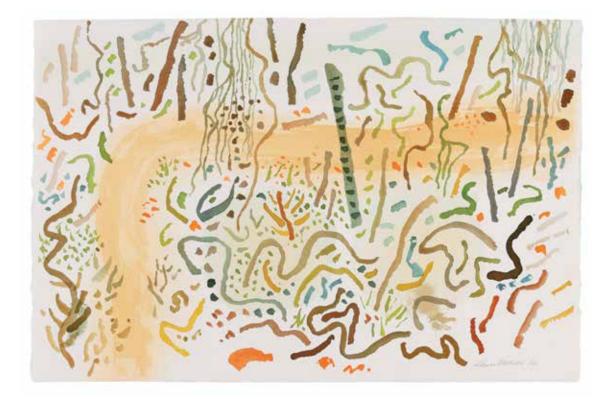
Windows #1 2020 watercolour & collage on paper 57 x 76 cm



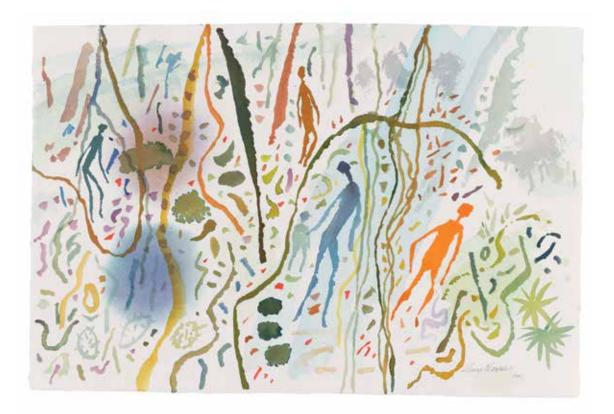
Time out #2 2020 watercolour on paper 57 x 77 cm



Echoes #1 2020 watercolour on paper 57 x 76 cm



Marking the bend in the track 2 2020 watercolour on paper 37 x 57 cm

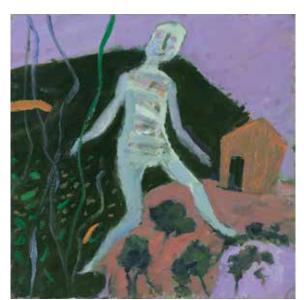


Figured forest 2020 watercolour on paper 37 x 57 cm

WORKS ON CANVAS



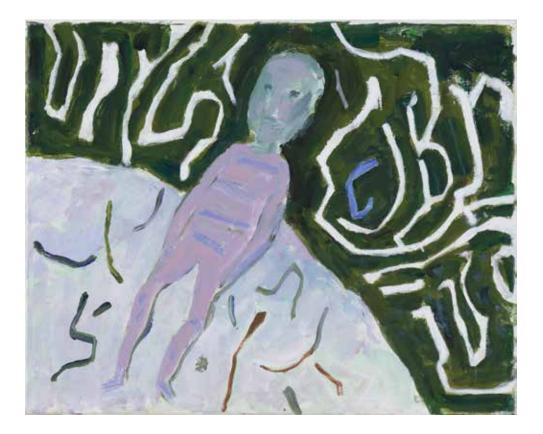




Memories 2020 acrylic on canvas 41 x 41 cm *Waiting* 2020 acrylic on canvas 41 x 41 cm *Walk to the hut* 2020 acrylic on linen 46 x 46 cm *Blue game* 2020 acrylic on linen 46 x 46 cm



Dry land with blue figure 2020 acrylic on canvas 35.5 x 51 cm



Black forest 2020 acrylic on linen 40 x 50 cm





Tangle Jamberoo 2020 acrylic on linen 36 x 36 cm *Quiet moment* 2020 acrylic on canvas 41 x 41 cm

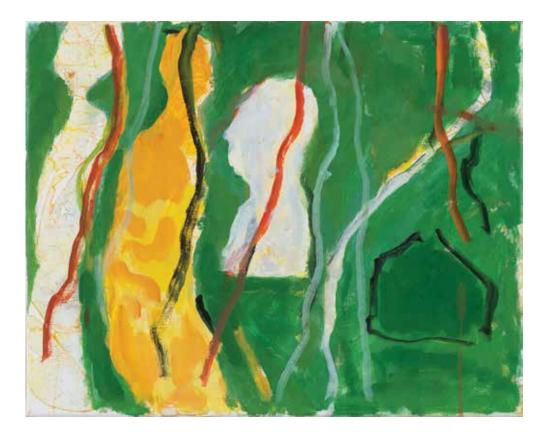


Red hill 2020 acrylic on canvas 40 x 50 cm

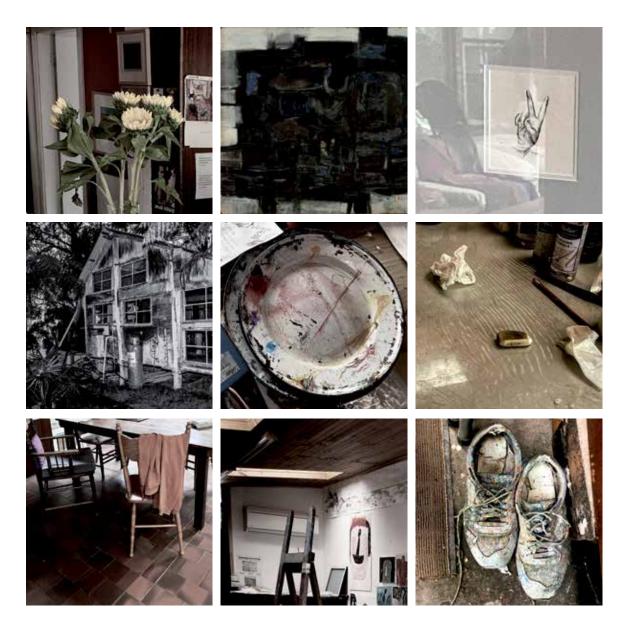
Blue forest 2020 acrylic on linen 46 x 51 cm (detail)



To Jamberoo with love #1 2020 acrylic on linen 40 x 50 cm



To Jamberoo with love #2 2020 acrylic on linen 40 x 50 cm



ABOVE Photos courtesy Riste Andrievski, Roller Photography, Amanda Penrose Hart

Guy Warren

Born

1921

Goulburn, NSW, Australia

Studies & work

1947-49 National Art School, Sydney, under the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Training Scheme
1950's Part-time study Chelsea School of Art, London School of Art and Central School of Arts and Crafts, London

Solo exhibitions [selected]

- 2021 Paintings and Paper Gallery Lane Cove and Creative Studios, Sydney From The Mountain To The Sky: Guy Warren Drawings National Art School, Sydney The 100th year King Street Gallery on William, Sydney 2020 New Works + King Street Gallery on William, Sydney 2019 Forward... & back King Street Gallery on William, Sydney 2018 River, Rainforest, Rock Shoalhaven Regional Gallery, Nowra, NSW 2017 Works on paper from the artist's studio King Street Gallery on William, Sydney 2016 Genesis of a painter: Guy Warren at 95 National Trust S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney 2015 Dust of Memory Olsen Irwin Gallery, Sydney 2012 Work from the Dry Country Rex Irwin Galleries, Sydney 2009 Rex Irwin Galleries, Sydney BMG Galleries, Adelaide. United Galleries, Perth 2008 2007 Annandale Galleries, Sydney. BMG Galleries, Adelaide 2003 Annandale Galleries, Sydney, Axia Modern Art, Melbourne 2003-2004 Presence and Landscape - Guy Warren in Retrospect; retrospective exhibition of works covering 60 years of art practice (a Mosman Art Gallery exhibition touring to six NSW regional art galleries).
- 2002 University of Wollongong retrospective exhibition of watercolours

Group exhibitions [selected]

- 2020 Flowline Canberra Museum and Art Gallery, Canberra, ACT
- Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
- 2019 Conversations with Alice Gallery Lane Cove + Creative Studios, Sydney
- 2018 Jamberoo Mountain Road Shoalhaven Regional Gallery, Nowra, NSW
- The Art of Friendship Gallery Lane Cove and Creative Studios, Sydney
- 2016 Luminous Australian Watercolours 1900-2000 National Gallery of Victoria
- 2015 Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne
- 2014 Across the Water: China-Australia Modern Masters of Watercolour, Quanhua, China; Shenzhen
- Fine Art Museum, Shenzhen, China; Juniper Hall, Sydney
- 2013 Not the Way Home -- 13 Artists Paint the Desert New England Regional Art Museum and travelling
- Australian Watercolour Unstitute 90th Annual Exhibition, Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW
- 2012 Tradition and Transformation: Taiwan-Australia Watercolour Exhibition, Taichung, China; Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney
- 2011 Taiwan International Watercolour Exhibition, Robeson Gallery, Pennsylvania, Carollton Cultural Art Center, Georgia, and the Chung-shan National Art Gallery, Taipei
- 2010 Wattle, Rose and Thistle: The Finest Watercolourists of Australia, England and Scotland. Also at the Wollongong Regional Art Gallery, Sydney; Wagner Gallery, Sydney; Bankside Gallery, London
- 2008 Lines of Fire: Armed Forces to Art School National Art School, Sydney

Prizes and awards [selected]

- 2013 Awarded the Australia Medal (AM.)
- 2007 Awarded Doctorate of Visual Arts (honoris causa) The University of Sydney
- 1999 Awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)
- 1998 Awarded Doctorate of Creative Arts (honoris causa) University of Wollongong
- 1998 Awarded Bronze Medal, 4th International Triennale of Drawing, Poland
- 1985 Archibald Prize for Portraiture, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

Public and corporate collections

Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, NT Artbank, Australia Art Gallery of New South Wales Art Gallery of South Australia Art Gallery of Tasmania Art Gallery of Western Australia Allens Collection, Svdnev Australian National University, Canberra, ACT Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, Bathurst, NSW Bendigo Art Gallery, Bendigo, Vic The British Museum, London, UK Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, Tas BHP Collection, Melbourne, Vic Cairns Art Gallery, Qld Contemporary Art Society, London, UK Churchlands College of Advanced Education, Perth, WA College of Advanced Education, Canberra, ACT Curtin University, Perth, WA The Deal Collection, Dallas, USA The Darnell Collection, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Qld Grafton Regional Gallery, Grafton, NSW James Cook University, Townsville, Qld The Kedumba Collection of Contemporary Australian Drawing Orange Regional Gallery, NSW

Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW Manly Art Gallery & Museum, Sydney, NSW Mosman Art Gallery, Mosman, NSW National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, ACT National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic National Library, Beijing, China Newcastle Art Gallery, Newcastle, NSW Parliament House, Canberra, ACT Qantas, Australia Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Qld Queensland State Library, Brisbane, Qld The Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Canberra, ACT The Stein Collection, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA Sheparton Art Museum, Sheparton, Vic Sheraton on the Park, Sydney, NSW The Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, Toowoomba, Qld The University of New England, Armidale, NSW The University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW The University of Technology, Sydney, NSW The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW The United Overseas Bank, Singapore Union Club, Sydney, NSW Westpac, New York, USA Wollongong Art Gallery, Wollongong, NSW





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