

# Rembrandtia

Newsletter of the Nora Heysen Foundation Inc

Spring 2014

## Nora Heysen in the South-East

By Jean Kenny

In March 1963 David Heysen organised a solo exhibition of Nora Heysen's works at Millicent. The catalogue from that show reveals that the Millicent exhibition was substantial with 28 flower pieces and still lifes, 3 landscapes, 9 portraits and 12 drawings.

Twenty-seven works were for sale, and the rest were on loan from her father, Hans, as well as David and Lyly Heysen, Dr. Robert Black, Lady Gosse and Mr. and Mrs. C. Hill.

The exhibition, part of the South-East Festival of Arts, was opened on 10 March by Sir James Darling, then Chairman of the ABC, who had retired as Head of Geelong Grammar School two years previously.

Chris Heysen, David Heysen's son and a student at the time, recalls that Sir James gave him a lift in the Commonwealth car back to Derrymore, the Heysen family property at Kalangadoo, for afternoon tea.

Chris commented that in 1963, Nora Heysen was in the middle of a 'period of obscurity' and that the exhibition was a wonderful supportive effort by his father David to give Nora greater recognition, for which Nora was very grateful.

Don McDonald (Jean's father), who was Principal of Millicent High School in 1963, attended the exhibition opening, and family records show that he and his wife Bertha were also present at the dinner organised by David Heysen on Sunday 17



Nora Heysen's recent exhibition at Mt. Gambier.

March at the close of the exhibition.

A number of Nora Heysen's works were sold. A family friend of mine recalls that a still life piece bought by an old school friend of David's was destroyed in a 1965 house fire, whereupon David and Hans visited the family with a selection of prints to compensate for the loss of the original work by Nora.

The chosen prints were then framed by David at no cost – a typically generous gesture.

This exhibition of Nora Heysen's art was followed by a joint exhibition of works by both Hans Heysen and Nora Heysen at H0amilton, Victoria in April 1963.

### 100 drawings by Nora Heysen

This exhibition was opened by Nora's nephew, Tim Heysen, at the Riddoch Gallery at Mount Gambier on 11 July.

All of the works in this exhibition were on loan from the Nora Heysen

Foundation Collection at The Cedars.

Jean Kenny visited this exhibition on Monday 18 August and spoke with the Director, Simon Close, and the Curator, Jacqui Porter, who told of an unexpected near-calamity on the opening night.

At about 7pm, shortly after the opening speeches, a fire in a large halogen ceiling light in the foyer/shop required guests to be evacuated, bringing the opening ceremony to an abrupt halt.

Paintings lent by Tim Heysen had been directly beneath the faulty light. However, the quick arrival of the fire brigade prevented any damage.

The Mount Gambier exhibition was well-attended, with 4,170 visitors recorded by the close.

The Foundation's 100 drawings were beautifully and thoughtfully displayed in several adjacent areas of the gallery.

■ Jean Kenny recently visited exhibitions of Nora Heysen's works in the South-East. Jean has been a volunteer guide at the Cedars for many years. She is also an accomplished artist who has exhibited regularly in South Australian galleries.



## Annual Members' Meeting, 2pm Sunday 26 October

The NHF Annual Members' gathering will be held on 26 October at 2pm.

We are banking on perfect spring weather for an outdoor get-together in the garden, and an opportunity to hear of the past year's achievements and activities,

as well as plans for the future. A delicious Devonshire tea will be served. Bring along a new member to enjoy the garden and see the new hang in Nora's studio! Please telephone your RSVP to The Cedars by 19 October – phone (08) 8388 7277

# Tracey Lock-Weir's Australian art credentials rejoin the Trust board

**T**racey Lock-Weir, Curator of Australian Paintings & Sculpture at the Art Gallery of South Australia has recently again taken up the position as the Gallery's nominee on the Nora Heysen Foundation Board.

South Australian born, and a "hills-dweller", Tracey Lock-Weir has been at AGSA since 1991, where she formerly worked closely with Jane Hylton, who is also a Foundation Trustee. Tracey was one of the initial Trustees of the Foundation appointed by the Director of the Art Gallery in 2004.

Tracey has curated numerous exhibitions for AGSA, most recently the

## Trustee Profile



remarkable retrospective, *Dorrit Black: unseen forces*, from June to September 2014.

In preparing for this exhibition, Tracey was awarded a 2012 Churchill Fellowship to research the artist's formative European period (1927-29).

Tracey has researched and written many other publications, among them *John Dowie: a life in the round* (2001) for Wakefield Press, and for AGSA - *Misty Moderns: Australian Tonalists 1915-1950* (2008) and *Anna Platten* (2013).

She also lectures in the Adelaide University/AGSA Masters Art History Program.

## Nora Heysen at the Queen Adelaide Club

The Queen Adelaide Club hosted an exhibition of paintings by Nora Heysen in their North Terrace clubrooms for three months.

Over twenty works were on loan from the Nora Heysen Foundation, Carrick Hill and Queen Adelaide Club

members. The exhibition was very well received, and hung in successful partnership with a selection of large format still life photographs by Sydney artist Robyn Stacey lent by Stills Gallery in Paddington.

Two entertaining talks were given

during the period of the exhibition. Robyn Stacey spoke about her fascination with the composition of the still life. Richard Heathcote, Director of Carrick Hill recounted the friendship between Nora Heysen and Ursula Haywood.

## 'Heysenettes' Exhibition hosts nine Nora Heysen Prize winners

From October 7th to October 19th the Hunters Hill Gallery hosted an exhibition of works by the nine artists who have won the Nora Heysen Prize since 2004.

The artists are to be applauded for their motivation and enthusiasm resulting in this inaugural exhibition.

The exhibition provided continued recognition of Nora Heysen's name, as well as presenting works of art that are both aesthetically appealing and stimulating.

It also served to promote the artistic talent of this particular region which has



historically become so identifiable with the Hunters Hill precinct.

The paintings hung certainly reinforced the continued exposure of this talent and in doing so reflected Nora Heysen's own appreciation for nature and humanity which continued to provide her with such a multitude of subjects for her art.

*Heysenettes*  
Exhibition 2014

## Nora Heysen Foundation Inc.

Custodian of the art of Nora Heysen

### Trustees

#### Chair and Curator:

Allan Campbell

#### Heysen Family Representative:

Tim Heysen (proxy: Jill Swann)

#### Curator and Art Publisher:

Lou Klepec (proxy: Christopher Orchard)

#### Art Gallery of South Australia:

Tracey Lock-Weir,  
Curator Australian Paintings & Sculpture

#### Minister for the Arts Nominee:

Jane Hylton, Curator and Art Historian

#### Hahndorf Academy Foundation:

George van Holst Pellekaan, Academy Chair  
Richard Heathcote, Director Carrick Hill

#### Public Officer:

Dr Peter Heysen



## Nora's studio: the current exhibition

While many of Nora Heysen's finest works were on show in Mount Gambier recently, Allan Campbell was able to change the display in her studio at The Cedars.

Visitors are offered a further range of subjects in different media that occupied Nora Heysen at various stages in her artistic life.

The new hang has early still life pieces and pencil portraits of Nora's siblings,

notably Michael, from the 1920s. A wall of portraits in oil includes *Peter*, Nora's *Self portrait* from 1932, *A little village girl* and *Phyllis*.

A group of five studies from Nora Heysen's war works, displayed on another wall, give glimpses of the medical teams and soldiers at rest whom the artist sketched in various locations in 1944-1945.

Allan has created a corner of particular

interest, with a focus on Nora Heysen's *Cedars interior*, from the 1930s, an oil painting on canvas laid on board.

The oil painting hangs with three other studies in charcoal, featuring family members relaxing in the sitting room.

The reproduction of Vermeer's *The girl with the pearl ear-ring* – that appears in the background of *Cedars interior* – sits on the window sill adjacent.

## The Heysen family's Pissarro connections

The much-publicised Camille Pissarro work *Prairie a Eragny*, painted in 1886 is now on display in Gallery 17 at the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Also in Gallery 17, in the "salon hang" of landscapes on the western wall, is Lucien Pissarro's *Campagne Orovida, the Lauristinus*. And with that painting lies a connection of the Pissarro family with the Heysens, and Nora in particular.

Camille Pissarro's grand-daughter, and Lucien's daughter, Orovida became a good friend of Nora Heysen while Nora lived and studied in London in the 1930s.

Lucien Pissarro and his wife visited

Nora's flat in London. Nora baked scones and cake for the Pissarro family, and Lucien advised Nora to try painting using his – and his father's – techniques.

The regard in which Nora was held by members of the Pissarro family is evident in that they lent three paintings to Nora – one each by Camille, Lucien and Orovida – to hang in her studio/flat for three months while the Pissarros were in France.

One of them was Lucien's *The Lauristinus*. Nora wrote to her father: "The Lucien Pissarro has a lovely atmosphere and feeling, and there is a beauty and vibrancy in the way

the paint is handled, being clear and crisp and yet having quality. I'm sure it would be a very popular picture if our Adelaide gallery could afford the £157 or guineas."

And Hans responded to Nora: "I am seeing Louis McCubbin about it and have every hope that it will find its way into our Gallery." And so he did, and the work was purchased for AGSA in 1937.

There are many more references to the Pissarros and their works in the correspondence between Nora Heysen and her father, quoted in Cathy Speck's book *Heysen to Heysen*, particularly from p72 onward.





## Collection Focus

*Fleurieu landscape*, [c1944-45], charcoal and pastel on paper, 15.5 X 31 cm.

# Three landscapes by Nora Heysen

By Jill Swann

Nora Heysen is best known for her portraiture, still lifes and figure studies. But she also painted landscapes from time to time.

Three small landscape works are in the Nora Heysen Foundation collection.

■ *Adelaide Hills Landscape* is a view of eucalypts and a gently rising slope, probably painted by Nora in her student years.

Executed in pencil and watercolour, and signed "N.H." in pencil in the bottom right corner, this small undated work is in very good condition.

Allan Campbell suggests that the landscape dates from about 1930, and may have even been painted as Nora sat beside her father.

This would appear to be around "The Cedars", perhaps looking south from the "Shady Pool" and upwards to the crest of the hill behind Hans Heysen's studio.

Tall young gums in afternoon sunlight are featured at the centre and right of the foreground, their strong vertical lines leading the viewer's eye to a softly defined high horizon.

These trees are balanced by a clump



Detail of *Fleurieu landscape*.

of more mature trees in the left mid-ground, as well as by the patterning of shadows and undergrowth.

Nora's palette is limited to mostly summery hues of golds and browns, with the olive and grey-greens of the gums.

■ *Fleurieu landscape* was a gift from Nora Heysen for Dr Robert Black, whom she married in 1953.

This charcoal and pastel work, although fragile, is nevertheless in good condition.

Nora was at home at Hahndorf in

the summer of 1944-45, and this piece is signed in pencil in the bottom right corner: "N.H. JAN".

A further inscription in the bottom left corner says: "To show you the hills by the sea. I do." "I do" was the artist's personal salutation in her private correspondence to Robert Black.

We could assume that it was Nora's intent to share with Robert a little of where she was spending her war-time break, while he was enduring life in the tropics.

Just above her message there appears

to be a car on a country road, with the rolling dry grassland extending to Sellicks Hill in the background, and the clear blue sky of a mid-summer day.

She has paid attention to the shadows in the gullies, recalling some of her father's renditions of shadows in Flinders Ranges landscapes.

■ With *Tropical landscape* Nora Heysen observes a very different environment from her summery South Australia.

Nora sent a small painting from Cairns to her father for his birthday in October 1945. The war in the Pacific had reached its end, but Nora Heysen was still in Cairns to complete commissioned works as an official war artist.

On 4 October, Nora wrote to her father: "I wish you could see this landscape ... It is not really Australian in the typical sense of being too lush, colourful and decorative, but it has a character and beauty all its own and is on a grand scale, the sun-filled skies, the blue of the mountains and the tender greens of the cane fields".

After receiving the painting, Hans Heysen responded in his 2 November letter to Nora, "your country ... your description and your little picture excite my curiosity."

The wetland in the foreground which mirrors the darkening tropical sky, is teeming with wading birds, and clumps of rushes stand beside colourful floating waterlilies.

The bands of green in mid-ground are the canefields, with stark towering palms denuded of their foliage from the cyclone of March 1945.

The Atherton Tablelands are very different in form from the Adelaide Hills seen in Nora's two previous landscapes.

Here are the shapes of the Great



*Adelaide Hills landscape*, [c1930?], watercolour & pencil on paper on card, 26 X 31 cm.

Divide covered in dense rainforest growth. And in the sky, a mid-afternoon storm advances.

Nora called it "subject matter for Van Gogh".

■ To read more of this correspondence refer to Cathy Speck's book, *Heysen to Heysen*, pp169-170

Jill Swann is a Cedars volunteer guide. She has also worked closely with Allan Campbell since 2007 to catalogue the works of art and other items in the Nora Heysen Foundation collections.



*Tropical landscape*, [c1945?], oil on board, 36cmX27cm.

## 'For the Love of Drawing' travelling exhibition

After a successful exhibition of drawings by Nora Heysen at the Murray Bridge Regional Gallery from 6 December 2013 to 2 February 2014, 'For the Love of Drawing' moved on to the Walkway Gallery at Bordertown in time for a May opening.

Naomi Fallon, Director of the Gallery wrote to the Foundation: "I would like to express appreciation for

allowing us to borrow the wonderful works of Nora Heysen.

"I am thrilled to say that this exhibition was the highest attended in the Gallery's short history, boasting visitors from right across South Australia, Western Victoria, and even a fellow Archibald Prize winner, Sam Leach (2010 winner)."





*The Love Birds*



*Souvenir Roses*

# Nora Heysen's favoured roses

By Allan Campbell

**T**he rose featured in *The Love Birds* is the superb tea rose - The Duchesse de Brabant.

It was bred in France in 1857 and is of a clear soft pink with a very good tea scent. It was named after Marie-Henriette, Archduchess of Austria later to become Queen of the Belgians.

Still growing healthily in the garden at The Cedars, it is always the first to bloom in late September and the last to finish in May/June.

*Souvenir Roses* shows us, of course, *Souvenir de la Malmaison*, a French Bourbon and known as the 'queen of beauty and fragrance'. Identified with the famous Chateau de Malmaison, home to the newly-wed Napoleon and Josephine who bought the estate in 1799.

The rose when bred in 1842 was named in memory of the Empress Josephine.

For those of you who know your French you would be perhaps wondering why such an exquisitely beautiful rose bears such an unfortunate name, namely the house of exile or sickness, the reason being that the building in the 15th century was originally used for the express purpose of providing a hospital for those suffering from leprosy.

This rose was a much favoured subject painted by both Hans and Nora Heysen. It is also known by the Heysen Family as the cemetery rose as the original cuttings were brought back to The Cedars from the Hahndorf cemetery to be planted in the garden.

Six of the bushes continue to grow and bloom happily and could possibly be between seventy and eighty years of age.

Nora Heysen wrote to her parents from Hunter's Hill in May 1956:

*You can blame the Souvenirs for the delay in writing - once again their subtle beauty has ensnared me to the neglect of all else ... I still wonder if I'm any nearer to getting that certain illusive something I'm after ... if only I could just admire those roses and not torture myself with trying to paint them.*

There are now **new stocks of cards** and books to be found in the shop at The Cedars, most notably new formats of two cards, featuring Nora Heysen's flower pieces, *The Love Birds* and *Souvenir Roses*.

The printing of these new cards has been funded by the Foundation.

## Foundation Membership now due

We would like to grow the Membership of the Nora Heysen Foundation in the next year.

This is vital for the ongoing conservation and promotion of the works of art of Nora Heysen.

We invite you to review your membership status, and re-join if it has lapsed. Also consider bringing in some new members to the Foundation from your family, friends or social networks, perhaps by presenting them with a membership subscription as a birthday or Christmas gift.

**1 Year** - \$25 single, \$40 double

**2 Years** - \$45 single, \$70 double

**3 Years** - \$60 single, \$100 double

Cheques to the Nora Heysen Foundation or on Credit card details through *The Cedars* shop Tuesday to Sunday – 8388 7277

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