

NORA HEYSEN FOUNDATION INC.

REMBRANDTIA

REMBRANDTIA WINTER 2007

Newsletter of the Nora Heysen Foundation Incorporated.

COFFEE WITH NORA

LAUNCH OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM ON SATURDAY 28TH APRIL 2007

'a life of her own : NORA HEYSEN'



Deirdre Cowell and Michael Heysen with Eugene Schlusser

We are pleased to report that this occasion was a decided success particularly in consideration of the most inclement weather witnessed on the afternoon with its drenching rain and gusty winds. However close to 200 members and their guests braved the elements to gather in the garden marquee to view this wonderful film. --- and what a film it was!

Congratulations to the writer and director Eugene Schlusser for a beautifully crafted presentation, indeed the extended expression of applause at the conclusion of the hour long documentary spoke for itself. The personal nature of the interviews with Nora by Eugene was, of course, the highlight and provided a rare insight into the artist's life particularly the early formative years, long art apprenticeship, achievements and frustrations as well as her personal philosophies on art and life. This was uniquely delivered by means of a fascinating conversational discourse between Nora and Eugene at

The Chalet, Hunters Hill in 1989 when Nora was approaching her 80th year.

Kerry Heysen Hicks carried out the opening delivery with appropriate aplomb talking about her own Nora connection and her obvious respect for Nora's status and achievement in the art world. Our thanks to Kerry for taking time out from her very busy work schedule to launch the film on the day.

High tea concluded the afternoon with welcoming hot coffee, sandwiches, German cake and creamed scones in traditional Heysen hospitality. Twenty two members of the Heysen Family were actually present to provide appropriate tribute and recognition of the obvious high esteem in which Nora is held by her Family.

Footnote – The rumour heard circulating on the day that the Foundation Chairman had been seen earlier in the morning standing, totally drenched in the pouring rain in what can only be described as a highly agitated state of behaviour, shaking both fists at the darkened heavens – is in fact quite true. However we are pleased to report that by the conclusion of the afternoon's proceedings he had fully recovered and was indeed seen devouring copious amounts of coffee, cake and conversation at the afternoon tea following the screening.



Guests 'under the marquee' and keeping dry at the launch of 'a life of her own'

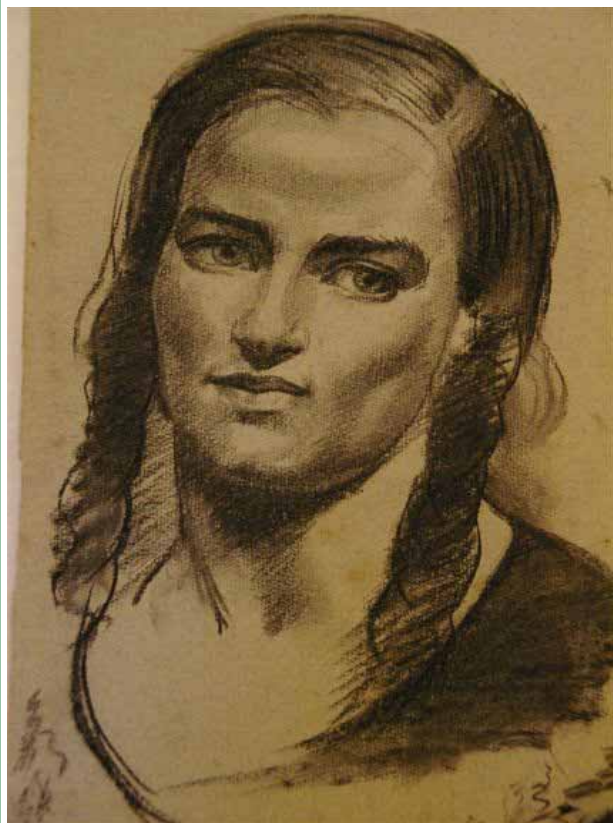
The DVD

'a life of her own : NORA HEYSEN'

Available from **The Cedars** bookshop

\$40 plus \$4.00 postage to all States.

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Curator: Allan Campbell



Special Thanks

The Foundation would particularly like to extend thanks to many helpful people, particularly Jan Kleinig and Phil Schmidt, for their invaluable input into preparations for the film screening preview.

Very special thanks to Paul White and Eve Campbell from Eve's Classic Coffees, Hahndorf for handling the catering for the afternoon in such a professional manner under the very difficult conditions!



Deirdre Cowell, 93.

Congratulations to Nora's sister Deirdre Cowell who celebrated her 93rd Birthday last month. "The Bollinger is already chilling in readiness for the 94th, Deirdre!"

Ruth—The story behind the face

Ruth became a favourite model for Nora Heysen particularly in the period 1930 – 1933 when Nora had established her own independent studio at *The Cedars*. Ruth was a young girl from the village at Hahndorf with strong Germanic features and long plaited hair which appealed to Nora greatly. Hence the portraits she did of Ruth were painted to convey an intense sculptural sense of form and a very distinctive realist presentation of the subject. In 1933, in particular, the artist was to complete a series of four to five oils of Ruth accompanied by quite a number of sketches and drawings. This was the year of her first individual and highly successful exhibition at the Royal South Australian Society of Arts and that year she was awarded the Melrose Prize for Portraiture with one of these portraits of Ruth.

The Art Gallery of South Australia went on to purchase this picture for the State's Collection and to this day it holds pride of place of Nora's work exhibited at the Adelaide Gallery. The rural landscape backdrop to the portrait suggests the influence on Nora of the early Florentine schools particularly that of Piero della Francesca. The classic projection of Ruth's strong facial features also shows the influence of the Australian artist George Lambert whose work Nora particularly admired.

A very striking study of **Ruth** against a glowing blue background was bought for the collection of the Rural Bank of Western Australia and in 2003 the National Gallery of Australia purchased a superb oil of **Ruth** in half profile for the Nation's Collection.

Editor's Note

Ruth's name was actually Rhonda (Rhonda Paech) but Nora renamed her Ruth in reference to the Biblical character. Nora was to comment, almost in the last year of her life – *'How dare I. What right had I to change that poor girl's name as I did ... I should never have done such a thing.'*

Nora was also to comment that recognising her own great love of drawing from the nude she had eventually asked Ruth would she be prepared to pose without her clothes on Ruth left never to return!

According to Nora's wishes a very fine set of drawings of Ruth has been returned to *The Cedars* as part of the Foundation's Collection. One of the charcoals is shown here.



Work on the replacement shelving in the Studio has now been completed. This has been reinstated into its original position and will house Nora's extensive library of books.

Painting Profile – *Apples on a Chair*

This fine piece is acknowledged as Nora Heysen's last completed oil, painted in November 1995. Due to the increasing deterioration of her vision Nora had made the decision to cease painting in oil in respect to her own very high standards. It would certainly have been a most difficult decision for an artist to arrive at particularly as oil remained Nora's most favoured medium.

It was to remain on the easel, undisturbed, for the next eight years until her death in 2003. She had made the decision in those latter years that the easel was to be returned for placement in her Hahndorf studio but was uncertain about the allocation of the oil. A month prior to her death Nora (in the final painting allocation) decided that the painting would remain on the easel and be sent to Hahndorf.

Apples, together with pears, had always remained one of



the most favoured components of her still life genre and it was perhaps appropriate that apples served to furnish her very last piece. Her long standing admiration for the still life paintings of the French artist Paul Cezanne becomes clearly obvious on viewing this picture.

The Melba Palette

On a visit to *The Cedars* in 1926 Dame Nellie Melba, friend and patron of Hans Heysen, was quite impressed on viewing a watercolour the young 15 year old Nora Heysen was working on at that time. The subject was a somewhat ambitious study of pale apple blossom against a blue background but Melba thought it displayed definite talent by such a young artist.

As a gesture of encouragement she was to give Nora her first palette which indeed initiated her into the medium of oil painting. Nora found herself far more comfortable working with oil and was to use this palette for the next 70 years up to her very last oil painting *Apples on a Chair* completed in 1995.



Studio Exhibition Update

The current exhibition *Nora Heysen – War Artist 1943-46* has been very well received and as a result of this ongoing interest, hanging of the exhibition has been extended through winter and until September this year.

Seventeen original sketches by the artist have been framed and hung for the exhibition together with a selection of photographs from the National War Museum's

Collection of Nora Heysen's work. Many of the sketches depict the surgical procedures in the hospitals and medical clearing stations in Finschhafen, New Guinea where Nora was stationed close to the front line of combat.

Fort hcoming:

To a somewhat different theme the next exhibition opening for the 2007 Heysen Festival commencing late September will be entitled **CATS!**

Nora had a definite fondness for cats and *The Chalet* at Hunters Hill was home to quite a number and variety of cats over many years. We have acquired some beautiful drawings of these favoured feline creatures and the provision of a unique but most appropriate exhibition hanging.



Nora at home with a favourite cat

Thesis Presented

Our thanks to Rosemary Heysen for presentation of her thesis, *'Nora Heysen in the Pacific 1953 – 1962'* to the Foundation.

Rosemary Heysen, B.Arch. Stud., Grad. Dip. Des. Stud. (Landscape), B. L. Arch. (Hons), a great niece of Nora Heysen, submitted the thesis as part of the course work requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Adelaide.

As Rosemary indicated :

"This thesis examines an overlooked period in the art and life of Nora Heysen.

"..... Three journeys made by Heysen to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides between 1953 and 1962.

" This study investigates how Heysen sought to portray a people unaffected by the presence of missionaries and a colonialist government and analyses the resultant images from the blending of the artist's own notions and the reality she was to discover."



National Library of Australia News

Those of you who are members of the Friends of the National Library would have enjoyed reading Dr Christobel Mattingley's articles on Nora in the January and March editions of the National Library of Australia News. Christobel first met Nora Heysen in 1979 and enjoyed her friendship until Nora's death in 2003.

New Acquisitions

Our thanks to Craig Dubery and Peter Heysen for their generosity in donating to the Foundation the two pieces from Nora's New Guinea artefact collection which had been shown on Ebay .



Craig had purchased the fruit bowl and Peter the pestle and they are now on display in Nora's Studio to complement the very fine strand of her drawings from that particular period of the 1950's and early 60's.



Foundation's Annual General Meeting

Our second AGM was held on Friday evening 24 November 2006 at **The Cedars** and attended by over fifty members.

Again I record the Trustees' appreciation in recognition of the positive response and enthusiasm for the future of the Foundation by members. Many issues were discussed in regard to collections, exhibitions and fundraising plans. Members voted unanimously in favour of increasing the membership fee by \$5 to :

\$25 single membership

\$40 per couple

\$10 student levy.

Allan Campbell, Chairman

Drawn Together

The Drawing Lives of Nora Heysen, Judy Cassab and Margaret Woodward

Having travelled to 9 different Galleries in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania this fine exhibition is now into its concluding stage with 3 venues yet to visit.

Muswellbrook Art Centre 22 June ————— 5 August 2007
Wagga Wagga Regional Gallery 24 August ——— 21 October 2007
Hawkesbury Regional Gallery 26 October — 17 December 2007

“THE THREE” MET EVERY MONTH OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS USUALLY IN JUDY CASSAB’S STUDIO AT DOUBLE BAY TO DRAW FROM THE LIFE MODEL.



“for Margaret”, 1994



Pens & Pencils meeting, Lou and Nora

Trustees' Profile : *Lou Klepac*

This is the first in a series of profiles on the six appointed Trustees of the Nora Heysen Foundation.

Lou was born in Croatia in

1936. From 1944 to 1950 he lived with his family in Italy where he went to school, first in Venice and later Trieste. His interest in art began in Venice where he had his portrait painted at the age of eight, and mixed with artists who were friends of his father. In 1954 Lou emigrated with his family to Western Australia. He was educated at Perth Modern School and graduated from the University of Western Australia in 1957.

After travels in Europe 1958 - 64 and part time teaching in London, he returned to Australia and became the first Curator of Paintings at the Art Gallery of Western Australia from 1964 to 1966 and then at the Art Gallery of South Australia from 1966 to 1970.

After returning to London for a further five years Lou was appointed Senior Curator and later Deputy Director at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1974 - 80 where he brought together an exceptional staff and instigated a dynamic system of acquisitions, exhibitions and publications. In 1980 he moved with his family to Sydney where he established The Beagle Press, publishing books and catalogues on the fine arts.

Lou Klepac is the author of many books on artists, among them – Lloyd Rees, Russell Drysdale, Judy Cassab, Donald Friend, William Robinson, John Coburn, James Gleeson and of course Nora Heysen. He has organised many exhibitions including Russell Drysdale Paintings – S H Ervin Gallery, Sydney; On the Road to Berry, Lloyd Rees and Brett Whiteley Drawings – Heide Museum of

Modern Art Melbourne and the Art Gallery of NSW; Giorgio Morandi Paintings and Etchings – Art Gallery of NSW; La Serenissima, The Fascination of Venice – S H Ervin Gallery, Sydney; James Gleeson Retrospective – National Gallery of Victoria.

Lou has been a keen supporter of the visual arts and tireless in the promotion of many Australian artists in order to gain them a higher profile and status by bringing their work to the attention of art critics and curators.

In 1988 while organising an exhibition of Hans Heysen’s drawings and watercolours for the S.H. Ervin Gallery, as the first stage towards producing a book on his work, Lou Klepac visited Nora Heysen and discovered that she was a remarkable artist and severely neglected. He first persuaded her to let him produce a small book on her work and later to arrange an exhibition, which was shown at the S H Ervin Gallery in 1989 and at **Carrick Hill**, Adelaide. Little by little she regained her lost reputation climaxing at the celebrated retrospective at the National Library of Australia in Canberra in 2000, curated by Lou.

This drew people’s attention to the considerable talent of this important but neglected female artist.

Klepac believes that one of the most valuable things he set up was the Pens and Pencils in 1991, where older artists like Nora, Frank McNamara, Frank Hinder and others could meet once a month. Nora attended the Pens and Pencils meetings regularly. The Ps and Ps evolved into an exciting group, which Nora attended regularly until her death.

Lou was appointed Cavaliere by the Italian government in 1980, and given an OAM in the Order of Australia in 1996. Last October the University of Sydney conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. Lou is currently planning the book on Hans Heysen he was going to write when he diverted his attention to Nora. The project has been assisted by a bequest left by Nora Heysen in her will for Lou to write the book on her father.

Extracts taken from the Chairman's Report

Annual General Meeting of the Nora
Heysen Foundation Inc.

24th November 2006

Again, on behalf of the Trustees, I would like to register my thanks to members of the Foundation for the very positive support, enthusiasm and optimism for the future of this fledgling body. The achievements gained already in only eighteen months of operation have been most encouraging, particularly in recognition of the patronage by members of the functions held in support of the Foundation.

Membership has certainly gained a noticeable increase thanks to existing members encouraging guests to attend gatherings and subsequent subscriptions gained. Identification to be given to single and joint membership subscription should provide us with a more accurate picture of member numbers.

The primary aim of the Foundation still focuses on the financing of a temperature control system for Nora's studio to safeguard the conservation requirements of the collection. This not only applies to the art work hanging on the studio walls but also to the storage and display of art books, art magazines, fabrics, artefacts and furniture returned to her Hahndorf studio by Nora Heysen's bequest. You may remember that the actual building itself is the oldest on the Estate (C1860) and as a result requires the necessary replacement of existing roof iron and ceiling fittings.

The fact remains that the Foundation now owns and houses the largest and most comprehensive collection of Nora Heysen's work in Australia. The status therefore, of the studio, as such a significant repository of the Foundation's collection also brings with it the accompanying and all important responsibility – namely, the correct preservation and presentation of this unique collection.

Accrued finances need to be directed towards a continued programme of restoration and framing of the work particularly in view of ongoing Exhibition hanging in



*Nora Heysen at 92
The Art Gallery of South Australia, May 2003
The photograph says it all ..don't you think?*

the studio. The ideal would be to be able to hang a new exhibition seasonally, that is, four times a year to accommodate different subject themes.

The year 2008 will see a fine exhibition of Nora Heysen's paintings and drawings hung at **Carrick Hill**. This will be curated by Foundation trustee, Jane Hylton and certainly **Carrick Hill** will provide a wonderful venue for continued exposure of Nora's work. Jane will glean significant pieces from both private collections and State and Regional galleries to present a most important Retrospective. Investigation continues regarding the feasibility of it becoming a travelling exhibition. This, of course, is totally dependent on financial support through private, corporate or State government bodies (or combinations thereof).

Allan Campbell, Chairman

Nora Heysen Foundation Incorporated - Custodian of the Art of Nora Heysen
TRUSTEES

Chair and Curator Allan Campbell
Heysen family representative Tim Heysen
Curator and Art Publisher Lou Klepac
Art Gallery of South Australia Nominee
Rebecca Andrews,
Assistant Curator, Australian Paintings and Sculptures

Minister for the Arts Nominee
Jane Hylton, Curator and Art Historian
Hahndorf Academy Foundation Representative
Lyndell Davidge, Academy Chair
Public Officer Dr Peter Heysen