



*Archibald Winner
'Agatha Gothe-Snape' painted by her partner Mitch Cairns*

ADFAS Pokolbin Art Gallery Excursion 2017

Archibald, Wynne and Sulman +
Georgia O'Keefe, Margaret Preston and Grace Cossington Smith
Exhibitions

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A privileged group of ADFAS Pokolbin members and friends visited two wonderful exhibitions at the Art Gallery of NSW on the first Wednesday in August, 2017 – the annual Archibald Prize, along with the Wynne and Sulman Prizes, in the morning and then “Making Modernism” in the afternoon. It was a terrific return bus trip to Sydney on a superb sun-drenched winter day.

ARCHIBALD, WYNN & SULMAN EXHIBITION

We split into two groups to be taken through the Archibald Prize for Portrait Painting. Our guides struggled because of the large number of visitors to the Gallery.



Portrait of artist John Olsen by Nicholas Harding

Controversy about the Archibald this year came from the Grand Old Man of Painting, 89 year old John Olsen, who called the prize “the worst decision I’ve ever seen”. Olsen is a former winner and three-time judge of the country’s best-know portrait prize and also has his own portrait, painted by Nicholas Harding amongst the finalists. Possibly a more traditional portrait and I love the red socks!

Another more traditional painting, of well known TV presenter and journalist Lisa Wilkinson AM, won this year's Packing Room Prize. It displays her casual elegance, and the special things in her life, a magazine open on the sofa and behind her a TV screen reflecting celebrity husband Peter Fitzsimmons and their children.



TV presenter and journalist Lisa Wilkinson AM, won this year's Packing Room Prize.



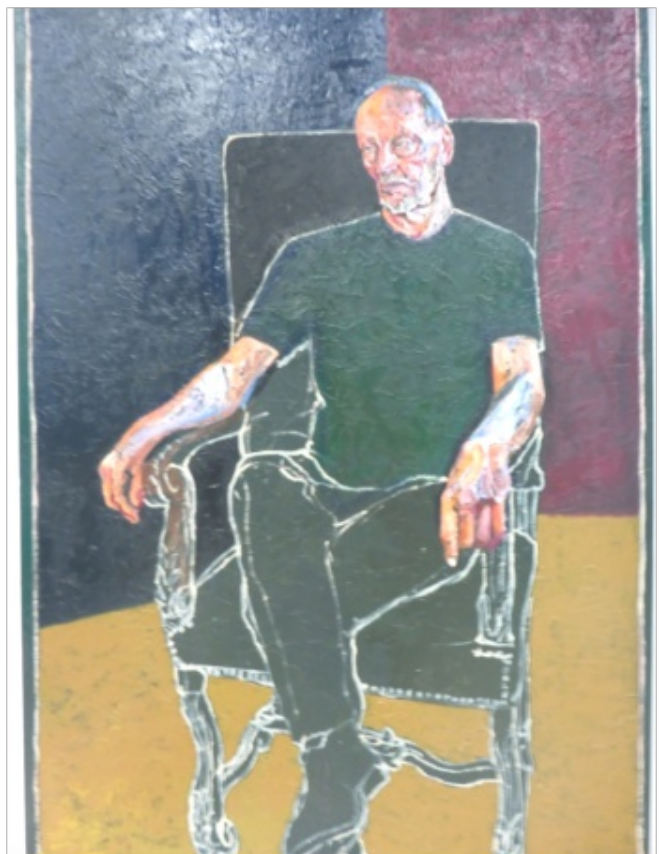
Dr John Vallance using painted blocks by students from Sydney Grammar School

The voting public's favourite is yet to be announced, however I voted for a delightful portrait called "Goodbye, Sir!" by Boys of Sydney Grammar Edgecliff Preparatory School.

The subject is Dr John Vallance who retired in April after 18 years as headmaster of Sydney Grammar's three campuses. He was popular with students and known for his sense of humour, commitment to a liberal arts education and open-door policy.

The portrait consists of 11,000 blocks, painted by 301 boys, aged five to twelve. Their intention was to use reverse technology – to make a painting that looked like a pixelated image on a computer screen; they started with a photograph and sketches then drew an 11,000 square grid on a wooden board, plotted the 20 colours, sanded and painted the blocks and glued them on. It is understandable that Kindergarten, Year 1 and 2 worked mainly on the blue background, Year 3 and 4 did the suit and tie, and year 5 and 6 were responsible for the intricate work on the face. What a marvellous portrait!

I was interested that there were two different portraits of veteran actor John Bell



This year's Archibald included 2 different portraits of veteran actor John Bell

MAKING MODERNISM

O'Keefe, Preston and Cossington Smith

We had little time to peruse the Wynne and Sulman Prizes. After lunch we were treated to a quieter upstairs gallery with a marvellous Exhibition - "Making Modernism". This celebrates the work of three pioneering female artists who made distinguished contributions to the development of international modernism.

American painter Georgia O'Keefe and Australian artists Margaret Preston and Grace Cossington Smith came of age during the 1910's and 20's, decades of great social and cultural transition. They were not connected by any personal familiarity or direct correspondence, but were kindred spirits, rejecting the artistic conventions of the past and forging new ways of picturing a changing world.



Georgia O'Keefe, 1887 - 1986



Margart Preston, 1875 - 1963



Grace Cossington Smith, 1892 - 1984

The fact that these three painters are women is not the important aspect of the exhibition - they were ambitious artists who were steadfast in their pursuit of a modernism distinct from European tradition, and were profoundly aware of the need for a visual language that suitably expressed the unique qualities of their own

countries. Their contributions to national culture show the shared contours of American and Australian art histories and the broader story of modernism's evolution around the world.

Georgia O'Keefe has become famous for synthesising the forms and lines of the New Mexico high desert, to share her experience of its vast and ancient landscape.



"Ram's Head, Blue Morning Glory", 1938 by Georgia O'Keefe

This iconic painting of the skull and a delicate flower juxtaposed – "Ram's Head, Blue Morning Glory", 1938, demonstrates almost a surrealism, using a skull that makes it seem inevitable and natural as well as grave and beautiful.

Australia's Margaret Preston has been recognised and admired for her vibrant and distinctive art. She is said to have possessed an equally colourful personality, being described as "the natural enemy of the dull".

She committed to a career as an artist from an early age, and has become well known in her public profile – she is known as a painter of highly individual modernist still lifes and an outspoken cultural commentator. She also wrote regularly on the arts and advocated a new national art for Australia.



Margaret Preston "Australian Coral Flowers" 1928



Archived magazines,
with Margaret Preston
Art on the cover.

Grace Cossington Smith was one of the most inventive colour painters to emerge from Australia's first wave of modernism in the early decades of the 20th Century. Although she travelled to Europe from 1912 to 1914, she claimed to have learnt her techniques at a central Sydney studio. Sydney's light filled harbour and the leafy terrains around Turrumurra formed the main subjects of her art. Colour was her interest and invoked the energetic undercurrents of her subjects.



*"Pumpkin Leaves Drooping", 1926 by
Grace Cossington Smith*

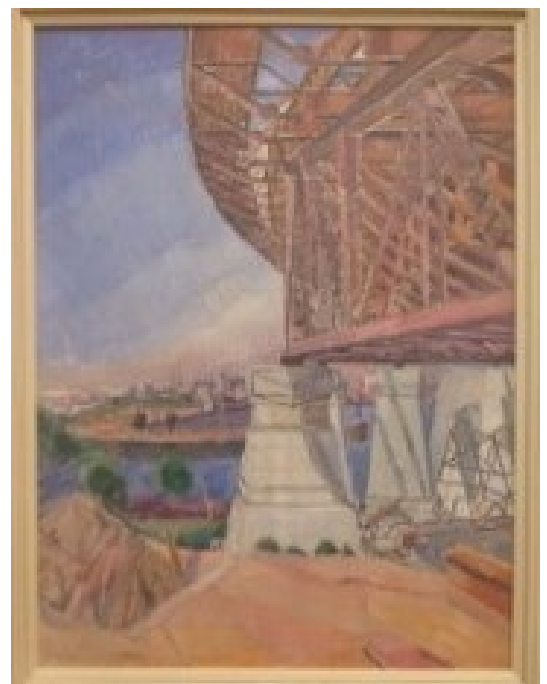


"Trees", 1927 by Grace Cossington Smith

Both Australian artists took a large interest in Sydney's Harbour, and Margaret Preston's iconic "Sydney Bridge" 1963 (postcards are available in the AGNSW shop) and Cossington Smith's "The Curve of the Bridge" 1928-9 and "The Bridge in Building" 1929 are well known Australian paintings.



"Sydney Bridge", 1963 by Margaret Preston



"The Curve of the Bridge", 1928-9 and "The Bridge in Building", 1929 by Grace Cossington Smith

One of Grace Cossington Smith's most recognisable images depicts the retailer David Jones's cafeteria, the fashionable American-style Soda Fountain decorated with gleaming scarlet and green lacquer furniture. She said "the cafeteria patrons struck me as interesting because they were all different kinds of people all in different stages of life.



"The Lacquer Room", 1936 by Grace Cossington Smith