



Art Gallery of South Australia acquires significant Clarice Beckett collection

Adelaide, Australia: The Art Gallery of South Australia today announces the acquisition of an exceptional private collection of works by twentieth-century Australian painter Clarice Beckett (1887-1935). Comprising 21 oil paintings, it is among the most significant single acquisitions of works by a woman artist to be made by an Australian art museum.

Made possible due to the generosity of Alastair Hunter OAM, the acquisitions build upon our commitment to promoting important women artists. The paintings come from the personal collection of Clarice Beckett scholar Dr Rosalind Hollinrake, who assembled this collection over a fifty-year period.

Clarice Beckett was a modern artist whose identity was lost to art history for decades. Following a chance encounter with Beckett's sister in the 1960s, Dr Rosalind Hollinrake salvaged hundreds of the artist's neglected canvases and held an exhibition of these paintings, which restored the artist's reputation. Today, Beckett is celebrated for her atmospheric abstractions of the commonplace.

AGSA Director Rhana Devenport ONZM says, 'This is a major acquisition and milestone for the Art Gallery of South Australia. The donation is a remarkable story of shared passions and expertise bound by a tremendous act of generosity by the Hunter Family. To celebrate this momentous acquisition, AGSA will mount a comprehensive Clarice Beckett exhibition in early 2021.'

Philanthropist, Alastair Hunter said, 'The story of Clarice Beckett and the work of Dr Hollinrake to protect and promote that story immediately appealed to me. The opportunity for the Art Gallery of South Australia to be the custodian of the collection and for my mother, Elizabeth, to be remembered in the process was a perfect fit. I commend the work of curator, Tracey Lock as an exemplar of how the relationships between collectors, donors and curators can have such joyous outcomes and be of benefit to the nation.'

AGSA's Curator of Australian Art, Tracey Lock, says, 'This is a timely and visionary gift and I'm honoured to have worked closely with both Dr Rosalind Hollinrake and Alastair Hunter to realise this outcome and, importantly, for Clarice Beckett to receive rightful recognition.'

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IMAGES https://files.artgallery.sa.gov.au/ftp/marketing/MEDIA/AGSA_Clarice_Beckett.zip

VIDEO <https://vimeo.com/417448743/50b031da4b>

Exhibition Details:

Clarice Beckett: the present moment, 27 February – 16 May 2021

During the 1920 and 1930s Clarice Beckett painted everyday scenes with such an extreme economy it tested her Australian audiences. Today, her atmospheric paintings are celebrated as radical turning points in Australian art. Including approximately one hundred examples of her work, and presenting fresh insights, this exhibition will explore the breadth of her career. The exhibition coincides with the Adelaide Festival 2021. Presented by the Neilson Foundation

Biographies

Clarice Beckett (1887-1935) exhibited her work over a sixteen-year period, including in solo exhibitions every year for ten years between 1923 and 1933 at the Athenaeum Gallery in Melbourne. Her paintings are distinguished by a gentle, atmospheric form of painterly abstraction. She was preoccupied with capturing the shifting effects of light in early morning or at twilight in her suburban Melbourne environment and often recorded transient motifs such as cars, trams, lone figures, waves or clouds. Beckett's perceived alignment with the polarising artist and teacher Max Meldrum saw her publicly ridiculed as 'a new and dangerous variety of Meldrumite'. This bias, together with her work being the antithesis of more commonly revered heroic landscapes, limited her acceptance. After she died of double pneumonia in 1935, age 48, her importance as an artist was overlooked entirely. In the late 1960s her work was rediscovered by Rosalind Hollinrake. A later monograph and an exhibition of her work restored the artist's reputation. Beckett was critically reappraised – the exhibition was favourably reviewed by venerated art historian Patrick McCaughey and six of her works were acquired for the National Gallery of Australia. A subsequent wave of scholarly reassessments in the 1970s of the role of women artists recognised Beckett's important contribution to Australian art. Her leading position in Australian painting was further secured through a hugely successful 1998-99 touring retrospective, *Clarice Beckett: Politically Incorrect*, curated by Rosalind Hollinrake (Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne).

Dr Rosalind Hollinrake is the world authority on the elusive Melbourne artist Clarice Beckett. Hollinrake sought and eventually located, in a Victorian country shed, hundreds of the artist's paintings. Those surviving works, she believed, were of great importance to Australian art history. She commenced what became 50 years of independent, passionate and painstaking research that predated research tools such as the internet and Trove. In 1971 she established the Rosalind Humphries Galleries in Melbourne, dedicated to the promotion of women artists. From that time she also publicly championed and promoted the art of Clarice Beckett, rescuing the artist from obscurity. Realities Gallery in Melbourne mounted a large Beckett exhibition to accompany the launch of

Hollinrake's monograph *Clarice Beckett: the Artist and her Circle*, published in 1979 by Macmillan, one of the first to celebrate an Australian woman artist. Her honours degree in the 1980s at Melbourne University was followed by her curation of the Ian Potter Gallery and Museum's touring exhibition *Clarice Beckett: Politically Incorrect*. In 2017 Hollinrake completed a PhD thesis (Swinburne University, Melbourne) that forms an extensive art biography on the unusual life and unique art of Clarice Beckett. Thanks to her research, today the artist's work receives public and critical acclaim.