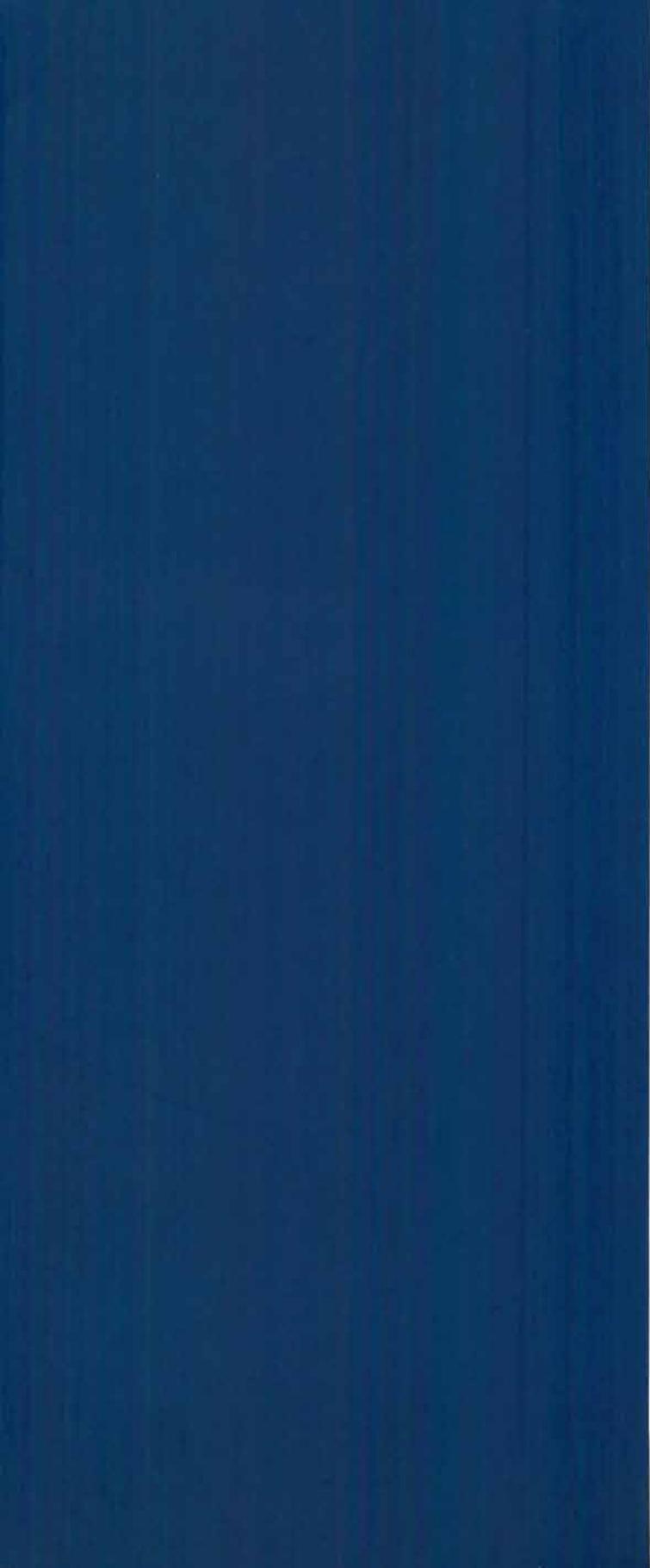




NORA HEYSEN



# NORA HEYSEN

Lou Klepac

National Library of Australia  
Canberra 2000

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Back cover: *Self Portrait* 1932  
oil on canvas; 76.2 x 61.2 cm  
Gift of Howard Hinton 1932  
Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales  
© Nora Heysen  
photo: Jenni Carter for AGNSW

## FOREWORD

It is a rare opportunity to highlight the life's work of an eminent artist. In developing the *Nora Heysen* exhibition the National Library has been privileged to work with the artist herself. From a famous and talented family Nora Heysen has, for more than 60 years, devoted her life to her art. Through the *Nora Heysen* catalogue and exhibition, the Library is delighted to reveal this remarkable life in art.

The context of the papers of Sir Hans Heysen being held in the Library's Manuscripts Collection is an important one, both for Nora and for this exhibition. As a mentor and guiding force, Nora's father was a constant presence. The exhibition features a selection of correspondence between Nora and her father. As well as the work of her father, the Library has acquired Nora's paintings and drawings over a number of years and some of the Library's works are represented in this retrospective exhibition.

Major Australian art museums, including the recently established National Portrait Gallery, have been acquiring Nora's works with increasing rapidity over the past 20 years. Many of these museums have generously lent their key Nora Heysen paintings to this timely exhibition. Private lenders have also shown their generosity in wholeheartedly lending us their works. I thank the many lenders to this exhibition.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the guest Curator of this exhibition, Lou Klepac, who has worked with Nora and the Exhibitions and Publications Branches of the Library to produce a memorable exhibition and catalogue.

Naturally, the person most deserving of our thanks is the artist herself, Nora Heysen. We, and the nation, owe her a debt of gratitude.



Jan Fullerton  
Director-General  
National Library of Australia

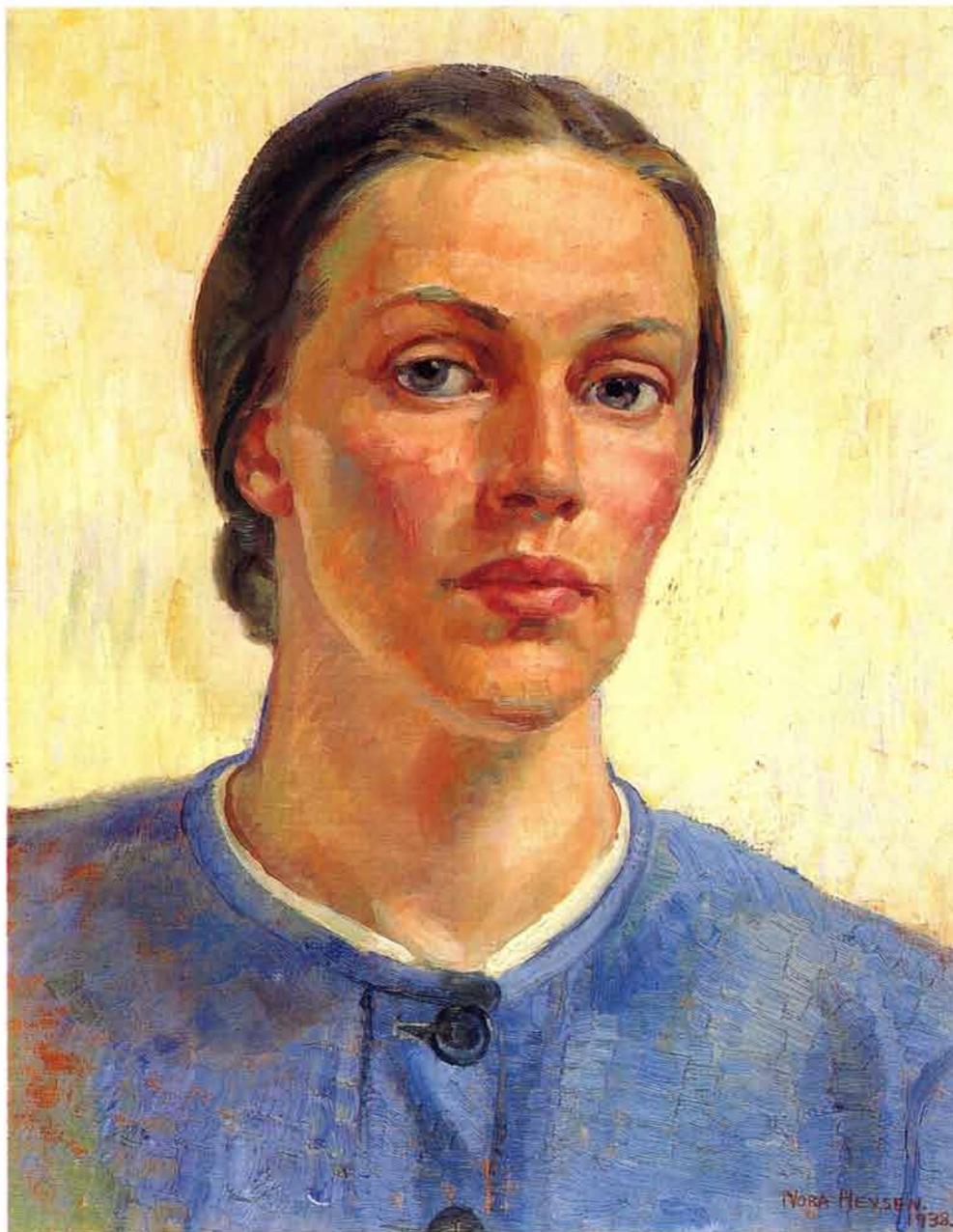
*For Steven*



*From the Kitchen Window, The Cedars* c.1940  
oil on canvas; 54 x 65 cm Private collection

# CONTENTS

Foreword	iii
Nora Heysen <i>Lou Klepac</i>	1
Biography	8
Exhibitions and Awards	10
Bibliography	12
Plates	15
List of Works	50



*Self Portrait* 1938

oil on canvas laid on board; 40.5 x 30.5 cm Collection: Meredith Stokes

## NORA HEYSEN

There are varying perceptions of Nora Heysen: the daughter of Hans Heysen, one of the most famous Australian artists of the first half of the twentieth century; the first woman to win the Archibald Prize 17 years after its inception, in 1938, with *Madame Elink Schuurman*; the first woman to be appointed a war artist during World War II; and one of the most remarkable women painters Australia has produced, her work only now being recognised after having been held back by the male dominance of the art world.

There is truth in all of these, but the real Nora Heysen is far more fascinating: a rare artist, a rare personality, and a rare woman, whose life has been driven by an intense, unwavering passion for art.

A very fine draughtsman (a word she uses herself) who has produced more stunning self-portraits than any artist except Rembrandt, she has devoted her life to largely painting flowers and to her garden and her animals. She is also very reserved, seldom giving interviews.

The daughter of a gentle man and a great painter and an exceptionally gifted mother, Nora Heysen was brought up in a large family, at Hahndorf, South Australia, in the heart of nature. It was an environment devoted to art, with a constant flow of distinguished visitors, such as Sydney Ure Smith, Lionel Lindsay, Dame Nellie Melba and many others.

All the children played in their father's studio, but it was Nora who, having shown early evidence of talent, decided that she too would be an artist. Her early ideas were formed by working with and watching her father and by studying the excellent reproductions of the masters of the past whom Hans Heysen revered: Vermeer, Constable and the great Italians, especially Piero della Francesca. (Many years later when British art historian Kenneth Clark visited Adelaide, he remarked that the Adelaide Hills seemed to have come out of one of Piero's paintings.)

Nora's life as a child at 'The Cedars', where the family lived from 1912 (she was born in 1911), proved to be an idyllic existence which remained a great source of inspiration for the artist. There were eight Heysen children. They required a great deal of organisation and various tasks were distributed among them. Nora's job was to milk the cows. Even when she began to attend art classes in Adelaide—a walk of about a mile to the station and an hour's train journey—she had to milk the cows before she went in the morning and after she returned.

All her spare time was devoted to painting. As her father was a landscape painter, she thought she would paint figures in the landscape. Her sisters posed for her, being paid from the money earned by sales of her work. Her mother found a girl called Rhonda, whom Nora renamed Ruth, to sit for her and who is the subject of several works including three remarkable portraits painted when Nora was only 22. Like Nora, 'Ruth' was of German extraction, a farm girl with strong features and large hands. One day Nora suggested to Ruth that she would like her to pose in the nude; she never came again. On a visit to Adelaide more than 60 years later, Nora sought her out.

Ruth was totally uninterested in the fact that she was the subject of one of Nora's most admired works, the *Ruth*, in the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Nora's father encouraged her to exhibit with the Society of Artists in Sydney, and by the time she was 20 years old, she had three works in State galleries. In 1933, at the age of 22, Nora was awarded the Melrose Prize for Portraiture in Adelaide and had her first solo exhibition. Her parents made an event of it. A special catalogue with three tipped-in colour plates was printed. She had a new dress made and her mother sent her to have her hair done—the result so displeasing Nora that she went to the Adelaide Botanical Gardens and dipped her head into the pond, which did not improve the effect. The exhibition was a great success, critically and financially, ending with £1000 to Nora's credit, a very large sum at that time.

Hans Heysen had studied in Paris and Italy, and it was decided that Nora too must study overseas. In 1934, with her mother and father and three sisters, she left for Europe. After visiting relatives and galleries, Nora settled in a flat in Kensington and enrolled at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Hans told her, 'Your innocence will be your protection', but she was not prepared for a great city like London. Nora recalls that no one spoke to her for six months and that the teachers were not particularly helpful. Her one comfort was the National Gallery where she could study her favourite painters, particularly Piero della Francesca, whose *Nativity* and *Baptism* were among her favourites, and the Vermeers.

Although the modern movement was sweeping the world during the 1930s, Nora remained fixed on the idea of painting that she had formed for herself in Adelaide. What she wanted from the art studies was to acquire the ability to paint figures in a landscape. She took some classes in modelling in order to better understand form, which for a time made her consider becoming a sculptor.

Her loneliness vanished when her friend Everton Stokes, a sculptor, arrived from Adelaide. At last she had a companion, someone with whom she could talk and share her enthusiasm for the things she saw. They visited Paris together and later, with help from Sir James McGregor, made a tour of Italy by train and car. But then Evie remarried and Nora was on her own again.

One event, which proved significant, was meeting Orovida Pissarro. Nora and she became good friends. They seemed to have much in common. Both women were artists and the daughters of famous painters. Orovida's father was Lucien Pissarro, who had made England his home, and her grandfather was Camille Pissarro, one of Nora's favourite painters. Lucien was an important English post-impressionist who had been a good friend of Van Gogh. As a child Lucien had also known Cézanne when his father and Cézanne spent much time painting together. Nora's contact with Lucien made her reassess her attitude to painting. The smooth, Renaissance manner of the portrait of Ruth, the carefully painted flower pieces and still lifes which had impressed visitors to her 1933 Adelaide exhibition, gave way to a more broken, painterly handling. Lucien and Orovida also advised her to give up all the earth colours and not mix her colours too much, so as to allow light and atmosphere into her work.

'It is amazing the depth and richness of colours that can be got without using brown or black,' she wrote to her father in October 1935.



*Quinces* 1991

pastel; 44 x 56.5 cm Private collection

In London Nora had an experience which marred an important period of her life and had a lasting influence on her career. She had been brought up on the books of Charles Holmes, which she and her father used for inspiration and reference. In the 1930s Holmes was director of the National Gallery, London. Hans Heysen knew him and showed him some of Nora's work when they first arrived. Holmes offered to look at Nora's work again and give her an opinion. After about two years of study, prompted by her father, but somewhat apprehensive, Nora took up the offer and made an appointment to see him. She took some of what she considered were her most successful paintings, including a study of Evie at breakfast, now in the National Gallery, Canberra. Holmes was devastating. He told her her drawing was weak, that she had learnt nothing at the Central School, and advised her not to paint landscapes. He suggested that she start all over again at the Byam Shaw School.

Coming from the author of *The Science of Picture Making*, which had been Nora's constant companion, the criticism was crushing. In one stroke it demolished her self-confidence and seriously shook her ambition to paint figures in a landscape. It was not just a student that Holmes had criticised so harshly, but a painter who had received high praise in Australia; who had held a sell-out exhibition and whose work was already in some public collections.

Holmes must have realised the effect of his criticism, for he wrote a letter of apology toning down his comments. In fact he was not well and died within a month of their meeting. Nora did, however, take his advice and enrolled at the Byam Shaw School for the rest of her period in London. This incident could explain why Nora has had so few solo exhibitions. To ask for an exhibition an artist has to produce examples of work for inspection. Nora might have been reluctant to repeat that unpleasant experience. She knew what she wanted to paint and how she would paint it. The activity was and remained a private affair. If someone offered her an exhibition, fine, if not, that too was all right.

The memory of the meeting with Holmes has remained with her all her life. It was a hard lesson but it did teach her not to depend on the opinion of other people, and to be cynical about praise and success. Even when she won the Archibald Prize in 1938, which was a great success for such a young artist and a woman to boot, she questioned the validity of the award, always suspecting that it might not have been the quality of the work alone that was responsible. In the same way she always wondered how much of the success of the 1933 exhibition was due to her paintings and how much to the fact that she was the daughter of Hans Heysen.

Nora had gone to London as a very talented painter: she came home as an artist in her own right. Her experiences overseas and her meeting with Orovida and Lucien Pissarro and the visits to Paris had made her more interested in the work of the impressionists and post-impressionists. Years before, her mother had bought her a book on Renoir and suggested that 'you will paint like him'. Whereas before going overseas she had been a disciple of her father, now there was a gulf of time between their attitudes to painting. Cézanne, who meant a great deal to her, proved too difficult for her father to appreciate. Even so, she gave him her prized Cézanne book hoping that he might respond to his work.

At Hahndorf Nora painted a number of exceptional works, such as *Corn Cobs*, 1938 (Art Gallery of New South Wales), the 1938 *Self Portrait* (private collection) and the very post-impressionist *From the Kitchen Window, The Cedars*, c.1940 (private collection). These works signal the emergence of an original painter, but fine as they are, her father found them to be in too light a key. She loved and admired him, but she now knew that she belonged to another world. If she was to make a life for herself in Australia, she must move. Nora went to Sydney and has lived there ever since.

The war interrupted the career that was now firmly set before her, but it provided her with another, that of war artist, which in turn also affected the course of her life. In New Guinea she fell in love with Dr Robert Black. It was a romance with difficulties because he was already married and it was not until 1953 that they were able to marry. Dr Black was a specialist in tropical medicine and Nora travelled with him to exotic places such as the Solomon Islands. At this time she made many fine portrait studies in red chalk. Her career was never on hold, but being married to a doctor with an important career (Dr Black was Professor of Tropical Medicine at Sydney University) brought responsibilities which did not allow her the freedom to paint full-time. Nevertheless she continued to exhibit regularly and also carried out various portrait commissions.

Nora and her husband moved to 'The Chalet' in Hunters Hill in 1954. This was a prefabricated Baltic pine house, which had been brought to Hunters Hill in about 1850. The house and the large garden proved to be Nora's paradise; it was her own version of The Cedars.

Nora has always been certain of her own values and remained true to them all her life. Few painters have shown the same dogged sense of direction. She has never pushed herself forward, but she has stood up for what she believes to be right. She regards what and how she sees as truth, and there she can't compromise. It is this element of her life as a painter that has been her mainstay.

Later when abstraction became the preferred art of the time and draughtsmanship was considered irrelevant and of little interest, it left stranded a number of exceptional painters whose lives had been devoted to a realistic approach to subject matter. A number of these painters—Lloyd Rees, Roland Wakelin, Adrian Feint, Arthur Murch, Douglas Dundas and Nora Heysen herself—held an exhibition at Prouds Gallery in Sydney in May 1970. They were looked upon as unearthed fossils. 'Meet some artists who still paint in the old-fashioned way', is how one review article is headed under the main title 'Dragging Some Sanity Out of the Mothballs' (*Australian*, 7 May 1970). Here was a group of very fine painters who were obliged to defend their beliefs and values. Even Lloyd Rees was uncharacteristically cynical in his comments on the interest of the time, of art as spectacle. The article also quoted Nora, who is described as 'proudly practical'. 'I don't care about the critics, I forget them and paint what I like ... I wouldn't pretend to be an abstract painter or on a popular bandwagon, I'm on my own private bus and I'm quite happy.'

During the 1980s a movement developed to redress the lack of recognition of women painters, who, it was felt, had been neglected while their male contemporaries enjoyed national acclaim. It seemed that the moment was right for Nora Heysen to emerge from her 'comfortable obscurity'.

My connection with Nora Heysen developed because of her father. About to arrange an exhibition of Hans Heysen's watercolours and drawings for the S.H. Ervin Gallery, I felt that I should speak to the daughter of the painter who, being an artist herself, could provide much of the information which I needed, especially about technical matters and his system of working. The visit to The Chalet proved to be a revelation of a different kind. What I discovered was that Nora was a remarkable painter herself. I was surprised to find out that she had never had a solo exhibition in Sydney where she had lived for 62 years. And when I saw her *Corn Cobs* in the exhibition *Counterclaims* (S.H. Ervin Gallery), I became determined to pass on my enthusiasm for her work to everyone. Could I arrange a retrospective of her work? 'No', she said, 'I don't want it.' Could I perhaps do a small book? She wasn't sure whether she wanted that either, but she was not so adamant as she was about the exhibition. Eventually I prepared a small book, and by then our regular meetings had developed into friendship and trust. When I suggested that we launch the book with a retrospective at the S.H. Ervin Gallery, Nora agreed. The exhibition attracted much attention especially in South Australia where it was also shown. Her work quickly found buyers and, since then, the demand has always exceeded the supply.

In 1993 Nora Heysen received an Australia Council Award for Achievement in the Arts and in 1998 the Order of Australia (AM). Like Lloyd Rees before her, she has accepted these awards with the tempered wisdom of experience. It is not the awards that she is interested in, but the recognition of her work—the children of her solitude.

The genuine interest in her work following the book and the retrospective and the reactions of her artist friends brought on a new phase of energy in her work. She had begun to use pastels in 1972 and in the late 1980s and early

1990s she produced a series of magnificent works in this difficult medium. Fruit and flowers are the main subjects, realised with strong and certain drawing, bringing out the structure of the form combined with a lyrical use of colour.

These late works are the culmination of her lifelong devotion to painting. They are a summation of her talent as a draughtsman and colourist, achieved in a medium, which is as elusive and fragile as a butterfly's wing. They have an origin in some early still lifes painted when Nora, after being confined to London and the strict art school routine, spent the summer at Rempstone Farm in Dorset, very close to Corfe Castle. The pleasure of again being in the midst of nature inspired her to produce some memorable works. One of the loveliest of these is *From a Cottage Garden*, 1935 (private collection). It is a passionate ode to youth and the bounty of nature. Painted with verve, it conveys the overflowing feelings of the artist, whose excitement is revealed in every brushstroke. The happy combination of various elements which make this painting so fine, represents a moment when Nora found her own voice.

Painting can be a mechanical process or an act of the imagination. In the first place one learns the means to make things appear as one sees them. The other is a *discovery* that is something quite different. Between them is the gulf, which separates talent from vision. In the first case, one joins the ranks of all those who paint; in the second, one becomes an artist with an individual personality.

What could be more of a Nora Heysen work than the late pastel *Quinces*, 1991 (private collection)? Drawn in 1991 it is one of her loveliest works. So much lies behind the seeming simplicity of this work. There is an allusion to both Courbet and Cézanne, but if we look at it as deeply as it deserves, we will find the certain, masterly gaze of an artist in complete control of the means of expression. It is a cautious gaze, which conceals as much as it reveals. Only slowly does one realise that the artist has projected her own visual ecstasy onto this assemblage of quinces on a wicker tray, casually placed on a stool. What may appear a simple still life is in fact a miraculous moment where the consciousness of the artist has reached a point of incandescent communion with the object of its gaze.

Since 1991, Nora has been a member of a group of artists (The Pens and Pencils) who meet regularly once a month, at the S.H. Ervin Gallery. And with two of this group, Judy Cassab and Margaret Woodward, she meets frequently to draw from the model. Although her eyesight has deteriorated and she cannot read a newspaper, she can still see paintings, which remains one of her greatest pleasures.

Of all the attention paid to her, the awards and honours, what pleased her most was when London publisher Thames and Hudson reproduced the self-portrait *A Portrait Study*, 1933, on the cover of the book *Seeing Ourselves*, 1998. By Frances Borzello it is a book of women's self-portraits from the twelfth century to today. Nora appreciates this attention because, in the end, it is her work that is being honoured.

Lou Klepac

Sydney, July 2000



*Adrian Feint* 1940

oil on plywood; 88 x 66 cm Collection: National Library of Australia

# BIOGRAPHY

## 1911

Born 11 January in Hahndorf, South Australia; the fourth of Hans and Selma Heysen's eight children.

## 1912

Family move to 'The Cedars'.

## 1926

Studied at the School of Fine Arts, North Adelaide (1926–1930), under F. Millward Grey.

## 1930–1933

Studied two days a week at the School of Fine Arts while during the remaining time she painted in her studio, a converted shed, at 'The Cedars'.

## 1930

Exhibited at the Society of Artists, Sydney. Works acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Art Gallery of South Australia. Illustrated Catherine Stow's *Woggheeguy: Australian Aboriginal Legends*, published by F.W. Preece and Sons, Adelaide, for which she made many studies at the Adelaide Zoo. Won the Still Life Prize, Society of Arts Autumn Exhibition.

## 1931

Visited Sydney with her mother and father; spent two weeks studying at the Julian Ashton School. Work acquired by the Queensland Art Gallery.

## 1933

First solo exhibition at the Royal South Australian Society of Arts Galleries, Adelaide; showed twelve portraits, thirty still lifes and twenty drawings. Awarded Melrose Prize for Portraiture with *Ruth*.

## 1934

Went to London with family; travelled to England and the Continent. Remained in London when family returned home. Enrolled at the Central School where she studied (1934–1936) under Bernard Meninsky, James Grant, Alfred Turner and John Skeaping. Moved into studio flat in Duke Street, Kensington.

## 1935

Met Orovida Pissarro who visited her studio and later took her to meet her father Lucien Pissarro. Influenced by Pissarro's advice she changed her palette. In June she paid her first visit to Paris with her friend Everton Stokes, a sculptor, who came to join her from Adelaide. She was thrilled by the Louvre, the Luxembourg and by a great exhibition of Italian Renaissance art. Stayed at Rempstone Farm, Dorset, with Evie, from June to the end of October, she painting and Evie carving.

## 1936

Second trip to Paris. At the end of the year enrolled at the Byam Shaw School and studied under Ernest Jackson for six months.

## 1937

Went on extended trip to Italy with Evie. Travelled to Rome by train and then by car to Orvieto, Assisi, Perugia, Siena, Florence, San Gimignano, Padua and Venice; then to Milan by train and from there to London (30 June – 18 July). In Paris saw a Van Gogh exhibition including paintings, drawings and letters. Embarked on a ship for home and arrived in Adelaide in October. Painted some works in her old studio, but soon decided to go and live in Sydney.

## 1938

Settled in Sydney early in the year. Made a member of the Society of Artists in September. Entered two portraits in the Archibald Prize, which she won, with the portrait of Madame Elink Schuurman.

## 1941

Painted portrait of Lionel Lindsay, commissioned by Sir James McGregor, who presented it to the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

## 1943–1946

Appointed official war artist in October 1943. Served in New Guinea, Lae, Finchhafen, Morotai and Borneo. Discharged on 7 February 1946. In New Guinea met Dr Robert Black whom she was later to marry.

**1947**

Travelled to England. Lived in Liverpool and London partly to be near Dr Black who was involved in the specialist study of tropical diseases in which he was to become an authority and later Head of Tropical Medicine at University of Sydney. While in England met up with Ursula and Bill Hayward, Jeffrey Smart and Jacqueline Hick with whom she visited exhibitions and galleries.

**1948**

Returned to Sydney where she lived in a flat in College Street, next to Hyde Park.

**1952**

Exhibition at Heysen Gallery, Hahndorf.

**1953**

In January married Robert Black; 'a wish of ten years' standing is finally fulfilled', she wrote to her father. Exhibition at the Moreton Galleries, Brisbane.

**1954**

Purchased, with her husband, 'The Chalet', a prefabricated house of Baltic pine exhibited at the Paris Exhibition, imported to Sydney and erected, c.1850, at Hunters Hill. Joined Frank Bennett's life classes at Hunters Hill where she drew from the nude every Friday night.

**1954–1965**

With her husband travelled frequently to tropical regions including New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. There she enjoyed

drawing and painting the local people, which figured prominently in her oeuvre of that time. A drawing of a 'native' was purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1956 from the Society of Artists Exhibition. Her husband, her cats, holidays and the large garden kept her from being very active as a painter. November 1965 interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the National Library's Oral History Collection.

**1957**

Exhibition at John Martin's Gallery, Adelaide.

**1962**

John Hetherington published a profile of her in the *Age* with the title 'I Don't Know if I Exist in My Own Right'. Death of her mother.

**1963**

Exhibited with her father at Hamilton Art Gallery, Victoria; solo exhibition in Millicent, South Australia.

**1967**

Exhibition at North Adelaide Galleries.

**1968**

Travelled to USA, London, Spain and Italy. Death of her father.

**1970**

Group exhibition at Prouds Gallery with Lloyd Rees, Roland Wakelin, Douglas Dundas, Adrian Feint and Arthur Murch. An article in the *Australian* called the

group 'artists who still paint in the old-fashioned way'.

**1972**

Travelled to USA, Mexico, England and Switzerland. Separated from her husband; retained the Hunters Hill house. Began working with pastels.

**1974**

Travelled to New Zealand.

**1984**

Retrospective exhibition at Old Clarendon Gallery, South Australia.

**1986**

Exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.

**1987**

Exhibited in second Annual Survey, David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney.

**1989**

Retrospective exhibition, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney, and publication of a monograph on her work by Lou Klepac, published by The Beagle Press. The retrospective was also shown at Carrick Hill, Adelaide.

**1993**

Received the Australia Council's Award for Achievement in the Arts.

**1998**

Awarded Order of Australia (AM).

# EXHIBITIONS AND AWARDS

## **SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

1933

Paintings and drawings, the Royal South Australian Society of Arts Galleries, Adelaide

1952

Heysen Gallery, Hahndorf, South Australia

1953

Moreton Galleries, Brisbane

1957

John Martin's Gallery, Adelaide

1963

Millicent Masonic Hall, Millicent, South Australia; Hamilton Art Gallery, Hamilton (with Hans Heysen)

1967

North Adelaide Galleries

1984

Retrospective 1927–1983, Old Clarendon Gallery, Clarendon, South Australia

1986

Survey 1930 to 1985, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, New South Wales

1989

Retrospective, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney and Carrick Hill, Adelaide

1996

Nora Heysen (with Jean Appleton),

Southern Highlands Regional Gallery, Moss Vale

1999

Sketch Book Drawings and Studies, 'The Cedars', Hahndorf

## **GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

1930

Exhibited regularly from this time with the Royal South Australian Society of Arts; Society of Artists, New South Wales and the Fellowship of Australian Artists, Melbourne

1938

Australian Academy of Art, Sydney

1954

Artists by Artists, Australian State galleries touring exhibition

1970

Prouds Gallery, Sydney, with Lloyd Rees, Roland Wakelin, Douglas Dundas, Adrian Feint and Arthur Murch

1975

Women Painters, Bloomfield Galleries, Sydney

1986

Counterclaims, Australian Art 1938–1941, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney

1987

Second Annual Survey, David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney

Survey Exhibition of Drawings, Woolloomooloo Gallery, Sydney

1988

Portraits of Australia, finalist in the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize Collection

The Self Portrait, David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney

A Gift to the Gallery, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney

1989

Send Me More Paint!, Australian War Memorial, Canberra

1993

A Century of Women Artists 1840s–1940s, Deutscher Fine Art, Melbourne

1994

South Australian Women Artists 1890s–1940s, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

## **PRIZES**

1930

Still Life Prize, South Australian Society of Arts

1933

Melrose Prize for Portraiture

1938

Archibald Prize

1973

L.J. Harvey Memorial Drawing Prize

1975

L.J. Harvey Memorial Drawing Prize

**REPRESENTED IN PUBLIC  
COLLECTIONS**

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery,  
Hobart

Australian War Memorial, Canberra

National Library of Australia, Canberra

City of Ballarat Fine Art Gallery

Newcastle Region Art Gallery

New England Regional Art Museum,  
Armidale

S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney

Hamilton Art Gallery

Geelong Art Gallery

Benalla Art Gallery

Tamworth Art Gallery

Carrick Hill Trust, Adelaide

and many corporate and private  
collections

**AWARDS**

Australia Council, Award for  
Achievement in the Arts, 1993

Order of Australia (AM), 1998

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*Still Life with Onions* 1927

oil on canvas; 45.5 x 61 cm Private collection

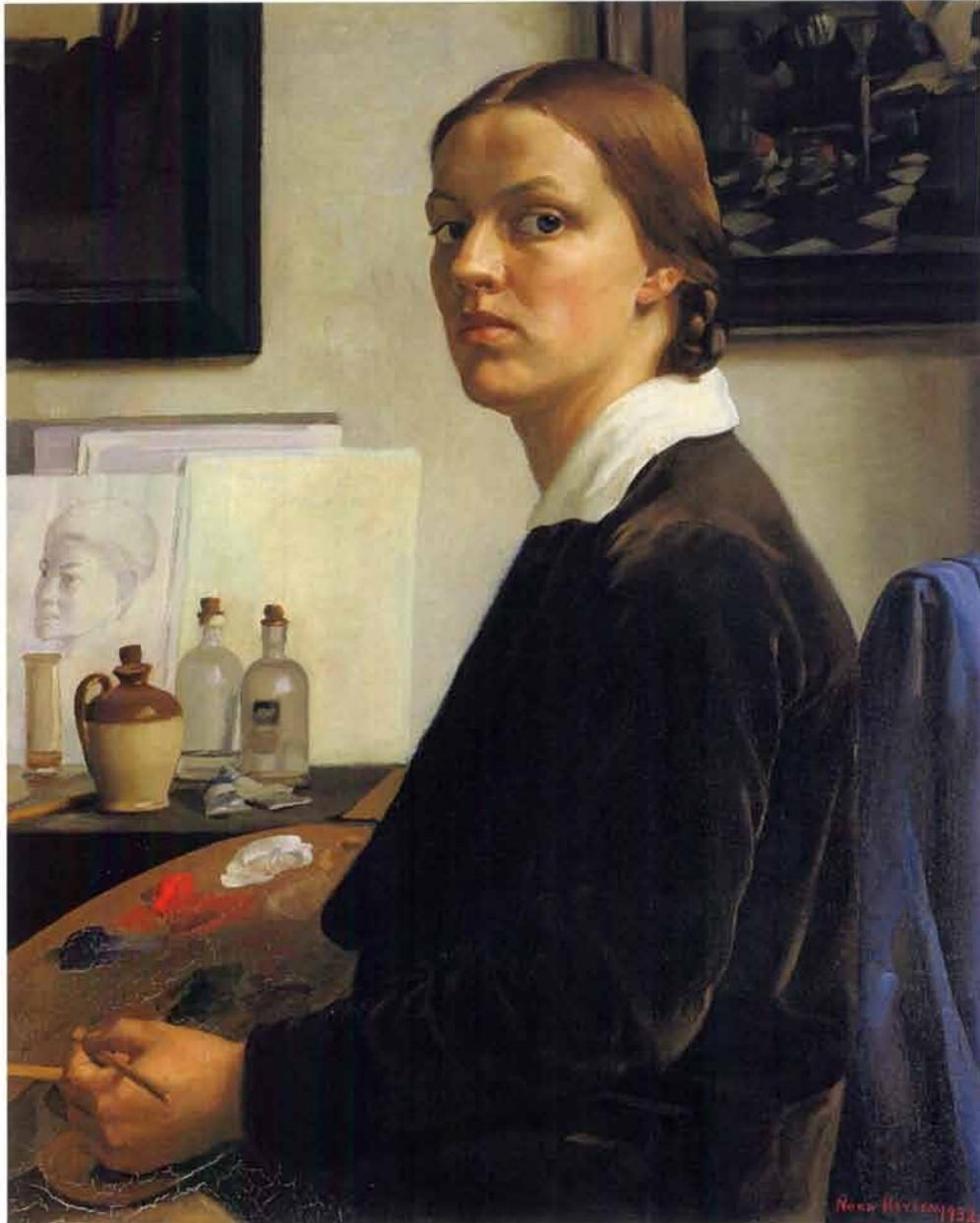


*Eggs* 1927

oil on canvas; 36.6 x 52.5 cm Gift of Howard Hinton 1934 The Howard Hinton Collection  
New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW



*A Bunch of Flowers* 1930  
oil on canvas; 38 x 46 cm Private collection.



*Self Portrait* 1932

oil on canvas; 76.2 x 61.2 cm Gift of Howard Hinton 1932 Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales

© Nora Heysen photo: Jenni Carter for AGNSW



*A Portrait Study (Self Portrait) 1933*

oil on canvas; 86.5 x 66.7 cm Purchased with the Assistance of The Art Foundation of Tasmania 1986

Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery





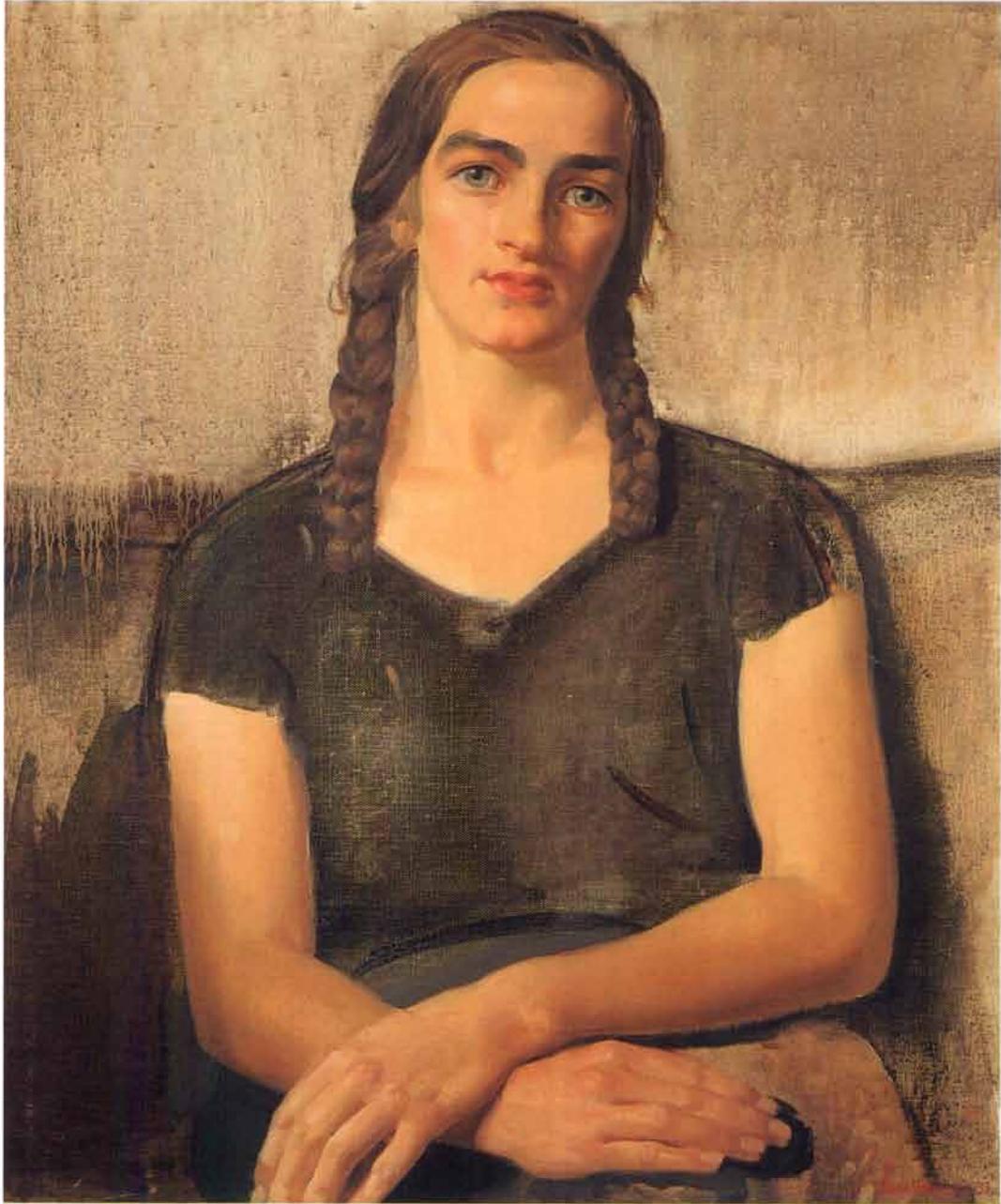
*Still Life* 1933

oil on canvas; 51.1 x 60.7 cm Gift of Howard Hinton 1933 The Howard Hinton Collection  
New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW

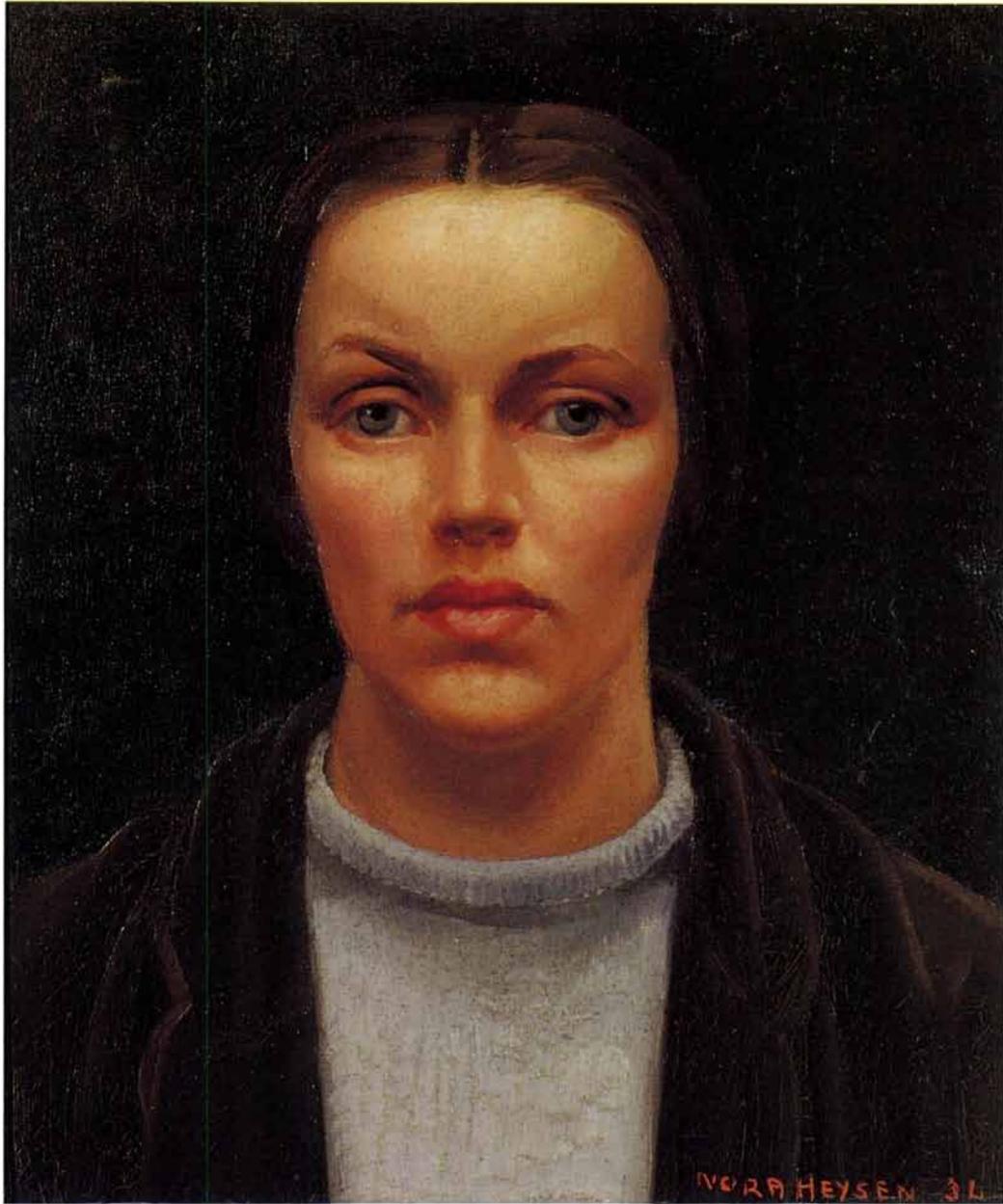


*Summer Flowers* 1933

oil on canvas; 76.1 x 61.2 cm The Hayward Bequest Carrick Hill Trust Adelaide, South Australia



*A Portrait Study—Ruth* 1933  
oil on canvas; 67.5 x 56 cm. Private collection



*Self Portrait* 1934

oil on canvas; 43.1 x 36.3 cm Collection: National Portrait Gallery Purchased 1999

photo: David Reid



*I like painting flowers direct, I like to gather a bunch in my hand in the garden, and put them in a container in a setting which enhances them, and paint direct, to get the whole feeling of the bunch in the round.*

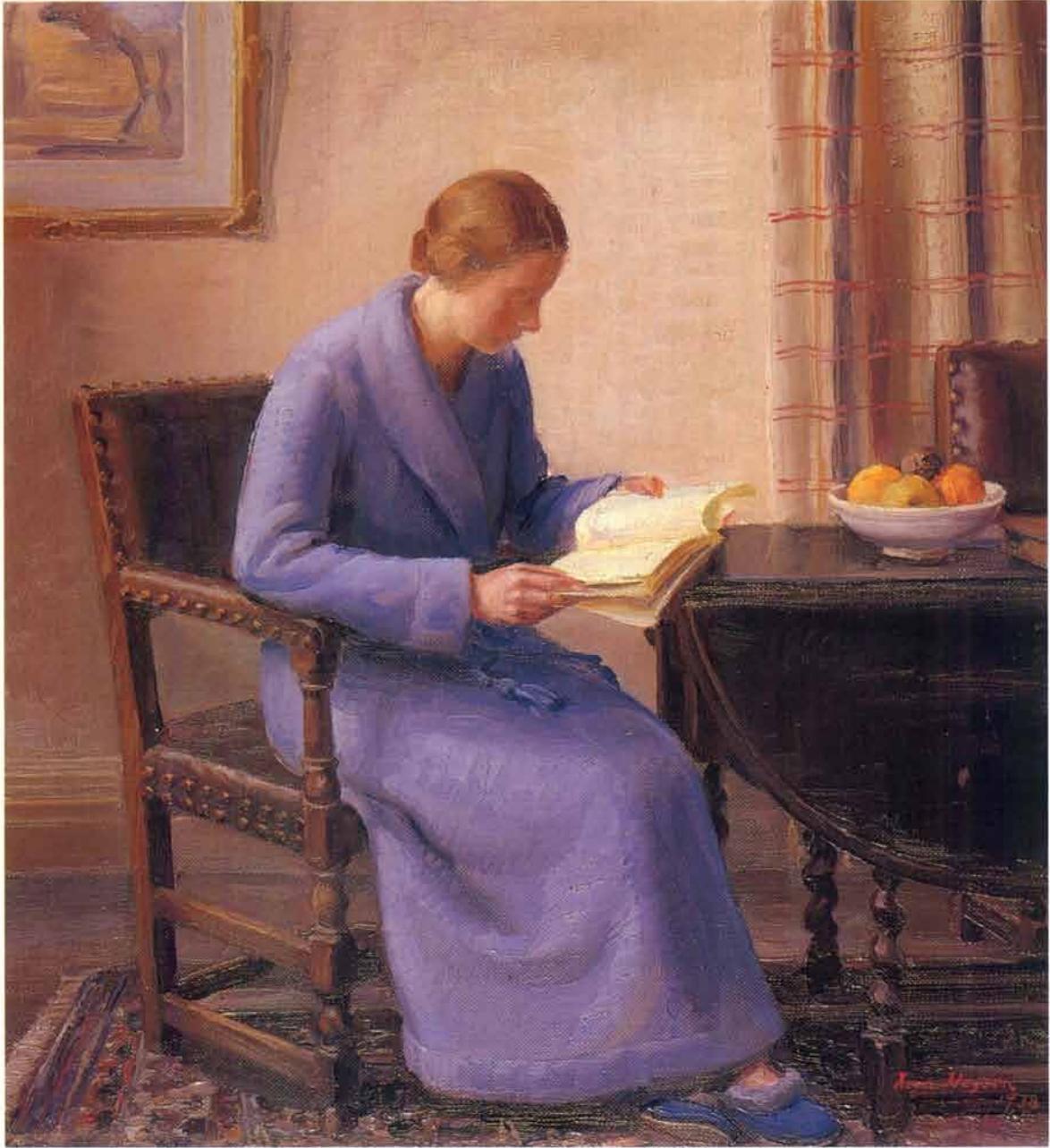
*I don't feel things decoratively, I don't feel that they're flat. I feel that there's light and air surrounding everything and that is how I like to portray it.*

Nora Heysen

oral history interview with Hazel de Berg, 1965



*From a Cottage Garden* 1935  
oil on canvas; 44 x 37.5 cm Private collection



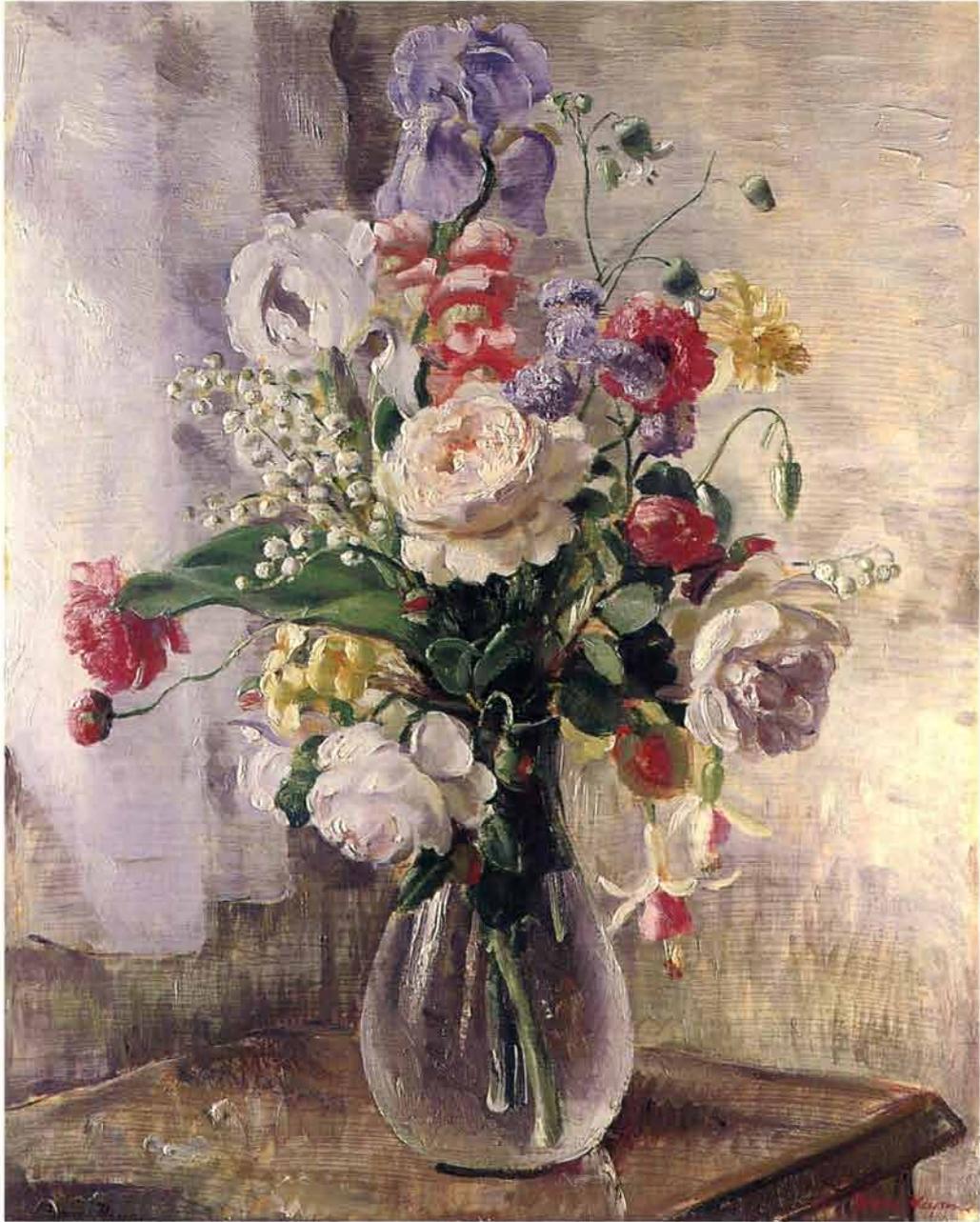
*Interior* 1935

oil on canvas; 33 x 30.5 cm Collection: Meredith Stokes



*Portrait of Everton (Evie) 1936*

oil on canvas laid on board; 40.6 x 30 cm Collection: Meredith Stokes



*Spring Light* c.1938

oil on canvas; 51 x 41 cm Private collection





*Corn Cobs* 1938

oil on canvas; 40.5 x 51.3 cm Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales

© Nora Heysen photo: Jenni Carter for AGNSW



*Motherhood* 1941

oil on canvas; 76.3 x 64.5 cm Collection: Ballarat Fine Art Gallery





*Merrie at Six Months* 1941

oil on board; 30 x 25 cm Collection: Meredith Stokes



*The Lovebirds* 1942

oil on canvas; 43 x 35.5 cm Private collection



WAAF Cook (*Corporal Joan Whipp*) 1945 

oil on canvas; 82.4 x 64.4 cm Collection: Australian War Memorial (negative number ART 24394)

*I believe flowers have always had a fascination for me, because I can remember when I was a war artist right up in the steaming jungle of New Guinea, I'd arranged myself a beautiful native bowl full of flowers and I was sitting in the mess painting this when I had a signal to be moved on down to Lae, and I ignored the signal, and the jeep came along to collect me to take me to the airport and I said 'Go away, I'm in the middle of painting flowers!' and I continued with my flowers, and got into hot water over this. The signals flew from New Guinea to Melbourne and back, and I was still painting my flowers, refusing to budge.*

*I recall that picture and sticking it out, and I remember painting it on the mess table and I had to move every time a meal was brought forward, and it took me about four or five days to complete it, and I've kept that canvas, I called it 'The Flower Ship', and that's one picture that didn't go into the Military History Section. I felt I deserved that one!*

Nora Heysen

oral history interview with Hazel de Berg, 1965



*The Flower Ship* 1945

oil on canvas; 55 x 64 cm Private collection



*Flowers in a Delft Vase* c.1946  
oil on plywood; 39.5 x 30 cm Private collection





*Robert H. Black M.D.* c.1950

oil on board; 78 x 59 cm. Gift of the artist 1999 Collection: National Portrait Gallery

photo: David Reid



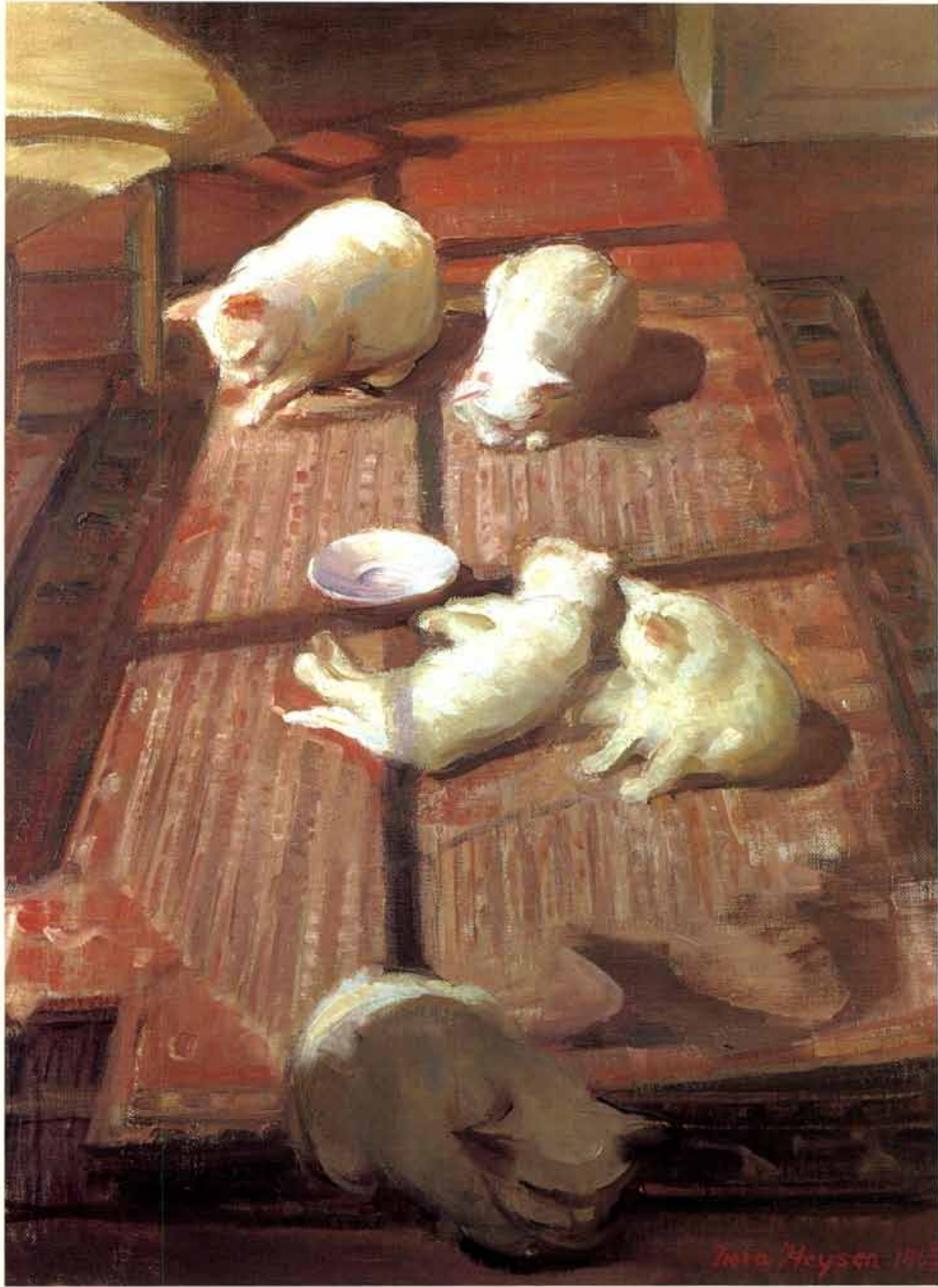
*Now I think I've found my own environment in an old home in Hunter's Hill where I'm living, looking over the Gladesville Bridge. The house itself is about 120 years old, made of Baltic pine imported from Europe and put up here by German workmen, in a very wandering wilderness of a garden where I can grow my own flowers for painting, and the atmosphere is peaceful and very conducive to my work.*

*Also I mustn't forget cats, the whole place is full of white cats which look beautiful, and I've done several paintings of them.*

*This peaceful spot is not so remote that I'm not all too aware of what is going on in the art world, and the disturbing trends. It is very hard to find what is true to oneself. There are all these new trends, and it is a very exciting experimental age to be working in, but after all one's own individual way of saying something is the important thing.*

Nora Heysen

oral history interview with Hazel de Berg, 1965



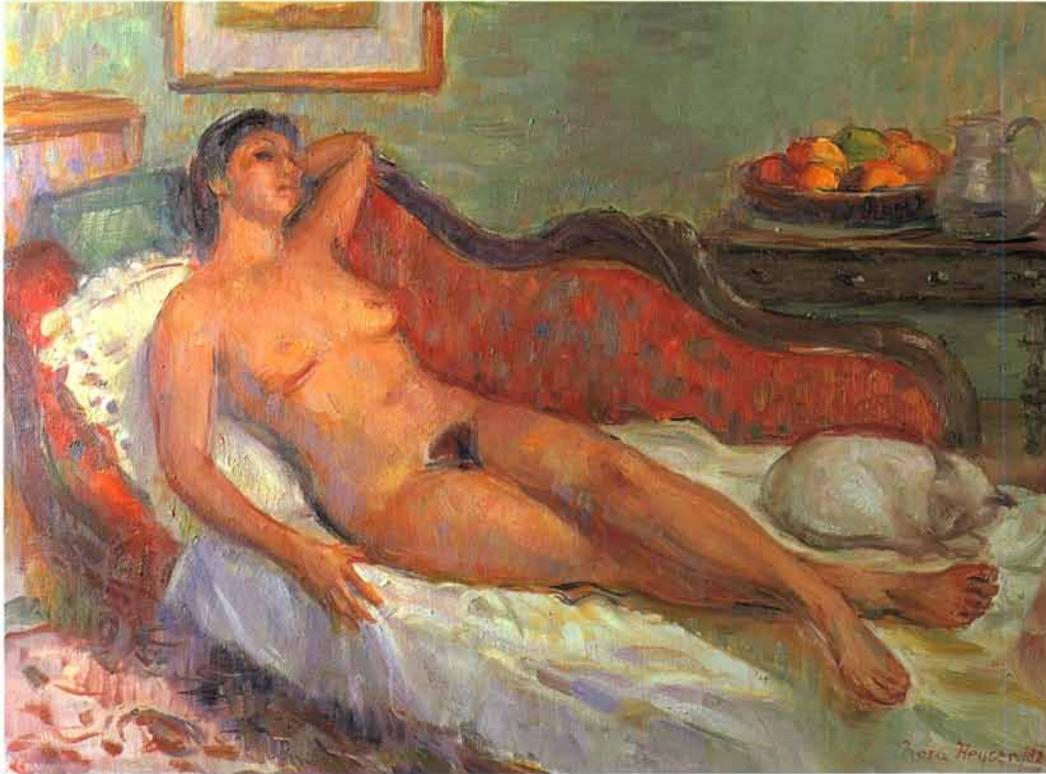
*Morning Sun* 1965

oil on canvas; 63.5 x 47 cm Private collection



*Flowers* 1981

oil on canvas; 45.5 x 40 cm Private collection



*Siesta* 1982

oil on canvas; 69 x 93 cm Private collection



*Freesias* 1985

oil on canvas; 50 x 61 cm Private collection



*Apples on a Chair* 1987  
oil on canvas; 39 x 49 cm Private collection

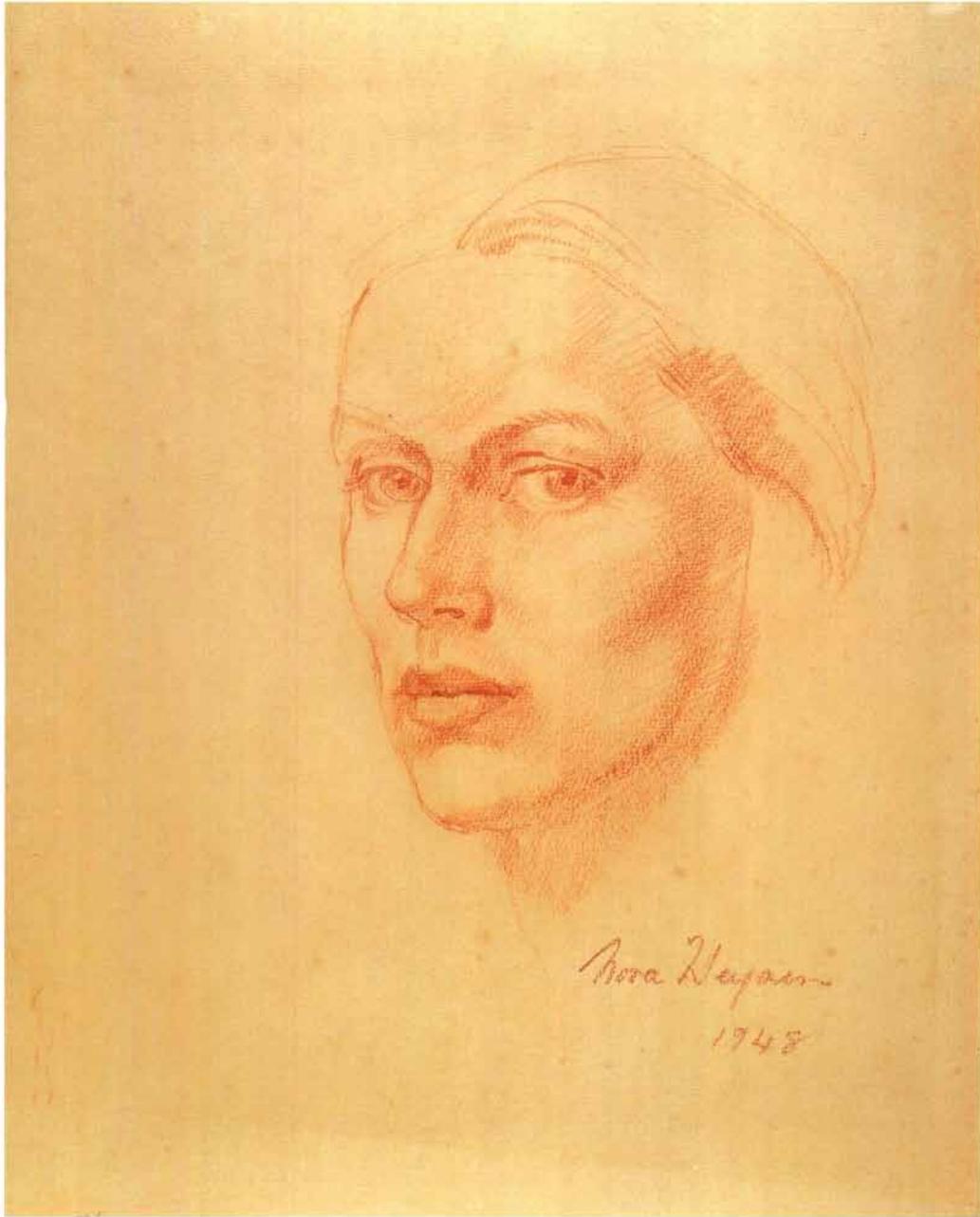
*My first interest was perhaps flowers and people, I was always interested in people, and I used to try and get my brothers and sisters to sit, and offer them a shilling for a sitting, which seemed to be very tempting to them in those days anyway. Since then, I've gone on with the same things probably, painting flowers and people.*

Nora Heysen

oral history interview with Hazel de Berg, 1965



*Portrait of Evie* 1935  
conte crayon; 34 x 26 cm Private collection



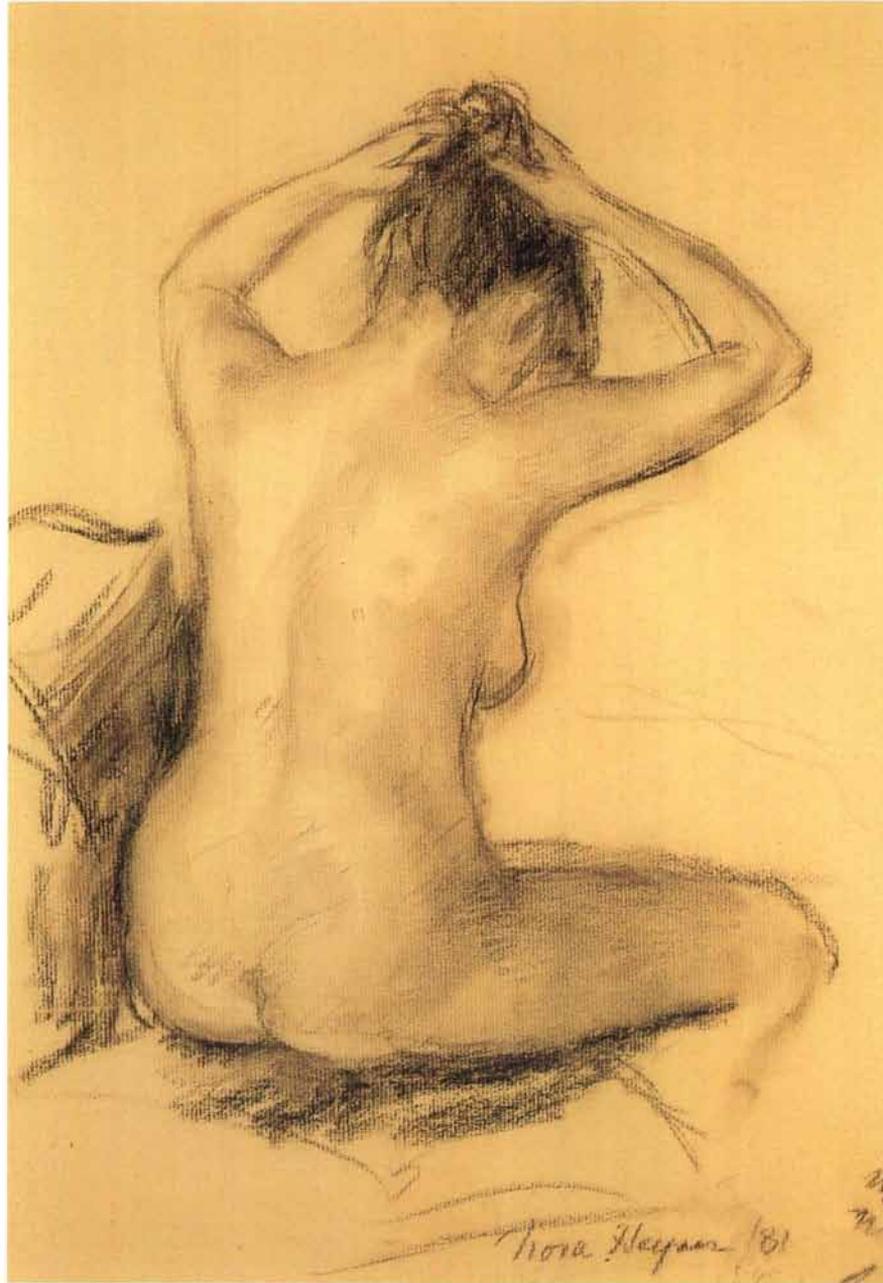
*Self Portrait* 1948

red chalk; 43 x 31.8 cm Collection: National Library of Australia

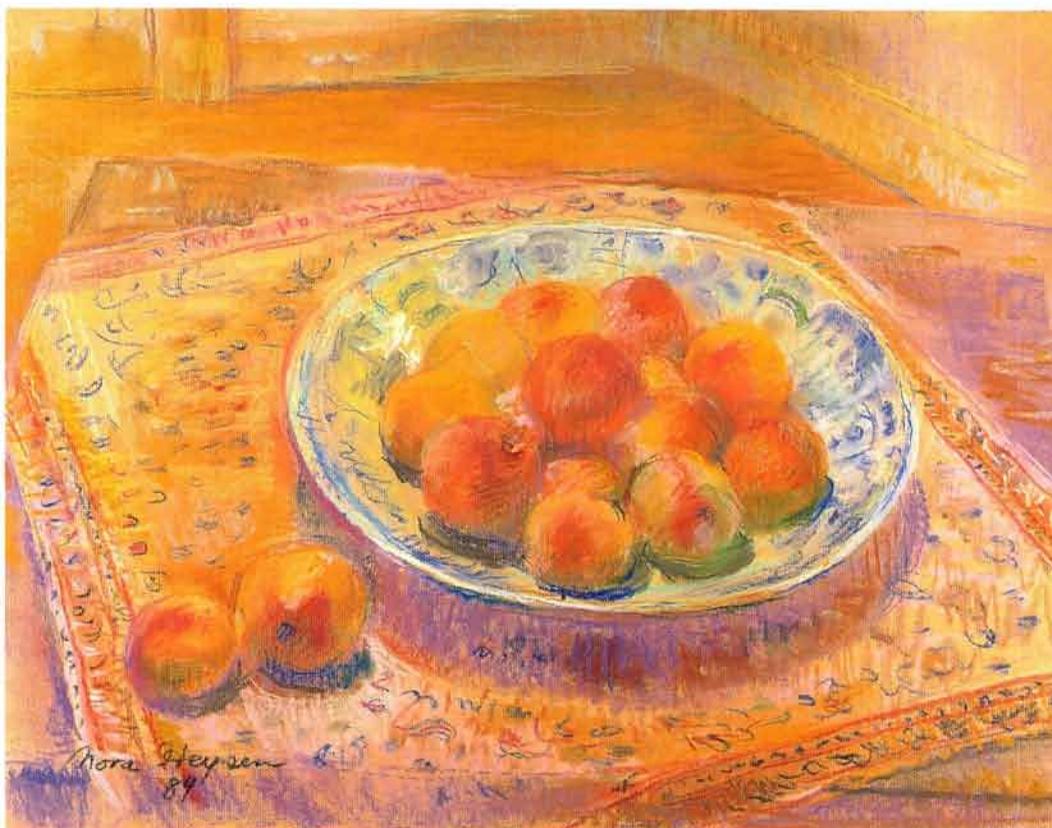


*Boy Dreaming* 1957

red chalk; 37.7 x 33.5 cm National Trust of Australia (NSW) S.H. Ervin Gallery Gift of Nora Heysen 1988



*La Coiffure* 1981  
charcoal; 43 x 30 cm Private collection



*Peaches* 1989  
pastel; 50 x 65 cm Private collection

## LIST OF WORKS

### PAINTINGS

***Still Life with Onions*** 1927

oil on canvas; 45.5 x 61 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

***Eggs*** 1927

oil on canvas; 36.6 x 52.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Gift of Howard Hinton 1934  
The Howard Hinton Collection  
New England Regional Art Museum,  
Armidale, NSW

***A Bunch of Flowers*** 1930

oil on canvas; 38 x 46 cm  
signed and dated lower left  
Private collection

***Camellias*** 1930

oil on canvas; 51 x 45.7 cm  
signed and dated lower left  
Burdekin Collection  
Collection: Tamworth Art Gallery

***Self Portrait*** 1932

oil on canvas; 76 x 64 cm  
signed and dated upper right  
Private collection

***Self Portrait*** 1932

oil on canvas; 76.2 x 61.2 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Gift of Howard Hinton 1932  
Collection: Art Gallery of New South  
Wales

***A Portrait Study (Self Portrait)*** 1933

oil on canvas; 86.5 x 66.7 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Purchased with the Assistance of  
The Art Foundation of Tasmania 1986  
Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art  
Gallery

***Still Life*** 1933

oil on canvas; 51.1 x 60.7 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Gift of Howard Hinton 1933  
The Howard Hinton Collection  
New England Regional Art Museum,  
Armidale, NSW

***Summer Flowers*** 1933

oil on canvas; 76.1 x 61.2 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
The Hayward Bequest  
Carrick Hill Trust  
Adelaide, South Australia

***A Portrait Study—Ruth*** 1933

oil on canvas; 67.5 x 56 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

***Self Portrait*** 1934

oil on canvas; 43.1 x 36.3 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: National Portrait Gallery  
Purchased 1999

***A Spring Bunch*** 1935

oil on canvas; 52.8 x 45.7 cm

signed and dated lower right  
Gift of Howard Hinton 1938  
The Howard Hinton Collection  
New England Regional Art Museum,  
Armidale, NSW

***From a Cottage Garden*** 1935

oil on canvas; 44 x 37.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

***London Breakfast*** 1935

oil on canvas; 47 x 53.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: National Gallery of  
Australia

***Interior*** 1935

oil on canvas; 33 x 30.5 cm  
re-signed and incorrectly dated 1938  
Collection: Meredith Stokes

***Still Life—Flowers in a Jug*** 1936

oil on canvas; 50.8 x 40.6 cm  
signed lower right; dated lower left  
Collection: Meredith Stokes

***Portrait of Everton (Evie)*** 1936

oil on canvas laid on board;  
40.6 x 30 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: Meredith Stokes

***Spring Light*** c.1938

oil on canvas; 51 x 41 cm  
signed lower left and lower right  
Private collection

*Self Portrait* 1938  
oil on canvas laid on board;  
40.5 x 30.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: Meredith Stokes

*Corn Cobs* 1938  
oil on canvas; 40.5 x 51.3 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: Art Gallery of New South  
Wales

*From the Kitchen Window, The Cedars*  
c.1940  
oil on canvas; 54 x 65 cm  
signed lower left  
Private collection

*Adrian Feint* 1940  
oil on plywood; 88 x 66 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*White Cacti* c.1941  
oil on cardboard; 39.7 x 29.2 cm  
signed lower right  
Elder Bequest Fund 1941  
Collection: Art Gallery of South Australia

*Motherhood* 1941  
oil on canvas; 76.3 x 64.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: Ballarat Fine Art Gallery

*Merrie at Six Months* 1941  
oil on board; 30 x 25 cm  
signed lower right and upper right  
Collection: Meredith Stokes

*The Lovebirds* 1942  
oil on canvas; 43 x 35.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Flinders Street Station* 1943–1944  
oil on canvas laid on plywood;  
45.5 x 62.5 cm  
signed lower left  
Private collection

*Flinders Street Station, No. 2*  
1943–1944  
oil on canvas laid on board;  
49.5 x 62.5 cm  
signed and dated incorrectly '1946'  
Private collection

*Sister Minnie Goldstein Working in the  
Blood Bank, Alexishafen* 1944  
oil on canvas; 45.6 x 40.6 cm  
signed lower left  
Collection: Australian War Memorial

*AAMWS (Private Gwynneth Patterson)*  
1944  
oil on canvas; 56.2 x 41 cm  
signed and dated lower left  
Collection: Australian War Memorial

*Theatre Sister (Margaret Sullivan)*  
1945  
oil on canvas; 91.8 x 66 cm  
unsigned  
Collection: Australian War Memorial

*WAAF Cook (Corporal Joan Whipp)*  
1945  
oil on canvas; 82.4 x 64.4 cm  
unsigned  
Collection: Australian War Memorial

*The Flower Ship* 1945  
oil on canvas; 55 x 64 cm  
signed and dated lower left  
Private collection

*Flowers in a Delft Vase* c.1946  
oil on plywood; 39.5 x 30 cm

signed lower right  
Private collection

*Souvenir Roses* 1946  
oil on canvas; 46 x 36 cm  
signed lower right  
Collection: The Cedars, Hahndorf

*October Flowers* c.1947  
oil on canvas laid on board; 56 x 46 cm  
signed lower right  
Collection: Meredith Stokes

*Margaret* 1948  
oil on canvas board; 33 x 25.7 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Robert H. Black M.D.* c.1950  
oil on board; 78 x 59 cm  
signed lower right  
Gift of the artist 1999  
Collection: National Portrait Gallery

*Morning Sun* 1965  
oil on canvas; 63.5 x 47 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Hardtmüt (Hottie) Lahm* 1973  
oil on canvas; 89 x 74 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: Mrs Joan Lahm

*Merv Lilley* 1977  
oil on canvas; 112 x 83 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Collection: National Library of  
Australia

*Flowers in a White Coffee Pot* 1979  
oil on canvas; 54.5 x 44.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Flowers* 1981  
oil on canvas; 45.5 x 40 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Siesta* 1982  
oil on canvas; 69 x 93 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Freesias* 1985  
oil on canvas; 50 x 61 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Apples on a Chair* 1987  
oil on canvas; 39 x 49 cm  
signed and dated lower left  
Private collection

*Apples* 1995  
oil on canvas; 40 x 50.5 cm  
unsigned  
Private collection

#### **DRAWINGS**

*Study of Apples* c.1927  
pencil; 23.5 x 26 cm  
signed lower left  
Private collection

*Quinces* 1927  
pencil; 30 x 36 cm  
signed and dated  
Private collection

*Self Portrait* c.1930  
charcoal; 36 x 30 cm  
signed lower right  
Private collection

*(Study for Three Birds) from the book  
Woggheeguy: Australian Aboriginal  
Legends* 1930  
carbon pencil; 23 x 17.8 cm

signed lower centre and incorrectly  
dated 1932  
Private collection

*Baagoddah (Aboriginal Implements)  
from the book Woggheeguy: Australian  
Aboriginal Legends* 1930  
pencil, ink; 30.4 x 23.9 cm  
unsigned  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Tailpiece 'Billai' (Two Aborigines  
Fishing) from the book Woggheeguy:  
Australian Aboriginal Legends* 1930  
pencil, ink; 23.7 x 30.7 cm  
unsigned  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Illustration for Borah the Kangaroo  
(Aborigines Dancing) from the book  
Woggheeguy: Australian Aboriginal  
Legends* 1930  
pencil, ink and wash; 13.8 x 22.2 cm  
signed lower left  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Frontispiece Borah (Bohrah) the  
Kangaroo from the book Woggheeguy:  
Australian Aboriginal Legends* 1930  
pencil, ink and wash; 20.4 x 30.4 cm  
signed lower right  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Gheerlahngahw-w (Three Aboriginal  
Figures) from the book Woggheeguy:  
Australian Aboriginal Legends* 1930  
pencil, ink; 15 x 20.7 cm  
signed lower left  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Illustration for The Bunyee Bunyee or  
Bunyip (The Bunyee Bunyees) from the  
book Woggheeguy: Australian*

*Aboriginal Legends* 1930  
ink and wash drawing; 20.4 x 28.7 cm  
signed lower right  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Tailpiece for The Lyre Bird (Three Lyre  
Birds) from the book Woggheeguy:  
Australian Aboriginal Legends* 1930  
pencil, ink; 23.6 x 30.8 cm  
unsigned  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Illustration for Yaraandoo the Southern  
Cross (Yaraandoo the Southern Cross)  
from the book Woggheeguy: Australian  
Aboriginal Legends* 1930  
pencil, ink and wash drawing; 20.5 x  
26.7 cm  
signed lower left  
Collection: National Library of Australia

*Study of Trees* 1930  
pencil; 29 x 33 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Study of Nude* c.1935  
pencil; 43 x 27 cm  
signed lower centre  
Private collection

*Portrait of Evie* 1935  
conte crayon; 34 x 26 cm  
signed lower right and dated lower left  
Private collection

*Self Portrait in Army Uniform* 1944  
pencil; 41 x 35.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Captain Robert Black* 1944  
pencil; 57.4 x 39.0 cm  
signed lower left  
Collection: Australian War Memorial

*Cypher Officer (Section Officer Jean Ewing)* 1945

pastel with pencil; 55.2 x 33 cm  
dated lower left

Collection: Australian War Memorial

*Self Portrait* 1948

red chalk; 43 x 31.8 cm  
signed and dated lower right

Collection: National Library of Australia

*John Brackenreg* c.1950

pencil; 28 x 21 cm  
signed lower centre

Private collection

*Portrait of Hans Heysen* 1952

conte crayon; 39.8 x 29.9 cm  
signed and dated lower right

Collection: National Library of Australia

*Nude Study* c.1955

crayon; 51 x 46.5 cm  
signed lower right

Collection: The Cedars, Hahndorf

*Boy Dreaming* 1957

red chalk; 37.7 x 33.5 cm  
signed lower left

National Trust of Australia (NSW)

S.H. Ervin Gallery

Gift of Nora Heysen 1988

*Portrait of Father* 1968

pencil; 30 x 22.5 cm  
signed and dated

Private collection

*Dr Lister Reid* 1975

red conte with some black chalk; 35.5 x  
27.3 cm

signed and dated lower right

Collection: Art Gallery of New South  
Wales

*Steven's Bed* 1979

pastel; 26 x 28.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right

Private collection

*George Lawrence* 1980

conte crayon; 38 x 28 cm  
signed and dated lower left

Artarmon Galleries

*La Coiffure* 1981

charcoal; 43 x 30 cm  
signed and dated

Private collection

*Peaches* 1989

pastel; 50 x 65 cm  
signed and dated lower left  
Private collection

*Flowers and Fruit* 1990

pastel; 53 x 72 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

*Quinces* 1991

pastel; 44 x 56.5 cm  
signed and dated lower right  
Private collection

Lou Klepac was born in 1936 in Croatia. He developed his interest in art in Venice where he lived as a child. Emigrating to Australia in 1950, he was educated at the University of Western Australia. He was Curator of Paintings at the State galleries of Western Australia and South Australia, and later Senior Curator and then Deputy Director, at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (1975-1980). His publications include those on Horace Trenergy, Russell Drysdale, James Gleeson, Nora Heysen, Judy Cassab and Giorgio Morandi.



Nora Heysen's life has been driven by an intense unwavering passion for art. This publication brings together a representation of her work from the early years as a young sixteen-year-old art student in the 1920s, to the rare, masterly confidence of recent years. As Lou Klepac writes: 'what may appear as a simple still life is in fact a miraculous moment'.