
REPORT ON FEBRUARY 2012 MEETING

Speaker: John Monteleone.

Topic: Wollongong Art Gallery.

Our speaker, the Director of the Wollongong Art Gallery commenced our speakers programme for this year with a talk on the Gallery.

The Gallery's beginnings in 1978, he said, were a result of an unexpected gift to the City of an extensive private art collection of a Mr Bob Sredersas, a native of Lithuania, who arrived in Wollongong in 1950 aged 40 and thereafter pursued his interest in art, by collecting and literally living amongst it. With the gift of the collection something had to be done to secure a new home for it so the idea of a local gallery was proposed, and established with contributions from private and government sources. Its growth has been steady. Substantial bequests have been received, and Local Council and Governments are committed to its staffing and development over the long term. The gallery brief is to exhibit its works and other artistic artefacts and those of other galleries in exhibitions here and at other galleries. Preservation and storage for the collection is an ongoing exercise. Acquisitions occur strictly in accordance with set policy.

The Director then highlighted the Galleries old treasures. These were works, local landscapes, by a few artists here in the early days of Wollongong. Their attention to the mostly pristine environment here did follow comments of Governor Bourke when he declared in 1830s the area to be the garden of New South Wales. Whatever motives drove the artists they captured the spectacular and extensive native vegetation in their paintings even if the light generally was subdued and some were less authentic in representation of scenery than others. Conrad Martens visited the area three months after arrival in the Colony in 1835, where his output in general was to become prodigious but his work **Mullet Creek, Illawarra** is now a Gallery treasure.

The Director reserved his greatest praise for Eugene Von Gerard painting of **Lake Illawarra and Distant Mountains of Kiama 1860**. He was, he said, the first recognised artists to visit, with formal training in

Austria and England. There is no doubt to the casual observer the particular painting is a most authentic representation of the Lake. The Society gave its members the opportunity to satisfy themselves about its authenticity, as part of the 50 year celebration of the Society's existence in 1994. A Mr Ken Orchard arranged, for those interested members, to visit Water Board property at Berkeley overlooking the Lake where Von Gerard must have at least sketched the scene he was so magnificently to reproduce in his painting.

Before passing to another area covered in his address, let me mention the first class catalogue produced for our 50th year celebration, of landscape works and their artists being paintings and sketches produced in and around Wollongong from 1827 to 1873 that were subject of a gallery exhibition in 1994.

John mentioned more of the collection that fell outside what he had described as colonial landscapes. Landscapes both in the colony and in England had a romantic even idyllic setting and the Australian artists in the late 1800s early 1900s were seeking a more realistic presentation of their localities and communities. They owed much to the emphasis of the French Impressionist School that developed among other matters a technique of admitting more natural light into their works, more in keeping with the natural light here. The artists that gave expression to this farewell to Arcadia were Tom Roberts, Hugh Streeton and Frederick McCubbin to mention three. Our speaker said that the subjects presented by them were novel, realistic and undeniably local, consistent with a new emerging individualism and nationalism. Furthermore, our landscapes too were realistically presented in Tom Robert's work **Stanwell Park** and in a later work of Lloyd Rees **Gerrigong Headland**.

There was more but little time left for elaboration. Prominent artists like Pollack were mentioned, as were works of Abstract painters. There are collections of ceramic pieces, and an extensive collection of indigenous art and artefacts. A proud possession is **the Escarpment** donated by Nowra High School, having been found almost abandoned there.

Our speaker made out a good case for trends in the art world reflecting what is taking place in the community at large. He should return to explain the works of some of our later artists whose paintings

and reality have on the face of things little in common.

The address was well received, informative and thoroughly enjoyable.

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