

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0067

Durack, Elizabeth

(1915 - 2000)

Born 1 January, 1915

Died 31 December, 2000

Occupation Artist, Illustrator, Writer

Summary

Born in Claremont in 1915, acclaimed Australian painter and illustrator, Elizabeth Durack, achieved both fame and controversy during her lifetime. For most of her life, Durack's success rested on her extensive body of paintings, drawings, and book illustrations, depicting outback life and Aboriginal settlements in Australia's remote north-west and which reflected her childhood experience. In recognition of her service to art and literature, Elizabeth Durack was appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1966 and the Order of St Michael & St George – Commanders (CMG) in 1982. In 1997 Elizabeth Durack achieved fame of a different kind when she exploded into media prominence upon admitting to entering work into Aboriginal art exhibitions under the name 'Eddie Burrup'. Despite the controversy Durack continued to paint under the nom de brush 'Eddie Burrup' until two weeks before her death on 25 May 2000.

Details

Elizabeth Durack was born on the 6 July 1915, the daughter of one of the few old pastoralist families in the Kimberley region with a reputation for not shooting Aboriginal people in the 19th century. After a childhood in remote Western Australia, Elizabeth was educated at the Loreto Convent in Perth. In the mid 1930s she travelled to Europe where she studied at the Chelsea Polytechnic in London. Throughout her life Elizabeth Durack travelled widely in Australia, Africa, US, the Indian Ocean, Oceania, the Pacific and Asia, her extensive travels always providing inspiration and featuring prominently in her art.

Elizabeth Durack's early life on cattle stations in the northern Kimberley region of Western Australia unquestionably provided an inspiration for some of her earliest drawings which were published in *The Bulletin* in 1935. Both Elizabeth and her sister Mary were influenced by both the landscape and their encounters with Aboriginal people on station properties, something that is reflected in their collaborative and individual work. Elizabeth illustrated many books, which were published in conjunction with her sister, Dame Mary Durack.

In 1939, Elizabeth Durack married Francis Clancy and moved to Sydney, but the marriage was short-lived and Elizabeth returned to Western Australia in the mid 1940s.

In the 1950s and 1960s Elizabeth attained recognition for her work featuring the Miriwong people in the Ord River area. She was one of the first white painters to adopt indigenous painting techniques in her work and began painting pictures on Aboriginal themes long before the Aboriginal art boom of the 1970s. The 'Eddie Burrup' controversy in 1997 supposedly stunned Elizabeth who was bewildered by the storm that erupted following her admission. Although it is true that her 'Eddie Burrup' confession was made voluntarily, by way of friend and art historian, Robert Smith, it was perhaps a little disingenuous of Elizabeth, given the contretemps surrounding issues of cultural appropriation at the time, to claim surprise at the heated response it received. If, as Smith says, Elizabeth's decision to confess was made 'because she feared the situation was getting out of hand', it is hard to accept her naïve bewilderment about the ensuing controversy. Despite the tempest her confession wrought in the art world and beyond, Durack continued to paint under the nom de brush 'Eddie Burrup' until two weeks before her death.

In recognition of her service to art and literature, Elizabeth Durack was appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1966 and the Order of St Michael & St George – Commanders (CMG) in 1982. She died at her Perth home, aged 84, after a long battle with cancer on 25 May, 2002. She is survived by her two children, Michael and Perpetua.

Published resources

Resource Section

Controversial artist Elizabeth Durack dies, Peacock, Matt, 2000,
<http://www.abc.net.au/am/s131252.htm>

Elizabeth Durack b.1915,
<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/LW/waywewere/durack.html>

Power, Desire, Interest, Nicholls, Christine, 2000,
http://www.anu.edu.au/culture/activities/conf_ab_masquerade.html

Resource

The Art of Eddie Burrup, Durack, Elizabeth and Clancy, Perpetua,
<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/nph-arch/2000/S2000-Aug-15/http://www.ozpages.com/eddieburrup/index.html>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Newspaper Article

Artist Elizabeth Durack dies after cancer battle, 2000

Obituary [Elizabeth Durack], 2000

Death of an artist and her alter ego [Elizabeth Durack], Day, Michael, 1995

A Critical Evaluation[Elizabeth Durack], Day, Michael, 1995

The Paintings of Elizabeth Durack, J.M.B., 1949

Book

Seeing through Indonesia, Durack, Elizabeth, 1977

The art of Elizabeth Durack, Angus & Robertson, Durack, Elizabeth, 1982

Derivations and Directions: The Work of Elizabeth Durack 1930s to 1950s, Catalogue of Exhibition 9 March – 30 April 1995., Gooding, Janda, c1995

Notable Australians: the Pictorial Who's Who, Hamlyn, Paul, 1978

The International Who's Who of Women: A biographical reference guide to the most eminent and distinguished women in the world today, 1972

The Canker at the Core [motion picture], 1981

Reflections : profiles of 150 women who helped make Western Australia's history; Project of the Womens Committee for the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of Western Australia, Popham, Daphne; Stokes, K.A.; Lewis, Julie, 1979

Contemporary Australians 1995/96, 1995

Edited Book

Monash Biographical Dictionary of 20th Century Australia, Arnold, John and Morris, Deirdre, 1994

Who's Who of Australian Women, Lofthouse, Andrea, 1982

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988

Book Section

Caught up in the Signs of the Times?: Elizabeth Durack, Pedersen, Annette, 1999

Travel hopefully: The Duracks, Browning, Julie, 2002

Journal

Obituary [Elizabeth Durack], Pederson, Annette, 2000/01

Journal Article

Elizabeth Durack: Pictorial <i>Tachiste</i>, Hutchings, Patrick, 1963,
https://westerlymag.com.au/digital_archives/westerly-82/

Obituary, Pederson, Annette, 2001

Conference Paper

Elizabeth Durack/ Eddie Burrup: Reconciliation, art fraud and the limits of dominant Australian law, Behrendt, Larissa, 2001

Site Exhibition

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

Archival resources

Australian Dictionary of Biography

[Elizabeth Durack](#)

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Elizabeth Durack interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection \[sound recording\]](#)

[Elizabeth Durack interviewed by Helene Charlesworth for the Battye Library collection \[sound recording\]](#)

Australian National University Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts

[Sketch-books](#)

University of Western Australia

[Westerly Archives](#)

Curtin University of Technology, T L Robertson Library (WCU)

[Seeing through Indonesia / by Elizabeth Durack](#)

State Library of Western Australia

[Papers 1936-1981 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Durack family papers, 1886-1991 \[manuscript\]](#)

The University of Melbourne Archives

[Rio Tinto Zinc Mining and Exploration Department Business Papers and Durack Lithographs](#)

Murdoch University

[\[Irene Greenwood Library Resources Trust\] : Food for Feminism Dinner, November 7th, 1986](#)

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