

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00694

Bennett, Portia Mary

(1898 - 1989)

Born 28 January, 1898, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Died 1 May, 1989, Perth Western Australia Australia

Occupation Artist

Summary

Portia Bennett was born in Sydney in 1898. In 1913-14 she attended classes under Dattilo Rubbo at the Royal Art Society of New South Wales, then won a scholarship to Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School, where she studied at night between 1915-1919. During the day she attended the Blackfriars Teachers College, where she taught art from 1921-5. In 1925 she married William Wallace and moved to Queensland and then, in 1932, came to Perth, Western Australia. Bennett helped found the Perth Society of Artists, working with Muriel Southern, Florence Hall and Margaret Johnson to establish a place for women artists in Western Australia.

Bennett's preference for architecture over painting as a career is reflected in her fascination with the city and modern recently constructed buildings, and she painted many watercolour studies of the architecture around Perth. This was also in keeping with a Modernist aesthetic – the city as centre for commerce, leisure and display – and a concomitant rejection of traditional pastoral landscapes as subjects for study. Bennett also used conventions of perspective but chose unusual vantage points, which allowed the foregrounding of certain objects which added an abstract quality to works that were highly realistic. As Dr. Sally Quin, curator of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, observed, "Portia Bennett claims a unique place as observer and interpreter of the city." Bennett died in Perth in 1989, aged 91.

Published resources

Catalogue

Beyond the Image: Western Australian Women Artists 1920-1960, Harpley, Melissa, 1990

Approaches To Modernism: The Art Of Portia Bennett, Elise Blumann And Iris Francis 1930s To 1950s, Quin, Sally, 2004

Western Australian Artists 1920-1950, Gray, Anne, 1980

Book

Western Australian Art and Artists 1900-1950, Gooding, Janda, 1987

Book Section

Work by Four Perth Women (originally published in The West Australian, 13 September, 1933), Benson, George, 1991

Journal Article

Modernism's Back Alley - Perth Streets as Signs of the Times, Bromfeld, David, 1986

Obituary: Portia Bennett, Heymans, Rie, 1989

Resource

Artist Profile: Portia Bennett 1898-1989 - The Holmes à Court Collection, 1996,
http://www.holmesacourtgallery.com.au/collection/artist-profile.cfm?artist_id=58

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[Biographical cuttings on Portia Bennett, painter, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details

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