

Editor's Desk

THE MELBOURNE SOCIETY OF WOMEN PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS INC.
 REGISTERED ADDRESS: 41-43 GIPPS STREET, EAST MELBOURNE 3002
<https://www.facebook.com/mswpaintersandsculptors/>

THE BULLETIN

Hello Members,

Yellow is my current favourite colour. A colour of Hope, a colour of sunshine, a colour of happiness and the colour of our unique Australian Native Wattle.

Wattle is a symbol of Spring, when we enjoy longer daylight hours and the sounds of Wattle Birds.

As gardens burst with an abundance of golden colour I imagine paint palettes spread with the yellow hues, Lemon Yellow, Cad Yellow and the range in between.

Buying paint online is a challenge where one cannot delve into the exquisiteness of touch, texture and smell when purchasing. However I did manage and love the Cad Yellow I received by mail.

Remember that this is your Newsletter and you have the opportunity to include articles of interest and upcoming events that can be sent to me at: bulletin2020@yahoo.com.

Look further into The Bulletin for Deadline Dates and any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

CONTENTS

- President Statement
- Where the Little Birds Meet
- Revealing Constance Stokes's Woman in Green
- Dates for your Diary
- 2020 Committee
- Online Catalogues Promote Sales
- Member News



Spring has sprung and September 1 is National Wattle Day.

Wattle Day is oriented towards the future, encompassing positive virtues in the celebration of Australia and the Australian spirit.

Website: www.wattleday.asn.au/

Image: Clara Southern (1861-1940) *Warrandyte Bridge* (c.1910) (via National Gallery of Victoria and Pinterest)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello members.

I hope you are well and keeping busy in these very strange, unprecedented times.

I have forgotten what it is like to walk around without a mask and the constant worry of keeping personal contact to a minimum.

With the numbers of infected dropping we are all looking forward to resuming some semblance of a normal life.

Sadly, there is very little happening with MSWPS so this report will be brief.

About 20 members took part in our zoom luncheon on August 6. It was great fun with some fabulous masks and stories of how they have been coping in lockdown. It was wonderful to see everyone.

It is moments like this that make me realise how much I miss seeing everyone. As you know I am always up for a chat.

We are waiting on the form for you to enter the online exhibition, Changing Perspectives 2020. We will send it out as soon as it is available.

As we do not have to be at a venue at a certain time, the launch is flexible. All going to plan the aim is the end of October.

Instructions will be sent along with the form. It should be very straight forward. Also, to simplify things there will be no entry fee and no commission taken on any sales.

Amanda Hyatt is our judge and she is happy to oblige in any way she can. We hope to have a zoom opening with Amanda announcing the winners.

Voting for the members award will take place. Details to be organised once we get the web page set up.

Hoping to see you all at the Christmas luncheon. Surely, we will be allowed out by then.

Linda McEwan

mswps2020@gmail.com



Where the Little Birds meet

On August the 6th MSWPS had their first ZOOM/luncheon meeting under the guidance of our President Linda. It always amuses me that half the meeting (regardless of what organization) is taken up with members trying to get on. In the end 20-30 people joined in and it was great to see everyone again. Linda went around the meeting and asked each of us what we have been doing during the lockdown. I found it interesting to hear of the different projects some of our members are involved in, for example the bushfire recovery project.

We all put on our masks and once again it was interesting to see how creative members have been. There were several masks that appealed to me Marion's for its great colours. The lady with the smiley face on black (Karen Hopkins), Linda's and Denise's were good too.

The main thing that came across from the meeting was how pleased we were to see each other. I would recommend more meetings possibly those with someone as chair. It is hard to get a word in when there are so many all trying to talk. The sound of Little birds chattering.

Margaret Gurney



MSWPS was given permission to re publish the following article. Constance Stokes was a MSWPS member in 1935 and a brief profile is on page 276 of *More Than Just Gumtrees* by Juliette Peers. Unfortunately at the time of editing the Bulletin, I had not received permission to include an image of the painting. However check this link for the image:

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/132965/>

Revealing Constance Stokes's woman in green

An intriguing portrait was recently donated to the NGV by bequest from the estate of Michael Niall. Its significance is unravelled through technical examination and conservation treatment, highlighting an important moment in Melbourne's social history and the artist's early career.

By Raye Collins

When this enigmatic painting arrived at the NGV in 2018, the first thing I noticed was the sitter's direct gaze and her expressive hands, conveying self-assurance, tinged by a slight sense of tension or unease. I felt that it was an arresting depiction by a portraitist of considerable sensitivity and flair. While the attribution was unclear, due to a partially illegible artist inscription, the painting was believed to be an early work by the Australian modernist artist Constance Stokes, sparking me to lead a program of technical investigation in the paintings conservation studio to help understand the condition of the painting and the context in which it was made.

I began by focusing on confirming the ambiguous artist inscription in the upper right corner, using examination tools such as microscopy and infrared light. While high magnification enabled better discernment of the individual letters, infrared helped to enhance the contrast between the inscription and surrounding area due to the differential absorption of infrared light by different colours. I successfully deciphered the inscription as 'C.Parkin' followed by the date of 1930. Parkin was Constance Stokes's maiden name prior to her marriage in 1933. While this is consistent with other works by Stokes from the time, I came across another crucial piece of visual evidence strongly associating the painting with Stokes; the presence of the same distinctive floral background in another of her works, *Marguerites and cornflowers*, 1930, which the artist exhibited in her 1933 solo exhibition at the Decoration Galleries in Collins Street, Melbourne.

Constance Parkin was born in 1906 in the Wimmera town of Miram Pira and grew up in Nhill and Horsham until her family relocated to Melbourne in 1920. In 1925 she commenced her four-year studentship under English-born Australian artist, teacher and former NGV Director, Bernard Hall at the National Gallery School, Melbourne. An outstanding student, she secured the prestigious travelling scholarship in 1929 at the age of twenty-three. She was, in fact, the eighth in a continuous run of victorious women starting with Constance Jenkins, who was the first woman to take out the prize for *Friendly critics*, 1907, in 1908. Given the timing, less than two months after the Wall Street crash precipitating the Great Depression, Parkin no doubt felt especially fortunate to secure the coveted stipend, enabling her to study and travel overseas for two years.

Portrait of a woman in a green dress, 1930, was painted during the year that elapsed between the scholarship victory and Parkin's departure for England, while she was working in a temporary studio above her parents' garage in Brighton.¹ In July that year she exhibited with a group of other emerging artists known as the Embryos (who chose their name because, according to another artist in the group James E. Flett, 'the members ...have little in common save embryonicity'²) at the Little Gallery in Little Collins Street, Melbourne, and in October, with the Australian Art Association. A review of the Embryos's exhibition referred to her as 'the portraitist of the group,'³ an astute specialisation to cultivate for any female artist who hoped to

generate her own income. While many of the artist's early sitters were friends and associates, it is known that she secured a formal portrait commission that year to paint the prominent Russian socialite Lydia Mortill.⁴

Portrait of a woman in a green dress reflects the traditional academic training at the National Gallery School, which was based around the principle of painting in layers, and the use of tone, the modulation of light and dark, to render form. Through pigment analysis, I established that the artist used a relatively traditional, restricted palette based on lead and zinc white, chrome green, iron oxide browns, vermilion red and cadmium yellow. The X-radiograph taken of the painting suggests that the artist adjusted the contour of the sitter's right arm and repositioned the cigarette holder in a more upright and dynamic angle. The evidence of adjustments to the folds of the dress around the sitter's legs suggests that she had difficulty resolving the complex foreshortening, and this reworking most likely contributed to the formation of the prominent drying cracks visible in many areas.

While the style and technique is relatively traditional, the subject matter is more progressive and responsive to the time. It hints at the evolving social environment in Melbourne, and the transition towards greater social prominence and financial independence for women. It is reminiscent of contemporary depictions of the 'Modern Woman', signalled through visual cues such as the direct assertive gaze, brazen smoking, and the long slender lines of the dress with its plunging neckline.⁵ The patterned background, most likely a curtain or wall-hanging that the artist admired, reflects the contemporary enthusiasm for decorative art forms such as printed textiles, which were brought to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s as part of the modernist mission to integrate the disciplines of art, craft, design and interior decoration.

The sitter is unconfirmed but speculated to be Dorothy Lloyd, the mother of the painting's donor Michael Niall, and who married Michael Niall (Snr) the same year the painting was completed. Images of Dorothy Lloyd, later known as Mrs Michael Niall, were published in the local press to mark her engagement, and later she was pictured with her nine-month-old son, Michael.⁶ Throughout the 1930s Dorothy featured prominently in the social pages of the local papers, with the journalist invariably expressing admiration for her fashionable dress and accessories. While this could be a formal commissioned portrait, it is also possible that the two women, of similar age, knew each other socially.

In January 1931 Stokes would embark on her travelling scholarship, initially studying at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and later at the Académie Lhote, Paris, with the cubist André Lhote. Lhote was a favourite among progressive Australian expat artists, and had tutored fellow artists Grace Crowley, Dorrit Black and Anne Dangar during the 1920s. The opportunity to examine *Portrait of a woman in a green dress* alongside another ambitious work painted after the artist's return to Melbourne, *The village*, c. 1933–1935, made me marvel at Stokes's thorough assimilation of European avant-garde techniques, including the adoption of a more sophisticated high-key palette, and this made her a significant figure in the development of modernism in Melbourne during the 1930s.

Although *Portrait of a woman in a green dress* is well-preserved, a considerable dirt layer has accumulated, and the varnish that was once applied as a clear coating is now noticeably discoloured, compromising the colour and tonal balance. The extensive drying cracks, formed as a result of flaws in the artist's technique, further disrupt the integrity of the image. The plan is to remove the old

varnish, apply a new varnish, and undertake discrete retouching, using conservation-grade materials that are distinguishable from the original and remain fully reversible over time. We are very grateful for Michael Niall's vision in donating the painting to the NGV, which enables it to be made accessible to a very broad audience, alongside other works by Stokes. The opportunity to rediscover the lighter and brighter image hidden beneath the discoloured surface layers, and to honour the artist's original vision, makes it an especially rewarding and exciting project to embark on.

Raye Collins is NGV Conservator of Paintings. Explore *Portrait of a woman in a green dress*, 1930, online at ngv.melbourne/explore/collection/132965/

Originally published by the National Gallery of Victoria for *NGV Magazine* issue 23, Jul–Aug 2020.

Notes

1. Lucilla Wyborn d'Abrera, *Constance Stokes: Art and life*, Hill House Publishers, Melbourne, 2015, p. 32.
2. Blamire Young, 'Young painters exhibit: Embryos' fine work', *Herald*, 1 Jul. 1930, p. 27.
3. *Ibid.*
4. d'Abrera, p. 32.
5. For instance see Paola Di Trocchio, 'Fashioning the modern woman', in Isobel Crombie & Elena Taylor (eds), *Brave New World: Australia 1930s*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2017, p. 38-39.
6. 'The woman's world', *Herald*, 12 Jul. 1929, p.12; 'Happy motherhood', *Herald*, 30 Jan. 1932, p.13.



The *Acrobat* and *Gloria* by Constance Stokes. Eastgate Gallery Catalogue 1997

SEPT/OCT 2020
DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

All Physical Activities at the Ola Cohn Centre are Postponed until further Notice.

When the Government Covid-19 Restrictions allow us to be together on our home site you will be notified.

- Inaugural Online Annual Exhibition (dates to be confirmed)
- Christmas Lunch - December 3 **TBC**
- The Bulletin Nov/Dec Issue - Oct 22 DL



PRESIDENT: Linda McEwan

VICE PRESIDENT: Joan Richard

SECRETARY: Tessa Wallis

TREASURER: Jude Marganis

General Committee

Louise Foletta

Jo Reitze

Marion Chapman

Denise Keele-bedford

Robyn Pridham continues her **ARCHIVIST** role

TIME CAPSULE: Submission from members is now officially closed and we thank all who have contributed to what will be a historic event in 2040 when future Members reveal the styles of artwork produced by female artists in 2020. Thanks to Carmel O'Connor, past President, for initiating this activity.

On Line Catalogues Promote Sales

by Tessa Wallis, Secretary August 6 2020

With the cancellation of MSWPS Annual Exhibition and an online catalogue planned, I thought members would be encouraged to hear about the success of an online catalogue produced by Anna Maas, curator of Encounters exhibition, Skepsi Gallery at the Whitehorse Art space. Like so many others, this exhibition was closed to the public on the day it was scheduled to open. There is a possibility it may open after lock down, but with Covid 19 cases rising dramatically in Victoria, opening at any time seems optimistic. Undaunted, Anna Maas put together an online catalogue which stimulated excellent sales. I am pleased to report that my effort; We're All in This Together, a porcelain vessel illustrating the current pandemic crisis, was among the many objects sold. "We're all in this Together" is a departure from the other lovely minimalist vessels selected for the Encounters exhibition. As I am interested in allegory, fantasy and symbolism, I enjoyed

interpreting the havoc caused by the corona virus in this work. With a Chinese dragon figurehead and the emblems of nine countries affected by Covid 19 illustrated in low relief on its sides, this vessel is symbolic of the world wide pandemic of 2020. A moose represents Sweden, a wolf Italy, a lion England, a rooster France, a crescent moon and star Turkey, a kangaroo Australia, a bull Spain, an eagle Germany and the emblem of Iran. An American eagle flies in the opposite direction while the vessel is tossed by waves. The virus is spreading far and wide as if on the infected tentacles of the giant squid at the prow. The large skull in low relief on the side is a grim reminder of the drastic consequences of Covid 19. Nearly all the other artist's represented also sold works thanks to the experience and commitment of Anna Maas and her online catalogue. **Encounters: Skepsi@Artspace** Under lock down, on line catalogues are an increasingly popular way for galleries and artists to reach out to prospective buyers and showcase paintings and sculpture. Social media and the websites of interested clubs and organisations are good vehicles for links to the catalogues as they have enormous numbers of followers. There is a myriad of approaches to on line catalogue presentations; Entries in the Winter exhibition of the Victorian Artist's Society appear as a slide show in its online catalogue, with artist's names and details of their works included in a handy reference list. The paintings were hanging on the gallery walls when the exhibition was closed due to the first lock down. Photographs were taken promptly and the VIC's online catalogue saved the day. victorianartistsociety.com.au Alcaston gallery exhibits a number of works from featured artists and with each, the click of an arrow reveals more works by that artist. alcastongallery.com.au The Affordable Art Fair's online catalogue is in booklet style. Each time the page is "turned" eight images of paintings or sculpture appear on a double page spread. Explanations of how to purchase works are included at the front as well as dates of events and promotional information. affordableartfair.com MSWPS past Annual Art exhibition catalogues are presently available at; guides.slv.vic.gov.au The State Library will have a hard copy of this year's online catalogue for future research. It may also provide links to the digital version.

Social media has enormous reach and will continue to open up new opportunities for MSWPS. Covid 19 has necessitated many changes and artists have responded quickly making use of the internet. After the sales success of the online catalogue for Encounters exhibition, Skepsi at Whitehorse Art space, I believe online catalogues may prove effective promotional tools for MSWPS Annual Art exhibitions in future.



MEMBER NEWS**FEATURED ARTIST**

Annemarie Szelezky

Floating No. 1 by Annemarie Szelezky is the current featured artwork on The Website Homepage and Facebook Page. *Floating No.1* was selected for a Highly Commended at the 110th MSWPS Annual Exhibition. Judged by Lesley Harding, Artistic Director at Heide Museum of Modern Art. Her words: Annemarie Szelezky's *Floating 1* seems to me a particularly thoughtful and technically accomplished work, creating a careful tension between the strata of textured abstract elements contained within the tondo, yet never losing sight of the overall image. It is not decorative, but rather emphasises rhythm and design, and the primacy of line and shape over content.



At a time when we cannot be physically together artists are embracing what technology has to offer. As with Tessa Wallis's informative article, below is a listing of several MSWPS Members' Links to activities available online:

GILLIAN LODGE - <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CARkD4LAXnU/?igshid=1lievorx4yt>

VICKY SULLIVAN - Cultura: Pietrasanta è "The Garden of Eden", ecco perché [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) (At 4:20m see and listen to Vicky)

"I was excited to have my paintings featured in this video about the three meter Sculpture of Pramashvar The Infinite by Nicola Stagetti from Commune Di Pietrasanta, in Italy. I am planning to visit Pietrasanta next time I am able to travel to Italy."

LOUISE FOLETTA - <https://www.facebook.com/murrindindishirecouncil/videos/3179786762113060> (At 19m see and listen to Louise)

And a note from Louise: This was sent to me by Bernadette Harris from the school with the Leopoldine Mimmovitch Collection, we had hoped to go and visit this year. I don't its so much our members that might be interested, One never knows, but I feel people may have friends they would like to send it too, so it could go into a Newsletter or a Bulletin, if it is going out before Sept 11. <http://www.friendsforgood.org.au/the-bloom>

Keep yourself informed with News and updates on the virus: <https://www.australia.gov.au/>

Check your Member Area access on our website as the Entry Form for the Annual Exhibition will be here for your artwork submission.

