



NORA HEYSEN FOREVER DRAWING
June 4 - July 26, 2022

Nora Heysen – her life in drawing

Nora Heysen's artistic life began at Hahndorf. As the fourth child of Hans and Sallie Heysen, Nora was born on January 11, 1911 in their cottage in Billygoat Lane. The Heysen family moved to The Cedars when Nora was 18 months old. Nora Heysen's earliest artistic experience was being allowed to draw while lying on the carpet in her father's studio. Miss Mary Overbury, a teacher from 1892 at the SA School of Design, was one of the tutors engaged at The Cedars, and she provided Nora with her first formal lessons in art. Overbury took the Heysen children on outdoor painting expeditions.

As Nora pursued this passion into her teens, she would jointly set up still life compositions with her father in his studio. They also walked or rode their bicycles, to draw or paint Hills' locations. Hans remained Nora's greatest inspiration, mentor and critic throughout her life, but wished not to be described as her teacher.

After completing her Intermediate Certificate at St. Scholastica's Covent of Mercy at Mount Barker, the 15 year-old Nora Heysen began formal art tuition at the School of Fine Arts in North Adelaide. Frederick Millward Grey gave her the "solid training in drawing" that her father recommended. Sessions focussed on developing a structured style that concentrated on breaking each subject down into three-dimensional geometric forms. This understanding of form was the ongoing basis of Nora Heysen's art as her career progressed. Later assessments often cite her fine draughtsmanship skills excelling those of her father.

Nora practised the essential principles of drawing through years of sketching plaster casts until the curriculum allowed participation in life classes. However, Nora regularly engaged her siblings as models at home, with younger brother Michael being the most frequent sitter. At 17 Nora was producing lively and accurate images of her family members. Her disciplined approach also resulted in remarkable drawings of the landscape, trees and animals. Pencil and charcoal still life studies preceded many of Nora's oil paintings of flowers, fruit and objects, as well as domestic interiors. She also experimented with etching and linocut prints.

In December 1933 Nora Heysen staged her first solo exhibition comprising 62 works that demonstrated her maturity in a range of subjects and media – twenty of these were drawings. As well as family portraits and her self-portraits, Nora looked to subjects beyond The Cedars. A significant series of portrait drawings in 1933 featured Hahndorf's Ronda Paech, or Ruth. Ronda was engaged by Sallie Heysen to pose in Nora's studio and in some outdoor settings. Most of these drawings by Nora remain in the Nora Heysen Foundation Collection. The works culminated in a striking oil portrait that was acquired by the South Australian Art Gallery in 1934 and is frequently displayed there.

The successful solo exhibition and income from other sales and commissions, enabled Nora Heysen to support herself from late 1934 in further studies in London at the Central School, and later the Byam School. Nora also travelled in Europe before returning to Hahndorf. In 1938 Nora Heysen decided to move from her home at Hahndorf to live in Sydney.

Drawings were a constant in Nora Heysen's artistic output over eight decades: privately commissioned portraits, drawings in her engagement as an Official War artist or series such those of the Tobriand Islander people. In later years, Nora met regularly with her Sydney peers Judy Cassab and Margaret Woodward to pursue their shared interest in drawing from a model. Nora Heysen continued to "make her mark" until her death in Sydney on December 30, 2003.

Curator - Allan Campbell. Collections Manager - Jill Swann

IMAGE Nora Heysen self portrait, pencil drawing

1926, at 15yrs of age.

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HEYSEN
THE CEDARS

