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The Quarterly Bulletin of the
National Gallery of Victoria



THE OFFICIAL WAR ARTIST
Self Portrait
By George Lambert, A.R.A., 1873-1930
Felton Bequest, 1921

The characteristically brilliant self portrait on this page was painted while George Lambert was serving as Official War Artist in the Great War. Already one of the great names in the story of Australian art—both as a draftsman and painter in oils—George Washington Lambert has yet to be finally assessed at his true value in relation to Australian painting as a whole.

Time alone—patient sifter and last impartial judge—can do that. It is now fifteen years since the May afternoon when Lambert, after attending to the wants of a well-loved horse at Cobbity, New South Wales, met a sudden and tragic death. He was then fifty-seven years old, at the height of a distinguished career, but ever striving towards a self-appointed goal of technical perfection.

Lambert loved horses and the Australian countryside with the same passionate love he gave to the hazards and excitements of painting. To him art was always exciting, so that even the making of a pencil drawing was a major adventure. He never became static, was never guilty of painting without something to say. His pictorial interpretation of the Australian scene—its men and women, horses and dogs, trees and flowers—makes a valuable contribution towards a fuller understanding of our national background.

THE ILLUSTRATION ON THE COVER is an air view picture of the entrance to Melbourne via Princes Bridge. It shows clearly the area which has been reserved, at the junction of St. Kilda Road and Sturt Street, South Melbourne, for our new National Gallery. In the selection and reservation of this site, not only may the Trustees be well satisfied, but the Government and the people of Victoria can also feel that it is one in keeping with the dignity and importance of the collection of art treasures which this State is so fortunate to possess.

It is known that before the final choice of this area was made, many others were looked at, but none combined so many advantages. It is close to the city, though sufficiently removed therefrom to give it dignity; it is well served by roads, by which it is bounded on all sides; its area is sufficient to allow for present requirements and the likelihood of future developments, and to provide a protecting zone of gardens and trees to safeguard it from the dust and noise arising from immediate traffic. Withall, the buildings, when completed, will form a fitting flank to Melbourne's most monumental approach. Some day it will be possible, by placing an institution of similar importance on the opposite side of St. Kilda Road, to complete the effect which the dignity of fine architecture can alone achieve.

Of the buildings themselves it is a little early to comment in detail, since the Director is abroad and his purpose is to study the type of collections which they are to house, but it may be fairly safe to predict that, as a result of his observations, we must expect some fairly drastic revisions in outlook as to the most suitable methods of display.

Two trends are noticeable—the growing awareness of the psychological problem of presentation, with its corollary of constant change, and the need for distinction between the wants of the casual visitor and those of the serious art student. Either of them can bring about an almost completely new form of arrangement whereby display space becomes smaller and more intimate, whilst the intermediate viewing rooms for the professional artist and the stores become more prominent. In place of the present day tendency, where everything is shown and nothing displayed, with consequent fatigue and loss of enthusiasm, the new gallery can well be made as emotionally exciting as shopping or a great drama; it cannot afford to disregard showmanship and remain merely a high dictionary of art.

There are many means whereby such things are being achieved in other fields, that could be applied here, even to the use of mechanical handling to enable constant rearrangement. This might even be as often as once a week. It is true that all this may require more trained personnel and staff, but Victoria, where our social services have been behind those of some States, is now realizing the necessity for providing such forms of cultural recreation.

Though also premature to suggest the possible appearance of buildings, it seems important, as the plans are gradually worked out with those who will determine their use, that, instead of restricting them to the monumental past, imagination and operational effectiveness should be the determining factors. The object would be to provide a group which, while not overwhelmingly glass and blank wall, may reasonably express our time and, as far as possible, allow for development. And when they are built, if the pulse of the people is felt aright, they will become, instead of a refuge of the weary on wet Saturday afternoons, a place where culture, the greatest product of peace, may gather strength and flourish.

LEIGHTON IRWIN.

In June and July the President and Trustees of the National Gallery, with special assistance from Mr. Charles Wheeler, arranged a comprehensive memorial exhibition in honour of the late Harold Herbert. This exhibition, tracing the growth and development of one of Australia's best known and most accomplished painters in water colour, attracted large crowds to the Latrobe Gallery.

We regret to record the death on 29th April of E. Norton Grimwade, who was appointed to the Felton Bequests Committee by Alfred Felton, and had recently been elected Chairman.

The lunch-time lectures held in the Latrobe Street Lecture Room continue popular with the public, and the encouraging reception accorded this Bulletin by the schools and other private and public bodies points to the increasing interest of Victorians in their Art Gallery. Readers of the Bulletin are reminded that any delay in its regular appearance is caused by war-time conditions beyond our control.



THE POULTRY YARD

By Melchior Hondecoeter, 1636-1695
Felton Bequest, 1920

Hondecoeter is a typical Dutch master of the seventeenth century in that he can take that most homely and domestic of subjects—a poultry yard—and transmute it into a scene of strange dignity and charm. There is a positively noble sweep in the mounting line of the cocks and hens, culminating in the dark, graceful shape of the solitary bird against the sky. Typical, too, of this school of painting is the meticulous attention bestowed on the detail, without detracting from the broad masses of light and shade and decorative value of the composition as a whole.

The fine flowerpiece by Rachel Ruysch on the opposite page is carried out in the same spirit and tradition as "The Poultry Yard", with a perfection of botanical detail kept subservient to the treatment of the bunch as a unit of decoration within the frame. Rachel Ruysch was born some thirty years after Hondecoeter. One of the comparatively rare women painters of her day, she not only bore ten children, but became Court Painter to the Prince Palatine at Dusseldorf. She is represented in various Continental galleries, and in the National Gallery, London.

Despite the inclusion of passionfruit blooms and a sense of air and space lent by the blue strip of Sydney Harbour beyond the window, "Morning Offering", by the Australian artist, Adrian Feint, shows an interesting affinity with the work of Rachel Ruysch, Van Huysum and other Dutch painters of this school.



FLOWERPIECE

By Rachel Ruysch, 1665-1750

*Presented by E. Norton Grimwade
in memory of his wife*

FLOWERPIECE
RACHEL RUYSCHE
1665-1750

MORNING OFFERING

By Adrian Feint, 1894-

Felton Bequest, 1942





GEMS FROM THE
ART MUSEUM

No. III

HENRY VIII'S CHALICE AND
PATEN, 1535

Felton Bequest, 1934

One of the rarest and most valuable pieces in the collection, both by reason of its authenticity and exquisite workmanship in silver gilt. The chalice bears the maker's mark of an eagle displayed in a circle.

THE COLLECTION OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN AND BALKAN TEXTILES IN THE VERDON GALLERY, made shortly after the Great War, is the only one of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a careful selection of individual pieces, which constitutes a revelation of the Peasant Art peculiar to these countries. Almost unconscious, the expression of an age-long tradition, this beautifying of the everyday things of domestic life is the result of loving personal skill and patience and a high standard of design handed down from parent to child.

The photographs on the opposite page can do little more than convey the general design and character of the items illustrated. To appreciate fully the exquisite needlecraft and bold, but subtle, colours chosen with such unflinching artistry and good taste, the collection must be studied at first hand. The woman's dress from Monastir, Macedonia (Fig. II), is a hand-woven white foundation with black vertical panels embroidered in wool running up from a heavily-decorated hem, with the usual fully-embroidered sleeve, which gives such a striking and decorative effect. The beauty is heightened by the introduction of an almost invisible touch of oriental blue. A woman's smock from Bucovina (Fig. III) is embroidered in dark blue wool on white hand-woven linen. The smock is always embroidered with a shoulder piece running at right angles to the sleeve. This example has parallel lines in gold and silver thread, and the sleeve is embroidered in diagonal stripes, the cuff being rounded off in a fine buttonhole edging. The smock is worn tucked into a full woollen skirt at the waist. Parallel lines are also used effectively to divide a Transylvanian pillow case into horizontal panels.

Our illustration (Fig. I) shows a fragment of the end of the case, which is traditionally the only portion embroidered. Pillows are piled up on the beds to show these ends, and a bride's dowry is reckoned by the number of pillows she thus displays. This example is of hand-woven linen stitched in blue cotton in a most satisfying design. Though the fundamental technique of weaving of these textiles remains the same, every village has its own variation of design. Light and shade effects are dependant on the direction of the stitch; harmony is achieved by the blending of the colours, and distinction by the interspacing of the bare material with the embroidery. Nothing is spoiled by overloading the design, even in the most detailed work.

In the hand-woven textiles the weaving in certain districts is so fine as to suggest an oriental technique. Weaving and embroidery grew up side by side, and both often enter into the design. Note specially the Peskirs among the Jugoslavian pieces. The ever-recurrent geometrical design appears in a variety of form, according to the different tools and materials employed. (In this connection it is interesting to note that the decoration on the sheaths of knives from a district in Transylvania are very similar to some of our aboriginal patterns.) Even in the textiles, linen, cotton and wool call for special treatment.

We may never see again such perfection of technique as that produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, after long years of experiments with hand and eye in conjunction with the pure vegetable dyes then in use. The Greek Islands embroideries (represented in our collection) still remain the supreme example of their kind. Much expert research remains to be done, but a study of these examples in the Gallery should help us to a better understanding and appreciation of the comparatively little-known textiles and embroidery of Central Europe.

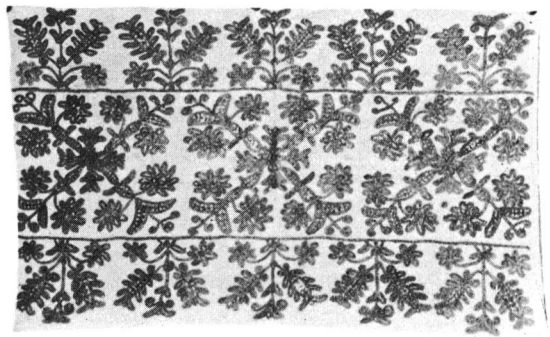


Fig. I



Fig. II



Fig. III



CHRIST, WITH THE SICK AROUND HIM, RECEIVING LITTLE CHILDREN
(The Hundred Guilder Print. Circa 1649)
 By Rembrandt, 1606-1669

FROM THE PRINT ROOM

The superb "Hundred Guilder Print" reproduced here is the most famous of all Rembrandt's etchings, combining deep psychological insight with technical mastery. The popular title by which it is best known today was already in use in the eighteenth century, and seems to have originated in the price of one hundred Dutch guilders once paid for the print at auction. Our print, a perfect early impression, was one of the first important purchases by this Gallery, coming to us from a collection of prints acquired from the Seymour Haden Collection in 1891. The best of these still form the nucleus of our large and valuable Print Collection. Over 1600 drawings and prints are assembled in steel cabinets in our newly-appointed room off the Print Gallery, where they can be studied and inspected on Tuesdays and Fridays from 2.30 p.m., by appointment with Dr. Ursula Hoff.

An exhibition of miscellaneous graphic works and some water colours was on view in the Print Gallery in June and July. The centre and third bays contained small purchases and some presentations acquired within the last five years. In August there will be an exhibition of British Official War Pictures, "The War At Sea", by Norman Wilkinson, O.B.E., P.R.I., followed in September by an exhibition of French etchings.

Recent additions to our collection included a line engraving, "Peasants at Market", by Albrecht Durer, and two pen and ink drawings by Tom Roberts, presented by Miss Jess Boyes.

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The usual lunch-time lectures in the Latrobe Street Lecture Hall are held on the first and third Thursday of each month, at 2.15 p.m. Speakers for the remainder of 1945 include Mr. George Bell, Dr. Ursula Hoff, Mr. Daryl Lindsay and Mr. Arnold Shore.

A selection of postcards, coloured reproductions, illustrated catalogues, etc., etc., are on sale at the Swanston Street entrance to the Gallery. An up-to-date catalogue of the Art Gallery is now available; price, one shilling.