



ARTSNATIONAL

# northern rivers

## Newsletter 20 ♦ December 2023

### Contents

- 2 From the Chair –  
with Dianne Stuart  
ADFAS Name Change
- 3 October Lecture, 'Pots  
And Frocks: The World of  
Grayson Perry'
- 4 October Raffle Winners
- 5 October Post-Lecture  
Gathering
- 6 2023 Annual General  
Meeting Report
- 7 Thanks to our 2023  
Committee
- 8 Tom Roberts: Father of  
Australian Landscape  
Painting
- 10 End-of-Year Raffle
- 11 End-of-Year Special Event
- 13 Lisa Gorman Teams with  
Mirka Mora
- 14 The Aussie Christmas



*Christmas Flowers and Christmas Belles,*  
Tom Roberts, 1899



## From the Chair With Dianne Stuart



This has been a very active and successful year on a number of levels, and I'd like to thank you, our members for your continued support.

The debate over a new business name within the broader Association has been spirited and sometimes acrimonious, but overall, has been managed respectfully and constructively.

This year we have had exceptional presenters and a diverse array of topics. Not all topics appeal to everyone, but your open and discerning minds and appreciation of a skilled and well-informed presenter is apparent.

It is through the member affiliation fees paid by societies that the National Association supports the model of paid expert presenters – both overseas and Australian based. That is the hallmark of what we do and value.

This is where we need your help to spread the word about us – without you we would not exist. My plea to you is to renew your membership and encourage others to join.

Wendy Edwards will again oversee our membership needs in 2024, and will be surprising you with a swish new member identifier.

I'm hoping you might also use your contacts to find someone who could assist us with some specific IT requirements. We believe the evidence of volunteer work would be an enhancement to any CV.

Violinist Robert Smith was the recipient of this year's Young Arts Award. It is hoped we can expand our support of young local talent in 2024 and welcome the links forged with the Lismore Regional Art Gallery and Susan Conroy from the Friends of the Regional Gallery.

Finally, I wish you a very happy festive season and all the very best for the new year.

 Dianne Stuart

## ADFAS Name Change

Australian Design and Fine Arts Society (ADFAS) has changed its name to Arts**National**. While still within the Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies Inc., the local chapter will from now on be known as Arts**National** Northern Rivers.

The name change is accompanied by renewed energy to make Arts**National** bigger and better than its previous incarnation. It will remain the same friendly organisation that always extends a warm welcome to members and guests, and focuses on presenting high quality content.

This is an exciting time for the Society as it moves forward to broaden its appeal and attract new members. It will continue to offer support for

young local artists, and provide an ever-expanding range of arts-related subjects in a friendly and relaxed environment where like-minded people enjoy quality presentations delivered by International and Australian lecturers – all experts in their field. Members can also look forward to 'special Interest' days and other social events organised by your committee.

Arts**National** Northern Rivers endeavours to inspire, stimulate and enrich people's lives while contributing to the conservation and preservation of our cultural heritage.

 Marion Pescud



## Pots and Frocks: The World of Grayson Perry

Our October lecture presented by Ian Swankie, delved into the world of British cultural icon Sir Grayson Perry, the flamboyant English contemporary artist, writer and broadcaster. Famous for his ceramic vases, tapestries, and cross-dressing, he is also a successful author, documentary maker, and social commentator. The man's life is full of imagination, a myriad of creative output, cheeky and insightful observations, political and sexually explicit messages, and psychotherapy! For the sake of time and decorum, Ian Swankie faced the dilemma of what to omit from his fast-paced presentation.

So how did Grayson Perry, the rebellious punk transvestite potter from Chelmsford become a National Treasure?

Perry's life story is as colourful and thought-provoking as his art. Born into a working-class family, he was four when his parent's marriage failed after his father discovered his mother was having an affair with a milkman, who later became his violent stepfather. Bouncing between his parent's homes and to cope with his unhappiness and anxiety, he spent much time alone in his room creating a fantasy world surrounding his teddy bear, Alan Measles.

He believes that early experiences shape one's aesthetic and sexuality, and revealed that his own first sexual experience at the age of seven occurred when he tied himself up in his pyjamas. As a child he liked to dress in women's clothes and in his early teens, while living with his father, he realised that he was a transvestite. When Perry's father discovered this, he was told to leave. He returned to his mother for a short while, but he left in 1979, and his stepfather instructed him 'not to come back'. He became estranged from his mother, and did not attend her funeral.



Ian Swankie



*The Faces of Grayson Perry and his alter ego, Claire*

Perry frequently appears dressed as a woman – describing his female alter-ego, Claire, variously as 'a 19th century reforming matriarch, a protester for *No More Art*, an aero-model-maker, and a forty-something woman who eats ready meals and can just about sew on a button'. He designs Claire's fabulous outfits – all tremendously colourful and most featuring embroidery.

In his work, Perry uses his own upbringing and the absence of proper guidance to reflect

upon male conduct. Much of his thought-provoking output contains sexually explicit content, some of which has been described as 'obscene sadomasochistic sex scenes' (hence Ian's dilemma). Perry's extraordinary talents seem to have no bounds. In addition to his artistic and writing successes, he is well known for his observations of the contemporary arts scene, and for dissecting British





'prejudices, fashions and foibles'. He has also explored US culture. In 2020 he crossed the States on a motorbike for the series *Grayson Perry's Big American Road Trip*, where he examined the country's biggest fault lines – from race to class and identity.

Perry has also dabbled in architecture, designing 'a house for Essex' (now a holiday let) for Julie Cope, a fictitious character whose life features on two of his giant computer-created tapestries.

*The Life of Julie Cope* (2015) illustrates the key events in Julie's journey from birth to her tragic death when she was run over by a curry delivery man on a motorcycle.

The second of the Julie Cope tapestries showing Julie with her second Husband and her death after being hit by a motorcyclist.

The tapestries are displayed in the Essex house, along with an audio recording of *The Ballad of Julie Cope*, a tale written and read by Perry that reveals Julie's hopes and fears as she journeys through life.

In this lecture, Ian Swankie brought Grayson Perry to life. The audience was treated to an insight into the art and philosophy of this multi-talented man and the fabulous imagination that drives him, and the energy that surrounds him.

OR Marion Pescud

## October Raffle Winners



Annie Abbink, the grand winner of our October raffle was delighted with her prize – the major monograph on Perry's life and work by writer and art historian Jacky Klein.

Our second winner was Elizabeth Grange whose prize was donated by Ian Swankie. Elizabeth received a keyring, designed by Perry which read, 'Grayson Perry Trophy awarded to a person with good taste'. A very fitting recipient, we believe!

Left: Annie Abbink

Right: Elizabeth Grange







# October Post-Lecture Gathering



After Ian Swankie's stimulating lecture on Grayson Perry, members and guests enjoyed drinks and a light supper.





## 2023 Annual General Meeting

This is my third report as Chair of this wonderful society. From the start of 2023, we became ADFAS Northern Rivers and now, Arts**National** Northern Rivers. Two name changes in one year, could make some describe your committee as indecisive, even confused, but I assure you they are progressive, forward thinking and timely.

This year, after three years of COVID constraints, we welcomed the return of UK presenters and embraced an ever-expanding range of Australian presenters. Each year, the topic choice is made 12 months in advance and is a challenging committee responsibility.

For the fifth successive year, we partnered with Southern Cross Soloists and the Bangalow Chamber Music Festival with our young musician award. This year's recipient, violinist Robert Smith, was a former student at the Northern Rivers Conservatorium.



*Dianne Stuart delivers the 2023 Northern Rivers Annual Report*

We advertise our monthly presentations in the Bangalow Herald, the Lennox and Ballina Wave and on radio via Bay and Paradise FM. The next step is greater communication via the Arts**National** brand. Advertisements will be run in the *Weekend Australian Magazine* early in 2024, highlighting our values of:

- Diverse illustrated presentations across a broad spectrum of arts related fields.
- Delivery by renowned experts sourced locally, the UK and Europe.
- Convivial hospitality for members, their friends and the community, to discover and connect with the arts and each other.
- Conservation and preservation of art heritage
- Support for young and emerging artists within local communities and nationally.

Fundamental to our business model is our legendary home hosting. While home-hosting this year was mostly done by committee members, non-member Shona Ewart stepped up once again.

A special resolution has extended my term as Chair for another year. The stark reality is: if no one takes up the chair role here for 2025, Arts**National** Northern Rivers will fold at the end of 2024.

The complexities of administering a large not-for-profit organisation continue to grow, as does the cost. Lecturer fees continue to rise, as do transport and accommodation costs. Societies face increasing venue hire and catering costs. While there is one new society at Coffs Coast, two societies, Riverina and Camden, will be closing at the end of 2024. This underpins the need for increased membership.

This year we had 79 members – up from 73 in 2022. The National Body lost 1,281 members in 2022, and has since only gained 126 new members. We cannot rest on our laurels. We must maintain and grow our membership base, and make it easier for people to participate.

We have tackled these challenges in 2023 – guests-passes can be purchased with a credit card at the door using a square reader, or online through Try Booking. Our mailing list of friends continues to grow.

Being one of the smallest societies, your committee remains conscious of the budget bottom line. We have increased the fees slightly in the face of inflationary pressures – and the Early Bird discount: \$150 single, \$260 per couple expires on 31 January 2024.

To the 2023 committee – I thank you all – you have been a great team. Carole Gamble is stepping down after two years on the current committee and a most enthusiastic and valued ADFAS/Arts**National** supporter over a couple of decades. Thank you, Carole.

 Dianne Stuart





# Thanks to Our 2023 Committee

This gives me the opportunity to thank the Northern Rivers committee members again, and explain in some detail the various tasks they perform to keep your society a vibrant and smoothly run organisation. Constantly thinking of new events that we can offer you, and ideas to promote our lecture series, the team unite in a friendly environment to bring you the best experiences we can. To save costs, committee members also supplied the post-lecture supper, and hosted our International and Australian presenters.

As Chair, I oversee and sign off on everything. I am in constant communication with our national body and other societies. Committee meetings are usually held at my place, as are some social gatherings.



*Dianne Stuart*



*Peter and Diana Harden*

Diana Harden is our most efficient secretary. This year she took on responsibility for organising the Australian lecturer's schedules and travel arrangements for their tour of four societies. Diana also organises our print advertising.

Treasurer Peter Harden managed our financial affairs, introduced guest payments by credit card on square reader and Try Booking and continued as a voice of wisdom during committee meetings.



*Chris Chaseling and Sue Anderson*

Sue Anderson liaises with local radio stations providing information about forthcoming lectures, and arranges interviews with presenters.

Chris Chaseling provides publicity back-up, distributing print material to libraries and other outlets when required. She is also a willing hand in assisting other aspects of committee tasks.



*Wendy Edwards and Carole Gamble*

Wendy Edwards is our Membership Secretary, providing information to prospective new members. She creates the name tags and was innovative in devising a new streamlined system of distribution.

Carole Gamble organised the home hosting this year. This entailed liaising with the presenter and arranging pick-up and drop-off at arranged destinations.

Our monthly raffle is a vital source of additional income for our Young Arts initiative. Erica Light's reputation for sourcing appropriate prizes for each monthly presentation is becoming legendary. Erica and Marion Pescud are responsible for the selection of lectures. It is not easy to choose topics that have the greatest appeal to the majority, but their depth of knowledge and uncanny judgement have served us well.

Marion Pescud once again produced a suite of outstanding newsletters. Their reputation grows as people appreciate the quality and depth of research in her articles. Marion also creates our promotional material.

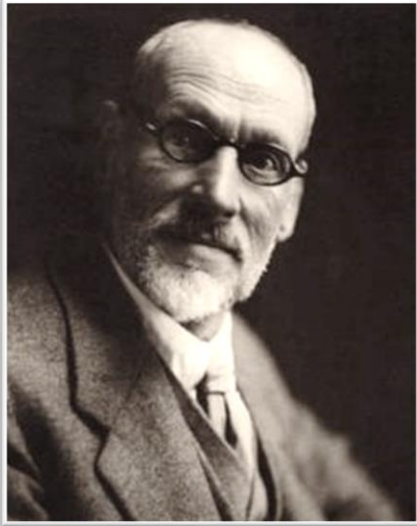
Finally, I would also like to thank Marion's husband Craig Snyder, who has sole responsibility for setting up and managing the IT sound and projection system. Special thanks to James Stuart for eight years behind the bar, and to Tom Trembath who has volunteered to take on this vital role next year.



*Marion Pescud and Erica Light*

Dianne Stuart

## Tom Roberts Father of Australian Landscape Painting



Tom Roberts

The front page of this newsletter features '*Christmas Flowers and Christmas Belles*', painted by Tom Roberts in 1899. The work captures an unemployed man selling flowers in King Street, Sydney. While Roberts was described in R. H. Croll's book (Robertson & Mullens Ltd. 1935) as the father of Australian landscape painting, it was his mammoth portraiture painting, '*The big Picture*' commissioned to record the official opening of the Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne in 1901, that gained him international recognition.

Tom William Roberts (1856-1931) gained fame as an artist, but during his life he experienced all that lay between the extremes of poverty and success. He was born in Dorchester England and following his father's death, he migrated to Melbourne with his mother and siblings, settling in Collingwood when he was 13 years old. He worked as a photographer's assistant during the day and helped his mother sew satchels and attended art classes under the guidance of Louis Buvelot in the evenings.

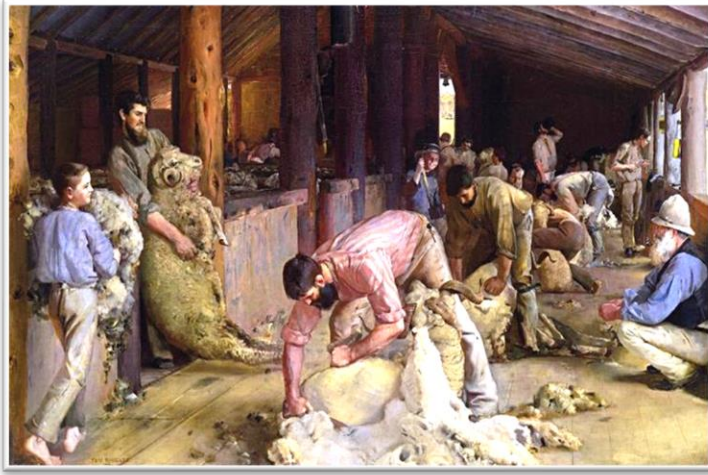
When his mother married a man whom he didn't like, Roberts decided to return to England. Having already attended anatomy classes at the University of Melbourne, the Victorian Academy of Arts assisted by providing him with a bursary to study full-time for three years at the Royal Academy Schools. He then travelled to Spain in 1883 with Australian artist John Russell, where they were introduced to the principles of Impressionism and plein air painting by Spanish artists Laureano Barrau and Ramon Casas. In London and Paris he was influenced by Jules Bastien-Lepage and James Abbott McNeill Whistler.



*'The Big Picture'* Tom Roberts (1903) with individual portraits of those who attended the opening of the Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne in 1901

Returning to Australia in 1885, Roberts worked from the purpose-built Grosvenor Chambers studio complex in Melbourne, and became a prominent member of the *Buonarotti Club*, made up of bohemian artists and associates. He adopted a bohemian habit of dress with a red satin lined opera cape and a top hat. His enthusiasm was important in a period when painters and writers were seeking local self-definition, and this dedication put him in the forefront of a group of plein air painters who collectively became known as the Heidelberg school.



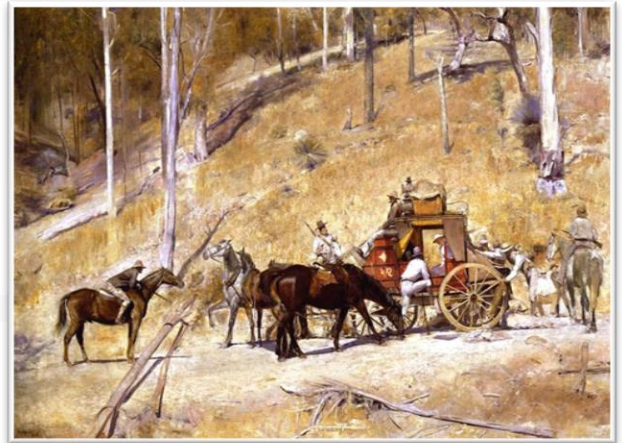


'Shearing the Rams' Tom Roberts (1890)

acquiring Australian pictures. In October Roberts established a camp at Sirius Cove, Mosman Bay, where Streeton joined him. He also set up a studio in Pitt Street.

In 1896, he married former art student Elizabeth (Lillie) Williamson and they had one son, Caleb. Lillie was an expert picture frame maker, and her income largely supported the family during the lean years of 1900–1914 when they had returned to England. During World War I, Roberts enlisted with several other Australian artists as an orderly, then became corporal, and finally a sergeant in charge of the dental department at the London General Hospital in Wandsworth.

The family returned to Australia for good in 1923, and built a house near Melbourne. Lillie died in 1928, and Roberts married her childhood friend Jean Boyes. Tom Roberts died of cancer in 1931 of cancer and his ashes were buried near Longford in Tasmania.



'Bailed up' Tom Roberts (1895)

His readiness to absorb major current influences and his energy in disseminating them made Roberts one of the prime movers in the development of Australian Impressionism. He was one of the first painters to recognise the special character of the Australian landscape – capturing the light, heat, space and distance. Although built on the same principals as the French movement, Australian Impressionism concentrated on form as well as atmosphere and reflected light.

Roberts attempted every area of representation – landscapes, subject pictures, and portraits – each with talent and intelligence. As a nationalist, his main aim was to record history in a rapidly changing Australia, particularly as the population gravitated toward the cities and the rural existence in the bush was diminishing. He contrasted the city and country, and a vanishing way of life.

He travelled widely in search of subject matter, riding long distances, living rough. He painted 'Shearing the Rams' at a station in the Riverina, and 'Shearing at Newstead: The Golden Fleece' (1894) and 'Bailed up' (1895) near Inverell. These works became definitive images of an emerging national identity.

Roberts' portraits of literary, artistic and political figures are as important as his landscapes and historical subject matter. He painted many distinguished figures which led to his famous commission, 'The Big Picture'. On his trip to Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands in 1892, he painted Aborigines as individuals rather than types.

Between 1886 and 1897, he formed the Australian Artists' Association as a body of professional painters in opposition to the Victorian Academy of Arts, and founded the Victorian Artists' Society. He was secretary of the literature and art section at the 1889 Melbourne meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, and in Sydney he was founding chairman of the Society of Artists.

Roberts was a straightforward man – direct in manner, and loved an argument. He was a born leader and mentor, promoting artists as professionals, and demanding respect rather than mere patronage. He was articulate and bold enough to duel with the hierarchy of the artworld and with journalists such as *The Argus's* critic James Smith who had labelled four-fifths of the 5 X 9 Exhibition as 'a pain to the eye'. This resulted in disfavour with some of the 'establishment', and as such, during his lifetime he never received the accolades accorded to Streeton.

In recent years however, Roberts has been acknowledged as distinguished a painter as Streeton, and more broadly, a much more significant figure as a patriot and champion of Australian art and his heroic energy in establishing respect for the artists.

QR Marion Pescud



The Arts**National**  
Northern Rivers Committee  
wish you a Christmas of good  
cheer and a very happy  
and safe holiday season

We look forward to  
seeing you in 2024



## End-of-Year Raffle



There were two prizes raffled at the end-of-year function held in November. Bob Johnstone won the luxury Christmas hamper, and Cas Veriga was delighted to take home two excellent bottles of wine.

*Bob (right) with the Christmas hamper, and Cas (left) all smiles with the wine.*







## End-of-Year Special Event

Following the Annual General Meeting, the committee organised a special screening of *'The Best Offer'* starring Geoffrey Rush. Set in Europe in the world of high-end art auctions, the psychological thriller unravelled a story of love and deceit. During intermission, members and guests enjoyed drinks and a Christmas-themed supper.









## Lisa Gorman Teams with Mirka Mora

In April next year, we can look forward to Kendrah Morgan presenting 'Mirka and Georges: A Culinary Affair', a lecture about Mirka and Georges Mora's early lives and food experiences in France, their celebrated hospitality in Australia and their intermingling of food, art, love and life. The couple were central figures in the cultural life Australia from the early 1950s, particularly in Melbourne where they established three restaurants.

Mirka Mora contributed significantly to the development of Australian contemporary art through her drawing, painting, sculpture, mosaics, embroidery and doll-making. She associated with Melbourne's unconventional Heide set, and became a bohemian icon of the city. She possessed an extraordinary overt personality and was loved, not just for her art, but also for her generous and outrageous nature.

Australian fashion designer Lisa Gorman, established the women's fashion label Gorman in 1999 and opened her first boutique in 2004. Considered one of the most iconic brands in the Australian fashion arena, Gorman's designs were recognisable by her whimsical style and inventive approaches to colour, pattern and form. By the time she retired in 2021 the brand had over 50 stores across Australia.



*Mirka Mora (2016)*



*Lisa Gorman*

'LISA GORMAN + MIRKA MORA: To breathe with the rhythm of the heart' is an exhibition currently showing at the Warrnambool Art Gallery in Victoria. (Gorman grew up in Warrnambool and retains strong ties to the city.) This colourful exhibition celebrates the collaboration between herself and Mirka Mora who worked together in 2016 and again in 2018, just before Mirka's death.

Curated by Warrnambool Art Gallery Director Aaron Bradbrook, the exhibition intersects at two iconic moments in Australian art and fashion history, and celebrates the artists' shared love of colour, illusion, and experimental modes of production, while highlighting the pivotal role fashion and textiles played in each of their daily lives.

Select garments from the Gorman label are displayed with Mirka's rarely exhibited embroideries, soft sculptures, and never before seen paintings directly from the artist's estate, alongside a large-scale, site-specific, sculptural installation by Lisa Gorman, who took inspiration from the two fundamental components of weaving – the warp and weft. It also includes works drawn from the Heide Museum of Modern Art, and from private collections.

The exhibition runs until March, 2024, and tickets may be purchased on line.

Entry fees are:

- ◆ Adult - \$18.00
- ◆ Members/Concession/Locals - \$12.00
- ◆ Family Pass - \$45.00  
(includes 2x Adult and 2x Children)
- ◆ Children Aged 8-17 - \$6.00
- ◆ Children Aged 0-7 Free

✉ Marion Pescud



# The Aussie Christmas

The convicts of the first fleet arrived in Australia in 1788, and introduced Christmas celebrations to Australia that same year. Being British and most likely very home-sick, they used their traditional symbols of Christmas – those being Santa in a red fur coat, reindeer and sleigh, holly and mistletoe, and songs such as Jingle Bells.

From the early 1800s, erecting Christmas trees, sending Christmas cards and displaying decorations became part of our tradition. Although Yuletide in Australia occurs in high summer, sentimentality for our original British heritage meant employing winter iconography. Snowmen, carol singers rugged up in coats, hats and scarves, and red robins, which some Australians have never seen, still serve as heralds of Christmas.

Over the years, more of Australia and our way of life has been incorporated into our Christmas celebrations and our own traditions have broken ground. We are more likely to consume pavlovas and prawns, than plum pudding and mince (fruit) pies. Rather than huddle indoors, we'll be at the beach or having a game of backyard cricket. Our airwaves will be filled with Mariah Carey singing 'All I want for Christmas is you' or Jose Feliciano wishing us a 'Feliz Navidad' – not British acts, but an example of how Australian Christmas traditions have broadened to accept a multi-cultural input.



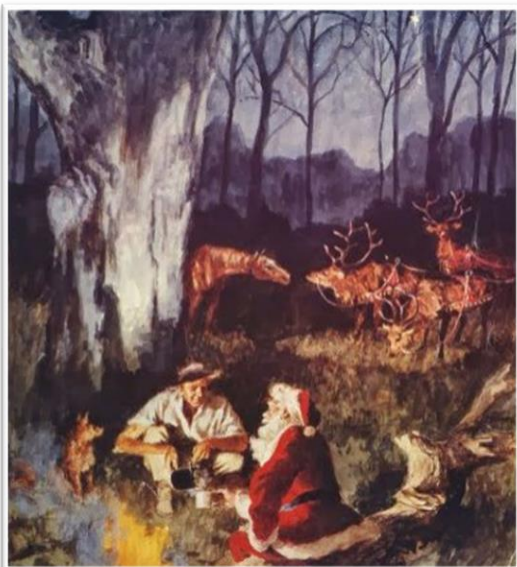
*Christmas in Australia, Wood engraving, 1863*



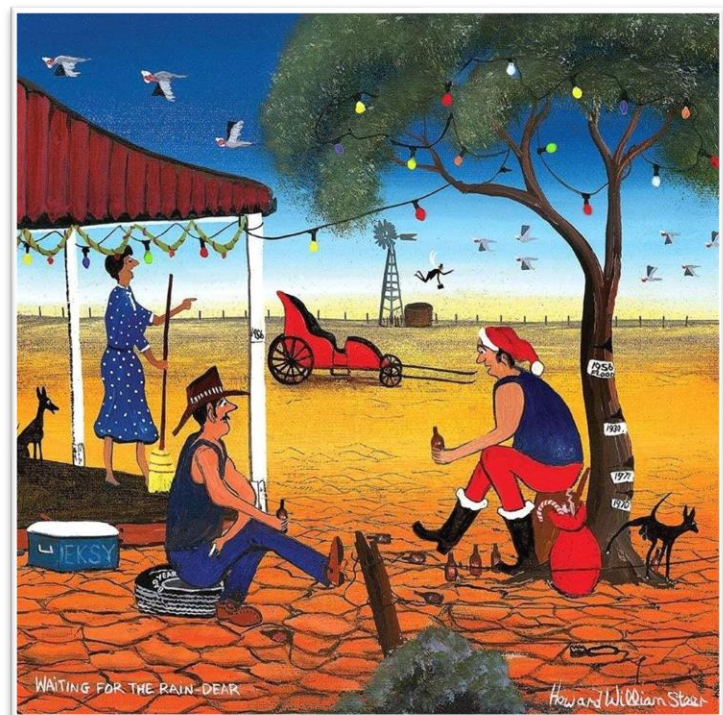
*The Christmas Camp, Clara Southern, undated*

But what about Australian Christmas art? Certainly, many of our Christmas cards feature Aussie animals or Santa at the beach. Most are cute cartoon-type entities. Modern fine art examples of our summer-time Christmas are harder to find.

✉ Marion Pescud



*Santa and the Drover, Jack Waugh, 1964*



*Waiting for the Rain-Deer, Howard William Steer, undated*