

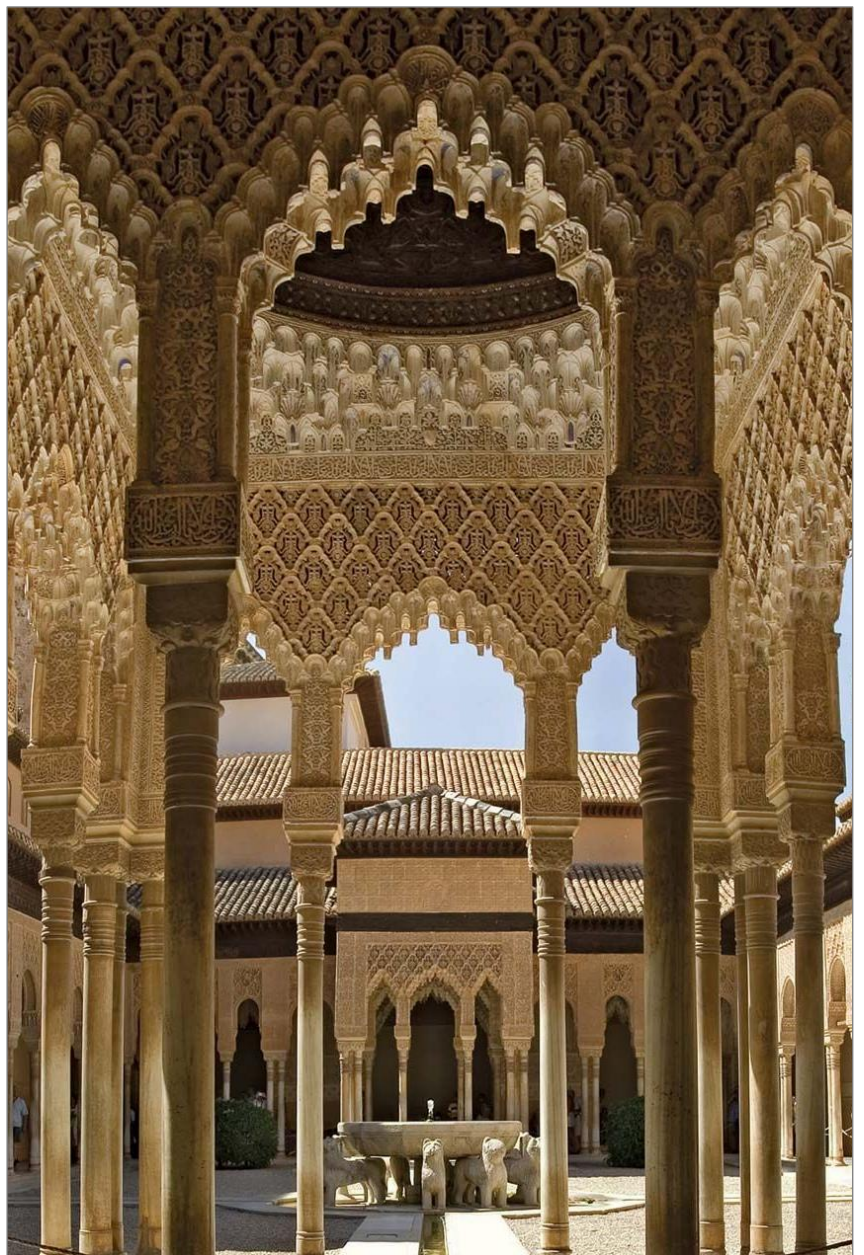
Newsletter 23 ♦ July 2024

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The Alhambra Palace, Spain,
Photo courtesy Britanica

From the Chair with Dianne Stuart

Our 2024 program of Arts Talks continues to be well received by members and a drawcard for an increasing number of guests. Animated conversations over drinks afterwards, demonstrate their ability to inform and challenge us.

I recently secured the last seat on the bus for a memorable guided tour of *Italian Renaissance Alive* Exhibition at the Home of the Arts (HOTA) on the Gold Coast. The tour was organised by



Elizabeth Grange and Olive O'Reilly

Sue Conrad - *Friends of the Lismore Regional Gallery*. Fellow ArtsNational members - Annie Abbink and Helen Revis, were also on the tour.

Watch this space for details of the proposed gala opening of the Lismore Regional Gallery in October, or chat to Sue or myself at our July lecture.

I hope those who have signed up are enjoying Dr Sam Bowker's 12 virtual lectures, *The Art of Everywhere Else*. The series began on 9 July and will continue to 8 October. You can still register by contacting: sbowker@csu.edu.au

Finally, an update on our first Young Musician Awardee back in 2018 - violinist Olive O'Reilly. Olive, pictured here with first violinist and ArtsNational Northern Rivers member - Elizabeth Grange, delighted the audience as the featured soloist in the Amatori Orchestra's recent concert in Bangalow. Olive will be studying at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2025. We wish her well.

I trust that you enjoyed Dan Evan's much anticipated Caravaggio talk on 15 July.

 Dianne Stuart

ArtsNational Patricia Robinson Fund

Our Northern Rivers society has donated \$250 to the ArtsNational Patricia Roberson Fund, founded in 1985 to support the conservation of Australian cultural materials.

Monies raised allow the Fund to provide workshops, special conservation-focused lectures, travel grants, and endow scholarships for conservation students and practitioners. It has also been instrumental in patronising the conservation of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's artefacts.



Australian Indigenous artefacts



Italian Renaissance Alive

HOTA's Immersive Multisensory exhibition

To an art lover, the 'Italian Renaissance Alive' exhibition currently on show at HOTA in Surfers Paradise, is a truly rapturous experience. Illuminated works from the Renaissance surrounds the viewer, transporting them into another realm. The giant images of paintings, sculpture and architecture are accompanied by a dramatic musical score which totally immerses one in the multisensory digital display of art from history's most influential period.

While the Italian Renaissance period is generally considered between the 15th and 16th centuries, this exhibition extends from the 14th to 17th centuries, showcasing masterpieces by Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Caravaggio and more.



Marion Pescud at the 'Italian Renaissance Alive' Exhibition, HOTA

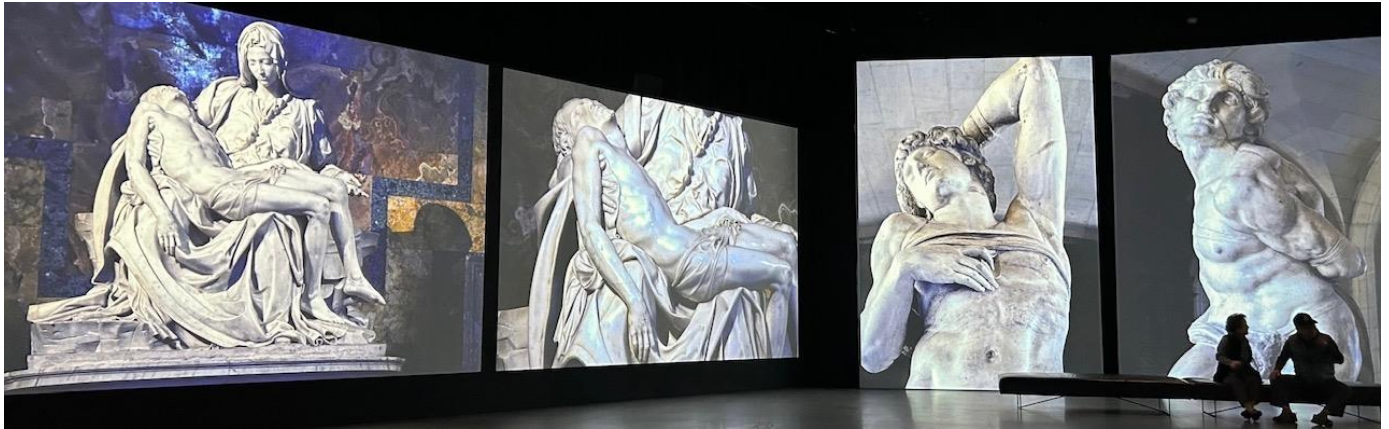


Visitors enter a large gallery space with scattered bench seating. The artworks are illuminated in a series of panels covering four walls and the floor. The works are dissected into varying sizes so the piece as a whole is observed beside magnified details of the same creation. Imagine a magnificent kaleidoscope displaying a feast of masterpieces seasoned with glorious closeups.

The panels not only move to totally envelope the viewer, but many of the characters are animated. Cherubs fly through cloudy skies, the wind flutters flimsy fabrics, and people move to complete the actions depicted. The Mona Lisa blinks, and Cecilia Gallerani, the Duke of Milan's 15-year-old mistress, sensuously strokes her ermine!

Left: 'The Lady with an Ermine', Da Vinci c.1488-90

To understand the important creative advances during the renaissance, you have to engage in the political landscape of the time. The crusades and many wars destroyed the Byzantine Empire, giving way for a new economical prominence through trade, banking, mining and agriculture. By the 14th century, the city of Venice had become a maritime power. The Italian trade routes that covered the Mediterranean and beyond were also major conduits of culture and knowledge. It resulted in spectacular advancements in painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, music, philosophy, and science.



Michaelangelo: the immersive experience

Giotto (c. 1267–1337) was the forerunner in Renaissance painting where he explored the illusion of three-dimensional space and a realistic emotional context. In the later 'High Renaissance' period, there were more advances in painting techniques such as linear perspective, and the manipulation of light and darkness which produced a unified composition of order, balance and harmony.

The high Renaissance evolved into the more playful Rococo interpretations and finally to the elongated figures of Mannerism and a more religious overtone.

The end of the Italian Renaissance is as fuzzy as its starting point. Conflicts between Italy, Spain and France (known as the Italian Wars) inhibited funds, the devastation wreaked by the Lutheran sacking of Rome in 1527, and the monk Girolamo Savonarola who led a backlash against secularism and indulgence were all contributors to the demise of the Italian Renaissance. Under the suppression of the Catholic Church and the ravages of war, humanism became a negative force.

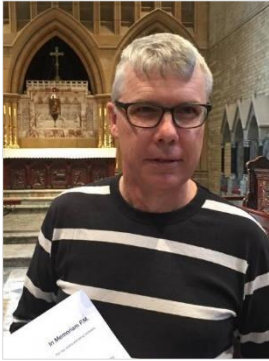
While the exhibition gave kudos to the Renaissance luminaries such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Botticelli and Titian, only one woman was represented. Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652), was a major follower of the Baroque painter Caravaggio and his dramatic realism. Unlike other 17th century women artists, she specialised in history painting rather than still life and portraiture. She used contrasts of light and dark in figurative compositions to heighten three-dimensional forms.



*'Portrait of a Lady',
Artemisia Gentileschi, C17th*

I found the 'Italian Renaissance Alive' quite a mesmerising experience. The exhibition extends until Sunday 4 August. Sessions are screening from 10am to 3pm, and tickets are \$29 for an adult and \$25 concession.

 Marion Pescud



Dr David Banney

June Lecture: Wonders of the Alhambra: Symmetry and Patterns in Islamic Art and Design

Australian medic, conductor, writer, mathematician, lecturer, and man of many interests, David Banney opened his presentation with a short video featuring the images of the magnificent Alhambra Palace, accompanied by Francesco Terrage's composition 'Reflections of the Alhambra'.

While the audience delighted in the visual embrace of the Alhambra, the lecture's main focus was on the symmetry of design, particularly in the stunning mosaics. Symmetry, according to David, is 'the organising principle of the universe'. He demonstrated how symmetry combined with mathematics, plays a vital role in almost every aspect of our lives.

The Alhambra is a palace and fortress complex. Muhammad I, the first Nasrid emir and founder of the Emirate of Granada, began building in 1238, but later rulers continued construction, adding more buildings until the Christian Reconquista in 1492, when it became the Royal Court of Ferdinand and Isabella.

In 1526, Charles V commissioned a new Renaissance-style palace, however, David Banney's presentation concentrated on the lower Nasrid monuments – the Mexuar, Comares and Partal Palaces and the Palace of the Lions - with their traditional Moorish architecture. These buildings have a central courtyard with water features at their centrepiece, and lavish gardens surrounding them.

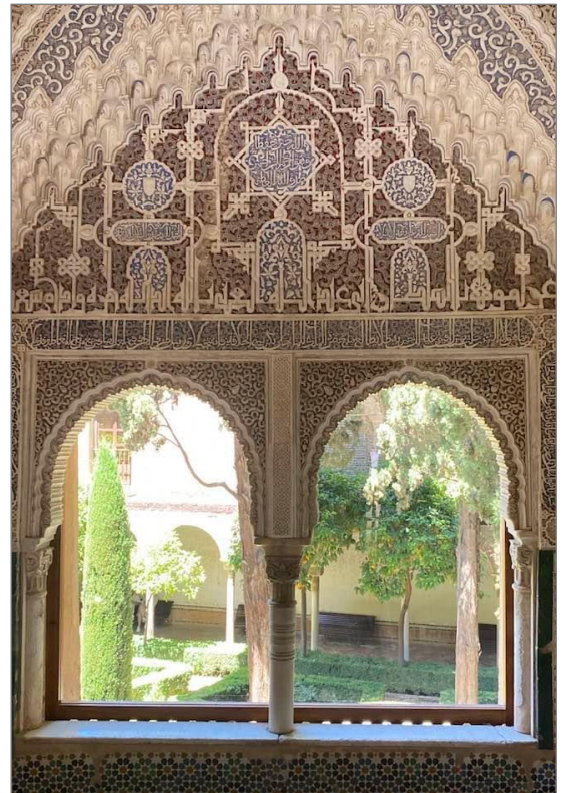
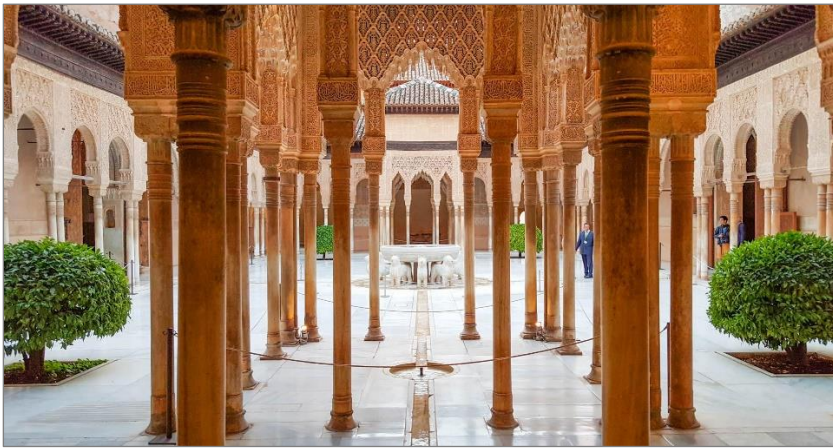


Photo courtesy of Gillian Hibbard



The interiors were decorated with mosaic tiles on the lower walls, stucco on the upper walls and generally wooden ceilings carved with arabesques interwoven with sacred calligraphy. Human or animal forms were forbidden, so mostly the arabesque feature scrolls and vegetal motifs entwined with under and over weaving lines. None of these would be possible without symmetrical tessellations. (A tessellation is the covering of a surface, using one or more geometric shapes, with no overlaps and no gaps.)

David likens symmetry to a bag of magic tricks. There are basically three types of symmetry: 1. Reflective; 2. Rotational; and 3. Translational. A complex repeated pattern across a large surface is called Wallpaper Symmetry, of which there are only 17.



Photos courtesy of Granada Tourism

Delving deeper, we find that symmetric tessellations require squares or rectangles, triangles or perfect hexagons. Circles will not tessellate, and pentagons have been labelled 'the bad boys' of tessellation. The mathematical Fibonacci sequence and golden ratio are embedded in tessellated design.

The presentation concluded with a video of the excruciatingly precise manual effort that is required to design a pattern, and

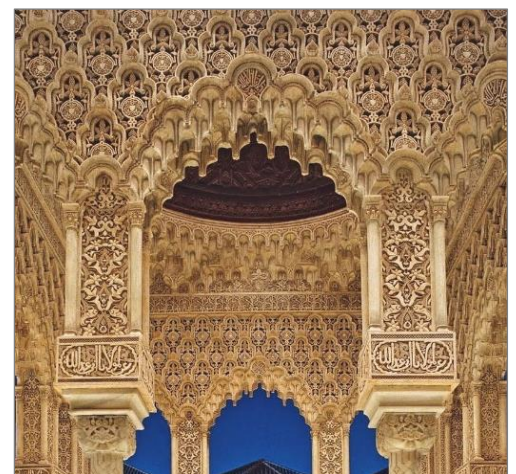
make, fire, and cut the tiles. The mosaics are constructed face-down, and it is only when turned over on completion that the craftsman is truly satisfied that he has laid the hundreds, often thousands of tile pieces correctly.

Finally, in the lively Q&A session following the lecture everybody discovered more facts about how symmetry affects our lives and perception – even sexual attraction!

Like many people in the audience, I have visited the Alhambra, but I'm certain all of us would like to do so again to better appreciate the fabulous Islamic symmetry and patterns of which we now know so much more about.



 Marion Pescud



June Post-Lecture Gathering

Members and guests mingled and enjoyed refreshments following the lecture.





Post
Lecture
Supper




ARTSNATIONAL
Northern Rivers





Elizabeth Grange

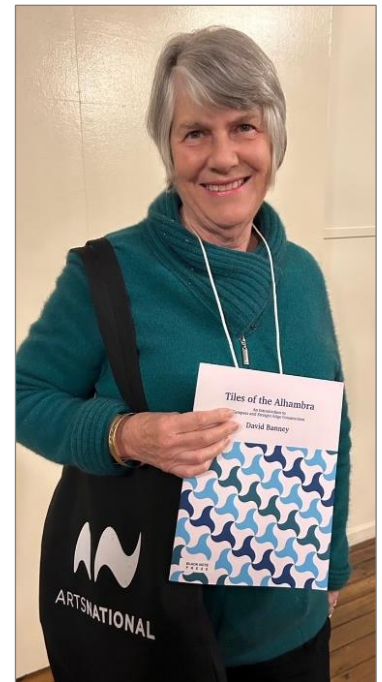
June Raffle

There were two winners in our June raffle winner.

First prize, was won by Elizabeth Grange, who received a copy of 'The Alhambra Revealed' by Michael B. Barry, which relates the story of Spain's Kingdom of Granada and contains an extensive collection of superb coloured photographs.

Helen Revis collected the second prize – a book on constructing the tile symmetry found in the Alhambra Palace, by presenter, Dr David Banney.

Both winners also received an ArtsNational tote bag.



Helen Revis

The Art of Everywhere Else: Global Art Histories



Dr Sam Bowker

We trust that our members are enjoying 'The Art of Everywhere Else: Global Art Histories', the 12-part lecture series presented by Associate Professor Sam Bowker. The series screens on Tuesdays from 6 -7pm until 8 October.

Members can still take advantage of this free offer to watch the remaining episodes by registering directly with Sam via e-mail: sbowker@csu.edu.au



Bringing you Centuries of Art

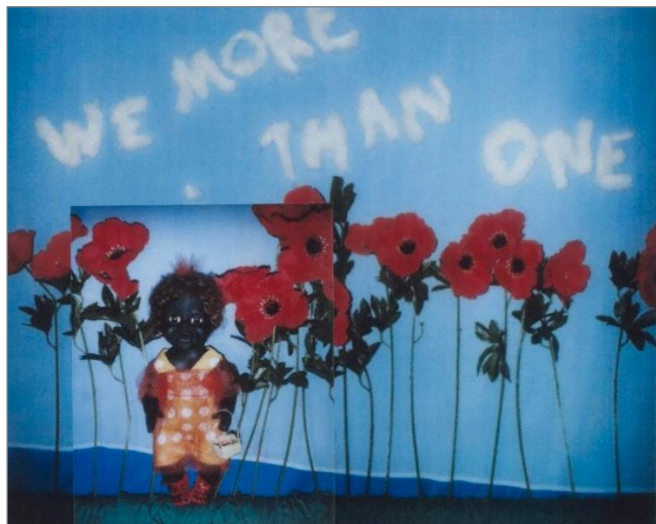
Vale Destiny Deacon

Internationally acclaimed indigenous artist Destiny Deacon, passed away in Melbourne in May, aged 67. She was best known for her darkly humorous take on racism, sexuality, feminism and the related historical injustices, trauma and stress suffered by Aboriginal people since colonisation.

Being politically conscious, it was she who in 1991 first dropped the 'c' in black, to coin the word 'blak' – an inclusive term to which urban Aboriginals without access to Country, language and unbroken cultural tradition could identify.



Destiny Deacon with her 'Koori kitsch'



'We are more than One', Destiny Deacon, 1998

worked as a teacher in Melbourne before joining former activist and senior bureaucrat, the late Charles Perkins at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra. In 2019 Deacon was bestowed with an honorary Doctorate in Education (*honoris causa*) from La Trobe University.

In 1990 after holding an exhibition with a few friends, she finally decided to redirect her career path to professional photography. She began using 'black dolls' and what she termed 'Koori kitsch' obtained from op shops as photographic props to expose racism in Australia.

She characterised herself as 'just a crappy artist', but her talent was extraordinary. While many of her installations, videos and laser-generated prints may look incidental, Deacon's message is sharp. Her cute figures strain under the burden of suffering because

Deacon was born in Maryborough, Queensland, in 1956, to an Irish/English wharfie father and an Erub/Mer (Torres Strait) and K'ua K'ua (Cape York) mother. She moved with her mother and siblings to Melbourne after her parents' marriage broke down. They lived in Housing Commission flats in the inner-city suburb of Fitzroy, where she became a vibrant strand in the fabric of the tight-knit black community.

Deacon gained a degree in Politics at the University of Melbourne. During that time, she was elected first Aboriginal student liaison officer, a role led to higher Indigenous participation and retention rates. In 1982, she gained a Dip. Ed. from La Trobe University and



Right: 'Axed', Destiny Deacon, 2016

of their Indigeneity. The ephemera - popular representations of First Nations people – oscillate between the patronisingly romantic to the blatantly racist.



*'Daisy and Heather Discussing Race',
Destiny Deacon, 2016*

Deacon lived in the world she portrayed – racism, intergenerational poverty, misogyny and homophobia. She came out as a lesbian in the 1970s. It was a brave move at a time when homophobic violence was widespread. She lost both of her great loves. Lisa Belleair, a community radio broadcaster and documentarian of urban blak Melbourne, passed away in her sleep in 2006, and her later partner and fellow artist Virginia Fraser, suddenly died on 'Invasion Day' in 2021.

Deacon's awards, both Australian and international, are numerous as were her exhibition contributions. She received the inaugural Yalingwa Fellowship for First Nations visual artists in 2018; and in 2022 was co-recipient of the Red Ochre Award for lifetime achievement in Indigenous arts, joint-winner the *Prix pour la Photographie* awarded by the Musée du quai Branly, Paris, and the Royal Photographic Society's prestigious Centenary Medal in recognition of a sustained, significant contribution to the art of photography.

She was represented in the prestigious international exhibitions 'Documenta', at the Yokohama Triennale, the first Johannesburg Biennale (1996) twice included in the Havana Biennale, the Sharjah Biennial (2023), the Biennale of Sydney on multiple occasions, including this year. She has had solo exhibitions in London, Tokyo, and Salzburg. Her major Australian exhibitions were *'Walk & don't look blak'* at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art in 2004, and *'DESTINY'* at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2020.

Through her images, Deacon exposed manufactured social maladies and inequalities, and she polarised popular Anglo culture against Indigenous existence. She will be remembered for her artistic talent, caustic humour and her proactive voice against hypocrisy, and the abuse of power.

✎ Marion Pescud

2024 Young Arts Programme

This year, we are pleased to announce that our Young Arts Award provided tuition fees for two young musicians, Jeremy Gerbach Routley and Oliver Bailey, from Northern Rivers Conservatorium to attend a three-day orchestral workshop.

The Lismore-based Conservatorium offers quality music education from group classes in early childhood music, to individual tuition in varying instrument choices.



The newly refurbished Northern Rivers Conservatorium

July Lecture

Caravaggio: Bad Boy of the Baroque

Thank you, Daniel Evans! Our July lecture was fabulous on every level – a great subject and wonderful presenter. Art historian and international lecturer Dan Evans had his audience spellbound with his brilliant delivery – when they weren't laughing at his humorous observations.

Dan spoke about Caravaggio's life – his talent and innovative approach to his painting, and of his adventures and misdeeds culminating in murder. He then discussed the art – the composition, the messages and the incredible rendering of light through chiaroscuro (light and shade) and tenebrism (dramatic highlighting).



Daniel Evans

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571 – 1610), whom we know as Caravaggio, experienced great tragedy as a youth with his father and grandfather passing away with the plague when he was 13, then losing his mother when he was 19. Following his four-year apprenticeship in Milan, he fled to Rome after committing a long string of crimes, including wounding a policeman.



*'Sick Bacchus', Caravaggio, 1593.
Earliest Known work/self-portrait*

Arriving in Rome penniless, he found work with Pope Clement VIII's favourite artist, Giuseppe Cesari. But also fell into crime with Cesari's brother who was leader of the street gangs. His unruly behaviour became more frequent. He was arrested for brawling, possession of illegal weapons, inflicting serious injuries, and sued for defamation, non-payment of rent and rock-throwing, and assaulting a waiter with a plate of artichokes! He was hospitalised on one occasion for an injury he asserted was the result of him falling on his own sword.

In 1606, Caravaggio murdered a prostitute's pimp. Some witnesses claimed was an accident after he meant to castrate the man, but instead severed his femoral artery. He was sentenced to be beheading in an open bounty which gave the right for anyone to legally carry out the deed on recognition. He fled to Naples, then Malta where he was knighted by the Grand Master of the Knights of Saint John who was impressed at having the famous artist as official painter to the Order. This too, ended in tears when Caravaggio was imprisoned for seriously injuring an aristocratic knight during a brawl. He was expelled from the Order for being a 'foul and rotten member'. He escaped from prison and made his way to Sicily where his behaviour became increasingly bizarre. Convinced that the Knights of Malta were trying to track him down he returned to Naples, and it was there in 1609 that he was attacked, possibly by the aggrieved Knights, and was severely injured and his face disfigured.

Encouraged by the promise of a pardon for the murder charge by Cardinal Scipione in exchange for some of his paintings, Caravaggio loaded his works on to a boat but it sailed without him, necessitating him to follow it to retrieve the art. In a desperate chase on land, sometime on foot, he became ill and died in Porto Ercole, Tuscany. His death is believed to have been from sepsis from a wound sustained in a brawl. He was just 36 years old.

The second part of the lecture dealt with Caravaggio's art. The Catholic Church was the main patron of the arts, and they were unhappy with the current Mannerist style of entwined muscular

bodies in exaggerated poses captured in sickly ice-cream colours. Their dictate was realism to emotionally stimulate piety. Caravaggio was the first to do so, and as such became the most preferred painter of the day. He employed close physical observation with simple yet masterful compositions that defined religious messages via incredible atmospheric use of light which became known as tenebrism or 'caravaggisti'. To obtain the realism demanded by the Church, he created a kind of camera obscura using a lens to refract the light. This ensured that his proportions were correct and allowed him the play with chiaroscuro, accentuating his narrative via dramatic light.



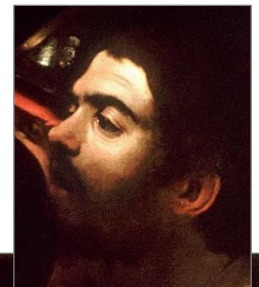
'Amor Vincit Omnia' Caravaggio, 1602

Although Caravaggio was bi-sexual, much of his work is homoerotic. He had affairs with men and frequently used the services of female prostitutes, however he never settled with one person. His intimate relationships matched the other chaotic elements of his life.



In many of the artist's work you will find a self-portrait, beginning with his first known work, 'Sick Bacchus'. His portraits, collated with the time they were painted, reveal his state of his mind. Evident is the drunkard, the genius, the criminal, the unforgiven and the murderer. After the bounty was placed upon him, he often painting decapitated heads – even of himself.

Self-portrait within the painting



'Taking of Christ', Caravaggio, 1602-1603

He worked rapidly using live models, many of them prostitutes, however it is believed that less than 60 of his paintings survive. His work inspired many of the great artists such as Rubens, Jusepe de Ribera, Bernini and Rembrandt. Caravaggio, the bad boy of the Baroque, had a tumultuous life and left a great legacy.

Left: 'David with the head of Goliath (Self-portrait)', Caravaggio, 1606

July Post-Lecture Supper



Members and guests enjoyed refreshments after the wonderful lecture on Caravaggio.





Committee members Erica Light and Sue Anderson on supper duty

July Raffle

Winners of our July raffle were Andrew Dingjan and Mario Fraietta. Andrew was delighted with his prize of the exquisitely illustrated and comprehensive volume of Caravaggio's works by Sebastian Shultze. Mario won an ArtsNational canvas tote bag.





**You will find us
in all the
best places**

Photo courtesy of Dianne Stuart

Lindy Lee: The Ouroboros Masterpiece

On 18 June, the most expensive work ever acquired by the National Gallery of Australia began its almost week-long journey from its birthplace in Brisbane to its new home in Canberra. The massive manoeuvre required months of planning, involving securing permits and approvals, road closures and police escorts. The truck was wider than a two-lane highway so trees had to be trimmed and street signs, lighting, and railings removed.



The 13 tonne, \$14 million Ouroboros sculpture, created by Northern Rivers artist Lindy Lee,

Northern Rivers painter and sculptor, Lindy Lee

was commissioned in 2022 to celebrate the Gallery's 40th birthday. Lee accompanied the giant Ouroboros on its journey, claiming it was "most exhilarating time of her life".



Tony Costa's 2019 Archibald Prize winning 'Portrait of Lindy Lee'

Lee was born in Brisbane in 1954 – the daughter of Chinese immigrants who had fled from communism. She is considered one of the foremost contemporary artists in the country, and is widely known internationally through her exhibitions in Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore. In her art, she explores her Chinese ancestry through Taoism and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism — philosophies that unite humanity and nature.

She first qualified as a secondary school teacher in 1975, however being enthralled by the galleries in Europe, she decided to focus on a career in art. She attended the Chelsea School of Art in London, then graduate school at the Sydney College of the Arts. In 2001, she gained a doctorate in Fine Arts from the University of New South Wales.

Lee began first experimenting with pierced paper during a residency in Kuala Lumpur in 2008, then began burning holes in other materials with soldering irons and blow torches during a stint in Beijing.

She worked with about 400 people to create the Ouroboros which is based on the ancient myth of a snake swallowing its own tail. It is a symbol representing the eternal cycle of renewal – the earliest known depiction is in the tomb of King Tutankhamun, dating back to the 14th century BC.

Lee channelled her own experience of being an 'outsider' to create an 'inclusive' work. She says, "The ouroboros is also about cosmos — and that cosmos is the open sky that we all belong to." Its statistics are impressive – the monumental sculpture is nine metres long and 4.5 metres high, took 60,000 hours to create with 45,000 hand-cut holes and two kilometres of welding.



Lindy Lee inside her Ouroboros (photograph: Kaeleen Minney)

Ouroboros is designed to last for at least 500 years. The stainless-steel sculpture requires still more work in situ, and will be ready for display in October. During the day, visitors will be able enter the 'mouth' of the sculpture and walk into the curved space to experience darkness illuminated by light emanating from the thousands of perforations on its surface. At night, it will be lit internally.

The National Gallery's director, Nick Mitzevich, says "You see the world reflected in Ouroboros, and then Ouroboros illuminates the world".

 Marion Pescud