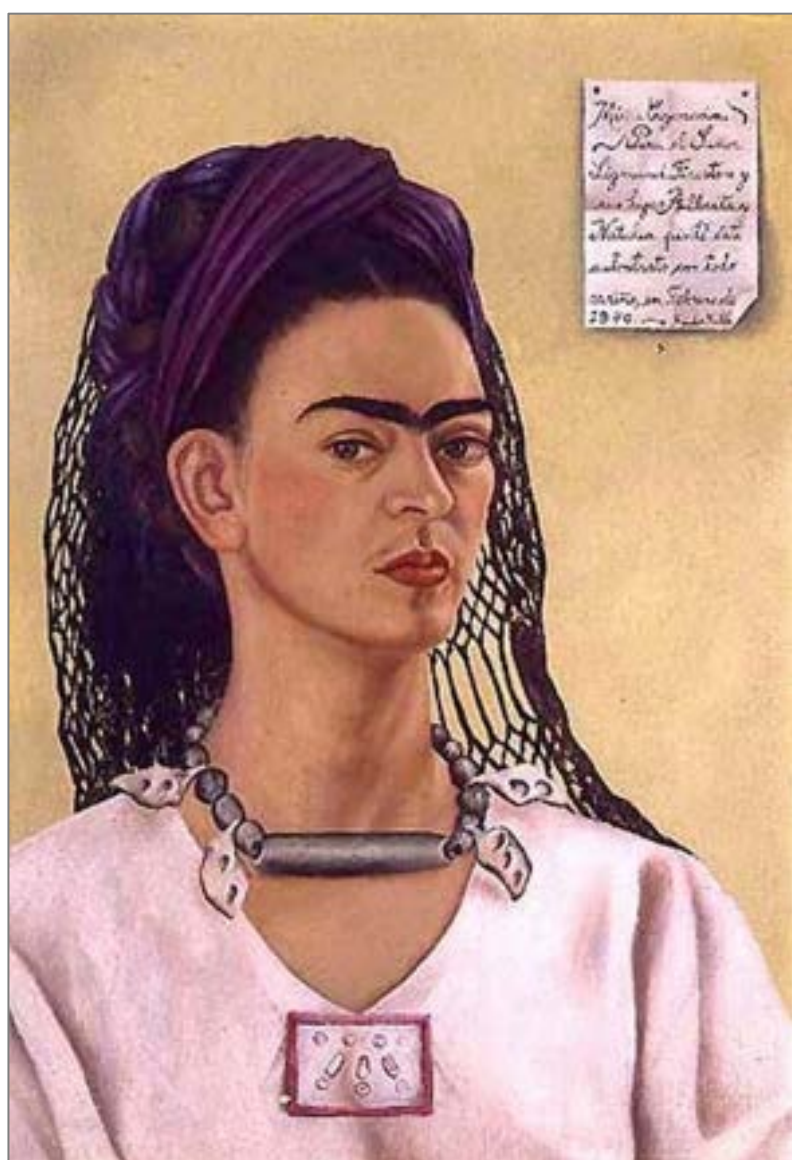


## Newsletter 27 ♦ July 2025



'Self Portrait Dedicated to Sigmund Firestone', Frida Kahlo, 1940

### Contents

- 2 From the Chair  
with Dianne Stuart
- 3 2025 Archibald, Wynne  
And Sulman Prizes
- 5 June Presentation  
The Art of the Japanese  
Garden
- 7 June Raffle  
Home Hosts  
Post-presentation supper
- 9 Sydney Film Festival
- 10 Local Regional Art Galleries  
Lismore Regional Gallery  
Grafton Regional Gallery
- 13 July Presentation  
Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera:  
A Volatile Relationship
- 16 July Raffle  
Post-presentation supper
- 18 The Rise and Fall of  
Johannes Vermeer
- 20 Save the Dates

## From the Chair with Dianne Stuart

*"I would like to add my congratulations and thanks to the members and team at Northern Rivers." It all sounds so positive - a good increase in membership and some positive replacements for long serving committee members."*

*Meg Larkin; Chair ArtsNational 14 July 2025*

I received the above message from the Association's National Chair following my advice to the Association Executive that ArtsNational Northern Rivers remains viable into 2026, with 91 members registered as of 30 June 2025. Added to this, three members have offered to nominate for the 2026 Chair, Treasurer and Secretary positions. These and further nominations will be voted on at our AGM on Monday 17 November – preceding our end of year celebration, to which you are all invited.

There's no doubt many of you helped spread the word and for that your committee is most grateful. Equally, I am delighted to witness the welcome given at each evening presentation to our new members and our guests.

Over and above our 91 members, are our two life members and founders of this society - Shirley Nelson and Nan Pulsford. I would like to take this opportunity to wish Nan and Shirley all the best. Nan is currently recovering after a most unfortunate fall which has left her with two broken bones in one leg. We look forward to seeing you both back when you are able.

At the time of writing, I have just returned from a stimulating and informative tour of the 2024 Archibald Prize winners. The tour was offered to members by Susan Conroy - president of the Friends of the Lismore Regional Gallery. I urge those who have not yet seen the exhibition to do so.

Meanwhile I look forward to seeing you at our forthcoming monthly evenings and remind you – cartoonist Harry Venning is our replacement September presenter.

 Dianne Stuart



Dianne Stuart



**ARTSNATIONAL**  
Northern Rivers

Relax and enjoy  
the arts with us

## 2025 Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes

Over its 104-year-old history, the Archibald Prize has attracted much controversy and several court cases for claims that the artists, or trustees did not adhere to the rules, yet the \$100,000 award for portraiture is Australia's most prestigious and best loved art competition. Inaugurated in 1921 by J. F. Archibald, editor of *The Bulletin*, the prize is given for the best portrait, preferentially of some man or woman distinguished in Art, Letters, Science or Politics, painted by an artist resident in Australia for the preceding 12 months.

### The Archibald Prize

Despite past sour grapes and accusations, The Archibald Prize has grown in esteem. This year there were 903 entries with 57 being selected, and for the first time, there were more finalist works by women artists than men in each of the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prize competitions.

This year's winner was four-time Archibald finalist, Julie Fragar for her portrait of friend and fellow artist Justene Williams, *Flagship Mother Multiverse (Justene)*. The entry was selected in a unanimous decision by the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) Board of Trustees.



'Flagship Mother Multiverse (Justene)', Julie Fragar

### The Archibald Packing Room Prize



'No Mountain High Enough', Abdul Abdullah

Since 1991, the \$3,000 Packing Room Prize, has been chosen by the AGNSW staff who handle the portraits in the gallery's packing room.

Abdul Abdullah won the prize for his portrait of Jason Phu titled *No Mountain High Enough*.

Born in Perth, seven-time finalist Abdullah is a multidisciplinary artist who divides his time between Melbourne and Bangkok.

## The Wynne Prize

The Wynne Prize is presented to an Australian artist for what the judges deem to be the best Australian landscape painting or figure sculpture art. Established in 1897 from the bequest of Richard Wynne, it is one of Australia's longest-running art awards, however it too, has had to deal with controversy and dissent. In 2010, the \$25,000 prize was won by Sam Leach, but it was later revealed to be a close copy of the 17th-century painting *Boatmen Moored on the Shore of an Italian Lake*, By Adam Pijnacker. Despite not adhering to the competition's criteria, the trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales decided that the award would stand.

This year the prize of \$50,000 was awarded to Sydney artists Jude Rae for her painting, *Pre-Dawn Sky Over Port Botany Container Terminal* (pictured right).



## The Sir John Sulman Prize



Gene A'Hern with 'Sky Painting' and guest judge Elizabeth Pulie

The Sir John Sulman Prize is awarded to the best subject painting, genre painting or mural project by an Australian artist. It was established in 1936. From a record 732 entries, 30 were selected as finalists – with the winner collecting \$40,000.

This year, guest judge, Sydney artist Elizabeth Pulie selected Gene A'Hern's work *Sky Painting* as the winner. She described the huge canvas as a "work of unselfconscious dedication to line and colour – an almost excessive celebration of the materiality of paint manifesting a certain energy".

 Marion Pescud

Art Gallery of New South Wales will exhibit the finalists the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman at a combined exhibition from 10 May – 17 August, 2025. A single ticket gives you access to see all three in the Naala Nura building (Lower level 2). Tickets:

## June Presentation: The Art of the Japanese Garden

Despite the very chilly evening, Kathleen Olive's lecture on The Art of Japanese Gardens attracted the most attendees for several years.

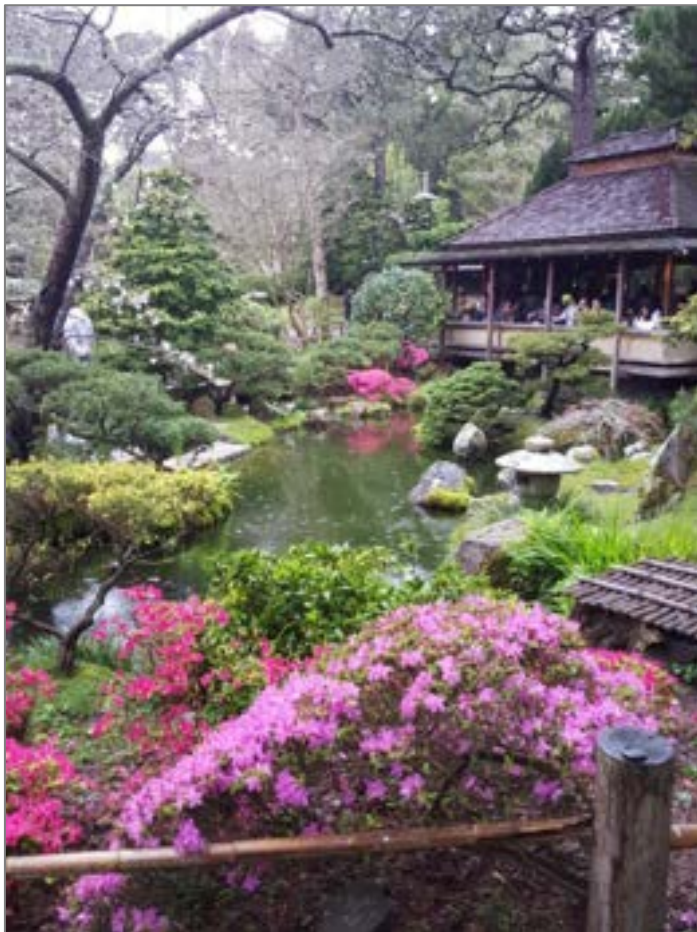
Kathleen explained the history of Japanese Gardens from the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Japan closed its borders to the outside world, until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While the early gardens had some things in common with those of China, since its isolation the country nurtured and expanded its own cultural and aesthetic values free of outside influence.



*Dr Kathleen Olive*

Japanese gardens are designed to reflect the country's geographical features, each with a foreground; middle; and background. Made up of mountains (with only 20% flat arable land) within an archipelago of over 14,000 islands, Japan's gardens feature five natural elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water. As in nature, they are created to look fragile and impermanent by changing their organic displays with the four seasons. However, the most important aspect of the Japanese gardens is balance, to reflect the ebbs and flows of life.

Garden designers strive for three main categories of balance, those being – artifice and antiquity; water course and panorama; and spaciousness and seclusion. Within these are subsets with opposing tensions such as – wildness and control; stability and exuberance; surface and volume; form and formlessness; and conscious versing the unconscious.



There is nothing easy about Japanese gardens – their design philosophy is extremely complex, and they require high maintenance. The true Japanese gardener will diligently rake gravel, collect fallen leaves, and trim moss daily. The Shinto philosophy being 'cleanliness is next to godliness'. The pruning to maintain contorted shapes is ever ongoing. Trees do not just grow – they are sculpted and propped to achieve the exact angle, canopy shape or water reflection desired.

Typical trees are cherry blossom, maples, black pines, quince fruit trees, and styrax trees which have white, bell-shaped flowers. These are underplanted with smaller flowering trees like rhododendron and magnolias, shrubs such as azaleas and camellias, and flowers being irises, liriopse and balloon flowers.

There are three types of Japanese gardens – Karesansui, Tsukiyama, and Chaniwa – each representing different meanings based on their style.

### **Karesansui (Rock/Dry/Zen Garden)**

These represents the spiritualism of Zen Buddhism. Instead of using water in this type of garden, sand or gravel is used to represent river or sea, and boulders of varying shapes and sizes to represent islands. It is a 'sitting' garden' used for meditation.

### **Tsukiyama (Hill and Pond Garden)**

Tsukiyama refers to the creation of artificial or manmade hills. The gardens are created as miniatures of natural scenery, and include paths meandering through hills, stones, trees, flowers and moss. There are ponds, and bridges crossing streams.

Visitors are meant to stroll through this garden, or view the landscape and temples from a rowboat in the pond.

### **Chaniwa (Tea Garden)**

The tea garden is much smaller than the other two. It has a tea ceremony house along with an inner and outer garden, united by a path and separated by covered gate.

The main features of the tea garden are Ishidoro (a small stone lantern), Tsukubai (A stone basin for hand washing), Nakakuguri (a middle gate), Tobi-ishi (stepping stones), and Kakei (a bamboo pipe through which water flows constantly).

Kathleen's knowledge of the history and philosophy of Japanese gardens was amazing. She visits Japan several times a year, and her expertise was appreciated. Very few audience members were aware of the deep complexity in design these gardens, nor the extraordinary amount of work to maintain them.



*Tsukiyama (Hill and Pond Garden)*



*Tsukiyama (Hill and Pond Garden)*



*Chaniwa (Tea Garden)*



## June Raffle

Carole Gamble was the winner of the June raffle, drawn by the evening's presenter, Kathleen Olive. Carole received *The Art of the Japanese Garden*, a beautiful hard-cover book by David and Michiko Young which delves into the history, culture, and design behind these botanical works of art.

*Left: Carole Gamble with Kathleen Olive*



## Home Hosts

Marion Pescud and Craig Snyder had the pleasure of home hosting Kathleen Olive, enjoying her good humour and interesting stories while showing her around the local sights. As an international tour guide and lecturer, Kathleen spends up to eight months a year travelling, mainly in Italy and Japan, and was delighted to relax in the comforts of a home rather than the sterile hotel rooms in which she usually stays.

In addition to admiring the scenery of the Northern Rivers, Kathleen was impressed with the Tweed Regional Gallery and the quality of the art exhibited. The Margaret Olley rooms are always intriguing, and it was great to see the new acquisition of Ben Quilty's Archibald Prize-winning portrait of Ollie.

*Kathleen Olive, out and about with Marion Pescud and Craig Snyder*



## Post-Presentation Supper

Despite the very chilly evening, a large gathering of members and guests attended Kathleen Olive's presentation on the *Art of the Japanese Garden*.

Afterward guests lingered for light refreshments and warm conversation.

*Left: ArtsNational Northern Rivers Chair, Dianne Stuart with current member and former Chair, Annie Abbink*

## Post-Presentation Supper



## Sydney Film Festival

As an avid film buff, I have been attending the Sydney Film Festival since the 1980s, yet my excitement never dims. It's a few days of the year that I can remove myself from reality to dwell in the fantastical world of film. While the festival stretches over several venues, I prefer the atmosphere of the magnificent State Theatre.

2025 was the festival's 72<sup>nd</sup> year, and drew the most participants ever. I have found the quality of the offerings depends on the festival director, and this year Nashen Moodley's effort was amazing. I feel like my eyes have been opened to the whole world. Most of the films are sourced from Cannes, Sundance and other big festivals around the world, where many have won awards for cinematography and screenplay. Debuting were 17 world premieres.

The Sydney Film Festival's international jury gives 10 cash awards from a total pool of \$200,000 – a respected and valued prize throughout the cinematic the world. This year, the Sydney Film Prize of \$60,000 went to one of my favourites, Jafar Panahi's Iranian thriller, *It Was Just an Accident*. Described as 'audacious, cutting-edge and courageous', it showed the terrible trauma the Iranian government has metered to its people.

I also loved Sundance Audience Award-winner *DJ Ahmet*, a coming-of-age story about tradition, dance music and first love in North Macedonia. It is lightly humorous, with a touch of magic realism.



Erica Light



Sydney's magnificent State Theatre

My favourite on non-fiction film was *Mr Nobody Against Putin*. This Sundance Special Jury Prize winner was an extremely brave endeavour set in the Urals. It tracks a courageous Russian teacher who exposes classroom propaganda.

The documentary that captured my attention was *The Golden Spurtle*, by Sydney based-Constantine Costi, a hilarious portrait of the World Porridge Making Championship in the Scottish Highlands.

The films I believe may follow with a general release are: *The Presidents Cake* – an Iraqi film about a young girl's quest to bake a cake for Saddam Hussein's birthday, and *Vie Privée* – a comic murder mystery set in Paris.

I'll just mention a few from the handful I thought were waste of time. *The Love That Remains* about an Icelandic family navigating separation; *The Mastermind* about a 1970s-set art heist; and *The Life of Chuck*, based on a Stephen King novella. In that at least I got to see Tom Hiddleston dance.

While feeling excited about the high calibre of the films I saw, after viewing between three and five daily, I can truly say that my appetite has been sated. At least for another year!

## Local Regional Art Galleries

Continuing the visits to local galleries, this month I will focus on the Lismore and Grafton Regional Galleries

### Lismore Regional Gallery

11 Rural Street, Lismore

The Lismore Regional Gallery, first established in 1953, is one of the oldest regional galleries in New South Wales. It first opened in the Trench Building, formerly the Government Savings Bank of New South Wales.



*Lismore Regional Gallery*

In 2015, the Gallery secured funding from the Federal Government's National Stronger Regions Fund and a donation of \$500,000 from the Margaret Olley Arts Trust to assist the transformation of the old Lismore High School site, into a more spacious home for the Gallery. The \$5.8 million project included the redevelopment of the existing C-Block building into a contemporary art gallery – linking it with the Northern Rivers Conservatorium and Lismore Library. The new Gallery opened in 2017.



*Marion Pescud and Peter Hannah with his magnificent cabinet before the flood*

And then . . . in the severe floods of 2022 water rose as high as the second floor of the gallery. Staff had moved valuable items to the upper level but still couldn't save many of the artworks. After a 16-month \$5.1 million refurbishment, funded by the Disaster Recovery Funding arrangements by the state and federal governments, the Gallery reopened in September last year. It features new exhibition spaces, a renovated cafe, and an artist studio space.

The new building has enabled the Gallery to deliver world-class exhibitions. It presents contemporary art across all disciplines, commissioning new works, and curating inclusive public programs such as talks, tours, and immersive experiences.

Some of the 1,400 flood-damaged artworks were able to be restored, including Geoff Hannah's famous Hannah Cabinet, a work of incredible complexity for which a 2019 campaign raised \$1 million to acquire and keep in Lismore. The cabinet is considered a national treasure, and by incorporating traditional techniques with state-of-the-art conservation equipment, its restoration is well advanced. Gallery Director Ashleigh Ralph said, "I know it will be restored to its former glory, with the story of Lismore now embedded in its legacy."

## Exhibitions at the Lismore Regional Gallery

4 April - 10 August

**Groundloop | Lisa Reihana**

A major immersive audio-visual artwork where indigenous voyagers sail between Aotearoa and Australia – a magical world where the moana, the ocean, is the connector.

27 June – 10 August

**Through the heart... | Jacklyn Wagner**

Composed of 100 photographic images, this exhibition showcases survivors and the unimaginable aftermath of the historic floods across Northern New South Wales in February and March 2022.

27 June – 10 August

**Dream vibrations | Peter Faulkner**

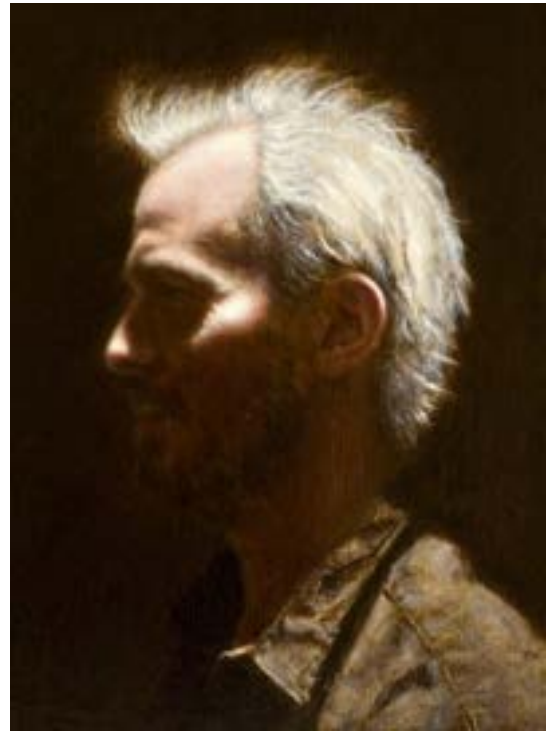
Faulkner is a Bundjalung man whose artwork reflects his community and the vibrancy of inherited cultural practice.

5 July - 31 August

**Archibald Prize 2024**

The Archibald Prize returns to the Lismore Regional Gallery for the second time, sharing all 57 finalist works from the 2024 award.

ArtsNational Northern Rivers provided members with a special guided tour of this exhibition on 17<sup>th</sup> July.



*Archibald finalist – 'Keiran', by Timothy Ferguson*



*The Grafton Regional Gallery*

## Grafton Regional Gallery

158 Fitzroy Street, Grafton

In 1985 Grafton City Council, with assistance from the Jacaranda Art Society (JAS), purchased Prentice House, former home and surgery for Dr James Houison, and later occupied by Drs Phillips and Prentice.

The late Victorian-style residence was constructed in 1880 and is considered one of Grafton's finest examples of architecture from that period.

Formed in 1961 with the aim of bringing contemporary art to the region, the

Jacaranda Art Society managed the Gallery for two years on a volunteer basis. Since then, the Gallery has undergone several stages of restoration and redevelopment. A grant from the New South Wales Bicentennial Council funded its upgrade to classify as a Regional Gallery. It was officially opened in 1988 with a gallery space in Prentice House, a storeroom, library, and offices. It is now administered by the Council.

A second gallery and collection room at the rear of Prentice House was added in 1991, as was the development of the courtyard area. Extensive additions were completed in 1999, enabling the gallery to increase its range of services and experiences for the community.



*Grafton Regional Gallery exhibition space*

The Gallery was awarded \$7.6 million through the Create NSW Regional Cultural Fund for a major building works program began at the end of 2019 and continued throughout 2020. The expanded Grafton Regional Gallery officially opened in 2021, with 40% more exhibition space.

This stunning state-of-the-art regional facility now incorporates six gallery spaces, workshop and meeting spaces, an on-site artist cottage, gallery store, visitor information outlet, and refurbished café. The new additions integrated into the heritage precinct and cottage gardens provide a wonderful visitor experience.

The Grafton Regional Gallery offers a dynamic new arts and cultural program. It works collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, communities, and cultural leaders and ensures practices follow respectful cultural and creative engagement.

The Gallery Store, Visitor Information Outlet, and Sweet Layers Café are open from 10:00am - 4:00pm, Tuesday through to Sunday.

## Exhibitions at the Grafton Regional Gallery

26 July – 14 September

### **RESIDUE+RESPONSE | 5th Tamworth Textile Triennial**

A celebration of 50 years of the National Textile Collection promoting and sustaining the unique cultural heritage associated with both the history and technology of textile practice.

26 July – 14 September

### **Selvedge | Robert Moore and Sue Hall**

Robert Moore's paintings on paper— characterised by large gestures, abstract marks, and landscapes – are transformed by Sue Hall who sews the paintings on paper into wearable forms such as shirts, bags, and hats.

26 July – 14 September

### **CVIAA 2025 | Clarence Valley Indigenous Art Award**

Now in its 22nd year, the CVIAA showcases all entrants to this year's prize with work by contemporary First Nations artists residing on Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, and Yaegl Country in the Clarence Valley. An array of artistic mediums, styles and methods will be on display.



## July Presentation: Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera: a Volatile Relationship

July brought us another wonderful illustrated lecture from visiting UK Professor Maria Chester. Accompanied by a wealth of slides, her talk on Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera was interesting, informative and entertaining, and enjoyed by all.

What a subject – passion and pain every step of the way of this unconventional union. Rivera, 21 years older than Kahlo, was born in Mexico in 1886 into a well-to-do family. He began studying art from the age of 10, and in 1907 he travelled to study first in Spain, then settled in Paris. His early works were in the cubist style (influenced by his friend Picasso) then he moved toward post-impressionism where he adopted simplified forms and bold areas of colour.



*Professor Maria Chester*



Detail, Pan American Unity Mural, Diego Rivera, San Francisco, 1940

While in Paris he acquired a wife and a mistress, and had a child with each. He married his second wife when he returned to Mexico in 1921, and had two more daughters. At this time, he began to create a new national art based on revolutionary themes in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. He painted huge frescoes, depicting Mexican agriculture, industry, and culture. These murals reflected an indigenous subject matter with stylised human figures set in crowded, shallow spaces with bright, bold colours.

Magdalena Carmen Frieda Kahlo y Calderón was born in 1907 to a German/ Hungarian father and a mother of Purépecha indigenous descent. She was born with spina bifida,

and at six she developed polio which left her with a withered right leg. She was an exceptionally intelligent child and was only one of 35 females (out of 2,000 students) enrolled in the National Preparatory School with the aim to study medicine. It was there, as a 15-year-old schoolgirl, that Kahlo first met Diego Rivera and whispered to her friend, "that is the man I'm going to marry!"

In 1925 Kahlo was involved in a bus accident, in which she was impaled on an iron railing. She was so seriously injured that she required more than 30 medical operations, and endured the most horrendous pain for the rest of her life. During her slow recovery Kahlo taught herself to paint. Her mother devised a special easel which hung above her head allowing her, with the aid of a mirror, to create



*Frida Kahlo and  
Diego Rivera, 1926*



*Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera,  
Wedding day, 1926*

artworks while lying on her back. It was the catalyst for the many brilliantly-coloured self-portraits, and her themes of identity, pain and death inspired by Mexican folk culture, pre-Columbian and Catholic beliefs. She stated, "I am not sick – I am broken, but I'm happy as long as I paint."

After her long convalescence, Kahlo joined the Mexican Communist Party, she met Rivera again. Later she was to say, "there were two accidents in my life – one was with a tram, and the other with Diego."

Kahlo had always been a liberal nonconformist who scoffed at society's rules, taking her first lover when she was 17. She embarked on a passionate affair with Rivera who had two common-law wives at the time. They married in 1929 – he was 42 and she was 22. Diego's mother described them as 'the elephant and the dove' – as he was of extremely wide girth, while she was tiny and frail. It was at this time that Kahlo adopted the traditional Mexican Tehuana style of dress, using long skirts to cover her deformed leg.

The marriage was toxic with his violent temper and mutual infidelities. Kahlo had several miscarriages and abortions. With her severe injuries it was likely that she couldn't carry a baby full term, but she knew that each time Rivera had a child he deserted the mother.

In 1930, the couple moved to the United States where Kahlo was known to have had affairs with photographer Nickolas Muray, art dealers Heinz Berggruen and Julien

Levy, Edgar Kaufmann Jr., and female artists Emmy Lou Packard and Georgia O'Keeffe. Rivera's work was lauded. He had a successful exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), and produced several large-scale murals, however he faced social criticism when he inserted the figure of Lenin in one of the giant works (which Rockefeller instructed to be painted over). Kahlo was also having success with commissions; however, she was referred to by the press simply as 'Rivera's wife', without mention of her creative output.

Kahlo and Rivera were both disenchanted with the US lifestyle and returned to Mexico in 1933. They built a house with separate individual spaces joined by a bridge. It became a gathering spot for artists and political activists, including Leon Trotsky and André Breton, who wrote the introduction to the brochure for Kahlo's first solo exhibition in New York. (Kahlo had affairs with Trotsky and Breton's wife Jacqueline, as well as a Japanese sculptor.)

In 1939, Kahlo exhibition in Paris, and was the first Mexican artist to have a painting acquired by the Louvre. Her indigenous-inspired clothes became a fashion favourite, and she appeared in Vogue magazine. Couture designer Elsa Schiaparelli was so taken with her style she incorporated similarities in her own collections.

Back in Mexico, the couple's art flourished, as did their infidelities. They divorced in 1939 when Rivera had an affair with Kahlo's sister. However, their relationship was such that they couldn't live without each other, and they remarried in 1940. It was on Kahlo's condition that they would not have sex with each other, but they did share lovers!



*Kahlo in indigenous dress*



Home and studios of Diego Rivera (white) and Frida Kahlo (blue), Mexico City

Kahlo was in physical and mental pain, which she depicted in harrowing works such as herself haemorrhaging, trapped within surgical corsets (she wore 28 separate supportive corsets, varying from steel and leather to plaster, between 1940 and 1954), or pierced with nails and screws. She wrote, "I wanted to drown my sorrows, but the bastards learnt to swim." She increased her consumption of painkillers and alcohol – downing a bottle of vodka every night. She had several more surgeries and bone grafts and was again confined to painting on her back in bed. She also suffered from syphilis and depression, chronic infection in her hand, and had gangrenous toes amputated.

Kahlo's first solo exhibition in Mexico was staged in April 1953. Her doctors deemed her too ill to attend, so she surprised guests at the opening by arriving in an ambulance, and being carried on a litter to a four-poster bed she'd had moved from her home. That year she had her right leg amputated from the knee down, and she attempted suicide when Diego began yet another affair.

In her last days, Kahlo was mostly bedridden with broncho-pneumonia, and on 13 July 1954, her nurse found her dead in her bed. Kahlo was only 47 years old. The official cause of death was pulmonary embolism, although many believe it was suicide. Her nurse testified that she had been prescribed a maximum dose of seven pills but had taken 11. She had also written, "I joyfully await the exit – and I hope never to return – Frida."

Kahlo's body was taken to the Palacio de Bellas Artes, where it lay in state under a Communist flag until she was cremated.

While Rivera stated that her death was "the most tragic day of my life", he married his agent one year later. He died of cancer of the penis in 1957, aged 70. He had refused medical treatment, stating that he was loathe to mutilate "something which had given him so much pleasure".



Kahlo's surreal/magic realism works

QR Marion Pescud



ARTSNATIONAL  
Northern Rivers

Join the journey to  
explore the world of arts

## July Raffle



*Presenter Maria Chester with Angela Connor*



*Helen Johnson*



*Catherine White*

July's bumper raffle provided three winners with great prizes. Helen Johnson received a book featuring Kahlo and Rivera's finest works. Catherine White won a Kahlo-themed tote bag which tucked into it's own little carry pouch, and Angela Conner was thrilled with her Kahlo bag which came directly from Mexico.

---

## Post-Presentation Supper

After another wonderful presentation, members and guests enjoyed a delightful post-presentation supper



## Post-Presentation Supper





Vermeer, *Self-portrait*, 1656  
Detail from 'The Procuress'

## The Rise and Fall of Johannes Vermeer

Most of us are aware of the brilliant luminosity of Vermeer's work – the calmness portrayed in his paintings of young women and the air of fragility in the still transient moment. He replaced the narrative with a certain suspense, allowing the viewer to wonder what will unfold next.

Vermeer's most famous work, *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* (sometimes referred to 'the Mona Lisa of the North'), is not actually a portrait but a 'tronie' – an imaginary subject. As with all his paintings, he depicted a world transfigured – a world according to his own perception of perfection. Some historians believe he used a *camera obscura* to filter his subjects and master the light.

But what of Vermeer, the man? His is a tragic story of scaling the social ladder to command financial security and respect – then losing it all. Johannes Vermeer was born in The Netherlands's city of Delft in 1632 into a family of rogues. His grandfather was found guilty of counterfeiting coins, for which two of his accomplices were tortured and beheaded. His grandmother was a con woman, frequently in trouble with the police. His father, a publican and part-time art dealer was charged with manslaughter following the death of a man in a canal-side brawl.

However, his Protestant parents had aspirations for their only son. Naming him Johannes, instead of the regular 'Jan' was the first step. The young artist fell in love with a Catholic girl, Catharina Bolnes, who was far above his social standing. The relationship originally encountered opposition from her mother, probably because he was from an infamous family of little means, and because he was not Catholic (an outlawed religion at the time during the 80-Years' War while The Netherlands fought for independence from Spain).

Converting to Catholicism changed the mother's mind, and Vermeer and Catharina were married in 1653. The young couple moved into the bride's mother's large house where they produced at least 12 children. That same year, Vermeer was admitted into the Guild of St Luke, and artists' collective.



*The Girl with the Pearl Earring*,  
Vermeer, c. 1665

Catharina's childhood, while having the privileges of wealth, was plagued with family rows. Her mother particularly, was abused and physically assaulted by her father, who also took his rage out on his daughter. Her brother had his father's disposition and resorted to violence when he was upset. Catharina's mother finally sought a divorce and they escaped to the large house in Delft that would remain the family home until after Vermeer died.

From 1588 to 1662, and despite the war with Spain (which ended in 1648), The Netherlands basked in the Dutch Golden Age – a time of extraordinary dimensions of creativity, innovation, and societal evolution. The sun shone on Vermeer. He had a new wife, new religion and new life. He had acquired

a dedicated patron in Pieter van Ruijven, who bought half of the work he produced. This allowed the artist to explore his own vision rather than cater to the market. He painted slowly, his output being only about three paintings a year. Vermeer was made Head of Guild of St Luke's in 1662.

So, what happened to end this domestic bliss and artistic independence? The fall began in 1672 when French troops led by Louis XIV invaded the country from the south, and soldiers from Münster and Cologne invaded from the east. Courts, theatres, shops and schools were closed, and the Dutch government opened the dikes to flood the land to inhibit the troop advancements. Unfortunately, the inundation flooded land and homes owned by Vermeer's mother-in-law and her tenants rent was lost. It was the last year that Vermeer sold a painting. He was left with no market, no patron and no money, yet he had a large family to provide for.

In desperation he made some rash decisions. He borrowed 1,000 guilders from his uncle using his mother-in-law's property as a surety, and he kept a large amount of money which she had asked him to retrieve as part of her inheritance. The misdeeds were discovered and Vermeer went into a sharp decline. He died in 1675 after a short illness. He was just 43 years old. Of his death Catharina wrote: 'As a result and owing to the great burden of his children having no means of his own, he lapsed into such decay and decadence, which he had so taken to heart that, as if he had fallen into a frenzy, in a day and a half he went from being healthy to being dead.'

Vermeer's mother-in-law paid for his burial in the Protestant Old Church in Delft. He left nothing but a grieving wife and children, a few paintings and mountains of debt. Catharine sold two of his paintings to pay a baker for supply of bread for the previous two years. It was a sad and distressing end to one of the artists that had shone so brightly during the Dutch Golden Age.

✎ Marion Pescud

*View of Delft,  
Vermeer, c.1660*

This tranquil view of Delft depicts Vermeer's home town as a serene haven. In most of his work, he portrayed his subjects in blissful stillness – with a perfection specific to his own ideals.





*Detail from Rembrandt's 'Night Watch'*

## Save the Dates!

We have more great lectures lined up to pique your interest and satisfy your artistic soul. Following are brief synopses of our August and September presentations by international guest lecturers.

18 August – Dr Sophie Oosterwijk

### **The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' and More**

Housing a staggering 8,000 Dutch artworks including masterpieces by Vermeer, Rembrandt and Van Gogh, Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum is visited by approximately 2.2 million people a year, many of whom come expressly to see Rembrandt's famous 'Night Watch'.

Commissioned in 1642, this gigantic group portrait (3.6m x 4.4m) was hugely controversial because of the unusual way Rembrandt painted the subjects actively doing something. Originally titled 'Militia Company of District II under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq', the painting became known as the 'Night Watch' after it darkened due to the build-up of dirt and vanish. The painting was cleaned in the 1940s.

Dutch art historian Dr Sophie Oosterwijk, is well qualified to give this ArtsNational lecture having studied and worked in both the Netherlands and the UK. Sophie holds two PhDs plus two Master's Degrees. She is also widely published on her numerous specialist research subjects including medieval art and iconography, sculpture, and Dutch art.



Wendy Edwards

15 September – Harry Venning

### **Oh No Dear, That's Not Funny – Cartoonists on Cartooning**

"There will be humour, there will be history and there will be live drawings" - cartoons as not only a form of political commentary and satire but as an art form. September 15<sup>th</sup>'s ArtsNational lecture by Harry Venning will trace the story of cartoons and cartoonists over the last two hundred years, focusing on artists who have made an abiding impression on culture, history and language. Harry Venning is an award-winning UK cartoonist, comedy writer and former actor.

The earliest humorous and political cartoons appeared in the English Punch magazine in 1843, ironically at first and then spread to other newspapers and magazines with the drawings becoming more satirical as time passed. One of the earliest cartoonists was Sir John Tenniel, known primarily as the illustrator of *Alice in Wonderland*. Sir John joined the Punch magazine in 1850 and contributed over 2000 cartoons over a 50-year period. Today cartoons are no longer limited to the print media and their influence also continues today by way of regular cartoon segments in TV programs such as the ABC's *Insiders*. Cartoons provide a powerful commentary on current affairs with both politics and politicians providing cartoonist with ample inspiration for humour and satire.

 Wendy Edwards