

Of childhood excursions with my father the most enjoyable by far were our visits to Melbourne Museum. Admittedly, the most popular exhibit there was a stuffed horse, but I loved the building itself with its palatial proportions, huge and echoing chambers, and long galleries filled with dusty glass cases of geological specimens, embalmed snakes and the unidentifiable detritus of the past. There were rooms through which we passed on our pilgrimage to Phar Lap in which paintings were hung, and these pleased me much more than the other exhibits.

Sadly the art collection – and it was a distinguished one by any standards- was removed long ago to a grandiose building on St. Kilda Road, the interior of which resembled a department store with escalators, worryingly flanged and ducted ceilings, and all but price tickets on the pictures. However, I have always been drawn to art galleries large and small, ancient and modern. The old-fashioned ones in opulent classical revival and beaux art styles are the best of course, because they were designed by municipal architects with no aspiration to greatness. Modern architects have created some remarkable buildings for the display of what Americans call ‘artwork’, but although they are sometimes tourist attractions they are rarely sympathetic environments for works of art, and they are frequently confusing, gimmicky and quickly dated (viz the inhospitable National Gallery in Canberra). The trouble is that contemporary architects rarely know much about art, which they deem inferior to their own monument-making, nor for the same reason are they often much good at designing theatres.

Small, out-of-the-way museums are the best, for they always contain pleasant surprises. Darwin’s for example, or the Art Gallery at Castlemaine or the little Art Gallery at Manly, which is stuffed with gems and one of my favourites. Ballarat, Bendigo (don’t miss *Too Late* by Herbert Schmalz) and even modern Newcastle all reward a visit. I especially like to be shown pictures exiled to the basement, and friendly curators in many parts of the world have often been kind enough to pull out those big wire mesh screens, and show me paintings and drawings which fashion has passed by.

In my selection for this exhibition I have included some works which I particularly like. Since I am now living in New York it is a selection which I have been obliged to make from memory. There are not many masterpieces amongst them but there are no duds either, I believe. They are mostly Australian artists and few of these artists are still living. This does not mean that I do not admire some of our modern masters, but Nolan, Boyd, Drysdale, Williams, Smart and Whiteley are familiar to most art lovers and I have chosen from amongst lesser men. It is a heterogeneous melange, but hope the visitor makes some agreeable discoveries.

Heysen, Longstaff, Murch, Lymburner, Fizelle. How well they painted, and how unjustifiably overlooked they are today. Amongst my favourites is a lovely thing by Sir William Dargie who’s happily still with us in leafy Mont Albert. Surely a retrospective exhibition devoted to this brilliant and versatile artist is long overdue.

Some of the artists in my selection were friends: Thea Proctor, Arthur Murch, Francis Lyburner and John Brack, so that aesthetic delight is enhanced by personal acquaintance. Then there is a modest gallimaufry of 'overseas art', as a used-car salesman turned art dealer once engagingly described any picture without a gum tree. Amongst them is a perverse little drawing by my favourite dadaist Francis Picabia (from Adelaide), a view of Pont Neuf by the great Albert Marquet (one of Sydney's treasures), a wonderful Sickert on a music hall theme dear to my heart and close to my life, and a Samuel Palmer – again from Adelaide – which I nearly bought in Sydney in 1955! Finally *Her crown and sceptre*, the English symbolist Thomas Cooper Gotch's beautiful portrait of his granddaughter, later the mistress of Aleister Crowley and subsequently a close friend of mine until the end of her life.

The organisers of the exhibition have required Miss Olley and I to include some of our own works, and in her case this can only lend further glory to her selection. I however am an amateur, albeit an enthusiastic one, and it is with this in mind that I beg visitors to view with a generous indulgence the pictures and objects of my authorship. There are some neo-dada pieces from the sixties and conventional landscapes from the last decade of the twentieth century which, if they betray little skill, convey I hope my undimmed relish for the incomparable therapy of painting, and the tempting beauty of the Australian landscape.

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