

= Hilda Rix Nicholas =

Hilda Rix Nicholas (née Rix , later Hilda Rix Wright , 1 September 1884 ? 3 August 1961) was an Australian artist . Hilda Rix was born in the Victorian city of Ballarat . Her father was an education administrator and poet , her mother a musician and artist . She studied under a leading member of the Heidelberg School , Frederick McCubbin , at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School from 1902 to 1905 and was an early member of the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors . Following the death of her father in 1907 , Hilda Rix , her only sibling Elsie and her mother travelled to Europe where she undertook further study in London and then in Paris . Her teachers during the period included John Hassall , Richard Emil Miller and Théophile Steinlen .

After travelling to Tangiers in 1912 , Rix held several successful exhibitions of her work , with one drawing , Grande marche , Tanger , purchased by the French government . She was one of the first Australians to paint post @-@ impressionist landscapes , was made a member of the Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français , and had works hung in the Paris Salon first in 1911 and again in 1913 . The family evacuated from France to England after the outbreak of World War I. A period of personal tragedy followed , as Rix 's sister died in 1914 , then her mother in 1915 . In 1916 she met and married George Matson Nicholas , only to be widowed the next month when he was killed on the Western Front .

Returning to Australia in 1918 , Rix Nicholas once more took up professional painting , and held an exhibition of over a hundred works at Melbourne 's Guild Hall . Many sold , including In Picardy , purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria . Following a period painting in rural locations in the early 1920s , Rix Nicholas returned to Europe . A 1925 exhibition in Paris led to the sale of her work In Australia to the Musée du Luxembourg , followed by an extensive tour of her paintings around regional British art galleries . There followed representation in other exhibitions , including at the International Society of Sculptors , Painters and Gravers , and the Royal Academy of Arts , both in London . Following the inclusion of several works in the 1926 Société Nationale des Beaux @-@ Arts Spring exhibition in Paris she was made an Associate of that organisation .

In 1926 , Rix Nicholas returned to Australia , and in 1928 she married Edgar Wright , whom she had met during her travels in the early 1920s . The couple settled at Delegate , New South Wales ; their only child , a son named Rix Wright , was born in 1930 . Though she continued to paint significant works including The Summer House and The Fair Musterer , Rix Nicholas , a staunch critic of modernism who was disdainful of the works of emerging major artists such as Russell Drysdale and William Dobell , grew out of step with trends in Australian art . Her pictures remained didactic , portraying an Australian pastoral ideal , and reviews of her exhibitions grew more uneven . She held her last solo show in 1947 . Rix Nicholas remained at Delegate until her death in 1961 . Her works are held in most major Australian collections , including the Art Gallery of South Australia , Australian War Memorial , National Gallery of Australia , National Gallery of Victoria , and the Queensland Art Gallery .

= = Early life = =

Henry Finch Rix and Elizabeth Sutton , each of whom had migrated to Australia as children with their families , met and married in Victoria in 1876 . They had two daughters , Elsie Bertha , born in 1877 , and Emily Hilda (known ubiquitously just as Hilda) , born in Ballarat on 1 September 1884 . The Rix children grew up in a gifted and energetic family . Henry , a mathematics teacher , was appointed a district Inspector of Schools in the 1880s ; he was also a poet who wrote in support of Australian Federation , and he played Australian rules football for the Carlton Football Club . Elizabeth had grown up assisting in her parents ' thriving music business in Ballarat , and was a singer who performed with the Ballarat Harmonic Society . In addition , she was an artist who had a studio in Melbourne 's Flinders Street , and a committee member of the Austral Salon , " a meeting place for intellectual women interested in the fine arts . " She painted in an academic style , generally choosing still lifes and flowers as subjects , though she also painted some large landscapes in the Beechworth region .

Hilda Rix and her sister Elsie both played musical instruments as children , and would perform songs or dances at regional shows . Elsie was a singer and actor who performed at the meetings of the Austral Salon , and the sisters collaborated in designing posters to advertise the Salon 's activities . As a child , Hilda was enthusiastic about drawing . Her artistic efforts drew praise while she was attending high school at Melbourne Girls Grammar (known as Merton Hall) , though in most other respects Rix was not an outstanding student . Both Elsie and Hilda took some art lessons with a Mr Mather , before Hilda went on to study at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School from 1902 to 1905 , where she was taught by a leading member of the Heidelberg School , Frederick McCubbin . Her fellow students were mostly women and included Jessie Traill , Norah Gurdon , Ruth Sutherland , Dora Wilson , and Vida Lahey . Rix would subsequently be critical of McCubbin 's approach to teaching , referring to his methods as " vague persuasions " . Nevertheless , the author of the only comprehensive biography of Rix , John Pigot , considered that McCubbin influenced her in several ways : he emphasised the creativity of individuals rather than imitating the style of any one school of painting ; he modelled the importance of nationalistic ideas and subjects that would become so prominent in her later painting ; and his work emphasised the painting 's subject over technical considerations .

Drawings undertaken by Rix while she was still a student were included in annual exhibitions at the Victorian Artists ' Society and the Austral Salon . At the same time , she was working as a professional illustrator for textbooks and a periodical , the School Paper , published by the Victorian Department of Education . In 1903 , all of the Rix family women had works included in the Austral Salon 's exhibition .

One of Rix 's early sketchbooks survives and pages from it were reproduced in the 2012 book , In Search of Beauty . Although she described the works as her " very earliest drawings when a child in Melbourne " , the dated pages indicate they were created up until at least the age of twenty . They mostly portray women , and the settings and dress of her subjects reflect the relatively affluent and educated milieu of which the Rix family were part .

In this period , it was common for aspiring Australian artists to seek further training in Europe , particularly London and Paris . Henry Rix arranged to take his family there in conjunction with a trip he was making to study British education reforms , purchasing first @-@ class tickets to travel in 1906 . But Henry , who had been overworked and ill , died suddenly , and for a time it appeared the trip might not happen . Denied a widow 's pension (Henry had been 58 : too young for his wife to be eligible) , the family had to reorganise their affairs and work out if they could afford to get to Europe . Finally , by combining an inheritance , rental income from their home , and money raised through the sale of works by both mother and daughter , they were able to trade the first class tickets for second class berths , and they set sail for England early in 1907 .

= = Europe 1907 ? 12 = =

Just before her departure from Australia , Rix was advised by the painter Arthur Streeton to study with many different masters , as a means of preserving her own originality . Her subsequent career reflected that advice . One of her first teachers was John Hassall , although he had initially protested that she was already a better drawer than himself . Rix thought him " simply great " , and Pigot credits Hassall 's simple and direct style with influencing the artist 's later practice .

Late in 1907 , Rix moved to Paris . There she met with Australian artist Emanuel Phillips Fox , went on sketching expeditions to the Jardin du Luxembourg where Ethel Carrick Fox also worked , and became a student at the Académie Delecluse , operated by academic painter Auguste Delecluse . The following year she was taught by American impressionist Richard Emil Miller . From him she acquired the use of a relatively bright colour palette , not always naturalistic , as well as his dextrous technique ; she did not , however , follow his predilection for pretty compositions , favouring more direct and clear images . Continuing to acquire skills from a wide range of artists , she next studied at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière , including with Swiss @-@ born illustrator Théophile Steinlen . In the summers , Rix , together with her sister and mother , would travel . In 1908 they journeyed through France and Italy , while in subsequent summers they spent time at the artists '

colony at the fishing village of Étapes , in northern coastal France . Among the artists painting there was Frenchman Jules Adler , who took an interest in Rix 's work , as well as many Australians , including Rupert Bunny , James Peter Quinn , Edward Officer and one of the colony 's longest @-@ term residents , Iso Rae .

Around 1909 , Hilda Rix met Wim Brat , an architecture student from a wealthy Dutch family . He asked Rix 's mother for approval to marry her daughter , and Mrs Rix agreed . A happy engagement turned sour , however , when Rix spent time at her fiancé 's home , where she found her prospective husband dominated by his mother , who strongly disapproved of the match . Rix reluctantly broke off the engagement .

Rix continued to work hard , and was rewarded with success in having her work hung in the Paris Salon in 1911 , alongside fellow Australians Arthur Streeton and George Bell .

= = Moroccan paintings 1912 ? 14 = =

Rix twice visited north Africa . She first joined American painter Henry Ossawa Tanner , his wife and a Miss Simpson on a trip to Morocco in January 1912 . They travelled via Spain , where Rix viewed the work of Velázquez , whose compositions and palette she greatly admired . The party 's destination was Tangier , a place where many other artists had sought inspiration . Jean @-@ Joseph Benjamin @-@ Constant lived and painted there in the 1870s , while Renoir and John Singer Sargent visited in the 1880s . Henri Matisse and Rix were in Tangier at the same time , during which both visited Tétouan , about 60 kilometres (37 mi) east of Tangier ; they also used the same model in their works .

For about three months , Rix sketched and painted in Tangier , spending time in the open @-@ air market place or soko . Her enthusiasm for the place was evident from her correspondence :

Picture me in this market @-@ place ? I spend nearly every day there for it fascinates me completely ? have done 16 drawings and two oil things so far ? Am feeling thoroughly at home now so am going to take out my big oil box ? wanted to get used to people and things first ? Oh how I do love it all ! ... Oh the sun is shining I must out to work .

Morocco had a similar effect on Rix as it did on many artists who visited . Paintings were created in high @-@ keyed colours that captured the intense north African light , and most works focussed on the figures , dress and activity of the people , or the local architecture . One interpretation of the perspective of Rix is that she was an orientalist , in the sense used by academic Edward Said . However , Hoorn argues that she and her sister were to a significant extent counter @-@ orientalist : they focussed on the common nature of human experience rather than cultural expressions of difference and they sought to portray everyday life in Tangier as they found it , rather than presenting generalised views of the orient . Her works also reflected the modernist interest in the empirical : in using the bright light of north Africa to help bring out the structures and shapes that made up visual impressions . Stylistically , Rix 's Moroccan paintings have been characterised as the " most abstract , flat and post @-@ impressionistic of her career " . Whether this reflected the influence of Matisse is not known ? despite the coincidences of their Tangier visits , it is not certain that they actually met . Rix was one of the first Australians to paint post @-@ impressionist landscapes , represented by works such as *Men in the Market Place , Tangier* (1914) and *View of Tangier* (1914) , produced at the time of a second visit to the city . Such works demonstrated the development of Rix 's style at the time : loose brush strokes , a palette confined to a few low @-@ keyed colours , and an emphasis on shadow and light , affecting both the overall impression made by the picture and the treatment of individual figures .

The 1912 trip represented a landmark in her work , led to several exhibitions and her first significant international critical acclaim . The journeys are also the subject of one of the few books about the artist 's work , Jeanette Hoorn 's *Hilda Rix Nicholas and Elsie Rix 's Moroccan Idyll : Art and Orientalism* . Exhibition of her first works produced immediate results : the French government purchased one of her pictures of the market in Tangiers , and in 1913 she again had paintings displayed at the Paris Salon . The purchase by the French government was of a pastel drawing , *Grande marche , Tanger* , which she would later copy in oils . The drawing was favourably

discussed in the French edition of the New York Herald , but not by one The Sydney Morning Herald reviewer , who complained that " the drawing and colour are eccentric , after the post @-@ impressionist manner " and described the central figure as " grotesque in its want of finish " .

The Herald 's reviewer was at odds with prevailing sentiment . Her success was widely reported in Australian papers such as Hobart 's Mercury , Melbourne 's Argus and Adelaide 's Register . In addition to displaying the results of her trip at the Salon , she was invited to exhibit in a 1913 collection at the Société des Peintres Orientalistes Français , also in Paris . Rix was made a member of the society . In November 1912 , there was a solo exhibition at a private gallery , Galerie J Chaine and Simonson . Her work was illustrated in the Notre Gazette , reflecting her emerging status as a significant artist , and the French press reported her exhibitions .

She returned to Tangiers again in early 1914 , this time with her sister Elsie , who also did some drawing and writing but whose main purpose was to provide her sister with company , assistance and protection from curious onlookers while she painted . Rix painted regularly at the soko , where she would both attract much attention and sometimes disrupt the flow of traffic as she sketched . The sisters returned to England and then to France , where Rix again spent the summer at Étaples , until the outbreak of World War I resulted in evacuation to London in August .

= = Disaster 1914 ? 18 = =

The retreat to London marked the beginning of a tragic period . Rix 's mother Elizabeth had been unwell , and deteriorated during the crossing from France to England . Elizabeth was transferred to hospital when they landed ; though she partially recovered and was moved to a nursing home , at that same time her other daughter , Elsie , fell ill .

Rix shuttled back and forth between her two ailing family members until , on 2 September 1914 , Elsie died . For three months Rix withheld the news from her mother , fearing it would harm her already fragile condition . Elizabeth survived the news , but as the war continued , Rix 's artistic output dwindled almost to nothing . Then in March 1916 , Elizabeth died . Rix was just over thirty years old , and all her immediate relatives were now dead . Recalling the experience , she later wrote : " I could scarcely put one foot in front of the other and walked like an old thing " .

Further misfortune lay in store . In France , an Australian officer , Captain George Matson Nicholas , was posted to Étaples . There he heard about the Australian woman artist who had had to leave her paintings behind when she and her family left abruptly for England . Nicholas sought out the works and admired them , and decided to contact the artist when next he was on leave . He met Rix in September 1916 , and they were married on 7 October at St Saviour 's , Warwick Avenue in London . After three days together , he returned to duty ; she was widowed five weeks later on 14 November , when he was shot and killed during battle at Flers , on the Western Front . Initially writing in her diary that she had lost the will to live , Rix Nicholas 's grief eventually found its expression in three paintings , titled And Those Who Would Have Been Their Sons , They Gave Their Immortality (a phrase from a poem by Rupert Brooke) , Desolation and Pro Humanitate . The second of these paintings (which was destroyed in 1930) , portrayed a gaunt and tearful woman shrouded in a black cloak , crouched staring at the viewer amidst a battlescarred landscape , featureless but for the crosses on distant graves . The National Gallery of Australia holds a charcoal drawing made as a study for the work . The first was " a portrait of a woman cradling a ghostly child " , while the third represented the tragedy of her short marriage to Nicholas . In visualising the ruin of war , her works were more personal than those of other artists of the last years of World War I , such as Paul Nash and Eric Kennington , and her representation of widowhood was both unusual for its time , and confronting for the viewer .

= = Return to Australia , 1918 ? 1923 = =

In March 1918 , Rix Nicholas , along with her brother @-@ in @-@ law Athol Nicholas , left England and arrived in Melbourne on 10 May . There , with the encouragement of artist Henrietta Gulliver and the members of the city 's Women 's Art Club , Rix Nicholas began to reconstruct her

career as a professional artist . It did not take long . In November , she was amongst the members of the Club whose works were displayed at the Atheneum Hall , where a critic described her as the " dominating personality of the show " . At the same time , in Melbourne 's Guild Hall she held a large exhibition of her European and north African paintings , sketches and drawings , with over a hundred works on display . Several were sold , including *In Picardy* , purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria . Noting the artist 's success in Paris and London , the reviewer for *The Argus* admired her " appreciation of character and talents for observation and representation " , while *The Age* was struck by " the influence of modern French Impressionism in [her paintings '] fearless handling of sunlight and open air effects . " When the exhibition travelled to Sydney in 1919 , reviews were likewise positive both from newspapers and from her peers such as Julian Ashton , Antonio Dattilo Rubbo and Grace Cossington Smith .

Rix Nicholas continued to experience success in her exhibitions and with regular favourable reviews in the press , such as for her show in the Queen Victoria Markets in September 1920 . Nevertheless , Pigot has argued that her place in the Australian art world at the time was complex , and her style was affected by vigorous debate around the emergence of modernism , which was being resisted by local critics . Her experience of this more conservative Australia , and the effects of the deaths of all those close to her , contributed to Rix Nicholas abandoning her more experimental art , and returning to more academic and figurative subjects . This ultimately had a detrimental effect on the long @-@ term trajectory of her career . Pigot also argues that her refusal to conform to the gendered expectations of the Australian artistic establishment led to her rejection .

In 1922 , a competition was launched by the trustees of the Melbourne Public Library for a mural to commemorate the Great War . Rix Nicholas learned of the competition and quickly prepared and submitted an entry . Three judges , all respected Melbourne academic artists , submitted a report to the trustees , who met to consider the entries received . The trustees voted six to five to grant the commission to Harold Septimus Power , despite the fact that he had not fulfilled the conditions of entry ; they then withheld the judges ' report from publication , decided not to exhibit any of the competition entries , and delayed awarding any prize . One newspaper reported that Rix Nicholas 's entry had been one of the top three . Rix Nicholas was furious , as were some former soldiers who wrote letters to newspapers about the incident . Pigot suggests that gender was a factor : " While Rix Nicholas 's claim to be a war artist was legitimate , the fact that she was a woman meant that she was denied an equal place within the discourse " . Later that same year , the Australian War Memorial decided to purchase a work by Rix Nicholas portraying a French woman (titled *A Mother of France* (1914)) , but not to acquire the other work offered , showing an Australian soldier (*A Man* (1921)) ; according to Pigot , this reflected the gendered approach taken by institutions , which considered that subjects suitable for portrayal by artists were dependent upon their sex .

Her paintings of war subjects were just one aspect of Rix Nicholas 's developing commitment to nationalist ideals and the heroic representation of Australia . At the time of her 1919 exhibition , Rix Nicholas had commented that she wished " to show the people [of Europe] what is possessed in a land of beauty where the colour scheme is so different , and which sent so many gallant men to the struggle for liberty " . In this respect she was following in the tradition of the Heidelberg School and writers such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson , who extolled the virtues of the bush and pioneer life . Accompanied by her friend Dorothy Richmond , Rix Nicholas set out to paint in rural New South Wales , beginning in Delegate , a small town on the border of New South Wales and Victoria . Here she created numerous works , including *In Australia* , *His Land* , and *The Shearers* . Other works from this period include *The Three Sisters* , *Blue Mountains* (1921 ? 22) , which is in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia . While Australian patriotic imagery and discourse of the period was very male @-@ dominated , Rix Nicholas 's portraits were frequently of women , such as in *The Monaro Pioneer* , *The Magpie 's Song* and *Motherhood* .

Back in Sydney , Rix Nicholas held another solo exhibition in August 1923 . Once again it was favourably reviewed , and there was again the description of her work in masculine terms : the reviewer at Sydney 's *Sunday Times* described her as " the most virile , and , in many respects , the strongest woman painter Australia has yet produced " . Rix Nicholas disliked being thought of as a " woman " artist , but she took such reviews as complimentary , given how dismissive were critics in

general when considering paintings by women .

= = Second trip to Europe , 1924 ? 26 = =

In 1924 , Rix Nicholas , again travelling with Dorothy Richmond , set sail for France , intending to exhibit her works in Europe . She voyaged on the Ormonde , which was also carrying the Australian Olympic team . She befriended several of the team members and painted a portrait of one for an Olympic artists ' competition .

Arriving in Paris in June , eventually Rix Nicholas rented a studio in Montparnasse , which had previously belonged to French artist Rosa Bonheur . An exhibition at the " prestigious " Georges Petit Galerie in Paris in January 1925 was a great success . It led to important sales , including to the Musée du Luxembourg , making her the only Australian woman to have more than one work in its collection and , according to one report , one of only three Australian artists represented at all at that time , the others being Rupert Bunny and Arthur Streeton . The exhibition led also to a tour of her works to London and British regional galleries , the first time any Australian artist had achieved such prominence ; between 1926 and 1928 , her works were shown in Hull , Sunderland , Tyne and Wear , Bootle , Blackpool , Northampton , Warrington , Folkestone , Leicester , Derby , Gateshead and Leek in Staffordshire .

The work purchased by the Luxembourg in 1925 was *In Australia* , a portrait of Ned Wright , manager of the property at Delegate where she had stayed in the early 1920s . He is portrayed on horseback , a pipe clasped in his exposed and bright teeth , with a panoramic backdrop of an Australian pastoral landscape . His stance is casual , self @-@ assured and heroic , consistent with the up @-@ beat nationalism of Australia at the time .

In 1925 there were further exhibitions , including at the International Society of Sculptors , Painters and Gravers , and the Royal Academy of Art , both in London . Also in London , a solo exhibition was held at the Beaux Arts Gallery in December , which displayed her painting *His Land* . The work was described by one reviewer as having " the rare quality of conveying the spirit of life in the Commonwealth as well as portraying that life pictorially ... the whole picture seems to convey the sunny heat @-@ laden atmosphere of Australia " . Like *In Australia* , this work also suggested the elemental strength and vitality that Rix Nicholas advocated should pervade Australian painting .

In the same year , Rix Nicholas created one of her most extraordinary works , which would also be her largest canvas . Standing almost 2 metres (6 @. @ 6 ft) high , and 128 centimetres (4 @. @ 20 ft) wide , *Les fleurs dédaignées* (' The despised flowers ') is an " unnerving " and " arresting " portrait of a young woman in fashionable eighteenth @-@ century clothing . Painted not with the artist 's typical technique , but in a mannerist style , the subject faces the viewer yet is glancing away , her pose tense , expression unreadable , with a bunch of discarded flowers on the ground next to the hem of her enormous formal dress . Although portraying a young lady , the person chosen to sit was " a Parisian professional model and a prostitute , apparently with a reputation for being moody and cantankerous " . The pastiche created in this work is striking : a sixteenth @-@ century artistic style , a composition comprising a seventeenth @-@ century tapestry and an eighteenth @-@ century dress , created by a twentieth @-@ century artist . It certainly reflected the scope of Rix Nicholas 's abilities and ambitions , and was painted with the specific intention of having it hung at the Paris Salon . When the work was displayed in Sydney in 1927 , it grabbed The Sydney Morning Herald critic 's attention :

For combination of grace , dramatic strength , and clearness in technique this picture would be difficult to surpass . There is nothing finicky about it ; it tells its story with vivid directness . As a background to the figure Mrs. Rix Nicholas has set a piece of antique tapestry , so that the trees on either side lean in arch @-@ wise over the head , the face and shoulders stand out clearly against an expanse of sky , and behind the body and limbs extends a countryside full of towers and rivers and trees . The quaint conventionality of this background accords exactly with the late eighteenth @-@ century costume , all sprigged with roses and heliotrope ; and the whole mass of detail harmonies [sic] perfectly with the type of the model 's face . It is a cold , selfish face . The artist has brought out with revealing strokes an expression of vindictive malice which is for the moment resting

there ; and the hands , the fingers of one grasped tightly by the other , give a clear indication of nervous tension within . The treatment of flesh tones and the general arrangement , drawing attention gently but not too obtrusively to the columbines scattered on the polished floor ? those are excellent .

While she exhibited many of the Australian works completed before arriving in France , she was also creating many new works , including illustrations and portraits of traditional life and costume , produced during a summer in Brittany . In 1926 , Rix Nicholas was again included in London 's Royal Academy of Art exhibition , where one of her Brittany paintings , *Le Bigouden* , was hung . She also appeared at the Société Nationale des Beaux - Arts Spring exhibition in Paris , in which she had eight works , a very large number for a single artist . The Société not only hung many of her paintings and drawings : she was also elected an Associate to the organisation in that year .

At the end of 1926 , Rix Nicholas and Dorothy Richmond together returned to Australia . Energised by her success , Rix Nicholas purchased a car , filled its rear compartment with painting equipment , and the pair set out to paint the landscape , ranging from Canberra and the Monaro plains to the south , up into central Queensland . This included a publicity - attracting occasion where she painted figures on the beach at Bondi , reported by various publications including *Australian* magazine , *The Home* .

= = Wright and Knockalong , 1928 ? 61 = =

Rix Nicholas had met the farming family , the Wrights , in the early 1920s , including Ned , the subject of *In Australia* . After returning to the district , she married Edgar Wright on 2 June 1928 in Melbourne , and the couple settled on a property called Knockalong , near Delegate . She continued to exhibit under the name Rix Nicholas , though she was also known as Rix Wright . Her friend Dorothy Richmond , with whom she had visited the region at the start of the decade , married Edgar Wright 's cousin , Walter , and settled in the same region . Then , in 1930 , Rix Nicholas and her husband had their only child , a son , whom they named Rix .

While Australian artists embraced modernism and addressed the city , Rix Nicholas focussed on representing a pastoral ideal . In France in the 1920s , Rix Nicholas had entertained Roy de Maistre , one of the first Australians to experiment with abstractionism , and enthusiastically asked him to share more about his ' colour - music theory ' ; however when modernism confronted Australian art in the 1920s and 1930s , Rix Nicholas sided against it . There was in any case , as art historian Jeanette Hoorn wryly observed , " no market for post - impressionist painting in outback New South Wales in the 1920s " . Rix Nicholas sought to build on her existing success and often focussed on portraits , while her approach to her subject matter became " more and more didactic " . Women were frequently portrayed , both as rural workers (as in *The Fair Musterer*) and in domestic or family scenes (as in *On The Hilltop*) . Several images , such as *On the Hilltop* and *Spring Afternoon* , Knockalong portray women caring for a young son in a rural setting . Her most " stereotypically feminine " work was *The Summer House* , which shows two of Rix Nicholas 's friends with some freshly cut flowers , in a setting that , unlike most of her works of the period , screened out the surrounding landscape . It was a picture about which Rix Nicholas was never convinced and which she never publicly displayed . Yet it has become one of her best known works , its easy acceptance consistent with the way reviewers in the 1930s pigeon - holed her work in terms of conventional gender roles .

Rix Nicholas had a number of exhibitions with some further critical success . Nevertheless , she became out of step with both the public , who bought few works at her last solo exhibition in 1947 , and with some critics , who either rejected her work or criticised its lack of novelty . One critic , Adrian Lawler , observed :

Mrs Rix Nicholas is very gifted and she has her own individuality as an artist ; but her personal outlook is not so much that of an artist with startling things to say ... as of a healthy fellow - Australian who loves the familiar beauty of our landscape and delights in representing it in all its splendour and virility .

Another , considering a 1936 exhibition at the David Jones Gallery in Sydney , found the quality of

her work uneven , and while he considered some to be strong , others were criticised as " nothing more than pretty and sentimental " . Rix Nicholas 's works remained didactic and insistent in their idealism about rural Australia , but following World War II , the country ? and its art critics ? had moved on . In 1945 , The Sydney Morning Herald critic , lambasting Rix Nicholas 's works as " crude in colour and poster @-@ ish in presentation " , concluded : " There is insufficient spiritual material to fill the canvases of Hilda Rix Nicholas ... The bravura , the boldness of these pictures is hardly in keeping with the actual knowledge displayed . A certain humility , a close attention to the organisation of detail , and less white mixed into the colours would help tremendously . "

The antipathy between Rix Nicholas and prevailing trends in Australian art was mutual . She was appalled by the works of Russell Drysdale and William Dobell , describing the figures in their paintings as " more like victims of the German prison camps " than representations of Australian people . It seemed that the critics did not share her opinion : Dobell and Drysdale had each just won the Wynne Prize in successive years , and both would soon represent their country at the Venice Biennale .

A final trip to Europe took place in 1950 . She set out to show her husband the sights of a Europe she knew well , and to find a teacher of sculpture for their son Rix . She was distressed by the standards of artistic practice she found , and instead discouraged Rix from any career in the arts at all .

Following her last solo exhibition , a letter from Rix Nicholas to her son expressed despair in her artistic career and summarised the professional fate of her final years :

Not doing anything creative is nearly killing me . The trouble is that there is no one near me who cares whether I ever do any more work or not ... I feel the artist in me is dying and the dying is an agony ... only one 's self knows the craving and the best part in one is aching unsatisfied .

By this time , her health was deteriorating , and her passion for art fading . Rix Nicholas did exhibit alongside her son in a group exhibition in Sydney , in 1954 ; she presented two oil paintings , while her son had the largest sculpture in the show , titled The Shearer . She died in Delegate on 3 August 1961 .

= = Legacy = =

Gender was a recurring theme in Rix Nicholas 's career , for better and for worse . Praise from a French art critic for her abilities was expressed by saying " [mademoiselle] Rix paints like a man ! " . An Australian critic was unsure what to say , admiring her composition but declaring her technique " strangely unfeminine " . Pigot considered that , when Rix Nicholas sought to stake out a woman 's place in nationalist art in mid @-@ twentieth century Australia , her career was ultimately penalised by her unwillingness to play by the male establishment 's rules . Art historian Catherine Speck had a different perspective on Rix Nicholas 's post @-@ World War I work , suggesting that it never subsequently attained the quality of her Paris output , because her first husband 's death in the Great War drove her to create nationalist images of inconsistent quality . In their reference work A Story of Australian Painting , Mary Eagle and John Jones considered Rix Nicholas , alongside Clarice Beckett , to be " the best woman artist to emerge from the artistic milieu of Melbourne in the decade of the First World War " .

Many of Rix Nicholas 's works went into private collections for which records are limited . Many more were burned in a fire at the family property after her death in the 1960s . Though her fortunes declined in the latter part of her career , the twenty @-@ first century saw a renewed appreciation of her output . Her oeuvre is represented in most major Australia public galleries , including the Art Gallery of South Australia , the National Gallery of Australia , and the Queensland Art Gallery , as well as in other collections including that of the Australian War Memorial . Internationally , Rix Nicholas is represented in the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume and Leicester Gallery , as well as by her works in the Luxembourg .

There have been several posthumous solo exhibitions of Rix Nicholas 's works : in 1971 at the Joseph Brown Gallery in Melbourne (established by artist Joseph Brown , donor of the Joseph Brown Collection) , followed by a travelling exhibition in 1978 , displayed at the Art Gallery of New

South Wales , the Art Gallery of Ballarat and Macquarie Galleries . In the 1990s there were exhibitions at Ian Potter Museum of Art in Melbourne and the Caspian Gallery in Sydney . In 2013 an exhibition of her work was held at Canberra 's National Portrait Gallery . The National Gallery of Australia in 2014 chose The Three Sisters , Blue Mountains as the painting it would seek to acquire through its Members Acquisition Fund appeal .