

= Jean Bellette =

Jean Bellette (occasionally Jean Haefliger ; 25 March 1908 ? 16 March 1991) was an Australian artist . Born in Tasmania , she was educated in Hobart and Julian Ashton 's art school in Sydney , where her teachers included Thea Proctor . In London she studied under painters Bernard Meninsky and Mark Gertler .

A modernist painter , Bellette was influential in mid @-@ twentieth century Sydney art circles . She frequently painted scenes influenced by the Greek tragedies of Euripedes , Sophocles and Homer . She twice won the Sulman Prize , in 1942 with For Whom the Bell Tolls , and 1944 with Iphigenia in Tauris . She helped found the Blake Prize for religious art , and was its inaugural judge . Bellette married artist and critic Paul Haefliger in 1935 . The couple moved to Majorca in 1957 ; although she visited and exhibited in Australia thereafter , she did not return to live , and became peripheral to the Australian art scene .

= = Early life and training = =

Bellette was born in Hobart on 25 March 1908 and grew up an only child in rural Tasmania with her artist mother and postmaster father . Initially a student at the local Anglican school in Deloraine , at the age of 13 she became a boarder at a Friends School back in Hobart , and then at Hobart 's technical college . She was subsequently a student at Julian Ashton 's art school in Sydney . Her teachers included Thea Proctor , while fellow students included artist John Passmore . Her drawings and watercolours displayed in the 1934 student art exhibition attracted favourable comment from The Sydney Morning Herald art critic . At Ashton 's art school , Bellette met fellow Australian artist Paul Haefliger and in 1935 , they married . The following year they travelled to Europe , and Bellette (like Passmore) studied at the Westminster School of Art , where she was taught by figurative painters Bernard Meninsky and Mark Gertler . In 1938 , Bellette and her husband studied life drawing at Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris .

= = Career = =

= = = Australia = = =

Bellette and Haefliger returned to Australia just before the outbreak of World War II . Shortly after her arrival , Bellette held an exhibition at Sydney 's Macquarie Galleries . The couple became influential members of the Sydney Art Group , a network of " fashionable " moderns whose membership included William Dobell and Russell Drysdale . Bellette painted and held regular shows ? " a solo show every second year and a group show every year at the Macquarie Galleries " ? while her husband served as art critic for The Sydney Morning Herald for a decade and a half .

In 1942 , Bellette 's won the Sir John Sulman Prize with For Whom the Bell Tolls . She won it again in 1944 , with her painting Iphigenia in Tauris . The composition is set in a dry , open landscape , with several riders on horses whose appearance suggests " the Australian present , rather than Greek antiquity " . The judge awarding the prize actually preferred another of her entries , Electra ? but it failed to meet the size requirements . Both Iphigenia in Tauris and Electra were among the many works created by Bellette in the 1940s that were inspired by the tragedies of Euripedes , Sophocles and Homer . Her choice of subject matter and approach placed her at odds with mainstream modernism , while she seemed to shun explicit links between the classical and the Australian . Bellette reasoned that she preferred to choose her palette and the spatial arrangements of her compositions to evoke a place 's atmosphere . Critics identified the influence of European modernists Aristide Maillol and Giorgio de Chirico , as well as Italian Quattrocento painters Masaccio and Piero della Francesca , some of whom Bellette wrote articles about in the journal Art in Australia .

The most distinctive feature of the artist 's work was this choice of classical subjects . In 1946 ,

Bellette 's works were hung in at least four separate exhibitions . Reviewers commented on her synthesis of " the impulsiveness of romanticism and the deliberateness of classicism " , and her " romantically classical " approach . Despite the generally positive views , there were some reservations , particularly that the artist might be at risk of settling upon , and then repeating , a formula in her work . Bellette 's treatment of classical subjects extended beyond conventional painting ; in 1947 she created a textile design , titled " myths and legends " , while in 1948 she created the sets for a production of Shakespeare 's Pericles , Prince of Tyre . Her " vigorous imaginativeness " was well reviewed , though the acting was not .

Though she did not again win the Sulman , she was successful in having works hung in that competition on many occasions , including the 1946 , 1947 , 1948 and 1950 shows . Bellette continued to paint classical scenes , and around 1950 produced the work Chorus without Iphigenia . Purchased by the National Gallery of Australia in 1976 , this oil painting shows five figures , " posed like statues in a tableau vivant , [and who] possess a kind of erotic energy " . Anne Gray , the National Gallery 's curator , interpreted the scene chosen by Bellette :

Although nothing is happening in this image , we associate the figures with tragedy , with death and mourning ? with the classical reference in the painting 's title . Iphigenia , Agamemnon 's daughter , gave her life for her country when the goddess Artemis asked for it in exchange for favourable winds so that the Greek ships could sail to Troy . Bellette 's melancholic painting might be supposed to portray Iphigenia 's friends mourning her death .

In 1951 , Bellette came second in the Commonwealth Jubilee Art Competition , behind the young Jeffrey Smart . The following year , she won a competitive exhibition sponsored by Metro Goldwyn Mayer , with Girl With Still Life .

Although Haefliger never critiqued his wife 's exhibitions , others occasionally stepped in to provide reviews in the Herald . Describing her 1950 exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries , one critic considered it " one of the most stimulating and refreshing that has been seen here for a long time " and that " She paints with a strong , sombre palette and her forms are sculptured with great decision . She uses paint sensuously and passionately , as paint , not as so many contemporary Australians do , as mere colour " .

Two years later , the same reviewer , attending another of the artist 's solo Sydney shows , observed that Bellette :

is one of the few Australian artists here who combines a firm technique with a sensitive and rich emotion . In some of the lighter landscapes in this exhibition , Miss Bellette seems to have been trying to solve some of the particular difficulties of painting Australian landscapes . The clear , strong light tends to flatten the form and bleach the colour ; a problem that doesn 't lend itself to the dramatic tensions and dark moods that are characteristic of her work . It requires a colder and more dispassionate approach . But when she finds landscapes to her taste , such as the rugged hills and beetling clouds in No. 8 , the earth decaying with erosion in No. 19 , or the prickly desolation of " Rough Country " , No. 14 , she handles them with great skill and effectiveness . Her figure drawings are decisively drawn and firmly modelled . The girls have a pensive dignity as though they are pondering the burdens and joylessness of a future to be spent as caryatids . The still lives and the interior are admirable exercises in formal organisation , the colours being sombre yet rich .

Around this time , Bellette also held a show in Melbourne , which included some black @-@ and @-@ white landscape studies as well as some of her classical Greek subjects . Arnold Shore , art critic for The Argus , drew a contrast between the two groups of works . He thought that one of the landscapes " sets the heart singing with its lovely tone , pattern and sense of place " . Continuing , he noted that the landscapes and some other works " attain at their best a standard only vaguely suggested when the painter concerned herself too much with striving after a new treatment of ancient Grecian ideals . "

Paintings by Bellette were among those of twelve Australian artists included in the 1953 Arts Council of Great Britain exhibition in London , five regional British cities , and at the Venice Biennale . Bellette was one of only two women represented , the other being Constance Stokes . As with her Sulman prize @-@ winners , Bellette 's subjects were classically themed works : Electra (1944) and Oedipus (1945) . Arts Council chairman Kenneth Clark was disappointed with the response of

British critics to the exhibition , and their focus on a theme of nationhood paid little regard to the works of Bellette and several others .

As well as spending time in Sydney 's art community , in 1954 Haeffliger and Bellette purchased a cottage in Hill End , an old gold mining village in central New South Wales . They added a studio , and the site became both a weekender and a venue for social visits and artistic endeavours by colleagues from the Sydney circle , including Drysdale , Margaret Olley , John Olsen , David Edgar Strachan and Donald Friend . This gathering of artists , sometimes referred to as the Hill End Group , is known for its landscape art . Bellette , though sometimes a painter of landscapes , was known for her classical subjects and still lifes , which critics struggled to accommodate within their understanding of the Hill End Group . Nevertheless , several still lifes from this period are held in public collections , including Still Life with Fish (1954) , in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery , and Still life with wooden bowl (c . 1954) , in the Art Gallery of New South Wales . These images were often rendered with strong colour , which was also sometimes a feature of earlier works on which critics would remark .

Both Bellette and Haeffliger had for many years been informal organisers of Sydney 's artistic community . In 1955 , Bellette played a more public role , when she helped found the Blake Prize for religious art , and was its inaugural judge .

= = = Majorca = = =

In 1957 , Haeffliger 's extramarital affair , which had lasted for over a decade , came to an end . Bellette and Haeffliger left Australia intending to divorce quietly , but were reconciled . After a year in Paris they settled in Majorca , living first in Deià , before buying a house in the hamlet of C 'an Baxu . Bellette painted landscapes and still lifes that reflected a Spanish influence , and showed periodically in Australia through the 1960s . However , the year she moved to Majorca turned out to be the last year in which she exhibited work outside Australia . The couple visited in 1970 and 1975 , and Bellette returned once more in 1983 . Bellette had , however , become an " onlooker " to the local art scene . This was in part because of a transition in Australian art that included the rise of abstract expressionism , the strong influence of a small number of gallery owners , and discrimination against women that reached " record levels " . Bellette was nevertheless able to secure some exhibitions , in Sydney and in Melbourne . These infrequent exhibitions were received very positively by critics . When her work was hung at the South Yarra Gallery in 1964 , noted art historian and critic Bernard Smith stated in his review for The Age that he " could not recall an exhibition in Melbourne of this quality since I began to write this column . " Reviewing her 1966 show in Sydney , the Herald critic considered it was her " ability to combine the calm beauty of form of her beloved classicism of content with a dark romantic spirit that has gained her such an honourable place in Australian painting ... the antiquity of nature and man 's constructions are explored with a subtle , powerful inquiry . " In 1971 , Melbourne critic Alan McCulloch considered her classical compositions to be her most successful . Drawing parallels between classical tragedy and contemporary global refugee crises , he noted " there is infinite tenderness in these paintings and infinite sadness . For although these rocky , shadowed landscapes are peopled with the ghosts and shades of an ancient civilisation , they are also curiously symbolic of present day tensions and tragedies . "

Bellette and Haeffliger lived and worked for the rest of their lives in Majorca , with periodic trips to Italy . Friends such as artists Jeffrey Smart and John Olsen visited them regularly in Europe . An injury to her wrist meant that paintings prepared in 1976 for a solo exhibition were her last . Paul died in March 1982 ; Bellette survived breast cancer and a mastectomy in 1986 and died on 16 March 1991 .

= = Legacy = =

Prior to her death , Bellette bequeathed the Hill End cottage to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (which manages the Hill End historic site) , on condition that it be used as an artists '

retreat . It continues to operate for that purpose . As of 2014 , Bellette is the only woman to have won the Sulman Prize on more than one occasion . A large number of her works are held by the Art Gallery of New South Wales ; other galleries that hold examples include the Art Gallery of South Australia , Art Gallery of Western Australia , Bendigo Art Gallery , Geelong Art Gallery , the National Gallery of Australia , and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery . In 2004 ? 05 , a major retrospective exhibition was held at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery , the S. H. Ervin Gallery in Sydney , the University of Queensland Art Museum , Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery and the Drill Hall Gallery in Canberra .

Described by Amanda Beresford as Australia 's " only true modern classicist " , Bellette is generally regarded as an influential figure in the modern art movement in Sydney in the mid @-@ twentieth century . Art historian Janine Burke described Bellette as " a leader of the post @-@ war art world " , while the University of Queensland Art Museum 's curator placed her as " a seminal figure in the visual arts from the 1930s until her death in Majorca in 1991 " . Of her paintings , opinions vary . Burke described her as " arguably the best painter " of the Sydney circle . Historian Geoffrey Dutton was unconvinced about her choice of subject but nevertheless praised Bellette 's " assured if muted " style , while simultaneously dismissing the lesser efforts of her husband . However , art historian and writer Sasha Grishin had a different view . Commenting on Bellette 's paintings of Greek mythological subjects created in the 1940s , he wrote , " they were neither very convincing as paintings , nor works that had a particular resonance in Sydney or Australian art at the time " . John Passmore and Bellette studied together both in Australia and England , travelled in Europe , and exhibited side by side in group shows . However , he was highly critical of Bellette 's work , while Yvonne Audette , who went to a few of the artist 's drawing classes , described her classical works as " dull poses , and very badly drawn , and even more badly painted , like clumsy colouring @-@ in " .