

Joseph Brown

Chris McAuliffe

The late Dr Joseph Brown AO, OBE (1918–2009) migrated to Australia from his native Poland in 1933. After training and practising as a sculptor and painter,¹ serving in World War II and working in the fashion industry, he became one of Australia's leading art dealers, collectors and consultants, whose research and connoisseurship led to the rediscovery of many under-appreciated or forgotten Australian artists and the mentoring of many others. He was a remarkably generous donor to many museums and galleries, culminating in 2004 with the gift of the major part of his collection of Australian art to the National Gallery of Victoria.

The University of Melbourne awarded Dr Brown an honorary Doctor of Laws in 1986. Dr Chris McAuliffe reflects here on the nature of Dr Brown's substantial contribution to the University of Melbourne Art Collection.

Over a period of 39 years, Dr Joseph Brown gave 75 works of art to the University of Melbourne Art Collection, making him one of the most significant donors to the collection. The story of Dr Brown's generosity is shaped by his personality; it is challenging, committed and occasionally a little eccentric. Looking back over those 39 years, it becomes clear that Dr Brown was determined to support the presence of art and an art museum at the University of



Melbourne, and that he had his own particular vision of what form both should take.

Something of this is evident in his first gift to the University, a modest 19th century depiction of the original Gothic revival buildings at the centre of the campus, by H.N.E Cook. The gift was made in 1969, in gratitude for the University's loan of works by Norman Lindsay for display at Brown's new gallery. Aside from reflecting Dr Brown's old-world manners, the donation also demonstrates his understanding that the University's art collection ought to reflect the history and values of the institution itself.

At this time, the University was beginning to make greater efforts to display its art collection. Discussion of an art gallery was incorporated into the design development of the John Medley Building and, in February 1972, the inaugural exhibition of the University Art Gallery was staged in the overpass lounge of the new building. Among the selections from the University Art Collection on display was Dr Brown's second gift: a major double portrait by Roy de Maistre, *Lord and Lady Ashbourne at Compiègne*, 1924. The gift was, as the University's then Vice-Principal, Ray Marginson, noted at the time, 'the act of a major patron'.² It arrived when

Opposite: John Peter Russell, *Inlet of Goulphar, Belle-Ile*, 1907, watercolour on cardboard, 31.3 x 44.4 cm (sheet). Reg. no. 1980.0012, gift of Dr Joseph Brown, 1980, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

the University was seeking to bring new energy to its collection and offered concrete evidence that major collectors, such as Dr Brown, would support such a move.

In his activities as a collector and art dealer, Dr Brown always showed a strong engagement with Australian art history, often leading the field in the rediscovery of neglected and undervalued artists of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This historical consciousness is something that I think he expected from the University Art Gallery too. His donations strike me as challenging the museum staff and academics to undertake research and to redraw the narrative of Australian art in greater detail. Early gifts of work by artists such as Horace Brodzky, Danila Vassilieff and Adrian Lawlor were made when such pioneers of Australian modernism were given little attention. The challenge was to rediscover their meaning and achievement. It is no coincidence, I think, that the later gift of a John Peter Russell watercolour, *Inlet of Goulphar, Belle-Ile*, 1907, came at the time when Dr Ann Galbally, then an academic in the Fine Arts department, had recently published her pioneering study of Australia's 'forgotten Impressionist'.³

The momentum that Dr Brown's gifts gave the University Art

Collection can be seen also in the way in which a donation galvanised attention on individual artists. Two gifts of works by Danila Vassilieff, in 1973 and 1977, prompted the later purchase by the University of three additional works by the artist.⁴ With a further donation by Dr and Mrs Eric Stock in 1997,⁵ the University's holdings of Vassilieff had grown from zero to six in 25 years. It is this combination of the 'significant moment' with a subsequent momentum of steady accumulation that is the pulse of the collection.

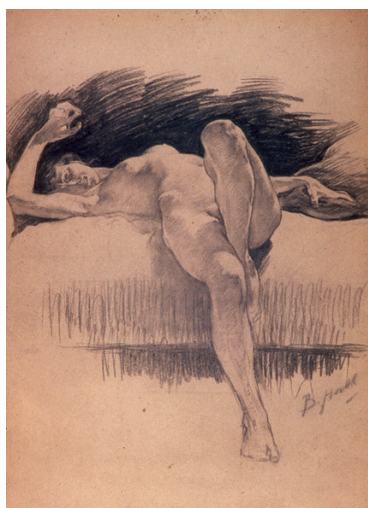
Elsewhere, Dr Brown's gifts observe that informal principle of complementarity that is so important to university collections. In 1985, his donation of a study drawing for Bernard Hall's enigmatic painting, *Despair*, brought together an initial figure study with the finished painting already held by the University in the Samuel Arthur Ewing collection.⁶ A pairing such as this is invaluable support for study and teaching.

Others of Dr Brown's gifts arrived in far more personal circumstances. The donation of Leonard French's *The trial* was described by Dr Brown as a thanksgiving gift.⁷ In January 1979, thieves had stolen 80 paintings from his famous gallery-home in Caroline Street, South Yarra. When

police recovered the works, Dr Brown donated a selection to Melbourne universities, with the suggestion that Fate was owed something in return for his good fortune.⁸

If Dr Brown's manner of donation was a little eccentric, it was always purposeful. I recall a phone call from Dr Brown in 2001. (I should note here that there is very little by way of correspondence with Dr Brown in the Potter's records. He preferred to operate on his own terms—in person, or in conversation—rather than in a bureaucratic manner.) He advised me that he had a number of works that he wished to donate to various university collections. What followed was a combination of 'pop quiz' and interview. As Dr Brown mentioned the names of artists, it was my task to both discuss their merits and to suggest how they might relate to our existing holdings. John Passmore, what did we have of his art? Would a non-objective work be relevant? You have a Ralph Balson, don't you? How would you see an abstract Passmore relating to it?

I must have passed the interview because the Potter's van was soon dispatched to Dr Brown's Prahran home to make a pick-up. And there we encountered something more of his personal touch. As two small works by Passmore and Meadmore



Bernard Hall, *Study for Despair*, c.1918, charcoal on brown paper, 91.5 x 64.3 (sheet). Reg. no. 1985.0004, gift of Dr Joseph Brown, 1985, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

were being loaded into the van, Dr Brown handed over another work, saying, 'You might as well take this one, too'. The added extra turned out to be a Margaret Preston linocut, *Hollyhocks*.⁹ Not only a fine work, but a significant addition to our small holding of her art. I wonder whether the 'bonus' gift was a reward for performing well in the telephone quiz, or whether Fate had again intervened.

Perhaps the most prominent example of Dr Brown's support of the University Art Collection was not the gift of an artwork itself. Dr Brown supported the restoration of Napier Waller's Leckie window, allowing the University to pursue its plan to reinstall the window in a prominent new building. As it eventuated, that building was, of course, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, where the Leckie window has pride of place in the atrium.

Dr Chris McAuliffe has been Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne since 2000.

Notes

- In 1999 the Ian Potter Museum of Art held an exhibition of Dr Brown's own art, see *Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE: A creative life: 65 years a private artist* (exhibition catalogue), Parkville: Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 1999.
- Ray Marginson, letter to Joseph Brown, 3 November 1971, files of Ian Potter Museum of Art.

- Ann Galbally, *The art of John Peter Russell*, South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1977.
- Danila Vassilieff, *Woronora*, 1936, oil on canvas on board, sight: 54.0 x 59.2 cm. Reg. no. 1977.0041, purchased 1977; *Nazareth Karagheusian*, (c.1940s), oil on composition board, 41.0 x 30.0 cm. Reg. no. 1982.0033, purchased 1983; *Time for lunch*, 1942, watercolour, 29.8 x 22.6 cm. Reg. no. 1982.0047, purchased 1982, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- Danila Vassilieff, *Portrait of Betty*, (c.1940), oil on composition board, 48.5 x 41.5 cm. Reg. no. 1997.0031, gift of Dr and Mrs Eric Stock, 1997, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- Bernard Hall, *Despair*, (c.1916–1918), oil on canvas, sight: 100.0 x 75.0 cm. Reg. no. 1938.0007, gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing, 1938, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 'Painting donated as thanksgiving', *Staff News* [University of Melbourne], vol. 7, no. 8, October 1979, p. 101.
- The gift of *The trial* and some other donations by Dr Brown are discussed in Robyn Sloggett's interview of Ray Marginson: 'High drama and ... comedy: Developing the cultural collections of the University of Melbourne', *University of Melbourne Collections*, issue 5, November 2009, pp. 12–21.
- Margaret Preston, *Hollyhocks*, (c.1928), colour woodblock, 30.5 x 31.5 cm (sight). Reg. no. 2001.0006, gift of Dr Joseph Brown, 2001, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

Donations by Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE to the University of Melbourne Art Collection (first part of registration number indicates year of gift).

- H.N.E. Cook (fl.1880–1899)
Melbourne University, 1883
oil on canvas on board, 41.3 x 67.7 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1969.0002
- Roy de Maistre (1894–1968)
Lord and Lady Ashbourne at Compiègne, (1924)
oil on composition board, 73.6 x 94.0 cm
reg. no. 1971.0051

Percy Leason (1889–1959)
Untitled (Old gum, Eltham Park), (1930)
oil on canvas on board, 38.0 x 45.5 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1972.0074

A.H. Fullwood (1863–1930)
Sydney Harbour, 1921
etching, 17.6 x 32.5 cm (plate), reg. no. 1973.0504

A.H. Fullwood (1863–1930)
Sand modeller. NSW, 1924
etching, 20.8 x 16.0 cm (plate), reg. no. 1973.0505

Danila Vassilieff (1897–1958)
Sunday Ebbott, (c.1938)
oil on canvas, 50.0 x 45.0 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1973.0528

Horace Brodzky (1885–1969)
Untitled (Head study (1)), 1935
pen and ink on paper, 38.3 x 28.0 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1977.0005

Horace Brodzky (1885–1969)
Untitled (Head study of John Brodzky, son of the artist, aged ten), 1934
pen and ink on paper, 30.3 x 21.8 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1977.0006

Adrian Lawlor (1880–1969)
Untitled (Landscape), (c.1940s)
oil on canvas on cardboard, 46.0 x 50.5 cm
reg. no. 1977.0015

Danila Vassilieff (1897–1958)
Nude lady, (c.1945)
oil on composition board, 82.6 x 61.2 cm
reg. no. 1977.0042

Arnold Shore (1897–1963)
Stringys and messmate near Airey's Inlet, 1957
oil on cardboard, 39.0 x 29.0 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1978.0019

Bessie Davidson (1879–1965)
Still life – apples and pears, (c.1930?)
oil and charcoal on cardboard, 21.8 x 26.6 cm
reg. no. 1978.0020



Danila Vassilieff, *Sunday Ebbott*, c.1938,
oil on canvas, 50.0 x 45.0 cm (sight).
Reg. no. 1973.0528, gift of Dr Joseph Brown,
1973, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
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Bessie Davidson (1879–1965)
Château d'Aix, (c.1920s–1930s?)
oil on wood panel, 26.7 x 35.0 cm
reg. no. 1978.0021

Tom Roberts (1856–1931)
*The opening of the first Parliament of Australia, 9th
May 1901*, 1903
Photo-engraving, 52.7 x 88.1 cm (plate)
reg. no. 1978.0022

John Brack (1920–1999)
Nude with revolving chair, 1972
pencil, 52.0 x 68.3 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1978.0070

Charles Blackman (b. 1928)
Gently, 1953
oil on muslin on composition board, 51.2 x 63.4 cm
reg. no. 1979.0001

Arnold Shore (1897–1963)
Side road at Flinders, Victoria, 1959
oil on composition board, 46.3 x 60.1 cm
reg. no. 1979.0005

James Wigley (1918–1999)
The unemployed and the workers, (c.1940s)
pencil on paper on cardboard, 39.4 x 51.8 cm
(sheet), reg. no. 1979.0030

Paul Jones (1921–1998)
Untitled (*Flower study*), 1953
pen and ink with wash, 36.0 x 42.0 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1979.0031

Leonard French (b. 1928)
The trial, (1962)
Enamel on hessian on hardboard with spackle
and plastic flowers, 228.5 x 183.5 cm
reg. no. 1979.0043

Sidney Nolan (1917–1992)
Bush verandah no. 1, (1948)
enamel on composition board, 45.7 x 61.0 cm
reg. no. 1980.0003

Sidney Nolan (1917–1992)
Bush verandah no. 2, (1948)
enamel on composition board, 45.5 x 61.0 cm
reg. no. 1980.0004

Bertram MacKenna (1863–1931)
Salome, (c.1900)
bronze, sculpture 27.0 cm
reg. no. 1980.0010

William Dobell (1899–1970)
Study for portrait (David Chambers), (1940)
oil on composition board, 45.5 x 39.8 cm
reg. no. 1980.0011

John Peter Russell (1858–1934)
Inlet of Goulphar, Belle-Ile, 1907
watercolour on cardboard, 31.3 x 44.4 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1980.0012

Margaret Thacker (active 1850s)
Untitled (*Near Sydney*), (c.1850)
sepia watercolour, 25.2 x 18.4 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1981.0001

Jane Sutherland (1855–1928)
Nellie Drake, (c.1896)
oil on canvas, 35.0 x 41.5 cm
reg. no. 1981.0003

Dawn Sime (1932–2001)
Untitled (*Semi-abstract composition with
drinking glass and foliage*), 1980
pencil, watercolour and cut paper collage
78.7 x 28.3 cm (sheet), reg. no. 1981.0004

Lina Bryans (1909–2000)
Bridge at Warrandyte, (1959)
oil on canvas on composition board, 76.5 x 63.5 cm
reg. no. 1982.0002

Russell Drysdale (1912–1981)
Untitled (*Still life with Chianti bottle*), (c.1938–
1939)
pencil, 8.8 x 13.5 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1982.0003

Tom Roberts (1856–1931)
At Phillip Island, 1886
etching, 11.6 x 17.6 cm (plate)
reg. no. 1982.0004

Unknown artist
Untitled (*Three women mourning*), (n.d.)
oil on canvas on plywood, 17.5 x 21.5 cm
reg. no. 1982.0005

Vic O'Connor (b. 1918)
The sisters – Butte Chaumant, Paris, 1980
linocut, 24.3 x 30.3 cm (comp.)
reg. no. 1982.0006

Napier Waller (1893–1972)
The procession, (c.1927)
watercolour on paper, 60.0 x 100.0 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1982.0007

Ola Cohn (1892–1964)
Herald boy, 1923
plaster cast, 49.0 x 21.0 x 20.0 cm
reg. no. 1982.0008

Unknown
Untitled (*Figure in landscape*), (1890s)
oil on wood panel, 14.6 x 12.0 cm
reg. no. 1982.0010

Derwent Lees (1885–1931)
Ethelreda (portrait of a girl), 1908–1910
pencil and wash, 47.3 x 30.0 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1982.0022

Robin Wallace-Crabbe (1938)
Family before a mirror, 1967
synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 124.0 x 114.0 cm
reg. no. 1983.0001

Eric Thake (1904–1982)
Hillend benefit (show animal) (Christmas card),
1970
screenprint with watercolour wash, 53.3 x 38.1 cm
(sheet), 25.0 x 44.2 cm (image)
reg. no. 1983.0003



Jane Sutherland, *Nellie Drake*, (c.1896)
oil on canvas, 35.0 x 41.5 cm.
Reg. no. 1981.0003, gift of Dr Joseph Brown,
1981, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

Arthur Boyd (1920–1999)
Untitled (Christ walking on the water?), (c.1950)
pen and ink with wash on buff paper on board,
38.2 x 46.2 cm
reg. no. 1983.0004

Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991)
Untitled (Red and blue grey abstract), 1957
crayon, watercolour and ink, 33.9 x 44.3 cm
(image)
reg. no. 1983.0005

Murray Griffin (1903–1992)
Bird of Paradise, (n.d.)
linocut, 35.2 x 46.4 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1983.0006

Fred Williams (1927–1982)
Waterfall, 1980
coloured lithograph, 76.0 x 57.5 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1983.0007

David Blackburn (1939)
Hillside trees (blue green abstract triptych), 1971
synthetic polymer paint and pastel on paper,
38.1 x 29.5 cm (each sheet)
reg. no. 1983.0008.000.A.000.C

George Lambert (1873–1930)
Portrait study, old woman, (c.1915)
red, brown and white chalk, 44.0 x 35.2 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1983.0009

Christian Waller (1895–1956)
The shepherd of dreams, (1932)
linocut on paper, 31.9 x 13.5 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1983.0010

Fred Williams (1927–1982)
Untitled (Four Welsh landscapes), (1952)
watercolour, 19.2 x 26.2 cm (each, sight)
reg. no. 1984.0200.000.A.000.D

Bernard Hall (1859–1935)
Study for Despair, (c.1918)
charcoal on brown paper, 91.5 x 64.3 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1985.0004

Sidney Nolan (1917–1992)
The sculptress, 1951
enamel on composition board, 76.2 x 63.5 cm
reg. no. 1986.0001

Hardy Wilson (1881–1955)
Liverpool Hospital, Liverpool, N.S.W., 1922
colour lithograph, 33.6 x 26.3 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1986.0266

Hardy Wilson (1881–1955)
Newington on Parramatta River, N.S.W., 1916
lithograph, 32.5 x 25.2 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1986.0267

Hardy Wilson (1881–1955)
Entrance to Brownlow Hill, Camden, N.S.W., 1919
lithograph, 33.8 x 26.1 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1986.0268

Derwent Lees (1885–1931)
Untitled (Landscape), (n.d.)
oil on panel, 19.1 x 26.4 cm, reg. no. 1987.0001

Audrey Bergner (b. 1927)
Untitled, 1985
watercolour and pencil, 25.3 x 24.6 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 1987.0002

Wes Walters (b. 1928)
Roger Woodward, 1980
oil on composition board, 91.5 x 61.0 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1989.0001

Harald Vike (1906–1987)
Portrait of a woman, (1942)
pencil on paper, 20.2 x 12.7 cm
reg. no. 1993.0020

John Perceval (1923–2000)
Mathew Perceval, (1974?)
pencil on paper, 35.0 x 28.0 cm
reg. no. 1993.0021

Thea Proctor (1879–1966)
Still life, (n.d.)
watercolour and pencil on paper, 55.0 x 46.0 cm
(sight), reg. no. 1993.0022

Eric Thake (1904–1982)
Pied cormorant, Werribee 1975, 1975
pencil on laid paper, 26.5 x 18.9 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1994.0006

Wes Walters (b. 1928)
Untitled (Abstract), 1963
synthetic polymer paint, P.V. glue, plaster, sand,
mixed media on canvas, 153.0 x 122.0 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1994.0025

Tim Maguire (b. 1958)
Untitled (Asparagus), (n.d.)
charcoal, white pastel (chalk?) on paper,
46.2 x 61.0 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1995.0064

Horace Brodzky (1885–1969)
Untitled (Head of a woman), 1934
pen and ink and watercolour wash, 20.5 x 20.5 cm
(sight), reg. no. 1995.0114

Arthur Boyd (1920–1999)
On the banks of the Shoalhaven, (c.1995)
oil on composition board, 23.0 x 30.0 cm
reg. no. 1996.0003

Helen Ogilvie (1902–1993)
Galvanized iron shed with gig, 1972
oil on composition board, 15.3 x 20.0 cm
reg. no. 1996.0024

John Passmore (1904–1984)
Untitled, (c.1954)
ink, watercolour and gouache on newspaper,
24.0 x 24.6 cm (sight), reg. no. 1996.0035

Wes Walters (b. 1928)
Tree, 1996
charcoal on paper, 76.0 x 54.5 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1997.0036

Jessie Traill (1881–1967)
*The jewell necklace – Bland River, Lake Corwal,
N.S.W.*, 1920
etching and aquatint on paper, 11.2 x 36.0 cm
(plate)
reg. no. 1997.0127

Lina Bryans, *Bridge at Warrandyte*, 1959, oil on
canvas on composition board,
76.5 x 63.5 cm. Reg. no. 1982.0002,
gift of Dr Joseph Brown, 1982,
University of Melbourne Art Collection.
© Estate of the artist.

Fred Williams (1927–1982)
Upwey landscape, (1965)
gouache on paper on composition board,
49.0 x 74.0 cm
reg. no. 1998.0002

Joseph Brown, (1918–2009)
Abstract landscape, 1954
oil on canvas, 74.5 x 125.0 cm (sight)
reg. no. 1999.0063

Wes Walters (b. 1928)
Preparatory drawing for portrait of Professor
Emeritus Sir Douglas Wright, 1988
pencil on paper, 40.8 x 33.9 cm (sight)
reg. no. 2000.0007

Clement Meadmore (1929–2005)
Untitled, 1992
black ink on paper, 56.0 x 38.0 cm (sheet)
reg. no. 2001.0004

John Passmore (1904–1984)
Untitled, (n.d.)
watercolour, charcoal and pencil, 42.5 x 47.0 cm
(sight)
reg. no. 2001.0005

Margaret Preston (1875–1963)
Hollybocks, (c.1928)
colour woodblock, 30.5 x 31.5 cm (sight)
reg. no. 2001.0006

John Brack (1920–1999)
Untitled, 1962
ink drawing, 51.2 x 20.3 cm (sight)
reg. no. 2003.0005

Charles Conder (attributed to), (1868–1909)
Untitled (Miss Raynor), (n.d.)
oil paint on board, 18.2 x 24.6 cm (image)
reg. no. 2008.0011

