



Art Gallery Society of New South Wales

An Overview For 2020

For the year ended 31 December 2020

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Presidents Report 2020

The Art Gallery Society of New South Wales

The Art Gallery Society of New South Wales (the Society), since its formation in 1953, has remained an independent body with a proud and significant history of supporting the Art Gallery of New South Wales (the Gallery). The Society's mission is to provide support to the State's foremost art institution, and the Society has proudly delivered on this mission in a variety of ways: sponsoring exhibitions and programs, providing scholarships for staff, raising funds for acquisitions and cultivating a core audience of art and culture lovers for the Gallery through a diverse range of events.

2020 was a year unlike any in living memory due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic and subsequent shutdown of NSW cultural institutions on 23 March 2020 required the Society to suspend its events program for the first time in its history. When members were informed of event cancellations, many generously chose to donate the cost of their tickets to the Society in lieu of a refund – a humbling reminder of how our members value the Society and the Gallery. The Society immediately extended all memberships for three months to support its loyal community of art lovers during this unprecedented period.

During the temporary closure, the Society implemented digital programs to keep members informed and engaged, including Art Appreciation Online, Resonate Online, audio recordings of previous sold-out lectures, and artmaking initiatives for members to complete at home, including Kids Club Online and the popular Art Challenges.

Look magazine kept members connected during the pandemic and an additional digital edition was created for overseas members whose mail deliveries were affected by shutdowns.

Together with the Gallery, the Society looks forward to a return to normalcy as we enter a period of celebration over the next few years with the 150th Anniversary of the Gallery in 2021, the opening of the Sydney Modern Project expansion in 2022 and the 70th anniversary of the Society in 2023.

The Year in Review

When 2020 began the Society was well placed with excellent attendance figures at events and indications of a strong year ahead for membership growth. Even with the Gallery's temporary closure, as at 31 December 2020 there were 19,475 memberships and 28,354 members, numbers which highlight the enduring loyalty of Society members. The 2020 Gift Membership campaign was our most successful to date, and over the eight-week festive season 608 gift memberships were purchased. The success of the *Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prize* and *Streeton* exhibitions, which brought high numbers of visitors to the Gallery, led to a 64% increase in new members in comparison to 2019. These results reflect a strong exhibition program, an engaged front of house team and increased online digital presence.

During March and April 2020, a survey was carried out online by both current and former members of the Society. The member's survey was completed by 2,783 respondents and the former member survey by 1,110 respondents. Members indicated satisfaction with the Society's benefits and relevant events and programs. The overall aim of the research was to better understand current members and their satisfaction with the Society, and what the Society can do to improve its member offerings. The survey findings will support the Society's continued evolution.

Members Programs and Events

The 2020 event program commenced on a very positive note with strong attendances and pre-sales building on a successful 2019 program. All signs pointed to another successful year of events. The temporary closure of the Gallery led to the cancellation of a substantial number of scheduled events from mid-March onwards. A total of 183 events representing 20,492 tickets were cancelled. The Society immediately moved towards online engagement and several Art Appreciation lectures were filmed and published online, as well as a mini-concert, filmed in the Grand Courts with a performance by singer Susannah Lawergren accompanied by harpist Georgia Lowe. Susannah wore a dress designed by Anjilla Seddeqi consistent with a program supporting refugees in the arts.

With the Gallery re-opening at the beginning of June 2020, some limited programming with reduced venue capacities recommenced from August, including coffee tours and individual lectures. New strict event guidelines such as physical distancing, member and guest data collection for contact tracing requirements, extensive sanitising and safety introductions for audiences. COVID-safe event and venue protocols resulted in rigorous administration and event procedures and we thank our team for their efforts to ensure member comfort and safety. Survey feedback from members and guests attending events was cautious but positive, indicating high satisfaction with the demonstrated COVID-19 safe protocols.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased throughout the year and venue capacities increased, event programming and bookings gained momentum from September to December. A total of 167 onsite events were held by the end of 2020. Programs included coffee tours, lectures, Resonate concerts, workshops, young member tours and monthly meetups. A total of 13,322 members and guests attended the combination of paid and free events.

Program highlights throughout the year included *The music of Sinatra and Basie* and *Sounds of Streeton* Resonate concerts, a *Celebrating Beethoven* lecture series, a day tour to Canberra to view the NGA's Matisse and Picasso exhibition and the ever-popular Art Appreciation lecture series, which was extremely well subscribed.

The Raphael symposium, which included both live and online ticket purchases, was launched as a pilot program to investigate and expand online lecture offerings. The take-up and response was incredibly positive and Society staff were quick to adapt to the technical requirements and new ticketing processes to ensure best practice offerings could be continued. Zoom workshops were offered for *Kids Club* subscribers to keep our youngest members engaged with the Gallery. The Society will continue to investigate member appetite for online programming in 2021.

Benefits to members included free member viewings for the *Archibald, Wynne and Sulman* and *Streeton* exhibitions, which were expanded to week-long access scheduled over four sessions per day.

Online bookings continued to be the main method of booking with 78% of bookings completed online.

Thirteen event surveys were conducted during 2020 with an average net promoter score of 9.03 achieved out of 10.

Communications

Our Society EDM's: *Members* and *Young Members*, continued to provide up to date information on Society programs. The *Members* EDM was distributed fortnightly to the approximately 19,000 member contacts, plus an approximate 16,000 additional contacts made up of past members, EDM subscribers and partners. This EDM provided information on members' programs and events, Gallery exhibitions, benefits, fundraising efforts and helped promote special offers and competitions. The *Young Members* EDM was distributed monthly to nearly 9,000 subscribers, with a range of content directed to a younger age demographic of 18–40 years.

Our broader digital campaigns have reached over 2.6 million users across email and social media channels. The Gallery distributed the regular *Artmail* EDM to approximately 180,000 subscribers in 2020. The Society was well represented in this popular e-newsletter, with a dedicated section to promote AGS programs and events, gift memberships, and key fundraising campaigns, such as the Collection Circle Acquisition Program.

Look magazine delivered an insider's view of the Gallery to members and kept them connected to the Gallery throughout the year. A key benefit of membership, the magazine continued to provide a wealth of stimulating articles by curators and specialist writers, providing members with exclusive insights into Gallery exhibitions, events and acquisitions, as well as Society events and programs.

The print edition was complemented with a new digital supplement, *Look online*, which was sent to members and a broader audience through social media platforms. The additional digital edition of the magazine, created for overseas members with inconsistent mail deliveries, is now shared automatically with new members when they join, allowing them to enjoy some of the benefits of membership immediately. A selection of *Look* articles was also published on the Gallery's website.

World Art Tours

In the wake of 2019, the most successful year for the World Art Tours (WAT) program since its inception more than thirty years ago, WAT ran a very different course in 2020 due to the pandemic, which decimated the travel industry.

Following two fully booked international tours, *Russian Winter Wonderland* with Alan Dodge in January and *Hidden Lands of the Himalayas* with Alex McKay in early March, all other, well subscribed international tours for 2020, including tours to destinations as alluring and diverse as Sardinia, Israel, South Korea, Ethiopia and Jordan, had to be postponed and then finally cancelled. Our regular promotional *Armchair Travel Series* also had to be cancelled.

The program was in limbo throughout the “lockdown” and in the subsequent months of uncertainty. Together with long-term travel partner Renaissance Tours, we however maintained our presence in the cultural tours space and focused on our domestic tours from late 2020 and into 2021.

Although challenging due to unpredictable border closures and the high cost of operating tours within Australia, we instituted a series of Art Escape Regional Tours. These included the *Illawarra Art Trail*, *Galleries of NSW Hunter Region*, *Northern Rivers Art Trail* and *Treasures of the National Capital*. We also developed a series of Sydney Day Tours such as *Contemporary Japan in Sydney*, *Urban Precincts of Sydney*, *A Walk down Macquarie Street*, *Art Deco Sydney*, *Looking Up: Tall Tales of Sydney Architecture* and *A Day at the New Chau Chak Wing Museum*.

Travel Draw

Our travel partner, Renaissance Tours continued provide the First Prize of Society's *Travel Draw*, which they have supported since 2015. The Travel Draw 2020 campaign closed on Friday 3 April 2020 and was highly-successful with 29,767 tickets sold.

Volunteers

Following the 2019 Review of Task Force operations, recommendations to align the Task Force with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement were implemented in 2020. As a result, the Gallery now centrally administers all volunteers under the one umbrella to ensure a unified, best practice approach.

Sydney Modern Project

Throughout the Gallery's temporary closure and during reduced programming, construction of the Sydney Modern Project expansion continued unabated. It has been exciting to witness the building works' slow reveal of the soon-to-be new Gallery building and the ongoing refurbishments across the current campus.

Members Lounge

Plans for the transformed Members Lounge are well under way and the Society looks forward to welcoming members when the Lounge reopens. As was to be expected, visitation to the Lounge was much reduced from previous years, with 25,437 visitors and guests making use of the Lounge in 2020, compared with 62,681 in 2019. The Lounge offers a peaceful reprieve from the outside world and is

considered an extremely important benefit of membership. The Society will continue to work closely with the architects to ensure an enviable Lounge for members to continue to enjoy.

Support for the Gallery

In 2020 the Society acquired Yosl Bergner's, *Self portrait* 1939, purchased through the Dagmar Halas Bequest Fund. The Dagmar Halas Bequest was established in 2008 from funds left by a former Art Gallery Society volunteer. In accordance with Dagmar's wishes, the works purchased were to be Modernist Australian paintings. The Society has subsequently acquired two works by Dorrit Black, and paintings by Grace Cossington Smith and Hilda Rix Nicholas; important additions due to the focus of collecting female artists. *Self portrait* is also an excellent addition to the Gallery's collection, given its significance within social realism in Australia.

Sponsorship

Support from our sponsors enables the Society to provide members with an expansive program across many platforms. Our travel partner *Renaissance Tours* once again sponsored the 2020 *Art Appreciation* lecture series, and other return sponsors include *Arab Bank's* sponsorship of the *Learning Curve* lecture series, Drapac Financial the *Resonate* concert series and Manly Spirits the Young Professional program. Once again Faber-Castell supported the Society's workshops and the much-loved annual *Kids Club Prize*. Finalists and winners of the *Kids Club Prize* were on display in the Members Lounge, as were the monthly winners of the *Art Challenges*, also sponsored by Faber-Castell. New Sponsors include the Sir William Dobell Art Foundation, whose support enabled the Society to program a *free-for-members* special lecture on Sir William Dobell during the 2020 drawing Biennial, and onlineinduction.com, whose support is allocated towards the scheduling of special lectures. The Society is incredibly grateful for this longstanding support and we continue to work with the Gallery to seek sponsors for new as well as existing programs.

Art Gallery Society Staff & Council

I am proud to note that even though 2020 was a difficult and challenging year for a membership and events organisation, the Society quickly adapted, managed to keep our members engaged and were able to provide a range of membership benefits. Society staff adjusted to the changing requirements of operating within shifting government guidelines and addressed these challenges to ensure the organisation would remain strong and fulfil its purpose. At the height of the pandemic all Society staff had their hours and pay reduced and three staff were stood down for ten weeks. The Society was eligible for the JobKeeper subsidy, which was a much-appreciated support throughout the pandemic. Through the commitment of the Art Gallery Society Council and the leadership of Executive Director, Ron Ramsey, and Assistant Director, Joseph Alessi, the dedicated Society staff have ensured the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales remains a leading arts membership organisation.



Brian Greenacre
President, Art Gallery Society of New South Wales

Position Holders

Patrons

Her Excellency, the Honourable Margaret Beazley AO QC, Governor of New South Wales and
Mr Dennis Wilson

Honorary Life Governors

The Hon Bronwyn Bishop
Peter Flick
Dorothy Holt
Raymond Kidd
Joan Levy
Max Sandow AM
Carolyn Ward
Leslie Walford
Diana Walder OAM

Distinguished Service to Council

Prue Allen
Nancy Cash
Robyn Flick
Inge Grant
Annette Jameson
Adam Johnson
Brian Ladd
Christine Liddy
Les Moseley
John Pearson
Natasha Serventy
Ross Steele AM
David Stewart-Hunter
Caroline Storch

Councillors 2020

Brian Greenacre **President**
Paula Latos-Valier AM **Vice President**
Sue Jackson **Treasurer**
Andrea Brown (from April 2020)
Anastasia Economou
Sue Dadswell
Jenny Green
Brian Ladd
David Sharpe (until April 2020)
Jo-Ann Smith
Ex-Officio
Dr Michael Brand
The Hon Ashley Dawson-Damer AM

Honorary Lawyers

Allen & Overy

Sponsors and Partners

January - December 2020

Arab Bank Australia

Bluestar Print

Drapac Financial

Faber-Castell Australia

Manly Spirits

Onlineinduction.com

Renaissance Tours

Sir William Dobell Art Foundation

Art Gallery Society Staff 2020

Executive

Executive Director Ron Ramsey

Assistant Director Joseph Alessi

Executive Assistant Batsheva Abrahams

Finance

Management Accountant Clare Vu

Finance and HR Coordinator Roanne Papas

Look Magazine

Look Editor John Saxby

Deputy Editor Susannah Smith

Marketing

Marketing Manager Natalie Maroon (until November 2020)

Marketing Manager Carli Collins (from November 2020)

Membership and Events

Membership and Events Manager Katrina Jones

Membership Officer Rachel Rodd

Membership Assistant Cathy Shen

Ticketing Manager Jamie Mackenzie

Senior Events Coordinator Sarah Maxwell

Events Coordinator Jaclyn Fenech

Art Programs Coordinator Dot Kolentzis

Events Assistants Kristy Stewart, Lisa Tarbuck

Members Lounge

Members Lounge Manager Fiona McIntosh

Reception Assistants Lucy Boyle, Ally Martin, Danielle Salvemini, Martyn Reyes, Louise Smart

Additional Support

World Art Tours Coordinator Liz Gibson

Acquisitions



Yosel Bergner, *Self-portrait* (1939)