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Nobody's Darlings: the lives and legacy of Australian women artists in Europe

Interior worlds: examining the inner lives of Australian women artists

Elle Freak & Tracey Lock

Lecture summary

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many Australian women artists in Europe turned inward, embracing the domestic interior as a site of their modern experience and expression. Referring to the work of Margaret Preston, Stella Bowen, Bessie Davidson and Agnes Goodsir, this lecture will consider how the motifs of open windows, balconies and mirrors became avenues for exploring inner states of being.

The inner realm of the spiritual was also a serious preoccupation in the major art centres of Europe and beyond. Many of Australia's travelling women artists led advances towards new forms of art that did not look church-like but gave meaning to art beyond the imitation of optical facts. An Australian resistance to this idea of art operating beyond the material realm will be discussed. This will be followed by the presentation of case studies with a focus on three artists: Nora Heysen, Anne Dangar and Dorrit Black.

Slide list [Elle Freak]

1. Title slide
2. Photograph of Rosamond Marshall, Dorothy Kate Richmond and Frances Hodgkins in Rijsoord, Holland, 1903; Courtesy of E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
3. *Dangerously Modern* installation view, Art Gallery of South Australia
4. Bessie Davidson, *Intérieur (Interior)*, 1925, Paris, oil on board, 91.5 x 73.0 cm; Private collection
5. Quote. Florence Fuller, 1913
6. Agnes Goodsir, *In a Paris studio*, c.1922, Paris, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 49.9 cm; Gift of Mrs Rachel Dunn 1947. Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art; Bessie Davidson, *Girl in the mirror (Jeune fille au miroir)*, 1914, Paris, oil on canvas, 73.0 x 60.0 cm; Gift of Andrée Fay Harkness through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2020. National Gallery of Victoria; Gladys Reynell, *Pensiveness*, c.1913, France, oil on canvas, 73.0 x 60.0 cm; 25th Anniversary Gift from the Friends of the Art Gallery of South Australia 1994. Art Gallery of South Australia
7. Florence Fuller, *Inseparables*, c.1900, London or Paris, oil on canvas, 90.2 x 68.5 cm; Elder Bequest Fund 1900, Art Gallery of South Australia
8. Florence Fuller, *Mother and child*, c.1898, London, oil on canvas, 43.0 x 61.0 cm; James and Diana Ramsay Fund 2021. Art Gallery of South Australia
9. Tom Roberts, *A break away!*, 1891, oil on canvas, 167.0 x 198.0 cm; Elder Bequest Fund 1899. Art Gallery of South Australia; Florence Fuller, *Woman in a garden in France*, 1895, France, oil on canvas, 55.0 x 38.5 cm; Purchased through the Sir Claude Hotchin Art Foundation. Art Gallery of Western Australia
10. Stella Bowen, *Reclining nude*, 1927, Paris, oil on wood panel, 32.6 x 41.0 cm; Gift of Mrs Suzanne Brookman through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2003. Art Gallery of South Australia
11. Quote. Stella Bowen, 1941
12. Berthe Morisot, *The Psyche mirror*, 1876, Paris, oil on canvas, 65.0 x 54.0 cm; Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

13. Quote. Louis Edmond Duranty, *The New Painting*, 1876
14. Mary Cassatt, *Young Mother Sewing*, 1900, France, oil on canvas, 92.4 x 73.7 cm; Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929. Metropolitan Museum of Art
15. Berthe Morisot, *The Cradle*, 1872, Paris, oil on canvas, 56.0 x 46.5 cm; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Berthe Morisot, *The Artist's Sister at a Window*, 1869, Paris, oil on canvas, 54.8 x 46.3 cm; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
16. Mary Cassatt, *Denise at Her Dressing Table*, c. 1908-09, oil on canvas, 83.5 x 68.9 cm; Bequest of Gioconda King 2004. Metropolitan Museum of Art; Bessie Davidson, *Girl in the mirror (Jeune fille au miroir)*, 1914, Paris, oil on canvas, 73.0 x 60.0 cm; Gift of Andrée Fay Harkness through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2020. National Gallery of Victoria.
17. Quote. Stella Bowen, 1941
18. Margaret Preston, *Nature morte (oignons)*, 1905, Paris, oil on canvas, 44.4 x 63.5 cm; Elder Bequest Fund 1907. Art Gallery of South Australia; Margaret Preston, *The tea urn*, c.1909, Adelaide, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 50.5 cm; Elder Bequest Fund 1909. Art Gallery of South Australia
19. Margaret Preston, *The studio window*, 1906, Paris, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 60.0cm; Purchased 2002. National Gallery of Australia
20. James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, 1864, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 51.1 cm; Bequeathed by Arthur Studd 1919. Tate Britain, London
21. Margaret Preston, *Anemones*, 1916, London, oil on cardboard, 55.5 x 46 cm; Private collection; Margaret Preston, *The Window*, c.1916, London, oil on cardboard, 61.0 x 49.9 cm; Private collection
22. Margaret Preston, *Still life*, c.1915-16, Paris, oil on canvas, 48.9 x 48.9 cm; Elder Bequest Fund 1940. Art Gallery of South Australia; Margaret Preston, *Still life with teapot and daisies*, 1915, Bunmahon, Ireland, oil on cardboard, 44.3 x 51.2 cm; Gift of the W.G. Preston Estate 1977. Art Gallery of New South Wales; Margaret Preston, *The teapot cosy*, 1916, London, gouache on card, 45.2 x 54.4 cm; Gift of Barbara Stewart of the Collier Estate 1983. Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare o Rehua Whanganui
23. Quote. Stella Bowen, 1941
24. Stella Bowen, *White steps*, 1936, France, oil on cardboard, 51.0 x 40.5 cm; Gift of Suzanne Brookman, the artist's niece, through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2011. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program. Art Gallery of South Australia
25. Stella Bowen, *Self-portrait*, c.1928, Paris, oil on plywood, 45.0 x 36.8 cm; Gift of Suzanne Brookman, the artist's niece, through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 1999. Art Gallery of South Australia
26. Stella Bowen, *La terrasse (The terrace)*, 1931, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, France, oil on canvas. 74.5 x 54.5 cm; Gift of Oliver Postgate 2001. The National Gallery of Australia
27. Stella Bowen, *Ford's chair*, c.1928, Paris, oil on canvas, 92.0 x 59.8 cm; Private collection; Stella Bowen, *Paris, interior*, 1931, Paris, watercolor, pencil on board, 55 x 38 cm; Gift of Suzanne Brookman, the artist's niece, through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2012. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program. Art Gallery of South Australia
28. Stella Bowen, *Embankment Gardens*, c.1938, London, oil on composition board, 63.5 x 76.2 cm; Elder Bequest Fund 1943. Art Gallery of South Australia
29. Quote. Bessie Davidson, 1941
30. Bessie Davidson, *An interior*, c.1920, Paris, oil, charcoal on composition board, 73.1 x 59.7 cm; Gift of Mrs C. Glanville 1968. Art Gallery of South Australia

31. Bessie Davidson, *Fillette au perrouquet (Little girl with parrot)*, 1913, Paris, oil on canvas, 92.0 x 73.0 cm; Collection of Carmel Dyer and Allen Hunter; Bessie Davidson, *Mother and child*, 1914, Medindie, South Australia, oil on canvas, 91.5x 73.5 cm; Gift of Margaret (Mrs Klasen) and Sybil de Rose 1992. Art Gallery of South Australia
32. Bessie Davidson, *Reading in the garden (Lecture au jardin)*, c.1935, oil on plywood, 94.0 x 114.0 cm; James and Diana Ramsay Fund 2021. Art Gallery of South Australia
33. Bessie Davidson, *Intérieur (Interior)*, 1925, Paris, oil on board, 91.5 x 73.0 cm; Private collection
34. Pierre Bonnard, *Effet de glace (le tub)*, 1909, France, oil on canvas, 73 x 84.5 cm; Kunst Museum Winterthur, Hahnloser/Jaeggli Stiftung
35. Bessie Davidson, *Portrait of Mademoiselle Le Roy*, c.1920, Paris, oil on board, 52.0 x 65.0 cm (irreg.); The Gift of Grace and Alec Craig of Bendigo, Victoria 2010. Bendigo Art Gallery
36. Quote. Agnes Goodsir, 1927
37. Agnes Goodsir, *Girl with a cigarette*, c.1925, Paris, oil on canvas, 99.5 x 81.0 cm; Bequest of Amy E Bayne 1945. Bendigo Art Gallery
38. Agnes Goodsir, *The letter*, 1926, Paris, oil on canvas, 81.0 x 65.3 cm; Bequest of the artist, 1947. National Gallery of Victoria; Agnes Goodsir, *Woman reading*, c.1915, London, oil on canvas, 71.0 x 91.5 cm; Presented through the NGV Foundation by John and Suzanne Playfoot, Governor, 2001. National Gallery of Victoria
39. Agnes Goodsir, *In a Paris studio*, c.1922, Paris, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 49.9 cm; Gift of Mrs Rachel Dunn 1947. Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
40. Photograph of Agnes Goodsir (far left) with her friends, Cherry, Estelle and Winifred c.1930, gelatin silver print; Gift of Bruce & Patricia Lorimer. Bendigo Art Gallery Collection
41. Agnes Goodsir, *Type of the Latin Quarter*, c.1926, Paris, oil on canvas, 100.0 x 81.0 cm; Collection of David and Patricia Lorimer
42. Napoleon Sarony, photographs of Oscar Wilde (1856-1900), 1882. Source: <https://www.oscarwilde.us>
43. Romaine Brooks, *Autoportrait*, 1923, Paris, oil on canvas, 117.5 cm x 68.3 cm; Gift of the artist, 1966. Smithsonian American Art Museum; Marie Laurencin, *Women with Dove*, 1919, Paris, oil on canvas, 61.5 x 50 cm; Gift of Lord Joseph Duveen, 1931; Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Centre Pompidou – Musée National d'Art Moderne / Centre de Création Industrielle, Paris.
44. Agnes Goodsir, *The Parisienne*, c.1924, Paris, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.1 cm; Purchased 1993. National Gallery of Australia

Slide list [Tracey Lock]

1. Title slide
2. Introduction
3. László Moholy-Nagy, *Hilla Rebay*, (1890-1967), 1924, gelatin silver print, 95.5 x 68.5 cm; courtesy of Moholy-Nagy Foundation
4. The Guggenheim Museum, New York photograph
5. Cristina Asquith Baker, *The star*, 1914, London, colour lithograph, 33.2 x 20.2 cm (image); Purchased 1983. National Gallery of Australia
6. Dora Meeson (1869– 1955), *Sunset at Chelsea*, 1913, 29.6 x 25.0 cm; Purchased by Public Subscription, 1986. Castlemaine Art Museum
7. Colin Simpson 'high brow joke' newspaper article
8. Robert Rooney, *Janine Burke*, c.1980, inkjet print on paper, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra

9. Tom Roberts, *Shearing the rams*, 1890, oil on canvas on composition board, 122.4 x 183.3 cm; Felton Bequest, 1932. National Gallery of Victoria and Iso Rae, *Young girl, Étaples*, c.1892, France, oil on canvas, 150.5 x 59.5 cm; Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell–Pretty AM and Family, Professor Graham Peirson and Christine Peirson and the Norma Atwell Bequest, 2020. National Gallery of Victoria
10. Janet Cumbrae Stewart, *Reclining nude*, c.1922-39, London, pastel on cardboard on composition board, 36.8 x 47.0 cm; Purchased 1978. Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
11. Florence Fuller, *Mother and child*, c.1898, London, oil on canvas, 43.0 x 61.0 cm; James and Diana Ramsay Fund 2021. Art Gallery of South Australia
12. *Bernard Smith*, photograph, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 14555647-1-v
13. Anne Dangar on the balcony at Moly-Sabata, France 1940s; courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales Archive
14. A seance scene from the 1922 film *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*. Michael Faraday and Harry Houdini were among the prominent sceptics of spiritualism. Photograph: Bettmann/CORBIS
15. The Star Ampitheatre, Balmoral Beach, Sydney, c. 1924
16. Margaret Preston, *Nature morte (oignons)*, 1905, Paris, oil on canvas, 44.4 x 63.5 cm; Elder Bequest Fund 1907; Art Gallery of South Australia and *Still life with teapot and daisies*, 1915, Bunmahon, Ireland, oil on cardboard, 44.3 x 51.2 cm; Gift of the W.G. Preston Estate 1977. Art Gallery of New South Wales.
17. Anne, Dangar, *Vierge a l'Enfant entouree d'anges (Virgin and child in majesty surrounded by six angels)*, 1936-37, earthenware with glaze and slip decoration; 4.0 x 44.0 cm (diam); Mollie Douglas Bequest Fund 2017. Art Gallery of New South Wales
18. Unknown photographer, *Nora Heysen*, 1934; Nora Heysen Foundation archive. Passport photo.
19. Nora Heysen, *Self portrait*, 1934, London, oil on canvas, frame: 60.8 cm x 53.5 cm, support: 43.1 cm x 36.3 cm; Purchased 1999. National Portrait Gallery and
20. *Self portrait*, 1938, oil on canvas laid on board, 58.8 x 48.2 x 4.3cm; Purchased 2011 with funds from Philip Bacon, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation. Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art and *Down and out in London*, 1937, London, oil on canvas, 55.0 x 40.0 cm; South Australian Government Grant 1994. Art Gallery of South Australia.
21. Unknown photographer, *Nora Heysen*, 1936, Dorset, England, Nora Heysen Foundation archive and Nora Heysen, *A Nude*, 1937, London, oil on canvas on board, 40 x 30 cm; Private collection
22. Michelangelo, (1475-1574), *The Entombment*, 1500-1, Rome, oil on wood, 161.7 x 149.9 cm; National Gallery, London
23. Piero della Francesca, *The Baptism of Christ*, 1437-45, Borgo Sansepolcro, Italy, egg tempera on wood, 167.0 x 116.0 cm; Bought 1861; National Gallery, London and *The Nativity*, early 1480s, oil on wood, 124.4 x 122.6 cm; Bought 1874, National Gallery, London
24. (detail) Piero della Francesca, *Saint Michael*, 1469, Borgo Sansepolcro, Italy, oil on wood, 133.0 x 59.5 cm; Bought 1867; National Gallery, London
25. (detail) Piero della Francesca, *The Dream of Constantine*, c.1466, fresco, 329.0 x 190.0 cm; Basilica of San Francesco, Arezzo, Italy
26. Unknown photographer, *Anne Dangar in her studio at Moly-Sabata*, France, c. 1940, Dorrit Black Archive, Art Gallery of South Australia
27. Albert Gleizes, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1929, gouache pochoir, 39.0 x 40.3 cm; Purchased 2015. Art Gallery of South Australia
28. *Dangerously Modern*, installation view, Adelaide

29. Anne Dangar, *Un composition, pochoir [pochoir composition]*, c1936, France, gouache, 35 x 28.9 cm; National Gallery of Australia
30. Unknown photographer, *Dorrit Black*, c.1927. Passport photograph. Dorrit Black Archive, Art Gallery of South Australia
31. Dorrit Black, *Coast road*, 1942, oil on canvas, 45.5 x 55.0 cm; d'Auvergne Boxall Bequest Fund 1989. Art Gallery of South Australia
32. Dorrit Black, *The olive plantation*, 1946, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 86.5 cm; Bequest of the artist 1951. Art Gallery of South Australia
33. Dorrit Black, *The Bridge*, 1930, Sydney, oil on canvas on board, 60.0 x 81.0 cm; Bequest of the artist 1951, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
34. Ethel Carrick, *At sunset*, 1914, oil on canvas mounted on cardboard, 25.0 x 31.0 cm; National Gallery of Australia
35. Ethel Carrick, *Mountain scene*, 1907, gouache on board, 23.9 x 31.0 cm; Art Gallery of Ballarat
36. *Dangerously Modern*, installation view, Adelaide

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