

DESIGN & ART AUSTRALIA ONLINE

Who will remember them?

Silas Clifford-Smith invites the participation of all Australian artists and designers, past and present, in this remarkable database



Photograph of a group of Art Society of Queensland members on a sketching excursion in Ipswich 1896. Henri Tebbitt is the boater-wearing artist on the far right. State Library of Queensland, image no. 95903

You've probably never heard of Christine Peckett (1908-96). Few have. She was a Modernist painter and ceramicist active in Sydney during the middle decades of the last century. Despite only having one solo show in 1937 she was a talented experimental artist who managed

to support herself financially by her own art-making despite having been severely crippled by polio. While her early streetscape etching, *Ormond Street, Ashfield* (illustrated over) is somewhat conventional, her later more modern images often reflect her physical torment.



Untitled river scene by Henri Tebbitt (private collection)

Australia's libraries and secondhand bookshops are filled with countless works documenting the life and work of famous living and dead artists. Sadly, most—like Peckett—are not as well regarded by the public as the likes of Sidney Nolan, Margaret Preston and Brett Whiteley so have been overlooked by publishers and documentary film makers. Others may have gained some notoriety during their careers but their lives and images were soon forgotten after their demise thanks to changes in style and taste. For example, who these days has heard of Henri Tebbitt (1852-1927), arguably Australia's most successful watercolourist during the early years of the last century, or railway labourer Thomas Dean (1857-1947), who despite his labours produced many landscapes, still lifes and portraits of 'beautiful ladies'.

In recent years there has been an ambitious project to address this neglect. The Design and Art Australia Online website (DAAO) is a free access academic database which aims to document every artist and designer who has worked in Australia, living and dead. The DAAO's scope includes not only the usual wellknown worthies, but also the tens of thousands

of lesser-known artists of past years as well as those practising today.

Taste or critical acclaim is no hindrance to entry to the DAAO database, and in keeping with post-modern historical theory anyone who is, or is considered, an artist is welcome to be included. To achieve this someone must write about them. These entries are being contributed by art historians, students, collectors, dealers, family members, and sometimes the artists themselves.

Before the establishment of the DAAO website the most reputable listing of local artists was McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art. Currently in its 4th edition this weighty and pricey tome documents the leading artists from Australia's current and past history. This is indeed a fine publication but is nevertheless limited to artists whose work is included in public collections, thus disqualifying the vast majority of living and dead artists.

The DAAO's origins date from the 1970s when Professor Bernard Smith established an academic project to document a comprehensive listing of Australian artists.



Thomas Dean posing with one of his Archibald Prize entries, c. 1925-30 (family collection)

Later, Smith's successor Professor Joan Kerr edited a published reference on colonial artists and later women artists (Peckett by the way was not included). In 2007, following Kerr's death, the Dictionary of Australian Artists Online (a precursor to the current website) was launched. Mining of existing biographies from earlier books saw the DAAO quickly become the leading reference on Australian artists. The site was next expanded by the inclusion of the biographies of Aboriginal artists as well as many other artists.

In 2011 the DAAO website expanded again, this time to include designers and craft workers. Reflecting this change the DAAO database has become known as the Design and Art Australia Online. At the time of writing over 11,000 entries have been published on the site including those of Peckett, Tebbitt and Dean. Entries vary from lengthy peer reviewed academic entries to brief 'stubs' which aim to tease an informed writer to provide a more comprehensive entry. There are still tens of thousands of entries to write, and surprisingly many notables are yet to be added. In time the DAAO will become the first place of call for art historians, dealers and collectors.

All contemporary artists, craft workers and designers are eligible to participate in the DAAO project. Whether they have had just one exhibition or a lifetime's involvement with the arts, this input will create a lasting record of an individual's art and career. The DAAO website includes many aids to help artists compile a new entry which might include a chronology of achievements as well as images and references to publications which mention their art.

You are invited to take the plunge and become involved today.

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Ormond Street, Ashfield (1935), etching by Christine A. Peckett (private collection)