

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR  
OF TASMANIA TO OPEN "THE SUNDAY PAINTERS" EXHIBITION, THE  
ALLPORT LIBRARY & MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, MURRAY STREET,  
HOBART, THURSDAY 19TH DECEMBER 2013.**

I welcome you all to this opening of the Sunday Painters' Art Exhibition. I should say straight up that I feel very privileged to have been asked to perform this ceremonial opening and, at the same time, I feel overawed by the magnitude of the gift made to the Allport Museum by Dr Row and his wife of no less than 65 water colours painted by six well-known Tasmanian painters, and somewhat intimidated by the fact that three of those artists are with us today.

When I first met Don and Maggie Row, I had no idea that they would be such generous philanthropists. That meeting was in the order of 56 years ago. Don and I were students at Christ College when it was located in Park Street, close by the University then, at Domain House, and Maggie, or as I then knew her, Margaret, was lodged in what, in those days, was the almost impenetrable fortress of Jane Franklin Hall – impenetrable for eager young men that is, although it appears not completely impenetrable. My initial thoughts were that I should use this opportunity for a nostalgic excursion into our days at College together, for there is many a tale to tell but, bearing in mind the law of defamation, my second and wiser thoughts were that there were some things that were best not revisited in public, especially not on such an important occasion as this.

However, today's invitation has been very beneficial for me. I discovered some marvellous reading matter including Natasha Cica's book about Olegas Truchanas called "Pedder Dreaming"<sup>1</sup> in which she writes about Truchanas' influence on the Sunday Painters. I also found that mind stunning,

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<sup>1</sup> University of Queensland press and reprinted 2012. ISBN 9780702236723 (hbk)

comprehensive joint work of the benefactors we celebrate today – Don and Maggie Row – “50 years of Painting in Tasmania – 1925 – 1975.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, as you will see from your catalogue, the Sunday Painters group began in 1958, when Roy Cox invited Max Angus to join him one Sunday to do some painting and, after a few weeks, they agreed to go painting together every Sunday unless inclement weather prevented it. Harry Buckie joined the group whenever he was in Hobart and not long after that Trish Giles became one of the Sunday Painters. According to Natasha Cica’s account of a conversation she had with Max Angus,<sup>3</sup> (as they are all here I am nervously ready to stand corrected) Patricia was a major influence on the group – although each had their separate styles - but Patricia introduced Max and Harry to the beauty of the wilderness areas of Tasmania and, at the same time, introduced stronger colours into her work. Natasha writes:

“Max credits ‘Trish with expanding the Sunday Group’s early horizons. Before she joined they mainly painted built landscapes or scenes that reflected famous works: ‘Trish brought the wildness of the great lake, where she’d worked for years on her own, and enlarged our scope. Roy used to look askance at her and say, ‘That’s a bit savage, ‘Trish.” And she would say, “It’s a very savage place up there.”

In the 1960’s, Elspeth (whom I have personally known for many years) was invited to join the group and thus the core of the Sunday Painters Group was complete. Others came and went over the years but the core remained constant until the mid-1970’s.

Although 2013 is nearly forty years on from 1975, the core values of the Group that are still adhered to by the surviving Sunday Painters, were referred

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<sup>2</sup> Published by Matroid Publications ISBN 978 - 0 - 9806555 - 6 - 8.

<sup>3</sup> Supra at page 138.

to by Hugh McKinnon, a former student of Max Angus and Patricia Giles, when he opened an exhibition of their work in June this year. In his opening remarks he described “the atmosphere, image and cleanliness of the scenes that ‘refresh the mind’ depicting an environment that has been ‘loved, pondered and painted for over 60 years’ and the practiced eye that draws out and extrapolates [the] beauty it sees”<sup>4</sup>

Early one morning last week, I looked out of an upstairs window at Government House and down the River Derwent. You could almost see the Iron Pot. The sun had been up for about an hour, there was not a cloud in the sky. As I admired the clean, clear air and bright colours I thought, ‘just like a water colour’. I think that maybe that was what Hugh McKinnon was talking about when he opened that exhibition last June.

Don and Maggie Row write that Max Angus denied the frequently asserted claim that the work of the six was very similar. They wrote that Max Angus said, ‘each took on board from the others what was agreeable. The individual is in the minute detail.’<sup>5</sup> Well, it would be surprising if there were no similarities between the works of the six Sunday painters. Five of them had the same teacher - Jack Carrington-Smith - and all worked harmoniously together for quite a few years in what I gather was an ambiance of friendship and mutual professional respect. I think that Don and Maggie Row take that view after writing what Max Angus said about this claim of similarity, but it was what they wrote next that caught my attention:

“The ‘Sunday Painters’ style became pervasive, almost a characterising feature of contemporary Tasmanian watercolour.

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh McKinnon, Opening speech at the joint exhibition of Max Angus and Patricia Giles, Colville Gallery June 2013 reported Island Magazine, Max Angus - “Humanity Personified” by Stephenie Cahalan No. 134, page 11 at 13

<sup>5</sup> Footnote 2 at page 84.

The group's influence is apparent in almost every watercolour sold today to tourists in the shops and galleries of Salamanca."<sup>6</sup>

Although between the 1950's and the 1980's, the members of the Sunday Group may not have been well-known outside Tasmania, Natasha writes:

"these artists loomed very large locally, [during this period] (personally I would add 'and since'). Every genteel Hobart household had a watercolour landscape from at least one painter in this stable or aspired to and hung it somewhere near the piano."

Leaving aside Natashas' deprecatory tone, I thought that's right; the Sunday Painters did loom large in our community and were a formidable influence on the community. That influence came at a critical time in Tasmania's history. The 1970's saw the dawning of a struggle to save from exploitation and destruction our wild and beautiful mountains, rivers and forests. The seventies saw a growing recognition of the importance of preserving the natural beauty of our island. The Sunday Painters were the creative intellectuals of these times. Their work - indeed, often hanging next to the piano - was bought and admired because it conveyed in an emotional way, the wild grandeur and soaring beauty of parts of Tasmania that few people had visited – except, of course, the Sunday Painters, led by Trish Giles. I have little doubt that not only did the Sunday Painters have an influence on the visual arts, but together with people like Olegas Truchanas they also influenced the Green movement that was gathering force, as they recorded in water colours the atmosphere and striking beauty of our island and effectively

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<sup>6</sup> Supra.

spread their love for it to many more who had not, or were not able to, experience it for themselves.

In 1971, Mineral Holdings sought a licence to mine limestone at Precipitous Bluff in the State's South West. The Tasmanian Conservation Trust objected to the grant of a licence and there followed a legal battle that ended in the High Court eight years later with a declaration that the Trust had no standing to be heard in opposition to the grant of a licence. I was one of the counsel in that fight. In 1972, Lake Pedder was flooded. A decade later, battle lines were being drawn over the damming of the Franklin River – I was in that legal battle too. And all the while, the Sunday Painters were in our sitting rooms - next to the piano - their work serving as emotional reminders of the rich beauty of our environment that was disappearing. Each one of the Sunday Painters has earned an honourable place in history for more than one reason.

Although, of course, each of the Sunday Painters has had many individual and joint exhibitions over the years, this exhibition is the first time that the work of the Sunday Painters has been exhibited together. The exhibition is enhanced by the recorded recollections of the three of the painters who are with us today, and it will no doubt form, and remain, an important part of the cultural history of our island state.

All of this has been made possible by the incredible philanthropy of Dr and Mrs Row. On behalf of all Tasmanians, I publically extend my gratitude to each of them for making this generous contribution to the visual art history of Tasmania and declare this exhibition open.