

Portrait of the Artist tour

Conducted by

Diana Giese

For

Mosman Community College

Travel at Home Tours

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Pictures and text by Daphne Gonzalvez

Grey clouds rapidly sped by to reveal beautiful blue skies on a late autumnal day as our coach took us on the long trip to Gymea where we were visiting The Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts centre. Having never heard of this gem of a gallery I was unprepared for the feast that awaited us.



We were ushered into the theatrette where we learnt of the dream of Ben and Hazel Broadhurst who bought the land that became Hazelhurst in 1945. These two pioneers were into sustainable living by practising recycling and organic farming; and, on the spiritual side, by investigating the paranormal. Besides farming, they ran businesses and were benefactors to several worthy causes. As happens with such admirable human beings, they left their estate to the people – in this case to Sutherland shire. And there we were, enjoying the peaceful garden, visiting their home - now a pad for an artist in residence - walking around land strewn with art, eating at a café with superb food served to please eye and palate, and visiting a gallery with just enough art to make a visit worthwhile.

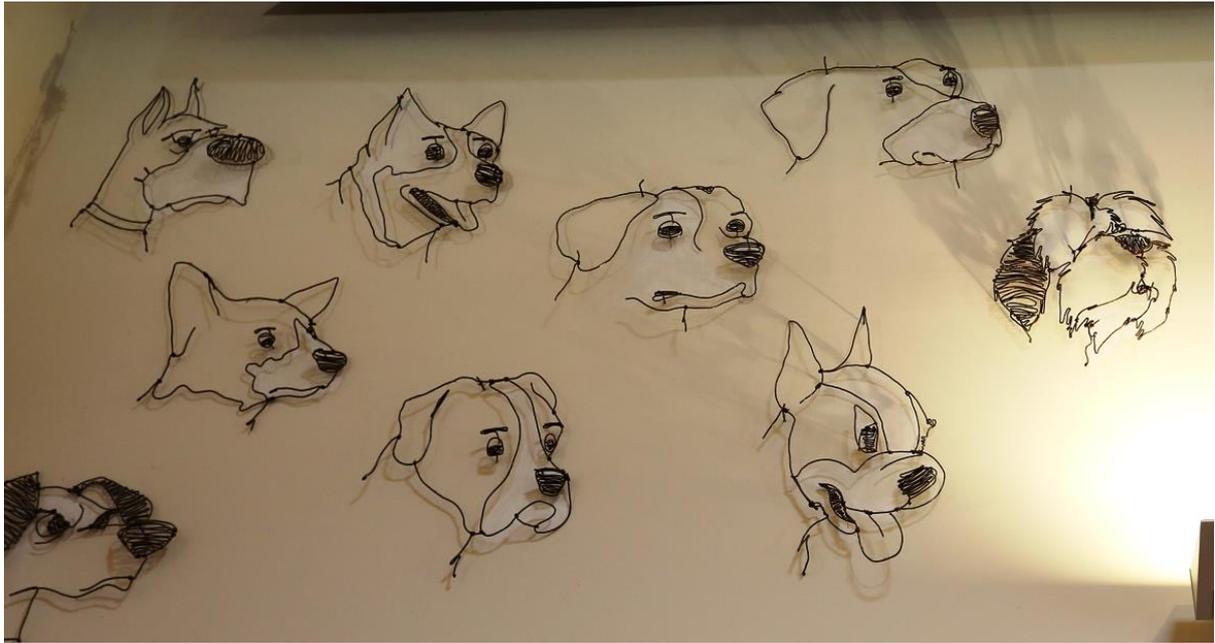
The Triumph of Modernism in the Art of Australia is a superb exhibition described by Edmund Capon as "the story of modernism but done with a more individual eye instead of a corporate eye".

We were fortunate to have three knowledgeable guides, Carol, Peter and Sophia, who impressed us with their passion for art and their interest in giving us fascinating details about the artists and their works. I could have listened to them for hours, appreciating the mathematical niceties of the art of Jeffrey Smart, or the way Imants Tillers blends words and brush strokes on small canvas boards to make up his paintings. We delighted in re-acquainting ourselves with artists we know and love, such as Russell Drysdale, Arthur Boyd, Charles Blackman, Brett Whiteley and John Olsen. But we also learnt of some of their delightful quirks: for example in the wonderful oil painting of an Angophora titled *Australia 1970-74* (which becomes 3-D with the inclusion of charcoal, dried reed, a eucalypt branch, a rubber snake, taxidermied Scaly-breasted Lorikeet, collage and plaster on plywood) Brett Whiteley did not leave to chance the shadows cast by gallery lights. He painted them in!

I would have loved to have photographed some of those paintings, so I could enjoy them at leisure, but was not allowed to. "There is a catalogue," suggested Carol. Naturally, I bought it, but the Whiteley painting is not in it, nor are some of the others.

Sixty years of Australian Art with over 50 iconic works by 26 artists who have shaped the development of modern art in Australia needed more time for detailed appreciation than was available to us. I am, however, grateful for the unique opportunity to see these paintings at all!

What I could legitimately photograph was a wall with dogs in wire art:



If you would like to see the Whiteley image, you can find it on the net at:

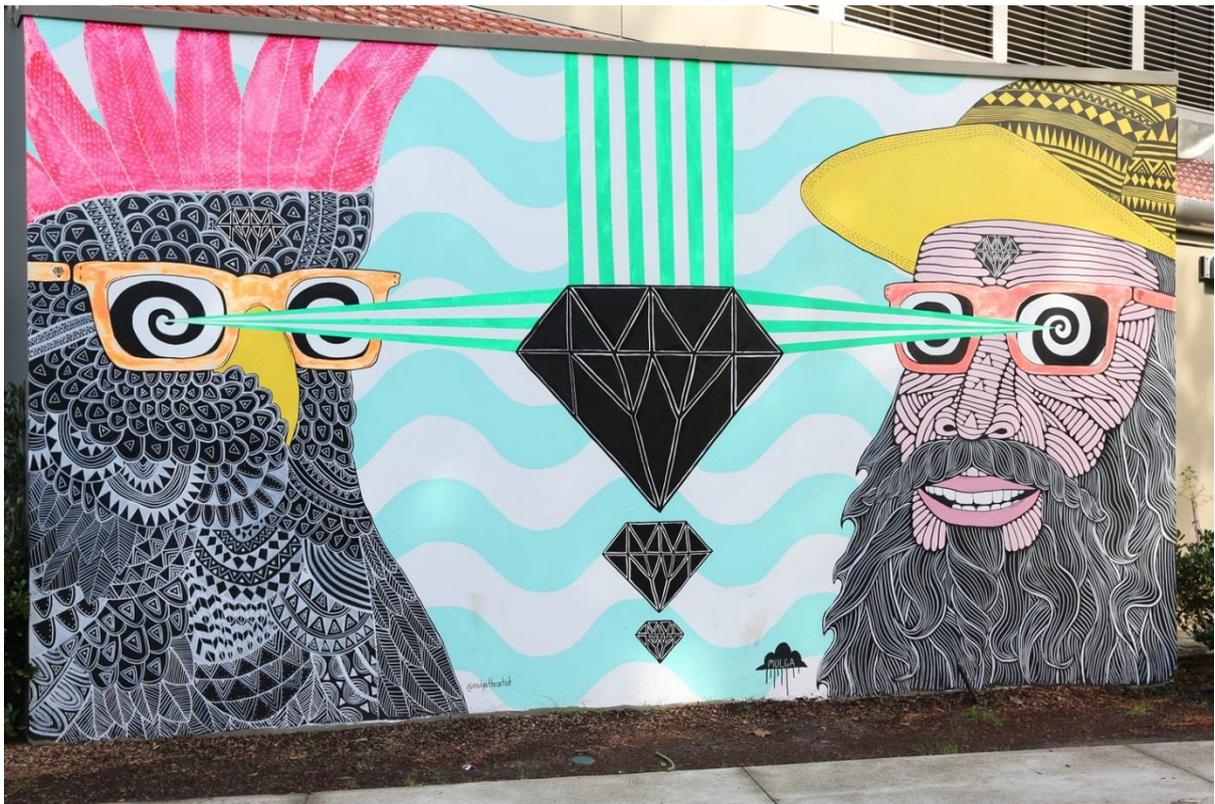
<http://www.theleader.com.au/story/2970831/how-has-australia-evolved-as-a-nation-since-wwii-a-new-hazelhurst-exhibition-may-provide-some-answers/EdmundCapon/>

The gardens of Hazelhurst

A wander around the gardens revealed a pretty pond,



some art works,



and some silhouettes on white sheets fluttering in the gentle breeze.





We also visited the Broadhurst home, now occupied by the artist in residence. I was curious to see the sunken bath we had been told about

in the video. A beautiful design, but not practical as it needed too much water!



Lunch in the café was delightful, the service superb. Not only was each dish delectable, it was beautifully presented, befitting a place that celebrated art.

Artist's Trail Bundeena

From Gymea we proceeded through the national park to Bundeena "on the cusp of development". There we were welcomed warmly by **Shen Jiawei** a Chinese Australian painter who has done portraits of many a famous personality. What struck me about Jiawei is that he is unassuming, welcoming each of our group with a warm handshake and his assurance that we could take pictures "for no charge!" That was for starters. When he began to speak in his studio, surrounded by the portraits he is currently working on, we were warmed by his knowledge of history, his generosity and his dedication to his talent. From his unassuming manner, you would not know that he is one of Australia's foremost portrait painters until you see his paintings and learn of the people who seek him out to do their portraits. Prime Minister John

Howard, Princess Mary of Denmark, and even Pope Francis are among his celebrity subjects.

Every portrait is not just the representation of what Jiawei sees in the person before him in a sitting, but also the details he imports into the painting from his knowledge of the person and the richness of relevant history. Jiawei told us how he read extensively about World War I to create a painting for the upcoming Sulman prize. He incorporated the humour and joy with which the Aussies went to war in the smile of the Aussie digger; with hope symbolised in the double rainbow! "I have noticed rainbows are always double", he said. Jiawei's portraits are artistic masterpieces enriched with literary qualities.



“How long did you take to do this painting?” we asked. “Ten weeks,” he replied. We were surprised at the speed with which he paints.

Jiawei paints on commission, but he has been known to do portraits as gifts. He is working on one for a friend who helped him translate into English a 200,000 word book. The painting is a charming portrait of his friend and partner in a relaxed pose.



We were lucky to get a preview of Jiawei’s entry into the next Archibald competition. A friend, Judith Neilson, who is a lover of art and owns the White Rabbit art gallery in Chippendale, is the subject of this portrait. That explains the laughing white rabbit on her lap. But why the background of Chinese figures? Neilson is the owner of a significant collection of contemporary Chinese art. To represent her love for Chinese

art, Jiawei chose to imitate figures from a work by his favourite Chinese artist.



Having been a finalist in 2011 and 2022, Jiawei deserves to win the prize this year. We wish him luck!





Portraits are not without controversy. His portrait of Cardinal George Pell was rejected as an entry for the Archibald Prize because of recent unfavourable media.

Jiawei spent a lot of time and thought choosing the location, sketching and photographing the Cardinal.

We noted that the hands are particularly well drawn. Jiawei explains why he pays particular attention to hands: "Hands are your second face," he says.

Of all the portraits my favourite is one we did not see on our visit. Jiawei told us about it and I found it on the web. It is a life-size painting of Pope Francis against a backdrop of men, women and children of all ages and cultures, hope in their eyes, their hands clasped in prayer.

Jiawei told us about the creation of this portrait – getting the right attitude of his subject, doing the research to find suitable images to put in the background, incorporating birds because of the connection to St Francis of Assisi, the patron of creatures. Notably, about to alight on the Pope's shoulder is a white dove with wings spread out in a gesture of embrace. The young girl with the Australian parrot on her shoulder is Jiawei's daughter. Jiawei tells us the painting was presented to Pope Francis during the canonisations in Rome of St John Paul II and St John XXIII.

I find the portrait captures the affability of the Pope Francis, his popularity with his world-wide, multi-cultural congregation and the hopes that rest in him for a renewal of the church in troubled times. The birds are a symbol

of the concerns the Pontiff shares with his patron saint for the living heritage of the earth.



"Shen Jiawei, Portrait of Pope Francis presented to His Holiness on 28 April 2014- 2014-04-28 23-20" by User:Gcmarino - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons"

After we left Shen Jiawei, we went to the studio of his wife **Wang Lan**.



An artist, in her own right, Lan has a very distinctive style.



We ran out of time to hear her story and the inspiration of her paintings, so I learnt more about Wang Lan from this site:

<http://arttrail.com.au/artists/lan/index.html>

Wang Lan is a warm, softly spoken person and our group were fascinated by her art works.



She told us how she had learnt to paint still life as typified in the picture of the lilies, but she has now developed her own style.

We found her work appealing. Here is a picture she is working on:



A member of our group found one of her paintings irresistible and bought it on the spot!



The tour to the Hazelhurst Gallery in Gymea, and to two outstanding artists in Bundeena, was an experience that delighted the eye and gladdened the heart.