Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0777

Shore, Ivy (Billie)

(1915 - 1999)

Born	19150114, Brunswick Victoria Australia
Died	19990825, Paddington New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Artist

Summary

Ivy Shore won the Portia Geach Memorial Art Award (Australia's richest and most prestigious art award for women painters only) with her first entry – a portrait of Della Elliott- in 1979. She went on to win "Most Highly Commended" prizes in the 'Portia' three times thereafter, making her the top winner in the history of the award.

Details

Ivy Shore was born in Brunswick, Victoria on 14 January 1915. She was the youngest of seven children born to New South Wales engineer John Williams and Elka (née Zandover – who came originally from Warsaw and was a leading light in the South Australian suffragette movement. Ivy remembers a photo of her mother being carried shoulder-high by other suffragettes, on the front page of an Adelaide newspaper). Ivy's parents moved often because John Williams was employed in jobs that varied from manager of the government battery at Mt Leonora in Western Australia to managing building projects in Victoria. When he died of influenza in 1919 the family was living in Melbourne, but after John was buried in Coburg Cemetery Elka took the children to Adelaide and settled near the beach at Glenelg. This was where Ivy grew up, in a big house always full of visitors and a happy environment always filled with friends. Ivy's childhood friends (like Lillian Appleton) always called her Billie. After finishing school Ivy trained as a seamstress. In 1936 Ivy met Irvine Alfred (Ray) Shore (b.13 Feb 1903 in Rosatala, South Australia) who was a rising star in financial management. When Ray pursued Ivy, she rejected him at first and ran away to Sydney with her best friend Lillian. But Ray followed her there, and they were eventually married at St Jude's Church of England Randwick on 12 November 1938. They initially lived in Carrington Road, Randwick, and Ray established the offices of Ray Shore Pty Ltd (Financiers) in Castlereagh Street Sydney. Ray's business prospered and by 1950 they had two boys Harvey (14 February 1947) and Russell (29 April 1949) and had moved into a big house at 1 Black Street, Vaucluse. But the marriage did not proceed smoothly, and by 1957 it was failing. Ivy was encouraged by her friends to seek an interest outside the Vaucluse home. Some of them had recently enrolled for art classes with a new painter in Sydney who had just been made a fellow of the Royal Art Society and sold his first Archibald entry to the Art Gallery of NSW. They encouraged Ivy to enrol in his classes too. The new painter was Graeme Inson.

In 1960, Ivy and Ray Shore separated. The home in Vaucluse was sold, and Ivy bought a house at 29 Ocean Street Woollahra. She lived there until she died in 1999. Ivy's relationship with Graeme Inson now strengthened. In 1962, Ray Shore died. Soon afterwards, Graeme also moved into 29 Ocean Street and it also became his home until he died in 2000. Ivy looked after Graeme's domestic needs and shared his professional and social life. Their relationship was extremely harmonious in almost every aspect. Through the 60s Ivy continued to develop her artistic skills under Graeme's tutelage, and he in turn eventually dubbed her "my greatest student." Ivy painted many landscapes and still-life, but always loved portraits best.

Graeme was a strict teacher, who allowed little variance in his Meldrum Method of tonal impressionism. But Ivy was brave enough to follow her own instincts, and develop her own artistic technique beyond the strict Meldrum Method. She also wanted to enter art competitions, but she felt that entering major competitions like the Archibald would put her in conflict with Graeme. So instead she focused on the Portia Geach Memorial Art Award, Australia's richest art competition for women painters only. In 1976, Ivy entered the 'Portia' for the first time with a portrait of Margaret Shore. This was selected by the judges for hanging, and it now hangs permanently at Cheltenham Girls High School where Margaret became a celebrated headmistress.) In succeeding years Ivy continued to enter the 'Portia' with portraits of actress June Salter (1977) and Lorna O'Regan (1978). Her portraits continued to be hung every year.

In 1979, Ivy won the Portia Geach Art Award with her portrait of Kondelia (Della) Elliott, wife of celebrated communist leader of the Australian Seaman's Union Elliot V. Elliott. Ivy's winning entry in the 'Portia' was also her first departure from the strict Meldrum Method taught by Graeme Inson. This departure charmed the 'Portia' judges (including John Coburn and Lady Fairfax) but annoyed Graeme to the extent that he actually walked out of the family celebration and went to live in his studio (which by now had moved from Rowe Street to a building in Sussex Street that had once been The Dundee Arms Hotel.) He later apologised and returned home after a week. Graeme claimed he had been upset by Ivy's departure from the Meldrum Method. Others said he was just miffed that Ivy had beaten him to win a prestigious award, though this does not seem likely because the 'Portia' is open to women artists only. Whatever the reason, they agreed to differ in their styles, and Ivy continued to develop hers, and to enter her developing style in the Portia Geach each year. Her 1980 portrait of Cranbrook School teacher George Woodger was again hung in competition. Her 1981 self-portrait was again hung and was specially 'Commended' by the judges. Her 1982 self-portrait Triptych was again hung and won the 'Highly Commended Award.' So too did her 1986 self-portrait. Ivy's paintings continued to be hung in the 'Portia', and were also hung on many occasions by the judges of the Royal Easter Show Art Prize Exhibition. She was approached often to enter portraits for the Archibald Prize, but her teacher Graeme Inson was also competing for that prize, so Ivy typically chose harmony over honours and left the Archibald to him. Graeme declared that Ivy's work had achieved a 'unique excellence', and took pride in calling her 'my greatest student'. But he continued to express displeasure at her developing style. So Ivy used her 'Portia' prize-money to have a studio built to her specifications by architect Peter Moffitt above the garage of her Woollahra home, and did all her painting from there – away from Graeme's sight. This allowed harmony to remain in their relationship. However a continuing resistance from Graeme eventually slowed Ivy's output. She last entered the 'Portia' with a self-portrait called "Looking Back" (1992), which showed herself looking at the floating images of her face from previous 'Portia' self-portraits. In 1993, she painted "Influences" – a tribute to the five people who had most influenced her developing style. It showed Henry Henke, Robert Haines, Justin O'Brien, Graeme Inson and Lloyd Rees at a dinner table, with Graeme Inson holding forth as usual with a wine glass in hand. This painting now hangs in The Dundee Arms Hotel with others, including Graeme's most loved portrait of Ivy herself, as part of a permanent exhibition mounted as a tribute to Inson and Shore by the Sheraton Group, following their acquisition of the building in 1985.

With this portrait, Ivy ceased painting. She later said it became a choice between her art and her relationship with Graeme Inson – and she chose her relationship! Happily this endured. Ivy continued to look after Graeme's affairs and his classes when he began to travel overseas on extensive painting trips. Their extensive correspondence that resulted from these trips was compiled into a manuscript by Graeme and is now preserved in the archives of the Art Gallery of NSW. Ivy also looked after Graeme when he was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 1996 and successfully operated on.

In 1998, Ivy herself became ill with a swollen spleen. This was eventually removed, but during the operation (at St Vincent's Hospital in Paddington) cancer was discovered. This developed quickly and, sadly, Ivy died on 25 August, 1999. She was cremated in the North Shore Crematorium and her ashes were scattered by Graeme and her two children on the Rose Garden at Centennial Park where she had often taken her children when they were small so they could feed the ducks in the nearby pond.

Graeme Inson continued to live in Ivy's home – for just nine months. On 9 May, 2000 he became suddenly ill while teaching a class of his students, and was rushed to St Vincent's Hospital where Ivy had died nine months earlier. He spent a peaceful night. But on the following morning – 10 May – Graeme suddenly had a massive heart attack and died. His friends said he died from a broken heart!

Graeme was cremated in the same chapel as Ivy, at the North Shore Crematorium, and his ashes were scattered beside hers on the Rose Garden in Centennial Park by his step-sons Harvey and Russell Shore. Their mortal remains now rest together on a bed of roses – a requiem this artistic couple – who always loved laughter – would have truly appreciated.

Her work hangs in many galleries and private collections around Australia and overseas in the United Kingdom and in Paris (France). Ivy was cherished to the end of her rich life and beyond by her sons Harvey and Russell, by many in the Arts community, and by an extraordinarily large circle of loving friends.

Love life and share it, and remember that you are the hero of your own story. IVY SHORE.

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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