

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE26102255

Haxton, Elaine

(1909 - 1999)

Born	19090926, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Died	19990706, Adelaide South Australia Australia
Occupation	Artist, Designer, Painter

Summary

Elaine Haxton was a successful artist, exhibiting and travelling widely throughout her life. She was a six-time Sulman Prize finalist and was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1986 for her services to art, specifically printmaking. Her work is held in private and public collections abroad, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and in regional and state galleries throughout Australia.

Details

The youngest of three children, Elaine Haxton was born in Melbourne but raised in Sydney. Leaving school at fourteen, she enrolled at East Sydney Technical College in 1924. From 1925, she continued her studies on a part-time basis at night while working during the day; first, as a studio assistant for the sculptor Rayner Hoff, which furthered her artistic and literary education, and then as an advertisement illustrator at David Jones department store. After three years in this role, she left in 1928/29 in favour of freelance illustration and design work. During this time, Haxton began to make a name for herself as an artist in Australia. With a desire to continue her studies overseas, she sailed to London in 1933 and found employment shortly after her arrival with the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson Company. She worked here for three years as a commercial artist and her drawings were featured in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Seventeen*, *House and Garden* and *Strand Magazine*. While working, Haxton enrolled in painting and drawing night classes at the Grosvenor School of Art, which strengthened her artistic abilities, particularly in depicting scenes from life.

She returned to Australia in 1939 via New York and Mexico, which she found especially inspiring and piqued her interest in mural painting. Staying in Sydney for the duration of the war, Haxton worked as a painter and illustrator and designed fabrics for Marion Best and Claudio Alcorso. During this time, she found exhibiting opportunities with various institutions but predominantly with Macquarie Galleries. She also became a key member of a group of Sydney artists which included William Dobell, whose portrait of Haxton won the Archibald Prize in 1941.

While she worked across a wide breadth of mediums, murals were regarded as Haxton's specialty, and she produced many in her lifetime. Notably, her 1942 mural 'Le Coq D'Or' commissioned by Sydney restaurant owner Walter Magnus won the Sulman Prize in 1943. In 1945 she accepted the role of stage manager for the Darya Collin dance group performing in Dutch West New Guinea and worked in costume and set design. After winning the George Crouch Memorial Prize in 1946 for her painting 'Mother and Child', she travelled to New York to study at the New School of Theatre Design, and then London. Upon returning to Sydney in 1948, Haxton accepted a commission designing and painting store and window displays for the Anthony Hordern & Sons department store, which led to several more commissions. Throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s, Haxton worked on major theatrical productions, including 'The Three Devils' and 'The Nutcracker' for the Borovansky Australian Ballet Company, 'Twelfth Night' for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre, 'Madame Butterfly' for the Elizabethan Opera and 'Wakooka' for Ballet Australia.

Travelling widely throughout her life, Haxton was the only woman member on Australia's first cultural delegation to China in 1956; a five-week trip which inspired much of her later work. In 1961, she was sponsored by *Women's Day* and *Home* magazine, the Venetian Blind Manufacturers Federation and British Overseas Airways Corporation to travel for three months to much of Asia, America, Europe and the Middle East. An exhibition documenting her travels, 'The World is Mine' opened the following year in Melbourne. During the 1960s, Haxton took to printmaking and studied the medium extensively. First, at the Willoughby Arts Centre in Sydney in 1965, followed by a course at Atelier 17 in Paris in 1969 and then in Kyoto, Japan to study under Tomikichiro Tokuriki later that same year. Throughout the 1970s, she worked as an illustrator for the publisher Angus & Robertson, who recruited her on three major publications: *The Story of China* (1970) by Lo Hui-min; *The Story of Australia* (1974) by Meredith Hooper; and *The Story of Indonesia* (1976) by Maslyn Williams. A work produced during this time, 'Indonesian Suite' (1973-1975), was purchased for the Australian Embassy in Jakarta.

A six-time Sulman finalist, Haxton was awarded numerous prizes and honours including being appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1986 for her services to art, specifically printmaking. Her work is held in private and public collections abroad, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and in regional and state galleries throughout Australia. Elaine Haxton died in 1999 at the age of 89.

Published resources

Book

Australian Painters: Forty profiles, Hetherington, John, 1963

Elaine Haxton: A biography: Achievements in paint and print, Coombes, Paul, 1990

Edited Book

Heritage : the national women's art book, 500 works by 500 Australian women artists from colonial times to 1955, Kerr, Joan, 1995

Edited book

Elaine Haxton: A colourful artist and life, McLoughlin, Lorraine Penny and Julia Beaven (eds), 2021

Article

Elaine Haxton 1909-1999, Thomas, Daniel, 2000

Archival resources

Art Gallery of Western Australia

[Portrait of Elaine Haxton by William Dobell](#)

[Portrait of Elaine Haxton by Judy Cassab](#)

National Portrait Gallery

[Portrait of Elaine Haxton by Max Dupain](#)

National Library of Australia, Oral History Collection

[Elaine Haxton interviewed by Hazel de Berg](#)

National Gallery of Australia

[James Gleeson interviews Elaine Haxton](#)

Author Details

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