

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE6228

Kerr, Joan

(1938 - 2004)

<b>Born</b>	19380221, Sydney New South Wales Australia
<b>Died</b>	20040222, Sydney New South Wales Australia
<b>Occupation</b>	Academic, Art historian, Historian

## Details

Eleanor Joan Lyndon was born in Sydney in 1938. She went to school at Somerville House, Brisbane, before studying English at the University of Queensland. Joan married James Kerr in 1960, after which time she became increasingly interested in art history. The family (which now included two children) moved to Switzerland in 1963 and then on to London. Here, in 1966, Joan enrolled in a two-year diploma in medieval art and architecture at the Courtauld Institute.

Joan and her family returned to Australia in 1968 and the following year she undertook studies in fine arts at the Power Institute, Sydney University. After successfully completing her courses, Joan was offered a tutorship in fine arts, a position she held for five years. Joan then completed a Master of Arts on colonial church architecture before enrolling in a doctorate at the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies at the University of York in 1974. Her husband James had also applied for a doctorate at the University of York, and after undertaking initial fieldwork in Australia, the pair set out for York in August 1975.

The Kerr's returned to Sydney in December 1977. Despite being accepted for the position of Senior Education Officer at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Joan did not take up the position. Instead the family moved to Canberra, where James had been appointed Assistant Director of the Australian Heritage Commission. Joan applied for a job in fine arts at the Australian National University and was offered the position of tutor. Whilst living and working in Canberra, Joan also worked on projects in Sydney, as well as writing reviews of exhibitions on architectural themes. She also contributed to the exhibition *Colonial Gothick: the Gothic Revival in NSW 1800-1850*, which was held at Elizabeth Bay House during March and April 1979. The catalogue for the exhibition was published as a book, entitled *Gothick Taste in the Colony of New South Wales*.

In 1981 Joan began a probationary lectureship in fine arts at Sydney University, in addition to becoming a member of the architectural Advisory Panel of the National Trust of Australia. It was around this time that Joan began writing and editing one of her most significant works: *The Dictionary of Australian Artists: painters, sketchers, photographers and engravers to 1870*. At the time of its publication in 1992, the text contained almost 2,500 entries. Another of her major works, *Heritage: the national women's art book*, was released in 1995. *Heritage* celebrated a program of nation-wide exhibitions which Joan masterminded. To commemorate the 20th anniversary of International Women's Year in 1995, 146 galleries, museums and libraries around Australia held simultaneous exhibitions of work by female artists under the umbrella of the National Women's Art Exhibition.

Joan was elected a fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1993 and two years later she was awarded the National Trust senior heritage award. In 1994 Joan moved to the University of New South Wales, where she worked as a research professor in art history and theory at the College of Fine Arts. She left this position in 1997 to become inaugural professor and convenor of program in Australian art at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University. Joan eventually returned to the College of Fine Arts as a visiting professor.

In 2001 Joan Kerr was awarded the Centenary Medal 'for service to Australian society and the humanities in the study of Australian arts'. Additionally, in 2003, she became the second woman to be granted an honorary life membership of the Royal Australian Historical Society for services to Australian History.

On 14 June 2004 Joan was also awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) 'for service to education and to the arts, particularly through research in the fields of architecture and art history, and through encouraging the study and recognition of Australian women artists'.

## Archival resources

### National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Joan Kerr, 1980-2005 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Papers relating to the National Women's Art Exhibition 1995, 1992-1995 \[manuscript\]](#)

### National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Joan Kerr interviewed by Martin Thomas \[sound recording\]](#)

## Author Details

Alannah Croom

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