Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0077

Cassab, Judy

(1920 - 2015)

Born	19200815, Vienna Austria
Died	20151103, Randwick New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Artist

Summary

Judy Cassab is one of Australia's best known portrait painters and the winner of many prestigious art awards including the coveted Archibald Prize. Austrian-born and of Hungarian parents, Judy Cassab emigrated to Australia in 1951 with her husband and two children. In Australia, she quickly gained a reputation for her distinctive expressionist technique and portrait abilities. In 1969 Judy was appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for her service to the visual arts. In 1988 she was also appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO). Following the publication of her diaries in 1995, Sydney University conferred upon her the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters (Hon. PhD). In 1996 she also won the Nita B. Kibble Award for women writers.

Details

When she was 12, Judy Cassab began two practices that would become lifelong rituals; she started painting and began to keep a diary. Later in life, in a retrospective moment, the internationally renowned portrait painter and published diarist explained how painting and writing came to feature so prominently in her life:

'I had always thought that I expressed my thoughts with a brush. I never knew that I could write. Writing, I thought, is just a habit like washing my teeth; I could not go to bed without doing it. I do not feel anxious about my paintings. I can always paint others. It is different with the diaries. I lost the first 11 years of my diaries when they were left in my childhood home in Beregszász and perished during the war. I lost everything else I had there. But objects, even beautiful objects are replaceable. One can never recapture a 12-year-old self.'

Judy Cassab was born Judy Kaszab in Vienna, Austria, in 1920, to Hungarian parents. In 1929 the Kaszab family returned to Hungary where her parents separated and Judy spent the rest of her childhood years living in her grandmother's house.

In 1939, only after making him promise that their marriage would not stand in the way of her being a painter, Judy married Jancsi Kampfner. Jancsi not only kept the promise throughout their long marriage but was sometimes the one who had to creatively enforce it when Judy herself was willing to put her traveling aspirations aside if it meant being able to stay with her husband and young children. Judy recalls that during one of her crying fits about a proposed overseas trip, Jancsi who was staying behind with the children, finally exclaimed 'we are only half of your life. Stop being such a coward.'

The first years of their marriage were plagued with the horrors of World War II. Jancsi was sent to a forced slave labour camp and was one of the few to survive. It was Jancsi who, nonetheless, encouraged Judy, if the opportunity were to arise, to flee to Budapest to study painting. She did. Between 1939 and 1949 she studied art in Prague and the Budapest Academy and although her studies were interrupted by Nazi occupation, she managed to survive by going underground and hiding her Jewish identity. It was the first time in my life,' she says, 'that I was not a girl, not a woman, not a human being, but a Jew'. After many years of hardship and loss, in 1951, already an accomplished painter, Judy, Jancsi and their two Budapest-born sons, were able to emigrate to Australia.

Since her first solo exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney in 1953, Judy Cassab has held well over fifty solo exhibitions throughout Australia as well as in Paris and London. In 1969, as the only woman to have won the Archibald Prize twice and having collected another 10 major art prizes, Judy Cassab was appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for her service to the visual arts. In 1988 she also appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO).

Published resources

Electronic Journal
Portrait of a Life: JUDY CASSAB (1920), Baer, Daniel, 1999,
http://www.theharvardadvocate.com/winter99/cassab.html

Resource Section
Diaries, Cassab, Judy, 1996,
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Judy Cassab: selected solo shows, The Doug Moran National Portrait Prize,
http://www.moranhealthcare.com.au/art/1996/cassab.html

Resource
Judy Cassab, Eva Breuer Art Dealer,
http://www.evabreuerartdealer.com.au/cassab.html

Judy Cassab, BMGART,
http://users.senet.com.au/~bmgart/cassab.html

Artists Represented [Judy Cassab], Wagner Art Gallery,
http://wagnerartgallery.com.au/artists3.html

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http://www.art-galleries-schubert.com.au/www/Judy_Cassab/Judy_Cassab.htm

Judy Cassab: a selection from the gallery, Greythorn Galleries Fine Art,
http://www.greythorngalleries.com.au/judy_cassab.htm

Guide to the Records of the Rudy Komon Art Gallery, 1959-1984, National Library of Australia, 2001,
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A dictionary of women artists of Australia, Germaine, Max, c.1991

Judy Cassab, artists and friends, Klepac, Lou, 1988

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Monash Biographical Dictionary of 20th Century Australia, Arnold, John and Morris, Deirdre, 1994

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Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html

Archival resources

Australian Dictionary of Biography
Judy Cassab

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Judy Cassab interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection [sound recording]

Judy Cassab interviewed by Barbara Blackman [sound recording]

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Judy Cassab, 1944-2006 [manuscript]

Records of the Rudy Komon Art Gallery, 1959-1984 [manuscript]

Australian Jewish Historical Society Archives
Cassab, Judy, artist

State Library of New South Wales
Cutler family - papers, 1909-1995

National Gallery of Australia
James Gleeson interviews Judy Cassab

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Created 12 August 2002
Last modified 10 March 2026