Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00779

O’Connor, Kathleen Laetitia

(1876 - 1968)

Born	18760914, Hokitika New Zealand
Died	19680824, Perth Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Painter

Summary

Kathleen O’Connor was born in New Zealand in 1876 to Charles Yelverton O’Connor and his wife Susan Laetitia. She was educated at Marsden School, Wellington, then taught privately after 1891, when the family moved to Perth, Western Australia, in order for her father to take up a post as a government civil engineer. Kathleen O’Connor then studied art at Perth Technical College, and later in London and Paris, where she relocated in 1910. There she attended night classes and immersed herself fully in the artistic and cultural milieu that Paris offered, attending galleries and lectures, and writing about her experiences for Perth newspapers.

O’Connor began exhibiting extensively – in the Salons d’ Automne (1911-32), des Independants, and de la Société des Artistes Français. She moved to London in 1914 and exhibited with the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers in 1915 and the National Portrait Society in 1916, before returning to Paris. In the early 1920s she began working in the decorative arts and fashion, as well as interior design and fabric painting. In 1926 she returned to Australia, working briefly for David Jones and Grace Brothers department stores, producing hand-painted plates and fabrics. After a solo exhibition in Perth, O’Connor returned to France in 1927. She kept working, and exhibiting regularly – in 1934 at la Société Internationale des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs, and Exposition des Femmes Artistes d’Europe, Musée du Jeu de Paume and Galéries J. Allard in 1937. She left Paris in 1940 just as the Germans were arriving, and spent the remainder of World War II in Britain.

Returning to Paris after the War, she found her Paris studio expropriated. After exhibiting in Nice in 1948, she returned to Fremantle with 200 pictures, which were impounded, subject to 20% import tax. She was forced to destroy 150 pictures and pay the tax on the rest, despite being an Australian citizen and not liable. She exhibited in 1948 at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and at Perth’s Claude Hotchin Gallery in 1949 and 1950. After another trip to Paris, she settled reluctantly in Western Australia in 1955. O’Connor won the Western Australian section of the Perth Prize Competition in 1958 and the B.P. prize, Commonwealth Games art competition in 1962, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia held a retrospective in 1967. O’Connor died in Perth in 1968. Since she had refused to be buried there, her ashes were scattered in the sea.

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book
New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art, McCulloch, Alan; McCulloch, Susan; McCulloch, Emily Childs, 2006

Chasing shadows: the art of Kathleen O'Connor, Gooding, Janda, 1996

Kathleen O'Connor: Artist in Exile, Hutchings, P. AE., and Lewis, Julie, 1987

Resource Section
O'Connor, Kathleen Laetitia (1876-1968), Watson, James, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110061b.htm

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

Archival resources

State Library of Western Australia
Papers, 1911-1981 [manuscript]

[Interview with Kathleen O'Connor] / [interviewed by Hazel de Berg]

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Kathleen O'Connor interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the Hazel de Berg collection [sound recording]

Ernest Lee-Steere interviewed by Helen Topliss [sound recording]

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Julie Lewis, 1931-1995 [manuscript]

Author Details
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