

---

# Castlemaine Art

---

## Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize



Dober, *Leaning Tree (Nuggetty Hills)*, watercolour and gouache on paper, 112 x 152 cm.

Usually my multi-sheet works on paper, shown at public and regional galleries in art prizes, are sent and returned by Australia Post, and pinned to the gallery wall.

But on the occasion of the Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize at Bendigo Art Gallery (ends 8 December) I displayed the work (above) in a frame and had it transported by courier. My work was made on location at the Nuggetty Hills, near Maldon, at two spots, 20 metres apart, a composite landscape.

The winner of the \$50,000 prize was Jahnne Pasco-White for her abstract work *messmates 1*.



Connie Burns, *Atrabilious* (detail of 20 metre installation), charcoal and ink on paper.

## Connie Burns at Upstairs 22 Gallery, Castlemaine

Connie Burns is a Bendigo artist, and in September she showed her wall-size charcoal and ink drawings on paper at Castlemaine's Upstairs 22 Gallery. These were made on site in a forested environment along the Murray River.

The artist told me how she pressed paper against fallen trees and rubbed willow charcoal on to wetted paper. Some additional reworking with black ink – to deepen the tonal range – was undertaken back in the studio. I see in this work a frenetic energy as well as an overarching harmony. A larger format of these wonderfully evocative and immersive drawings was previously shown at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery.

## Clarice Beckett and Rick Amor in the Castlemaine Art Museum (CAM) collection

Among my favourite artists represented in the CAM collection are Clarice Beckett and Rick Amor.

**Clarice Beckett** (1887 – 1935) was a Melbourne artist who spent about a year studying with the influential tonalist painter, teacher and theorist, Max Meldrum, before adapting what she learnt to her own unique and Whistler-like style.

The CAM collection lists 5 signature small works from Beckett: made in the 1920s, four are plein-air landscapes and one a still life. Three of the works were bequeathed by Maud Rowe (in 1937) who was a friend of the artist and a student of Meldrum, one was the gift of the artist's sister (in 1936), and the other a gift (in 2013) of Jane Desailly.



Clarice Beckett, *Wet Evening*, oil on cardboard, 26 x 30 cm, c1927. Castlemaine Art Museum

Melbourne artist **Rick Amor** (b. 1948) is known for compelling, dark and brooding landscapes and streetscapes that infuse observation with imagination. Amor is also one of the nation's pre-eminent portrait painters.

CAM has a substantial collection of Amor's work: 32 works are cited. This includes 8 oil paintings and 7 watercolours and gouaches. By way of comparison, the National Gallery of Victoria cites 50 works by Amor, but of these only 2 are oils, and none are watercolours or gouaches. The Art Gallery of Ballarat cites 38 works by Amor, while Bendigo Art Gallery has 6 works by the artist.

The particularly strong collection of Amor's work at CAM and the Art Gallery of Ballarat is mostly the result of personal connections established between the artist and previous directors of these galleries, respectively Peter Perry and Gordon Morrison (though so far as CAM is concerned, around 20 years ago, several paintings were gifted by Mrs Beth Sinclair).

Recently I spoke to Perry about his acquiring Amor's work for CAM's collection. Over a considerable period of time Perry assembled this donated work, visiting the artist's Melbourne studio to make his selections. Perry sought to acquire work across a range of media – oils, watercolours, drawings, prints and sculptures. Perry explained to me that he had a particular interest in the artist's plein-air studies – a huge body of work in both oils and watercolour made in hundreds of plein-air outings. This work is generally not included in the artist's regular exhibitions at Niagra Galleries in Richmond.

In 2013, the last year of Perry's long tenure as director of Castlemaine Art Gallery (as it was then known), Perry's memorable exhibition, *Rick Amor: from Study to Painting* graced the gallery walls. A catalogue accompanied the exhibition, and the exhibition was

reviewed in a feature article by Christopher Allen in *The Australian* newspaper (*World of Artifice*, 29 June 2013). Several of Amor's works entered CAM's collection (as donations) at this point (no Amor's have been added to the collection since then). Unfortunately, it has been years since any of Amor's work has been on display at CAM.

Meanwhile, over at the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Amor instituted a biannual and acquisitive Drawing Prize for small works. This was last held in 2016 (the gallery discontinued the prize). The last time I visited Ballarat a large painting of Amor's from the Gallery's collection was on show.

CAM's collection of Beckett's work, and almost entirely Amor's work (Perry purchased a charcoal drawing in 1984) has been built from donations. Relying on donations from both collectors and artists to build regional gallery collections is quite the norm for many regional galleries, according to a recent article by Gina Fairley in *Arts Hub* (4 September 2019). The author notes that Sarah Gurich, Director of Bathurst Regional Art Gallery (BRAG), puts donated art works at 50% of the BRAG collection. The Mosman Art Gallery Director puts gifts from artists and collectors at 60%. But there was some disagreement about whether donating is increasing or decreasing.

## The real: Matthew Collings and Facebook

Did you watch the fresh and fearless British TV series, *This is Modern Art*, presented by Matthew Collings in 1999, with episode titles like *The Shock of the Now?* Collings remains an active commentator on art showing in London. This includes a constant stream of coverage on Facebook, including this exchange with me on 6 September 2019:

**Matthew:** ...*Like painting a landscape – there's no "landscape" already out there, which you're accurately getting down: there's an incoherent load of visual stuff out there from which you're improvising a visual order...*

**Me:** "An incoherent load of visual stuff" is overstating things. Just as getting it down accurately isn't possible. The reality in painting grounded in observation lies somewhere between – selection, emphasis, in a word interpretation, is inevitable (and hopefully original and of interest rather than clichéd).

**Matthew:** ...*The incoherent load of stuff referred to is reality out there, which is indeed an incoherent load of stuff. Art's job is to order it.*

## Upcoming Castlemaine and Maldon painting workshops

I am tutoring a number of painting workshops late November and early December: details are posted on my website: [www.markdober.com](http://www.markdober.com)

---

To *unsubscribe* to my newsletter please email me: [info@markdober.com](mailto:info@markdober.com)