



## PRINTMAKER GALLERY

### Charles Blackman

Charles Blackman (born 12 August 1928) is one of the best known Australian artists still living today, especially for the famous *Schoolgirl* and *Alice in Wonderland* series of the 1950s. He was a member of the Antipodeans, a group of Melbourne painters that also included Arthur Boyd, David Boyd, John Brack, Robert Dickerson, John Perceval and Clifton Pugh.

Blackman, born 12 August 1928 in Sydney, left school at 13 and worked as an illustrator with the Sydney *Sun* newspaper while attending night classes at East Sydney Technical College (1943–46). He was later awarded an honorary doctorate. He came to notice following his move to Melbourne in the mid-1940s, where he became friends with Joy Hester, John Perceval and Laurence Hope as well as gaining the support of critic and art patron John Reed. His work met critical acclaim through his early *Schoolgirl* and *Alice* series, the latter Blackman's conception of Lewis Carroll's most famous character. For some time while painting the Alice series, Blackman worked as a cook at a cafe run by art dealer, George Mora and his wife, fellow artist Mirka Mora. Blackman married the poet Barbara Patterson in 1951.

In 1959 he was a signatory to the Antipodean Manifesto,<sup>[1]</sup> a statement protesting the dominance of abstract expressionism. The manifesto's adherents have been dubbed the Antipodeans Group. His work is associated with dreamlike images tinged with mystery and foreboding. In 1960 he lived in London after winning the Helena Rubenstein Scholarship, settling in Sydney upon his return six years later. In 1970 he moved to Paris, when awarded the atelier studio in the Cité des Artes. He lived there for a year at the same time as John Coburn, and subsequently returned often, as Paris was an eternal source of inspiration.

His strong friendships with fellow artists led to field trips, sessions with models, cultural interchanges with poets, writers, musicians and worked with the ballet, doing set designs, i.e. Daisy Bates. After 27 years of marriage, Patterson divorced Blackman in 1978 and he married the young artist Genevieve de Courvreur. He married a third wife, Victoria Bower in 1989, who he also later divorced. He has six children, Auguste, Christabel, Barnaby, Beatrice, Felix and Axiom. He has won many prizes and distinctions, culminating in a major retrospective in 1993 and an OBE for services to Australian art in 1997.

A portrait of Charles Blackman by Jon Molvig won the Archibald Prize in 1966.

After years of alcohol abuse, Blackman now suffers from Korsakoff's syndrome, a brain disorder affecting memory. After suffering a stroke and heart attack in 1994, Blackman has subsequently been under full-time care. The subject of ownership of Blackman's paintings has been a controversial issue, though his former wife Barbara maintained that her possession of some of them had been for the sake of preservation and that she intended to donate them to galleries.<sup>[2]</sup> This commitment may have been met by the donation of five works to the National Gallery of Australia in August 2010. In a statement published by the Canberra Times newspaper, Ms Blackman said that, "At Easter my house was flooded. No paintings were damaged but since then I have been giving paintings to public collections. I have no valuable Blackmans left in my collection..."<sup>[3]</sup>

Blackman has repeatedly expressed disdain for the concept of making money from or maintaining exclusive ownership of his paintings. His accountant and close friend, Tom Lowenstein, set up the Charles Blackman Trust to manage the painter's affairs. Lowenstein periodically sells off the works that Blackman still owns to ensure Blackman's expenses are taken care of.<sup>[4]</sup> Blackman lives a simple but happy life in his rented home in Sydney. He meets with friends and fellow artists Judy Cassab and Marina Finlay twice a month to draw and have "passionate discussions" about art.<sup>[4]</sup>

In August 2010, The Blackman hotel opened in St Kilda Road, Melbourne. It features 670 digitally reproduced fine art prints by Charles Blackman.<sup>[5]</sup>

Charles Blackman (b.1928)

## Biography

1928 Born Sydney, Australia

1943-46 Studied East Sydney Technical College

1945-60 Lived and painted in Melbourne

1950s Painted Schoolgirl series, followed by Alice in Wonderland series

1960-64 Travelled and studied overseas after winning Helena Rubinstein Scholarship

Lived and painted in London, exhibited at Whitechapel and Tate Galleries

1965 Tour of northern France and Flanders

1966-74 Lived and painted in Sydney

1975 Occupied Australian Studio, Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris

1976-2001 Lived and painted in NSW, Queensland, WA

Currently lives in Sydney

## Solo Exhibitions

1953-93 Numerous solo exhibitions in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, London and Tokyo, including a major retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria, 1993 - Charles Blackman: Schoolgirls and Angels

## Awards

1997 OBE

1963 Georges Invitation Art Prize, Georges Gallery Melbourne (one painting and one drawing)

1960 Helena Rubinstein Scholarship, Melbourne

1960 George Crouch Prize, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery

1960 Wins prize. A. Shore, The Age (February)

1958 George Crouch Prize, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery

1958 Rowney Prize, Richmond Gallery Melbourne

## Collections

National Gallery of Australia, and all state galleries

Numerous regional galleries and university collections

## Selected Bibliography

- 1993 Charles Blackman: Schoolgirls and Angels, catalogue for retrospective at National Gallery Victoria  
1989 Shapcott, T., The Art of Charles Blackman, Andre Deutch, London  
1983 Amadio, N., Orpheus the Song of Forever, Craftsman Press, Sydney  
1982 Amadio, N., Charles Blackman's Paris Dreaming, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Sydney  
1980 Amadio, N., Charles Blackman: The Lost Domain, A.H. & A.W. Reed. Sydney  
1967 Shapcott, T., Focus on Charles Blackman, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane  
1965 Mathew, R., Charles Blackman - Monograph, Georgian House, Melbourne