

Melbourne Miss Havisham emerges at women's art sale

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Leonard Joel's 10th annual Women Artists auction takes place on Monday night in Melbourne, with celebrated names placed alongside unknowns whose apparently grim biographies could rival Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

Who's heard of **Jessie Lavington Evans**, who was born in 1860? Very few, Saleroom would suggest.



(Farm Scene), by Jessie Lavington Evans (1860-1943), carries an estimate of \$2000 to \$4000 in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction to be held in Melbourne on Monday.

Yet Evans appears in this year's Women Artists catalogue with a beautiful, bucolic painting titled (*Farm Scene*), in oil on canvas, estimated at just \$2000 to \$4000.

Aesthetically similar to the work of her old art school classmate **Frederick McCubbin**, (*Farm Scene*) is only the 19th of Evans' art works to come to auction – and only the fourth since 2012. Her average historical price is \$1514 for paintings and \$1157 for drawings. Of the two works sold this year, the consignors of (*Farm Scene*) will be hoping for a repeat of the bidding on *Beach Shack*, which sold at Lawsons in February for \$3191 on an estimate of \$400 to \$600.

Such appreciation for women artists was seen at last month's big mid-year sales of Australian art, when many of the works that sailed above their estimates were by women artists. Maybe a successful outing for Evans will shake more of her works out of storage.

Evans was recognised during her lifetime with various art prizes, but seems to have stopped exhibiting in her mid-30s, probably thanks to the social mores of her day.

In a fairly typical mindset of the times, Evans' father pronounced that women did not sell their work in public. If his daughter did so, people might doubt his ability to support his family. So that was that. One imagines that from then on, the discouraged but talented artist shared her work only with a close circle.

According to Leonard Joel senior art specialist Hannah Ryan, the Evans family home was called Clifton, and was at 14 Dendy Road at Brighton in Melbourne. After Evans' parents died, she and her sister Ethel remained in Clifton until their own

deaths a few months apart in 1943. By then, Evans had lived at Clifton for more than 50 years.

Evans' paintings in Clifton, along with the sisters' other possessions inside the house, were dispersed at an executors' auction in 1944. The Clifton address is written on the stretcher at the back of (*Farm Scene*).

Ryan says Evans "quietly sustained" her practice over many decades, venturing out to paint plein air landscapes around Brighton and nearby Beaumaris.

In 1906, after her parents' death, she became a drawing and painting teacher in private practice.

"While many of the artists she had once studied alongside rose to prominence, Evans continued to paint largely away from public view, her occupation simply recorded as 'house duties,'" Ryan writes.

"Though much of her work remained unseen during her lifetime, the paintings she left behind offer a glimpse into a practice quietly sustained over many decades."

Evans studied at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School from 1880 to 1891 and again from 1903 to 1904.



A Good Haul, by Jessie Macqueen Mackintosh, carries an estimate of \$2000 to \$4000 at Leonard Joel.

There, she studied alongside now-celebrated Australian artists such as **McCubbin** (who was a pupil there during Evans' time and became the school's drawing master in 1886), **Arthur Streeton** (who took night classes in drawing from 1882 to 1887), **Emanuel Phillips Fox** (who was there from 1878 to 1886), as well as more recently "discovered" female artists such as **Jane Sutherland** and **Josephine Muntz Adams**. Muntz Adams was at the school in 1882, and again in 1884-89. She has a work in next week's Women Artists auction.

Elsewhere in the auction are works by women born later than Evans who had more societal agency.

Jessie Macqueen Mackintosh, for example, was born in 1892 – 32 years after Evans – and also studied at the National Gallery of Victoria School. Mackintosh later studied with modern artist **George Bell**, who dubbed her “Messy Jackintosh”.

Mackintosh was secretary and treasurer of the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors between 1951 and 1957. She illustrated board games for John Sands.

Some of her linocut prints ended up in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5zusc>]. In the Leonard Joel auction, both of Mackintosh's works are linocuts. They are *Fruit Stall*, 1936, and a fishing scene titled *A Good Haul*. Each carries an estimate of \$2000 to \$4000.



Sherbrooke, by Clarice Beckett, carries an estimate of \$30,000 to \$40,000 at Leonard Joel.

Like the aforementioned Evans, **Clarice Beckett** was the ultimate neglected artist until curator Rosalind Hollinrake discovered a cache of her work mouldering in a shed near Benalla, Victoria, in 1970.

Beckett is now widely exhibited and avidly studied. She is one of the most prolific artists on the Australian Art Sales Database, with 485 works offered at auction and

her highest price of \$331,364 (including buyer's premium) fetched for a work called *The Boat Sheds* in 2021.

Fittingly, Beckett's work carries the highest estimate in this year's sale. An oil on board titled *Sherbrooke*, it's a landscape in which a dirt track curves invitingly away through the landscape. The estimate is \$30,000 to \$40,000.



Girl Reading, 1963 (also known as Girl Reading at a Table), by Margaret Olley, carries an estimate of \$25,000 to \$35,000 at Leonard Joel.

The second-highest estimate in the sale is \$25,000 to \$35,000 for **Margaret Olley's** early work, *Girl Reading*, 1963. At that time, Olley had begun painting Indigenous

women from the Joyce Wilding OPAL Hostel in South Brisbane, not far from her home.

Alice Maud Stone, 1890-1962, is so little known that her work has only appeared twice before at auction. In Leonard Joel's Women Artists, Stone's oil painting, *Still Life*, 1947, is a gorgeous riot of pink, white and green on a brown tabletop. The estimate on this very pretty work is \$800 to \$1200.



The Lands Office, Sydney (Cnr Bent and Loftus), 1962, by Margaret Olley, carries an estimate of \$20,000 to \$30,000 in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction in Melbourne on Monday.

Stone had success in her lifetime, with her portrait of former Australian prime minister Sir Robert Menzies' sister, Mrs Isobel Alice (Belle) Green, hung in the 1943 Archibald Prize.

Mary Cecil Allen is another name that has all but faded from history. Allen was born in Melbourne in 1893 and, like so many others, attended the National Gallery of Victoria School. She later studied in New York and London.



(Reflections) c1920, by Mary Cecily Allen, carries an estimate of \$5000 to \$7000 in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction, to be held in Melbourne on Monday.

Only 20 of Allen's artworks have ever come to auction. Her picture in Women Artists is titled (*Reflections*), c.1920, and depicts a tranquil pond with overhanging trees. The estimate is \$5000 to \$7000.

"She was an important art figure," Leonard Joel head of art Wiebke Brix told Saleroom.

"In 1925, she became the first woman appointed as an art critic for *The Sun*, followed a year later by her appointment as the National Gallery of Victoria's first female guide.



In the Valley, Merano, by Ethel Carrick Fox, carries an estimate of \$8000 to \$12,000 at Leonard Joel.

"At a time when few women held such important public roles in the arts, she became an influential voice."



Flowers with Ranunculus, c1950, by Alison Rehfisch carries an estimate of \$6000 to \$8000 at Leonard Joel.

At the other end of the visibility spectrum is **Ethel Carrick Fox**, one of the most traded artists on the Australian Art Sales Database with 823 works offered and three works sold for over \$1 million each [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5o7au>].

Carrick Fox's lovely gouache on paper, titled *In the Valley, Merano*, has an estimate of \$8000 to \$12,000 in the Women Artists auction.



Visiting Day, 1937, by Lill Tschudi, carries an estimate of \$10,000 to \$15,000 in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction.

Another well-known artist in the sale is **Alison Rehfisch**, born 1900. Almost 400 of her works have come to auction, and the one in this sale is the impeccably designed oil on canvas, *Flowers with Ranunculus*, c1950, whose estimate is \$6000 to \$8000.

Brix says there is still much to uncover about the contribution of women artists in Australia, in spite of intense institutional interest in female artists.

Brix says this features makes women artists an interesting category, “and one in which dedicated collectors can still discover overlooked gems with significant

potential for growth”.



Ida Rentoul Outhwaite's *Back to Fairyland* carries an estimate of \$5000 to \$7000 at Leonard Joel.

The Women Artists sale has gone well for Leonard Joel since the series' inception in 2017. The first auction realised sales of \$248,631 (including buyer's premium). Last year the figure was \$506,188.

This year the estimates range from \$373,300 to \$550,800. These figures do not include buyer's premium.



(Etaples), by Iso Rae, carries an estimate of \$5000 to \$7000 in Leonard Joel's Women Artists auction.

Leonard Joel managing director John Albrecht told Saleroom he continues to back the dedicated Women Artists sale because it's commercially successful for his company and "a joy" to see modestly priced works singled out for special attention when they might otherwise be lost in the general flood of consignments.

"We probably sell things to an institution in every one of those auctions," Albrecht said.



Vida Lahey's *Still Life with Garden Roses*, c1930, carries an estimate of \$5000 to \$7000 at Leonard Joel.

Hannah Ryan had just drawn his attention to a work estimated at \$800 to \$1200 in the forthcoming Women Artists sale, and told him two institutions were interested in it. Albrecht declined to name the artist, not wishing to upset potential institutional buyers.

Other notable works in the Women Artists auction this year include *Visiting Day*, 1937, a linocut by **Lill Tschudi** with an estimate of \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Ida Rentoul Outhwaite's *Back to Fairyland*, in ink on card; **Iso Rae's** (*Etaples*), in oil on card, and **Vida Lahey's** *Still Life with Garden Roses*, all carry an estimate of \$5000 to \$7000.

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Elizabeth Fortescue writes the Saleroom column and about the visual arts. She was previously arts editor at The Daily Telegraph and is Australia correspondent for The Art Newspaper.