

Sonia Skipper – A Retrospective Exhibition

Barn Gallery, Montsalvat

Opening January 29

Sonia Skipper, a founding artist of Montsalvat died in 2008. A Retrospective of her work is to be held at Montsalvat. The paintings span a lifetime of work and include her early pieces under the tuition of Justus Jörgensen to the recent pastel works on paper painted in her home at Renmark, SA.

Sonia grew up around Ivanhoe and was the second eldest child of Mervyn and Lena Skipper. Helen Skipper, now deceased was the eldest child and Matcham the youngest and last surviving member of that Skipper generation.

Sonia moved with her family to a cottage on the grounds of Montsalvat as a teenager and began a life influenced under the guidance of Justus Jörgensen, the charismatic man who was able to inspire many people to fulfil his dream of creating an artists haven for creativity building and stimulation.

During her life at Montsalvat she was part of a large team of family and supporter artisans who laboured lovingly under Justus to create what we now know as the famous artist colony on the hill in Eltham. She had a well rounded artistic education which included stone carving, hand building, mud brick and pise building, oil painting, drawing and sculpture in all its forms. Many of the gargoyles around the magnificent buildings of Montsalvat seen today have been carved or sculptured by Sonia. The artefacts have been a collective effort and not easily identified historically as by a particular artist.

Sonia began exhibiting her paintings and sculptures in local and Victorian galleries and her work was readily sought after for private collections. She also worked in an apprentice master manner on many of the paintings seen around Montsalvat by Justus Jörgensen. Justus ran his collective of artists in the old world tradition of studio practice whereby the student would be responsible for many of the beginnings of his work which was seen as educative for the student.

The early influences of Sonia were directly in line with the Max Meldrum School of tonal painting. She was a family friend of the much acclaimed Clarrice Becket and attended the annual artists camp at San-Remo along with the Jörgensen and Skipper families.

Sonia bore her first child (Saskia) to Arthur Monday fellow artist while living at Montsalvat and later left the enclave to begin work as a dairy herd tester on Phillip Island and Gippsland. It was difficult for an artist to have an identity under the powerful influence of Justus; Sonia was a strong minded and independent woman who dared to leave the grasp of the colony. She then began her relationship with Joe Hannan who was her life partner with whom she bore her second child; Mervyn Hannan. The family moved to a cottage in Eltham moved again in the 1960s to Research where she continued her work as an exhibiting artist.

Sonia had a great love of the desert and made numerous painting trips to the inland with fellow artists such as Alan Martin and Myra Skipper. She suffered from chronic asthma and found the local environment difficult and moved to the Riverland in South Australia in 1981 where she could live closer to the desert regions and the warmer climate beneficial to her health.

During her time in South Australia she made a name for herself through her art work and teaching.. She was also awarded the title by the South Australian Government as a 'Living Treasurer' and was part of the travelling exhibition of South Australian artists Livings Treasures 'Living Treasures-Artists Working Over Time'.

Another collaborative work can be seen gracing the Ivanhoe Catholic Church; a base relief work undertaken with her brother Matcham Skipper to produce the Stations of the Cross.

The works in the forthcoming retrospective exhibition to be held in the Barn Gallery at Montsalvat will showcase a large number of works from her early drawings and paintings executed at Montsalvat to the more recent works from her studio at Renmark. Most of the works have not been exhibited before and many are from her sketch books. It is an important documentary tracing of the unfolding working life of an artist and fitting that this work be shown on the walls of the place she began her artistic journey.

Sonia Skipper died May 21 2008, aged 90. The works will be for sale.

The exhibition will be opened by Rosalind Hollinrake on January 29 at 6.30 pm.

For further information and preview of works in preparation for hanging Jenni Mitchell & Mervyn Hannan
(03) 9439 3458 Mob. 0417 585 102 Mob. 0411 423 886 email: jenni@jennimitchell.com.auRSVP Montsalvat
9439 7712 or 9439 3458.