

JOHN THOMAS RIGBY

1922 - 2012

Compiled by Mark T. Rigby

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Artist Biography

- 1922 Born in Brisbane on 9 December. Later lived at Palen Creek south-west of Brisbane, briefly in Brisbane again, and then near the Glass House Mountains north of Brisbane by the early 1930s.
- 1937-38 Studied art at Central Technical College, Brisbane.
- 1939-42 Worked briefly at the Victor Day & Son sign-writing company and then in commercial art at National Advertising in Brisbane.
- 1941 First public showing of work (Royal Queensland Art Society Annual Exhibition in Brisbane).
- 1942-46 Served in the Australian Military Forces, mainly in Townsville and Mareeba, Queensland, and then New Guinea and New Britain. Initially with the 101 Australian Anti-Tank (later re-named the 101 Australian Tank Attack Regiment) and then with 1st Australian Army Intelligence.
- 1946-47 Worked as a freelance commercial artist with National Advertising in Brisbane and was sports cartoonist for *The Sunday Mail*, Brisbane.
- 1948-50 Studied for a Diploma in Fine Art at East Sydney Technical College under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme.
- 1949 Married Shirley Walker.
- 1951 Awarded a Diploma in Fine Art in January; returned to painting and freelancing in commercial art at Noble Bartlett (later George Patterson Noble Bartlett) in Brisbane, living in the suburb of Kedron. John and Shirley separated.
- 1954 First showing in the Archibald Prize for 1953 (exhibited as a finalist Jan/Feb 1954) with a portrait of Jon Molvig. First one-man exhibition at The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane. Son Mark born. Began presenting private art classes at St Mary's Church Hall, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane.
- 1955 Won the *Italian Government Travelling Art Scholarship* (organised by the National Gallery Society of New South Wales and the Dante Alighieri Society).

- 1956-58 Sailed from Australia with wife Margaret and son Mark on 29 August 1956 to live and paint in Italy. Later visited England and France.
- 1957 One of 10 finalists in *The Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize*.
- 1958 Arrived back in Australia in late January and resumed working in commercial art and painting in Brisbane. Won Australia's then richest art prize, *The Australian Women's Weekly Art Prize* for best portrait (of wife Margaret) in September. Daughter Renée born.
- 1959 Won three Queensland centenary year art prizes.
- 1961 Founding Executive Member, *Contemporary Art Society, Queensland Branch*.
- 1962 Moved to Brisbane's western suburbs. Son Anthony born.
- 1963 Won the *Sir John Sulman Prize* for 1962, Art Gallery of NSW and *The Melrose Prize*, Art Gallery of South Australia. Other prizes followed in the 1960s and 1970s.
- c.1966 Started *Rigby Studio*, an advertising art studio with staff.
- 1969-87 Appointed as a Trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery by the Queensland Governor for four years from 16 May 1969, but served for 18 years. He helped guide the move of the Queensland Art Gallery from its original Gregory Terrace building to temporary quarters and then to the purpose-built facility at South Bank, Brisbane in 1982.
- 1972 Left the field of commercial art at the end of the year to paint full time.
- 1973 Teaching one day per week at the College of Art, George Street, Brisbane.
- 1974-84 Appointed Senior Instructor/Officer-in-Charge at Brisbane's School of Fine Art, Queensland College of Art (now part of Griffith University).
- 1980 Featured in UNICEF's 'Queensland Men of Achievement' photographic exhibition.
- 1981 Toured US galleries with some fellow artists.
- 1984 Retired from the College of Art in January and returned to full-time painting. Painted on Lord Howe Island.
- 1985 Invited to paint in Kakadu National Park under the Artists in the Field program run by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. Painted in the Whitsunday Islands.
- Extensive recorded interviews conducted with Rigby on his life, art and the Australian art scene by Barbara Blackman for the National Library of Australia. Now archived, transcribed and updated by NLA online in 2017.

- 1987 Painting trip in Tasmania.
- 1989 Painted throughout Western Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands.
- 1990 Travelled to Greece, England and France.
- 1992 Painted on Thursday Island, Torres Strait.
- 1994 Awarded an honorary doctorate, Griffith University, Qld.
- 1995 Travelled to Egypt and Central Australia with works resulting from both trips in later solo shows.
- 1996 Painted in Bali.
- 1997 Travelled to North Queensland and painted around Port Douglas and the Daintree National Park.
- 1999 Visited galleries in Spain and continued to Italy with wife Margaret and son Mark to revisit places lived in during 1956/57.
- 2000 Painted in Fiji.
Awarded the Watling-von Bibra \$20,000 Art Award, Gold Coast. Following a dispute over the conditions, Rigby chose to return the prize.
- 2003 Painted in Queensland's Whitsunday Islands (St Bees and Keswick Islands), North Queensland.
Launch of the book *John Rigby: Art & Life* by John Millington and Mark Rigby at the Queensland Art Gallery.
- 2004 *Portraits: John Rigby* – a major survey of portraits mounted by the Museum of Brisbane, City Hall
- 2005 – 2009 Continued to have exhibitions - Gold Coast, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney.
- 2006 Last of many painting trips to the Whitsunday area (Long Island).
- 2009 Last painting trip in the field (North Stradbroke Island).
- 2012 Passed away on 18 October.
- 2017 December 9 - major website, *John Rigby Art*, online to mark the 95th anniversary of his birth.
- 2019-2020 Retrospective *John Rigby: Monumental Colour* – Caboolture Regional Art Gallery, Moreton Bay Regional Council (4 Dec 2019 – 15 Feb 2020).

SELECTED PRIZES AND AWARDS

- 1955 Italian Government Travelling Art Scholarship, Sydney
- 1958 The Australian Women's Weekly Art Prize, Portraits, Sydney
- 1959 Redcliffe Centenary Art Contest, Queensland
Centenary Year Royal National Agricultural Association Prize, Queensland
Caltex Centenary Art Competition
- 1960 H.C. Richards Memorial Prize, Brisbane
- 1962 Royal National Agricultural Association Prize, Queensland
- 1963 The Sir John Sulman Prize for 1962, Sydney
Melrose Prize, Adelaide
- 1965 Finney's Art Prize, Brisbane (later became the David Jones Art Prize)
- 1968 David Jones Art Prize , Brisbane
Albury Art Prize, New South Wales
- 1969 Armidale Figurative Prize, New South Wales
- 1970 Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts,
Manufactures and Commerce, London
- 1971 Gold Coast City Art Prize, Queensland
Naracoorte Acquisitive Exhibition, South Australia
- 1974 Gold Coast City Art Prize, Queensland
- 1994 Honorary doctorate, Griffith University, Queensland
- 2001 Honorary membership, Royal Queensland Art Society
- 2003 Companion, Queensland Academy of Arts and Sciences

Also selected for hanging in the Archibald (24), Wynne (24) and Sulman (21) Prizes from 1953 to 1999, as well as in the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize competitions from the 1980s to 2004.

RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 2004 *Portraits: John Rigby* – a major survey of portraits mounted by the Museum of Brisbane, City Hall
- 2019-2020 *John Rigby: Monumental Colour* – Caboolture Regional Art Gallery, Moreton Bay Regional Council (4 Dec 2019 – 15 Feb 2020).

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1954 The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1956 The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1958 Terry Clune Galleries, Sydney
The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1961 The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1963 The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1964 The Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
Leveson Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 1965 The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1966 The Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
- 1967 Design Arts Centre, Brisbane
- 1969 Leveson Street Gallery, Melbourne
The Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
- 1970 The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1973 Young Australian Gallery, Brisbane
Reid Gallery, Brisbane
- 1974 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1976 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1978 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1981 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1984 The Broadbeach Gallery, Gold Coast, Queensland
- 1985 Wagner Gallery, Sydney
Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1986 Wagner Gallery, Sydney
- 1988 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1989 Wagner Gallery, Sydney
- 1990 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1992 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
Wagner Gallery, Sydney
- 1993 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 1994 Buderim House, Buderim, Queensland
- 1995 Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane

1997	Wagner Gallery, Sydney
1998	Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
2000	Wagner Gallery, Sydney
2004	Wagner Gallery, Sydney
2005	Art Gallery Collections, Gold Coast
2006	Gallery G, Brisbane
2007	Pollock Gallery, Melbourne
2009	Wagner Gallery, Sydney

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Showed in many exhibitions of Brisbane's *Half Dozen Group of Artists* and the *Queensland Artists of Fame and Promise* annual exhibitions during the 1950s.

Also exhibited in national touring exhibitions shown in state or regional galleries, e.g. *Australian Women's Weekly Art Prize*, *Archibald*, *Wynne*, *Sulman*, *Uncommon Australians: Towards An Australian Portrait Gallery* (1992/93), *To Look Within: Self Portraits in Australia* (2004). and the *Moran National Portrait Prizes*. Flood prints (1974) are featured within the Museum of Brisbane exhibition *100% Brisbane* (2016 – 2019).

1941	Royal Queensland Art Society Annual Exhibition, Brisbane (painting published in the <i>The Telegraph</i>).
1942	Royal Queensland Art Society Annual Exhibition (3 works exhibited).
1943	Royal Queensland Art Society Annual Exhibition (5 works exhibited; done while in the Army and based in Townsville).
1944	'Exhibition of Soldier Arts and Handicraft 1944', Australian Army Education Service in conjunction with the Toowoomba Art Society (11 Rigby artworks).
1949	Strath Art Exhibition, Sydney (7 works exhibited).
1951	'The Strath Art Group', Marodian Gallery, Brisbane 'Mixed Exhibition' (created title), Marodian Gallery (predecessor of the Johnstone Gallery), Brisbane
1952	'Christmas Exhibition', The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
1955	'Four Queensland Artists', The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane 'A loan exhibition of paintings and sculpture', The Johnstone Gallery

- 1959 'October Exhibition', The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1961 'A Group of Brisbane Painters', Rudy Koman Gallery, Sydney;
 'Australian Painting', Raymond Burr Galleries, Los Angeles, USA (works selected by Kym Bonython)
- 1962 '14 Queensland Painters', The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
 'Christmas Exhibition', The Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane
- 1964 'Brisbane Artists', Rudy Koman Gallery, Sydney
- 1965 Mixed show, Leveson Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 1966 Mixed show, Leveson Street Gallery, Melbourne
 'Brisbane Painters', Rudy Koman Gallery, Sydney
- 1972 'A section of drawings', The Johnstone Gallery
- 1985 'Downs Artists', Downs Gallery, Toowoomba
- 1986 'John Rigby and Judith Laws', Downs Gallery and Arts Centre, Toowoomba
 'The Artists' Camp VI', Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin
- 1995 'A Time Remembered', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
- 1997 'Out of Queensland - Three Contemporary Painters', Wagner Gallery, Hong Kong
- 1998 'Out of Australia', Liu Hai-Su Art Museum, Shanghai, P.R. China;
 'Five Men and a Houseboat', Bruce Watling Galleries, Gold Coast, Queensland
- 1999 'International Year of Older Persons Exhibition', Verlie Just Town Gallery, Brisbane
- 2000 'Modern Masters of Australian Painting', Wagner Gallery, Sydney;
 'Artists in the Field: A Retrospective', Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin
- 2001 'Out of Australia', Visual Arts Centre, Hong Kong
- 2002 'Australian Realist & Modern Painters', Visual Arts Centre, Hong Kong

FURTHER INFORMATION

John Rigby Art

johnrigbyart.com.au