

HAZEL DOONEY



BIOGRAPHY

In 2001, when she was just 22, Hazel Dooney was invited to join nine, very well established, middle-aged Australian male artists – including John Olsen, Tim Storrier, David Larwill and Robert Jacks – on a privately funded artists 'expedition' to central Australia. This unusual journey was the subject of an ABC documentary, *The View From Here*, directed by Liz Jones and a best-selling coffee table book, *William Creek And Beyond*. The resulting artworks toured museums and regional galleries all around Australia.

In December, 2007, Hazel Dooney was the only female artist under 30 with works included in the prestigious auction, *Modern and Contemporary Australian Art*, held at Christie's in London. In what was a record-setting sale, with major works by Brett Whitely, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin, Sydney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Fred Williams and Tracey Moffat, two modest early works by Dooney fetched over \$AU23,000 each.

In the December, 2007, issue of *Vogue Australia*, Dooney was one of just two young artists included – along with actresses Toni Collette, Rose Byrne and Isla Fisher, industrial designer Marc Newson, and fashion models Gemma Ward and Catherine McNeil – in a pictorial entitled *Australia's Most Wanted (Home-grown actors, artists, musicians and designers who are making their mark on the world)*. Over the previous 12 months, every national newspaper and magazine had delved into her career, from a major full-page profile in the *Australian Financial Review* – *Hazel Dooney walks the razor's edge between respect and celebrity in today's art world*, the sub-heading read – and several pages, titled *Self-Portrait*, written by the author, Matthew Condon, in the Brisbane *Courier Mail's* *QWeekend* magazine, to a widely read and re-published autobiographical essay, *Life Study*, in the *Griffith Review*.

It isn't just because of her darkly post-punk attitude, Amazonian stature and what the glossies referred to (too often) as "her fashion model good looks". Her art was always strong, well-crafted and yet accessible. As Michael Reid wrote, in a feature titled *Contemporary Artists To Watch*, for *The Australian* newspaper, "*Peter Booth, Hazel*

Dooney, Jeffrey Smart... are all members of a select breed of artist who, for the benefit of all concerned, cast a somewhat critical and even destructive eye over their artwork. These artists do not turn out bad art."

When she exhibited the first of her controversial watercolours, *Venus In Hell*, in Melbourne, in 2006 – at a solo show at MARS opened by the former Victorian premier, Jeff Kennett, and Channel V presenter, Yumi Stynes – the respected art critic, Ashley Crawford, wrote in *The Age* newspaper, "*Dooney has ripped the surface asunder, revealing a troubled and troubling potpourri of psychological self-investigation ... one wondered whether she could in fact draw. Venus in Hell removes all doubt.*"

Doubt was nowhere in evidence when more of Dooney's watercolours, *Kelly, The First Time*, and an autobiographical installation – collectively titled *Sex Tourist*, telling the story of her fleeting relationship with an Asian sex-worker – were the focus of a public uproar when the organizers of *Art Melbourne '07* and their corporate sponsor, Renault, tried to censor the sexually explicit images. The controversy was covered by the national press in Australia and New York's art press.

Controversy also dogged her first exhibition of photography, titled *PORNO*, at Melbourne's MARS Gallery, in 2008. It drew one of the largest crowds ever for an opening at a commercial gallery in Melbourne. However, critics and collectors were clearly discomfited by the artist's obvious participation in some of the sexually explicit images – forcing viewers to confront the reality that sexual identity is, more and more now, experimented with, reconfigured and shared using home-based media and the social networking capabilities of the web.

In December, 2008, Hazel Dooney's ten-year-old enamel painting, *Drowned Ophelia*, was sold in Sydney, at Deutscher-Menzies' high profile auction of contemporary art, for over \$A13,000, an astonishing result during a deep economic downturn. With buyers premium and taxes added, this exceeded the very ambitious pre-sale estimate of \$A10,000 to \$A14,000 and represented a strong argument for the enduring investment value of Dooney's work. The painting was first sold for around \$A1,200.

In a second remarkable result, less than a week later, Dooney's 2008 large enamel on board painting, *Dangerous Career Babe: The Aviatrix*, was sold for \$A32,701 at Christie's sale of *Modern And Contemporary Australian And South African Art* in London. This represented a new record for Dooney's work at auction – and extraordinary for a young artist who has yet to exhibit in Europe.

In early 2009, Dooney decided not to exhibit for an extended period but rather travel and increase her output of new work from two studios she maintained in Sydney. Her work continued to turn up at auctions in Sydney, Melbourne and London and achieve good prices.

In August, 2010, she was invited to join an international board of advisers for the 2011 Charlatan Ink Art Prize, despite (or, perhaps, because of) her ongoing criticism of the idea of competition in art. She also announced her intention to mount a series of solo exhibitions in late 2011 – she referred to it as "a rock 'n' roll art tour" – at various independent galleries along Australia's east coast.