

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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COLLECTION FOCUS #4

THE HILLS:

An Artists' Gathering

Holmes à Court Gallery @ Vasse Felix

Cnr Caves Rd and Tom Cullity Dr, Cowaramup WA 6284

T: +61 8 9756 5000

Gallery Hours : Daily | 10am – 5pm

13th April – 22nd June 2025

Holmes à Court Gallery @ no.10

Douglas St, West Perth WA 6005

T: +61 8 6217 2640

Gallery Hours : Tues-Fri 12 – 5pm | Sat 12 – 4pm

5th July – 23rd August 2025

Exhibition Curator: Laetitia Wilson

Cover image: Robert Juniper, *Flood Creek*, 1980, copyright of the artist's estate, all rights reserved

Ngala kaaditj Noongar moort keyen kaadak nidja boodja.

We acknowledge the Noongar people as the original custodians of this land.



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THE HILLS // An Artists' Gathering

As the fourth instalment of our series of *Collection Focus* exhibitions, *The Hills: An Artists' Gathering* features a selection of artists and artworks from the heart of the Janet Holmes à Court Collection. These artworks derive from the very beginnings of the Collection in the late 1960s and span through to the twenty-first century. This demonstrates an ongoing *collection focus* toward art and artists of the Hills region; a place where the Holmes à Courts resided from 1966 to 1969, following Janet's childhood time spent in the hills from 1943 to 1969.

On the fringes of Perth, the Hills have been, and continue to be, an area of rich artistic activity. They nurture the spirit and creative imagination of many artists and while there were artistic forays in the hills prior to the 1960s, after this time there emerged an artist's colony, of sorts. Described candidly as 'an arty bohemian enclave', it was a place where creative minds and hearts gathered, a place to form community, to work, to bicker, to celebrate, to build lives and create.

The Hills were especially appealing for artists in so far as the bush was restorative; the shifting light through the trees at different times of day was compelling, as was the quality of that light, the starry skies, the uniqueness of the flora and fauna and the sweeping views beyond to the hazy city. The natural surrounds provided an escape and a sanctuary from the bustling city. Many of the artists were sensitive to the qualities of the landscape and several had come from situations of war, conflict and sickness. The landscape enabled a simple way of life, a relief and a source of inspiration.

Several of the key figures at that time were Robert Juniper, Guy Grey Smith and Wim Boissevain. The first artworks acquired by Janet and Robert Holmes à Court were by these artists, from the Darlington Arts and Craft exhibition which became a part of the Darlington Festival. This festival was, and continues to be, a community highlight. It was originally begun to help raise funds for the local fire fighters (who were frequently required when Guy Grey Smith's burning off went out of control). The festival was organised by Guy and Helen Grey Smith and joined by artists including Robert Juniper, Brian McKay, Wim Boissevain, George Haynes, Philippa O'Brien, Mac Betts, Richard Woldendorp and many others from within the arts and other professions.

Each of the artists living in the Hills was unique in their style, however, certain tendencies emerged. There was a shift away from traditional representations of landscape and toward Modernist sensibilities. Painting was approached with an eye to colour, form, texture and light. It was less about representing what was literally seen, and more about expressing what was felt and experienced. This is apparent in pieces such as George Haynes', *On the Horizon*. Haynes is masterful with light and here the picture plane is broken down to the intensity of light and effect of colour.

As you walk through the exhibition you will notice the diversity of approaches, as well as the threads that unite the works. Keeping the subject matter close to home, there is a representation of the surrounding landscape. This is apparent in the artworks by Guy Grey Smith, Howard Taylor, Nigel Hewitt, Hal Missingham, Philippa O'Brien and Betsey-Currie Linton, with their images of trees and the bush, Helen Grey Smith with her exquisite *Summer Landscape* and Bethamy Linton and Richard Woldendorp's representations of Xanthorrhoea. There is also an interest in country further afield. Mac Betts paints the Gascoyne region, Linda van der Merwe paints the *Road to Broome*, Robert Birch paints *Onslow*, Madeleine Clear paints *Yallingup Beach* and Vaclav Macha also turns to the coast to paint a *Harbour Scene*.

Some of the works are less about the landscape and more about figuration, about urban, interior space and humanity. This is evident in Stuart Elliott's surrealistic *Becalmed*, Douglas Chambers' abstract composition, *The Light of the Lamp*, Michele Theunissen's *Imperfect Consonance*, Bernard Tandy's dynamic *Untitled* painting, Brian McKay with his Francis Bacon inspired *Figure*, Hans Arkeveld's curious anatomy class and Theo Koning's rendition of the Sisyphean burden. There are also otherworldly dimensions discernible – as in Juniper's *Spirit Figures* or even Brian Blanchflower's ambitious *Glimpses (An Earth History)*. Howard Taylor's *Sapling* also has ethereal spiritual qualities in its glowing rendition of a young tree.

The Darlington Festival spanned beyond painting as a vibrant multi-arts community gathering – with local people contributing from all walks of life. From the beginning, the art exhibitions featured other media, such as ceramics and textiles. Guy Grey Smith was known to source clay locally for his pottery and Helen Grey Smith became celebrated for her incredible textile works. In this exhibition we see the collaborative ceramic works of Toni Donley and Philippa O'Brien, the exquisite, delicate ceramic pieces by Sandra Black and the earthly works of Nalda Searles.

Together, these works tell a story of a place over time, from its exciting beginnings to its thriving identity today. These artists have left an enduring legacy, placing the Hills on the map as a significant place for Western Australia's art history.

ARTISTS

Hans Arkeveld, Mac Betts, Robert Birch, Sandra Black, Brian Blanchflower, Wim Boissevain, Douglas Chambers, Madeleine Clear, Betsey Currie-Linton, Toni Donley, Stuart Elliott, Guy Grey Smith, Helen Grey Smith, George Haynes, Nigel Hewitt, Robert Juniper, Theo Koning, Bethamy Linton, Vaclav Macha, Brian McKay, Hal Missingham, Philippa O'Brien, Nalda Searles, Bernard Tandy, Howard Taylor, Michele Theunissen, Linda Van Der Merwe, Richard Woldendorp