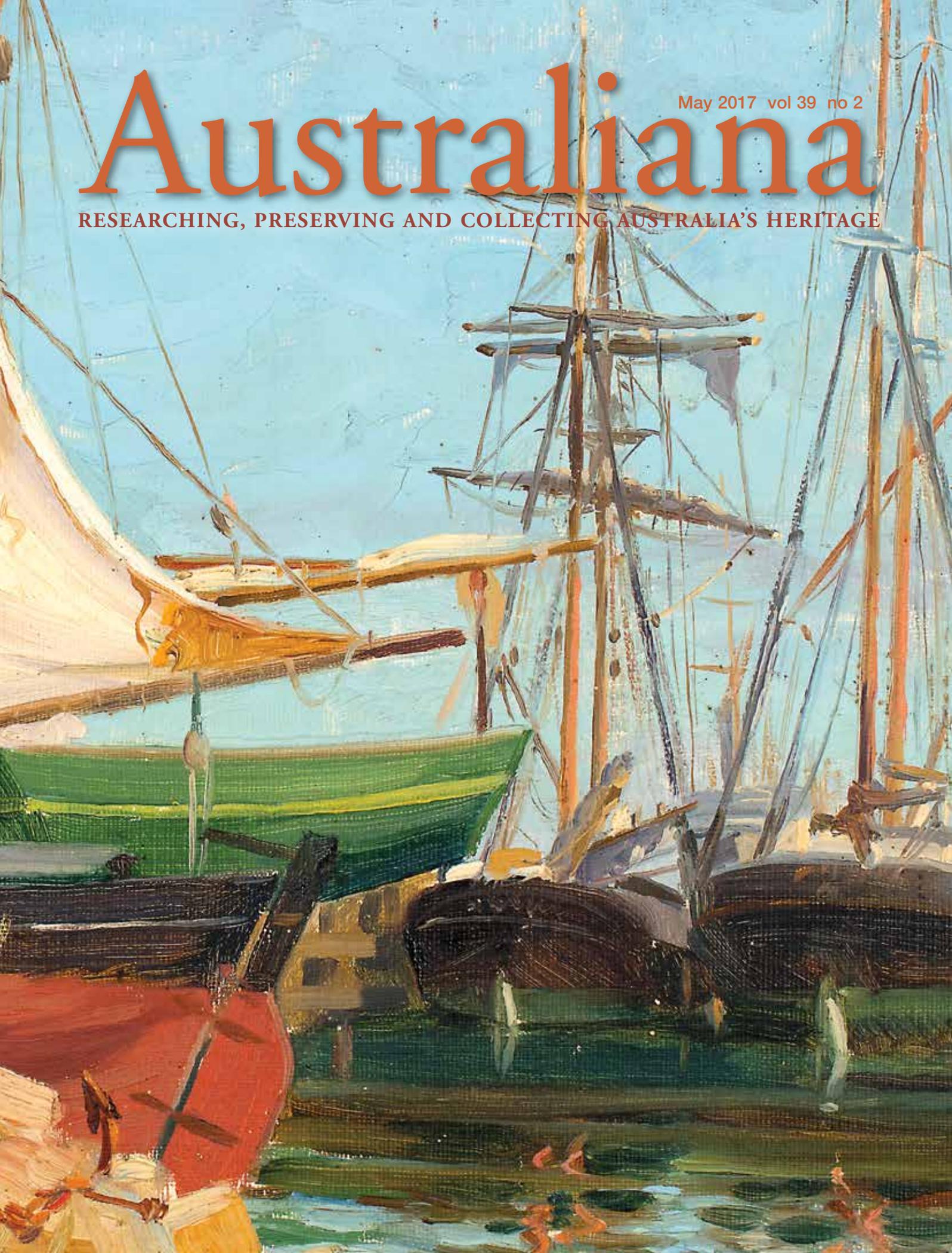


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# Australiana

RESEARCHING, PRESERVING AND COLLECTING AUSTRALIA'S HERITAGE





# Miguel McKinlay: the Australian years

The artist Miguel Mackinlay/McKinlay has been variously described as Spanish, Scottish and Australian and all three descriptions are partially correct. Born in the province of Guadalajara in Spain to a Spanish mother and Scottish father, he arrived in Western Australia as a ten year old and undertook his major art training there. On moving to London to further his career, he mixed and exhibited with Australians in his early years. However, marrying a Londoner, he stayed and enjoyed considerable success as an artist and illustrator. Most of his family remained in Western Australia and we still like to think of him as West Australian.

## 1.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959),  
Detail from a self-portrait aged about  
16 years, c 1912, oil on academy  
board, 26 x 17.5 cm.  
Private collection, Melbourne

## 2.

*Sir Frederick and Lady Bedford  
Presentation Album* 1909.  
State Library of WA, Batty Library  
acc 1991B

## DOROTHY ERICKSON

Miguel McKinlay (1895–1959), known as Michael or Mick in Western Australia (**plate 1**) arrived in Fremantle on the Orient Pacific Line's *Ortona* on 16 January 1906 with his father William, sisters Williamina, Sara, Ramona, Margarita (**plate 7**) and his brothers Daniel and John (**plate 5**). They had sailed the usual route via Gibraltar, Marseilles, Naples, Port Said, Suez and Colombo.

William (**plate 6**), a widower and retired engineer who had reputedly worked on copper mines in Spain, had decided to commence a new life in Western Australia. Eldest son Daniel, an accomplished sketcher became a draftsman and before long was working in Sydney and the USA, where he remained after serving in WWI. The older sisters Williamina and Sara kept house, while Ramona trained to become a milliner.

The youngsters Michael, John and Margarita attended Highgate School where in 1909, a design work of Michael's was included in an album presented to the retiring governor, Rear Admiral Sir Frederick Bedford.<sup>1</sup> Bedford was an enthusiastic amateur artist whose

wife Ethel, Lady Bedford, painted the unique wildflowers of the south-west corner of Australia, now one of the world's hot spots for endangered species. Michael's design featured two of the 11,000 or so species endemic to Western Australia – kangaroo paws and cowslip orchids (**plate 2**).

Not long after this the family moved to a new suburb, South Perth, east of the city on the Swan River where they had a large house with an orchard. Mick, as he was known, could be found at the end of the orchard watching the glorious sunsets and trying to catch the magnificent colour effects on paper. Legend has it he drew portraits of visitors on the walls of the family home.<sup>2</sup>

Attaining the age of 14, when compulsory education ceased, Mick was apprenticed to Walter Meston (1870–1936) and Frank Walters (1877–1941) of Meston & Walters "Signwriters and Decorative Artists, (William Street), glass gilders and embossers, calico signs, designs and estimates, banners, illuminated addresses, scenic artists, cottage plates, monograms, house painting and paperhanging." According to expatriate news columnist Edith Fry, writing from London in 1927, Frank Walters said:





We advertised for a boy to learn decorating and amongst other applicants came this dark-eyed lad of 14 years, with a bundle of sketches under his arm.<sup>3</sup> On inspection I could not believe that the work was that of an untrained youth, and told him so. He flared into a temper, waving his arms and sketches around his head, and dared me to let him paint a portrait then and there in our studio. From that day on, for the next five years he studiously and honestly went through the drudgery of apprenticeship – drudgery to him, as he told us after years, as his aims were far beyond the capacity of our humble business.<sup>4</sup>

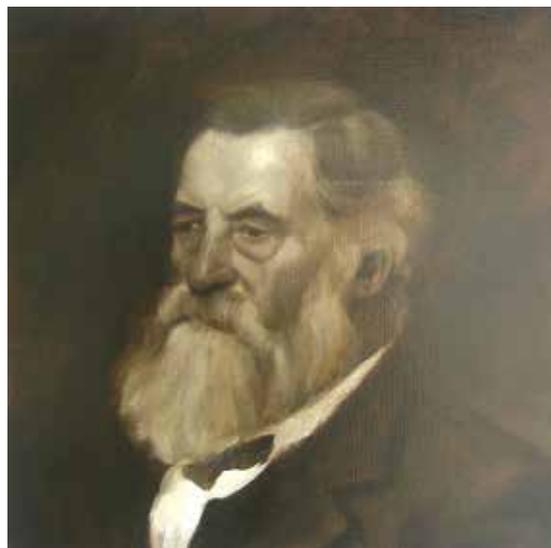
Michael may well have found the work boring but it did provide him with a variety of skills and encouraged him to practice and work on a large scale later. Life was not all drudgery, for the Perth Technical School, where apprentices were encouraged to enrol alongside art students, had a gifted teacher in James Walter Robert Linton (1869–1947) and Michael enthusiastically enrolled (plates 3–4). Quoting Fry again,

The work so stimulated his ideas that he would frequently return home from the school and ignore altogether the fact that his dinner had been placed in front of him on the family table. He would be reminded over and over again

**3.**  
Perth Technical School in 1912

**4.**  
J W R Linton with students at the Perth Technical School c 1912. State Library of WA, Battye Library 6512B/2

**5-7.**  
Family portraits c 1912, Brother John, oil on canvas, 41.5 x 36.2 cm. Father William, oil on canvas, 44.5 x 45 cm and sister Margarita, oil on canvas, 45 x 42 cm still to be restored





### 8-9.

Figure study and portrait head by Michael 1911-12, charcoal on paper. Family collection, Perth

### 10.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895-1959), *Fremantle Harbour*, 1910, oil on academy board, 39 x 34 cm.

### 11.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895-1959), *Evening Glow*, c 1912, 29 x 29.5 cm, oil on academy board, exhibited West Australian Society of Arts 1912. Private collection Melbourne



that he should eat it, but he preferred to express his ideas by sketching at the side of his plate.<sup>5</sup>

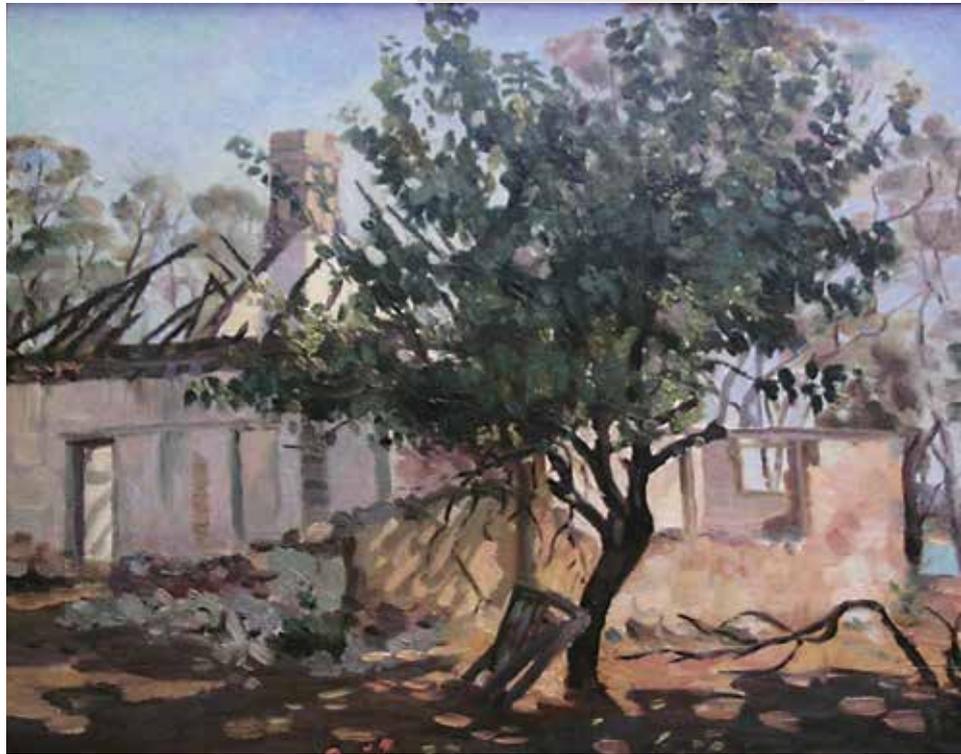
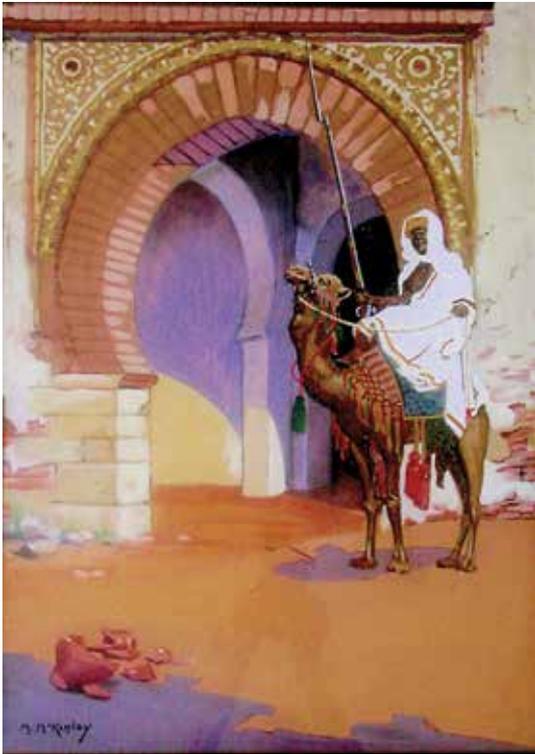
Linton, who had trained in the UK where his father was art tutor to Queen Victoria's daughters, "was insistent that the whole business of art was based on drawing, more specially life drawing."<sup>6</sup> Young Michael obviously absorbed this dictum. Linton taught the students the technical aspects of preparing canvases etc and once a week the students' work was discussed in an open forum. Linton encouraged his students to go to Europe and a number of the talented ones such as Miguel/Michael, May Gibbs (1877-1969), Kate O'Connor (1876-1968) and Ernestina Levinson (1887-1951) were able to do so. Levinson and McKinlay stayed while the other two came and went between the two continents and are now highly regarded in Australia while the two who remained overseas are virtually unknown here.

While studying at the 'Tech', Michael exhibited regularly with the West Australian Society of Arts. In the November 1911 Black and White show he exhibited a "Portrait in Charcoal" and "Study of a Head in Charcoal".<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after, in December in an open competition at the Art Gallery, he won the poster design section and came second in the figure drawing competition. He also won first and second prizes in *Spencer's Pictures' Poster Competition*.

This encouraged him to join the Art Society's committee in February the following year, volunteering to become secretary for the life class, which gave him access to live models two nights each week. At the monthly meetings of the society subjects for sketching exercises were set in advance and the members were requested to bring these as well as drawing materials to undertake ten minute sketches after which they indulged in criticism sessions. This regular practice honed his natural ability for memory training, catching a pose or likeness and rendering it quickly and accurately (**plates 8-9**).

Michael's art supplies came from Barnett Bros in Hay Street, a major stained glass studio that also imported artist's materials. They had exhibited at the great Paris Exhibition of 1900 as well as in Glasgow in 1902, and supported the local arts community. Descendants of Martin Glick, who worked at the firm, still cherish paintings by Michael



whom family legend has it Glick helped support by supplying some of his materials. The paintings (**plate 16**) were framed by Alberto Fortunato Mayrhofer of Mayrhofer & Co. at 659 Hay Street, Perth. This firm were print sellers and artist colour men as well as framers and had an art gallery that displayed their prints and occasionally other artists' work.

Members of the Art Society met regularly for painting excursions at picturesque sites around the city such as Fremantle Harbour, Cottesloe Beach and the Old Mill in South Perth. They organised artists' camps on the coast in Mandurah just south of Perth and in the hot summers at the seaside resort of Albany on the south coast. Michael joined in these activities, and he later exhibited many paintings with titles derived from these places.

As local news reports indicate, the young man soon made an impression. In July 1912, when he exhibited paintings of "Fremantle Harbour" (**plate 10**) and "Bazaar Terrace" with the Society of Arts, he was described as

this promising young artist shows considerable talent. His drawing is excellent, his colour values are gauged with

remarkable judgement and the treatment is broad, daring yet eminently successful.<sup>8</sup>

Sir Winthrop Hackett, introducing the Governor Sir Harry Barron who opened the exhibition, remarked that he welcomed new exhibitors Miss Heap and Mr McKinlay and remarked on the quality of the posters. Critic Daisy Rossi stated he showed

Three sound, well-studied boat sketches. His drawing is careful and his colour strong and full. The composition of no 5 is a little cramped but the distance is well expressed and the water moving, luminous and reflecting (**plate 11**).<sup>9</sup>

At this time he signed his paintings and drawings "M. McKinlay". His posters soon graced the hoardings in the Perth railway station and were reproduced on hoardings on the east coast of Australia.<sup>10</sup> This would have provided welcome income.

By 1914 he had established quite a reputation for bold coloured poster work (**plate 12**), winning a national competition in January at the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures' *Great All*

## 12.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), poster c 1912-3, gouache paint on paper

## 13.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Abandoned building Mandurah* c 1912, oil on academy board, 29.5 x 39 cm

*Australian Exhibition* in Melbourne with "The Wanderer".<sup>11</sup> This was encouraging and he planned an exhibition with his friend Stan Cross (1888–1977), who said Michael had

no atom of use for anything but Art. He never spoke but to bandy some abstract thesis or to report some artistic 'find' in the art section of the public library. How he haunted that library, and how he hated that bewiskered old librarian who misconstrued his interest in the French nudes of 'Le Salon'.<sup>12</sup>



14.

A view of the exhibition the *Western Mail*, 20 March 1914, p 26

15.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Fishing boats (The White Sail)*, 1914, oil on academy board. Collection: Art Gallery of Western Australia. Gift of Doug Collins, 1961

16.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *The Smugglers*, exhibited in the duo exhibition in Perth 1914, oil on academy board, 21 x 31.5 cm. Private collection Melbourne



The pair exhibited at St George's Lesser Hall, Hay Street, Perth in March 1914 as a fundraiser for a trip to London<sup>13</sup> (plates 14–17). Their exhibition was opened by Sir Edward Stone, the Lieutenant Governor, who said they would be sadly missed by the Society of Arts. "All present, he felt satisfied, were absolutely astonished with the class of work exhibited that afternoon"<sup>14</sup> and wished them every success. Forty-one oil paintings by the two men and almost the same number of posters, "black and white" and watercolours lined the walls of the Lesser Hall (plate 14).

The "black and white" entries were mostly Cross' work while McKinlay's were the posters, including his five prize-winners.<sup>15</sup> An unnamed reviewer in the *Daily News* wrote of "several of the Cottesloe and Mandurah beach scenes are veritable gems" and discussing the posters wrote "the writer would be pleased to call pictures, and give them pride of place on the walls of his home yet all are posters in the true sense of the word with plenty of room left by arrangement for the addition of advertising matter." The reviewer went on to state that "the portraits prove that the artists are destined to go far indeed."<sup>16</sup>

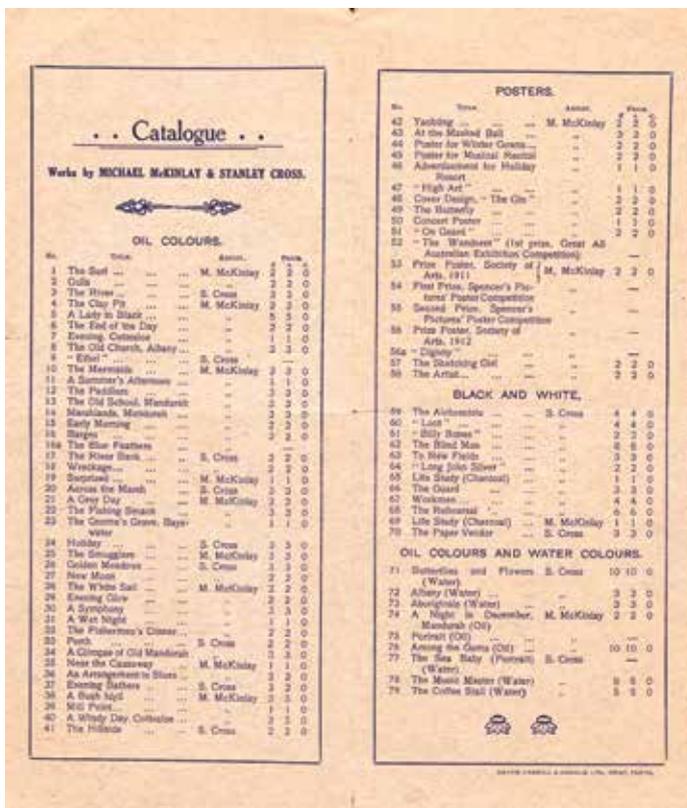
Barely two days later and leaving a house full of art works behind, the pair

17.

The catalogue, courtesy State Library of WA no PR4367

18.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *Full Speed*, frontispiece from Blackie's reprint of R M Ballantyne's *The Young Fur Traders*, 1920s-30s



sailed for London on the *RMS Osterley* departing Fremantle 24 March 1914.<sup>17</sup> Both studied at St Martin's School of Art while supporting themselves with other work and in McKinlay's case probably with a stipend from his father, as some other Western Australians overseas were receiving from theirs. Stan Cross, whose brother helped with funding, had cartoons accepted for *Punch* magazine, but soon returned to Australia where he became a household name. Mackinlay never returned.

The handsome and dashing young artist arrived in London apparently armed with an introduction to the Western Australian Agent General and no doubt to others of his teacher Linton's London circle such as the Woodward sisters, whose cousin Bernard was the curator at the Western Australian Art Gallery and Museum. They were the daughters of Dr Henry Woodward FRS, geologist and palaeontologist, Keeper of Geology at the British Museum, and nieces of the Keeper of Prints at Windsor Castle. Alice was a well-known illustrator of children's books working for Blackie & Co. The family lived in Chelsea and later moved to Bushey where Alice occupied no 17

of the Meadow Studios. Michael was to follow her lead, living first in Chelsea and then moving to Bushey. He also became an illustrator for Blackie & Co.

He was soon at work on commissions to decorate *Savoy House* in the Strand, containing the offices and residence of the Western Australian Agent General.<sup>18</sup> His commission to paint a grand panoramic view of Perth and the Swan River for the main street window was admired and commented on as

This is the work of young Mr M. McKinlay, a young Western Australian artist, and conveys some idea of the wonderful beauty of the outlook from the summit of Mt Eliza, with the broad waters of the river sweeping around by the splendid Esplanade at the foot of the city, and over the tops of the many magnificent buildings, the outlines of the distant Darling Ranges.<sup>19</sup>

The building, opened in February 1915, suffered bomb damage in a Zeppelin raid later that year. The fate of the painting is not known.





## 19.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), *The Grass Widower*, cover for *John Bull* magazine 22 July 1947. Miguel's grandson Michael Wood protests while his father Ken Wood (later of Kenwood Chef fame) bathes him

Michael's circle in Chelsea included South Australian Max Martin, who had come to London in 1913 to study, was hung 'on the line' at the Royal Academy and became an overnight sensation in 1922.<sup>20</sup> Another was the expatriate Australian cartoonist and post-impressionist painter Horace Brodzky, a member of the London Group who had been schooled in Melbourne, the USA and England and exhibited in many countries. Brodzky came from a wealthy Jewish family in Melbourne where his bohemian father owned the society

publication *Table Talk*.<sup>21</sup> When H. S. Ede wrote his book *Savage Messiah* in 1931 about French artist Henri Gaudier and Polish writer Sophie Brzeska, a reviewer wrote of the book:

they deal with their lives in Chelsea. Everybody in the days before the war who knew Augustus John, Epstein, Max Martin, Mike McKinley [sic], Margaret Mansfield, Frank Harris and Roger Fry knew these two.<sup>22</sup>

Quite a group in which to be included.

However the Great War intervened. McKinlay was on the Western Front in 1915. He is listed in vol. 6 of *Art in Australia* (1919) as an Australian artist who served in WWI for, as William Moore wrote, besides the official war artists there was

the Honorable Company of Combatant Artists who have done Australia some service. ... Campaign sketches, done by some of the younger artists on their own

account, have become more and more valuable of a period long before the official artists were sent to the front.

Michael's war-time story and his drawings featured in *Australiana* February 2017.

In 1917 Michael was living at 31 Cheyne Road, Chelsea, working as an illustrator (**plate 18**) and studying at St Martin's School of Art.<sup>23</sup> St Martin's was primarily a painting school, providing traditional training and was perceived as an environment where few students would complete a full-time three-year diploma, but rather took classes depending on their needs (**plates 20–22**). He was co-habiting with Laurie Anne R. Carruthers (born Kensington, 1897–1964), an artists' model who bore him a son Michael John that year while he was away fighting with the British forces.

After the war, they lived with her parents at 65 Surrey Road, West Battersea and life was looking promising. They soon had a new daughter and he worked regularly as a magazine illustrator on *Hutchinson's Story Magazine*, *Nash's* and *Good Housekeeping* signing his work 'Mac' and later 'MM'. He illustrated Arthur O. Cooke's *Godfrey Gets There* for Blackie & Son and went on to do a considerable amount of illustrative work for this publishing house from the 1920s to the 1950s including the well-known covers for their children's annuals. He also illustrated for Oxford University Press and Longman's and appears to have developed two personae, one the illustrator and one the artist.

Following WWII he undertook illustrations for *John Bull* magazine earning the epithet the British Norman Rockwell, which would probably damn him in the eyes of the art establishment. It seems Miguel found the commercial work so lucrative that he had little time to paint the many major works of art that had been his original intention and had been the hope of those who followed his early career. When exactly he decided to revert to using Miguel as his Christian name and also commenced to spell his surname Mackinlay are still being investigated.



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*Australiana* who lives in Perth WA. Miguel Mackinlay's story of artistic success in Britain will be continued in a future issue. You can contact her at dorothyerickson@ozemail.com.au

#### NOTES

- 1 *Sir Frederick and Lady Bedford Presentation Album* Batty Library, State Library of WA acc. no 1991B.
- 2 "A Painter of Note: Miguel Mackinlay" *Western Mail* (Perth WA) 18 Aug 1927 p 26.
- 3 Poetic licence; his eyes were actually grey according to his war record.
- 4 *Western Mail* (Perth WA) 18 Aug 1927 p 26.

- 5 *ibid*
- 6 Anne Gray, *Line, Light and Shadow: James W. R. Linton: Painter, Craftsman, Teacher*. Perth, Fremantle Arts Centre Press 1986 p 45.
- 7 *Catalogue WA Society of Arts* Nov 1911. State Library of WA, Batty Library PR 10795/27.
- 8 *West Australian* 17 Jul 1912 p 4.
- 9 *West Australian* 23 Jul 1912 p 8.
- 10 *Truth* 28 Feb 1914 p 4.
- 11 *Western Mail* (Perth WA), 18 Aug 1927 p 26, SLWA PR4367.
- 12 "Three Musketeers of Art", *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney), 25 Dec 1937 p 16.
- 13 *Catalogue of exhibition of paintings etc. by M. McKinlay and S.G. Cross opened by Sir Edward Stone [Perth] 16 March 1914*. Batty Library, State Library of Western Australia Call no PR4367.
- 14 *Western Mail* (Perth), 20 Mar 1914 p 46.
- 15 Note the spelling of his surname on this.
- 16 *Daily News* (Perth) 17 Mar 17 1914 p 6.
- 17 *Daily News* (Perth), 24 Mar 1914, p. 5. Where the paintings and other objects that filled a shed went on his brother John's death is at present a mystery.
- 18 *Western Australia in London 1915: opening of the new offices of the Agent General, Savoy House, Strand*,

W.C. State Library of Western Australia, Q 994.1 WES.

- 19 Batty Library, State Library of WA, Q 994.1 WES. *Western Mail* 26 Feb 1915 p 2.
- 20 *Victor Harbour Times* (SA) 11 Feb 1949, p. 2. And "London Lights: Australians and the Academy", *West Australian* 4 Jun 1932 p 5.
- 21 *West Australian* 4 Jun 1932 p 5.
- 22 Unidentified cutting from Miguel's cutting book.
- 23 Record of Service Paper Army form B2513. 30971\_173059\_00239.

#### 20–22.

Miguel Mackinlay (1895–1959), chalk on paper, 56 x 39 cm, pencil on paper, 37 x 20 cm, pen and wash on paper, 45 x 18 cm. These are probably from life classes at St Martin's, 1914–17. Family Trust UK

