



VERA  
LINDSAY  
WHITESIDES

1886-1941

A TASMANIAN  
PORTRAITIST





Tasmanian  
School of Art  
Gallery  
Mt. Nelson Campus  
Uni. of Tas.  
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Mon - Fri. 10 - 4  
Sat 10 - 12





# VERA LINDSAY WHITESIDES TASMANIAN PORTRAITIST

In October 1982, the organisers of a women's art exhibition *Detours by Tender Aliens*, held in Hobart as part of the Australia-wide *Women and Arts Festival*, advertised for work by women artists who may have previously been unacknowledged. It was through a response to this advertisement that some of the work of Vera Lindsay Whitesides was exhibited. Although she had been a professional painter, working in Hobart early in the twentieth century, receiving portraiture commissions from many eminent Tasmanians, her work has become virtually unknown to the general public since her death in 1941.

This fading from public awareness is a fate which has overtaken the work of many artists, particularly women, of the period. Working, as they were, outside the principal concerns of the modern movement, their works nonetheless provide valuable insights to the attitudes and values prevailing in our community during the first decades of this century. This alone, even without the considerable charm and versatility of Vera Whitesides' work, would be reason enough for serious consideration of her oeuvre.

That we are now able to appreciate the full range of her concerns is wholly due to the efforts of her niece, Mrs. Joan Graney, who has actively undertaken the care, conservation and documentation of the large family collection of Whitesides' work. It was Mrs. Graney who, in answering the *Tender Aliens* advertisement, brought the work to our attention.

Vera Whitesides was born on St. Valentine's Day, February 4th, 1886, at Oatlands, where her father was the manager of the Commercial Bank of Tasmania. She was third in a family of four children whose education was supervised by a series of governesses. One of these, a Miss Glover, may have given Vera Whitesides her first lessons in painting and drawing, as there is a competent oil in Mrs. Graney's collection by Miss Glover. Vera Whitesides' mother, the former Sara Jane Field, was also proficient at drawing and painting.

In 1903, at the age of seven, Whitesides became deaf. The same affliction was to overtake her sisters and brother. However, her family showed courage and intelligence in facing this tragedy, bringing up their children to believe that they should be thankful that they were deaf and not blind. The children were taught to lip-read, and so expert was Vera Whitesides that she could understand conversations between fellow passengers while travelling by tram, without them being aware of her ability. Her articulation was perfect and she seemed to have complete control of pitch.

In 1896, the Whitesides family transferred to Hobart, and lived first at "Bleak House", Battery Point, and in 1903 they moved to "Birralea" in Lambert Avenue, Sandy Bay.

At the age of fifteen, Vera Whitesides entered a competition run by Brownell Brothers, a Hobart department store, which she won. The drawing for an advertisement is very much in the style of the time. She was formally taught drawing and painting, first by Mr. Benjamin Shepherd, and then by Lucien Dechaineux, at the Hobart Technical School.

Records show that she was enrolled in classes at the Hobart Technical School in 1908, and through to 1919.

From the many newspaper cuttings left in her scrapbook, it is evident that she participated regularly in Tasmanian Art Society Exhibitions between 1910 and the mid 1920's. She seems invariably to have won the portrait sections. She also held a solo exhibition, in 1918 at her home, to raise money for Red Cross. The Art Societies Exhibitions and displays held at home were the full range of possibilities for artists to publicly show their work in Hobart at the time. The exhibitions were events of some interest and received generous coverage in the press of the day.



In a paper on Tasmanian Art by Mrs. Joan Harvey given to the Women's Art Society of Victoria on July 26th, 1928, which covers the period from William Glover through to J.J. Connor, Vera Whitesides is listed as the miniature painter of her day. There is also mention of eighteen illustrations for a book written by Mrs. Nelmes Bluck in 1918, titled "Child Life in Verse", but we have been unable to locate a copy of this book.

Although a large body of Vera Whitesides' work has been kept by Mrs. Graney, this represents mainly family portraits, and studies she made as a student. Her professional career as a miniaturist is much more difficult to unravel, as many of the works have been dispersed. She left a list of thirty-five miniatures she had painted but no dates or other information, simply the names. It has been possible to trace only some of the works listed.

She went to Government House to paint miniatures for the two governors, Sir Francis Newdegate, and Sir William Allardyce.



When Sir William's daughter married, she was commissioned to paint miniatures of both bride and groom for their respective wedding presents, and was invited to the wedding.

Mrs. Graney remembers that although she had a downstairs studio, she secluded herself in her bedroom when painting miniatures, where she could be totally undisturbed, except for the company of her fox terrier, Nap. There is a charcoal sketch of Morton Allport in the Allport Collection which Mrs. Graney believes may have been a preparatory drawing for a miniature.

Vera Whitesides died in 1941, but failing eyesight caused her to give up painting earlier. The first impression of Vera Whitesides' work is one of admiration for the diversity of her interests. As well as her paintings and drawings in various media, she pursued a range of craft interests. From evidence of objects left she was competent in china painting, raffia work, copper and leather work, and was an extremely proficient silversmith. The Graney family have pieces of her carved blackwood furniture including an impressive hall seat.

Her aunt on her mother's side was the noted Tasmanian wood carver, Ellen Nora Payne, 1865-1962.

Historically Vera Whitesides' work is very much of her time and place. Her paintings are in the traditional style instilled by the teaching of Shepherd and Dechaineux, and they reflect the conservative trend prevalent in both British and Australian art of the time. Although the European avant-garde made significant innovations in art, in the first twenty years of this century, their influence was not wide enough to cause many ripples in Hobart, Tasmania.

Many of the numerous designs she left for leather bags, writing compendia and copper and silver work, which she was taught by Mr. Alan Walker, reflect the art nouveau style which was so pervasive in the decorative arts during the early part of the twentieth century. The pastel portraits she made were satisfying likenesses for their owners and viewers.

Vera Whitesides seems to have been committed to the depiction of the human figure. Only a few landscapes studies appear to have been attempted, and there is only one impressively-painted still life of chrysanthemums in Mrs. Graney's collection.

For the contemporary viewer her most successful works of art will probably be her small watercolour studies of women and girls, absorbed in domestic activities. Working without the pressures that must arise when producing art for others she was able, in these studies to record a quiet sense of identification with her sitters and their lives. She uses the play of light to heighten beautifully a mood of tranquility which exists in these paintings.

Vera Whitesides was part of a very close and loving family. In her late life she took pride in the running of the laundry, did all the family mending exquisitely, and with her sister Elvie, spent long and happy hours caring for a very large garden.

That we are able now to appreciate these works by Vera Whitesides is due largely to the recent relaxation of the hold on our minds of modernist certainties, and with this a decline in the urgencies instilled by modernism's concept of a universal mainstream in art. One advantage of the new critical liberalisation has been that we are able to return to, and consider this quieter art from earlier in the twentieth century, which makes no claim to be part of the modern tradition. Indeed our argument in presenting this exhibition is that the value of works by artists like Vera Whitesides lies precisely in their isolation from, and reluctance to explore the concerns of distant modern art developments.

Vera Whitesides by being so much a part of Hobart's traditional social patterns produced work which enables us, through the mind of an interesting and talented individual, to gain insight into the ideas and values which dominated her society's life. The work, not simply what it looks like, but the choice of subjects, the treatment of them, the areas she chose to excel at, all bear witness to a facet of this community's past, which is our past. It helps us to establish our cultural context, and with the decline of a belief in a universal mainstream we have to redefine the significance of the social context from which our art is produced.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Graney, Joan, (Kingston, Tasmania), unpublished MS and biographical information.

Harvey, Joan, unpublished paper given to the Womens' Art Society of Victoria, July, 1928.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## China Painting

1. White vase painted with purple flowers and vines,  
230 x 100mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
2. White bowl painted with cornflowers,  
105 x 200mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
3. Bottle, painted with roses,  
115 x 100mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
4. Ornamental jug with Art Nouveau design,  
160 x 60mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
5. Teacup and saucer, painted with a butterfly and violets,  
saucer 25 x 150mm. cup 65 x 95mm,  
Coll. Mrs. Graney

## Carved Furniture

6. Carved blackwood table,  
785 x 850 x 540mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
7. Carved blackwood hall seat,  
1150 x 1150mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
8. Carved blackwood mirror,  
530 x 680mm Coll. Mrs. Graney

## Jewellery and Silver

9. Sawn silver brooch,  
33 x 13mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
10. Silver Bracelet with turquoise enamelled ovals,  
180 x 7mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
11. Beaten silver brooch with enamelled centre,  
26mm diam. Coll. Mrs. Graney
12. Silver spoon with sawn handle in M shape,  
160 x 50mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
13. Fabricated silver spoon, inset cabachon stone,  
155 x 47mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
14. Beaten silver vase,  
95 x 100mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
15. Set of five silver spoons Coll. Mrs. J. Trim

## Leather and Raffia Work

16. Leather box, relief design; dated 1921 on side,  
85 x 130 x 120mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
17. Lidded round sea grass basket,  
80 x 170mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
18. Cylindrical container,  
113 x 180mm Coll. Mrs. Graney

## Miniatures

19. Unmounted miniature of a young man,  
35 x 35mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
20. Unmounted oval portrait of the artist's mother,  
64 x 49mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
21. Unmounted circular miniature of the artist's mother,  
25mm diam. Coll. Mrs. Graney
22. Preparatory pencil drawing of a young woman,  
170 x 126mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
23. Preparatory pencil drawing of a young woman,  
170 x 125mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
24. Girl in a blue pinafore,  
94 x 73mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
25. Portrait of Miss Sarah Lindsay, 1931,  
55 x 42mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
26. Profile of a young woman,  
50 x 45mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
27. Mrs. James Whitesides,  
48 x 35mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
28. Portrait of a young woman with black hair,  
63 x 50mm Coll. Mrs. Graney

29. Sir Henry Jones, circa 1926,  
70 x 55mm Coll. Mrs. J.R. Hansen
30. Robert Peacock (Sir Henry Jones' grandson)  
c.1926,  
70 x 55mm Coll. Mrs. J.R. Hansen
31. Portrait of Pattie Davies,  
70 x 55mm Coll. Mrs. F. Trim
32. Portrait of Mrs. Charles Davies as a bride,  
25mm diam. Coll. Mrs. F. Trim
33. Marjorie Walker, aged 16,  
25mm diam. Coll. Mrs. Robertson



## Pastel Portraits

34. Mr. E.J.C. Whitesides, the artist's father, 1922.  
655 x 495mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
35. Mrs. Whitesides, the artist's mother, 1916,  
620 x 445mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
36. Portrait of a girl in a blue dress, 1915,  
645 x 480mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
37. Seated female nude, 1916,  
635 x 475mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
38. Female nude, 1916,  
490 x 660mm Coll. Mrs. Graney

## Oils

39. Head study of old woman, 1914,  
350 x 265mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
40. Landscape, 1915,  
260 x 220mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
41. Portrait of Mrs. Marie Dechaineux, 1917,  
645 x 580mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
42. Still Life of Chrysanthemums in a Silver Bowl,  
1905,  
472 x 575mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
43. Profile study of a boy in a blue shirt,  
480 x 390mm Coll. Mrs. Graney

## Watercolours

44. Portrait study of an old woman, 1914,  
205 x 173mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
45. Portrait of a girl in a white hat, 1914,  
335 x 240mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
46. Back view of seated female nude,  
220 x 315mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
47. Seated woman in a white petticoat,  
290 x 125mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
48. Landscape of glasshouse and garden, Sandy Bay,  
223 x 285mm Coll. Mrs. Graney

49. Female nude, seated on floor,  
204 x 294mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
50. Female nude in profile, seated on floor,  
175 x 290mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
51. Back view of female nude, seated on stool,  
249 x 270mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
52. Girl Reading, 1912,  
184 x 241mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
53. Profile view of girl in blue dress, knitting, 1912,  
340 x 258mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
54. Woman painting,  
348 x 253mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
55. Profile of girl with blond hair,  
291 x 227mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
56. Woman in white dress, with spectacles,  
165 x 129mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
57. Head of woman in white dress,  
188 x 150mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
58. Profile of woman, brown hair and white dress,  
318 x 256mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
59. Woman in blue costume drawing,  
346 x 250mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
60. Woman reading,  
285 x 235 Coll. Mrs. Graney
61. Girl in straw hat, reading,  
255 x 170mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
62. Back view of girl in strawhat,  
250 x 170mm Coll. Mrs. Graney

## Drawings

63. Portrait of Alice Gertrude Adams, conte, 1920,  
655 x 480mm Allport Collection
64. Portrait of Morton Allport, pencil, 1909,  
39 x 28mm Allport Collection
65. Portrait of small girl in white bonnet, pencil,  
1907,  
335 x 265mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
66. Back view of woman's head, pen and ink with touches of white,  
160 x 112mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
67. Half-length view of standing girl, pencil with touches of white chalk, 1915,  
275 x 174mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
68. Two studies of nurses, pencil, 1918,  
each 170 x 129mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
69. Profile head of young girl, pencil, 1918,  
178 x 114mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
70. Four studies of young women, pencil, 1917,  
each 135 x 116mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
71. Four head studies of young women, pencil,  
1917, 1918, 1918, 1917,  
Each 135 x 116mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
72. Four studies - old man, girl, young man, girl,  
pencil, 1917, 1919, 1918, 1917,  
Each 135 x 116mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
73. Seated female nude, pencil,  
197 x 287mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
74. Seated female nude, pencil, 1915,  
360 x 280mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
75. Portrait of Mrs. Alan Murdoch, pastel,  
860 x 660mm Coll. Mrs. Nicholas

## Small Unframed Sketches

76. Design for silver spoon, pencil,  
176 x 127mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
77. Brownell Bros., advertisement, pen and ink,  
1901,  
210 x 318mm Coll. Mrs. Graney
78. Mrs. Graney as a child in a party hat, coloured pencil,  
242 x 191mm Coll. Mrs. Graney