



Media Release

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Significant cultural gift adds to Geelong's collection

Geelong Gallery
Embargoed until Monday 16 September

Free entry
Open daily 10am to 5pm



Russell Drysdale
Half-caste woman 1960
oil on canvas
Geelong Gallery
Gift of Mrs Rosemary Gough, 2019

Geelong Gallery is delighted to announce the most significant acquisition into its collection since the public campaign to acquire Eugene von Guérard's *View of Geelong* in 2006. Received as a gift from Rosemary Gough and family, Russell Drysdale's *Half-caste woman* 1960, adds substantially to the riches of the Geelong collection.

Sir Russell Drysdale was one of the first Australian artists to examine the complex relationships between the landscape and inhabitants of rural Australia. He achieved an international reputation for the distinctly Australian character of his work.

The generous donor of the painting, **Rosemary Gough** says 'My husband and I welcomed Sir Russell Drysdale's *Half-caste woman* into our home in 1991. We were excited to have a work from one of Australia's iconic painters in our collection, especially one that had graced the walls of such exotic locales as the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, Government House at Yarralumla and the Australian Embassy in Paris.'

In 1997, Geoffrey Smith, dear friend of Mrs Gough and then Curator of Australian Art at the National Gallery of Victoria and now Chairman of Sotheby's Australia, curated a travelling retrospective of Drysdale's work. The Goughs were asked if *Half-caste woman* could join the touring exhibition.

Mrs Gough says 'Through this process, we learnt much about the history of the artist, how he had come from England as a child and spent his latter school years at Geelong Grammar, holidaying with his aunts at Drysdale on the Bellarine Peninsula. Drysdale loved the outback of rural Australia but often felt that he never quite belonged in Australia and by the same token was now alienated from his English roots. In Geoffrey's words "Drysdale too was a half-caste".'

Reflecting on this process with Mr Geoffrey Smith, Mrs Gough says 'I suddenly saw the painting in a new light. I appreciated the empathy with which Drysdale had painted this woman who didn't fit comfortably in her two worlds. But I could also appreciate the dignity he had captured in her.'

After 28 years of enjoying *Half-caste woman*, Mrs Gough and family have decided to donate the work to the public collection of Geelong Gallery. Mrs Gough says 'It is time for me to pass her on to a new home and to a new group of people to love her and learn about the important contribution Russell Drysdale made to Australian Art. I am thrilled she is coming to the Geelong Gallery, near to Geelong Grammar and Drysdale which were such important parts of Drysdale's early life in Australia and where my younger daughter, Anna Le Deux, works as a volunteer. I am also thrilled to be passing her into the safe hands of Jason Smith, who worked at the NGV as Curator of Contemporary Art when my husband, John, was the Chairman of Trustees in the 1990s.'

Geelong Gallery Director & CEO **Jason Smith** says 'We are overwhelmed and delighted by the generosity of Rosemary and the extended Gough family. Russell Drysdale's numerous representations of Aboriginal people, rural families and workers, often isolated in harsh and dramatic environments, were highly idiosyncratic contrasts to the dominant imagery of pastoral Australian landscapes at the time. *Half-caste woman* joins Russell Drysdale's landscape, *Hill End* 1948 in the Geelong Gallery collection. We look forward to providing learning opportunities for our diverse audiences through this significant work and acquisition.'

Half-caste woman will be on display at Geelong Gallery from 20 September 2019.



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Full statement by Rosemary Gough

September 2019

My husband and I welcomed Sir Russell Drysdale's *Half-caste woman* 1960 into our home in 1991.

We were excited to have a work from one of Australia's iconic painters in our collection, especially one that had graced the walls of such exotic locales as the NGA in Canberra, Government House at Yarralumla and the Australian Embassy in Paris.

It is often hard to put two strong women under one roof! She did not sit comfortably in our home at first. She too was proud, but reserved, although exuding a quiet dignity, I could feel her alienation from her new surroundings.

She challenged me and my conventions. We trod warily around each other for a number of years.

In 1997 our dear friend Geoffrey Smith, the then Curator of Australian Art at the NGV, asked to borrow her for a travelling retrospective he was organising of Drysdale's work. It was an exhibition that would travel from Melbourne to Sydney, Brisbane, Darwin and Hobart over 1997 and 1998 and would introduce a new generation of Australian art lovers to this important artist.

He came to our house to arrange for the packing of the painting and we sat together and talked to him about the painting and its place within Drysdale's body of work.

Geoffrey explained much of the history of the artist, how he had come from England as a child and spent his latter school years at Geelong Grammar, holidaying with his aunts at Drysdale on the Bellarine Peninsula. How he loved the outback of rural Australia but often felt that he never quite belonged in Australia and by the same token was now alienated from his English roots. In Geoffrey's words "Drysdale too was a half-caste".

Suddenly I saw the painting in a new light. I appreciated the empathy with which Drysdale had painted this woman who didn't fit comfortably in her two worlds. But I could also appreciate the dignity he had captured in her.

I missed her while she was away but was pleased that others could see and enjoy her and understand a little more about this important Australian painter. I was glad to have her home but happy to make her available to Geoffrey again in 2014, briefly, for an exhibition he was curating for Sotheby's Australia in Sydney called "Russell Drysdale's Australia: Masterpieces from Private Collections".

I have enjoyed the company of the *Half-caste woman* for the last 28 years. But I have always been just a custodian of the painting. It is time for me to pass her on to new home and to a new group of people to love her and learn about the important contribution Russell Drysdale made to Australian Art. I am thrilled she is coming to the Geelong Gallery, near to Geelong Grammar and Drysdale which were such important parts of Drysdale's early life in Australia and where my younger daughter, Anna Le Deux, works as a volunteer.

And I am thrilled to be passing her into the safe hands of Jason Smith, who worked at the NGV as Curator of Contemporary Art when my husband, John, was the Chairman of Trustees in the 1990s.



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