



## ITALIAN ART PRIZE TO EX-SERVICEMAN

A young Brisbane artist who has never won a major competition, yesterday was awarded a travelling art scholarship to Italy.

He is John Rigby, who lives with his wife and two young children in Brisbane.

He studied art at the East Sydney Technical College as a Returned Serviceman under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme.

Mr. Rigby had paintings hung in the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prize exhibitions in Sydney, and has had several

successful one-man exhibitions in Brisbane.

The scholarship, valued about £850, was given by the Italian Government. It includes a first-class return passage to Italy and about £9 a week for 12 months while there.

### Well-known Artists

Well-known Australian artists entered oil paintings.

They had to paint an Italian subject.

A panel of judges, representatives of the Dante Alighieri Society and the National Gallery Society, which jointly organised the competition, and of the National Art Gallery, selected the winning painting from among 92 entries.

The results of the competition were announced by Signora Silvio Daneo, wife of the Italian Minister in Australia, who opened the exhibition at the National Art Gallery.

Mr. Rigby was not at the opening.

Second prize went to Michael Kmit, who has won several major art prizes, including the Blake prize for a religious subject in 1953.

• Picture above shows Signor Daneo and the vice-president of the Dante Alighieri Society, Mr. Vincent J. Flynn, admiring the winning painting, "Italian Family."

## In War On Ants

Government last night declared "total war" against the pest, offering £5 reward to finders of new infestations.

"The offer applies anywhere in the State except areas already identified with the pest and which are being periodically surveyed by anti-ant teams.

"Payment will be made immediately Government experts have identified specimens and verified new infestations. "Specimens should be lodged at the Department of Agriculture."



# Winning entries: £2500 Art Prize

## AUSTRALIAN AND OVERSEAS AWARDS

THE four awards in our 1958 Art Prize went to both Australian and overseas artists. For the second year in succession, the prize for the best portrait entered by a woman was awarded to a Czechoslovakian—this year Ivana Vrana, whose charming painting is reproduced on the opposite page. The three Australians are John Rigby, of Brisbane, whose £1000 winning entry is shown at left, Albert Tucker, a Melbourne-born painter now living in England, and Phyl Waterhouse, also of Melbourne, whose entries are shown on the opposite page. Mr. Tucker is 44. He left Australia to live abroad in 1947. Since then he has been acclaimed by European critics as "the most remarkable Australian painter abroad," and as "one of the major painters of his continent." This year the world-famous Museum of Modern Art in New York acquired one of his canvases.

### MARGARET

by John Rigby (Brisbane)  
£1000 Award for the best  
portrait  
(Left)

● Other distinguished  
entries are reproduced on  
page 11





# Winning portrait was inspired by artist's wife

● The inspiration of his wife, Margaret, was one of the main factors which helped young Brisbane artist John Rigby win the £1000 portrait section of the 1958 Australian Women's Weekly Art Prize.

"SHE is all womankind to me," he said after recovering from the news that his portrait of her, titled "Margaret," had won.

"Even when I use the faces of women in the street, I still turn to Margaret to model the hands or the feet or some body movement to make the portrait really live.

"I love painting Margaret because I know her so well. "Margaret" was inspired by a memory of her standing among trees on a beach near

Currumbin, on the Queensland Gold Coast. "She was barefooted, and there was a certain wildness in the setting which suggested the most wonderful feeling of freedom to me."

This tribute came after the first shock had worn off. His first reaction was "Whew... I just can't believe it... let's have a beer."

Dark-haired Margaret said: "John entered this year's contest hopefully, just as he did before in 1955 and 1957... but winning it was quite beyond our expectations..."

Then John again: "The

£1000 is wonderful news... but for an artist the prestige of the award means even more than the hard cash."

For the Rigbys the jackpot has come just at the right time.

With their four-year-old son, Mark, they returned "flat broke" to Brisbane last January after 18 months studying abroad.

And they're expecting their second child in December.

Brown-eyed and brown-bearded, John Rigby, now in his thirties, began as a commercial artist with a Brisbane advertising firm at the age of 15, after a year's study at the Brisbane Technical School.

His art career was interrupted by five years' war service, mostly as a soldier in New Guinea.

Before returning to take up commercial art again in Brisbane, he did a rehabilitation course in Art at the East Sydney Technical College.

In 1955 John won the Danfe Alighieri Scholarship. Given by the Italian Government, it provides a first-class return trip to Italy and 12 months' study there with a living allowance.

As he didn't want to be separated from Margaret and baby Mark, they all made the trip and had a wonderful time "living on a shoestring."

Then they had six months in England before returning to live in a neat, simply furnished war-service home they are buying in Kedron.

Margaret, the daughter of the Rev. John Auld, of Neutral Bay, Sydney, and the late Mrs. Auld, is a niece of well-known artist of the Stretton era, the late James Muir Auld.

Albert Tucker, who won the



JOHN RIGBY and his wife, Margaret—the subject of his prizewinning portrait — with 4-year-old son, Mark, at their Brisbane home.

£1000 prize for the best subject painting with his "Australian Gothic," is a 44-year-old Melbourne artist who has lived in Europe and England for 11 years.

"This money means I can live in absolute peace for at least six months," he said when told of his win.

"And it's come at the right time, as I'm leaving for a trip to America and Canada next week."

"It's just what I need because I'll be having my most important one-man exhibition in London on my return."

"After that I plan to return to Australia, but until now I did not know how I'd raise the fare."

"I've been invited to give exhibitions in Melbourne and Perth, which I now hope to do late next year."

## Acclaimed abroad

Tucker's work has been acclaimed in most of Europe's capitals, and this year New York's Museum of Modern Art bought one of his paintings.

Some of his paintings, now on tour with the Commonwealth Artists' Exhibition, will soon be on show at America's Smithsonian Institute.

Two years ago Tucker was the only Australian to be invited to exhibit at the Twenty-eighth Biennial of Venice, where critics hailed him as the most remarkable Australian painter abroad.

They said his canvases have a savage strength.

Tucker, aiming at cheap travel and accommodation, is one of the very few people who have built a caravan in a Paris hotel bedroom.

He built it, piece by piece, lowered each section out the window, and assembled them on a quay near Notre Dame.

There he lived in it for four months before setting out on a tour of Europe.

In Rome he parked it in the famous Piazza del Popolo and held an open-air exhibition around it. There he lived for five weeks, bathing in a nearby fountain.

After her first excitement, Phyl Waterhouse, who won £250 for the best subject picture by a woman, had a woman's typical reaction to the news of her success. She began to make a new chemise-

line dress to wear to the opening of the exhibition in Sydney.

This gay-spirited, warm-hearted Melbourne artist is just as deft with an electric machine as she is with oils or water colors.

This is the fourth—and biggest—art prize she has won. The others were the Crouch Memorial Prize for Oils in 1950 and 1951, and the Cassell Richards Memorial Prize, Brisbane, in 1956.

Her paintings hang in the Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Perth National Art Galleries, and she has exhibited with the Royal Academy in London.

When she is not working at her easel in the fascinating North Melbourne studio she shares with fellow artist Charles Bush, she is a switchboard operator with broadcasting station 3AW.

Born and bred in Moonee Ponds, a Melbourne suburb, Phyl is the only child of Mr. and Mrs. S. F. Waterhouse.

"I couldn't take with school," she said, "so I left at 10 and diddled around till I went to the National Gallery Art School when I was 15."

There she studied under McInnes and Wheeler until she had her first show in 1939.

Since then she has exhibited with the Victorian Artists, the Independent Group, and the Melbourne Contemporary Artists, as well as holding one-man shows in Melbourne, Brisbane, and Adelaide.

She has packed her studio with her own individuality by way of paintings, Victorian bric-a-brac, and what Phyl frankly calls "junk."

"I'm really the 'junk queen' of all time," she said, "with particular leanings towards Staffordshire and antique glass in my better moments."

Ivana Vrana, winner of the £250 prize for the best portrait by a woman, is a 29-year-old artist of Czechoslovakia.

One of the modern school of Czech painters, she had an entry hung in the supplementary exhibition of the 1957 Portrait Prize in Sydney last year.

She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

Ivana Vrana is the second Czechoslovakian woman to win a prize in our international art competition.

Last year, Vilma Kotrbavova-Vrbova, of Prague, won the £500 award for the best painting entered by a woman.



ALBERT TUCKER, subject-painting winner, was packing gear in his London studio in preparation for a trip to America when told that he had won the £1000 prize.



PHYL WATERHOUSE, in her North Melbourne studio, machining the new dress she made for the 1958 Art Prize opening.



IVANA VRANA, only non-Australian winner in the 1958 competition, at work in her studio in Prague, Czechoslovakia.



**CHILDREN** Dancing, by Brisbane artist, John Rigby, which won the £120 Sulman Prize in Sydney yesterday.



**JOY ROGGENKAMP**, of Geebung, who won the trustees' water colour prize in the Wynne competition.



**SALI HERMAN**, Sydney artist, whose painting, "Devil's Bridge, Rottneest," won the Wynne Prize for landscape.

## The artist who doesn't know...

**BRISBANE** artist John Rigby is travelling "somewhere in Australia" probably unaware that he has won one of the country's top art prizes.

Rigby, 39, of Moggill Road, Kenmore, yesterday was announced as the winner of the £200 Sulman Prize with a painting of children at play.

The director of the Johnstone Galleries in Brisbane (Mr. Brian Johnstone) said yesterday that Rigby was "somewhere" on a working holiday, probably by caravan, doing sketches and drawings for a major Johnstone exhibition later this year.

**The £700 Archibald Prize**, Australia's senior art award, yesterday went to 58-year-old Melbourne artist Mr. Louis Kahan.

Kahan won with a contemporary portrait of Australian writer Patrick

White, painted in less than a week without sittings.

Kahan came from Vienna 16 years ago, and this was his eighth attempt at the Archibald Prize.

He said in Melbourne last night that he had tried to blend White's interest—centred on the bush—and novels into his portrait of the author.

The £200 Wynne landscape prize went to Swiss-born Sydney artist Sali Herman, 65, for his study of the Devil's Bridge, Rottneest Island (W.A.).

Herman won the Wynne prize in 1944 and the Sulman prize in 1946 and 1948.

The trustees' 100-guinea prize for water-colours in the Wynne competition was won by Brisbane painter Joy Roggenkamp, of Bulwer Street, Geebung.

Miss Roggenkamp is the 34-year-old wife of real-estate developer Mr. Ross McCowan.

### Yacht subject

Her win in Australia's top water-colour competition was only her second "real" art prize. The other was a win about four years ago in a Lismore competition.

She won the Wynne section with a painting of yachts at anchor at Bribie Island. She painted it in less than a day, and it hung in the Johnstone Gallery Christmas exhibition without being sold.

Mrs. McCowan, still excited at the news, said yesterday: "I jumped over the divan—I haven't been able to do that in years—and I kissed the cleaning woman."

"If the telegram boy hadn't beaten me to the gate I would have kissed him, too."

She said she had been painting since she was three years old, despite a "sound thumping" for

decorating a new wall with abstract symbols at the age of four.

Mrs. McCowan has three children, aged 10, eight, and four, and when she feels like painting she just forgets the housework and starts; her German shepherd dog (named Digby because he is almost a wolf) looks after the children.

### Other awards

Bearded commercial artist, John Rigby's Sulman win is his eighth major art prize in five years.

He has won the Italian Government travelling scholarship (1957), Women's Weekly £1000 portrait prize (1958), Half-Dozen Group of Artists' Queensland Centenary prize, Redcliffe Art Prize, and Caltex Queensland Centenary Year Prize (all 1959), H. C. Richards' Memorial Art Prize (1960), and a £250 landscape prize in last year's R.N.A. art section.

Born at Palen Creek, near Brisbane, Rigby is now regarded as one of Australia's most successful painters.

He saw service in World War II, and returned afterwards to his work as a commercial artist. The Italian Government scholarship enabled him to study and paint in Italy for 12 months, and then in London and Cornwall.

The 216 entries in the Archibald Prize fell 24 short of the 1952 record. There were 366 works entered for the Wynne Prize, and a record 98 entries for the Sulman.

**PORTRAIT** of Australian Melbourne artist, Archibald

COURIER MAIL  
JAN 19, 1963

**JOHN RIGBY**, of Kenmore, winner of the Sulman Prize for a genre painting.

20 JAN 1963  
COURIER MAIL

# Perry wins Rigby £156

**PERRY** Mason has won another case . . . in private life. He has sold a painting for Brisbane artist John Rigby.

Rigby, of Kenmore, who heard on Friday of his £200 Sulman prize win, has just heard that Raymond Burr, who plays the TV character Perry Mason, sold one of his paintings from the Burr Swathe Art Galleries, Los Angeles.

When Burr visited Australia in June, 1961, he enlisted the help of South Australian Kym Bonython to gather a collection of Australian paintings.

One of Rigby's works was among those selected.

"I think it sold for about 350 dollars (£A156)," Rigby said from Buderim yesterday, where he is holidaying with his wife and three children.

## His memories

Rigby painted the Sulman winner, "Children Dancing" from memories of his own bush school-days.

"I started off with patches and repetitions of red and white, and earthy colours, and then fitted the children into it," he said.

Children are a pet theme of his. He loves to watch them playing. He painted several pictures along a similar theme about three months ago, but selected "Children Dancing" as his entry because the Sulman prize this year was for a subject painting.

"I think the subject figure has been relegated to the background by too many Australian artists," he said.



**PAINTINGS BY JOHN RIGBY— WORKS FROM 1948 TO 1968**





THE SUNDAY MAIL

MAY 18, 1980

**Color** MAGAZINE



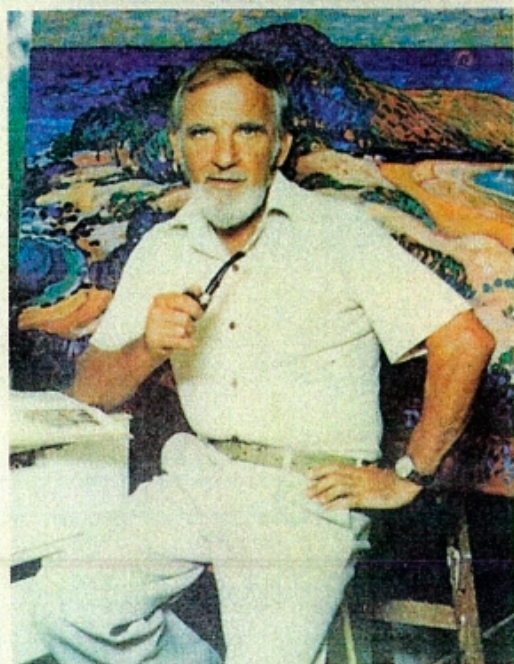
**The MANGO TREE**  
A special serialisation of a great Australian novel. The Sunday Mail proudly brings to its readers "The Mango Tree" by Ronald McKie, a prize-winning story that became a major Australian film. Start reading now on Page 3.

**BEGINS  
TODAY!**

A gallery of the famous names in our community,  
chosen for their initiative and dedication.

# Queensland's Men of Achievement

TURN TO PAGE 5



Top: Sir Leslie Thiess. The Thiess Brothers organisation, begun in Queensland in 1930, became the largest civil engineering construction company in Australia with South-East Asian operations, too, and with its activities covering mining, vehicle marketing and pastoral involvement.

Above: John Thomas Rigby. Painter, teacher, he is officer-in-charge, Fine Art, College of Art, Brisbane, and Trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery.

Right: Greg Norman. Champion amateur golfer, he turned professional in 1975 and has won tournaments in Australia, Japan, Scotland, England, Fiji and Hongkong.



# Conveying the northern warmth

By GAY RICHARDSON

IT would be hard to find a more vibrant painter than Queensland's John Rigby.

Seeing his work leaves you with a happy feeling — landscapes alive with sparkling light and vivid colours and pictures of pretty women in decorative settings that are equally as colourful.

Many years ago, as a young Queensland back from a stint in Fleet Street and after several winters in chilly London, I encountered Rigby's work for the first time.

Although I was not aware of it then, my instant love affair with his paintings was undoubtedly because of his ability to convey the feeling and look of Queensland in his work. They simply radiate warmth.

Last September John Rigby had his fifth one-man show with Verlie Just at her Town Gallery in Brisbane.

One firm of solicitors bought 13 works and the Commonwealth Bank bought two major paintings. Prices ranged from \$3500 to \$10,000.

The Town Gallery has been his Brisbane gallery since the Johnstone Gallery closed over a decade ago.

Rigby's first exhibition at the Johnstone Gallery was in 1954 where he had five more one-man shows and where his work was always in stock.

Straight after his successful Brisbane show, John Rigby went north.

"I was mainly around the Whitsundays collecting material for my next Sydney show at the Wagner Art Gallery in September," he said. "It will have the theme Landscapes of the North."

In 1958 Rigby won the Italian Government Painting Prize and went to Italy where he absorbed so much that was beneficial to his work.

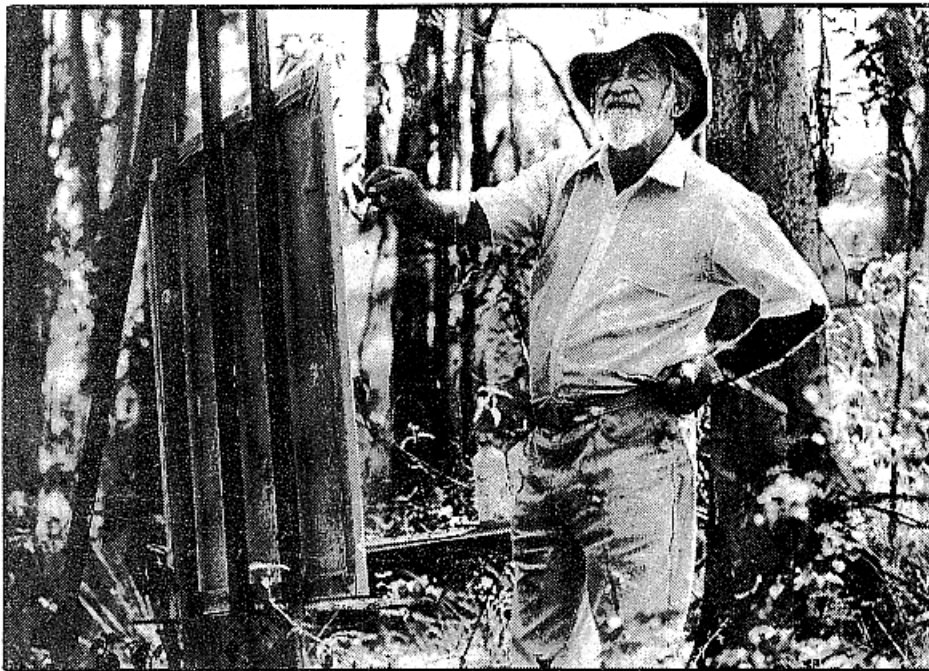
David Seibert, senior lecturer in charge of painting, print making and sculpture at the Queensland College of Art and himself a painter, has a great respect for Rigby's work.

In his opinion Rigby is presently Queensland's most accomplished portrait painter — "he offers both his sitters and viewers the opportunity to see themselves recreated through warmth and understanding of his adept brush and steady probing gaze," Seibert said.

"Amongst the treasures in his studio are portraits of beautiful women, some mysterious and exotic, others displaying an open innocence that only love and understanding can produce.

"There are also portraits of men revealing strength and sensibility.

"John Rigby's land and seascape paintings are actually portraits of Queensland."



John Rigby painting in bushland near his home in Queensland





Painted on location,  
John  
Rigby's *St  
Brigids,  
Paddington*.

## Looking through the eyes of Queensland

### VISUAL ARTS

**John Rigby Exhibition**

Verlie Just Town Gallery

until November 5

Review by Peter Anderson

**J**OHNSON Rigby is one of those artists who contradicts the idea that Brisbane is a place that creative people leave.

While it is true that he has spent time away from this city, these periods have been brief sojourns when compared to his more than five decades of painting in the local environment.

In this exhibition, he presents a large body of work — around 60 pieces — dominated by bright colours and a strong sense of space.

The works which really seem to stand out, perhaps because they are

so bright, are the Thursday Island paintings.

These range from small "sketches" that capture a simple moment (or "scene") in a relatively simple arrangement of shape and colour, to large, more substantial pieces, such as *Waiting, Thursday Island*.

This particular work seems to mix the documentary demands of a figurative approach, with the formal issues of abstract "colour field" painting; bold horizontal bands of colour are intersected by five dark figures whose clothes play off the oranges and reds that dominate the painting.

In a way, Rigby could be considered an "abstract painter", although there are only two "abstracts" in the exhibition.

For me, these two small works provide a clue to what is going on "behind" what is represented in the other pictures. In fact, many of the paintings would probably "work" just as well if they were hung up-side-

down, and appreciated for their formal qualities alone.

However, such an approach would undercut the important representational aspects of the work, for John Rigby is also very much concerned with painting particular "things".

In many respects his subject matter is very "traditional" — the nude, urban and rural landscapes, figure studies, still life — while his sense of colour is as "up-to-the-minute" and bright as a TV commercial for soap powder (his colours really "sparkle").

In moving between the various "subjects", he also shifts styles, from the fairly loose brushwork of the two *Flower Stall* paintings, through to the very flat surfaces and limited palette of *Midday Nude* or *Lady in Waiting*.

Unlike many artists who produce most of their larger landscape pieces in the studio, John Rigby works "on location" — often sorting out formal problems with a smaller piece or two, before moving on to tackle a big canvas.

In this exhibition his eye seems to have been caught by a particular kind of Brisbane view, one structured by the way the houses seem to form "steps" up a hill, towards some more dominant landmark, like a church spire, or tall roof on the ridge.

These are not "grand" paintings, but instead suggest a much more intimate (even casual) way of grasping urban space. Perhaps some would describe it as a particularly "Queensland" way of looking at things.

# A man and his art

When a leading Queensland newspaper promoted a write-in poll for readers to nominate 60 of the State's most recognised achievers, Brisbane artist John Rigby featured prominently.

Rigby, who is on the Coast this Friday to open the new Bruce Watling Galleries at Pintar Drive, Southport, has carried on a lifelong love affair with Queensland through his art, and it seems Queenslanders have equally taken him to heart.

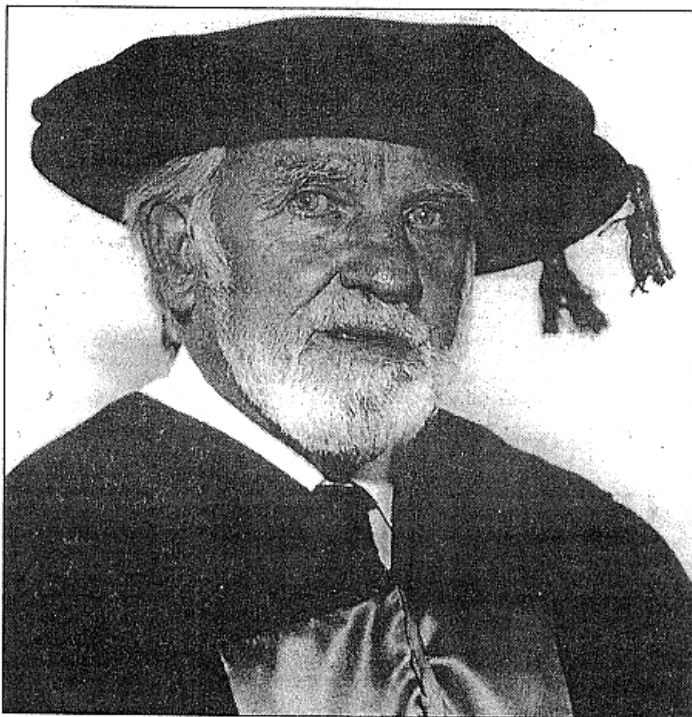
Not only is he much-loved by the art public but he is also held in the highest esteem by his professional peers and colleagues, as evidenced by the Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts bestowed on him last month by Griffith University at a moving ceremony at Brisbane's Performing Arts Complex.

Rigby, who served with the AIF throughout World War Two and trained under the Repatriation scheme at the National Art School, East Sydney, has, like other native-born Queenslanders such as the great Lloyd Rees, faced the dilemma of whether to turn his back on his place of birth in order to further a career in what were then more culturally fertile pastures.

The pressure to leave the north was at its most intense when Rigby won the prestigious Sulman prize, part of the Australian art world's Holy Trinity of annual awards, the Archibald, the Sulman and the Wynne prizes, held annually in Sydney.

That was in 1962, during a decade when the artist as 'red hot', winning a bagful of major awards including the H.C. Richards Prize, two David Jones prizes, the R.N.A. award and prizes in Adelaide, Armidale and Lbury.

But Rigby rejected the assumption that an artist couldn't make it in the Australian art scene while working and living in an artistic 'outpost' like Brisbane.



Dr John Rigby at the ceremony at Griffith University



## Millington On The Arts Scene

Not that Rigby is in any way averse to broadening his outlook, having worked in Italy for two years during the late 1950s on an Italian Travelling Scholarship, and has made several overseas painting tours since.

He has, in fact, proven to be well ahead of his time in believing that if any artist is good enough and dedicated enough he can work from any base he chooses without necessarily penalising himself, a contention that is now widely held to be true.

And, of course, the dazzling light and brilliant colours of Queensland

have always been the major ingredients in Rigby's joyful, optimistic paintings of the rainforests, palm-fringed northern beaches, spectacular ranges, cosy rural hideaways and richly patterned farmlands of The Downs.

In his most recent exhibition in Brisbane late last year, he turned his attention to the city's distinctive heritage architecture, producing sparkling, colour-charged interpretations of such subjects as the almost impossibly high-stilted houses on the hillsides in the Red Hill area.

Rigby has always said, in answer to queries about the vibrancy of his pictures, "I want my work to be like a song. There's so much depression about, I don't want to add to it."

Always honest and unusually forthcoming for an artist, Rigby says of the formulation of his distinctive style, "I tried a few 'band-wagons' (in the early days) but I found that sincerity was more important, and in the end I followed my own line.

"Sometimes people will

look at a road I've painted red and remind me that it wasn't really that colour, but it's my prerogative, and the painting takes on a life of its own because of it. Anyway, I don't like to let what I call 'tyranny of subject matter' take over too much."

Rigby's colour palette is largely based on the French Fauvist painters of the early 20th Century, who were concerned more with the feel and sense of a place as expressed by colour rather than the actual colours that may have been there at a certain time.

The system is ideally suited to the landscape and

lifestyle of Queensland and the North, and Rigby conveys the heat, the excitement and the visual delights of the 'nearest place to Paradise'.

Delivering the address at Griffith University's Graduation Day after receiving his Doctorate, Rigby slipped easily back into the mode of the teacher, a role that shared time with his art practice for more than a decade, during much of which he was Officer-in-Charge of Fine Arts at the Queensland College of Fine Arts, the institute that was now awarding him the highest accolade.

Though a senior artist with a style fixed in time before current contemporary art trends, he was able to bring to life for the graduating students an exciting pioneering time in Queensland art when the likes of Ian Fairweather, Jon Molvig, Mervyn Moriarty, Charles Blackman and Andrew Sibley coloured the local art scene, and there was an unusually Bohemian, vital, and somewhat avant-gardist cultural lifestyle in the otherwise sleepy northern city.

Rigby stressed the immutables to the young artists on the threshold of a career - dedication, commitment and perseverance of 'the loneliness of the long-distance artist'.

Small in stature, a giant in Queensland art, the most loyal of Queenslanders, John Rigby will no doubt remain a favourite son for many years to come.

- John Millington



# The Gang's all here

A band of rumbustious Brisbane artists showed Australia what was what in the 50s and 60s. On the eve of an exhibition celebrating their work, Adrian McGregor caught up with their life and times

ONE day in 1953 police rapped on John Rigby's door in Brisbane and asked: "Do you know a bloke called Molvig? He's in Boggo Road jail." They had nabbed Jon Molvig for jumping the rail from Grafton without a ticket, and held him for 10 days in a miffed cell before calling on his friend Rigby to bail him.

Such an inauspicious introduction to Brisbane for Molvig, an artist destined to adorn one of Australia's most exciting and productive periods of provincial painting. By the time he died, in 1970, Molvig and a small band of contemporaries — Rigby, Roy Churcher, Ray Crooke, Sam Pullbrook, Ian Fairweather, Margaret Olley, Joy Roggenkamp, Charles Blackman and Mervyn Moriarty — had inspired northern art to come of age.

Critic Robert Hughes, after a visit to Brisbane, wrote scathingly, "It is an inbred art world, hemmed in by public philistinism, constantly defensive, yet at times, apathetic to what goes on outside it."

The year Hughes wrote that, 1963, Sam Pullbrook won the Wynne Prize, and repeated it the following year. Molvig won the West Australian Art Gallery's Perth Prize, and Rigby, who had won the Sulman the previous year, won the Melrose Memorial in Adelaide.

Two years earlier, enlightened Sydney critic Laurie Thomas had become director of the Queensland Art Gallery.

bald and his two Wynnes; Rigby won the Sulman and the prestigious Women's Weekly portrait prize; Arthur Ryan Read won his Wynne; and Olley won the Helena Rubinstein for portraits.

Slade School-trained Betty and Roy Churcher's arrival from London brought a fresh gust of international ideas and, by 1961, Roy had founded the Queensland Contemporary Art Society.

Southern artists were drawn by the northern hubbub to exhibit in Brisbane — Pugh, Daws, Friend, Perceval, Coburn, Dickerson, Nolan and Arthur Boyd.

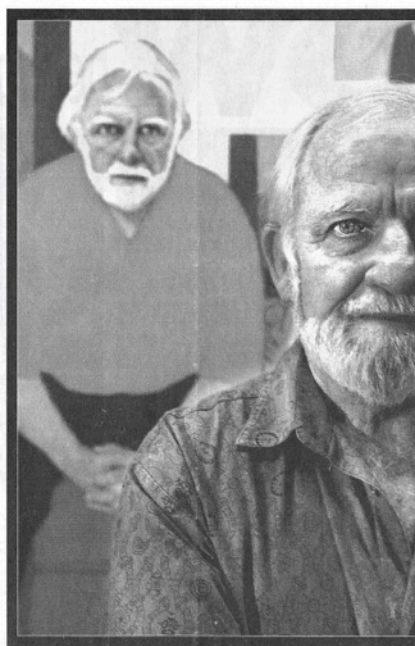
"Southern dealers got upset because artists sent their work to Brisbane rather than to Sydney," says John Rigby. "Brian Johnston had a new opening every three weeks, changed artists. Hundreds would turn up. We'd sell more there than anywhere else."

Artists of the time refer to it as Brisbane's golden era, and an exhibition recognising their work — *A Time Remembered*, Brisbane Art, 1950-1975 — will open at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane next Saturday.

Many of the exhibitors were born before the war and it is salutary to hear them talk of their bohemian days in Brisbane up to half a century ago.

For, while formal paths — galleries and prizes — were necessary for them to bloom, it was the artists and their city, Brisbane, that generated the excitement.

Brisbane in the 1950s was a somewhat city of suburbs on stilts, redolent of prawns and pubs, milkbars, trams and far, all



adjourn to the nearby Story Bridge or Pineapple hotels.

"It was wild, very wild," says painter Maryke Degues. "Today seems tame by comparison. We painted, partied, and learned. Molvig used to say, 'Come on, we'll get some inspiration at the pub, and I'd tag along. It was often very sad, old prostitutes and mad sailors dancing. At 10pm the detectives would throw us out.'"

One of Degues's paintings in the exhibition, entitled *Jitterbugging Sailors*, depicts the scene.

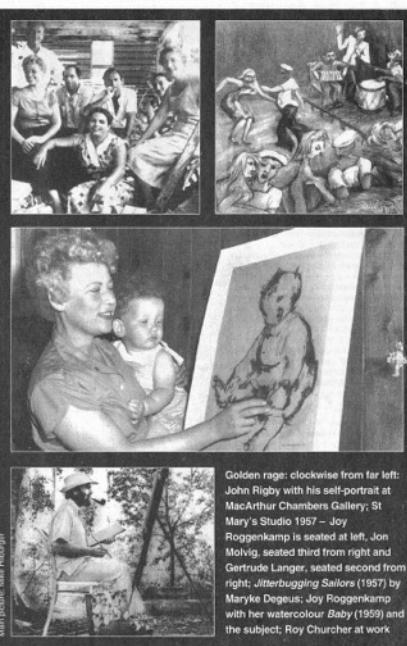
When the pub shut, Molvig and friends would kick on back at the studio, and often paint. Degues remembers painting away at 2am when the St Mary's minister

Komon, Molvig's ambition was to win the Archibald, "God knows who," says Roggenkamp. "He said the Archibald was like the Public Service, but still he wanted to win it."

His first entry was rejected. Year after year he entered, once with a painting of Roggenkamp that should have won. Says Roggenkamp, "Bob Hughes said Jon's portrait of me was one of the glittering paintings in an otherwise dreary exhibition of a lot of files pickled in amber."

After 13 attempts, Molvig eventually won in 1965 with his portrait of Charles Blackman, ironically, considered one of his lesser works.

Molvig and Rigby were long-time rebel-



Golden rage: clockwise from far left: John Rigby with his self-portrait at MacArthur Chambers Gallery; St Mary's Studio 1957 — Joy Roggenkamp is seated at left, Jon Molvig, seated third from right and Gertrude Langer, seated second from right; *Jitterbugging Sailors* (1957) by Maryke Degues; Joy Roggenkamp with her watercolour *Baby* (1959) and the subject, Roy Churcher at work

To show his support for Molvig, Pinney attended a city art exhibition armed with a custard pie. Degues intercepted him and asked what was with the pie. "Just watch. I'm going to throw it at Roy," said Pinney. And did, into Churcher's face as he was leaving a lift. Molvig admonished Pinney, who was unrepentant. "I'd like to do it again next year," he enthused.

Roy Churcher was president of the Queensland Contemporary Art Society from 1965 to 1971. According to Queensland Art Gallery curator Glenn Cooke — who has collected the 1950-1975 exhibition — in the Society's first interstate exhibition in 1961, some 18 of the 45 local artists hung were Churcher's ex-students.

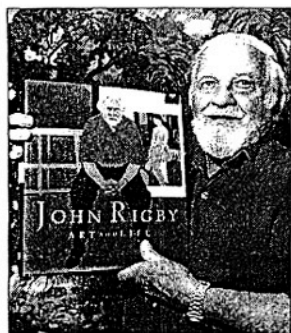
artists and galleries. Rigby and Molvig often drank at the City View hotel with gallery director Laurie Thomas and it was there they hatched the idea of an artists versus the symphony orchestra cricket match. The match proceeded with as much hostility as could be generated between two teams, each terrified about damaging their tools of trade — their hands.

By 1970, when Molvig died of kidney failure, the Brisbane movement had already lost its impetus. Roggenkamp remembers Brisbane art critic Dr Gertrude Langer, a Viennese-born art historian, telling her, "You know darling, I don't know where they think they are going."

Thursday, November 27, 2003 The Courier-Mail

7+

## Celebrating 50 years of art excellence



PUBS and mates . . . John Rigby with his book.

Debra Aldred

SENIOR Queensland painter John Rigby belongs to a time when artists were few and pubs were many.

"Artists would come up from Melbourne or Adelaide, and we'd all meet in the pub, (the old Windsor Hotel was a favourite), and we'd spend three-quarters of the night saying, 'Bloody Dargie's won the Archibald again,'" said Mr Rigby, who turns 81 next month.

"When you did win national prizes, all the artists around Australia, from here to Perth,

would know about it. There was a friendship among the artists then."

Mr Rigby's own contribution to Australian art has been celebrated at the Queensland Art Gallery with the launch of a book about his career titled *John Rigby: Art and Life*. The book condenses half a century of artwork and awards (including winning the Italian Government Traveling Art Scholarship in 1955) into 239 pages, weighing 2kg.

An exhibition of Mr Rigby's portraits will be held at Queensland's new social history museum, the Museum of Brisbane, at City Hall in

January, followed by an exhibition in Sydney.

QAG director Doug Hall applauded Mr Rigby's dedication to the Brisbane's artistic community as a painter, art educator and an artist trustee for the Queensland Art Gallery from 1969 until 1987.

"There are two institutions that have been around for a long time, one is the Queensland Art Gallery, and for the second half of the 20th century the other has been John Rigby as an enduring presence in Queensland public culture," Mr Hall said.

**QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY/GALLERY OF MODERN ART**  
**Website Blog**

**WE REMEMBER JOHN RIGBY (1922-2012)**

THURSDAY 31 JANUARY 2013



John Rigby, Australia 1922-2012 | Photograph: Richard Stringer, 9 January 2003 | © John Rigby family

The passing of John Rigby on 18 October 2012 allows us to reflect on what a senior figure in Queensland and Australian art he was. Rigby began exhibiting in 1941 as a member of the Younger Artists Group of the Royal Queensland Art Society and had some 35 solo exhibitions, principally in Brisbane but also in Sydney and Melbourne. He received several prestigious awards, including the Dante Alighieri/Italian Government Prize (1955), Australian Women's Weekly Art Prize (1958), Caltex Centenary Art Competition (1959), H.C. Richards Prize for Landscape Painting at the Queensland Art Gallery (1960) and the Finney's Art Prize (1965), amongst others.



John Rigby | Lady Cilento 1973 | Oil on composition board | Bequest of Lady Cilento 1987 |  
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | © John Rigby family



## QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY/GALLERY OF MODERN ART

### Website Blog

Landscape and portraiture were his favourite subjects and in January 2004, the Museum of Brisbane presented 'Portraits: John Rigby', including many works that had been entered in important portrait competitions, such as the Archibald Prize, Doug Moran Portrait Prize and the Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize. An example of Rigby's keen interest in portraiture is seen in the Gallery's work, *Lady Cilento* 1973. This portrait was hung in the Archibald Prize of 1973 and remains a sensitive tribute to this well-known and respected Queensland identity.

Apart from John Rigby's contribution as a major artist, he admirably served Queensland in art administration. He was appointed Officer in Charge of the School of Fine Art, Queensland College of Art in 1974 and he taught there for ten years. He was a Trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery from 1969 to 1987 and helped oversee the transition from temporary premises in the city to then Gallery's new purpose-built accommodation on Brisbane's Southbank in 1981. John Rigby will be remembered, not just as a fine artist but also a teacher who influenced generations of Queensland artists and students.



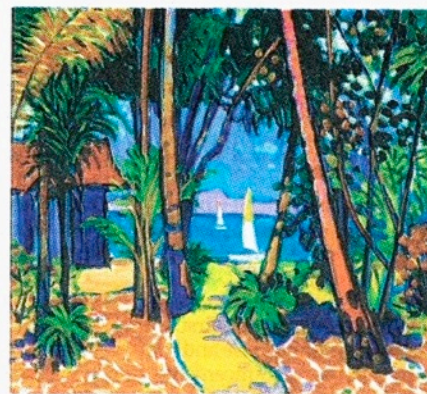
John Rigby | *A place for people* 1973 | Oil on canvas | Purchased 1973 with the assistance of an Australian Government Grant through the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council | Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | © Queensland Art Gallery

Author: [Michael Hawker](#) | Associate Curator, Australian Art



## COLOURFUL CHARACTER CAPTURED STATE

MASTER Queensland painter John Rigby, whose lush pictures have delighted Australians for half a century, died last week just short of his 90th birthday. Few artists manage to capture the tropical grandeur and "Queenslandness" of this great state. Rigby (left) did. As well as landscapes drenched with colour, Rigby created lively portraits of Queenslanders as diverse as actress Babette Stephens, likeable crook Russ Hinze and basketballer "Leapin" Leroy Loggins. Rigby was born December 9, 1922. At school he painted comics for classmates for pocket money. He leaves his wife Margaret, and children Mark and Anthony Rigby and Renee Aland.



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# Enduring impression on art

QUEENSLAND artist John Rigby was, more than any other post-war artist, the greatest influence on generations of Brisbane artists and students.

He was born in Brisbane in 1922, the second son of James and Lillian Lucy Rigby.

His father, a saw-sharpener and engine driver, found work initially in the tiny timber-mill township of Palen Creek, near Rathdowney, and later at Commissioners Flats near the Glasshouse Mountains, where John and his brothers - Frank and Ron - attended one-teacher schools.

His childhood was an idyllic life of exploring and bush adventure. His artistic talent was furnished by his imagination, and he sold hand-drawn cartoon strips to his schoolmates for a penny a copy.

He did not continue on to high school but, at 14, started studying at the Central Technical College in Brisbane under art master F.J. Martyn Roberts.

He later worked for sign-writers Victor Day and Sons, then at National Advertising in Brisbane, but his aim was to be a fine art painter.

He stayed in advertising until

## John Thomas Rigby

Artist, teacher, gallery trustee

Born: December 9, 1922, Brisbane

Died: October 18, 2012, Brisbane

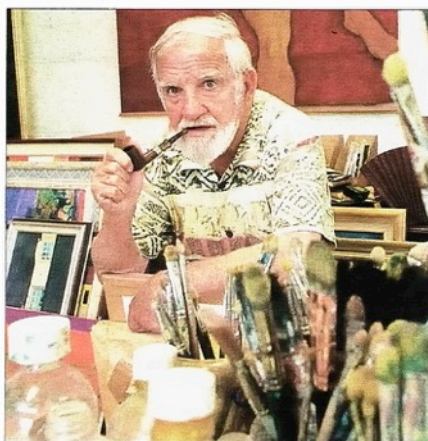
he joined the Australian Imperial Forces in 1941, serving firstly in Townsville then Mareeba and New Guinea.

Mr Rigby was initially attached to the 101 Australian Tank Attack Regiment and with 1st Australian Army Intelligence in Lae, working on information related to troop movements and topography in the Pacific region.

He produced some paintings while in New Guinea and also a series of cartoons showing aspects of army life.

The first public showing of his work was in 1941, with the Royal Queensland Art Society.

After the war, he worked as a freelance commercial artist and



**BIG INFLUENCE:** John Rigby won many awards for his work.

also drew sports cartoons for *The Sunday Mail*.

From 1948 to 1950 he studied for his Diploma in Fine Art at the East Sydney Technical College under a special Com-

monwealth Training Scheme for returned servicemen.

Mr Rigby met Margaret Auld in 1952 and they married in 1954. That year, he held his first one-man show at the Johnstone

Gallery in Brisbane and entered the Archibald Prize for the first time. His first son, Mark, was also born that year. Two other children followed, Renee in 1958 and Anthony in 1962.

His painting career was progressing, with his first major prize in 1955, when he won the Italian Government Travelling Art Scholarship. This gave Mr Rigby the chance to live, study and paint in Italy and the UK with his family.

Other impressive prizes and awards followed, including the Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize, H.C. Richards Memorial Prize, David Jones Art Prize, Melrose Prize, Caltex Centenary Art Prize, Redcliffe Centenary Art Contest and the Sir John Sulman Prize.

He kept active in commercial art and taught privately in Brisbane to support his family.

Mr Rigby started his own commercial studio in 1966, but finally left the advertising world in 1972 to paint full time.

It was around this time that Alan Warren offered him a position as head of fine art at the Queensland College of Art, a position he held from 1974 to 1984.

After that he became a full-time painter, and was also sought after to judge competitions, open exhibitions and conduct art classes throughout the state. In 1969, he was appointed a trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery, where he served for 18 years.

In 1994, Mr Rigby was awarded an honorary doctorate from Griffith University for his services to the arts in Queensland. Nine years later, he was made a Companion of the Queensland Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In January 2004, the Museum of Brisbane presented *Portraits: John Rigby* an exhibition of his portraits, many of them entries in important portrait competitions, including the Archibald Prize, Doug Moran Portrait Prize and the Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize.

His paintings were bold, colourful impressions, full of light and life, as seen through the eyes of a sensitive artist.

Mr Rigby is survived by his wife of 58 years, Margaret, and his children, Mark, Renee and Anthony and their families.

Greg de Silva