

Mr Lou Klepac OAM

The degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) was conferred upon Lou Klepac OAM at the Arts ceremony held at 11.30am on 20 October 2006.



Mr Klepac, photo, copyright Memento Photography.

Citation

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Lou Klepac for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa. Lou Klepac was born in Croatia in 1936. From 1944-50 he lived with his family in Italy where he went to school, first in Venice and later Trieste. His interest in art began in Venice where he had his portrait painted, at the age of eight, and mixed with painters who were friends of his father.

In 1950 Lou Klepac emigrated with his family to Western Australia. He was educated at Perth Modern School and the University of Western Australia, from which he graduated in 1957 in English Literature with a major in Drama and Poetry. While at University he was the art critic for the student paper the Pelican 1956-57. After travels in Europe in 1958-64 and part-time teaching in London, he returned to Australia, and became the first Curator of Paintings at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (1964-66) and then at the Art Gallery of South Australia from 1966-70.

He was also art critic for the Adelaide News and a part-time lecturer in art history in the Department of Architecture at the University of Adelaide.

After another five years in London he became Senior Curator and later Deputy Director at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (1974-80) where he brought together an exceptional staff and instigated a dynamic system of acquisitions, exhibitions and publications. In 1980 he moved with his family to Sydney where he established The Beagle Press, publishing books and catalogues on the fine arts.

Lou Klepac is the author of many books and catalogues including: Lloyd Rees Drawings; Russell Drysdale: His Life and Work; Judy Cassab: Portraits of Artists and Friends; Australian Painters of the Twentieth Century; The Genius of Donald Friend: drawings from the diaries; William Robinson: paintings 1987-2000; John Coburn: The Spirit of Colour; and James Gleeson: beyond the screen of sight.

He has organised many exhibitions including: Russell Drysdale paintings, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney; On the Road to Berry, Lloyd Rees and Brett Whiteley drawings, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne and the Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney; Giorgio Morandi Paintings and Etchings, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney; La Serenissima, the fascination of Venice, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney; James Gleeson Retrospective, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne In 1980 he was appointed a Cavaliere by the Italian Government for services to Italian art. He has been a member of the Advisory Committee of the S. H. Ervin Gallery of the National Trust of Australia since 1984. He was President of the Frederick May Foundation for Italian Studies at the University of Sydney from 1991-95 and is the Chairman of the recently established Gleeson O'Keefe Foundation. In 1996 he was awarded a medal in the Order of Australia for services to art.

He has been a keen supporter of the visual arts and tireless in the promotion of the work of important but neglected artists such as Nora Heysen. A consummate networker, Lou likes to assist artists by supporting their work and bringing it to the attention of art critics and curators.

He has given lectures, talks, opened exhibitions (he gave a particularly witty and erudite lecture at the University's Art Gallery for the launch of "Donald Friend, friends and lovers exhibition" in 2005) and launched books as well as organising poetry readings. He has also organised dramatic presentations such as the recent "An Evening with Donald Friend" at the S.H. Ervin Gallery produced in conjunction with the exhibition Donald Friend: A Charmed Life, which he is curating for the National Library in Canberra for November of this year. He is currently writing a book on Hans Heysen, whose achievement he feels has been neglected and his work often overlooked.

Pro-Chancellor, I present Lou Klepac, art historian, author and publisher, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.