

Dr Gene Sherman

The degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) was conferred upon Dr Gene Sherman at the Faculty of Arts graduation ceremony held at 9.30am on 7 November 2008.



Pro Chancellor John McCarthy QC conferring the honorary degree upon Dr Sherman, *photo, copyright Memento Photography.*

Citation

Pro Chancellor, I have the honour to present Dr Gene Sherman, Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa.

Gene Sherman has contributed richly to our knowledge about the contemporary visual arts in Australia. This has been the result of twenty years of activity as the director of Sherman Galleries, and as a mover and shaker for many other arts organizations. In its heyday employing a staff of ten, Sherman Galleries mounted up to twenty local and travelling exhibitions each year until 2007. It became a model of intellectual engagement unparalleled in Australia. The Gallery sponsored scholarship through a pioneering website, by documenting each exhibition with illustrated critical essays, and by publishing books and seminars at its own expense.

Gene made her gallery into a unique cultural hub. It had an educational and public programme worthy of a publicly-funded institution. Activities included Saturday debates, and a rare tradition of engaging key figures (including State Governors and, presciently, future Prime Ministers) to speak at her packed exhibition openings. Gene also turned on her famous monthly dinners for artists and Sydney art-lovers.

Gene and Brian Sherman emigrated in 1976 from South Africa (she had studied at the University of Witwatersrand) with just a few dollars in their pockets. In Sydney they raised a son and a daughter who have gone on to make rich contributions to the worlds of cinema (Emile) and animal rights (Ondine). A fluent francophone, Gene completed a PhD at this University on the writing of André Gide. She taught in the Department of French, and became Head of Languages at Ascham School. In 1986 Gene set up her first Gallery with the financial support of her husband Brian, whose business career was flourishing.

Gene has been a key figure in the new culture of art collecting in Sydney, regularly advising groups and individuals on forming collections. Gene is an author of short essays, a public speaker, art prize judge, radio interviewee, and mentor of many emerging curators and art dealers.

She has lent her acumen and extraordinary energy to arts organizations as diverse as the Bundanoon Trust, the Asia Society of New York, the Foundation of the National Gallery of Australia, and the Australia-Israel Cultural Exchange. Between 1996 and 2006 as Vice-President of the Power Foundation, she was the Power Institute's most persuasive fund-raiser and a key donor. She helped fund the new Fine Arts Library, opened in 2000 and a jewel of the University's cultural infrastructure. In a generous parting gesture she established the Sherman Foundation Research Fellowship in Contemporary Art.

In early 2008 Gene transformed her dealership into a non-profit philanthropic entity, the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation. It continues the vital work as a portal for new art from East Asia and Australia, and as a place for reflection and scholarship.

Pro Chancellor I have great pleasure in presenting to you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, the writer, art dealer, philanthropist, and galvanizer of the visual arts, Gene Sherman.