

**DORA SERLE - An account of her art training and work, written for Mrs. Lina Bryans when she was contemplating compiling a history of women painters.**

My desire to paint started from school days. My sister Elsie and I attended the drawing class at 'Fairelight' the leading girls school at the time, held by Miss. Jane Sutherland. When Miss. Sutherland saw that we were keen about it and not just playing, she asked us to come to her class in town to draw and paint from life. So we gave up the school class and started in earnest, and by great good fortune were put on the right road from the beginning by a wonderful teacher. Mother naturally I suppose, was not very keen on our going off every day, and two night a week to draw from the nude.

Both Elsie and the sister a little older than me, married early and I was left the only one at home, as our elder sisters had married long before.

Mother was pining to go back to England again to see her old friends again so Father arranged that I should go with her.

While there I had a summer term at the delightful studios of Mr. & Mrs. Stanhope Forbes on the cliffs at Lands End. Whenever the weather allowed we worked outside. When I came back to London, Mother and I went over to Paris for a short time, and I revelled in Manet and Monet and the other Impressionists. I decided that was how I wanted to paint. Back in England I took every opportunity I could of seeing any exhibitions that were being held, amongst them that of Augustus John at the National Gallery, he had a flowerpiece of Australia's national flower and I thought he hadn't been any more successful than any of us.

When Miss. Sutherland had to give up teaching and painting outside, I went once a week to work at Heidelberg with Walter Withers. He gave up one of his schools drawing classes at Malvern to me (and) was partly instrumental in my buying from a former pupil, the so called Art School at Geelong. I found it far from being what had been made out, and the list of pupils did not eventuate.

But there it was and I had to make the best of it. To make things worse, the Church started a Church school at 'The Hermitage' and it appeared that the Principal had a sister who also taught Drawing, so I was only allowed to keep the girls I had, and she got the coming on girls I had been promised. However, I had a class at two schools with half a dozen pupils at each and students began to come slowly, and for a time had 3 young men for drawing among them, at a Saturday morning class.

After 6 months I had a students exhibition of work and got a glowing notice in the local paper. There were one or two quite rewarding, doing really good studies. I think any who had attempted painting before just copied, which of course was taboo; quite often I had someone sitting but it wasn't easy to get models. I kept this going for some years, coming up to town at weekends by boat, but gave it up when I was going to be married. Ironically the 'sister' became engaged at the same time so neither of us profited by the other leaving. While the children were young, it was a kind of marking time, but I managed to send in to the V.A.S. Exhibitions. Then we bought this place and it did away with the necessity of daily walks as there was plenty of room for them to play about and as they got to school age I had more time. Later on we went overseas for 12 months. Geoff was too young to take but he went off to my sister in the country who was fond of and wonderful with children, and (he) was happy there. The other two, nearing leaving age, went to schools in England, in holiday time travelled round with us, my husband and me. Naturally we went to all the great galleries and in Paris again I was impressed by the Impressionists and decided that was the way I wanted to paint. Soon after we were all home together again the depression started and jobs had to be found. The Women Painters group had a stall at Mary Farmer's studio for which we made and knitted and sold when the war years followed on. By the time we could give it up, we had made over £2000 for the war funds beside the

donation of clothing and goods. Both sons enlisted, the elder one going through the whole period of the war, reaching his colonelcy, being wounded in the leg in Africa, fortunately not seriously; the younger one seriously wounded by shrapnel, nearly passed out twice and took a long time to get home going from hospital to hospital. As soon as it was possible, he was back at the University and in a few months had won the Rhodes scholarship. Betty at having to leave the University trained as a Kindergartener but she very soon married, and Robert, on leave, also married, and when Geoff left for Oxford, my husband and I were alone again. Things had cleared up by that time and I was able to give a good deal of time to painting and he to his literary work. I had a show at George's and did quite well, getting quite good notices and selling about half a dozen. Sir Daryl, then Mr Lindsay, bought one for the Gallery and one went over to the West. Since then I have exhibited at various exhibitions and regularly at the V.A.S. I have always been intrigued with the study of the play of light on colour.

A small, square, textured box containing the handwritten signature "Dava" in a cursive script.