

REINIS ZUSTERS OAM (1918 – 1999)

Reinis Zusters was born in Odessa, Ukraine of Latvian parents in 1918. In 1950 along with his family, he migrated to Australia as did so many other European artists in post World War 2. He arrived in Freemantle, Western Australia before moving to Canberra, Sydney and then finally Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains in 1976. This area was to be a huge source of inspiration for his painting in his later years.

He studied initially at the Technical College of Riga (Latvia) and later at the East Sydney Technical College. When Zusters lived in Sydney he forged strong friendships with many artists in the Lane Cove area. Lloyd Rees opened his third exhibition at Darlinghurst Galleries Sydney in August 1967. Rees remarked that Zusters saw the Australian landscape both urban and rural in a fresh and very vivid way unlike Australian painters who depicted it in a half tonal manner. Rees felt that this interpretation reflected a zest for life. Zusters' love of texture, form and colour of aged geological surfaces combined to produce a very distinctive style of painting which very much included an abstract interpretation of the landscape. Often extremely large canvases resulted. Today in the Conservation Hut in Wentworth Falls a very large triptych can be seen depicting massive sculptural boulders covered in abstract patterns. The inspiration for this work came from the landscape in the area immediately located in the environs surrounding the hut. Zusters had gifted this work to the nation. His body of work also included cityscapes where urban scenes came to life using a palette knife and many thick layers of colourful paint. He also painted inland scenes and did several portraits. He became a full time artist in 1968 after working as a draughtsman and chief designer for the architectural firm Austin-Anderson at St Leonards.

According to William Pidgeon, Zusters was an evolutionary artist who did not bend to what was fashionable. Zusters' unique vision saw him being the recipient of numerous awards in Australia, Japan and the United States. He also won the prestigious Wynne prize in 1959. He received an OAM in 1994.

By Margaret Vickers