

Local Treasure

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Alice Blanch Chehovski was born in Queensland to a Russian mother and Polish father. When her father died leaving three small children to bring up on her own, her mother took them back to Russia to visit her own parents. In the following fateful year, Stalin came to power and the family was trapped by Russia closing its' borders. At the age of twenty three, in Autumn 1944, Alice entered Moscow's Institute of Decorative Arts and Applied Arts to study ceramics. Neither the subject of ceramics nor the academic drawing in fine pencil inspired her. At that time Moscow was surrounded by German troops, Russian culture was inhibited by the war and generally speaking it was not the time for arts. Alice said 'My soul and my hands were needed as a volunteer, to help the wounded soldiers survive'.

Alice struggled through a lifetime of hardship and triumph before returning to her native land of Australia in 1981 at the age of 60.

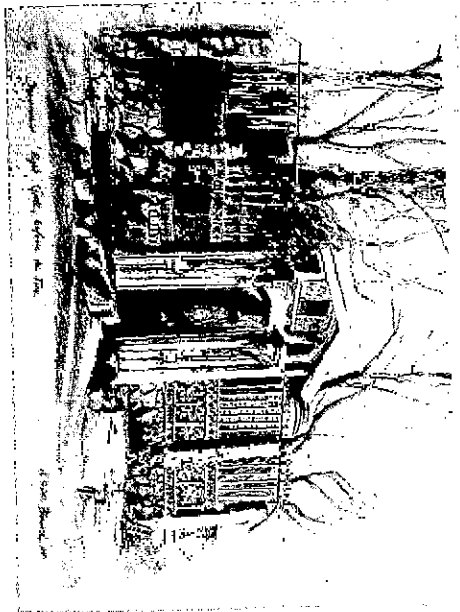
At her first exhibition in Australia, seven works were acquired by the Australian National Gallery in Canberra and her prints by the Australian Print Workshop archive. The State Library of Victoria has acquired a set of ten lithographs Alice created just before the fire in 2001 which destroyed the main buildings of Dunmoochin and depict the buildings and landscape as Clifton Pugh would have known them.

Alice came to Dragonfly Gallery some months ago with her artists' display folder on her trolley and chatted with me for some time. We struggled through communication barriers such as her strong accent and her hearing now a little compromised. Alice told me her story before producing a set of unframed lithographs, of which ten sets were made, the same lithographs the State Library purchased for their collection depicting Dunmoochin as it was when Clifton Pugh was alive. I have since sold several of the framed pieces mostly to local residents of Dunmoochin, who have recognised their important historical significance.

The last time I visited Alice in her home, which is crammed floor to ceiling with her own art works, she trustingly gave me the final two unbroken sets of the ten lithographs, one set in black ink and one in sepia, unframed to sell as I saw fit.

I felt such an immense sense of responsibility to ensure the right thing be done with the treasure she'd just entrusted me with. I have given it some thought and am planning to discuss the prospect of Nillumbik Council acquiring a set to form part of our own local art archive. I have several framed and unframed pieces from other sets of ten of the same series available at the gallery but am loathe to break the second and last set of ten, I plan to sell that for Alice as a set from the gallery.

I will continue to display and sell Alice's other works for her as she sees fit from the gallery on an ongoing basis.



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