

Casterton honours Clarice Beckett



The Yarra, Sunset, painting, oil on board, 30.5 x 35.5 cm, by Clarice Beckett. Image: Menzies Art Brands.

I It is a little known, but fascinating fact about South-West Victoria that one of Australia's most inspiring early women artists, **Clarice Beckett**, was born in the town of Casterton.

The picturesque sheep-and-wool town, west of Hamilton, includes a small, but robust art collective called [Artists of the Valley](#) who each year celebrate the town's most famous artist with an art prize.

The Clarice Beckett Award, with a main prize of \$500, will be announced during the Queen's Birthday long weekend (June 7-8)

when the entries for this year's competition will go on display at the Casterton Bowling Club.

Artists of the Valley promotions officer **Jenn White** said the group "stumbled across" the connection between Clarice and Casterton several years ago and, in 2012, decided to honour her legacy through its annual art prize.



A young and very beautiful Clarice Beckett at the age of 18. Image supplied by Artists of the Valley.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] C [/dropcap]larice was born in the town on 21 March, 1887, to a bank manager, Joseph Beckett, and his wife, Elizabeth, both of whom Clarice would spend most of her adult life caring for after they retired to Melbourne.

It appears Clarice spent only her earliest years in Casterton,

having been sent to boarding school in Ballarat and, later, moving to Melbourne where she took drawing lessons at the Melbourne Gallery School under the guidance of **Frederick McCubbin** and **Max Meldrum**.

Despite the indifference to women artists at the time, Clarice was determined and prolific and, according to biographers, used every opportunity she could to paint. She worked mostly outdoors, in all kinds of weather, and this is reflected in her misty, shadowy renderings of every day scenes such as a bend in a road, or a house in the distance.

While Clarice held exhibitions with her fellow students at the Melbourne Gallery School, very few of her works sold during her lifetime and it was only many years after her death, at the age of 48, that her work was “rediscovered” and celebrated for its excellence.

“I actually feel very sad when I think about Clarice,” Jenn said, “because most of her work ended up in a shed and she really didn’t get much of a go.”



Clarice painting at
Mount Macedon. Image

supplied by Artists of
the Valley.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] J [/dropcap]enn, who is a printmaker and one of a growing number of artists based in the tiny town of **Sandford**, said the Clarice Beckett Award was an opportunity to celebrate South-West talent.

“Last year, the overall winner was one of our (Artists of the Valley) members – **Collin Tenney** – which was wonderful,” she said.

The competition is open to anyone, using any medium, with prizes for each of the categories that include works on paper, oils, watercolour and 3D.

The exhibition also co-oincides with the annual Casterton kelpie muster, so Artists of the Valley are hoping for great weather and a bumper crowd.

Postscript: This year’s major prize for the exhibition was awarded to **Vida Pearson** for her hand-coloured, lino cut titled “Large Fruited Mallee”. Vida, from Haddon, near Ballarat, also won first prize in the Works on Paper section, for a hand-coloured lino cut called “Waratah”. You can find out more about Vida on [her website here](#).



Collin Tenney, winner of the 2013 Clarice Beckett Award, with his portrait of Australian artist Margaret Olley.

[box type="bio"] The Clarice Beckett Art Award exhibition will be held on Saturday June 7 and Sunday June 8 at the Casterton Bowling Club, Murray St, Casterton. You can read more about Clarice on the Artists of the Valley website [here.](#) [/box]

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The sculptor who helped save the snipe



Port Fairy sculptor Don Stewart with one of his creations.

Lately it has been his activism, as much as his art, that has propelled him into the headlines.

By Carol Altmann

On first appearances, **Don Stewart** looks more like the artist that he is and much less like the robust activist he has become.

Yet the slightly-built, soft-spoken, always-smiling sculptor from Port Fairy has been a central figure in one of the longest-running planning sagas to hit the town and which has only just been resolved.

In a battle which stretches back 14 years, Don – and a small group of determined, like-minded souls – has fought to protect the habitat of a migratory bird called Latham's Snipe that arrives between August and April each year from its breeding sites in Japan to rest up at the Powling St wetlands.

The wetlands are just a short walk from Don's home and studio near Port Fairy's South Beach, where Don is usually immersed in creating his wonderful fibreglass sculptures that capture a sense of character and fun.

There has been less fun, however, around the tug-o-war that developed when a large portion of Moyne Shire council-owned land adjacent to the wetlands was sold in 1998 to a former council engineer, since retired, **John Bock**.



Worth fighting for: the Powling Street Wetlands in Port Fairy are home to one of the largest congregations of Latham's Snipe in Australia.

"Mr Bock", as Don always calls him, had hopes of converting the 3.5ha space into 43 building blocks but this would, Don explains, have spelt disaster for the snipe which relies on the protection of tall grass and the sustenance of the nutrient-rich wetlands.

Powling St is one of the few sites in Australia where the snipe still congregates in large numbers.

"In my view, nothing should be built there, because there are only about 36,000 of these birds left in the world and we have one of the largest habitats right here," Don says.

Indeed, a congregation of 18 migratory birds is considered to be of national significance and 360 birds is of international significance: the Powling St wetlands has recorded up to 430 Latham's Snipes.

Don, his wife **SherriL**, who is a retired art teacher, and

their neighbour, author **Jodie Honan**, were founders of the **South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group** that was set up in 1999 in response to the Moyne Shire Council's decision to sell-off part of the site and they began to actively monitor and care for the wetlands area.

Using their first-hand knowledge, backed by expert opinion about bird habitats, the group mounted not one, but two challenges through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) against Mr Bock's proposals.



Don on a patch of the Powling Street Wetlands that has been at the middle of an intense battle about its future.

The first, in 2008, resulted in Mr Bock having to revise his plans, which he did, reducing the subdivision to 32 blocks, including one allotment that would be given back to the council and added to the wetlands. The revised plans were put to the council last year and approved.

Most people would have given up there, but Don Stewart and the South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group are not like most

people. Just as it takes time and enormous patience to create a life-size figure in fibreglass, Don knew it would take patience to protect the snipe.

Don and Jodie, this time represented by [Environmental Justice Australia](#) (formerly the Environmental Defenders Office), returned to VCAT this year and argued that 32 blocks was still too many. [VCAT agreed](#) and reduced the number to 23, with a number of conditions, including that a protective fence be built around the snipe's habitat. It was a significant victory for the Landcare group.

"It is a good decision and probably the best decision we could hope for, but whether the birds actually stay around once the development goes ahead, we won't know until it is built," Don says.



Don has created fibreglass versions of Latham's Snipe: "Jodie says the legs are a bit too long."

Don suggests we wander out to see the wetlands and guides me through a wire fence and onto an invisible council "road" that cuts through the private land owned by Mr Bock. As long as we

stay on the “road”, he explains, we are not trespassing.

As it happens, Mr Bock – who no longer lives in Port Fairy – is down for a few days to mow his land and he spots us in the distance. I wave (what else do you do?) and he takes the opportunity to glide over on his ride-on mower to say hello.

Suddenly, I am standing between the two antagonists in what has been a long and no-doubt often heated battle, and for the first few minutes neither looks at the other as they talk. (Gulp.)

But then, Mr Bock – who I remember from his days at Belfast Shire Council – says two extraordinary things. The first: “you can’t cry over spilt milk”. The second, this time looking directly at Don: “I saw one of your snipes today”.

Don, now looking directly at Mr Bock, replies: “Really? Wow, that is late (in the season). I will have to make a note of that.”

And in that single moment – after 14 years, two VCAT hearings, endless legal argument and a lot of anxiety and stress on both sides – it felt like something of a truce.



Don at home in the studio, with dog Tuff: "It's a good decision and probably the best decision we could hope for."

The South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group holds regular stalls at the Port Fairy Farmers Market to raise funds to pay its legal bills from the VCAT battles. Don Stewart and Jodie Honan both contribute work for sale.

Win an Ella Webb limited edition print



CLOSED: Winners Fiona Haywood and Pat McLaren

[dropcap style="color:#8F9F59;"] T [/dropcap>he generosity of our supporters knows no bounds and this week we are offering one lucky paying subscriber the chance to win a limited edition, framed print by Warrnambool artist **Ella Webb**. ([You can subscribe here](#)).

Ella, who we profiled in our magazine shortly after we started last year ([you can read our story here](#)), has kindly donated a finely executed drawing of a Southern Crowned Pigeon and a runner-up prize of a pack of three gorgeous cards.

Ella has donated the prizes in the hope that they will encourage others to join her as a paying subscriber to *Bluestone Magazine*. We currently have 124 125 paying subscribers, but are aiming for 200 by September.

Paid subscribers just need to email editor@bluestonemagazine.com.au to enter the draw.

The first five new subscribers will be entered automatically.

We will draw the prize as soon as we have five new subscribers (update: we have 3 already, so only 2 to go!) so please, if you have been thinking about subscribing, [do it now!](#)

Thankyou so much Ella, for helping *Bluestone* to keep going and growing.

[box] Note: The winner will be announced here and on our Facebook page, plus we will contact you personally. Please note the main prize can be delivered to the Warrnambool area only, so if you are one of our wonderful subscribers from further afield, you will need to arrange collection.[/box]

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Whimsical art to capture the heart



Falling Knowledge (featuring the book, 'George Eliot' by Robert Speight): one of the works by Jenny Laidlaw in her exhibition at Port Fairy.

[dropcap style="color: #ddce8d;"] A [/dropcap]n exhibition of whimsical sculptures by artist and illustrator **Jenny Laidlaw** is in its final days at Blarney Books and Art, Port Fairy, with a talk by the artist herself this weekend (May 25).

Jenny, who lives in Jan Juc, on the Great Ocean Road, creates beautiful, eye-catching works by manipulating the pages of a humble book and then adding Prosculpt human figures to each piece.

As Jenny says in her promotional material for the work, "the figures sit atop their literary throne, creating a vessel for emotion, message and imagination".

The "Pages, Pen and Paint" exhibition also features Jenny's highly detailed and colourful illustrations that, once again, capture the world of fantasy and imagination through pen, ink and watercolours.

Jenny will speak about her work at a free event next Sunday (May 25) at 3pm at Blarney Books and Art, 37 James St, Port Fairy. You can also find out more about Jenny's work on her [website here](#).



'Release' (featuring 'Walden, or Life in the Woods' by Henry David Thoreau) which also features in the 'Pages, Pen and Paint' exhibition.

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