

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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