

ADRIAN FEINT: CORNUCOPIA
September 9, 2009

Ms FOX (Bright) (15:32): I was privileged to attend the launch of a significant exhibition at Carrick Hill on Sunday—Adrian Feint: Cornucopia. It also coincided with the launch of a companion book published by the South Australian publishers Wakefield Press. The reason I rise to speak about this is because, with this outstanding and first retrospective curated by Richard Heathcote, a new light is shone on a very important Australian artist. Since his death in 1971, Feint's work has somewhat slipped from the consciousness of Australian art lovers but with this, the largest exhibition of his work ever brought together, it is time to reconsider Adrian Feint's place in the constellation of Australian artists. Certainly, at the very least, this exhibition demands that we re-examine his oeuvre.

Although born in Sydney, Feint's work is of particular interest to South Australians because of the impact our landscape and people, especially those in and around Carrick Hill, had upon his work. Indeed, I think the biggest collections of Feint's work are still to be found in South Australia. His patrons were the Hayward family who, of course, owned John Martin's.

Adrian Feint was born in 1894 in country New South Wales and from an early age he enjoyed drawing and decorating. His studies at the Sydney Art School were interrupted by his war service on the Western Front, where he was praised for his gallantry. In 1919, when the Great War ended, he continued his studies for three months in Paris.

When he returned to Australia he began a very successful career as a graphic designer and he worked for the famous advertising guru Sydney Ure Smith. Much of his work appeared on the front covers of magazines and he was also for a time the director of the Grosvenor Galleries in Sydney. He was very well known for his etchings and wood engravings, particularly those which appeared in his bookplates—indeed, until the late 1930s he was more famous for the bookplates than anything else, and he designed bookplates for the Duke and Duchess of York. In the late 1930s he began to concentrate entirely on oil painting, receiving guidance from none other than Margaret Preston.

While his landscapes are both intimate and peculiarly evocative of urban and rural Australia, it is in his floral paintings that Feint has found his greatest achievement. In 1948 a collection of his flower paintings was published, but it is only at Carrick Hill today that we can see a comprehensive retrospective of them, garnered from galleries and private collectors all around Australia. His work is, as art historian and author Craig Judd points out, 'innately romantic, his flowers vibrant but controlled, joyous but meticulous'. Juxtaposition abounds in these enchanting oils, and they are certainly worth a visit.

The exhibition at Carrick Hill continues until 1 November this year, after which it will go to the Geelong galleries, and I urge all members to take a look. Adrian Feint deserves to take his place alongside Preston, Heysen and Hannaford in our artistic canon, and I personally think he should be there already. As Richard Heathcote, director of Carrick Hill, says in his introduction to the book:

It is the intensity of Feint's focus on floral and landscape subjects that sets him apart from his peers and positions him as unique in the history of Australian art.