A RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF THE PAINTINGS OF MAX MELDRUM

Acknowledgments . . .

The Trustees and the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria wish to express their thanks to the Trustees of State and Provincial Galleries, Institutions and private collectors for their co-operation and generosity in lending pictures for the Exhibition. They would also like to thank Miss Ida Meldrum for her help in supplying information and details for the Catalogue, and the Shepherd Press for the use of colour blocks.

THIS EXHIBITION
OF
FIFTY PAINTINGS
BY

MAX MELDRUM

WILL BE SHOWN AT

NATIONAL ART GALLERY OF N.S.W.

July—August

QUEENSLAND NATIONAL ART GALLERY

August—September

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

September—October

1954

Foreword . . .

Max Meldrum is the second Australian artist to be granted the signal honour of a retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. His predecessor was Rupert Bunny. It is fitting that the Gallery should have recognized the distinction of these artists in the course of their lifetime.

Meldrum is now in his 80th year. Until his health became impaired some months ago, such was the vigor of his body and intellect, that he seemed to be one of the youngest men in the Australian art world. He seemed incapable of rest, and incapable of existing without production. Indeed, his long life has been dedicated to art, and whatever he did or said proclaimed this devotion.

As an uncompromising realist claiming that art is an exact science—the science of appearances—Meldrum is the first Australian artist to assert the impersonality of art. Although painters as renowned as da Vinci and Constable have expressed similar ideas, Meldrum's dictum aroused the spleen of critics and of artists following ends more accommodating than the search for demonstrable truth. Thus it is that controversy has followed every stage of his progress towards achieving the perfect record of visual reality. Ironically enough, fate has decreed that many of the artists and critics once loud in condemnation of his earlier work should have lived to praise it at the expense of a later and immeasurably greater achievement.

For those who glimpse the quality of the artist's mind and sense the progression of realist depiction, " Portrait of the Artist's Mother " and the landscape " Picherite's Farm " are relatively primitive performances when compared with the visual validity of the little " Road to Olinda ".

For one who has lived so long in the art world, biographical detail seems unnecessary. However, the occasion is one demanding some guide to the main facets of the artist's career.

Max Duncan Meldrum was born in Edinburgh in 1875. He was educated at George Heriot's Hospital, and when his family settled in Melbourne, he became a student at the National Gallery School. In 1899 he was awarded the Travelling Scholarship. Following precedent he went to Paris to continue his studies. He was suspicious, however, of the arbitrary conventions dispensed at established schools and decided to seek the meaning and purpose of art through observation of the masterpieces in the Louvre.

It was inevitable perhaps, that this son of a rationalist father and mother should find his way to the realist tradition that commenced with da Vinci and continued in unbroken line through the works of Rembrandt, Velasquez, Constable, and Whistler. That Meldrum has placed himself as the latest link in this chain is not a matter of vanity. Within the realm of realist depiction through optical analysis of visual phenomena, he alone knows just how much he has accomplished, and just what others have failed to accomplish.

Meldrum's career bears many marks of distinction. Whilst abroad he was elected associate of the Societe Nationale des Beaux-arts. He exhibited with the Societe des Artistes-Francais and the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. In 1913 he returned to Melbourne where he established a school and expounded his views on painting in a thesis titled " The Invariable Truths of Depictive Art ".

The thesis attracted attention abroad and Meldrum was invited to deliver a series of lectures in the United States of America, Britain, and France. He returned to Melbourne in 1931 and established a school destined to influence the course of painting in this country for a number of years.

In 1937 he was appointed as a Trustee of the National Gallery, and in 1939 and 1940 was awarded the Archibald Prize for Portraiture. Then in 1950 he published " The Science of Appearances ", a cogent and closely argued study of the art and craft of depictive painting.

Meldrum has never been diplomatic or conciliatory where matters of art were concerned. His uncompromising attitude, however, has earned the respect of friend and foe, and this display is a tribute to one who has advanced the course of human knowledge. What more could be asked of any man ?

ARTHUR V. COOK.

Catalogue . . .

1. A Peasant of Pacé .. .. 1908 National Gallery of Victoria Collection
2. Rouen Cathedral .. .. 1910 Lent by Robert Haines Esq.
3. Portrait of the Artist's Wife .. ,, Possession of the Artist
4. Picherite's Farm .. .. ,, National Gallery of Victoria Collection
5. Portrait of the Artist's Mother 1913 ,, ,, ,, ,,
6. Ida Meldrum .. .. .. 1916 Possession of the Artist
7. Portrait of Mrs. Meldrum .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
8. Portrait of Sir Thomas a'Beckett 1920 Lent by the Supreme Court Library, Melbourne
9. Portrait of Professor Mica Smith 1923 Ballarat Art Gallery Collection
10. The Approaching Storm, Sunbury ,, Lent by R. P. Harbig Esq.
11. Gometz, Le Chatel (1) .. 1927 Possession of the Artist
12. The Merry-Go-Round, Pont Reau ,, ,, ,, ,,
13. Gometz, Le Chatel (2) .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
14. Pont Neuf, Winter .. .. ,, Lent by Robert Haines Esq.
15. My Lady's Table .. .. ,, National Gallery of Victoria Collection
16. Chinoiseries .. .. .. 1928 ,, ,, ,, ,,
17. A Street Scene in Paris .. 1930 Lent by Dr. Edward Ford
18. Le Pont de St. Cloud .. ,, Possession of the Artist
19. Self Portrait .. .. .. 1932 ,, ,, ,,
20. Portrait of Max Meldrum .. ,, Lent by Dr. J. M. Agar
21. Olinda Falls, Sunny Afternoon .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
22. Mount Dandenong, Olinda .. 1933 Possession of the Artist
23. Olinda Falls Road, Winter .. ,, National Gallery of Victoria Collection
24. Portrait of Professor Agar .. 1935 Lent by Dr. J. M. Agar
25. Portrait of Mrs. Agar .. .. ,, ,, ,,

26. Reverie .. .. .. ,, Possession of the Artist
27. Columbines .. .. .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
28. Pink Tiger Lillies .. .. ,, Lent by Robert Haines Esq.
29. Portrait of John Farmer .. ,, National Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection
30. Interior .. .. .. 1936 ,, ,, ,, ,,
31. Portrait of Dr. Forbes McKenzie 1940 Lent by St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne
32. Chrysanthemums .. .. 1942 Lent by R. P. Harbig Esq.
33. Portrait of Professor Skeats .. .. Lent by Geology School, University of Melbourne
34. Flowering Gum .. .. 1943 Possession of the Artist
35. Zinnias .. .. .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
36. Mrs. Mary Ford .. .. ,, Lent by Dr. Edward Ford
37. Interior .. .. .. ,, Queensland National Gallery Collection
38. Olinda Landscape .. .. 1944 Possession of the Artist
39. Interior .. .. .. ,, Castlemaine Art Gallery Collection
40. Interior .. .. .. 1945 Geelong Art Gallery Collection
41. Containers .. .. .. ,, Possession of the Artist
42. Zinnias .. .. .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
43. Portrait of Barbara Cox .. ,, Lent by Dr. Leonard Cox
44. Corner of the Studio .. .. 1946 Possession of the Artist
45. Self Portrait .. .. .. 1950 ,, ,, ,,
46. The Reading .. .. .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
47. Landscape, Belgrave .. .. ,, ,, ,, ,,
48. Portrait of Sir David Rivett .. 1951 Lent by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization
49. Summer Haze .. .. 1952 Possession of the Artist
50. Sydney Harbour .. .. ,, ,, ,, ,,

Max Meldrum