

## **Response to a *White Glove Event***

**by Dr Avis Smith**

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This interesting event was held in the Art Gallery of South Australia on Friday afternoon, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010 and enabled those present to view South Australian artists' work on paper that is now held in the Art Gallery's collection but not normally on public display. The artists concerned studied or taught in what is currently called the South Australian School of Art within the 1860-1960s period. Most of them were also members of the (Royal) South Australian Society of Arts.

The event, hosted by Dr. Jenny Aland PSM and Dr. Pamela Zeplin, with Maria Zagala, Associate Curator, Prints, Drawings and Photographs, Art Gallery of South Australia, was held as a fundraiser for the Friends of the South Australian School of Art Inc. An informative catalogue with additional information on selected artists was given to each person present, then Dr. Aland spoke briefly about the displayed artwork and artist as Maria held up each item in turn. The manner in which the artwork was setup also allowed those present to walk freely around the tables and look carefully at each item. This was a great privilege, as to closely inspect an original piece of art is a different experience to looking at a commercial reproduction.

Moreover art displayed in many large exhibitions, tends to show 'the public face' of the artist and be of a size, medium and finish that will catch the eyes of the public and hopefully, a purchaser. However the artwork in *a White Glove Event* was on a smaller scale and a wide range of media, including drawings, etchings, lithographs, watercolours, pastels. The small scale and variety of media provided a somewhat more intimate glimpse into the persona of the artist. Some of the pieces, such as the Ivor Hele's confident quick sketch of a young man sitting at a desk, and Jeffrey Smart's pastel portrait of the face of a youth with very eloquent eyes, were of the type of art that many artists tend to keep in their personal portfolios. Harry Pelling Gill's watercolour rendering of aborigines in a tent, and his treatment of a coastal scene south of Adelaide, revealed a sensitivity of approach to his subject that I personally thought surprising, considering his somewhat stern reputation as an advocate of the South Kensington School's method of teaching art. By the 1920-30s, etching became a popular method of printmaking, and a close-up inspection of the variations of line work in Ethel Barringer's small, hand-coloured etching of Adelaide buildings as viewed over the river, showed her amazing skill with the etching needle.

This Art Gallery experience was not only enjoyable, but also extremely valuable from an historical perspective. We learn by listening to informative speakers and looking closely at original work by artists who have gone before us. It enables us to better understand the traditions of our art in South Australia, how it has changed, where we are now, and perhaps anticipate some interesting future pathways. I hope occurrences such as *a White Glove Event* can be repeated.

***Dr Avis Smith***

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