

Patrick McCaughey

Patrick McCaughey is one of the most eminent, and admired art historians in Australia and the United States. At the age of ten he emigrated with his family, from Dublin to Melbourne, when already his genial Irish humor was a formidable part of his personality.

Educated at Scotch College and Ormond College, he graduated from the University of Melbourne with distinction in Fine Arts and English. In 1966 he made his popular reputation as art critic for *The Age*, where he promoted sixties abstraction, that led to creating the climate for *The Field*, the innovatory exhibition about Australian Modernism that opened the new National Gallery of Victoria on St Kilda Road by Roy Grounds in 1972. Among Australian artists his friends were Leonard French, Roger Kemp, Fred Cress, Robert Jacks, Jan Senbergs and above all Fred Williams. After a year in New York on a Harkness fellowship he returned to Melbourne to become foundation professor of Visual Arts at Monash University in 1972. There, as a very young professor, he established the first department to specialise in contemporary art in Australia. He involved himself in projects of national good, such as the creation of the professional association of art history in Australia. Like his mentor, the first professor of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne, Joe Burke, and Patrick was a success with contemporary artists, both as the creator of exhibitions, and as a critic. In 1980 he published the classic monograph on the work of one of Australia's greatest artists, *Fred Williams*, two years before the artist died. The work has been revised and expanded three times, in 1987, 1996 and 2008, to provide the basis for the outstanding exhibition, currently at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

In 1981 he was appointed Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, where he is remembered as the most admired director of that institution, for his acquisitions and for his policies. Patrick made the institution and the director loved by the press and the public. He invented the concept of the Internal Blockbuster, with exhibitions based on the gallery's collection, beginning with *The Great Eighteenth Century Exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria* (1983), and successive exhibitions on Sidney Nolan, the first by Richard Haese, *The City and the Plain* (1983) and with Jane Clark, *Landscapes and Legends: A Retrospective Exhibition 1937-1987* (1987).

In 1990 he returned to America as the Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard, shortly after which he was appointed Director of the Wadsworth Athenaeum Gallery, at Hartford Connecticut, a museum that contains distinguished collections of contemporary American art and seventeenth century Italian art.. Successively he became director of the Yale Centre for British Art, where he introduced exhibitions of outrageous contemporary British art to the quiet public of New Haven. In his retirement he has published his memoir, *The Bright Shapes and the True Names* (2003), which provides the best account of undergraduate life at Melbourne University in the early sixties, as well as a genial account of his own career. In 2006 the Miegunyah Press published his *Voyage and Landfall: The Art of Jan Senbergs*, whose career mirrors Patrick's own.

From his undergraduate years until the present Patrick McCaughey has been intensely concerned with Australian culture and literary life. He has become the preferred

reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* on Australian exhibitions and art, in a way that is unique. For Australian newspapers and journals he is equally in demand as an engaging reviewer, as shown by his writing for the *Australian Book Review*.

In 2009 and 2011, Patrick returned to his alma mater, to be the Director on two occasions of the *Festival of Ideas*, where with enviable social ease and generous wide-ranging catholic interests, he created themes as relevant to science as to art, as to Australia, such as: *The Pursuit of Identity. Landscape, History and Genetics* (2011).

For his contribution to art history and to Australian cultural life, I present Patrick McCaughey, Hon D.Lit of Monash University, Hon DFA of the University of Hartford, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.