

Robert Brett Bailey landscape artist; born 25 January 1947, Melbourne, VIC, died 30 June 2022, Woonona, NSW

Brett Bailey's influences range from the romantic landscape painting tradition of Europe, including Turner, Samuel Palmer and the Ancients to Chinese Literati painting and Japanese individualists. He created his own way of making vivid and plausible the phenomena and experiences of the natural world. It was an attempt to capture the essential meaning of the subject with forms deriving from his own unavoidable ideas and feelings about the subject. In his work, he reinvented and appropriated many Asian techniques by including titanium mica in his pigments, creating a range of reflective lustres and the inclusion of 'weather' in his images. With a subjective transformation of his raw materials in making his own paint with an "untrammelled mind", he shared with others, his joy in the world which all cultures share.¹



Brett was born in Melbourne, the first child of an RAF pilot, Flight Lieutenant Peter Bailey and his wife Shirley Tilley. Peter and Shirley had met in Australia when Peter, in 233 Squadron Transport Command, was ferrying new Dakota DC3 aircraft to the Pacific region. Two years later, the family moved back to UK as Peter became an integral part of the Berlin Airlift. As a result, Brett grew up on airbases in Germany in the shadow of the Cold War and was compelled by a sense of duty to follow in the father's footsteps.² He began his secondary education in 1958 at Framlingham College Suffolk near the family home in Snape. He showed some early promise as an artist, winning second place in the 1965 Arts Cup for a colour and black & white work. He competed in the Suffolk AAA Championships over three years, stage-managed theatre productions, debated and contributed poetry to the school magazine. After leaving Framlingham in 1965, he took his father's advice and gained some experience of life by joining the British Army. Brett spent three years on a Short Service Commission in the 1st Battalion, the King's Regiment. He served in Northern Ireland, Malta, Aden and Libya where he did his first desert landscapes. However, Brett decided that the army wasn't for him and he returned to London in 1968 where he took a one-year foundation course at Hammersmith College of Art and Design. He then took up art studies at Chelsea College of Art where he developed a fascination with Chinese and Japanese art as well as Asian history, philosophy, and politics. During his three years of study for a Diploma in Arts and Design, he was a prize winner in the *Young Contemporaries* 21st Anniversary Exhibition at the Royal Academy.

After completing his diploma course, Brett divided his time between lecturing at various colleges of art and building/design work and painting. In 1981, Brett travelled for the first time since birth to his native Australia and was captivated by the natural beauty of the landscape. He visited Japan for three months *en route* to Australia where he was inspired by their history of borrowing and synthesis of techniques

between Chinese and Japanese artists.³ He resolved to move back permanently in 1983 and began painting his first Australian landscapes. His first trip to Central Australia in 1986, including Kata-tjuta and Uluru, had a profound effect on his work which he exhibited at the Belsham Street Space Artists 3rd Open Show in London. He returned to the Red Centre in 1987, and the resulting pieces were exhibited in a one-man show *The Heart of Australia* at the Cahill & Grebler Gallery in London. A series of exhibitions and one-man shows followed in London and Sydney and in 1999, he was a finalist in the William Dobell Prize for Drawing at the Art Gallery of NSW. A year later, he exhibited his massive synthetic polymer on canvas work measuring 198 cm by 960 cm and titled *Nine* at the Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery. In 2001, his entry for the Art Gallery of NSW Wynne Prize for landscaping painting, *Sea of Passion*, was exhibited in the *Salon des Refusés* at the SH Erwin Gallery in Sydney.



In 2006, he travelled to Shanghai with 20 other artists of both Australian and Chinese backgrounds where he gained further insight into oriental artistry. Brett achieved his first major success by being chosen as a finalist in the 2009 Wynne Prize. Well into his career by then, he quipped that “You just apply for 17 years” (to become a Wynne finalist). He was also a finalist in the Paddington Art Prize 2014 and exhibited very successfully with Art Atrium at the inaugural Sydney Contemporary in 2013 and at Melbourne Art Fair 2014. His final exhibition was at the 2015 Sydney Contemporary. Brett also had successful shows at the Solander Gallery and Stephanie Burns Fine Art in Canberra.

Brett met Simon Chan of Art Atrium in Sydney when he was a Wynne Prize finalist in 2009. The Asian influence in his Australian landscape was a perfect fit for the special focus of Simon's gallery of cross-cultural expression and collaboration in art. Brett exhibited in the inaugural group exhibition at Art Atrium, *Transcendence*, and he was the first artist to have a solo exhibition at Art Atrium in 2010. Simon Chan involved him in his 10th Anniversary exhibition at Botany in 2019 with some of his earlier works but unfortunately this was the last time that his work was exhibited. Brett experienced major health issues, including a stroke, which affected his desire to continue painting.

Simon writes *Brett was always a lot of fun to be hanging out with and our Art Atrium family will all be missing him. We had shared our journey and adventure in art over the years supporting each other along the way. Life is short and it is a rollercoaster journey with lots of peaks and valleys along the way. We can never tell what lies ahead around the corner, but we hope that we will always have our photographs and memories.* Fortunately, Brett's works are held in public, private and corporate collections in Australia, USA, Japan, UK and Ireland.

Brett relocated from Canberra to Woonona in 2020 and enjoyed the last couple of years experiencing life near the coast, his rescue cocker spaniel as a constant buddy and quiet times with close ones. He passed away on 30th June 2022 after a short illness at home with members of his family at his side. He is survived by his partner Sue Heins for the greater part of 20 years, a sister, five children and eight grandchildren.

Neville Marsh
9 August 2022



¹ Art Atrium website

² *Canberra Times*, 15 March 2010

³ *Ibid*

