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# ry catches Crooke

Ray Crooke's Xavier Herbert (Study) is one of several portraits he made of the author, including one that was a finalist in the 1963 Archibald Prize.

former governor-general (and later Fairfax chairman) Zelman Cowen and artist Ian Fairweather.

The price paid for the Herbert portrait has not been revealed. The more typical Crooke island scenes in the exhibition are priced from \$13,000 up to \$90,000, but the portrait is only a study, and portraits tend not to be popular with private buyers. Gallery owner Denis Savill will only say the price was modest but yielded him a small profit.

He says it is a wonderful accolade for Crooke to be acknowledged in this way with the National Portrait Gallery seeking out and purchasing the oil.

Crooke is one of many artists whose prices have shrunk since the global financial crisis. Australian Art Sales Digest figures show the average price for Crooke was more than \$30,000 in the boom times of 2007 but has since almost halved to about \$16,000.

Such averages have to be treated with caution, of course, since few owners would offer high-value works when the market is poor.

Another work in the exhibition is *In the Museum, Port Moresby*, circa 1964, a slightly gloomy scene of a seated figure reading against a backdrop of tribal masks. If Crooke's prices have fallen, this one runs against the trend. It is priced at \$42,000 – more than double the \$19,500 it fetched at auction in Sydney back in 2005.

And highlighting the hefty price appreciation enjoyed by most serious Australian art since the 1960s, it first seems to have come on the market in 1969, when it sold for a mere \$900.

Savill has long been close to the artist, who is now 90 years old. He claims to have owned more than 400 works by Crooke, and staged a major exhibition in Melbourne in 1998 – the first such commercial showing of his work in 20 years.

Over the years Savill has donated paintings by Crooke to regional galleries in Bathurst, NSW, and Cairns, but says this is the first he has sold to a public institution.



Sanne Mestrom's Weeping Woman. The aluminium and bronze sculpture, which will actually weep tears, is 'art about art'; it references Picasso's famous painting Weeping Woman.

## New media makes its mark

Ashley Crawford

Painting is dead. Such was the catch cry from artists and academics in the 1980s as video, photography and performance dominated galleries from New York to Melbourne. Yet judging by the recent success of the Francis Bacon exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW and the inclusion of many painters in the Museum of Contemporary Art's annual emerging artists exhibitions, Primavera, painting is alive and well.

But if one were to judge by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art's annual NEW exhibition in Melbourne, painting barely exists. Under the stewardship of director Juliana Engberg, "new media" art is a priority. Engberg has been director since 2002, and was recently announced artistic director of the 2014 Biennale of Sydney.

NEW offers rising Australian artists the chance to make works for the ACCA's large exhibition spaces.

Now in its 11th instalment, NEW13's associate curator is Charlotte Day, who has just been appointed director of the Monash University Museum of Art.

"NEW provides the opportunity to commission and present the artwork of upcoming artists and introduce them to a wider public," says Day.

"This year, artists represent a range of practices from video and film to sculpture, collage, computer programming, archiving, performance and live events."

These include Benjamin Forster pulling apart LCD screens and iPhones and repurposing them as mysterious objects; and Scott Mitchell, who has devised a way to harness sunlight and direct it into the furthest reaches of the sealed galleries.

Day draws a crucial difference between NEW and the Museum of Contemporary Art's Primavera.

"We are able to build specific environments for each artwork so the exhibition looks and feels different, even though both NEW and Primavera are surveys of emerging contemporary practice.

"It is interesting to observe directions in one and the other in any given year."

Day vigorously defends her avoidance of what may be called the "old" media, of painting or drawing.

"One of the threads in this NEW is how artists may relate to an historical movement, for example, Sanne Mestrom's *Weeping Woman* is a large scale sculpture with a water feature that is in direct dialogue with Picasso's painting, *Weeping Woman*," she says.

"A number of the artists working with film, video, iPhones and LCDs are exploring ideas related to painting and drawing so maybe it's about the expanded field of painting and drawing rather than the death of a medium."

Mestrom describes her own work as "art about art". "The modernist period interests me because it has much reverence for originality, whereas I came of age in a 'po-mo' [post modern] generation that understood there is no such thing as an original," she says.

"I'm interested in the question that if you start with an 'original' [an existing work of art], and appropriate it, how many cycles of deferral does it take for the work to unhinge from the 'original' and become entirely its own work again.

"Is this even possible?"

NEW13: ends May 12; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Sturt Street, Southbank, Melbourne.