ABC NEWS

Guy Warren, Archibald Prize-winning Australian artist, dies aged 103

ABC Arts / By Hannah Story and Hannah Reich

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Artist Guy Warren in his studio in 2016. He died this morning, age 103. *(ABC RN: Fiona Pepper)*

Australian artist Guy Warren has died, aged 103.

The gallery that represents him — King Street Gallery on William in Sydney — has confirmed he died at 5am this morning, Friday June 14, following a short period in palliative care. He is survived by two children, Joanna and Paul, from his marriage to the late Joy Warren, a potter and art teacher who died in 2011.

In a statement, gallery directors Robert and Randi Linnegar described Warren as "a wonderful, kind-hearted, incredibly intelligent, funny and thoughtful person and artist", who was "dedicated to the education, expression and encouragement of the visual arts".

"He mentored hundreds of young artists over the course of his long and significant artistic career," the statement reads.

"The world will be the lesser for having lost this trailblazing 103-year-old painter, teacher, philosopher, holder of history and story-teller."

Born in Goulburn in regional NSW in 1921, Warren had a career spanning more than 80 years, with more than 50 solo exhibitions around the world since 1955.

He won the Archibald Prize in 1985, as well as the Art Gallery of New South Wales Trustees' Watercolour Award in 1979, and the Bronze Medal at the 4th International Triennial of Drawing in Poland in 1988. He received the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1999, and the Australia Medal in 2013.



ırren (pictured here in 2019) painted in a studio in Leichhardt, in Sydney's inner west. *(Supplied: Mark Tedeschi)*

His work features in the collections of every Australian state gallery, as well as the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, the British Museum, the National Library in Beijing, and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, among others, including regional galleries across the country.

Never stopped painting

Speaking to ABC TV's The Mix in 2020 at 98 years old, Warren said he was still painting every day: "Every time in your life is a pivotal point if you're an artist. Every second is important. Every time you look around you is important … I just want another 50 or 100 years, there's still too many things to do."

He reflected on his enormous success, and on the end of his life: "What has made it possible for me to be successful for so long? Dumbness. Stupidity.

"It's been a good life. I've had a lot of fun. I've helped a lot of people, I think. I hope. I've known a lot of people. I've enjoyed the world. I have no complaints."

Two years later, Warren told ABC TV's Art Works: "People find it fascinating that, at 100, I'm still working. Well, if I'm still alive and I'm still capable of thinking and doing, of course I'm still working, because nothing matters so much as to keep on making marks."

He explained that he remained committed to experimenting and following his intuition: "I know artists who paint the same painting year after year after year ... That's great for the bank balance and it's appalling for the soul.

"I want to keep my soul intact. So I reserve the right to do any damn thing I want to do at any time."







y Warren, Self portrait in jungle green, oil on canvas, 61x40.5cm, 1946. *(Supplied: King Street Gallery on William)*

Warren's son Paul, a cinematographer, tells ABC Arts his father was still painting three weeks ago and leaves behind a number of unfinished works.

"He didn't put down the paintbrushes [at that point]; he was just unable to pick them up anymore. He was still saying he wanted another 50 years to paint and explore. His curious mind is the thing that drove him, more than anything."

A rich life and career

Warren had left school and was working as an assistant proofreader at The Bulletin when, encouraged by the magazine's art editor John Frith, he began taking night art classes at the age of 15.

Still, he didn't think he would grow up to be an artist, as he told The Mix: "Australia, when I was a teenager, was not the sort of place where one could even dream of being a painter."



y Warren in his Greenwich studio, 1960s *(Supplied: Jill Crossley)*

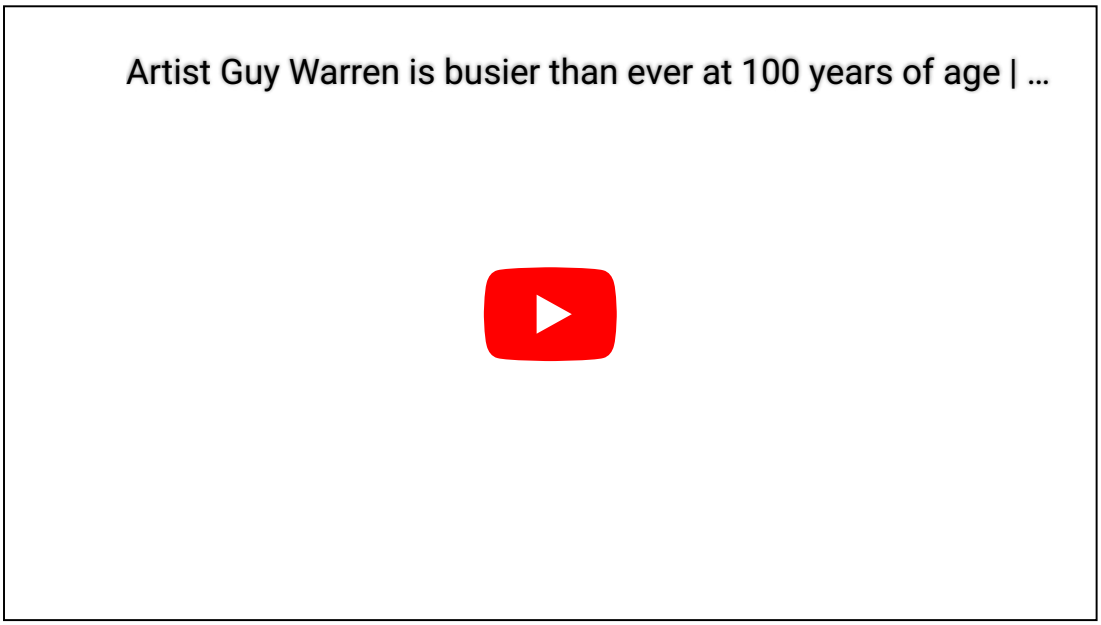
Yet by the time he enlisted in the Australian army at age 19, Warren was proficient at drawing. Serving from 1941 to 1946 in New Guinea and Bougainville, Warren would sketch his fellow soldiers. He was influenced by the landscapes there and by the rainforests of south-east Queensland, where he also served.

His work is now collected in the Australian War Museum in Canberra, and an exhibition of Warren's drawings and photographs from his time in the army is on display at the ANZAC Memorial in Hyde Park in Sydney.

After World War II, Warren studied at the National Art School in Sydney, alongside Tony Tuckson and Herbert (Bert) Flugelman, before he moved to London for 10 years, training at the Chelsea School of Art, the London School of Art and the Central School of Arts and Crafts.

"I found the English landscape a bit uninteresting to paint: very beautiful, but I didn't want to paint it," he told Art Works.

"I started, in desperation I suppose, to paint my memories of New Guinea."



YOUTUBE: Guy Warren on ABC TV's Art Works in 2021

Warren, along with John Olsen and Tuckson, became part of the abstract expressionist tradition that developed in Sydney through the 50s and 60s. His paintings often contained human figures in the landscape — including the rainforest at Jamberoo, an hour-and-a-half south of Sydney, where he and Flugelman owned adjoining plots of land.

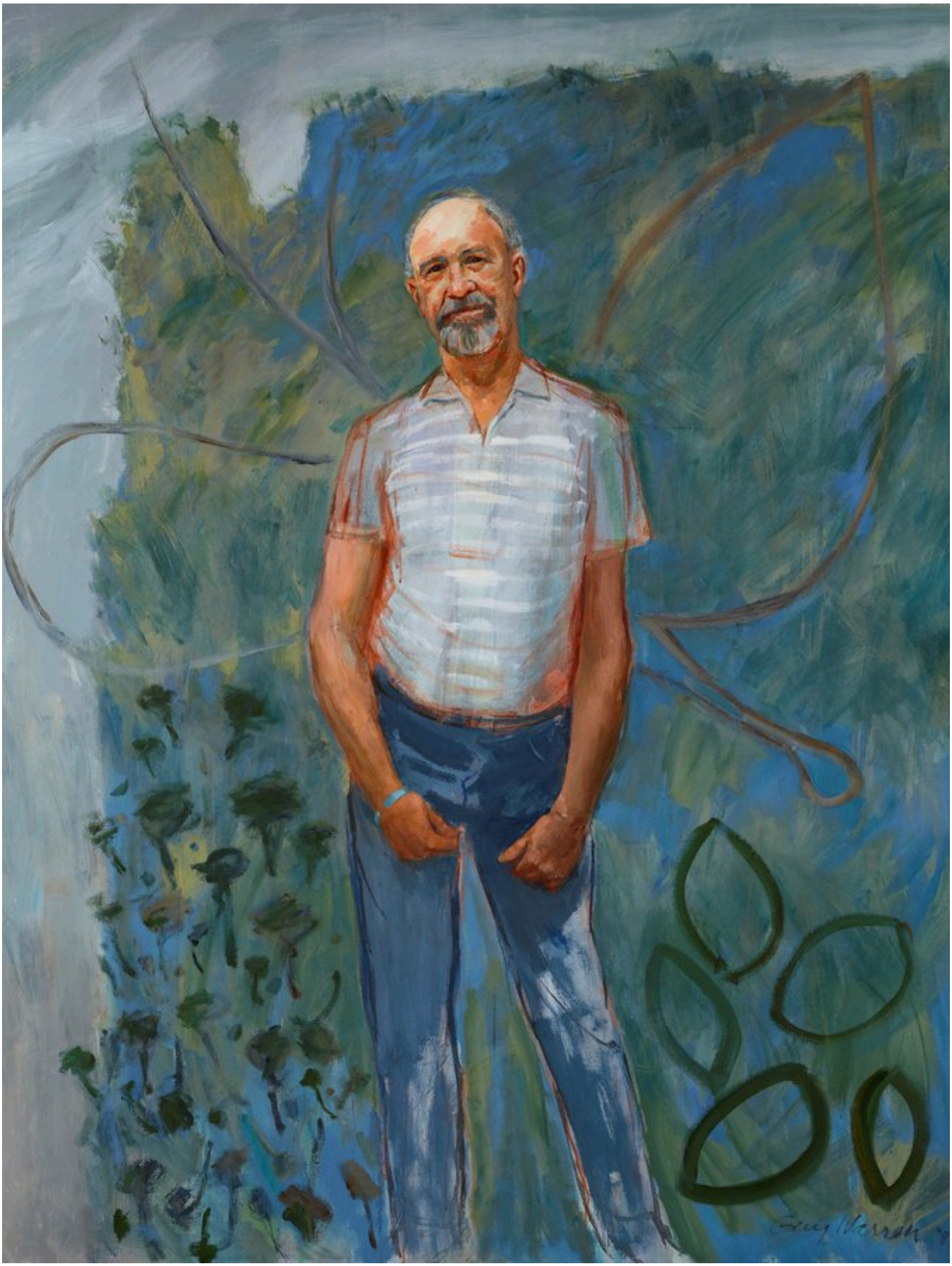
He told The Mix: "Landscape has been the most important subject to me: landscape and people. I prefer not to see people as a separate entity to the world, but as being part of the landscape."



y Warren, Land of the Patient Creeks, oil on canvas 180x200cm, 2012. *(Supplied: King Street Gallery on William)*

Back in the Archibald

In 1985, Warren won the Archibald Prize for his portrait of Flugelman. The work was inspired by Warren and Flugelman's shared scepticism about Australia's most prestigious arts prize being dedicated to portraiture, as Warren's son Paul explains.



y Warren, Flugelman with Wingman, oil on canvas, 231 x 180 cm, 1985. *(Supplied: Art Gallery of NSW)*

"They thought that portraiture is just a small element of Australian art. But they decided [on a whim] to paint each other... and then ironically my father won!" he says.

In 1996, Warren was an Archibald finalist once more with a self-portrait and, in 2021, he was the subject of Melbourne artist Peter Wegner's winning portrait.



egner's Archibald Prize-winning portrait of Warren at age 100. It was the prize's 100th year. *(Supplied: AGNSW/Jer rter)*

At the ceremony, Warren said: "The difficulty with a portrait, you all know this as well as I do, is that it's got to be more than just a good likeness ... Everybody says [Peter's painting] is — I don't know. If it catches my character, then that's marvellous.

"I think I'm getting almost as much pleasure out of this as if I'd won the damn thing myself."



ırren at the Art Gallery of NSW after Wegner's portrait of him won the Archibald Prize. *(ABC News: Timothy ʏanston)*

On news of Warren's death, Wegner told ABC Arts: "I was moved this morning when I heard that news, and saddened, because we've lost someone of great significance to Australian art."

Wegner recalls Warren quoting Oscar Wilde while he sat for his portrait:

> "Never regret thy fall, O Icarus of the fearless flight, For the greatest tragedy of them all, Is never to feel the burning light."

(Inspired by Icarus, Warren often painted the figure of the "wingman", including in his Archibald-winning portrait of Flugelman).

Wegner continues: "I'll never forget that moment. That quote was a summary of his life: getting close to the sun and taking a chance."

But, as Warren told The Mix, the most important thing in his life wasn't painting, but family: "What comes first? Art or relationships? Probably relationships … I've had a family and that's the most important thing. Best damn things I've ever produced — my two kids."

Paul says he was incredibly fortunate to have him as a father: "He was an extraordinarily generous human being … He's going to be deeply missed."

But standing before his father's paintings, his son observes: "He's forever alive through the work; each mark on the canvas is a bit of him."