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Miguel Mackinlay: artistic success in London

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959) arrived in Western Australia as a child in 1906 and trained as an artist. He sailed for London in 1914 and was caught up fighting and sketching in the Great War. Dorothy Erickson concludes her three-part series on the painter who settled in England after the war and never returned to Australia.

DOROTHY ERICKSON

Miguel Mackinlay's career got off to a good start in England once he had recovered his health following the horrors of WWI. In 1921 he began exhibiting with the New English Art Club, seen as a stepping-stone to the Royal Academy, and with The London Group, a progressive co-operative dominated in the 1920s by Roger Fry, and the Bloomsbury Set who exhibited in Heal's new 'Mansard Gallery'. This was a space on the fourth floor of the department store in Tottenham Court Road opened as a venue for young artists.¹

Miguel (**plate 1**) was never formally a member of either of these groups but managed to mix with men such as the senior and very bohemian figure in the

New English Art Club, the Welsh portrait painter Augustus John (1878–1961). They both exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1930 when John showed a painting of Tallulah Bankhead, which was criticised while Miguel's *Tête-a-tête* (**plate 16**) was hung "on the line", the most prestigious position and was the sensation of the year.

Miguel exhibited *Laurie* and *Michael* (**plate 2**) in the 1921 Summer Exhibition of the New English Art Club. In the Winter Exhibition 1922 he showed *The Blue Overall* (**plate 3**); in Summer 1922, *Charlotte*; in Winter 1923 *The Convalescent* (**plate 4**) and in the Summer in 1923 *Dorothy*.² To his great satisfaction, *La Siesta* (**plate 6**) was hung in the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1922, when Max Martin made his stunning impression.³ *La Siesta* was also known as *Mother and Child*



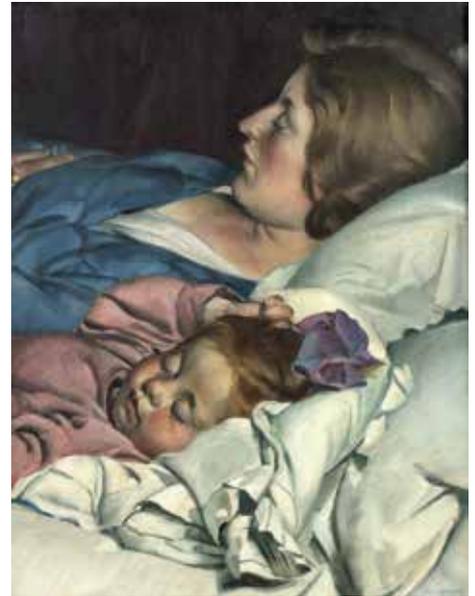
1.
Miguel Mackinlay, photograph 1914.
Courtesy of his family in Western Australia

2.
Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
Michael [Michael John Mackinlay] c 1921,
oil on canvas, 94 x 74 cm.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

3.
Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
The Blue Overall c 1921,
oil on board, 36 x 31 cm.
Family collection UK

4.
Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
Convalescent [Michael John Mackinlay]
1922, oil on canvas, 58 x 40.5 cm.
Family collection UK





when published in *The West Australian* in 1930. By now he was trading on his exotic Spanish connection and signing his paintings *Miguel Mackinlay*.

Miguel, as one of the up and coming Australians, was selected to exhibit in *Australian Artists* at the Faculty of Art Gallery, University of London⁴ in 1924 and *Australian Artists in Europe* at the Spring's Garden Gallery in 1925. Princess Marie Louise, Queen Victoria's sculptor daughter, opened the 1924 exhibition, comprising 150 works. The critic for the Sydney *Sunday Times* wrote:

The chief interest of the exhibition ... was to disclose the Dominion origin or connections of several artists well known in London. Of

these the most noteworthy was Mr Max Martin, the young painter whose hard-bitten "Portrait group" made something of a sensation in the Academy two years ago ... Mr Miguel McKinley, [sic] with a painting of Still Life (plate 7), and Mr Horace Brodzky, with some racy paintings of street life and drypoints of the nude, are other additions to the list ...

A critic for the *Australasian* discussing the exhibition wrote:

Technically, the level of the exhibition was very high – in the opinion of several competent judges, as high as that of an average academy exhibition. It further resembled

recent academy exhibitions in the variety of schools it represented. As distinguished from other London shows in which the artists are all tarred more or less with the same brush, it was remarkable for the high standard of technical skill maintained in a great diversity of styles. Australian artists stood revealed among the leading exponents of the artistic cults of the day. ...

The other exhibitors included Sydney Long, Penleigh Boyd, Septimus Power, Arthur Streeton, George Lambert, Dora Meeson, John Longstaff, Elioth Gruner, Hans Heysen, Charles Conder and Edith Fry. All except the last were or became big names in the Australian art world.

5.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Drowsy Child* [Laurie Marion Mackinlay] c 1922, oil on board, 39 x 60 cm. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

6.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *La Siesta* c 1922, oil on board, 48.5 x 38 cm. Hung in the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy 1922, also known as *Mother and Child* [The two Lauries]. Family collection UK

7.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Still Life* 1924, oil on canvas, 45 x 50 cm. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

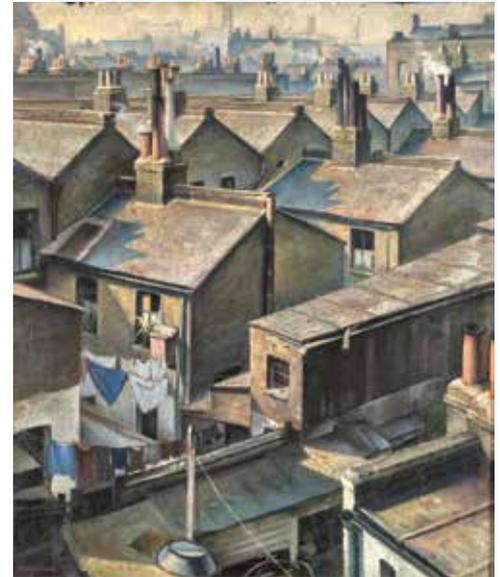




"EL ANDALUZ" OIL PAINTING BY MIGUEL MACKINLAY



"THE MOTHER," PEN DRAWING BY MIGUEL MACKINLAY



The critic for the *Colour Magazine* wrote that the paintings “should find a home in some Australian art gallery.” He was referring to works by Max Martin, Miguel Mackinlay, Rupert Bunny, Emanuel Phillips Fox, Edith Fry, Jessie Gibson and Horace Brodzky.⁵

Martin and others were virtual exiles because of Australian import duties. Martin declared that

when the unjust tax on imported works of art by Australian artists in Europe is lifted, I shall bring over an exhibition to the cities of Australia.⁶

Import duties would have deterred artists such as Miguel and his friend Brodzky returning to Australia; as Leslie Rees observed in *Art in Australia* in 1931:

I fancy that both these accomplished artists would like to return to Australia, even if only for a short time. They will not do so without encouragement from the Australian public. It remains for the public to show them practical sympathy.⁷

Miguel’s involvement in these and other exhibitions engendered interest and he was feted with an article in *The Studio* in December 1926. The premier art magazine illustrated *El Andaluz* (plate 8) along with *Drowsy Child* (plate 5) and a pen and ink sketch *The Mother*

(plate 9). *The Studio* writer “W. G.” remarked of Miguel:

His technique follows the broad lines laid down by Cézanne, which the modern may honestly follow without losing his own personality and with the possibility of unlimited development. ... A strong sense of individual character MacKinlay undoubtedly has; and this, we may note, is one of the features of the Spanish genius. The Andalusian (plate 9) with his coarse strength of countenance is extremely well realized, and MacKinlay has done other portraits in which the same striking quality of personality appears, notably in a picture of a thin young girl, who holds an orange in her hand (plate 11). He is excellent at seizing a likeness; but one does not feel constrained to rest all one’s appreciation of his work upon this talent. It is accompanied by real merits in pure painting. MacKinlay draws also with a great sense of style, and the pen drawing of mother and child we reproduce is beautifully sensitive. Some of his other drawings have an almost pre-Raphaelite care and tenderness of line. All his work shows a reverence for nature – a carefully thought out design and the capacity for taking pains which a true artist must possess. It is to be hoped Mr MacKinlay will occupy himself less, as time goes on, with

8.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *El Andaluz* c1924/5, print reproduced in *The Studio* magazine in 1926

9.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *The Mother* [wife Laurie with their baby Laurie], as published in *The Studio* in 1926

10.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Battersea Roofs* c 1920, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

11.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Girl with Orange* c 1925, oil on canvas, 77 x 61 cm, discussed in *The Studio* Dec. 1926. Family collection UK





picture, “The Bath” has an unusual combination of qualities – accomplished technique, artistic conception and psychological insight – conspicuously lacking in most exhibits which surround it.⁹

The Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy had been a fixture on the English art calendar since 1769. Paintings by the most important artists as well as the largest were usually “hung on the line”, originally this was with the bottom edge of the painting 244 cm from the floor. This was the most prestigious position where large paintings and those by famous artists hung. Reviewing for the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, Anthony Bertram thought *The Bath*

A well-built, well-kit picture, an interesting progression of greens on a background of drab pinks, neutral greys and browns, a sincere picture.¹⁰

About this time Miguel’s drawings were collected by Dan Fellows Platt (1873–1937), a wealthy American ‘Renaissance man’, trained in archaeology and law, who travelled the world, lectured on art and amassed a major collection of drawings which he left to his alma mater Princeton University. He purchased the 13 drawings now in the Princeton

12.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *The Bath* c 1927 oil on canvas, 126 x 187cm. Hung in the Summer Exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1927, the models are his wife Laurie, son Michael and daughter Laurie. Family collection on loan to Bushey Museum and Art Gallery

the illustrative work he has recently been doing and concentrate on pure painting – in which field he has great promise.⁸

Miguel continued with the illustrative work. It paid the bills. He was soon able to celebrate earning £1,000 in one year. Miguel did not cease exhibiting. In the summer exhibitions at the Royal Academy. *The Bath* (plate 12), *Interior* and *El Andaluz* (plate 8) were reviewed in 1927 by Edith Fry for the *Western Mail* in Perth and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She wrote of:

13.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Children in a tub* c 1920s, 15.4 x 19.3 cm. Collection: Princeton University Art Museum

... the gifted Western Australian, Miguel Mackinlay, whose large

14.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Head of a Child* 1920s, 27.4 x 22.7cm. Collection: Princeton University Art Museum





University Art Museum from London dealer F. R. Meatyard between 1924 and 1928. Two of Miguel's works that Platt collected, *Japanese Dancer* and *A Bather*, were exhibited in the Art Institute of Chicago in 1932.¹¹ The others are in the university collection (plates 13–14).

In 1928 the family moved to 31 Bournehall Road in the artist colony area of Bushey in Hertfordshire. Mackinlay painted in the Bourne Hall Studio of Elizabeth Milner (1860–1953) at neighbouring Bourne Hall. The size of the major paintings he was producing demanded a large studio. Whether he still continued to paint there after about 1932, when the family moved to *The Hut* in Finch Lane with its own capacious studio, is not known. Later when he moved to *Ruiflands* (plate 15) he also had a studio at the Bushey Meadow Studio complex.

In 1930, when he was again hung in The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, Miguel's *Tête-à-tête* (plate 16) created quite a stir among the 1,669 exhibits. It was the first thing noticed when entering the Academy, being described by eminent art historian and critic William Moore in the *Brisbane Courier* as "...the success of the year".¹² Gui St Bernard noted that *Tête-à-tête*

was of 'decided merit;' ... The effective placing of component arts and soundness of figure construction are also characteristics¹³

This was his year to be the success of the season. *The Week-end Review* declared it

one of the best pictures in the show, with something of the suave openness of a Seurat but without the childish incapacity to maintain a background steadily ... and if he is a young man he should perhaps be warned against getting the Prix de Rome.¹⁴

An innovation that year was the presentation of five 'tableaux vivants' at the Coliseum featuring Academy paintings. Brightly lit living representations of the hung works of Miguel, Laura Knight, Russell Flint, Walter Webster and Campbell Taylor were posed on the stage surrounded by huge gold frames. Miguel's tableau was illustrated in the *Daily Sketch*. Knight and Flint were Royal Academicians. Australian critic Leslie Rees wrote:

Tête-à-tête was one of the most discussed and most outstanding pictures in the last Academy. Like Cezanne, whose method he follows, he is concerned with expression not surfaces, but of essential structures; that is to say he paints not what he sees, or not only what he sees but, what he knows to be there. He achieves par excellence the roundness of things that are round, adds emphatically the values of mass and weight.¹⁵

15.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *The Hut* 1932, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 60 cm. The garden at their new address Finch Lane, Bushey. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

16.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Tête-à-tête* 1930, oil on canvas, 202 x 237 cm, hung "on the line" at the Royal Academy. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK, on loan to Bushey Museum and Art Gallery

His *La Siesta* or *Mother and Child* (plate 6) was illustrated and written up in Perth, Western Australia where his career was being avidly followed. The critic for the *West Australian* wrote:¹⁶

Mackinlay has very definite theories about his art and is a direct descendant of Cezanne, in that he aims first at the realization on his canvas of solidarity and volume in his forms by use of massed planes of colour. In other words he is definitely a three-dimensional artist. His capacity for achieving the effect of roundness in an object that is round, of adding the values of weight and mass, is well seen in the picture called "Mother and Son". The child's head here is not lying merely on



17.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
Rutlands 1940, oil on canvas,
67 x 81 cm.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

18.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
The Marrow Bed, oil on canvas
59 x 74 cm.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

19.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
Gypsy Caravans 1930s, watercolour
and ink on paper, 27 x 37 cm.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

20.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
Brixham Harbour, Devon 1930s,
watercolour on paper,
24.5 x 35 cm.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

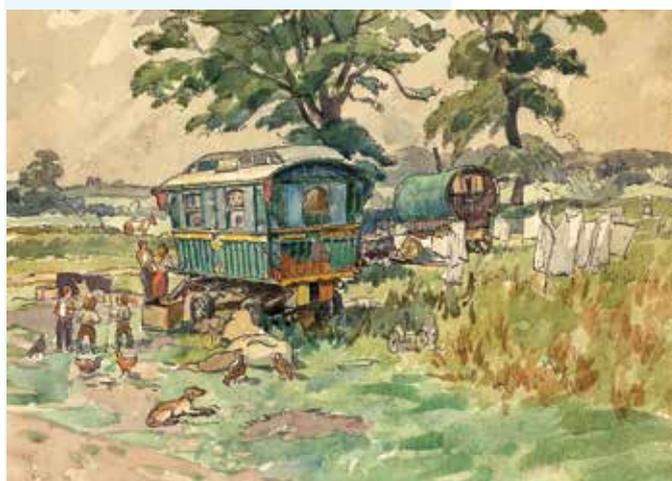
the pillow but is essentially pressing into it. Mackinlay's early training in modelling no doubt influenced him in this insistence on the third dimension. ... It is only necessary to examine the picture "Tête-a-Tête" to see that Mackinlay is a constructive designer of skill. He builds his pictures with a kind of solid deliberation and the movement in them is slow. The appearance of the figures in "Tête-a-Tête" combines in an individual way the static solidity of sculpture with a plastic rhythm of line possible only in painting. He favours figure compositions on an unusually large scale, but also paints landscape and still life.

The critic for the *Brisbane Telegraph* and *Boston Evening Transcript* had other ideas, describing *Tête-à-tête* as

very terrifying with its two heavy young women lying on a slope so steep that the tea-things just below are in danger every moment, but its' forms and lights and colour are interesting.¹⁷

Leslie Rees, discussing Mackinlay and Brodzky in *Art in Australia* in 1931, wrote that:

Among Australian painters who have left Australia to seek a larger fortune in London, only a few have adapted themselves to those principles, which have become known popularly as "Modern." Fred. Porter, Horace Brodzky, Max Martin and Miguel Mackinlay stand out. ... While both [Brodzky and Mackinlay] are essentially modern,





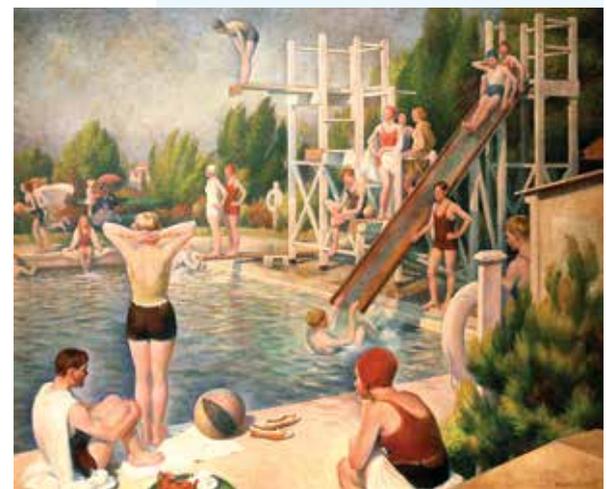
neither subscribes to theories so abstruse or abstract as to cause head scratching in front of their pictures. They are neither of them so keen on emotional self-expression that they throw technique to the winds and try to achieve art in a passing spasm of aesthetic agony.¹⁸

However, the critic for London's *Sunday Times*, discussing Miguel's entry in the Royal Academy *Summer Exhibition* of 1931, was unfamiliar with the artist and resorted to speculation:

From afar we can see Miguel Mackinlay's "The First Communion" (631) which occupies the centre of the centre wall of Gallery VIII. ... his picture – which suggests Besnard with a soupçon of Marchand – has a familiar look. It is very sunny, clear and dry in colour, the kind of thing we are more accustomed to see at the Tuileries than in Burlington House. I suspect the artist is Paris trained.¹⁹



That must have amused him. Life in a rambling house on Bushey Heath was pleasant (plates 17–18). The extensive gardens that he cultivated provided fruit, vegetables and flowers and room for elder daughter Laurie's little black dog that appeared in a number of paintings. Yet Miguel never lost his interest in the sea and boats. Holidays, especially in the 1930s were mostly taken in Cornwall and Devon where there were several artists' colonies and contacts could be made to plug into exhibition circuits. Numerous images of the sea and harbours remain in his portfolio (plate 20). He was also reputed to have kept a boat in France.²⁰ Trips to the countryside saw farmyard scenes painted and, in later years when his TB or war wound was troubling him, many vases of flowers (plate 23).



21.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Self Portrait as artist* 1940s, oil on board, 59.5 x 49 cm. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

22.

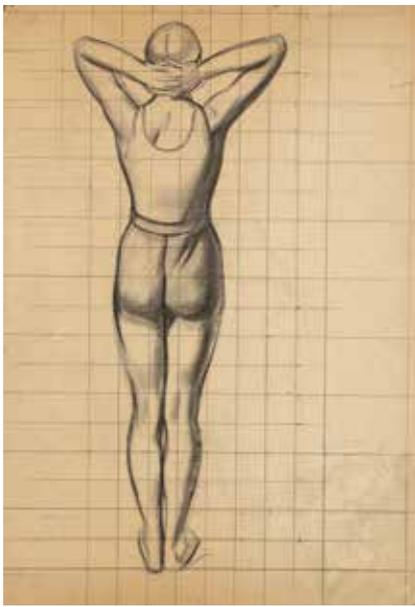
Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), Probably *Cornish Village* 1936, oil on canvas 60 x 49.5 cm. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

23.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), Possibly *Kitchen Bunch* 1945, oil on canvas 75 x 62 cm. Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

24.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959), *Summer* 1933, oil on canvas, 166 x 200 cm, hung at the Royal Academy in 1933. Family collection on loan to Bushey Museum and Art Gallery



25.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
Study for *Summer*, charcoal on paper,
56 x 38 cm. Son Michael and his
friends Pat and Boy were models for
figures in the painting.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK.

26-27.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
Sketches for *Summer*, pencil on
paper, 38 x 31 cm.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK

28.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894–1959),
The Poacher c 1936, oil on canvas,
214 x 150 cm. Hung 1936
Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.
Collection: M J McKinlay Trust, UK



Miguel's best-known image is that of *Summer* (**plate 24**) currently on loan to the Bushey Museum and Art Gallery. It had been exhibited at the 1933 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. Swimming had been introduced as an Olympic sport for women in the 1920s and costumes became figure hugging rather than the preceding baggy Edwardian style. Miguel with his facility in figure drawing was in his element. After this we hear little of Miguel in the Australian papers and he faded from sight. However he did continue a lucrative career as a portrait painter and illustrator in England. In 1936 much was made of *The Poacher* hung at the Royal Academy and the next year in Bradford (**plates 28–29**).



Two other well-known images are that of *The Young Reader* hung in the 1945 Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy and now in the collection of Leamington Spa Museum and Art Gallery (**plate 30**). The subject is his youngest daughter Theresa, then nine years old. Another is *Still Life with Dress Uniform* thought to be the enigmatically titled *Props* hung in the Royal Academy in 1942 now on loan to Bushey (**plate 31**). One of the loveliest and last paintings he undertook was of daughter Theresa's wedding bouquet in 1957 (**plate 32**). He died of TB in the UK in January 1959.

A recent sales pitch on the internet for a print of *Summer* claimed that Miguel was:

one of a small group of British figure painters whose crisp realist style enjoyed great notoriety across 1930s Europe. Positioned between the avant-garde abstractionists and Edwardian traditionalism, they fostered a mainstream popularity for this style of art. However it is only now that these painters are being fully recognised for the contribution they made to British art in the years between the two great wars.

It is time to recognise Miguel's part in this.

29.

The Poacher being hung in
Bradford in 1937. *Yorkshire
Observer* 19 March 1937



NOTES

- 1 Research notes provided by Claire Fitzgerald May 2016 citing Denys J. Wilcox, *The London Group 1913-1939: the Artists and their Works* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, c 1995), p 180 and *London Group 1914-64 Jubilee Exhibition. Fifty Years of British Art at the Tate Gallery (exhibition catalogue, 15 July – 16 August 1964)* (London: Tate Gallery, 1964), appendix 'Fifty years of London Group Exhibitions 1914-64', no pagination.
- 2 Research notes provided by Claire Fitzgerald May 2016 citing Charles Baile De Lapperriere (ed.), *The New English Art Club Exhibitors 1886-2001: a Dictionary of Artists and their Works in the Annual Exhibitions of The New English Art Club* (Calne: Hilmaron Manor press, 2002), volume III, p 93.
- 3 *Royal Academy Exhibitors 1905-1970: A dictionary of artists and their work in the Summer Exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts*, vol V Wakefield, EP Publishing Ltd 1981 p 91
- 4 If this was the Slade students' gallery it could account for the notion that he had trained at the Slade.
- 5 Quoted in the *Huon Times* (Tasmania) 24 Nov 1924 p 3.
- 6 *The Register* (Adelaide) 26 Dec 1927 p 13.
- 7 "Two Australians in London", *Art in Australia*, 15 Feb 1931 p 38.
- 8 *The Studio*, December 1926 pp 393f.
- 9 *Western Mail* (Perth), 18 August 1927 p 26 and Supplement p 2 and *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 July 1927 p 11.
- 10 Anthony Bertram, "Art: The Royal Academy", *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, (143: 3732) 7 May 1927 p 703.
- 11 Exhibition catalogue held by the family.
- 12 William Moore in "Art and Artists", *Brisbane Courier* 5 July 1930 p 23.
- 13 Gui St. Bernard, "The Royal Academy and the Public" *The Studio* 99 1930 pp 387-402.
- 14 *The Week-end Review* (London) 10 May 1930.
- 15 Leslie Rees, *West Australian* 31 May 1930 p 18; «Two Australians in London» *Art in Australia*, Feb 1931, pp 36-38.
- 16 *West Australian* 31 May 1930 p 18.
- 17 "A Bird's Eye View", *Telegraph* (Brisbane) 19 June 1930 p 4.
- 18 See n 15.
- 19 *Sunday Times* (London) 3 May 3 1931.
- 20 Information from daughter Theresa 2016.

30.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894-1959), *The Young Reader* 1945, oil on canvas, 50 x 44 cm. Exhibited Royal Academy 1945. Collection: Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum.

31.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894-1959), *Still Life with Dress Uniform*, 74 x 62 cm; possibly *Props*, exhibited RA 1942. Family collection, currently on loan to Bushey Museum and Art Gallery

32.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894-1959), *[Head of a girl]* c 1957, pencil on paper, 33.5 x 23.5 cm. The subject is his granddaughter Gilly, daughter Laurie's youngest child. Family collection UK

33.

Miguel Mackinlay (1894-1959), *Wedding Bouquet* 1957, oil on board, 37.5 x 47.5 cm. Daughter Theresa's wedding bouquet. Family collection UK



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Miguel McKinlay's birth date is usually given as 1895, taken from his army enrolment forms. Attempts to locate his birth record in Spain have not yet been successful. However, on 23 October 1918 he wrote to his sister Wiliamina discussing his time in the trenches and requesting a birth certificate as he believed he was older than he thought. As his younger brother was born in February 1895, Miguel was more likely born in 1894. The few drawings which I dated 1915 in my first article "Miguel Mackinlay in the Great War" in *Australiana* February 2017 are now known to have been drawn in 1918, as the upstroke on the 8 is missing.

