

Professor The Honourable Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO

**SPEECH AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF
JUDY CASSAB AO CBE**

**THE ART GALLERY NEW SOUTH WALES
SYDNEY**

Thursday, 11 February 2016

PROFESSOR THE HON DAME MARIE BASHIR AD CVO

DR MICHAEL BRAND, *Director, Art Gallery of New South Wales*

**TRUSTEES AND STAFF OF THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH
WALES**

**MR JOHN SEED AND MR PETER KAMPFNER, SONS OF JUDY CASSAB,
AND ALL FAMILY MEMBERS**

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL KIRBY AC CMG

MR LOU KLEPAC OAM

MANY FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

**IT IS INDEED A DEEPLY FELT PRIVILEGE TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO
SPEAK ABOUT THIS GREATLY ESTEEMED AND DEARLY LOVED
ARTIST, JUDY CASSAB, AND ESPECIALLY TO FOLLOW HER DEAR
SONS JOHN AND PETER WHOSE WORDS WILL HAVE TOUCHED US
ALL DEEPLY.**

**HAVING KNOWN OF JUDY SINCE MY FORMATIVE YEARS OF
ADOLESCENCE -, AND ALSO TO NOTE ITS EFFECT ON OTHERS, -
THE ART OF JUDY CASSAB HAS HAD A DEEP PERSONAL IMPACT
UPON ME.**

TODAY WE JOIN TOGETHER, SHARING OUR GREAT SENSE OF LOSS IN THE PASSING OF A WOMAN OF INCOMPARABLE COURAGE, OF GREAT RESILIENCE, OF DEVOTED MATERNAL LOVE, AND A PERSON OF COUNTLESS ENDEARING QUALITIES – IN A LIFE OF ALMOST 100 YEARS. AND IN HER CONSIDERABLE ARTISTIC LEGACY, A UNIQUE SENSITIVITY REACHED OUT TO ALL.

IN MORE RECENT YEARS, HAVING READ OF HER JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE, I WAS BETTER ABLE TO APPRECIATE WHENCE CAME THIS SENSITIVITY, THIS EMPATHY WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL WHOM SHE PAINTED.

INDEED, JUDY CASSAB WAS AN ARTIST OF UNIQUE SENSITIVITY, A SENSITIVITY WHICH HAD BEEN HONED IN HER LONG LIFE – FOR ALMOST A CENTURY - BY TRAUMA AND LOSS, BUT WHO ALSO CAME TO REJOICE IN A LIFE OF CREATIVITY, WHICH GAVE MUCH INSPIRATION TO OTHERS.

THOUGH BORN IN THE GLORIOUS CITY OF VIENNA IN 1920 TO HUNGARIAN PARENTS, SHE RETURNED TO HUNGARY AT THE AGE OF 9 YEARS TO LIVE WITH HER GRANDMOTHER.

THE EVILS OF WORLD WAR II, OF NAZI PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION FOLLOWED, RESULTING IN THE INCOMPARABLE TRAUMA OF ALL OF HER DEAR FAMILY BEING SENT TO AUSCHWITZ, THAT PLACE OF ENDLESS CRUELTY, WHERE TRAGICALLY ALL PERISHED. JUDY HERSELF THROUGH IMMENSE COURAGE MANAGED TO REMAIN HIDDEN, AND EVENTUALLY TO ESCAPE IN 1951 TO THIS COUNTRY, AUSTRALIA, WHICH BECAME A WELCOMING HOME TO SO MANY VALUABLE JEWISH PEOPLE WHOSE CONTRIBUTION HAS BEEN INESTIMABLE.

IN 1939, JUDY HAD MARRIED JANSCI KAMPFLER, A MAN WHOM IT SEEMS GAVE IMMENSE LOVING SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT, IN HER DEVELOPMENT AS A FINE ARTIST. THIS MARRIAGE ENDURED A TERRIBLE SEPARATION WHEN JANSCI, AN INNOCENT VICTIM OF THAT WAR BECAME A PRISONER IN A FORCED LABOUR CAMP IN RUSSIA. MIRACULOUSLY JANSCI WAS ONE OF THOSE FEW WHO SURVIVED BUT THIS INSPIRATIONAL MAN (MY UNDERSTANDING OF HIM) HAD ENCOURAGED HIS BELOVED JUDY TO HASTEN TO PRAGUE AND BUDAPEST TO CONTINUE HER DEVELOPMENT AS AN ARTIST. JUDY'S INCREDIBLE FEAT OF SURVIVAL – AND I QUOTE FROM WRITTEN ACCOUNTS OF THIS, – HER SURVIVAL WAS THE RESULT OF “GOING UNDERGROUND AND HIDING HER JEWISH IDENTITY”. EVENTUALLY JUDY AND JANSCI WERE REUNITED, TWO FINE SONS WERE BORN AND SUBSEQUENTLY AUSTRALIA HAD THE BOUNTIFUL ADVANTAGE OF WELCOMING THEM AS CITIZENS.

CERTAINLY, THE LIFE HERE OF JUDY AND HER FAMILY, HAS BEEN TRULY INSPIRATIONAL.

AT THE TENDER AGE OF 12 YEARS, JUDY HAD DISCOVERED HER LOVE OF PAINTING AND THE INCALCULABLE VALUE ALSO, FOR HER LATER LIFE EXPERIENCES, OF KEEPING A WRITTEN ACCOUNT, A DIARY OF THE ROAD OF THE LIFE SHE WOULD TRAVEL.

JUDY WAS DESTINED TO BECOME A RENOWNED PAINTER, - RECOGNISED, REWARDED, AND AN INSPIRATION TO MANY OTHERS. AND IN THE TRADITION OF THE FINEST ARTISTS, THROUGH HER DEPTH OF LIFE EXPERIENCES AND HER UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANITY - BOTH THE JOYS AND THE TRIBULATIONS - SHE WAS ABLE WITH GREAT SENSITIVITY TO ENFOLD THESE QUALITIES IN HER ART.

WHILST JANSCI, A CHEMICAL ENGINEER, WAS ABLE TO FIND WORK IN A FACTORY, HE CONTINUED TO PROVIDE JUDY WITH IMMEASURABLE SUPPORT IN HER ARTISTIC JOURNEY. BEFORE LONG, SHE WAS TRAVELLING ALONE TO FULFIL OUTSTANDING COMMISSIONS IN PORTRAITURE, WHICH INCLUDED THE PORTRAITS OF THE QUEEN OF THAILAND, OF PRINCESS ALEXANDRA IN LONDON, AND OF A MAHARAJAH IN INDIA.

AND I WELL RECALL HER EXHIBITION IN NOVEMBER 2013 AT THE EVA BREUER GALLERY – VIVACIOUS AND TRULY INSPIRATIONAL. IN HER 90'S, SHE WAS DELIGHTING IN THE EFFECT HER PAINTINGS WERE HAVING ON ALL.

INDEED, AS I HAVE NOTED, JUDY'S LOVE OF, AND INVOLVEMENT WITH PAINTING HAD BEGUN AT THE AGE OF 12, AND AS SHE HERSELF SO TOUCHINGLY HAD SAID, "I HAD ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT I EXPRESSED MYSELF WITH A BRUSH. I DO NOT FEEL ANXIOUS ABOUT MY PAINTINGS. I CAN ALWAYS PAINT OTHERS".

ONE OF THOSE OTHERS, WAS MY HUSBAND SIR NICHOLAS SHEHADIE, FORMER LORD MAYOR OF SYDNEY, WHOSE FINE PORTRAIT IS HELD IN THE SYDNEY TOWN HALL. JUDY WAS ABLE TO REVEAL IN THAT PORTRAIT, THE QUIET AND REFLECTIVE QUALITIES OF HIS CHARACTER WHICH HE SO SKILFULLY COULD DISGUISE FROM MOST!

INDEED, JUDY'S SENSITIVE ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS WHICH INCLUDED FINE LANDSCAPE AS WELL AS PORTRAITURE, HAVE BROUGHT ACCOLADES OF THE HIGHEST LEVEL IN OUR SOCIETY:

- IN 1960 & 1967 – SHE WAS THE WINNER OF THE ARCHIBALD (TWICE A WINNER OF THE ARCHIBALD!)
- 1969 - COMMANDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE – CBE
- 1988 – ORDER OF AUSTRALIA – AO
- 1995 – UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY HONORARY DOCTOR OF LETTERS (WHICH ACKNOWLEDGED HER FINE WRITTEN WORKS)
- 1996 – WINNER OF THE NITA B. KIBBLE AWARD FOR WOMEN WRITERS
- 2011 – HUNGARY’S GOLD CROSS OF MERIT

SHE HAS BEEN ACCLAIMED AS AN ARTIST OF AN EXTRAORDINARY RANGE OF COMMITMENT AND TALENT.

INDEED, AS JOHN McDONALD, THE ART CRITIC, HAS SAID, “ONE OF THE BEST LOVED OF ALL AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS”.

IT IS SO FITTING, THAT THIS HISTORIC TREASURY OF ART IN OUR CITY, THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, TO WHICH JUDY HAS BEEN SO GENEROUS, IS HONOURING HER TODAY IN THIS CELEBRATION OF GRATITUDE FOR HER LIFE.

INDEED SHE WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.

I THANK YOU ALL.