



*Peter Alexander Tomory*  
(1922–2008)

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Professor Peter Alexander Tomory became a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1974 and served on the Council of Academy from 1984 to 1986. He contributed incisively to the cultural and academic life of Australia and New Zealand by his serious commitment to the development of the Auckland Art Gallery and the teaching of art history at La Trobe University. Fellows of the Australian Academy of the Humanities mourn his passing.

Peter Tomory was born in Hong Kong in 1922 and died in a nursing home at Rhayader in Wales on 25 March 2008, aged eighty-six. His school education began in India and continued in Great Britain. It was interrupted during the Second World War, when he joined the Royal Navy, and served in an Inshore Squadron in the Mediterranean and then commanded a destroyer on the North Sea convoy escort to Murmansk. After the war, with a war service bursary, he enrolled at the University of Edinburgh, where he studied art history.

On completing his university education, he worked in museums and galleries in England, notably at Leicester and York. From 1953 to 1956, he was an assistant regional director of the Arts Council of Great Britain, resident in Birmingham. This post gave him the opportunity to tour many of the smaller regional galleries in England.

The experience of working in the art world in Britain prepared him for the position of Director of the Auckland Art Gallery, which he held from 1956 to 1964. There he took over from Eric Westbrook, who had presided over the Gallery since 1952. Between them, these two directors transformed the rather 'provincial' art gallery in Auckland into a modern museum of international standing. Tomory insisted on formulating sound policies for the acquisition of European and New Zealand art. It was his aim to create a carefully planned collection of European and New Zealand painting and sculpture to inspire, delight and educate New Zealanders of his day and for many generations to come. He cajoled and persuaded local councils and politicians

to fund gallery acquisitions of European art of the highest quality, purchasing nineteenth-century French and English paintings, nineteenth and twentieth-century sculpture, and European prints from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. When he discovered a collection of watercolours by the eighteenth-century artist Henry Fuseli in Dunedin, he exhibited the works and acquired them for the Gallery. Later, he published the definitive book on Fuseli, *The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972). Tomory also promoted local New Zealand artists, such as Colin McCahon, by organising numerous exhibitions of their work at the Gallery. As a result, many New Zealand artists donated works to the Gallery, or their art was independently acquired for the collection.

In 1964 Tomory left the Gallery to join the newly formed Art History Department at Auckland University, thus beginning his career in university teaching. When he moved to the United States of America, he taught at Columbia University, and Hunter College, New York. While in America he also worked as Senior Curator of Baroque Art at the Ringling Museum, Florida.

Peter Tomory came to Australia in 1972, when he was appointed Foundation Chair of Art History at La Trobe University. He brought to his new position a thorough knowledge of how art history was taught in Great Britain and in the United States, and he wanted art history students at La Trobe to receive an education in the subject that was equal to that offered by the best art history departments in the English-speaking world. He set up a fine, internationally accredited department. He upheld very high standards and was an inspiring teacher.

Undergraduates found him very approachable and encouraging. First-year art history students were fortunate in having his book *Foundations of European Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969), which briefly set out the main themes of European art from Ancient Greece to the twentieth century, the scope of their first year survey course. Second- and third-year students flocked to his courses on 'Art and the Classical Tradition', 'Italian Baroque Art', and 'Art of the eighteenth century'. Many felt he had opened their eyes to a new and wonderful world of beauty and meaning. At Honours level he taught a superb course on Connoisseurship, which would equip aspiring gallery staff and art historians with hands-on experience in attributing paintings, and particularly prints and drawings, to individual artists. Often students had the opportunity to handle and to comment on prints from Professor Tomory's own extensive collection.

Postgraduate students found doing research with Peter a stimulating and exacting experience. Some of them have made Melbourne an internationally known centre for the study of Baroque art. Others have found employment in universities, academies, colleges, museums and galleries in Australia, New Zealand and overseas. In memory of his excellence in the teaching of art history, La Trobe University on his retirement in 1987 named the university Visual Resources Library the 'Tomory Archive'.

The teaching staff from the La Trobe Art History Department recall Peter's competent administration and his dedicated vocational attitude towards teaching. As professor, he actively encouraged their endeavours, promoting excellence in research and teaching. He is remembered for his affable manner, his dry sense of humour, and his unwillingness to accept pomposity or self-aggrandisement. He could keep one enthralled for hours with his stories about his time in the Navy, for he was a great raconteur, especially after he had wine and dined copiously. This he did at least once a week at the university staff club with his mates from other departments.

Professor Tomory was one of the founding members of the Art Association of Australia (now the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand). He also established the journal published by the Association, insisting on the highest international standards of scholarly writing and peer review.

As well as being an inspiring teacher and capable administrator, Peter Tomory was an original researcher and writer. Early in his career he published the collection of drawings by Annibale Carracci in the Ellesmere Collection, giving a first glimpse of his erudition in Baroque art, which was then a very new field. Many articles, catalogues and scholarly papers followed. In 1976, he brought out an important volume, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings before 1800*, Ringling Museum of Art, Florida, USA.

With an Australian Research Grant he and Robert Gaston undertook a thorough investigation into the European paintings in Australia and New Zealand. The result was a reattribution of many artworks and a book by Peter Tomory, with Robert Gaston, *European paintings before 1800 in Australian and New Zealand Public Collections: summary catalogue* (Sydney: Beagle Press, 1989). This work was followed in 1997 by an important volume written in collaboration with Anne Kirker, *British Painting 1800–1990 in Australian and New Zealand Collections* (Sydney: Beagle Press in conjunction with the British Council, 1997). In these two books Peter Tomory used his remarkable gift for connoisseurship to classify, catalogue and point out the importance of European and British art in Australia and New Zealand. In this way he has permanently enriched our knowledge and enjoyment of these works.

He made his own collection of artworks, especially of European prints and drawings from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, which the Auckland Art Gallery purchased in 2005. Fittingly, these works now reside in the art gallery, which he directed and shaped from 1956 to 1964.

After retiring from La Trobe University, Peter eventually went to live in England so as to be closer to members of his family. His sons, David and Nick, his daughter-in-law Sarah and a grandson survive him.

*Joan Barclay Lloyd*