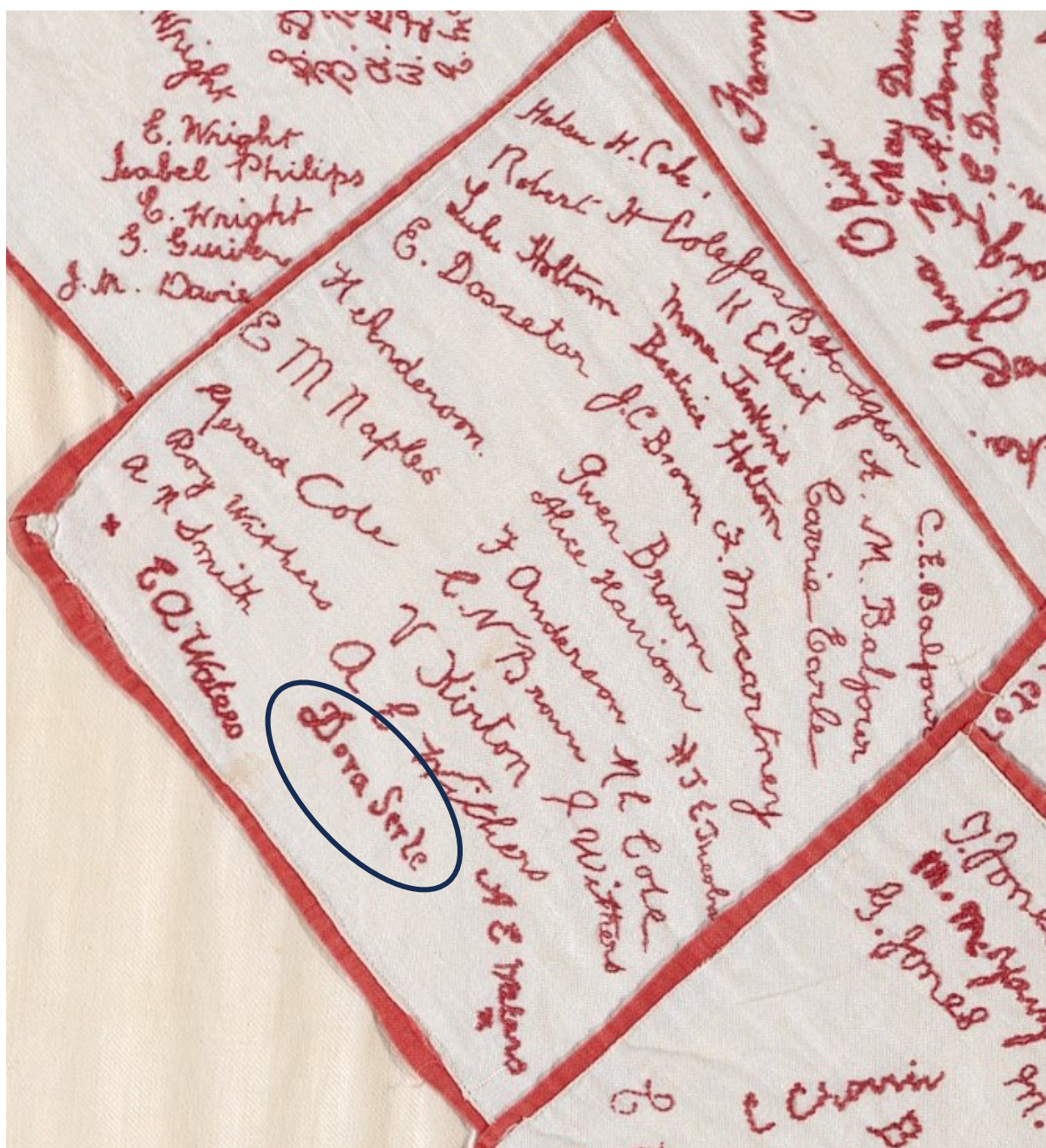


Dora Serle



Square 26 featuring the signature of Dora Serle

Dora Serle (née Hake), was born on 2 September 1875 in South Melbourne, the sixth child of Sidney Hake and his wife Charlotte, (née Hemsley). Dora and her younger sister Elsie (Barlow) attended drawing classes given by Jane Sutherland at Fairelight Girl's School about 1890. When Sutherland saw that they 'were keen about it and not just playing, she asked us to come to her class in town to draw and paint from life'. They went daily as well as two nights a week and were put 'on the right road from the beginning'.



Dora Hake (right), with her sisters Rose (left) and Elsie (centre) 1890

In the mid-1890s, when Jane Sutherland had to give up teaching, Dora travelled once a week to Heidelberg to work with Australian Impressionist Walter Withers and he also gave up one of his school drawing classes at Malvern to his protégée.

Between 1895 and 1902 she was a student at the National Gallery School under Bernard Hall and Frederick McCubbin, and an exhibiting member of the Victorian Artists' Society from at least 1900. In 1899 she shared a studio at 187 Collins Street with her sister Elsie.

Dora then travelled abroad in 1902, accompanying her mother who wanted to visit old friends back in England. While there she was accepted for the summer term at the school run by Stanhope and Elizabeth Forbes at Newlyn, situated on the cliffs at Land's End. "Whenever the weather allowed, we worked outside"¹. She and her mother visited Paris where she fell in love with the art of Manet and Monet and the other French Impressionists' and decided that was how she wanted to paint.

On her return home from Europe, with Withers's help, she acquired the Geelong Art School in Little Malop Street. She lived in Geelong for most of that decade and scoured the district for subjects. Outdoor oils from this time *Geelong Morning* (1904), a view of Corio Bay and *Fyans Ford*, the latter one of eight works hung in the *Women's Work Exhibition* in 1907. In 1908 she exhibited a 'Ceramic Specimen' at the Arts and Crafts Society where she was later to show china painting. That year she won first and second prize and Mrs Herman Guttermann's Gold Medal at the Ladies' Art Association Exhibition in Ballarat, coming second to Charles Wheeler for landscape.

In 1910 she married scholar Percival Serle, who went on to be an acclaimed author compiling *The Dictionary of Australian Biography*, published in 1949. From 1915 they lived at *Asolo*, one of Hawthorn's oldest houses, set in a large garden. During this time, she didn't produce many artworks while her three children were young, although she still exhibited regularly with the Victorian Artists' Society.



'Asolo', 70 Church Street, Hawthorn
Coll: Victorian Heritage Database

By 1928 her children were old enough for she and her husband to spend a year abroad, visiting galleries, sketching, reaffirming her commitment to the Impressionists and reacting badly to some modern art. She exhibited with the Melbourne Society of Women Painters in 1929, was their President in 1933-34 and represented them on the National Council of Women.

In 1930 she showed watercolour and oil 'Sketches and Notes of Travel' at the Lyceum Club, where for several years she convened the Art Circle. The Victoria Centenary retrospective exhibition in 1934 included her *The Chinese Vase* (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne), and she showed work with the Australian Academy of Arts. In 1936 she held a solo exhibition at Margaret McLean's Collins Street Gallery. She was also a founder-member in 1939 of the Independent Group of Artists.

Dora and Percival had three children, Alan Geoffrey Serle, Robert Percival Serle and Kath Beatrice Serle. Their sons both enlisted in WWII, Alan Geoffrey enlisted at 19 years of age and reached the rank of Corporal was wounded and, on his return, enrolled at Melbourne University and then earned a Rhodes Scholarship. The younger son Robert enlisted and served with distinction in Africa, earning the rank of Major before he returned home after being injured. Their daughter trained as a Kindergarten Teacher.

The 1930s-40s was her peak period in terms of output and critical esteem, with George Bell, Basil Burdett and Arnold Shore among her admirers. In 1942 she was represented in the second annual Exhibition of New Paintings at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne by a still life and *Al Fresco* now in the collection of the University of Western Australia.



The Chinese Vase c.1934
Coll: National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
© Estate of Dora Serle

She ceased to paint for a time after her husband died in 1951 but by 1954 felt equal to making her last trip abroad. Despite failing eyesight, she continued to work well into her eighties – a period of over 70 years. She died on 10 September 1968.

Notes:

1. DORA SERLE - An account of her art training and work, written for Mrs. Lina Bryans when she was contemplating compiling a history of women painters.

References:

- <https://www.daa0.org.au/bio/dora-beatrice-serle/biography/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dora_Serle
<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/serle-percival-8387>