



Brett Whiteley: Art, Life and the Other Thing

Ashleigh Wilson

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When he died in 1992 Brett Whiteley left behind decades of ceaseless activity—some works bound to a particular place or time, others that are masterpieces of light and line.

Whiteley had arrived in Europe in 1960 determined to make an impression. Before long he was the youngest artist to have work acquired by the Tate. With his wife, Wendy, and daughter, Arkie, Whiteley then immersed himself in bohemian New York. But within two years he fled, having failed to break through.

Back in Sydney, he soon became Australia's most celebrated artist. He won the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes in the same year—his prices soared, as did his fame. Among his friends were Francis Bacon and Patrick White, Billy Connolly and Dire Straits. Yet addiction was taking its toll: Whiteley struggled in vain to separate his talent from his disease, and an inglorious end approached.

Written with unprecedented behind-the-scenes access, and handsomely illustrated with classic Whiteley artworks, rare notebook sketches and candid family photos, this dazzling biography reveals for the first time the full portrait of a mercurial artist.

Ashleigh Wilson has been a journalist for almost two decades. He began his career at the *Australian* in Sydney before spending several years in Brisbane, covering everything from state politics to the Hollingworth crisis to indigenous affairs. He then moved north to become the paper's Darwin correspondent, a posting bookended by the Falconio murder trial and the Howard government's intervention in remote Aboriginal communities. During that time he won a Walkley Award for reports on unethical behaviour in the Aboriginal art industry, a series that led to a Senate inquiry. He returned to Sydney in 2008 and has been the paper's Arts Editor since 2011. He lives in Sydney.

'Ashleigh Wilson has produced an intriguing, absorbing and assured account of Brett Whiteley's life and work'. Mark Knopfler

'With relentless precision, Ashleigh Wilson has provided a peerless grasp of the life and genius of Brett Whiteley. This storied journey of one of Australia's most mercurial twentieth-century artists will be impossible for the reader to put aside until it is finished. It is the dispassionate biography Whiteley has long needed: a career clarified from the brilliant clouds of myth.' Barry Pearce, Emeritus Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of NSW

'[Wilson brings] his subject to life in a fast-paced, thrilling way...Clever selection of detail...An excellent biography.' *Books+Publishing*

'A full-dress life of Whiteley that speeds and soars and never ceases to do homage to the colossal confrontation and contradiction the artist represents...Wilson has written that rarest of things, a 400-page biography that is hard to put down...[It] will make you weep for this exasperation of a man and hunger for his art.' *Australian*

'An essential and invaluable resource for any Whiteley scholar...Wilson's achievement is considerable...Ashleigh Wilson's *Brett Whiteley: Art, Life and the Other Thing* is a benchmark publication in Whiteley studies.' *Sydney Review of Books*

‘Ashleigh Wilson’s new telling of Whiteley is a remarkable exercise in sustained authorial discipline...Wilson has given Whiteley the biography he deserves. Accommodating, even forgiving on occasion, but never indulgent. Engaged and attentive, unaffectedly interested in the artist, but not uncritical.’ *Sydney Morning Herald*

‘This new book is an engrossing look at the life, artistic development and person behind the enfant terrible of the spotlight.’ Best Art & Design Books of 2016, *Readings*

‘The best biography I read [this year] was Ashleigh Wilson’s *Brett Whiteley: Art, Life and the Other Thing*...Combines journalistic rigour and personal compassion his landmark account of one of our greatest artists.’ *Australian*

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