



PHILIP MOULD
& COMPANY

EILEEN MAYO

A collection of four artworks

(1920s -1960s)



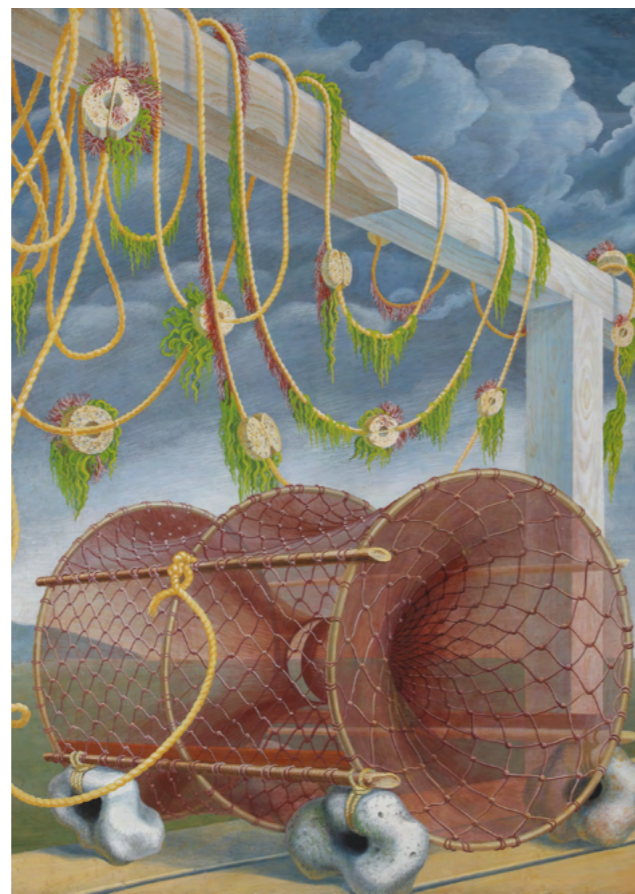


Laura Knight
Dancer in a Dressing Room

1927

Watercolour and pencil
22 x 15 in. (56 x 38 cm)

Signed '*Laura Knight*' lower right



Eileen Mayo
Lobster Pot

c. 1950

Tempera on board
16 x 12 1/2 in. (40.5 x 32 cm)

Signed '*MAYO*' lower left



Eileen Mayo
Australia (Kangaroo and Joey): lithograph for the
Australian National Travel Association

1956

Lithograph
39 5/8 x 25 3/8 in. (100.6 x 64.5 cm)



Eileen Mayo
Circular Quay, Sydney

1964

Painted mixed media
16 3/4 x 24 1/4 in. (42.5 x 61.5 cm)

Signed '*MAYO*' lower left



Eileen Mayo, 1930 by E.O. Hoppé © E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection.

EILEEN MAYO

Eileen Mayo (1906–1994) was an ambitious artist whose work bridged the fine and applied arts across Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.

She began her career in Britain as a model for established artists such as Laura Knight, Dod Procter and Duncan Grant before making a name as an artist in her own right. Her artistic vision was deeply rooted in the natural world, with meticulous observation and a focus on patterns. She developed a strong foundation in technical skill and design, excelling in multiple mediums, including painting, linocuts, lithography, tapestry design, and illustration, seamlessly blending fine art with practical design.

Her relocation to Australia in 1953 marked a prolific phase where she created iconic posters and stamps that celebrated the

nation's unique biodiversity. Her vibrant linocuts, posters, and illustrations captured the essence of native flora and fauna, elevating public appreciation of Australia's natural heritage and contributing significantly to public art and cultural identity. In New Zealand, she furthered her reputation as a painter, printmaker and stamp designer, pushing the technical boundaries of her craft.

Her teaching and advocacy for accessible art solidified her legacy, bridging the worlds of fine art and practical design. In recognition of her remarkable contributions to the arts, Mayo was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1994.



Eileen Mayo posing for Dame Laura Knight.
Still from *Camera Interviews: Mrs Laura Knight The Famous Artist*, 1927. British Pathé Archive.

EARLY YEARS

Mayo As Model

Mayo's modelling career positioned her at the heart of Britain's dynamic interwar art scene. She was employed as a model by some of Britain's most celebrated twentieth century artists, including Laura Knight, Harold Knight, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Dod and Ernst Procter, gaining unprecedented access to their studios and working methods. Of her modelling career, she said: '*All the time I have been posing for painters I have been studying their methods and listening to their talk. In this way I have learned more than I ever learned in an art school.*'¹ Mayo's approach to modelling was both pragmatic and imaginative; it allowed her to observe different artistic styles, from the classical realism of Knight to the modernist experiments of Grant and Bell, first hand. By aligning her modelling career with her creative ambitions, Mayo transformed what had traditionally been viewed as a passive role into an active opportunity for learning and observation.





LAURA KNIGHT (1877-1970)
Dancer in a Dressing Room

1927

Watercolour and pencil
22 x 15 in. (56 x 38 cm)

Signed 'Laura Knight' lower right

Provenance

Polak Gallery, London;
Christie's, London, 23 June 1994, lot 9;
Private collection U.K.;
Sotheby's, London, 13 December 2018, lot 85;
Private collection, U.K., acquired from the above;
Karen Taylor Fine Art, U.K., sold on behalf of the above;
Philip Mould & Company, acquired from the above 2024.

Publications

Janet Dunbar, (1975) *Laura Knight*. London: William Collins & Co, illus. facing p. 104.



At this date, Mayo was Knight's primary model. Here, she is portrayed as a ballerina – a theme that captivated both artists throughout the 1920s. It was painted in 1927, the year that Knight was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy and is amongst the first paintings of Mayo by Knight.

This painting marks the beginning of a reciprocal artistic relationship between the two women. They first met when Mayo approached Knight and offered to model. Mayo was a striking figure, with strong statuesque features and long blonde hair – she was affectionately known by Knight as the 'golden girl'. Although quickly gaining renown as an artist's model, Mayo aspired to become an artist herself, and Knight helped launch her career, securing her

first major commission – a book cover for dance critic and historian Cyril Beaumont OBE's publication – in the same year this work was painted. Knight's stardom was on the ascent when this work was painted – the following year she was awarded a silver medal in the paintings category at the Amsterdam Olympics and the year after she received a damehood.

The present work is a variation on a theme that culminated in the monumental oil painting *Dressing for the Ballet*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1927. It toured to the United States in 1931 but was later damaged and then reworked by Knight, who re-exhibited it at the Royal Academy in 1947 as *No. 1 Dressing Room*. When it was first shown, *Dressing for the Ballet* was



heralded as '*One of the Most Admired Pictures on Exhibition*' and was warmly received by the critics.²

The nude female model, when painted by a woman, was still a controversial subject at this time. This much is clear from a film produced by British Pathé in 1927, filmed the same year as the present work, which documents Knight painting Mayo. In the background, Knight's masterpiece, *The Toilet*, depicting Mayo seated nude on a chair, was strategically positioned to ensure that Mayo's painted body was constantly covered, either by another canvas or by Knight herself. The artist rebelled against this kind of restrictive censorship and, thanks to Mayo's professional modelling, the prevalence of the female nude in Knight's oeuvre is particularly pervasive.

'Eileen Mayo, the loveliest of girls, with bright yellow hair as fine as spun gold and big dark grey eyes ... I put her in all my chief pictures.'

— Laura Knight, 1927

Eileen Mayo in her Garden, Stroods Fletching, 1946.
Courtesy of the Gainsborough family.



Mayo in Britain

Whilst studying at art school in Britain, Mayo discovered an early propensity for design and craft. Mayo initially attended the Slade School of Art, where she honed her technical skills under the influence of Henry Tonks, whose rigorous draughtsmanship profoundly shaped her artistic approach. However, she grew disappointed with the teaching which did not meet her expectations for personalised instruction. Seeking an alternative education, she registered at the Central School of Arts and Crafts where she explored a diverse range of techniques, including wood engraving, lithography, and calligraphy. This period fostered her lifelong commitment to crafts. She mastered techniques such as linocuts, woodcuts, and lithography,

producing works celebrated for their precision, vibrant colours, and elegant compositions.

Mayo's painting and printmaking from this period reflect a deep sensitivity to form and texture. Her tempera paintings, in particular, stand out as her finest works. The technique, with its demand for meticulous detail and controlled application, perfectly suited her need for precision, allowing her to create images of exceptional clarity and refinement.



EILEEN MAYO Lobster Pot

c. 1950

Tempera on board
16 x 12 ½ in. (40.5 x 32 cm)

Signed 'MAYO' lower left

Provenance

The Artist;
Ralph Gainsborough (the artist's husband), gifted from the above 1952;
John Gainsborough (the artist's stepson), bequeathed from the above 1969;
Abbot and Holder, London, acquired from the above 2005;
Peter Nahum At The Leicester Galleries, London, acquired from the above 2005;
Deutscher and Hackett, Melbourne, 27 August 2008, lot 5;
Collection of Leslie and Johanna Garfield;
Sotheby's, London, 7 June 2024, lot 182, sold on behalf of the above;
Philip Mould & Company, London, acquired from the above.

Exhibitions

Worthing Art Gallery, West Sussex, 'Some Modern Trends in British Painting', 1950;
Peter Nahum at The Leicester Galleries, London, 'Egg Tempera', January – June 2013.

Literature

Art News & Review, 21 April 1951;
Peter Vangioni (ed.), (2019) *Eileen Mayo: Nature, Art and Poetry*. Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery, p. 44;
John Gainsborough, (2019) *Eileen Mayo DBE: Artist Illustrator Designer and Model*. Sussex: The Towner Gallery, p. 68;
Sara Cooper, (2021) *Eileen Mayo*. London: Eiderdown Books, p. 28 (illus. no. 16).



Mayo's paintings in tempera, by far her most accomplished works, are also the rarest within her oeuvre and reflect her profound appreciation for the natural world.

Lobster Pot is dreamlike in its subtly surrealist composition. Depicting a lobster pot in the foreground of a seascape, the unusual perspective and hyper-realist detail exemplifies Mayo's mastery of the difficult medium, tempera. Mayo also appears to wryly reference the loaded symbolism of lobsters within the surrealist movement, which was brought to public attention when Salvador Dalí

created his *Lobster Telephone* in 1936. After the Second World War, Mayo began to work in tempera which lent itself to her meticulously detailed working method. The quick drying properties of tempera appealed to Mayo, enabling her to add intricate layers of detail within her work, whilst maintaining a matt, smooth surface finish. Very few artists were using tempera at this date; not only was it a more difficult medium to master compared to oil paint but, crucially, eggs were scarce throughout the 1940s due to rationing. Determinedly, Mayo would use the family's egg ration to bind her tempera.³



Mayo was continually experimenting in different materials and mediums, making little to no distinction between fine and applied arts. She worked as a printmaker, illustrator, designed tapestries, stamps, coins and printed posters. Although she is now best known for her printmaking, Mayo maintained her painterly ambitions and set her sights on exhibiting her paintings at the Royal Academy, which she achieved in 1948. She stated '*I am especially concerned about the texture of paint. I like to think that if a small piece were removed from any part of a picture it would be interesting in itself.*'⁴ In the case of *Lobster Pot*, the smooth surface was clearly a priority for the artist

with the intricate brushwork barely visible on account of her punctilious working method.

Eileen Mayo at work, 1962.
Reproduced from Webb's Auction.



Mayo in Australia

In 1953, Mayo left England as a mid-career artist and restarted her career in Sydney, Australia, reestablishing her home, studio, and clients. She was embraced by the artistic community and commissions followed, including murals for the Australian Museum and the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation, design commissions for QANTAS, the New South Wales Education Board, and the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board.⁵ Other commissions included coin designs, bookplates, stamps and travel posters, as seen in this collection.⁶

She began teaching at the National Art School in Sydney and established friendships with the city's museum directors and curators including Hal Missingham, Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales; Elizabeth Pope at the Australian Museum, Douglas and Dorothy Dundas of the National Art School and Sir Daryl Lindsay, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria.

Eileen Mayo



EILEEN MAYO
Australia (Kangaroo and Joey): lithograph for the
Australian National Travel Association

1956

Lithograph
39 5/8 x 25 3/8 in. (100.6 x 64.5 cm)

Provenance

Harper Baxter, 8 October 2024, Lot 336;
Philip Mould Gallery, London, acquired from the above.

Literature

Margaret Jillian Cassidy, (2000) '*Shifting Boundaries: The Art of Eileen Mayo*', Unpublished Thesis, University of Canterbury, no. 173, p. 280.





This poster is one of six designed by Mayo for the Australian National Travel Association. The commission was established to revitalise Australian tourism in the post-war era and consequently placed Australian graphic art on the global stage. Mayo's designs, which drew on Australia's flora and fauna, resonated with local audiences and gained international acclaim.

Mayo's print work contributed to the broader legitimisation of printmaking as a fine art form in Australia at a time when it was still seen by many as secondary to painting and sculpture. Arriving in Sydney, Mayo brought with her an established reputation as a printmaker; after exhibitions at prominent British

galleries – including the Redfern Gallery – two of her prints were acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁷ She was accepted and valued in Australian art circles and became a prominent figure within Sydney's printmaking circles, co-founding the Sydney Printmakers group in 1960, which played a pivotal role in the medium's development.⁸ Her technical innovations, such as subtle layering techniques and precise line work, were widely admired and helped set a new standard for Australian printmaking. Her skill and artistry were recognised through prestigious awards, including the Albany Prize and the Ku-ring-gai Prize in 1954.



This poster design features a striking depiction of a kangaroo and its joey, an unmistakable symbol of Australia. Other prints in the commission, a series of images that celebrate Australia's natural beauty including depictions of koalas, birds, fish and plants, were featured in the commercial design journal *Modern Publicity*.⁹ Mayo's printmaking, particularly in linocut and lithography, was characterised by a meticulous approach to detail and a balance between artistic design and natural observation. In this case, the choice of offset lithography enabled Mayo to make the most of bright, bold colours.¹⁰ Mayo's technical expertise as a printmaker, particularly her ability to integrate fine art and commercial design, is particularly evident in this poster series.



Eileen Mayo, 1959. Reproduced from Webb's Auction.

Mayo in New Zealand

While living in New Zealand, she continued to receive commissions from Australia and exhibited her work extensively. Notably, she secured significant commissions from the Print Council of New Zealand and showcased her work in prominent venues, including the Logan Art Gallery, New Vision Gallery, Barry Lett Gallery, World Craft Council, and the New Zealand Museum of Fine Arts. Her achievements were celebrated through a retrospective exhibition at the Aigantighe Art Gallery and a dedicated prints exhibition at the Otago Museum.¹¹

During her time in Australia and New Zealand, Mayo was entirely self-funded,

relying on her teaching job and paid commissions to sustain herself. However, her diary entries from her latter years in New Zealand reveal her deep commitment to producing the 'best possible work', valuing its lasting impact over immediate financial returns.¹² She remained steadfast in her dedication to her craft, as evidenced by her persistent output in an impressive variety of mediums, as seen in the expressive *Circular Quay, Sydney* in this collection.

She was appointed a Dame of the British Empire three days before her death.



EILEEN MAYO
Circular Quay, Sydney

1964

Painted mixed media
16 3/4 x 24 1/4 in. (42.5 x 61.5 cm)

Signed 'MAYO' lower left

Provenance

Riverhouse Galleries, Brisbane;
Tennants, 5 October 2024, lot 595;
Philip Mould Gallery, London, acquired from the above.

Literature

Margaret Jillian Cassidy, (2000) '*Shifting Boundaries: The Art of Eileen Mayo*', Unpublished Thesis, University of Canterbury, no. 154, p. 275.



Mayo emigrated to Australia in 1953, and later to New Zealand in 1962 where she stayed until her death in 1994. Mayo painted *Circular Quay, Sydney* after she had moved from Australia to live in New Zealand. This view of Sydney's iconic waterfront is closely tied to Mayo's daily ferry journeys between her home in Sydney's Neutral Bay and Circular Quay, where she commuted to to teach at the National Art School from 1954. The vibrant palette and architectural details capture the spirit of the area as it existed before significant redevelopment; during the nineteenth century it was a central port for Sydney and later developed as the passenger ferry hub – used by Mayo – but huge redevelopments during the 1950s replaced the warehouses depicted here with the first skyscrapers in Sydney. Today, the quay is home to the Museum of Contemporary Art and neighbours the Sydney Opera House.

Mayo's focus on architecture and texture

bridges her skills as a designer and as a painter. Here, she has married her painting process with techniques that echo her expertise in printmaking, such as the layering of colour and an experimental approach to texture. The soft, grainy finish of the painting reflects her exploration of different tools and methods, as seen in her printmaking practice with foam rollers and light inking. These techniques lend the painting a tactile, almost dreamlike quality, which contrasts with the stark industrial reality of the warehouses themselves. This dreamlike quality is particularly striking given that the work was created from memory, and probably sketches, from her new home in New Zealand making it a deeply personal reconstruction of a scene that Mayo experienced daily during her time in Sydney. Filtered through the lens of nostalgia, Mayo's depiction captures a moment of transformation in Sydney's urban and cultural history and preserves the memory of a rapidly changing city.



Footnotes

- 1 *Daily Herald*, 16 September 1930, Tate Archive, TGA 916.
- 2 *The Sphere*, 7 May 1927, p. 1.
- 3 Recalled by John Gainsborough, the artist's stepson.
- 4 Eileen Mayo quoted in Mary Sorrell, (1949) 'Eileen Mayo', in *Apollo*. vol. 74 (320), 1949, p. 111.
- 5 Jillian Cassidy, (1992) *Eileen Mayo: Painter/Designer*. Auckland: National Library of New Zealand, p.11.
- 6 John Gainsborough, (2019) *Eileen Mayo DBE: Artist Illustrator Designer and Model*. Sussex: The Towner Gallery, p. 64.
- 7 John Gainsborough, (2019) *Eileen Mayo DBE: Artist Illustrator Designer and Model*. Sussex: The Towner Gallery, p. 54.
- 8 Jillian Cassidy, (1992) *Eileen Mayo: Painter/Designer*. Auckland: National Library of New Zealand, p. 11.
- 9 Frank A Mercer (ed.), (1956/7) *Modern Publicity*. no. 26, p.45-52.
- 10 Peter Vangioni, (2019) *Eileen Mayo: Nature, Art and Poetry*. Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery, p.16.
- 11 Margaret MacKean-Taylor, (1992) *Eileen Mayo: Painter/Designer*. Auckland: National Library of New Zealand, p. 11.
- 12 Eileen Mayo, *Diary*. 24 May 1969. Quoted in Margaret Jillian Cassidy, (2000) 'Shifting Boundaries: The art of Eileen Mayo', unpublished thesis, University of Canterbury, p. 93.