

An example to us all

FRIENDS of the great philanthropist Diana Ramsay, who died on Sunday, aged 91, would often hear her say: "Without art, you are nothing".

Mrs Ramsay put her money where her mouth was, giving \$80 million to the arts as well as medical research, education programs, and at-risk children.

Through art, she and her late husband James, wanted others to feel something special — just as she had as a 10-year-old on her first visit to the Art Gallery of SA.

The family's wealth came from James, an accountant, who was an heir to the Kiwi

Boot Polish fortune. With no children, they devoted their wealth to trying to make the state a better place.

Now, while Mrs Ramsay will be missed by her many friends, she has ensured that generosity will not end with her death.

Thanks to her decision to set up the James and Diana Ramsay Foundation, which now has substantial investments, her benefaction will continue in perpetuity.

The Ramsays have set a great example for other South Australians.

Hopefully their generosity will encourage others to follow in their footsteps.

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NEWS 05

Magic childhood moment inspired the life of SA's \$80m patron saint of art

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WHEN Nick Mitzevich finally secured the French impressionist he'd been scouring the world to find for the Art Gallery of South Australia, the first person he took it to show — still in its packing crate — was an elderly woman in a North Adelaide nursing home.

Diana Ramsay, whose generous philanthropy helped the gallery buy the \$US4.6 million Camille Pissarro 1886 painting, *Prairie a Eragny*, in 2014, looked closely at its crisp brushstrokes and remarked to the gallery's director: "It looks like it was painted yesterday."

Mrs Ramsay, 91, who died peacefully on Sunday, was one of SA's most generous benefactors, donating an estimated \$80 million to projects that ranged from the art gallery, the Australian Ballet, the Australian National Gallery, the Adelaide Youth orchestra, the Helpmann academy and more.

She also supported medical research, through the University of Adelaide and a mentor project at the SA Health and Medical Research Institute.

Mrs Ramsay fell under the spell of art while on a visit with her father to the art gallery in 1936, aged 10.

The magic happened in front of a Nora Heysen still life of flowers, *Scabious*. She never forgot the transformative power of that experience, and later in life often remarked that: "Without art, you are nothing."

Mrs Ramsay was born into the Hamilton wine family and married James Ramsay, whose family were heirs to the Kiwi Boot Polish fortune, in 1960.

She had been a social worker, played hockey for South Australia from 1945-47, loved golf, and was made an Officer of the order of Australia in



GENEROUS: Diana Ramsay with the \$US4.6m painting she helped the Art Gallery of SA acquire and, top, in a painting with husband James by Anna Platten.

1992. While James died in 1996, Mrs Ramsay's decision to set up the James and Diana Ramsay Foundation will mean their generous donations to the arts, medical research, education and at-risk youth will continue, executive director of the foundation, Kerry de Lorme, said yesterday.

"Diana will be greatly missed," she said.

"She was a wonderfully

warm, generous and gracious lady who has been one of the most longstanding and admired arts philanthropists in Australia."

Mr Mitzevich yesterday paid tribute to "an extraordinary individual, one of the State's greatest benefactors".

She also supported fixtures like The Studio, a dedicated space for children at the gallery, and the new \$100,000

Ramsay Art Prize, which is the richest contemporary art prize in Australia, for artists under 40.

"I will always admire her passion for life, her passion for giving, and her passion for the state," Mr Mitzevich said. "She wanted to make SA a better place and she did it with her philanthropy and she did that through art."

Arts Minister Jack Snelling

said Mrs Ramsay would be deeply missed.

"She leaves behind a massive legacy of philanthropy in both the arts and in medical research," he said.

Liberal leader Steven Marshall, who enjoyed a friendship of more than 20 years with Mrs Ramsay, said while she was wealthy, she never flaunted it.

"She was a very modest woman, who never wanted to

be in the limelight," Mr Marshall said.

"She was also great company with a great sense of humour — cheeky, bordering on naughty — and she could hold a dinner party in the palm of her hands with hilarious stories and a very prim voice."

The couple had no children, but young people were close to the heart of her philanthropy.

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