

Rebecca Wilson

# The Kate Kelly Collection

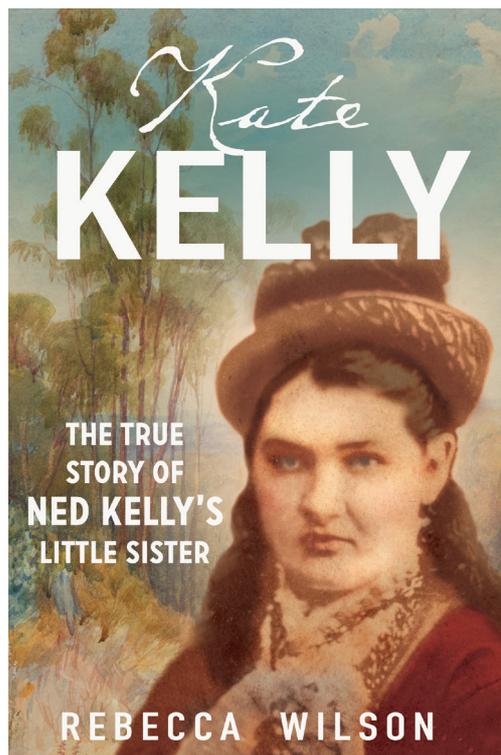
18 February - 21 March 2021

GANG GANG  
gallery

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In celebration of Rebecca's biography *Kate Kelly* published by **Allen & Unwin**, **16 February 2021**, **Gang Gang Gallery** presents **The Kate Kelly Collection**, a series of narrative paintings and story cards based on years of research and investigation into the life of Kate Kelly, Ned Kelly's little sister.



Above: Cover image of Rebecca's biography provided by Allen & Unwin

Kate Kelly was a younger sister of Ned and Dan Kelly. Kate helped the Kelly Gang when they were being hunted by the law, often delivering news and supplies to their bush hideout, or riding as a decoy to distract police, prolonging her brothers evasion of capture. She became very famous during the time of the Kelly Gang and even more so after Ned's death, when she travelled and performed widely.

Kate spent the last 14 years of her life in Forbes NSW, also the hometown of the artist. While researching Kate's life, Wilson discovered that her relatives had in fact hired Kate when she escaped her enormous and unwanted fame, arriving as Ada Hennessey to work as a domestic servant at Cadow Station, not far from the town of Forbes.

She was known as an exceptional horsewoman until her untimely death, aged only 35. A great deal of mystery surrounded the circumstances of Kate's death when her body was discovered in a lagoon at Forbes 14 October 1898.

Rebecca's extensive research has been the spring board from which she developed her travelling exhibition of narrative works, now known as **The Kate Kelly Collection**, her self published graphic book from 2015; **Kate Kelly: Sister of an Outlaw** and has culminated in her biography **Kate Kelly - the true story of Ned Kelly's little sister**, the first biography of Kate ever published.

Rebecca has been examining icons, myths, truth and lies in history since her **Australianism** exhibition in 2007, in which her works poked fun at iconic Australian symbols such as Sir Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly, Skippy and others, as a tool to ask questions about who we are as a nation and challenge our notions of truth in recorded history.

Her work 'Ned's Burqa' depicts a burqa clad woman (some perceived this as his sister Kate) humourously exchanging glances with Ned Kelly at Uluru, and was a Blake Prize finalist in 2007. In it, the two characters (both of whom have been persecuted outsiders at different times in history) are standing on ground that doesn't belong to them, at the heart of Australia. While in her work 'Ned & Skippy' the irreverence continues as one of our toughest bushrangers rides one of our most beloved fictional animal characters turned hero and national icon.



Ned's Burqa ©2007 RWilson  
Private collection



Ned and Skippy ©2007 RWilson  
Private collection



Kate Kelly Portrait with Horses ©2012 RWilson  
 Featured in *Kate Kelly, A&U, 2021*  
**Bathurst Regional Council Collection**  
 Inset: Photo portrait of Kate Kelly c1880



Fatal Bloodline ©2012 RWilson  
 Featured in *Kate Kelly, A&U, 2021*  
 Inset: Thomas Carrington engraving, 1880

Ned Kelly's story is deeply embedded in the Australian psyche but Kate Kelly's was lesser known and so, Rebecca furthered her research into the Kelly mythology and began her journey unearthing many unknown aspects of Kate Kelly's intriguing but ultimately tragic story. Since 2010 Rebecca has been researching, writing and painting Kate Kelly, referencing iconic and historic images such as the photographic portrait of Kate donated to author Edgar Penzig in the 1970's by an American family whose relatives were from Kelly country in the late 1800s, and the impressive sketches and engravings by Thomas Carrington who was a reporter present at the Glenrowan siege in 1880.

In her work 'The Last Time I Saw Her', the artist references her earlier work 'Ned's Burqa', and Germaine Greer's seminal work *Female Eunuch*, as a symbol of feminism and comment on Australian society, while questioning our culture's progress and recognising the socio - sexual constraints that affected Kate Kelly's life and eventually contributed to her demise. Rebecca continued the use of symbols such as the flag of the Suffragettes to represent the struggle of women and to acknowledge Kate's own struggles, quilting to reference Nolan, represent the role of women in the Kelly saga and Ned's plight and patterned horses to represent the doomed Kelly bloodline and the direct relationship that Kate and the Kellys had with horses for their survival.

Rome-based art critic Jonathan Turner writes of Rebecca's paintings: ***"In Wilson's confident paintings, the narratives shift. The perspective is tilted, with shadows and forms overlapping and shimmering in the outback sun. She uses a vivid palette of gold, ruby, sapphire, emerald and other jewel-like colours. Some of her portraits give a respectful nod to Sidney Nolan and his renowned paintings of Australia's favourite outlaw, as well as to the newspaper illustrations from the late 1880's by Thomas Carrington, but Rebecca Wilson's graphic and original compositions remain as bold as Ned Kelly's bush-ranging."***

Kerry Negara, documentary filmmaker writes of Rebecca's biography *Kate Kelly*: ***"For the first time, Kate Kelly is given the attention she deserves, and it's quite a story. Rebecca Wilson skilfully evokes the realities of the lives of the Kellys."***



The Last Time I Saw Her ©2012 RWilson

# About the Artist

Rebecca Wilson has a studio under the white box trees in the bush setting she called home when she arrived at Hill End in 2009. She was employed at the local gold mine as a wave table operator and eventually found herself pouring gold bars in the security clad goldroom until it shut down mid 2010.

She married Hill End local David Thompson in 2012 and she continues to produce her research, writing, artwork and podcasts from the remote, historic gold town.

In the 1990's Rebecca studied her B.A (Fine Art) at the National Art School and went on to complete her M.A (Fine Arts) at the College of Fine Art at UNSW in Paddington, Sydney (2002).

After exhibiting three solo shows and participating in various group shows and competitions in Australia, she finished her studies and went overseas to live and work in Bangkok, Thailand (2002-2005), where she taught art at an international school, was invited as a guest lecturer at ABAC Tertiary College and exhibited at February Studios & Poh Chang Art Gallery.

Rebecca was the only Australian artist invited to participate in the first Artists for Elephants expedition (Lampang) and group exhibition at the Thailand Cultural Centre in Bangkok. Her work was purchased for private collections in Asia and the funds raised by the exhibition sales went to assisting rescued elephants.

From 2011-2016 she taught art and design at TAFE Western Institute in Bathurst and Orange. At the beginning of 2016 Rebecca completed an artist residency at Red Gate Gallery in Beijing, China. In 2017-2018 she worked as Communications & Project Officer for the regional arts development organisation, Arts Out West in Bathurst.

In 2001 and 2007 Rebecca was a finalist in the Blake Prize for Religious Art and was invited as part of the Blake Tour 2001-2. In 2007 her Australianism exhibition started her investigation into Australian myths and icons such as Ned Kelly. From 2010 she started to research the life of Kate Kelly, the sister of Australia's most famous bushranger. From 2015, Kate Kelly: Sister of an Outlaw, Rebecca's collection of narrative paintings and graphic book were exhibited in Leichhardt, Blackheath, Bathurst, Hill End, Orange and Forbes as part of the River Arts Festival and later exhibited at Wangarrata in Victoria. Rebecca's story was featured in the SMH and the Age, she was interviewed on ABC radio and 2MMM in Orange and she appeared on Channel Ten's Studio 10, 2016, to discuss her research, artwork and book while it was exhibited in Grenfell and the following year in Parkes. In 2018 Rebecca was invited to London where she exhibited some of her Kate Kelly paintings at an art fair. She also presented a talk at London's Central Library about her Kate Kelly research, narrative paintings, book & travelling exhibition and recorded new podcasts with some London artists. She continued to develop and tour her work which led to her biography, **Kate Kelly**.

Across 2018 and 2019 Rebecca's series of narrative works and accompanying book A Portrait of Landscape and Time in Hill End, toured Leichhardt Library, Grenfell Art Gallery and Gang Gang Gallery and is currently on display at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery (19 February - 5 April 2021) along with Kate Kelly works from the BRC collection. All media coverage can be seen/listened to from her website at [www.rebec-cawilsonart.com](http://www.rebec-cawilsonart.com).



## Contact the artist

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Kate Kelly Carte de Visite ©2013 RWilson  
Inset: Carte de Visite, studio photograph, State Library of Victoria c1880

For all artwork sales enquiries please contact [sharon@gggallery.com.au](mailto:sharon@gggallery.com.au)