



MEDIA RELEASE – FEBRUARY 2025

New landmark exhibition blooms at David Roche Gallery

A new exhibition is blooming at David Roche Gallery in North Adelaide with the opening of *Nature Revealed: Rosa Fiveash & Ellis Rowan* on Friday 14 February until Saturday 24 May, which explores South Australia's rich botanical collections.

This landmark showcase of more than 180 works is coming together for the first time thanks to the generosity of Principal Lender Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium of South Australia, the State Library of South Australia, the University of Adelaide Special Collections, the National Trust (SA), and descendants of the Fiveash family.

Challenging Victorian conventions, Rowan travelled widely and enjoyed international acclaim for her gouache and watercolour wildflowers painted from the 1870s to the 1910s, while the work of Fiveash attracted the interest of Australia's leading botanists through her dedicated botanical paintings of the 1870s to 1930s.

David Roche Gallery director Robert Reason said this is a rare chance to witness nature through the eyes of two incredibly talented female artists.

"Although they lived very different lives, each had a passion for painting Australia's native flora," Reason said.

"Fiveash resided in North Adelaide and was highly regarded for her exquisitely detailed images of wild orchids. In contrast, Rowan was an inveterate traveller, a self-promoter and a regular exhibitor of wildflowers, with a national and international profile.

"For a short period of time, between 1906 and 1907, Adelaide was the focus of Rowan's attention, to the extent that she cajoled the citizens and the government into buying works from her, culminating in the acquisition of 100 wildflower paintings for the state, many of them illustrating the local flora. Vibrant and painterly, Rowan's large watercolours from 1906-07 are considered alongside the dedicated botanical paintings of Fiveash from her long artistic career which ended upon her death in 1938.

"The exhibition includes their significant contribution to design through painted porcelain, further enriching our understanding of these two remarkable artists."

Nature Revealed: Rosa Fiveash & Ellis Rowan is accompanied by a beautiful, fully illustrated catalogue available in store or online at David Roche Gallery.

On Thursday 20 February, the public is invited to attend the *Nature Revealed Twilight Evening* to explore the exquisite beauty of local flora meticulously painted in watercolour, while enjoying

refreshments on the forecourt. Special guest Lindl Lawton, Manager Interpretation and Cultural Collections, Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium, and exhibition curators Robert Reason and Timothy Roberts will present lightning talks throughout the evening. Tickets online \$20, or pay at the door.

What: Nature Revealed: Rosa Fiveash & Ellis Rowan

Where: David Roche Gallery, 241 Melbourne St, North Adelaide

When: Friday 14 February until Saturday 24 May – open Tuesday to Saturday, 10am-4pm (closed Sundays, Mondays, Public Holidays)

Cost: Adult \$12 | Concession \$10 | DRG Member \$9 | Children U12 Free

David Roche Fermoy House tours: 10am, 12noon, 2pm (must be prebooked online)

Cost: Adult: \$20 | Concession \$17 (includes entry to exhibition)

For more information and events, visit rochefoundation.com.au

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Learn more about the artists

About Rosa Fiveash (1854-1938)

Rosa Fiveash was born in Adelaide on 22 July 1854 and from the age five lived in North Adelaide at 'The Gables' on Ward Street. She initially took private lessons from Ann Maria Benham, who specialised in bird paintings, and in 1881 Fiveash enrolled at the Adelaide School of Design. She taught as a private governess, then at the School of Design and later in china painting; art instruction being one of her significant influences in Adelaide.

During the period 1882-1890, Fiveash contributed botanical specimens for illustration to John Brown's *The forest flora of South Australia* of which 32 were lithographed and published. In the 1890s the South Australian Museum commissioned Fiveash to illustrate a range of animals and First Nations artifacts.

Fiveash exhibited regularly with the South Australian Society of Arts and the Field Naturalists Section of the Royal Society of South Australia. Her floral drawings were exhibited at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition 1888-89, and she was included in the groundbreaking exhibition of Australian art hosted by London's Grafton Galleries in 1898. From 1908, Fiveash worked with Dr Richard Rogers specialising in the botanical illustration of native orchids. He provided the specimens, and Fiveash's illustrations sat alongside his detailed studies published in 1909 and 1911. The Art Gallery of South Australia's substantial collection of botanical studies by Fiveash were transferred to the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium of South Australia in the late 1970s and the State Library and University of Adelaide hold significant collections of her work.

About Ellis Rowan (1848-1922)

Marian Ellis Rowan (known as Ellis) was born in Melbourne on 30 July 1848 into a wealthy family. In 1873, she most likely met Ferdinand von Mueller, Government Botanist in Victoria, who identified the plants she painted until his death in 1896.

Between the 1870s and the early 1890s, Rowan, a highly productive artist, entered and won an astonishing twenty-nine medals at international exhibitions in Australia, Britain, Russia, the

Netherlands, India, and the United States (ten gold, fifteen silver, four bronze). During these decades she travelled regularly to Queensland and Western Australia, painting wildflowers in remote locations. From 1895 to 1904, Rowan embarked upon a series of travels, visiting England first of all, followed by the United States, with shorter trips to Cuba and the Caribbean. In England, she showed her work to Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle, who selected three paintings.

In the United States, it was Rowan's work with the botanist and writer Alice Lounsberry (1873–1949) that received most acclaim. The pair travelled widely together, with Rowan illustrating three successful books with Lounsberry. In late 1904, Rowan returned to Melbourne, her adventurous spirit subsequently taking her to remote parts of Western Australia to paint wildflowers in 1905–06, and to South Australia in 1906–07. She continued to visit Queensland to paint, and her final exploration – geographical and aesthetic – took her to the jungles of Papua and New Guinea to paint the plants and birds of paradise in 1916–18. Paintings from this last trip and earlier images of Australian native flora were developed by Rowan into designs produced by Royal Worcester porcelain. Rowan died in 1922. Her work is represented widely in public galleries, museums, libraries and botanical collections.

Image: Ellis Rowan, Sturt's desert rose (*Gossypium sturtianum*), 1906-07. Painted: Broken Hill, NSW. Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium collection.



Image: Rosa Fiveash, Lilac hibiscus (*Alyogyne huegelii*), Flannel weed (*Abutilon oxycarpum*) c.1893, Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium collection.

