

Saleroom

New portrait head

Katrina Strickland

A deputy director at the National Portrait Gallery, Louise Doyle, is expected to be announced as its new director today.

The news comes as the Canberra-based institution acquires Cherry Hood's 2002 Archibald Prize-winning portrait of pianist Simon Tedeschi, which Sydney gallery owner Tim Olsen donated to it.

Doyle has been deputy director of programs and collections at the NPG since 2007, prior to which she ran regional galleries in Cairns, Wagga Wagga and Bathurst.

Doyle, who is thought to be in her early 50s, grew up in regional NSW. She studied fine arts and archeology at the University of Sydney and has a masters in arts management from the University of NSW.

She replaces founding director Andrew Sayers, who left mid-year to take over the nearby National Museum of Australia.

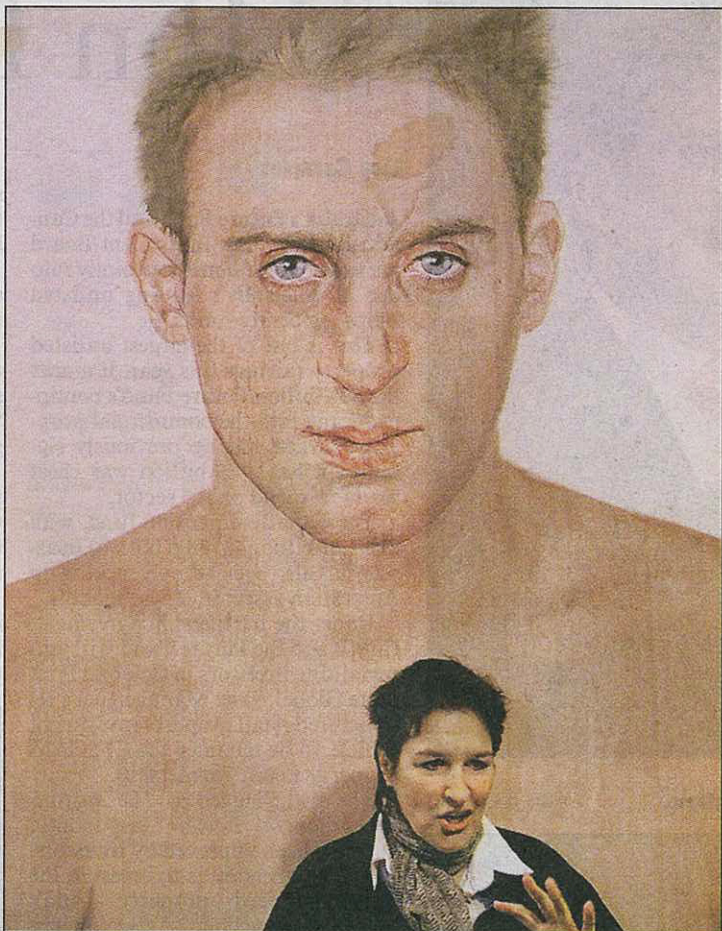
The elevation of one of the gallery's two deputy directors to its top job is something of a surprise; the position is expected to have been keenly sought after, and internal candidates rarely win such battles.

The incoming director inherits a beautiful \$87.8 million building, which opened in late 2008 and has achieved strong attendances. It has a small but growing collection of 1700 portraits, of which about 400 are on display at any one time.

Joining that collection is Hood's Tedeschi painting, which secured her the Art Gallery of NSW's Archibald Prize in 2002. At 3.3 metres high, the portrait kicked off the trend towards oversized craniums being entered in the Archibald, a trend which, notwithstanding this year's winner (Sam Leach's depiction of comedian Tim Minchin is relatively modest), has not abated.

Size might get you noticed by the AGNSW trustees, but it can prove a problem when selling a painting that won't fit on most lounge or dining room walls.

Hood's Tedeschi watercolour was consigned for sale to



Cherry Hood with her portrait of Simon Tedeschi.

Photo: DALLAS KILPONEN

Sotheby's in May 2007 with a relatively modest \$28,000 to \$38,000 pre-sale estimate, but it was passed in. A Melbourne collector subsequently bought it but, according to Olsen,

Cherry Hood's portrait of Simon Tedeschi has been donated to the National Portrait Gallery.

discovered it was too big for his lounge room wall. At this point Olsen stepped in — he represents Hood — and bought the painting from the collector.

He tried subsequently to sell it but also failed to find a buyer. Portraits are tricky to sell anyway, and one this big added to the degree of difficulty.

"It's one of those paintings that everyone loves but nobody can house," Olsen says.

He held a function during Art Month in March at which Tedeschi played Gershwin on the piano and Hood talked about the inspiration for the painting. It was after this that Olsen got in touch with the portrait gallery, initially in the hope that it would buy the work. After discussions with curator Michael Desmond, and his successful sale of a large John Olsen work (see story, right), he decided instead to gift it.

Olsen does not yet know what the work has been valued at for cultural gifts program purposes. Asked if he would claim a tax deduction for the donation under that scheme, he quipped, "You have to make a profit first to offset it against, don't you?"