German artist Elise Blumann arrived in Perth in the summer of 1938. She was immediately struck by the local landscape and the piercing brightness of the Australian light. Her painting in the subsequent decade focused on an analysis of various plant forms surrounding her home in Nedlands and in the hills outside Perth – the zamia palm, xanthorrhoea, banksia, casuarina and melaleuca. Blumann was also drawn to the settings of the Swan River and the Indian Ocean, which feature prominently in her work.

Prior to her arrival in Australia, Blumann had lived through a tumultuous period of European history. She studied art in Berlin during World War I and with the rise of Nazism fled Germany in 1934, for Holland and later England. As a young artist she was attracted to a number of artistic styles – from the Post-Impressionist paintings of van Gogh to various forms of expressive art. In Australia Blumann brilliantly applied aspects of a modernist artistic style to the Western Australian landscape.

While including some early works produced in Europe, the exhibition focuses on paintings from the artist’s first decade in Australia, the series of bold portraits produced in the late 1930s to the increasingly abstract renderings of the landscape of the late 1940s. These paintings reveal a flourishing of creative activity, as Blumann investigated her new home in Western Australia.
MEDIA SUITE FOR ELISE BLUMANN

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Elise Blumann, Surge, 1943–44, oil on paper on board, 86.0 x 55.5 cm. Private collection. Photo: Bo Wong

Elise Blumann, Summer nude, 1939, oil on board, 121.5 x 91.5 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Acquired with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Dr Albert Gild Fund, 1976. Photo: Bo Wong

Elise Blumann, Self-portrait, 1937, oil on board, 52.5 x 62.5 cm. CCWA 37. Photo: Victor France
Elise Blumann, *Dying melaleuca in Western Australia*, 1948, oil on board, 58.5 x 49.0 cm. Private collection. Photo: Bo Wong

Elise Blumann, *Surf*, 1940, oil on paper, 64.0 x 51.0 cm. Private collection. Photo: Bo Wong
Elise Blumann, *Rottnest lighthouse and salt lake*, 1947, oil on board, 44.5 x 54.9 cm. University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Dr and Mrs R. K. Constable, 1985. Photo: Bo Wong

Elise Blumann, *Riverside melaleuca (detail)*, 1948, oil on paper laid on cardboard, 58.0 x 67.0 cm. The Edith Cowan University Art Collection. Photo: Bo Wong
Elise Blumann, Malcesine, 1929, oil on cardboard, 45.5 x 35.5 cm. Private collection. Photo: Bo Wong

Elise Blumann, On the Swan, Nedlands, 1942, oil on composition board, 56.6 x 66.4 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Acquired with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Dr Albert Gild Fund, 1976. Photo: Bo Wong