



Lunch break: Tom Gibbons loved the notion of lunch bars and created several series of images of them for exhibition. He is seen outside one near his home in Joondanna. Below, an extract of a 1970s work, Allsorts, shows his pop art credentials.

## MAN OF MANY COLOURS

# Academic turned lunch bars into works of art

## TOM GIBBONS

Lecturer, artist, author  
Born: England, 1928  
Died: Perth, aged 83



Life was a palette of plenty for Tom Gibbons, who died on February 16. In a studio he blended wit with the full spectrum of paints to transform everyday images into art. As university lecturer in English literature, Dr Gibbons — after completing a PhD at Cambridge — found fresh ways to raise awareness and enjoyment of texts. As author he had an international reputation as a commentator on artistic and literary material.

His view of life was kaleidoscopic: an ever-changing array of strong colours, words that morphed into pictures and photographs that amounted to a commentary on suburban glories, as he saw them, such as lunch bars or old brick “dunnies” backing into laneways.

Friends could be served kippers for lunch. This led to discussion of Kipps, a favourite Gibbons book, written by H.G. Wells in 1905 . . . another twist of the kaleidoscope turned conversation to the novelist’s *The Time Machine* (1895), then on to science fiction, *Dracula* . . .

Fascination with the alphabet, and juxtaposition of disparate objects such as newspaper, paint tube and butterfly, are evident in a current exhibition at Mundaring Arts Centre. Titled *Setting Their Sights*, the exhibit pays tribute to four artists known as the Perth Group, of which Gibbons was a founder member in 1958. He was then 30, experimental by temperament and meticulous in practice. From boyhood he had retained an eye for the playful.

Thomas Henry Gibbons was born in Salford, a hub of Greater Manchester in England, on May 10, 1928, the only child of a railway clerk, also named Thomas Henry, and wife Alice (Williams). Thomas senior had a gift for languages and was a translator when interned in Germany during World War I. He encouraged his son’s language skills as much as limited means permitted

and visits to libraries were frequent. The boy grew to remember his mother as sensitive and intelligent.

His wife, Miriam Stannage, recalls that, when he was a schoolboy during World War II, he saw flames from German bombing and he reprised the imagery in a sonnet, *Snow Fire*.

Immediately after the war he studied at University College, Hull, in Yorkshire. When founding a film society, he made posters to entice students to screenings. So began a lifelong love affair with typefaces and marriage of verbal and visual.

After graduation and National Service in the Royal Air Force, a first teaching post took Gibbons to Derbyshire. In 1955 he and his first wife, Jean, and their son emigrated to Perth, where he joined the staff of Scotch College. Though English and arithmetic were his main duties, the headmaster’s artist wife, Eileen Keys, helped extend his role.

Teaching art was a launch pad for creating his own. Still lifes from that period convey a sense of fun that endured during decades of solo exhibitions and the particular pride on hearing that the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra had bought his work.

In 1957 Gibbons became a lecturer at the University of WA, remaining until retirement in 1993. The day job was for the benefit of students whose grasp of irony in *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, was strengthened by his lively teaching.

A return to England in the 1960s for doctoral research became a

stimulating sojourn in an England far removed from the postwar restrictions he had escaped.

Back at UWA his contribution to campus life included designing and building theatre sets. At home and on holiday, ever inspired and encouraged by wife Miriam Stannage’s own artistry, he relished producing what many would call pop art. A commission from Channel 7 in the 1970s for 22 large film-star portraits was a highlight.

As author, Gibbons ranged from specialist literary criticism, as in *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel*, to lucid and accessible guidance such as *Literature and Awareness*. Though learned, he was no elitist. In 1983 the *Daily News* quoted him at length in an article about slipping standards of English.

Miriam Stannage says his art is imbued with a strong Christian faith. He described Stanley Spencer and James Joyce, both “deeply religious artists”, as two of his touchstones.

Practical kindness to friends was another constant. He regularly gave away CDs, DVDs, books and magazines. Retired UWA lecturer Collin O’Brien is among many who attest to that.

“I met him 50 years ago as my tutor,” he says. “Later, as his new colleague, he was the one who invited me to lunch. Fine gesture.”

Tom Gibbons, who had treatment for cancer last year, was pre-deceased by his sons from his first marriage, Dan, Tim and Ben. He died in Perth, aged 83, and is survived by his wife.

The legacy of art, writing and generosity is enormous. Hanging in Mundaring is a work called *Allsorts*. This could be the title of an autobiography he never wrote but in fact the images are the licorice variety. “This was important to a man who grew up during the Depression and World War II,” says exhibition curator Philippa O’Brien, “because it’s the ‘jar of lollies’ view of life. The future ‘will be full of goodness.’ And he discovered it to be so.”

Patrick Cornish

■ The author is a former student and friend of Tom Gibbons.

## Deaths

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Born Benevento, Italy, 16.12.1931 - 06.03.2012. Dearly beloved Husband of Gilda (dec). Loving and caring Father of Charlie, John and Lucy. Father-in-law to Rene and Joanne. Nonno to seven Grandchildren. In God’s care. The family of Venturino wish to thank Dr John Ricciardo for his kind care and attention given to their Father. Special thanks to all the staff at Bethesda Hospital.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Dad, you showed me so much courage. I’ll miss our talks. The memories I have will be treasured forever. Always in my heart Charlie and Joanne

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Nonno, you always tried to teach us right from wrong. You were truly an inspirational man. We’ll miss you. Forever in our hearts Jarryd and Stephanie

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Dad, we love you and are going to miss you so much. Thank you my friend for everything you’ve done for me and the good times we shared. God bless, rest in peace, see you in Heaven. Love John, Christian, Jennifer and Michael

**CATALANO (Venturino):** True love never dies, now you’re in the arms of your beautiful Gilda forever. My dearest Dad and truly my best friend, we were always together right to the end, you were the one constant in my life that I’ve always counted on, we will always remember your boundless energy, generous spirit and ongoing devotion to your family. You and Mum played a great part in Paul and Jody’s upbringing. They will never forget the happy days spent together, the best Nonnis in the world. Miss and love you Rest in peace Your loving Daughter Lucy, Son-in-law Rene, Grandchildren Paul and Jody

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Our dearest Brother-in-law, you always treated us with love and respect. So many wonderful memories over many years of friendship. Now reunited with your beloved Wife Gilda. You will forever be in our hearts. Love always, Eddy and Josie

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Our heartfelt sympathy to Charlie, Joanne, Lucy, Rene, John and Grandchildren on the loss of your beloved Father, Father-in-law and Nonno. Many wonderful memories shared. We always be treasured. Now in God’s care. Uncle Eddy and Aunty Josie.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** My Brother-in-law Vendi. Our memories and good times we shared will remain in my heart forever. Rest in peace. Nunzio, Gino and Melissa, Francesca, Adrian.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** We have a lifetime of treasured memories of a special Brother who now joins Gilda, Mum and Dad, in God’s Heavenly garden. Deepest sympathy to Charlie, John, Lucy and all respective families. Antonietta and Vittorio Miraudo. Rest in peace.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Fond memories of a fun loving Uncle and times spent together. Our thoughts and prayers with heartfelt sympathy to Charlie, John, Lucy and all your families. Rita, Frank, Jess and Simon. RIP.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Happy fun memories of a lovely Uncle. Condolences to my dear cousins and their families. Love Greg, Adriana and Ally. RIP.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** Deepest sympathy to Charlie, John, Lucy and all your families on the sad loss of our Uncle. Vic, Alan and Che Miraudo.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** A loving tribute to my dear brother, brother-in-law and uncle. You accepted your fate with grace and dignity. So many special memories shared together, too precious to ever forget. Strong and courageous until the end. We will miss you so much. Our heartfelt sympathy to Charlie, John, Lucy and families. Your loving sister Josie, Charlie, John, Mark, Andrew and Paul. Riposa in Pace.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** To Compare Eddy, Comara Josie and respective families. Sincere condolences on the sad passing of brother-in-law and Zio. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all. Compare Mario and Comara Graziella.

**CATALANO (Venturino):** In loving memory of Venti, brother-in-law of Rosaria and uncle of Gino, Francesca and Adrian. Your smile and caring nature will live in us forever. Our deepest sympathy to Charlie, John, Lucy and their families.

**COLES (Colin):** You were the best we could have ever wished for. You will live forever in our hearts. All our love Fiona, Dean, Grant, Emma, Bailey, Chylene, Ash and Paige. Lots and lots of happy memories are ours to keep. Deepest sympathy to Pam, Fiona, Grant and family. You fought to the end. Love you Uncle Colin.

**COLES (Colin):** Uncle to Linda, Jason, Kirsty, Caitlin, Jacinta and Hayley. Lots of happy memories are ours to keep. Deepest sympathy to Pam, Fiona, Grant and family. You fought to the end. Love you Uncle Colin.

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**CLIFFORD (Florence Marjorie):** 06.05.1915 - 08.03.2012. Loved and loving mother to Douglas, Neville and Roberta. An inspiration to all.

**CLIFFORD (Florence Marjorie (Flo)):** Ever loving mother of Douglas and Cliff. Goodnight dear mother.

**CLIFFORD (Florence Marjorie (Flo)):** Very special mum and nan to Neville, Jill, Andrew, Wayne, Terri and Stephen. Thank you for all your love and care. A well earned rest.

**CLIFFORD (Florence Marjorie):** Most loved mother of Roberta. Your love and gentle guidance has been the foundation of my life. Dearly loved Nan and great nan of Timothy and Abigail. Go to Peter on that star of gold.

**CLIFFORD (Florence):** Come to the light, tis shining for thee. Sweetly the light that shines upon me. Once I was blind now I can see. The light of the world is Jesus. Loved Sister of Pat, adored Aunt of Deb, Chris and Vicky, Dianne, Richard and families.

**CLIFFORD (Florence):** So long my darling aunty. Deepest sympathy to Doug, Neville, Roberta and your families. Happy memories always. Wendy.

**CLIFFORD (Florence):** In loving memory of Flo, happy days at Brookhampton Hall. Deepest sympathy to all. Mabel Cain, Rae, Bill, Rob.

**COCIVERA (G):** Deepest sympathy to Anna and family. From Nobile family.

**COLE (Denis):** No longer working away in his workshop creating great ships but always present in our hearts. Much loved husband of Judy and much loved father of Michael, Amanda, Rebekah, Teresa and Nicholas. Dearly loved by his many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

**COLE (Denis):** After 58 years together, side by side, I can only say it’s hard to not have you here. So, Good Night, God Bless, Love Ya. Judy

**COLE (Denis):** Dearly loved Dad and Grandpa, we will miss your sense of humour, wise tales and kindness. Thanks Dad. Rest in Peace. Michael, Marianne, Emma, Sean, Taj, Clare, Jacob, Jaye and Gabby

**COLE (Denis):** How strange to come home and not see you sitting in your chair or pottering in the workshop. We will miss you old fella. Recky, Selawney and Taylor

**COLE (Denis Raymond):** Thanks Dad for your selfless devotion, your patience and your constant teaching. We will miss you. Your loving if wayward son, Nick. Daughter-in-law Allison, and grandchildren Thalia, Loughlin and Griffin.

**COLE (Denis):** Dad. Finally sailing on calm waters, may the winds of love carry you on to eternal life. Good night, God Bless, sweet dreams, see you in the morning. God willing. Bec, Ian, Monique and Alex

**COLE (Denis):** The letters you wrote in your unique handwriting will be forever cherished. How we will miss the sound of whistling coming from the backyard. Sleep well. Monique, Dave, Cole (smiley) and Nate

**COLE (Denis):** Surrounded by ultimate gadgets in the perfect shed. We will miss you, Alex, Nadine, Jordyn and Elias

**COLES (Colin Clayton):** 16.07.47 - 07.03.12. Husband and Best mate of Pam, Loving and supporting Father of Fiona, Dean, Taryn (dec), Grant and Emma. Fun loving Gubby of Bailey, Chylene, Ash and Paige. Lots and lots of happy memories. We all love you

**COLES (Colin):** You were the best we could have ever wished for. You will live forever in our hearts. All our love Fiona, Dean, Grant, Emma, Bailey, Chylene, Ash and Paige. Lots and lots of happy memories are ours to keep. Deepest sympathy to Pam, Fiona, Grant and family. You fought to the end. Love you Uncle Colin.

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**CONGDON (Betty):** Our sincere condolences to Geoff, Ron, Justin and family on the sad loss of Betty. From staff and members at the Claremont Yacht Club.

**CUTLER (Inez):** Age 100+ Promoted to Heaven 7th March 2012. Rejoicing with Jesus. Much loved mother of Clare and Dennis, Gran to Maureen and Roger, Steven and Kathleen, Cheryl and Carl, Charlene and Jason, More Grandma to Kyla, Sophie, Lauren and Eliza. Thank you for loving us all.

**CUTLER (Inez):** Dear Gran, you were such a strong hard working woman who we will always look up to. The kids will miss all your kisses and clapping along at dancing time. Love Sam, Serena, Stephanie and Steven.

**DADSWELL (John):** Deepest sympathy to Mary, Kerenna, Dawn, Vinnie and their families on the sad loss of their husband and father. All our love. R.I.P. Ashley, Marjorie, Glenn, Darryl, Valerie and their families.

**DELANDGRAFFT (Fred):** Loved brother of Kathleen, Amy and Stan. Our sincere sympathy to Fred’s extended family with a special thought for his devoted wife Peg who nursed him in his long and debilitating illness. We Stan, Esme and Cheryl will sadly miss the very pleasant visits and hospitality we enjoyed so much over the years at the Delandgraff’s lovely home at Wandoo Downs. Rest in peace Fred.

**DELAVALLE (Nathan):** Roslyn, Darren and family our love is with you all. Grandma Mavis and Terry.

**DELAVALLE (Nathan):** Darren, my thoughts are with you every day. With much love, Cheryl.

**DELAVALLE (Nathan):** Dearly loved grandson of Ross (dec) and Margaret. Deepest sympathy and love to Roslyn, Kellee, Hayden and Liam.

**DELAVALLE (Nathan):** To my friend of many years, deepest sympathy to all your family. Nathan, I will always remember your strength, smile and good looks. I will treasure our special times together. Never ever forgotten. Love Always Charlotte x

**DELAVALLE (Nathan):** Darren and Regan our thoughts are with you both at this sad time. Love and friendship always. Michael, Nicole, Deacon and Tahya.

**DEWITT (Maus):** We will miss your warm embrace and loving smile. You were truly awesome. Rest in peace gentle cousin. Sadly missed. Cliff, Doug, Beverley, Ray, Heather and John.

**DOSEN (Tony):** Loved brother-in-law of Helen and Ken (dec), Marg and Eric and families. A hard worker now at rest. Love to Irene and family.

**DOWNES (John):** Brother-in-law of Clare and the late Kevin. Uncle of Nancy and Brian, Cathy and Scott, David and Casey. RIP.

**DUCKWORTH (Shirley):** Dear Mum, I will miss you so much especially our phone conversations and I still haven’t learnt to crochet yet. Peter has lost his special partner. Love you. Lynette and Peter. Fond Nanna of Stephanie, John, Bevan, Maria, Royce, Anna and Garth. GG to Britt, Conner, Taigh, Emily, Tom, Carrie, Imger, Fletcher and Neeve

**DUCKWORTH (Shirley):** Loving partner and friend to Henk. Deepest sympathy to the Duckworth families on the loss of their mother. No longer in our lives to share, but in our hearts you will always be there. Love from Henk, Cobi and Murray, Anna and Kingsley, Rita and Allan, Fiona and Steve and families.

**DUCKWORTH (Shirley):** R.I.P. Sister-in-law and aunt to Keith (dec), Win (dec), Allan, Margaret, Bruce, Lesley, Ross, Pauline and families. Sympathy to the family, thinking of you all.

**FERGUSON (Heather):** Heartfelt sympathy to Ian, Lyn and all the family on your sad loss. Heather was a very kind and lovely lady. Re-united with Brett Love from Linda, James, Ana, Kate and Lilly.

**FERGUSON (Heather):** Much loved niece of Min (dec) and Bill (dec) Taylor and cousin to Bill (dec), Ruth (dec), Norma and families. Our deepest sympathy to Ian, Lyn and families at this sad time. Love from the Evans and Dodd families.

**FERGUSON (Heather):** Dear friend of Maureen, now at peace after much suffering. Sympathy and love to Ian and family.

**FERGUSON (Heather):** Happy memories of a dear friend. Sympathy to Ian, Lyn and family. Adele and Ken

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Phone: 9482 3153 Fax: 9482 9070 Email: torrance.mendez@wanews.com.au Post: GPO Box N1025, Perth, WA 6843