

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Dr. Kiera Lindsey, South Australia History Advocate and author of the new biography, *Wild Love: The Ambitions of Adelaide Ironside, the first Australian artist to astonish the world*. Now, that's a pretty bold subtitle. So can you elaborate?

KL: One of the first things you kind of need to know about Adelaide is when she was 14 years old, she added a new name to her middle name, and that was the name of Scott. And she did that so that she could take each initial of her name, and suddenly, henceforth, called herself ASI as in Adelaide for a, she took each initial and basically created her own name. So here's a young girl in the 1840s who is self-constructing herself based on who she wanted to become. You know, she is, as she described herself, an aspirant. She is aspiring to something other than what was typically expected of the women of her age, which was to marry, to be a wife and a mother. So she was a woman of bold ambitions. What she wanted to do was to become the acknowledged mistress of art in the Southern Hemisphere. And so that's no small order, right? And to do that, she trained and she engaged as a professional portraiture in 1840s and early 1850s, colonial Sydney, at a time where really there was nobody else in the colony who was making money as a professional portraitess, who was a woman. And she received enough encouragement, including receiving a silver medal for exhibiting her work at the first exhibition of materials to go off to an international exhibition. She received a silver medal for her art there, the only woman to do so. And this encouraged her to follow that collection off to Paris and then to Rome, where her vision was that she would train with the masters for a whole decade so that she could come back and fresco the public buildings of Sydney with republican frescoes of the future history of this country because she believed, she had this vision that Australia would become a republic and that she would be able to capture that moment.

Now, there's just so many unusual things about just that little bit of a story, Allison, that would surprise most people who know anything about Australian history. First, here's a woman with different ambitions. Here's a woman who believes in republicanism at a time where, which we don't really associate with republicanism. And here's a woman who goes off and pursues her ambitions so that she can achieve these high goals. But in fact, when you start to drill down deeper into the historical context, you find that there were in fact quite a number of women at this time who were going to Italy to live lives of greater professional and personal freedom because they could do so there in ways that they couldn't in their home countries of America or England or Ireland or Scotland or even other parts of Europe like Russia. There in Italy, they could live a life that was usually cheaper, but they could also typically find masters either who were Italians or other expatriates who have gone to live there, who were prepared to take them more seriously as artists.

So that's what Adelaide did. She went to Italy with the intention of living there as long as the siege of Troy - that is, for a decade - so that she could come back and take on that role as a leading figure in the artistic worlds of Sydney. Alas, alas, she achieved so many things, but not the return to her homeland.

AT: With artists, I'm always curious, how would you describe her style? Like what tells you this is a work by Adelaide Ironside?

KL: That's a great question, and one of the things that really had me scratching my head when I first started to look at her archive. I've always been really interested in how we might re-present women who are lost from the historical record. And I became particularly interested with a group known as native-born or currency Australian women, currency lasses, because they were the first generations of women born to European parents in the colony. Very often their parents or their grandparents were convicts. So there was an idea that these people might be tainted by the convict stain in some ways. And so they were typically disparaged on the kind of a class system, looked down upon by free British settlers. But what I found really surprising is when you looked at the currency lads, that is their male counterparts, they had this really extraordinary sense of patriotism. They were, the colonial records, they always swearing, punctuating their word. There's every sentence with the word bloody, and constantly drinking and toasting their country and saying how fabulous it was. It does sound a lot like contemporary Australian nationalism, right? So my question was, well, where are the women in this story? And I went looking for native-born currency lasses who might have some sort of a record who could help tell that story. And I found that there was hardly anything. In fact, my first book is about one woman who had something of an archive, Mary Ann Gill, who was my great, great, great aunt. And she only had a record because she was involved in the great romantic scandal, a thwarted elopement in Sydney in 1848, where her father caught her trying to run away with the Attorney General's wayward son and almost murdered him by shooting at him twice. Anyway, that's another book and another story, but I kept looking around for currency lasses who might have some sort of historical record. And that is how I stumbled on Adelaide Ironside. Unlike most other women of her era, she was born around the same time as the first woman that I wrote about and in Sydney, but she had a much more extensive record. So in the State Library of New South Wales, there is correspondence to her and her mother, Martha, who went with her on this expedition. And there's something like a hundred letters or more. Some are from John Ruskin, the most important art critic and social reformer of the 19th century, at least he would think so. From Sir James Clark, who is probably best known for being the doctor who tended to the poet John Keats as he was dying and then died in Rome in 1821. He also looked after Adelaide Ironside when she was sick with tuberculosis and eventually died in Rome some 40 years later. So there were letters from all these, you know, what we might call eminent Victorians to Adelaide and her mother, but there was hardly any record from Adelaide. You could hardly find her voice. So there were about 14 letters from her and they were really captivating. I found some in the Mitchell records, but some in a box that happened to have been found by a tenant who was living in a property belonging to her descendants. And this box was probably going to be thrown out, except for the fact that this woman thought, "oh, old letters probably should go somewhere," and she dumped it at the Society of Australian Genealogy where it sat in the cellar for a very long time. But inside that, Adelaide's letters to her friends and some really moving letters that allowed me to triangulate that story. So when I tried to find Adelaide's voice, obviously I wasn't going to get that much from the letters, so I continued to look around. I found that there were over 20 poems that she wrote and published in the colonial newspapers, many of which contain that same fiery passion for republicanism, but they're also bizarre and mystical. You know, they're from a voice that is very hard for us to understand as

21st century Australians, so that also made me start to try and find out more about her. And then finally I came to her archive. Now, this is a really interesting collection of work. Some of it is based in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Some are in smaller regional holdings like Newcastle and Benalla. There's quite a large collection in a private possession, and then there are bits and pieces in what is called her commonplace diary, and these include what we might call scribble scrabbles, which she probably did while she was scrying crystal balls.

Okay, so what do we make of this? There are so many different types of works. There are sketches, there's no landscapes. That is probably one definitive piece. There are portraits that are done in pastels, there are sketches in pencil, there's things in charcoal, there's works that are copies of famous artists of the time. And then there are a series of oil paintings that she did once she had acquired sufficient skill and she was living in Rome and she had sort of been trained by the masters. And what's really interesting about this is that although the topics of these oil paintings might, by our opinion, be conservative, the very fact of her presuming to work in oil in what was then known as a historical genre was extraordinarily ambitious. Because women were not, Ruskin himself said women can't be artists. They can't paint, you know, the best that they should do is go and sketch pheasant wings or, you know, bits of fruit or apples or shells or feathers. They should never aspire to something that involves originality because they don't have that capacity. Yeah, for those who don't get visual cues here, Allison is making a series of faces now, which is pretty much the kind of face that I made when I read those comments. And I think probably Adelaide would have made as well. And many of her female contemporaries did too. So what she did, what she produced when she was in Rome was three or four very ambitious oil paintings, all of which focus on female, on women's subjects in one way or another. And that tells us a lot. Most of her portraits, 90% of her portraits are of women. And so she was celebrated for having a delicate sensibility, a beautiful eye, quiet feeling, deep but quiet feeling. These are the ways that she's typically described. But to be honest, one of the challenges that I had was to try and get my finger, get tried to really pinpoint an answer to your question, which is what is her style. I think she was working between styles. And in one of the letters from one of her advisors, they basically say to her, you need to stop copying other people's works and start to become more, you know, trust your instinct and become more of an original. And I think that's, it's actually quite a telling comment because I think for many female artists of the period, when you think about Ruskin's comments and which were very common at the time, common attitudes, it was very hard for them to find their original voice, their authority, let alone to be bold enough to express it. But Adelaide did express it. And I think one of the things my biography has found is that she was at this brink of making a breakthrough in her work. That's what my kind of meditation on her art has led me to the conclusion that she started off in the tradition of neo-classicism, which is really quite focused on purity and on divine proportions. It's very influenced by those Greek notions of the golden mean. And she was trained by masters who espoused those kind of values. But she went to the London exhibition of 1862 where she exhibited her work and she got to see the work of the pre-Raphaelites. And at that time, I think she realised that she was going down the wrong path because she managed to secure the attentions of John Ruskin and he agreed to teach her. So in the summer of 1865, she manages to convince Ruskin, who was, as we know, not very sympathetic to female artists. But there was such excitement about Adelaide at this time. People were describing her as a

genius. People were organising dinners in London to come and visit the genius fresh from Rome who would come to London. So everybody was kind of talking about her. Her work was being sold for £500 to £1000. She was kind of one of the it girls of this moment. And so Ruskin agreed to take her on. But surprise surprise, what he decided to do was strip her of all her influences, her neo-classical influences, because he believed that she had been spoiled and asked her to focus on just learning how to draw a shell right, an egg right, a stone right, a feather right. And these are the last works that Adelaide produced. But they represent this, if she had spent 10 years of her life acquiring expertise in neo-classicism and showing what she could do there. Her shift to go in training with Ruskin was a massive change in perception and in possibility. She was in a sense, you know, she had reached the pinnacle of one style of art. But that style of art, that neo-classical approach, was actually on the nose now in England. So while it was still very popular in Italy, it was no longer, it was laughed at. It was a kind of source of derision. It was considered the old, you know, it was out of day, no longer attractive, you know, the pre-Raphaelites had changed the art world. And everybody was into that kind of hyper realism with high degrees of allegory and drama and emotion and vivid color. And I believe that Adelaide was on the brink of making the transition into that art world. And there's an almost courage, right, to have become so good in one art form and then decide to let it go and embark as a beginner. Unfortunately, she was so sick with tuberculosis at that time that she never got to realize that potential. And when she was spending time with Ruskin, he would talk about her as having a fireworking nature, being impulsive and hard to understand. Her hands were always shaking. And the small, beautiful sketches that she did for him, very careful, they're the last works that she ever did. She returned from England back to Rome in the summer of 1866. And she was dead. She died in Rome in April 1867, at the age of 36. So it was a short life. It was a life lived passionately, one of risks, one of great ambition, the one that didn't perhaps realize its potential as an artist.

So when we look at her art, I actually don't think that's the real story of her life. You know, I don't think that understanding the significance of Adelaide Ironside is about understanding the significance of her art. I rather think that that is a suite of records that help us to understand her. And we need to put her in the broader context of that pursuit of women of her age that were going for greater personal and professional freedom in Italy. And what is most interesting for me about that is that those women were all connected into the first wave of feminism. They were all espousing to change the lives of women by creating women's only reading rooms, by creating art schools that were just for women, by insisting that women be allowed to be taught at the Royal Academy when they never been allowed to before. And by being involved in political movements, like the Married Women's Causes Act, et cetera, et cetera. And so, you know, we often think that this group of women have no agency, this mid group of mid-19th century women. But what I see is that they were exploring using art, their artistic training, which they had been given in order to become good wives and mothers. But they were using this to become independent, professional women who could make their own income, think for themselves, and make changes in their life economically, socially and politically.

AT: When we're talking about the context that she was in, you were mentioning being part of this first generation of European-descended people born in Australia. So, can you tell us a little

bit more about her specific background and her family?

KL: Thank you for that question, because we've sort of raced ahead to, you know, the last part of her life. But the early part is really quite interesting too, fascinating in fact. So, she was born in Sydney in 1831. Her father was a man named James Ironside, who arrived in Sydney in the 1820s. And he was a Scottish auctioneer and broker who had come from a very small country town around the Smugglers Coast, around Banff area. But her mother was another native-born currency lass. And her name was Martha Rebecca Redmond. And she was the daughter of a convict forger named Mary Redmond, or Mary George. And Adelaide's mother's father was a man named John Redmond, who was a First Fleet marine, who arrived on board the Charlotte in 1788. So, when those ships all sailed into the waters of Warrang, as Sydney Harbour is known, John Redmond was there working as a young marine. He was in his 20s there. And he was one of the first to set up the settlement in Sydney Cove, which became known as the camp. And then, he had a try as, living in Norfolk Island as a farmer, but he eventually became a member of the Night's Watch. And then the Chief Gaoler in Sydney. So, he brought property right down the bottom of George Street near Circular Quay. And he had a place called Redmond Court, where he ran his own timber-lugging business. He built properties. He made his fortune and he ran the gaol, which was just across the road. So, when Adelaide was born, her parents lived nearby to the Redmonds, but that marriage didn't survive. Adelaide's mother, Martha, had another son, and he died early. He died at about the age of six months. And shortly after that, the couple separated, and Martha and James Ironside separated. And so, basically, Adelaide Ironside was brought up by a single mother who made a living for the family, allowed them to kind of survive financially by teaching piano lessons. And what I find so interesting about their lives is that Martha was fluent in German and French and Italian. So, she spoke several languages. So, here we have these ideas. You know, there's this kind of stereotypes, I think, of the colonial era, you know, this period of the 1820s and 30s, that everybody's walking around in bedraggled threads and, you know, they're speaking with accents and they've got bad teeth. And, you know, there's a lot of "arr's" and groaning and criminality and brutality. And all of that is true. But what the story of Adelaide Ironside and her mother, Martha Ironside, reveals is that there was, in fact, this, also a culture of gentility and education and some refinement that women were able to enjoy, even in those circumstances. And, you know, as Chief Gaoler of Sydney, John Redmond was not really high up in the class order at all. And yet he managed to ensure that his daughter could have that kind of education. And I speculate that it was actually John Redmond's wife, Mary Redmond, who provided Martha and then Adelaide with that kind of education and then those social expectations and ambitions. Because, in 18th and early 19th century British society, forgery was a crime that was most associated with the middle and upper classes. To be a successful forger, you had to be able to write, paint, you had to be literate. And to pass the notes successfully, you also had to have a degree of flair and performativity, right? Now, having said that, Mary Redmond couldn't have been so successful as a forger because she was eventually transported. But nonetheless, she and her father, who was also transported, clearly had been running this forgery business for some time before they were both transported. And so what we have in Adelaide's background is a First Fleet marine, and a convict forger, who had been part of the beginning of European settlement in Sydney. And that gave them, as

currency classes, a strong sense of entitlement and what they called priority, that whatever the British sterling classes, the free classes, might have thought about themselves, these people felt that they had been there from the beginning, and that this was their country, and that they were entitled to some recognition. Now, that is clearly a very complicated set of assumptions that I do try and unpack and problematise in my biography, because they use this phrase “native born” to describe themselves. And that in itself is just, it tells you so much, there's deliberately, I think, or maybe they're not. They're on one way, whether it's conscious or not, and I think it is conscious, appropriating the word “native” to position themselves as having a claim to the land, to the country, at the exclusion of both the free settler classes who have come later, and what they call the “jimmigrants,” or the migrants, the immigrants, the immigrants who came later, and also the First Nation people who were commonly known as natives at the time.

So I'm an Australian historian, I'm an Australian citizen, I'm really passionate about these questions about the problematics of nationalism, and a really big part of my inquiry has always been, what were these people thinking, and how has the kind of, the inception thoughts that they had as native-born people, as self-entitled native-born people? How has that continued to have some influence on the way that Australians think about themselves? I think we can trace some of contemporary Australian racism, the racism that is inherent in Australian nationalism to the attitudes and assumptions that are inherent in that term, native-born. So, you know, when I'm writing about Adelaide Ironside, this is not a hagiography. I'm really keen to situate her within her context as someone who's implicit in the colonial project. So we're not just going to be romancing Adelaide as this, you know, great, heroic, ambitious woman, even though she is all those things, she's certainly exceptional in so many ways, but she is also very much implicit in the colonial project. And, you know, one of the things I found really interesting is that try as I might to find references to First Nations people in her archive, there are only three references to it in her poems, which were in two poems that she wrote about the Prussian explorer, Ludwig Leichhardt. And in both of those, she's talking about Aboriginal people in really kind of romantic tropes, either they're savage blacks or they're the noble natives. So they're those sort of things that we see. And there's one other tantalizing reference that she makes in an 1853 letter when she's living on the North Shore, which was then a very kind of sequestered retreat, as she describes it. And she talks about how she often feels when she's walking in the bush, presumably to look for her wildflowers, which we'll get to in a minute, because she painted all these wildflowers. But she talks about imagining that she's sharing this land with antique eremites. Right. So here we are, we're in this high Victorian language, right? This is the highfalutin world of the mid-Victorian world, where they use wacky terms, they're in this sort of late romantic mindset, where they're just confabulating almost everything. But what is an eremite? An eremite is a kind of a hermit philosopher figure who lives in the desert, who lives in this kind of heightened world of mysticism, in fact, and Adelaide was a mystic. And so she's imagining the people, the First Nation people, around her. And we know the First Nations people were very present on the North Shore this time. I've done investigations into that by looking at a number of other sources. So she's thinking of herself as sharing, coexisting with First Nations people as ancient eremites. I think in that, for all its romanticising, is potentially some sort of recognition that First Nations people had their own spirituality, their own philosophy, and that they could be compared to figures that she admired, who had their own cultural tradition. But

other than that, there's hardly any references to Aboriginal people. And so I wanted to try and address that in my book. And one of the ways I did that was to recover the wildflowers that she painted and make references to the uses that they had. So I've re-presented her wildflowers all through the book and tried to reference where I can the way that they were used by First Nations people either as for healing or as household goods or for weapons, as a way of just bringing the story of Aboriginal people and making them more visible in the story. Yeah, because I guess at this stage, when Adelaide was writing and living, that colonial Victorians were very much in the enterprise of trying to make Aboriginal people invisible. But they weren't, they were very much a part of Sydney society at this time. Yeah.

AT: I would like to talk a bit more about her relationship with her mother, because obviously they must have had a very close relationship, and I would imagine that Martha was quite supportive given that she went with her daughter all the way to Europe.

KL: It's something that I spent a lot of time thinking about, because the correspondence that we have is often to both women or to one woman or the other. And yeah, so there was another biography written about Adelaide in the 1980s, it's sort of part of that early wave of recovering women from the archives. But very little mention is made of Martha Ironside in that. And so one of the things I did want to do was bring Martha back into the story as a woman who, as a woman as well as a mother and a champion of her daughter, and she most certainly was. So what we know is that Martha worked as a piano teacher, and therefore managed to maintain the family, and pretty much based on that, based on that form of income. And that she managed to generate enough funds to take Adelaide, to travel with Adelaide, to London, and then Paris, and then Italy, and then for them to live there for a decade together.

But what I started to notice as I meditated upon the sources more and more, was that there were also quite strong tensions between the two women as well. And sometime in my research, I found this very intriguing set of letters from a man named Seymour Kirkup, who was an expatriate living in Florence. He was actually a British artist who had fled London after his family had lost their money, and he had set up in Florence in the 1820s, and he had become the sort of doyenne of all things to do with Dante, and literature, and art, and he had also become a spiritualist. So he was often reading crystal balls, etc, etc. And when Adelaide and Martha went to Florence on one of their tours, they met him and spent quite a lot of time. And in fact, in these letters from Seymour Kirkup to Joseph Severn, who was the man who held John Keats as he died, he talks about Adelaide and Martha, and he says, you know, "Miss Ironside had all these wonderful qualities," and I'm paraphrasing, you know, "she read these crystal balls for me, and I believe that she was a painter of the imagination who was on par with none other than my old friend William Blake." You know, she was such a talent, but unfortunately her vulgar mother, stupid, foolish mother, had taken her away from her real calling as a spiritualist, and forced her to follow in the way of Rome, and doing these well-behaved, stuffy religious paintings that nobody cares for anymore. So Kirkup clearly had an opinion about Martha Ironside, which is not very nice, but also really quite fascinating, right? Because you can imagine that if you were Martha, that you would want your daughter to be a successful artist, not to be dabbling in spiritual experiments that could be dangerous for her reputation, and perhaps to choose topics

and styles that were going to be sellable and popular, and able to gather the support of the established art world.

AT: You would think that as a single mother, who I don't know if she received any financial support from her former husband, but you would think that a single mother would particularly be concerned with her daughter being able to support herself when they're not independently wealthy, as far as I know.

KL: Yep, that's exactly right. So look, there are occasional hints in the archive that there is support coming from her own family, and some support from James Ironside from time to time, although he took up with another woman and had three children with that woman, and so I think most of his finances were devoted to his own family, and it seems quite clear that shortly before Martha and Adelaide left Sydney that there was a rupture between Martha and James and Martha, therefore from that point onwards was on her own financially, and she made it work. You know, she did basically get Adelaide over to Italy, she managed the household economy, and Adelaide managed to sell quite a number of works, including, she sold one of her wildflower watercolour paintings, which were the original things that sent her off to Paris and then to Rome and made her her name and made her famous. She sold one of those paintings to the Prince of Wales when he came to visit her studio in Italy in 1859. But what we have is a story of female economy and precarity here. We have women living in straitened circumstances, really in very unstable conditions, really not knowing, trying to make it work, and no doubt Martha was anxious and trying to keep her exuberant, ambitious daughter on the straight and narrow, and to Seymour Kirkup, that was considered vulgar. So we hear these little sources like that, and he makes these kind of references a few times about Adelaide and Martha. You get these really interesting alternative perspectives on women's lives, and that's what I think is one of the richest things about their historical record, and my working with it, is it's very difficult to know exactly what is going on here, but these sources provide us with stimulants with which we can speculate about the possibilities.

The other thing to say is that I think Martha was quite a devout Presbyterian. She was reasonably evangelical and conservative in her opinions, but Adelaide wasn't. Adelaide was a spiritualist. You know, as she talked about universal love, she talks about her enthusiasm for the invisible, as she calls it, she scried crystal balls for Elizabeth Barrett Browning and for Kirkup. She was living the life of a mystic and an artist, and I love that about her. I think that kind of makes her a much more expansive thinker, which I think would have put her at odds with Martha as well. And it talks to parts of Adelaide's nature, and also the female experience in the 19th century, which I think we often neglect at our peril. I mean, you know, a number of historians have now, I think, convincingly argued that along with abolition, along with the women's question, that this topic, the influence of spiritualism was one of the most influential things about the 19th century, because it provided women, often middle-class women, often women from dissenting traditions like Quakerism and Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, with a way of having a voice, an authority, and an expression for their other frustrated lives. So they could become moral and spiritual authorities in their homes, and sometimes in public too. And in the Brownings' letters, I've found references to them describing Adelaide's performances, which

I think is really intriguing, because it shows us that Adelaide had a dramatic, performative, imaginative personality, and those are the kinds of things I've tried to capture. But you can imagine that if you were Adelaide's mum, you know, a lot of the time you'd be sort of looking through your fingers, just holding your breath and just terrified. It wouldn't have been an easy life for Martha, I think. And just as a bit of a spoiler alert, what I think is, you know, really terribly moving, is that Adelaide dies before she realizes her ambitions in 1867 in Rome, while she's being tended to by Martha. And Martha decides that she doesn't want to bury her daughter in Rome. So she embalms Adelaide and brings her back to London, leaves her in the catacombs with the intention of making enough money so that she can bring Adelaide back and have her buried in Sydney, and have her returned at last to her native land. And that again is another incredible expression, I think, of her maternal devotion to her daughter.

So one of the things that I've done in the book is try and write their story by occasionally including Martha's voice in it, bringing her perspective into the book, so that sometimes you see Adelaide and her life through Martha's perspective. And sometimes you see Martha through Adelaide's perspective. So it becomes a story of mother and daughter. But in so doing, we can honour what Adelaide said about Martha in the very last letter that she wrote, that we still have. And she wrote this letter to their new to their pastor, Dr. John Dunmore Lang, just a few weeks before she died. And she said in this, you know, "my mother has sacrificed everything to come with me on my arduous undertaking. And she really is to be loved and admired for that." And so that's why I wanted to bring her back into the story. Because I think she too was a woman of extraordinary ambition. I mean, after all, she encouraged Adelaide to have those ambitions when it would have been much easier for her to see her daughter married to a wealthy settler.

AT: And as we're talking about being a woman before her time and the adventurousness needed to undertake this, it did later become very common for Australian artists to go to Europe, to get training, to find career success. And even today, you see this, I happen to have several opera singers who have followed that same Australia to Europe path for career purposes. But she was doing this before it was cool, especially for women.

KL: Yeah. Yeah, she totally was. When Adelaide and Martha left Sydney in June 1855, Adelaide became the first Australian-born artist of any gender to leave Australia, to train with the masters overseas. And it was absolutely, about 10, 20 years before she did so. And this became a really important part of her international identity and reputation. She often described herself as Miss Australia, as the flower from Australia. It was extraordinary. The Prince of Wales wanted to meet her because no one had really met an Australian, let alone an Australian woman, let alone one who had decided to commit 10 years of her life to living in Rome, to training with the masters. The Pope was the same. The Pope requested a meeting with Adelaide and her mother. And during that meeting, Adelaide, who I believe, as well as having a strong personality, a mystical, an imaginative personality, she was also very charming and persuasive because she managed to persuade the Pope to give her permission to go and look inside, to go and visit a monastery so that she could study the art of Fra Angelico, a very famous pre-Renaissance artist, very popular at the time. Now, at this time, women were never allowed in monasteries. It was completely impossible. Many female artists had tried to do this, but only Adelaide achieved that.

So Adelaide was this kind of person who, who said about blazing trails, and she certainly did that. And when you go through the record and you look at the way that her female colonial friends describe her, because many came to meet her or bought her art or tried to keep the torch alife of her memory after she died, all of them talk about her courage, the fact that she was the first, and that she actually gained real recognition. The first Australian artist to gain real recognition. And she did. I mean, she was described as the impersonation of genius. She was described as admired, her work was sold for extraordinary amounts of money. She had wealthy patrons, but she died before she realized her potential, I think.

And then when her artwork was returned to Sydney, it was eventually sort of not well cared for. And some of her greatest works, the 43 flower watercolours of, of Australian wildflowers, which made her famous, have been scattered to the winds. So we don't have any remaining examples of those, which is another reason why I wanted to include her wildflowers into the, into my book. But the most famous, one of the most famous artworks that she did, which is known as the Pilgrim of Art, which depicts her and her mother on their journey. This was stored in a three-sided shed associated with the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and there it deteriorated beyond repair. So that all we now have is a black and white photo of it that was taken in the 1930s. So the neglect that was given to this woman and her art is one of the reasons that I think her story wasn't known, but it certainly was at odds with how the reputation that she managed to achieve for herself.

AT: To switch focus to your day job, I'm actually really intrigued by your title of South Australia's History Advocate with the History Trust of South Australia. So what does that role entail?

KL: Well, in this role, this is my day job, and I put on my proper hat as a historian, and I am a champion for all things to do with history. So that is history as it's done in academic forms, in public forms, in creative forms. It's a version of a role that used to be known as the State Historian of South Australia, and that role developed in the 1980s, and there were three or four state historians, and their job was pretty much the same sort of job as mine, but it had a specific focus on South Australian historians, making South Australian history relevant to the world and for the world. In this configuration of the job, I'm the inaugural history advocate for South Australia, so it's just a new role. It's really just recovered funding. My job is, yes, to celebrate South Australian stories, and I have to say South Australian history has its own particular taste and tambour and tone, which I do love and would love to talk about with you more and hope to write a book in that area, but as well as doing South Australian stories, I'm also championing history, and that means championing history both in schools, in universities, in the arts sector, in the heritage and tourism sector, really trying to make the case for history as a vital form of meaning-making that can help to give us a great sense of belonging and connectivity with each other, so I kind of think of history as a giant tree, and it gives us, the deeper the roots, the stronger that tree will be when the winds are blowing, or when there's a drought and the roots need to go down deep to get the water, that history is that kind of root system. And then during the good times we can really, you know, enjoy the pleasure of its shape even more, so my job is really about making the case for history, and I think that it's a really necessary job actually, because history is quite a threatened species, not only in our universities at the moment, but in

fact across the whole sway, we see that there's a kind of a taste, or an appetite for certain type of histories, military histories, national histories, blokey histories, but the other forms of history I think, especially in Australia, don't always get the attention that they need and deserve, so part of what I'm really interested in is making sure that women's histories, First Nation histories, working class histories, migrant histories, the histories of everybody and anyone who often are not well represented in the record, they're the stories that I also want to see, so part of the things I've been doing before I became the history advocate, I had an Australian Research Council Grant, which was called Historical Craft and Speculative Biography, and in that I developed a kind of speculative method for how we can ethically use an informed imagination to take the little traces of the archives that are often left about these people who are marginalized from the record and see if we can bring them back to life. So we know that people who are illiterate, women, blah, blah, blah, basically anyone who wasn't a white man with the money, the economics, the education or the influence to leave behind a record usually doesn't have much of historical record. They might feature in some newspapers, they might feature in statistics, there's often very little that we can know about them. But what that means, Allison, is that so often when we look to the past, it's a really distorted and inaccurate past. It's just full of all these white men and top hats walking around, it doesn't tell us a lot. And so my mission as a historian has been to think about well how can we take those little traces of the archive and actually re-people that past with all those other figures who were just as influential, just as important, but are otherwise silenced and shadowy and sketchy in the historical record. And so that's what I've kind of dedicated my life to doing and that's what my my own approach has been. And so now I get an opportunity to take that kind of work and do some of it, but also support lots of other people to do it in my role as a history advocate. So I'm talking about the fact that I think sometimes the end result justifies the means with which we go about that result, and what I mean by that is if the end result is that we get a much richer understanding of the past and the role of women and First Nation people and migrants in it, then I think the means of coming about that richer understanding, which might involve using more imagination, informed imagination and the discipline of context, then I think it's worth it, because what we get is a more balanced, a more accurate, or if not accurate, let's not use that word, a more balanced and richer way of understanding the past, and let's face it, history itself was created by, was largely kind of brought into the academic world as a discipline, and made to look like it was scientific, but it's not. You know the so-called facts and evidence of history are always, always partial, they're always biased. And so I think we have to bring a political lens to that, and a political lens to how we write about women. We have to say rightio, if I just accept your archives as fair dinkum and well behaved, then we're just going to perpetuate the same silence against women, against these people who have been marginalized by the sources, so we have to make a radical act, we have to be ambitious, like Adelaide Ironside was, and decide upon using techniques that disrupt, you know, those silencing techniques, those silencing implications of the archive. So my work is about, I guess, being a bit radical and disruptive and coming up with techniques that allow those, those silenced, shadowy people to be seen and heard once more.

One of the things I do love about Adelaide's archive is that you get these glimpses into all sorts of different women, so she has done so many portraits of women at different stages of her life, there's all these letters to and from women of different generations, many of whom are

Australian, but some are American, some are Scottish, some are Italian, some are English. And what I thought was so rare and wonderful about her archive is not only did I get to re-present her and her mother, but I got to re-present her grandmother, so three generations of women, and all these other women that supported her life. Some were very wealthy, some were not, some we know almost nothing about, but it shows us that women's lives are always networked, so we're used to these stories of the hero's journey, typically it's this independent man who goes off on his own and fights the unknown and climbs mountains and does all these things and he's a hero, right, that hero's journey. Joseph Carlisle, who I think Adelaide may have met, a close friend of Raskin, he once said, "really history is nothing more than the biography of great men." But what I found in writing the biography Adelaide and Martha, that the heroine's journey is one that only exists because of all the other women in her life. It doesn't just take a village to raise a woman like Adelaide Ironside, it takes a village of women loving and looking after each other.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember - well-behaved women rarely make history.