

Artist Robert Hannaford wins court battle for works

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less than 2 min read, updated on February 3, 2012 - 11:00PM



AFTER a protracted legal battle, Robert Hannaford is preparing to show 10 portraits of famous Aboriginal women he painted more than a decade ago.

The multiple Archibald Prize finalist, who ignored a life-and-death battle with cancer to pursue the paintings, will exhibit the collection - which he considers some of his best work - in Riverton later this month.

Hannaford painted the women in 1999 and 2000 for a book called *Black Chicks Talking*. "I did the job because I thought it was helping Aboriginal women," he says.

But numerous attempts to get the paintings back failed, prompting the renowned artist to go to court. For some of that time, he battled a cancer in his throat.

The book, written by Aboriginal actor Leah Purcell, was published by her partner Bain Stewart and Bungaburra Productions in 2002, and the paintings were exhibited to promote the book.

The subjects were Purcell, Deborah Mailman, Kathryn Hay, Frances Rings, Tammy Williams, Rosanna Angus, Sharon Finnan, Cilla Malone, Liza Fraser-Gooda and Rachel Perkins.

Hannaford said he had agreed to do the work for no fee but retained ownership because he understood the project was to support a program for the mentorship of Aboriginal women.

"I have been deeply interested in Aboriginal culture since I was a boy, when my grandfather told me of the local Ngadjuri people camping in the riverbeds," he said.

"My love for painting Aboriginal people was one of the reasons I was happy to accept and paint the portraits for the book."

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But from 2005 to 2007, he told the NSW Supreme Court, he tried unsuccessfully to secure a return of the works from Mr Stewart.

"Bain once offered me \$10,000 to buy them; but as my price was \$20,000 a portrait at the time, I declined," he said. His portrait price today is \$35,000.

The *Black Chicks* paintings have never been shown in South Australia, so Hannaford is putting them on exhibition at his Riverton Light Gallery at 54 Torrens Rd, Riverton, from February 19 until mid-April.

"I am not sure what I want to do with them after that," he said. "But one thing I don't want to do is split them up."