



Touching portrait of love will affect many

PICK OF THE DAY

Artscape: Jenny Sages
Paths to Portraiture
10pm, ABC1

GRAEME BLUNDELL



"SOMEONE said one time, 'if you can consider giving up art, you should'," the great painter of portraits, Bill Leak, well-known to readers of this newspaper, once suggested. "And I believe that; art is either a matter of life and death, or it is of no consequence."

Painter Jenny Sages, herself the subject of a portrait in tonight's revelatory *Artscape*, would agree, I'm sure. Director and writer Catherine Hunter starts her compelling study of the great painter documenting the provenance of her portrait of Sages's late husband Jack, the wonderful picture a finalist in the Archibald Prize in 2011, and painted lovingly in the last year of his life.

"Jack's portrait was very personal and meaningful and I was so deeply in my grief that the idea of painting another portrait seemed trivial," Sages says.

Hunter's camera almost caresses the picture just before workmen carry it down the stairs of her studio, to be later hung, while Jack, then still alive, played with a cup of tea.

"I think the essential thing about Jenny's painting is when she chooses a subject to do for the Archibald, it becomes a friendship and becomes knowing the person and that is one of the fortes of Jenny's paintings," he comments. "She puts everything in it from the point of view of knowing the person, loving the person; she wouldn't do anyone she doesn't like."

It's a moving sequence in a gorgeously elegiac film about the nature of art. Sages's portraits have been exhibited 20 times in the Archibald and this year her extraordinary painting, *After Jack*, was both runner-up and winner of the People's Choice Award. This documentary study explores the process she undertakes in the painting of both her portraits (novelist Helen Garner, an earlier subject, calls it "a psychic encounter") and her abstract landscapes. Her concern: the individuality and physicality of human identity.



ART GALLERY OF NSW

Jenny Sages's portrait *My Jack* features in tonight's *Artscape*, a gorgeously elegiac film about the nature of art