

What brought you to live in the Fleurieu?

Though born and educated in Adelaide, our family often escaped to our shack which we shared with friends on the Murray River. Love of the natural world grew out of many years of outdoor activities such as camping, hiking and sailing.

I have always been drawn to life in the natural world. In 2002 with retirement approaching, we found 55 hectares of scrub and cattle country above Rapid Bay. Passing kangaroos on the dirt track and an eagle soaring overhead, we knew this was the place we wanted to spend the rest of our lives. Over twenty years we have addressed cattle degradation, eradicated weeds and planted thousands of trees. The property was deemed a sanctuary by the state in 2010. First peoples participated in a celebratory Kaurna welcoming ceremony for Yaitya-kauwingga Sanctuary and our family feels privileged to participate in its care and maintenance. We live off grid and in the bush with all its "inconveniences" and just love living here as part of the wider Fleurieu community.

You went to Norwood High School? To what career paths did that lead?

My family consisted of tradespeople and shopkeepers, but I had always wanted to teach. And so, I was the first to attend university where I studied geography, psychology and education. I loved my country teaching at Kapunda High though my experience in the city schools was less rewarding. I joined the Education Department's Psychology Branch, happily with lots of country work. On a year's scholarship to study in Canada I met my wife Janet and later had a challenging year in Canberra reviewing school guidance services. I escaped the Education Department in 1991 and worked in private practice. This really freed me to explore my career and personal life, and following more study, I enjoyed counselling work, training and therapy.

When did art first become an interest, and then a serious pursuit?

I always took a notebook on camping trips and sketched or drew maps, as well as spending two decades of playing with sculpture in clay and wood.

In 2014 I changed my orientation to painting after seeing Peter Fitzgerald's interesting work on display at Wirrina. I hadn't seen Peter for about 55 years and renewed the old school



Bill's painting *The sun always rises* features in the exhibition

Lorraine McLoughlin
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contact. How different he looked from the skinny young kid I knew at school! I have always been drawn to abstraction and so I asked him for some lessons. His generous support gave me the confidence to experiment, to draw and paint and work increasingly freely. I now relish the freedom to explore and test new directions on an independent path and find stimulus in talking with other artists and sharing ideas and approaches.

I have exhibited what I considered successful works in different venues and sold some works; it is satisfying when my efforts find a connection with others.

What has significantly influenced your art?

Inspiration for my work comes from love of the natural world. I first explored the Northern Flinders as a teenager hiking and camping through the Gammon Ranges. The place of ancient rocks and history made a lasting impression on me, and I've returned there regularly.

While I've had no formal training in art, I'm indebted to the generosity of friends, our art community and the Arkaroola Art Adventure team in mentoring and critiquing my work. I am self-motivated to research diverse artists and multi-cultural art history. My passion is the abstraction of landscapes and nature with an emotional connection, though realism sneaks in when I'm not watching.

Can you describe your actual art practice?

In my work, I often use acrylics on canvas, boards and paper. I also experiment with collage which sometimes incorporates found objects and natural materials on site. I enjoy the unpredictability of learning new techniques. From first ideas and location sketches to a finished piece, I explore different media such as natural pigments, sand, plant material or charcoal. I take time to immerse myself in a place, and then strive to express its essence as an art form.

Where do you paint and work as an artist when not out in the field?

Although I love to experience nature raw and in solitude, at home a lined shed originally built for a son's wedding reception is now a studio and a tranquil place for me to lose myself in creating. I have opened the studio for Festival Fleurieu and SALA, and the property for plein air workshops. I welcome sharing art talk, my painting space and this special piece of country.

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Bill at Arkaroola

You're strongly involved in the community. What are the areas of your commitment?

I joined the Rapid Bay CFS service here shortly before I needed its help to save our property from nearby fires. I have recently stepped down from an active role but continue to offer support where I can.

I have coordinated the artists trail for Festival Fleurieu and two art exhibitions to raise awareness and support for refugees.

Your concerns go beyond the local in your role as convenor of Fleurieu Refugee Support Group (FRSG). Can you describe its work and ways in which others can help?

Our first step was to have Council acknowledge and support our work by declaring our area as a Refugee Welcome Zone in 2019. The FRSG group engages in community awareness of the plight of refugees and funding for refugee support here and overseas. My passion for this is driven by wanting our grandchildren and great grandchildren to grow up in a compassionate Australia, one that looks outward to the world of which we are a part. Bill Clinton said it: *"We all do better when we work together. Our differences do matter, but our common humanity matters more."*

To join or help contact:
refugeefleurieu@gmail.com

Your work in the 2022 SALA exhibition is exciting and different from earlier work.

Yes, I think it's evolved to a personal expression of my connection to land, ancient rocks, maps and geography. I have followed my own path to express what gives me pleasure and look forward to discussing it with others.

The SALA exhibition in Coral Street Art Space Victor Harbor will show Bill's work with that of fellow artists Karen Hammat, Barb Pettigrew and Peter Fitzgerald until Monday 15 August, and is open 10 to 4 daily (closed Wednesdays)