

Have you loved art from an early age?

My mother remembered that from infant years I was engaged visually, always looking at things closely. I recall watching my older brother John drawing and wanting to draw like him. Thus began a love of drawing and painting. I became obsessed, drawing whenever I could, and school projects had more drawings than content. I often drew birthday cards for family and won prizes in competitions.

Who encouraged you from such an early age?

It was taken for granted that I could draw, and I received quiet support from my family. When my brother's girlfriend saw my sketch book she was so impressed that I felt encouraged to pursue an art based career. I was shy growing up in the small dairying community of Gumeracha but in secondary school at Birdwood High I was able to follow my interests and did well in art, English and singing. Sport wasn't on my radar, but I gained a reputation for my drawing and painting. In my final year art became a matriculation subject. I could choose art over maths, and I excelled. Later my mother supported me by keeping me company and knitting while I sketched buildings around the district. I hadn't seen much real art, however, and had limited access to art books. When my older sister gave me a book of Australian Impressionists with colour illustrations, I began to see the world differently. Struck by the colours, patterns, the structure of paintings and their shade and light, I knew I wanted to paint like that.



Going to Torrens College of Advanced Education and Art School then changed your world?

It certainly did. Although I was now a smaller fish in a larger pond, my world expanded in those exciting years. I had access to galleries, creative fellow students and wonderful teachers. When our art history lecturer, David Dolan, organised a student trip to the US, I eagerly signed up. I was 19 years old, had never been in a plane before and was off to see real major art in famous galleries in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Washington and Los Angeles. It was mind-blowing, and worth using my car-funds to pay for the trip.

You completed a Diploma of Teaching (Fine Arts) in 1978. Where did you start teaching?

True to my rural roots, after three years of teachers' college I found myself as a twenty year-old in a very small world again at Lock Area



School on Eyre Peninsula. For five years I taught art across years from reception to year 10, followed by three years closer to the city at Willunga High School.

Why did you stop teaching?

To pursue paths in the wider art world. I designed and made clothes, had fashion shows and art exhibitions, worked as a doctor's receptionist and trained and worked in remedial massage.

Painting took a back seat when I had children. I wanted to bake, sew and garden, and spend time with my girls to see they were secure. They went to Westbourne Park Primary School with Jane Smeets's children, and Jane and I started painting weekly in her lounge room. Thus, after an eight year break, I was back into the rhythm of painting. (It's serendipity that Jane and I now live near each other again and regularly paint together around our district.)

After bowel cancer and a separation, I needed to earn money to support my children. I took up an artist-in-residence position at Glen Osmond Primary School. Loving it, I reregistered as a teacher to do relief work. I spent time at Gilles St Primary School with new arrivals, Warriappendi School with Indigenous children, and on outreach programs for at-risk students at The Parks Community Centre. I loved the diversity of the students and that they found a way to express themselves through the combination of art and laughter.

I was a much better teacher for having such life experiences and went on to do relief and contract teaching locally at Rapid Bay and Yankalilla.

Why did you move to Normanville?

It had family connections. My parents had share-farmed at Inman Valley early in their marriage and often brought us through the area. I'd visited my brother living here and when I had the chance to buy his house, it felt like coming home. I'm still a country girl at heart. This small town made me feel safe and gave me opportunities I hadn't found in the city such as singing and joining a ukulele group. I love the sense of community and the dear friends I've made. I enjoy living by the sea and watching the birds and animals that come to our garden. The beautiful Fleurieu scenery with its own special light constantly uplifts and inspires.

You now teach at the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) and privately. How do you manage this with your art practice?

It's a juggling act. I love teaching at AGSA. I facilitate adult and children's workshops for public programs funded in part by the James and Diana Ramsay Foundation. I also take portraiture and landscape sessions and topics associated with exhibitions for the AGSA schools programs, and fortnightly, I teach a private group at Mitcham.

Teaching is personally rewarding, and I need to support myself, but it fragments my creative and painting time. My aim is to follow my art practice fulltime and to maximize use of my beautiful studio space at home. My journey is still evolving.

You live with artist Gilbert Dashorst. How can two artists coexist?

That's tricky too. It's great to share reactions to nature, changes of light and the evolving garden. We're certainly very supportive of each other's art practice. We talk over teaching strategies, critique and discuss each other's work, and bounce ideas around. We are, however, clear about boundaries and give each other mental space, and keep our studio spaces quite separate.

How do you describe your work?

I mostly paint in oils, realistic work which captures light and reflections from trees, flowers and water.

I love the physical processes, preparing canvases, putting down paint on linen or board. I need to be passionate about my subject: the water's edge, tree trunks, flowers and landscapes. I also relish challenge and learning, having a creative experience rather than churning out by formula. Portraiture is becoming an interest and whatever I am working on takes over my thoughts. At the moment my obsession is pink gums as I prepare for the local festival in April.

What are you doing for the next Festival Fleurieu?

Dora and John Dallwitz invited Jane Smeets, Bill Page, Gilbert Dashorst and me to join them in responding to their beautiful local property "Mistletoe Block". Each of us is focusing on a different feature and highlighting the fragility of the wild life and plants.

The works, begun in plein air, will come together in a festival exhibition at Myponga Hall before moving on to Coral Street Arts Centre in Victor Harbor. Within the exhibition I will run a free workshop "Drop-in and draw" for Country Arts on Thursday 27th April. I'm thrilled to be involved in this project.

Thank you Judith for sharing your artistic story. Good luck with what promises to be a wonderful exhibition and festival highlight.

Details for the exhibition and workshop are on www.festivalfleurieu.com.au

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