

At what age did you show an interest in art?

From the age of four I was already enthusiastic about painting and disappointed at kindergarten when allowed to do only one painting a day. I wanted to do more. My childhood pocket money went on buying paints and books about painting, and I learned early to mix colours from a how-to book. I drew too but colour was my big thing and became a lifelong obsession.

Were there art influences in your home or family?

My parents were supportive although not artists. My mother and grandmother always did craft work, so I came from a tradition of making things with my hands, but my father was pure intellect, though very encouraging. I did art in year 8 at Pt Lincoln High School, but when it wasn't on the curriculum at boarding school, I had to have extra lessons.

You spent early years on Eyre Peninsula. How did your family's unorthodox choices affect you personally?

My father certainly took courageous decisions. Raising capital by running the general store at Coffin Bay after being a stock and station agent, he bought a lease on eleven islands in the Sir Joseph Banks group in Spencer Gulf. He took the family to live on Reevesby, the largest island, in order to fish and farm. It was very isolated with few amenities. Hence my need to go away to boarding school where, in spite of homesickness and strict rules, I happily made friends.

When my father later queried my choices to live quite basically and alternatively at times, I had to remind him of the example he'd set me. Besides, my rural childhood stayed with me and living in the country is where I belong, although I spent more than ten years in Adelaide, studying and working.



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What did you study in the city?

On leaving school, I considered doing art full-time but thought university knowledge of psychology more likely to lead to a career path and studied it as an undergraduate at Adelaide University and then completed a master's degree at Flinders.

Was it the right choice, to choose security over art?

I loved working as a psychologist and earning steadily, but admit I stole moments to keep doing art. In 1998 when my younger child was 12, I went to art school to pursue a visual arts degree, the best thing I ever did. By then in my 40s, I had the confidence to immerse myself in an art focused milieu. I relished the interaction with lecturers and fellow students and the constant discussions about art. Grasping the opportunity to follow my passion, I could even indulge in the luxury of painting all day.

Although I'd practiced psychology part time while having children, I had reached a stage where I could change the balance by doing more art and less psychology eventually doing the latter only one day a week. I stopped working as a psychologist in 2020.

While I enjoy people and value personal interaction, I am most comfortable in meaningful conversations one on one. I do, however, appreciate being alone to go deeply into my art without distractions. I love the time in my studio totally focused on art.

How would you describe your art?

Primarily, I am a painter. I search for the elemental energies within the world to capture in paint, I don't paint things in nature but try to paint the nature of things. I draw from the energy of life to let the muse do its work, let intuition flow through.

I like life-drawing and making things with my hands, craft and felting and spinning, but painting is my central passion. Its practice informs how I see the world and how I live my life.

I am always striving and learning, doing courses on line, reading about painting, and interacting with artists. I connect via Zoom with an artist club of members from across Australia and beyond. We discuss not only the creative process but also our professional practice, and how to use social media and promote online. As a result, I sell regularly on Bluthumb.

Yankalilla Yarns and Fine Art Studio is a well-known local art venue and popular during festivals. Has a dedicated studio changed your art direction?

It has had a huge impact. I can do large paintings, I don't have to clear the dining table



before we eat, and I have room to spread and have workshops.

It was a long-held dream to build a combined gallery and studio space in cob. I am enthusiastic about earth building and loved sculpting the mud, sand, and straw mix with my hands to create the walls into the organic spiral which sits happily in the environment.

It took years and slowed my art practice but gradually grew into what I had imagined, thanks also to the assistance of my partner, Ian Main, and some help from WWOOFers. And I read books about cob building, a method dating back to 11th century and sometimes still seen in thatched houses in Devon and Cornwall.

I am delighted with the result. I take great satisfaction in what I have created and made with my own hands. I love to work here. The energy and light and sense of space are highly conducive to working productively and creatively.

You hold well-received art classes in your studio. Does teaching interfere with your art practice?

I love teaching and find immense stimulation in sharing knowledge and learning with others yet have to balance it around my art practice which is the most important aspect of my art life. I enjoy the stream of visitors to my gallery during Festival Fleurieu, exhibitions and classes, but I am happy when those times end and I am alone again in my special space. I am living the dream and am in my studio most afternoons. This is where I belong.

And sharing a conversation with you here has been a privilege Karen. Thank you.

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