

Your business card gives a website address only:

[www.TripodDogGallery.com](http://www.TripodDogGallery.com)

This seems to reflect your priorities, so let's discuss the dog first before we talk about you.

Bailey is an RSPCA rescue dog who came to us in good nick although minus a leg, and we do joke that the advert said 25% off. He is a wonderfully calm presence in my life. He is my buddy, and I am known around town by the trike I ride with him in the front box. Pets can be a way to form connections with others by providing a non-threatening icebreaker. Incidental conversations ensue because of Bailey and often talk turns to art. Many locals obviously notice and appreciate art and its significance in their own lives and that of the community.



Leith and Bailey

**Moving to your own background, do you come from an arty family?**

That depends on the definition of art. I spent my early years in the Lefevre Peninsula region surrounded by caring adults with strong community networks who worked for social justice and welcomed outsiders into our home. It was also a family that made things, modelling or drawing as a hobby for the pleasure of creating for themselves. They enjoyed making from an idea: flower arranging, transforming gardens, inventing immersive games. That's my idea of art, not just producing an object to hang on the wall of a white box gallery but creating something that wasn't there before. My family members have always encouraged me to pursue my own versions of art.

**Your art qualifications show depth and diversity. What pathways led to your art practice?**

I went to schools in Port Adelaide and had some time working before going to the University of South Australia. I started out studying technical and industrial drawing and finished with a Bachelor of Design and Master's Degree Visual Arts, enjoying both practical and theory courses as I diversified my directions. I am indebted to lecturers such as Bruce Anderson, Claire Belfridge, Helen Fuller and David Archer whose ideas and sense of playfulness made a great difference to how I approach art. Because of them I learned art playfulness, to make mistakes and have a go. I dared to shift to sculpture, think expansively and work on a larger scale.

**And other influences?**

Influences beyond art training included Judy Potter, current Chair of the Adelaide Festival and former chair of Adelaide Fringe, whose passion and advocacy for the arts showed me that art needs to be financially viable and that artists receiving public or private funding need

to be responsible, and financially aware in marketing and public engagement.

Seeing the architectural masterpiece of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao would make anyone think outside the square. So would the large works of Jeff Koon, Louise Bourgeois and Richard Serra in its outdoor areas. They made me think differently, and to see the transformation art can make to local spaces, the community and economy. Bilbao was a small dying mining town before the Guggenheim; now it is rich and growing.

**From drawing to huge sculptures and then beyond, your work continues to evolve.**

Yes, I worked on commissioned sculptures, and learned a lot about collaborating with the corporate world to source funding and involvement. But working in 3D is expensive and logistically difficult. Later I reinvented myself by working in 2D, with less financial risks and less maths involved. I moved into Ripple Studio in Port Adelaide, and later into Central Studios art collective. Recently, I established my studio in the Fleurieu once we made this area home. For ages we'd been holidaying in Carrickalinga, and finally we bought a quiet house here with spectacular views, trees and birds. This special place brings happiness with its backdrop of sea waves breaking, lightning on the ocean, wonderful sunsets observed with G n T in hand, and incidental surprises in the garden such as echidnas, lizards, kangaroos.

**Back to your unique and impressive art. Can you describe it?**

Carrickalinga informs my art with its white sandy beaches punctuated by dramatic rock bluffs and wonderful dunes rich in biodiversity. It's all too beautiful to lose. My oversized drawings created with minute details record the inter-tidal zones of Carrickalinga. I want to capture local beauty before climate change damages it forever. Using a unique method involving quill pens, I apply inks onto kiln dried wood, and often employ a magnifying glass to do close-up detailed work. The result is hyper-realistic yet stylised art that looks like silk long stitch tapestry.

I celebrate the beauty of nature and am concerned that coming generations won't have memories of walking our pristine beaches.

**Serious topics yet there is always a sense of surprise and play in your work.**

I certainly aim for that in my technique, and often in my take on the subject matter. Humour underpins my social commentaries. In self-portraits for example, I reinterpret propaganda and have fun.

I've adapted a portrait by French artist Jacques-Lewis David to reveal the falsity of portraits commissioned by people to invent their own legacy. With tongue in cheek I turned pompous Napoleon into my own self-portrait. I'm dressed in pyjamas under the robes, wear trade union and Star Trek badges, am barefoot as a dignitary would never be, and hold a bent cross.

In a current work in progress, "The Emperor Crossing The Alps", is changed into me as "Conqueror of the Driveway". I've transformed Napoleon's military conquest into a celebration of the successful ascent of our incredibly steep



Emperor in his PJs

driveway as climbing it can be physically challenging. Pushing my heavy cargo trike up the driveway is a super achievement even if it's not leading armies over mountains.

**Your canvases are often exceptionally large, confronting or deep. Where are the markets for such work?**

Covid continues to be a bushfire burning through the visual arts. As I lost many established outlets nationally and internationally, I am busy starting again and rebuilding connections for exhibiting places and opportunities. There is some support for some artists, diversity and new stars, which is terrific, but there is also a need for a larger pot of support for all artists. There is not yet enough recognition of the link between art and tourism; policy and strategic decisions are taken for expediency, rather than with the vision that a little arts funding can ignite an economy. My experience is the arts leverage \$25 for each \$1 invested.

I have a comprehensive website as one of my marketing tools and as well an online gallery shop selling not only art works but gifts and merchandise which I make. I have belief in myself as an artist and enjoy the ride.

**Thank you, Leith. I encourage readers to view**

[www.TripoddDogGallery.com](http://www.TripoddDogGallery.com)

**to see the range of Leith's work. He has received numerous commissions including as Official Artist to the President, Parliament House South Australia, and among his numerous awards is the Queen's Trust.**

*Cover: Leith creating in fine detail*

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