

Where did your personal story begin?

My twin sister and I were born in Adelaide, but my parents returned to live in Tennant Creek near my grandparents. My grandfather had been in the Russian navy and jumped ship in Australia. Eventually he went after gold in Tennant Creek but without capital had to work for others and take jobs on the side. In time he became a butcher and had a lease on Tennant Creek station with its homestead the old Overland Telegraph Station. As one of ten children we often spent time with grandparents when on holidays from Tennant Creek Primary School. They were dry and difficult years with no modern conveniences and terrible droughts and dust storms.

My father worked in transport for a while in Adelaide, then back in Tennant Creek. Finally, the family settled in Alice Springs. I went to high school there for three years, and then boarded for a year in Charters Towers.

On leaving school I took up an apprenticeship in motor mechanics and worked in car spare parts. For a while I worked as a transport driver on long hauls out of Alice to Tennant Creek, Darwin and Mt Isa, but when we had little children I settled fulltime in Alice. I took employment, still based on motors, particularly cars and motor bikes, eventually buying into a motorcycle business in 1997 with my sons-in-law. When I retired, we came south.

Where did your art story begin?

I drew a lot as a child. My grandfather kept us busy, and quiet, by supplying my brother and me with lots of butcher paper! We passed long hot summers in the early 1960s drawing 1950s cars in minute detail.

At Alice Springs High School, I loved art, but it was only offered in the first two years. I excelled at art but not in other subjects, and drawing was never considered a useful talent. When I had a year under the Christian Brothers in boarding school in Charters Towers and without the distraction of art I did well in traditional subjects.

Aged about 14 or 15, I started drawing landscapes comprising water tanks, fence lines and clothed stockmen on horseback, often from an overhead perspective. Winning a prize at the Alice Springs Horticultural Show led to lessons from local Dutch artist Henk Guth but being asked to copy European landscapes didn't help me much.

During my apprenticeship there was little time for art, but I took it up again when our children were small. I started with a door set up across two drums while we still had a spare room. My father-in-law brought me some tubes of paints from overseas in 1975. I smeared paint on hard board, overly applying turps, but persevering undeterred, without a palette and already using

untraditional techniques such as dragging colour on a cloth across the surface to create streaks.

In Iris Harvey, owner of Arunta Art and Book Shop I found encouragement and a sales outlet. I sold in her store for over ten years, supplying another work as one sold, then increasing the number produced. Eventually she would buy them up front from me. It was steady money and a helpful start.

Can you describe your art and how its unique and complex style evolved?

Other people tell me what it is, and I say, "Oh! Really?"

I suppose it's a mishmash between realistic and abstract surrealism. I paint creations from my own mind as various starting points spark my imagination. Seeing a reflection in a fender, window, or cloud, away I go, doodling and playing with the idea. My clouds can be quite surreal and hardly recognisable as I improvise shapes and forms. The colours also come out of my mind, chosen for tones that are complimentary and which I use in various shadings and unusual combinations. My figures, no longer clad, have become more stylised.

I always base paintings on drawings which are free in design and prepared meticulously. I then enlarge them using a grid. Often they become quite big. One commission was 2 by 1.2 metres. I smear paint, work on a table rather than an easel, and seldom use a palette, perhaps just for black to put on as lines. My studio is quite minimalist.

Why do you do it?

I'm having fun. I love the freedom of painting without having to reproduce in accurate detail or be exact about what I see. It is much freer and more pleasurable than that, as I follow my whimsical interpretations and experimental ideas. Pivoting from wrist or elbow I create sweeping lines as I play. I love it



What and who have been major influences?

Landscapes of Central Australia where I grew up of course. My work is inspired by deserts, land affected by droughts, and rocks weathered and pared of soil by frequent sandstorms. I see each rock and pebble with an artist's eye and have been influenced by the Devils Marbles and similar landforms in the Territory. Now that we live close to the coast, I am also exploring marine subjects.

Artists I've been influenced by include Ainslie Roberts, Salvador Dali, Brett Whitely, and



Francis Bacon. But my ideas come out of my head as I pursue ways to adapt what I see to create a painting. I love the effect of light, refractions and reflections and incorporate them into playful shapes and clouds.

And you have sold well over the years?

Yes, the Chief Minister's Office purchased one to present to then Governor General Sir Zelman Cowen on a visit to the Northern Territory. Another was presented as an official gift to Princess Alexandra when she opened the standard gauge railway to Alice Springs. I've received awards and commendations from judges and one of my paintings is in a permanent collection of the NT Art Award. Through Alice Springs connections, I continue to sell in the NT and across Australia. Selling frees space for me to create more.

When and why did you come to Yankalilla?

It was hot in Alice Springs, and the times were becoming more troubled and difficult. We went to Pt Lincoln for a while, back to Alice, and eventually found this piece of paradise. We fell in love with the area's beauty and sense of community, and this property's views down the coast. There's also marine inspiration for painting - it's been a great move.

You live on the former Trafford Hill winery. How do you combine art with looking after a large property?

They are complementary occupations. I work regularly, painting for a few hours most mornings and when tired of it, find plenty to occupy me mowing and slashing. We prune the vines but don't continue the tradition of professional winemaking. When fed up with outside work, back I go to painting. It keeps me balanced.

Your orderly studio and well set up gallery should attract many festival goers in April. Visitors are in for a treat, and I hope they'll buy works, without being too distracted by your magnificent views. All the best.

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