

ARTIST INSIGHT : Hilary Herrmann

1. Introduce yourself and your art.

I have been painting for many decades. It has become something I do as part of my every day. It was instilled to me in childhood. My mother's world was filled with weavings, cloth, tapestries and foliage that enriched our home. My father's world was full of animals, trees and grass, and an understanding of the land. These formative years introduced me to the importance of beauty, respect, and knowledge; I have stockpiled this information and it spills out in my storytelling. The need to capture the things I encounter, to make sense of them and to distil them into stories of curiosity and escape, drives my practice.

Much of the work is in the language of figuration. My paintings' populations are often ephemeral and ineffable; they are of the sea and the air with no clear point of separation. Mythic creatures, animals and small beings glide by, steer boats, float through space, set forth off on seemingly solitary journeys, make contact, take leave or wait patiently – all in a misty 'other' world. They speak of quietude, poignancy, innocence, and the hero's journey. They are images, musings, ideas that dissolve the minute you try and pin them down. They are unspoken truths that have no need to be said out loud, rendered in hypnogogic swirls of colour and space.



2. What led you to becoming an artist?

I have always felt the need to express myself, in written words or drawn marks. Whether writing journals and letters, or in a visual means, I've managed my life and self-soleed through creative expression. It allows me to connect and communicate. I love the exchange of story and paint, where an idea emerges and a painting ends – not just in aesthetic resolve, but in the interpretation of a viewer. How the story touches them and connects to their life and history. I love the intelligence of paint, the discoveries it lets me undertake; it helps me find answers in a complex world.

3. What is a typical day in your studio?

I live in rural NSW. It's stunningly beautiful. We're surrounded by rainforest trees, undulating hills and are bordered by the close sea. I listen to the bird songs as I wake early, drink a mandatory black coffee and curl back into bed, considering the day ahead. A daily walk by the sea before I enter the studio. Water, clouds, light, starting off the day... one of my many psychiatric couches.

My studio is on the veranda of my house, a rambling old homestead, over a hundred years old. I am fairly disciplined. I pretty much paint and stare and look at art books each day. I listen to documentaries, radio, music or audio books while I paint. Impossible to know how much seeps in.

I love my routine, it is dotted by domestic and gardening chores and interruptions from neurotic dogs, demanding chickens, mournful ducks and the occasional tawny frogmouth perched on my easel. My daughter is home for the pandemic, and there are plenty of shared cups of tea and sitting in the sun to gain the winter rays. Dust and cobwebs and bills to pay are on the list but avoided whenever possible.

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4. Is there an artist who has inspired or influenced you in your work?

Yes, I think there are hundreds of artists that have coloured my world, and who have influenced who I am and how I think. My home is full of novels, art books and music, paintings and prints and photos. We don't believe in wall space.

From the existentialists that took over my youth, to the magical realists that have enchanted me, the modernist painters that have guided me and the poets and musicians that have narrated and lyricised my life, my work is saturated in and layered with a multitude of influences.

5. What else do you do with your time?

My time is filled. I am an early riser and, when I'm not in my studio, I fluctuate from being highly productive – chores, organising, cleaning, chutney-making, weeding, filling vases with foliage and flowers – to less so – maybe hiding in a sunny spot with a book. I have a lovely, eclectic group of friends. Many cuppas, tipples and dinners. I also spend time with other artists working on collaborative projects. Collaborations are informative and challenging and have given me some incredibly strong friendships.

I have a new rescue puppy called Shelley, and that will be what I do now; chasing after her antics and searching for stolen shoes.

6. What are you currently working on or doing next?

I'm currently working on a solo show for Francis Keevil Gallery called *A Curious Time*. I've been working on this body of work throughout these COVID months. As it unfolded, it's become about escapism. The works are playful and disappear into dreamscapes, far removed from ventilators, masks and death; the series doesn't try to deny or trivialise, it just offers a moment of reprieve.



Red Balloon Day oil on canvas 75 x 75 cm



A Small Venture oil on canvas 45 x 45 cm