

A softie at heart: Megan Nicolson



Artist Megan Nicolson (with one of her softie creations called a Babbit) returned to Warrnambool three years ago to find the local art scene on an upswing: “I was surrounded by artistic people doing amazing things and it was just wonderful.”

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I[/dropcap]t is one year exactly since we named Warrnambool artist **Megan** (‘Megsie’) **Nicolson** as our very first Quiet Hero and promised to tell you more about her ... boy, is she one hard artist to catch!

Like everybody we chat to for *Bluestone*, Megan was determined to leave the limelight to others, but we are nothing if not persistent, particularly when it comes to someone who has been a quiet but energetic force in reviving the local community arts scene.

It is three years since Megan returned to Warrnambool, where she graduated in Fine Art at Deakin University as a young student straight from her home town of Macarthur, and the reunion between the city and the artist has been one of enriching, mutual benefit.

“When I returned here, I started doing my art again: I was surrounded by artistic people doing amazing things and it was just wonderful,” she says.

It had been a 10-year hiatus from visual art for Megan, not because she didn't love it, but because the momentum of her earlier years had been lost.



Megan's watercolours, reflecting her love of the natural, botanical world. “I get bored easily,” she says of her desire to work in different mediums.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I[/dropcap]n her student days, working under the guidance of artists such as **Bruce Vinall** and **Ron Quick**, Megan developed her talent as an oil painter who loved to work on big portraits and murals. One of her earliest works, a mural with **Gareth Colliton**, is still at

South West Healthcare.

She later completed a teaching degree and worked as a relief art teacher at Hawkesdale High School (her old school) before embarking on a 10-year “tour” with her husband, Lachlan, an ecologist and academic, to various work opportunities in Canberra, Adelaide and Mt Gambier.

While in Canberra, Megan secured a position with the Canberra Museum and Art Gallery which sounds like the dream job for an artist and it was, except for one small problem.

“It was amazing. I got to talk about art all day and to listen to great artists, but I stopped painting,” Megan says.

Why?

“Because after hearing and seeing all of these great artists, I thought ‘gee, I’m no good compared to them’ and I had no confidence.”



A basket full of unique softies, using recycled fabrics from op-shops, the Warrnambool Woollen Mill, Fletcher Jones and local textile artists.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A[/dropcap] crisis of confidence, a lack of a studio space and, eventually, a lack of time from having four children (now aged 3 – 10) kept Megan's visual art firmly in the background, but she maintained the sewing skills that came with her genes.

"I have always been a good sewer and come from a family of sewers, so that became my creative outlet when I was a Mum. I get bored really quickly, so I needed to be doing something," she explains.

Megan began to make – and sell online – unique soft toys, known as "softies" or Babbits that are designed to have their ears sucked, their legs pulled, and to be crushed, squashed, washed, and spun around with joy.

All of the materials are recycled, including the filling, and, if you look closely at those she makes today, you might spot pieces of original screen-printed fabrics by **Ruby Richardson** or **Danielle O'Brien**, or offcuts from Fletcher Jones and the Warrnambool Woollen Mill.

"When people ask me what I do, I say I am a toy maker," Megan laughs.

But, of course, this is now only one layer to her creativity.



A sewer lives here – Megan’s studio in The Artery is full of eclectic examples of her tools of trade.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] M[dropcap]egan returned to Warrnambool in 2011 to find the art scene emerging from somewhat of a slump. The highly successful The F Project art collective was just establishing itself and Megan became its vice-president for the next three years (she only recently stepped down).

Inspired by the creative energy around her, Megan began to “practice” visual art again and now moves between printmaking, oils, watercolours, textiles and her softies.

“As I say, I get bored really easily and so I keep moving on – I want to try it all!”

Her timing has proven to be perfect.

“They say that cultural activity rises in a politically charged environment and we are seeing that with The Artery, Art Four, what’s happening at the Warrnambool Art Gallery and Scope, etc: that culture is coming to the fore and is being

embraced by a footy mad town.

"It's an exciting time".



Megan in her studio at The Artery with members of her other "family" that have long legs and ears designed for sucking and pulling.

[box] You can see more of Megan's work on her [Facebook page](#), [Pint](#) and at The Artery, 218 Timor St, Warrnambool. One of Megan's Babbits will be given away as part of our birthday celebration prizes – stay tuned for details via our [Facebook page](#). [/box]

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