

Art as medicine: Glenn Morgan



Warrnambool artist Glenn Morgan has inspired many students to explore their creativity.

AS one of South-West Victoria's most successful and prolific artists, Glenn Morgan could have easily become pompous and aloof, but instead he remains refreshingly down to earth and committed to his home town.

Glenn's quirky style is instantly recognisable, with many of his paintings and sculptures exuding a whimsical, cartoon-like quality that belies the often serious political or social message within.

Others capture our national obsession with sport – an obsession Glenn shares when it comes to the Geelong Football Club – and many are witty or off-beat, like Glenn himself. But while Glenn's talent has been well documented, *Bluestone* wanted to ask him about the importance of inspiring and supporting emerging artists.



Sport features in many of Morgan's works, including this piece: 'Black Caviar's too bloody good' (2013).

It is a topic for which he is well qualified, as in addition to his own art career, Glenn taught art at both secondary school and tertiary level in Warrnambool and encouraged dozens of students to develop their artistic talents.

As a result, rarely do you meet an artist from South-West Victoria who has not been taught by Glenn, knows him as a friend, or used his story as inspiration.

"I have always considered teaching to be a privilege. Not just because it was a job – and you can't take that for granted – but because it sharpens your brain as an artist," he said.

"When you are working among students, solving problems, it soon makes you realise that you are learning as much from them as they are from you."



'Smokers' (2012) acrylic on board.

Glenn, who was born in Allansford, remembers his own student days at the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education (now South-West TAFE) when the art class would do some of their best thinking and sharing of ideas in the pub across the road.

"It is that communal thing. My best classes, as a teacher, were the ones where we were all jammed in a classroom, sharing ideas, talking about ideas: that's where the good stuff happens."

Watching students being "bitten on the arse by the art bug" was one of his greatest pleasures as a teacher.

"Art is medicine. It gives people something to do with their head. To work things out.

"I remember my father-in-law would make furniture. He would disappear into the shed and be completely lost in it. We all need something like that."



‘Australia Turning Its Back on the Needy’,
(2013) Tin, wood, wire and enamel paint.

One of the critical elements of Glenn’s teaching was to urge students to step out into the world and take a show to Melbourne.

“By getting out there and seeing that your work is just as good, if not better, than anybody else’s...it makes a huge difference. I wanted my students to see Melbourne as just another place.”

Glenn lived in Melbourne for three years, as a post-grad student, but secured his first teaching post back in Warrnambool and has never left. He loves the lifestyle and the friendliness of the community.

The community, in turn, loves him back.

In 2009, one of Glenn’s favourite works – *Banjo’s Funeral*, which captured the funeral of local Aboriginal elder Banjo Clarke – was being sold by a Queensland couple who had bought it several years earlier.

A public fundraiser was held to try and buy the piece for the community and so many people made donations, some of the money

had to be returned. The work is now held by the Warrnambool Art Gallery.



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