

Notes for my talk 13 October 2017

I was asked if I was able to give a talk at the opening of the BMAN (Blue Mountains Artist Network) exhibition. It was a request at short notice. Could I fill a gap? Their speaker wasn't able to do it.

Sitting in front of a computer it seems quite easy.

Then I thought what will I talk about?

And I thought I'd talk about self-doubt.

These are my notes:

All of you here are artists. You came to your creative work various ways.

When I thought about what I could share I thought maybe it's the individual paths we follow. For me:

- Loved to create and play as a child. Wanted to draw and paint – kept me quiet.
- Given time I worked out I wanted to be an artist.
- Art was seen as just a 'nice pastime' and not really practical
- First of the Wyndham scheme in NSW. Worked with another student and a sympathetic teacher to have art included in year 5 & 6. We managed it! Had to catch up 4 years if I could get a scholarship.
- Being an artist is not a real job. Girl. Need a profession. Way forward was to be an art teacher. Ditch the teaching, get the art!
- Taught here and after travelling overland to London stayed there. Lived in Soho and worked in an East End comprehensive for 3 years. No money in London. Or in teaching and Thatcher was coming into power. I made the decision to leave and I managed to get back to Sydney.
- Managed a few fill in jobs and not wanting to get back into the bureaucracy of teaching started my own cleaning business.
- Life takes many turns and I ended up in Wagga after selling my business. It was not the best decision but it set in train the next chapter of my life. You'll notice the lack of painting and art in the story at this stage
- But I answered an ad in the local paper to work in a silk screen studio at Kurrajong. All I will say is I was new to Wagga. So I turned up. And was blind-sided. Kurrajong was an institution for adults with an intellectual disability. The job was to run a silk screen printing studio with the clients. I didn't react well and I wasn't offered the job.
- But the person who did get the job left Wagga. They were obviously desperate. They came back and offered me the job. And I took it.
- I learnt from the clients and hopefully they learnt from me. And I got to be seen as a trouble maker as I saw potential and the institution saw inconvenience in what I was proposing. And it was forcibly suggested I take up the position of Programme Co-ordinator at a new day centre in Narrandera an hour west of Wagga. With a colleague from Wagga we started some innovative programs. I also did further study in the field of adult vocational education. Stayed 3 years then left and moved to Sydney.
- I stayed in disability as an area for another 15 years. Not much art in that. But I dragged my partner to many art exhibitions and when I met her I said 'I'm an artist, I just happen to be ...' at the moment. Art was always there but not my main focus.

- Art wasn't my full focus until I did a deal with my partner Anny about 20 years ago. The deal was - I will stay in my managers role in DoCS and when your business is up and running I will then go part time and paint. And gradually that happened. In fact I ended up doing the admin for the business. My right brain approach is not a good fit with accountancy. My Dad thought that it quite a novel – told me at least you are using both sides of your brain. Could stave off alzheimers disease!
- BUT I was able to paint
- And after moving to the upper mountains I found others who painted. Others who talked about art and supported each other. Though always at the back of my head I sometimes think if I had painted from leaving College? And the feeling that I need to make up for time lost.
- BUT I do remember what a lecturer when I was about to leave college said. Some people reflect what around them. And some need to live life and paint from that lived experience. I asked 'which was I?' And he said go away and live life. I did. I just took a bit of time to get to it.
- All of my experiences have informed who I am and what I paint and how I paint. And I think I am looking at people who also have a life journey to draw on. And have their own journey to tell. And I think that's important. Because art and the making of it is individual. We express on an individual basis. One of the best things about it.
- My advice? It's to follow your own journey. Seek improvement and technique as you go.
- And sometimes I doubt. My own ability.
- I've left it all too late to achieve. What am I doing? I sit down and talk to myself. I might take a walk. Go to a favourite lookout. Or just walk into the studio and put the brush in some paint and make a mark. Any mark. Start. Anything.
- And it's at these times that I don't want to conform to what's necessarily expected. It's when I want to push the barriers. It's a bit of an 'up yours' I think. To, in my head, what the 'art world' expects. And I realise this is when the possibilities and creative break throughs occur.

Ruth le Cheminant
13 October 2017