

Helene Oberman's story shows a person born to be an artist. She was instinctively drawn to create from a very early age.

When and how did you get started working in your art practice?

I have strong childhood recollections that my parents' garage was a source of inspiration and passion for drawing, painting and other creative pursuits. My father worked there on weekends designing and building shelves and furniture for our house. He worked in clothing manufacturing and had studied design and pattern making. I often looked at his designs and drawings for his projects and learnt about tools and materials used in the process. I put to good use the offcuts of wood from his home projects. I used small pieces of masonite to draw and paint on, with whatever materials I had at the time, chalk, pastel and eventually paint. As a youngster I enjoyed reading comics and I saved to purchase them, particularly ones containing Disney characters. I then created my own comics and movies, using a paper roll fitted into a shoe box with a cut out for the paper to scroll so I could share my 'movies' with my family.



I viewed my bedroom walls which were painted white as a blank canvas and with my parents' permission painted a very thick black arrow along the walls and ceiling, possibly inspired by 'Pop Art'. This was done during my early High School years. I believe they thought this could be painted over when they would eventually sell our home.



Painting done about age 12

My parents were very supportive of my artistic pursuits and enrolled me in an oil painting class when I was 12 or thereabouts and I recall the students were much older than me. I have a small painting from this time of an outback scene with sheep and gum trees. I spent considerable time on this painting and on completion told my parents that the issue for me was copying a magazine picture provided by the teacher. I didn't see the point as I knew nothing about the image. Working directly from nature was to prove a lifelong approach. So, I did not continue these lessons and continued developing my art at home and at school.

I went on to Caulfield Institute of Technology (now Monash Uni, Caulfield campus) to pursue a qualification in Fine art, Art and Design. Those years were particularly memorable for the opportunities afforded to me including the wisdom and expertise of my lecturers who were well known artists, including: Christopher Pyett, Andrew McLean, John Neeson, Gareth Sansom, Max Thompson, Craig Gough and Robin Angwin. I pursued, printmaking, painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics and Art History, which were integral to developing my knowledge and technical skills in those fields. A painting trip to the Flinders Ranges with my group and lecturers was a highlight! We were also able to submit our work into art exhibitions and competitions at the university, and I was awarded several prizes including the Lucato Peace Prize and The Arches Rives awards.

I secured my first studio an old weatherboard cottage in Murrumbidgee with a fireplace for heating where I burnt old fence pailings I found in the sideway. The image of 'artist in a garret' comes to mind. I painted and taught evening classes there.



I travelled interstate with opportunities to lecture and tutor in painting, drawing photography and Art History at TAFE and Council of Adult Education courses. I also wrote for local newspapers as an art critic. In the following years I continued to exhibit my work which focused on landscape, en plein air painting. I also completed further degrees in education, art education and taught art at all levels for forty years and took study tours overseas for several years.



Mallard Contemplating,
Hand coloured linocut



Botanic Gardens, Linocut

For the last six years I have pursued my art full time in painting and printmaking which had its challenges for me due to Covid travel restrictions. Now these restrictions have been lifted I can continue my love of painting outdoors. In 2024 I had my third solo show of paintings and printmaking at Firestation Print Studio which was based on my trips to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne when we were allowed to travel up to a limited number of kilometres.



I continue to participate in groups' shows, joining Malvern Artists' Society, Victorian Artists' Society and Firestation Print Studio. These have offered further opportunities to meet and exhibit with other artists and join communities of artists.

What inspires your work: people, places, nature, emotions, or ideas?

I enjoy being immersed in landscape, near the sea, mountains or forests. The weather, the light, scent of the leaves, trees, wind, sea are all elements I incorporate in my work. I seek to share stories in each of my works; sunlight coming through a darkened forest area, the wind as seen across the bay, a pathway and particularly the subtleties of colour.

**What is your favourite tool and why?**

For more than forty years I have had a red case not unlike ones used by young school children before the introduction of material bags and backpacks. This case contains my paints brushes, mediums, canvas boards. It is surprising how much can be fitted into this small case that travels in the car everywhere with me. I also take a very lightweight metal compact easel and a lightweight canvas compact chair. Over the years I have shed a lot of the equipment, such as easels and larger canvases so travelling now is easier and unencumbered when setting up and packing up. The red case has a lot of memories and more to make.

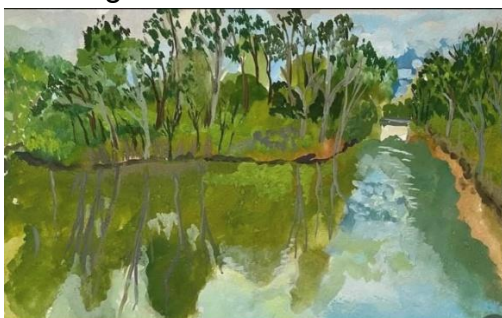
**If you could collaborate with any artists, past or present, who would it be and why?**

I was inspired from my art school years and still inspired by the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements, and the significance of the Australian Impressionist artists (also known as the Heidelberg School). I have painted in several areas which were historically the places where these artists frequented including Warrandyte and along Port Phillip Bay, Brighton and Sandringham.

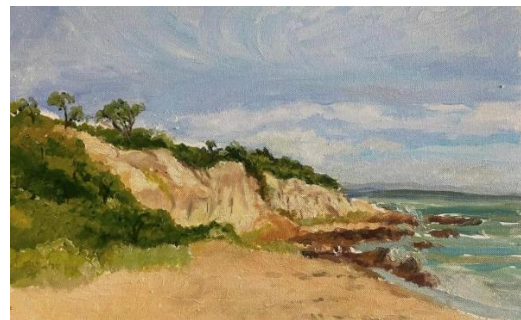


Botanic Gardens

There are several women artists of the time I would have liked to collaborate with including: Margaret Preston, Nora Heysen, Clara Southern, Grace Cossington Smith and Clarice Beckett. They made a significant contribution to Australian modern art movement with their determination, passion, unique and well-known styles in painting and printmaking.



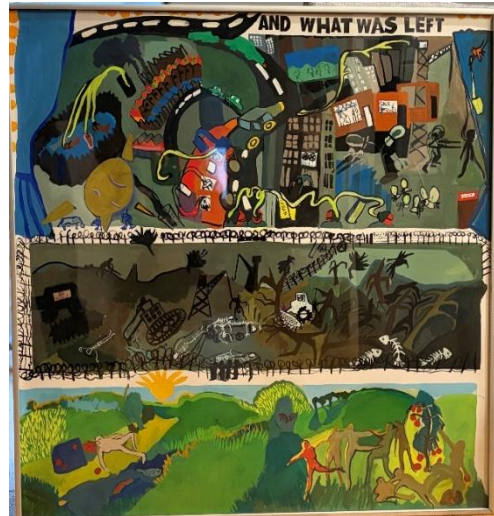
View to Herring Island, Gouache



Half Moon Bay, Oil

Do you have a piece with an interesting story behind its creation, for example the implements you used in its creation?

Whilst at Art School I entered a painting competition for the Lucato Peace Prize. The ethos of the prize was promoting peace. Climate change was my focus, and I questioned then how we could ensure a cleaner and safer world for the future. This was a triptych which in retrospect has elements of animated characters perhaps from my years of devouring comics. It was entitled 'Man versus Machines'. We are still grappling with these issues today. I was awarded a prize for this work.



Man versus Machine

What is the work you wished you'd never sold?

I don't have any regrets, I am always happy when a work is sold, admired my another.

Thank you **Helene**.

If you would like to see more of **Helene's** work go to Instagram
@heleneobermanart