

Featured Member

Harold Pinto's paintings and award-winning woodwork have become a familiar sight at our MAS members' exhibitions. His creative journey and insights make for interesting reading.

My Artistic journey: From childhood caricatures to canvas



I don't think there was ever a time in my life when I wasn't drawing or looking at the world through an artist's eyes. My love of art began during my school days in Goa and Bombay, India. In those days, art materials, books and references were not easy to find, but that didn't stop me from creating.

I became interested in caricatures and spent hours drawing neighbours and friends. Some loved seeing themselves in my drawings, others were not amused! Those early caricatures were the beginning of my journey as an artist.

At that time in India, working as an artist, or having anything to do with the arts, was not considered a worthwhile profession. There was tremendous pressure on students to pursue careers in engineering or medicine, so I began studying for a degree in Chemical Engineering. I did reasonably well during my three years of study, but I didn't enjoy the course. I was more than happy to leave it behind when my family was given the go-ahead to migrate to Australia.

Arriving in Australia felt as though a whole new world of art had suddenly opened. Local galleries, libraries and exhibitions gave me access to inspiration that I had only dreamed of before. I began exploring different mediums, including oils, acrylics, and pen and ink.

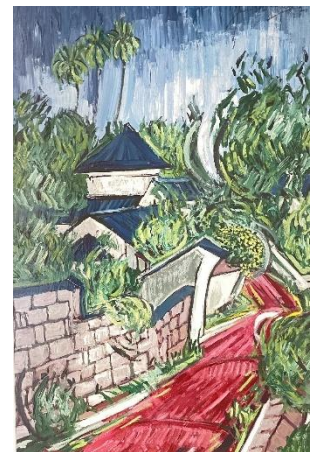
Soon after arriving a friend told me that the Australian Border Force—then known as Her Majesty's Customs—was recruiting staff. I applied, was accepted, and initially expected to work there for a year or two before finding employment in some artistic field. However, I soon discovered that I enjoyed the work, the people, and the camaraderie. One or two years turned into a fulfilling career, and I remained there for 35 years.

My day job didn't call for much creativity, so in my spare time I would retreat to my studio which became my little sanctuary.

Then, in 2003, I took early retirement. At last, I had the freedom to devote myself much more fully to the creative life I had always wanted.

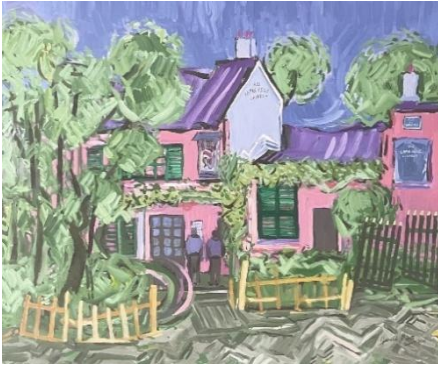


Feeding Time. Goa



Street in Bastora

Thinking Outside the Square



Au Lapin Agile, Montmartre

Most of my landscapes are inspired by my childhood memories and from the photographs I took during my travels to places that left a lasting impression on me. A photograph brings back not only a beautiful view, but also the feeling of being there, which is what I try to capture in my paintings.

Painting isn't my only creative passion. I have also always had a great desire to work with wood.

After retiring, I bought a lathe and began experimenting with woodturning. Before long, I was making bowls and platters, each one revealing the natural beauty and character of the timber. I began selling my work at the Arts Centre Sunday Market in the city. There's something special about knowing that a small wooden object you created with your own hands has found a place in someone's home, perhaps thousands of kilometres away.



Running a market stall was quite an experience. Meeting people, hearing their reactions and watching them discover my work gave me plenty of encouragement—and it also challenged me to think a little differently.

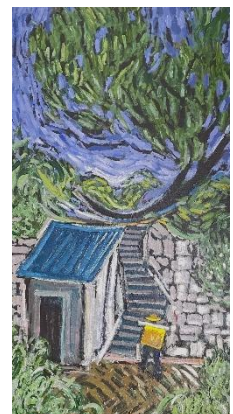


I started experimenting with local materials and unusual combinations. Gum nuts and twigs found their way into my creations, while gum leaves and blossoms were preserved and embedded in resin. It became a wonderful way of combining my love of art, woodworking and the Australian landscape.

The Masters Who Inspire Me

When it comes to the artists who have inspired me most, my heart belongs to two very different movements: the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the Post-Impressionists, especially Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. My admiration for these artists has taken me on some memorable journeys.

In 1980, I travelled to England with a very specific mission. I wanted to see the Pre-Raphaelite collection at the Tate and, just as importantly, to visit Rossetti's grave in Birchington. There was something deeply meaningful about standing in the places connected to an artist whose work had touched me so profoundly.



*Vincent in Dr
Gachet's Backyard*

Years later, in 2012, I joined a group of students in Paris for an Impressionist art tour. That trip opened another door for me. I fell deeply in love with France and have returned several times since, travelling through the landscapes that inspired some of my favourite artists.

I have visited Arles, where Van Gogh famously hoped to work alongside Gauguin at the Yellow House. I have spent time in Saint-Rémy, reflecting on the asylum where Van Gogh lived for a year. And I have visited Auvers-sur-Oise, where he spent the final days of his life.

Standing in those places is a very different experience from simply seeing a painting in a gallery. Suddenly, the landscapes, colours and stories become real. You begin to imagine the artist standing there, looking at the very same fields, houses and skies.

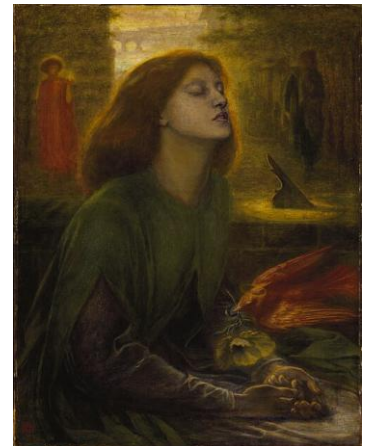
Two Paintings That Hold a Special Place in My Heart

Of all the artworks I have encountered over the years, two masterpieces remain especially close to my heart.

The first is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, on right.

This painting is a deeply symbolic tribute by Rossetti to his wife Lizzie Siddal, whose tragic death left him filled with grief and remorse.

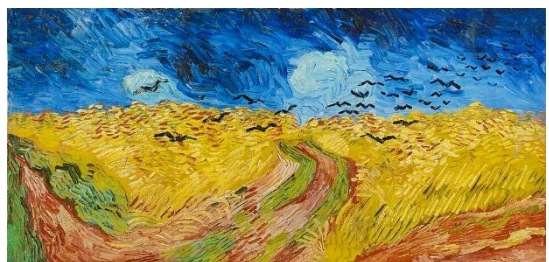
The ground had already been well prepared for the theme of this painting, in Rossetti's long-standing identification of himself with the 13th century Italian poet Dante, and his identification of Lizzie with Beatrice, the object of Dante's idealised love.



At first glance, the painting appears to depict Dante's beloved Beatrice, but for Rossetti it carried a much more personal meaning. It is a tombstone to his wife, a portrait of Lizzie as Beatrice. Rossetti described her as being “rapt from earth to heaven”. In the background, Dante and the figure of Love look at each other. Into Lizzie's hands, a red bird drops a poppy—a beautiful but haunting symbol associated with passion, sleep and the opium that ultimately contributed to Lizzie's death.

There is so much emotion hidden within the symbolism that I find myself discovering something new whenever I look at it.

The second painting is Vincent van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Crows*, on right. This painting affects me in a completely different way. Painted only days before Van Gogh's death in Auvers-sur-Oise, it is filled with energy, movement and a sense of unease.



The golden wheatfields stretch beneath a dark, turbulent sky, while the crows sweep across the scene. The paths lead in different directions, yet to nowhere at all. The rapid bold brushstrokes and dramatic colours make the painting feel almost alive with emotion.

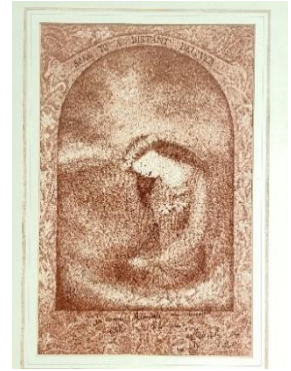
What makes it particularly special to me is that I have made several visits to the spot where it was painted. It is only a short walk from the inn where Van Gogh stayed and from the cemetery where he was eventually laid to rest.

Standing there and looking across that same landscape is something I will never forget. It creates a connection between the painting, the artist and my own journey that goes far beyond simply admiring a work of art in a gallery.

My Most Precious Artwork

And finally, there is one artwork of mine that is more precious to me than anything else—and it will never be for sale. It is a pen and ink drawing I created for my fiancé, who is now my wife.

At the time, we were living on opposite sides of the world. We spent our days waiting, hoping and counting down the time until her visa was approved and she could finally migrate to Australia. During that period of separation, I created the drawing for her and it became a little piece of our story.



That is perhaps what art has always meant to me. Whether I am painting a landscape, turning a piece of timber, or creating something for someone I love, the artwork carries a memory and becomes more than the finished object. In many ways, my life as an artist has simply been a collection of those memories.