

for

sake



SUSAN SCHMIDT

words angela bueti ■ photography michelle hill

IF A PICTURE PAINTS A THOUSAND WORDS, THEN LOCAL ARTIST SUSAN SCHMIDT HAS CLOCKED UP THE EQUIVALENT OF QUITE A FEW NOVELS OVER HER 16-YEAR PAINTING CAREER. ANGELA BUETI DISCOVERS WHY SUSAN'S REFRESHINGLY DIRECT AND BOLD APPROACH TO ART MAKES IT SO EASY TO APPRECIATE.

I love art I can understand. Put me in front of an abstract painting and I wonder what it is and what's the point, while grumbling that a kid could do better.

When I'm confronted by a huge painting of a Pandanus tree overhanging crystal-clear water in Susan Schmidt's art studio in Noosa Heads, I'm instantly relieved and entranced. I get it. And I like it. Susan confides to me that it's the most popular painting, with many people requesting it as a daily reminder of why the Sunny Coast is such a magical part of the world.

Susan's approach to her art and art in general is refreshingly down-to-earth. There's no art snobbery lingering in this studio, which is evident with Susan's response to my question about what I should look for when buying a piece of art. "You should buy art because you love it, not just because it appreciates," she says without hesitation.

She informs me that to the untrained eye it's often hard to tell good art from bad, but the quality of the brushwork, the artist's drawing skills, the colours used and how the canvas is presented are all things to consider when you do find that must-have painting.

As we walk around Susan's studio and home, I begin to comprehend the variety of subjects that captivate this artist; from harsh, eye-catching Brisbane street scapes, to the more serene boats sitting in clear blue water, to the amazingly vibrant and precise bull rushes, and to the wonderfully life-like and sympathetic depictions of Aboriginal and Islander people.

Thankfully for me, there's not an abstract, mind-boggling, obscure stroke anywhere in these easily appreciated works.

This self-taught artist describes her work as realistic, representational, contemporary, bold and bright. "I love colour. I love to push the boundaries with colour while still making it look realistic." Susan certainly has that down-pat as I ponder a huge painting of an Aboriginal girl on a backdrop of sparkling water depicted by a striking dark colour, layered with thousands of tiny white dots. The landscape is as enthralling as the main subject.

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Susan is in a position that many would-be artists aspire to be - she is able to make a living from her artwork - although she laments that keeping up with the demand for her work leaves little time to experiment.

"My pipe dream is to be able to lock myself away in an attic and just paint whatever I want, just like the wonderful artist Margaret Olley." At this point Susan retrieves a beautiful book and shows me a page with a very elderly Margaret Olley (who paints still life) sitting in her house-come-studio among what must be hundreds of flower arrangements, bowls of fruit, paints, easels, canvasses, cups and saucers and teapots. According to Susan, people turn up and deliver things for her to paint and she just spends her days blissfully painting.

As Susan ponders her personal nirvana, her practical, sensible approach takes over again and she adds, "I just want to paint until I die and keep selling my art so I can keep working."

I'm sure that will be the reality for this talented Coast artist.



1. TRANQUIL SHALLOWS
2. SUSAN AND 'GUS'
3. PANDANUS SPLASH
4. TOOLS OF THE TRADE
5. WASHING UP

at the easel ...

The person I most admire is ...

Vincent van Gogh. I admire his genius, passion and belief in himself as an artist.

What keeps me awake at night is ...

my partner's snoring.

I would love to paint ...

with the inhibitions of a child.

The last time I cried was ...

watching *PS I Love You*. I cried through the whole movie.

My mother and father always told me ...

many things, but my daughter Amber reminded me of something my mother also said to her once; "It's not the dress on the girl, it's the girl in the dress."

If only I could ...

absolutely, totally relax like Gus (our Staffy).

The hardest thing I've ever done was ...

I'm still doing it - being a parent, but it can also be the most rewarding.

My favourite work of art is ...

whatever artwork I am loving at the time.

At school I ...

was always in trouble for drawing in class. My pencils and pens would be taken away and once I even had to stand through a whole lesson as punishment.

The best invention is ...

paint, of course.

If I wasn't an artist I would be ...

I don't know. I've never wanted to be anything else. ■

www.susanschmidtart.com

