

# BRONWYN WOODLEY GRAHAM

loving the light  
and home

WORDS: JON WOLFE IMAGES: SHOT BY JAKE



Bronwyn Woodley Graham is an artist based in the New England – Tamworth – who has earned an enviable reputation for her stunning landscapes, portraits and abstract works.

In 2010 Bronwyn had well attended and successful exhibitions in Tamworth, Brisbane and Italy and is currently working on pieces for three exhibitions in 2011.

Bronwyn found her calling to art relatively late in life, having previously been a successful graphic designer and musician.

"I think I was always interested in art but I guess I decided that it was [what I wanted to do] about ten years ago when I became very sick and because I wasn't able to go back to work it was an opportunity to start painting, which I did," Bronwyn said.

"I studied for four years at the Charlie Shead Studio School in Sydney."

Bronwyn says there were definitely things that she was able to take from her time as a graphic artist into her painting regimen.

"There are design elements and composition elements that come into play. However graphic art tends to be more 'tight', linear I suppose. With the type of work I do it was a challenge to let that go and be more free in my expression of the work. But it was certainly a good grounding to have.

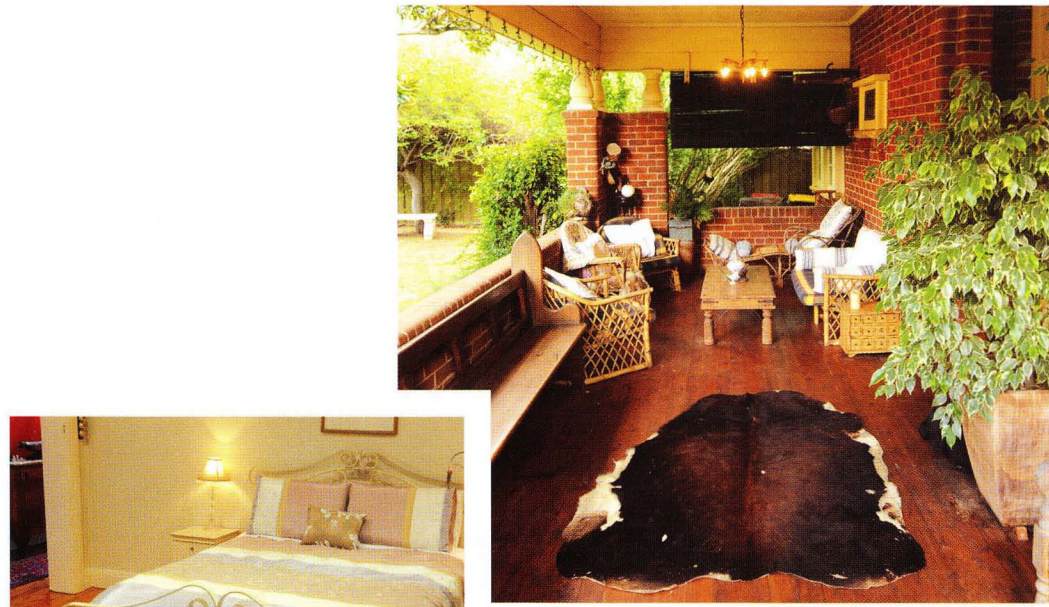
"I always loved portraits and when I started I did a lot of still life and portraits. I never thought that I'd ever venture into landscapes because I love people and I love to capture that essence of a person on canvas, so I worked really hard on portraits for quite a while."

As with most artists Bronwyn is fascinated by light and how it plays on her subjects.

"It's the light that I really love, because light is the thing that enables us to see," she said.

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"With landscapes the light shines on the landscape but there's parts where it comes from within the landscape as well. Light emanates from a subject and falls on it and creates different colours and movement and I want to capture all of that in my work."

Bronwyn's first gallery exhibition, in Balmain in 2004, was very successful, with all the works selling.

She said that it felt fantastic when she first saw her paintings on display in that exhibition.

"It had been a dream for a long time and it was also fantastic for me because it was the start of a brand new career," she said.

"I was actually an artist and I was selling work and it was a great feeling!"

And that first cheque?

"I photocopied it and hung it on the wall for a couple of years," she laughed.

Eventually Bronwyn moved back to her hometown of Tamworth and set up a studio, which like most artists' studios is a little messy – a contrast to her beautiful home.

"It's really nice to be able to go to the studio and have it separate to the house and then come home to a clean, spacious area because in the studio it gets frantic," she said.

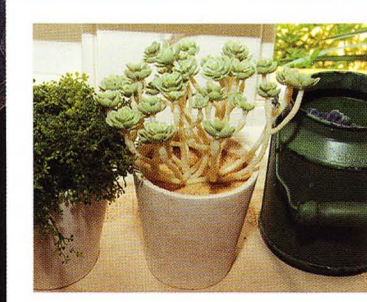
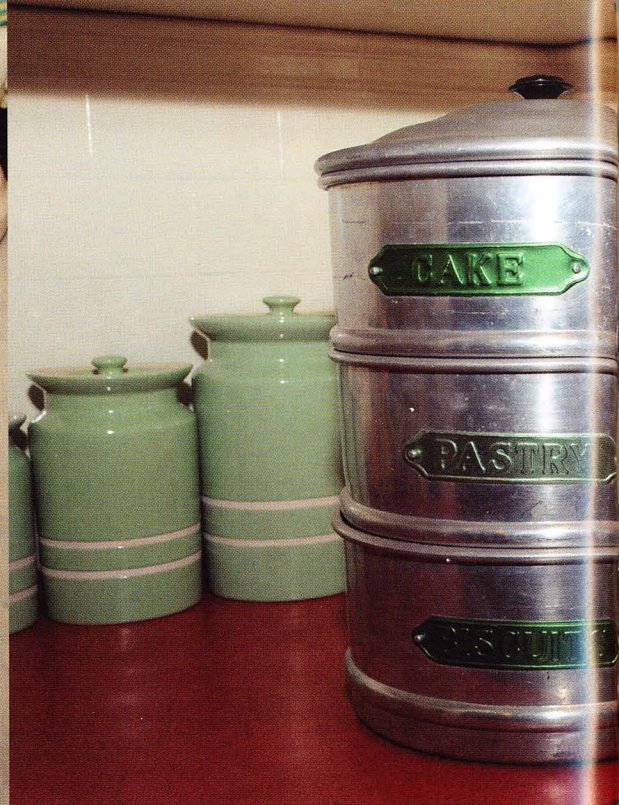
"When you're working on a piece that's all you're thinking about, so if you've finished with a brush or a tube of paint, you leave it wherever it is."

Her circa 1932 home is on "right side" of Tamworth and once belonged to Guy Kable, a Tamworth Town Clerk, and when Bronwyn and her husband Kel bought the house four years ago it was ready to be "worked on".



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"We had a great canvass to work from," she said.

"The patterned ceiling, the little lead-light touches were there but basically it was untouched when we got it. When I first saw it, it was like walking into the set of 'The Sullivans' (TV show). Everything was original, it hadn't been touched, and it was amazing.

"It was fantastic to see it like that but it also needed a lot of work. The house is so solid that what we did was really cosmetic work. So I tried to retain a lot of the original feeling of the house, particularly with the kitchen and the bathroom and they are the areas that tend to deteriorate first. So we tended to take them back to how they were – even the red laminate in the kitchen and the tiles in the bathroom."

As you walk around the house you can easily see that an artist had a hand in how it looks and feels now.

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As could probably be expected there is a lot of artwork hanging in Bronwyn's house – but maybe not as much of her own work as one might expect.

"I love art – and I love other people's art too," she said. "I have a few of my pieces here but primarily I love to be surrounded by things that inspire me.

"I've got a bit of an eclectic mix of art here – from Aboriginal through to Norman Lindsay, to typical 'Old Master' type stuff, old prints, Japanese woodblocks, Chinese paintings and also quite a few works by my artist friends. Artists that I love and that's beautiful for me because I not only like the work but it reminds me of them and who did it, so it's quite personal."

Bronwyn said that the house is somewhere to get away from her work, but sometimes the two tend to merge and she will write ideas down while at home. Even

her dreams tend to sometimes be about her work as an artist.

"I've solved problems in my dreams," she said.

"Say I've got an issue with a painting that I'm trying to create, sometimes a technical issue, trying to get the paints to glow or do what I want them to do and I'll be struggling with that and I'll dream a solution and go into the studio the next day and that's it!"

Bronwyn has three exhibitions booked for this year including one in Melbourne in May, one in Brisbane and one at Tamworth's Weswal Gallery later this year.

"That'll keep me busy!" she said

Whenever you visit Bronwyn there is always another constant companion by her side - her white miniature poodle Remmy (Rembrandt).

"He loves all my work. He doesn't really care as long as he is around 'Mommy'. He comes to the studio every day and he's such a good boy and he sleeps under the easel."