
A misty forest scene with tall trees and a person in a red coat walking away on a path.

What the heart longs for

FROM THIS PLACE IS A NEW COFFEE-TABLE
BOOK THAT SHOWS OFF A DIVERSE RANGE OF
UPPER YARRA ARTISTS.

WORDS Mara Pattison-Sowden PHOTOGRAPHS Angela Rivas

A woman with her eyes closed and hands raised in a graceful pose, surrounded by large, colorful, stylized flower-like props. The background is a dense green forest.

Two Upper Yarra artists have bucked the trend of creating as a solo pursuit, to collaborate on a project that serves as an important historical document of the prolific artistic talents of the region. Photographer Angela Rivas and writer Lindy Schneider began working on the project two years ago, culminating with the production of a 128-page, full colour book and an accompanying photographic exhibition, to be launched on September 1. Their aim was to explore the lives of working artists and to inspire others with these stories. They found they were already living the process of what many of these artists prescribe – doing something for the love of doing it, and thus enabling it to sustain you.

"This is finally the project I've waited for my whole life," says Lindy. "The writing is completely of my own creation and what I want to put out there expresses my ideals and the way I want to write. There's a lyrical quality that I love to write with and a freedom that comes from working on your own project."

A Warburton local for 16 years, Lindy met Angela five years ago when the new-to-town photographer captured the bellydancing troupe that Lindy was performing with at a local festival. A friendship soon flourished, and when the idea for a book was brought up it was a natural collaboration. It was meant to be, they believe, as Lindy had come up with an idea two years earlier, to create a coffee table book of inspiring stories. She planted the idea into her notebook, setting it aside 'for later'.

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- LINDY SCHNEIDER

OPENER Kate Baker's essence photo. OPPOSITE PAGE Jena Bedson's essence photo - a study painted in clay in her beautiful garden. THIS PAGE TOP A pen and ink drawing by Lucy Pierce. BELOW Jemimah Alli Reidy in her essence shoot at home by the window.

Angela happened to be that 'later', and when she had her own lightbulb moment for a book, she knew the writer had to be Lindy. "She was the only one that popped into my mind," she says. "We had worked together before, and we worked so well. I was so excited I was jumping around the room before I even called her."

"Would we have even started, or got as far as we have, without each other?" Lindy questions. "Probably not. It was a way bigger exercise than we originally envisaged."

Lindy says she was really curious about why so many artists live in the Upper Yarra. "We were curious about 'why Warburton?' and what it means to be here in town," she says. "There were very strong themes of community coming through, and of people obviously being attracted to the natural beauty. Curiously though, not many of the artists paint their surrounds in a direct 'landscape' kind of way, but they're hugely influenced by what they're amongst every day. I can only term this as unquestionable beauty, and that influences the kind of work they do."

When Yarra Ranges Council supported the project with a grant, it gave a strong legitimacy to what they were doing, and the women had more than 40 expressions of interest. They also had funding support from the Warburton and Yarra Junction Community Bank branches, and 146 members of the community who pledged funds through a Pozible campaign, which supported the printing of the books, and mounting of artworks for the exhibitions.



While they chose to focus on 14 women in the Upper Yarra, they're hopeful that if the first book is successful it could lead to a series – perhaps on male artists or other areas in the region.

Angela says the book is like a piece of art, open to the interpretation of each reader. There are a variety of artists, different circumstances in life, story, and age. There's a broad commonality throughout but also a lot of differences. "It should be encouraging for anyone who thinks life as an artist needs to look a particular way, but actually these stories show it can look like anything," she says.

The plan was to interview each artist and take photographs of them both during the interview and while working in their studios, but the pair felt something was missing. This is where the idea for an 'essence shoot' was born. "I got excited because at first it was fantasy and it didn't feel quite right, and it turned out to be essence, which was an extension of their creativity". Each artist curated their own photoshoot of how they wanted to be seen and either consciously, or sub-consciously, revealed something of their inner world.

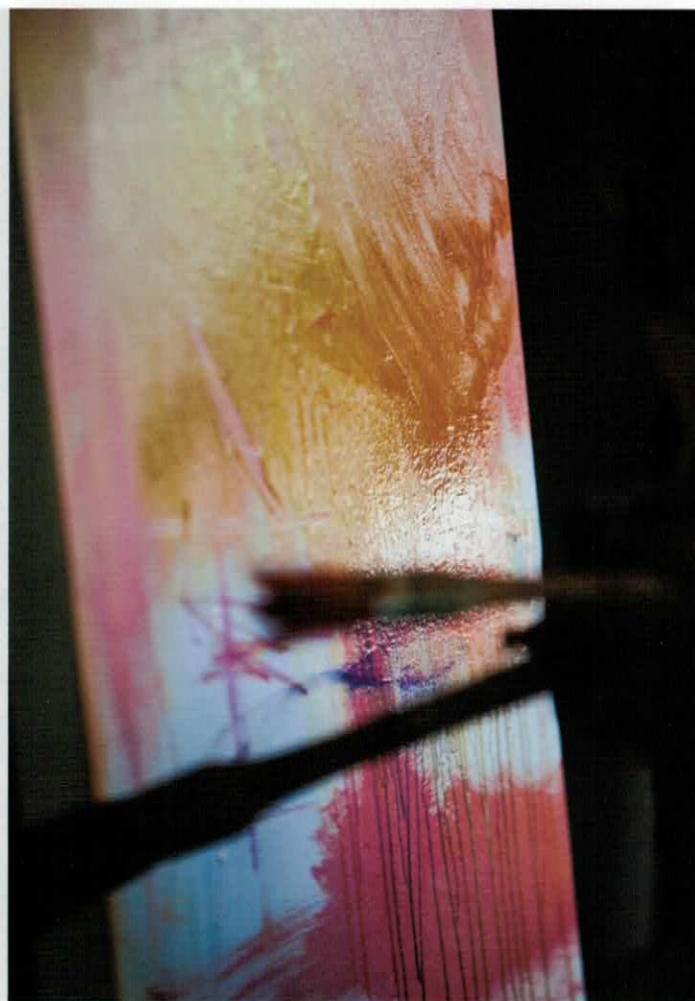
"It's been really liberating for some of them because we decided it's not dependent on how you look, but what comes through you," says Angela, who helped the artist curate their shoots. "On the day sometimes it was completely different to what we had planned but the essence came through more in the moment."

Angela completed more than 60 photoshoots, and both women have spent around 400 hours each to write, photograph, edit and compile the stories into the beautiful book it has become.

A strong impulse for Angela was to photograph people who do what they love and have sustained themselves through it. "This society raises you to think you have to do what makes you money," she says. "What actually works better, is if you do something you love and that ends up sustaining you. It's a journey, and often artists have to do other work in order to sustain their art in the beginning."

Lindy says it's questioning what the heart longs for, which can be a real challenge for many artists to embrace – but these artists have done that. Jena Bedson had a great example of this need, designing a unique spoon that people wanted to buy, and making and selling thousands of them in the process. Lindy says her impression is that many artists design a piece and never want to repeat it, "but Jena making that spoon sustained her art so she could do other things. 'Live as though all you do is artistic practice' – this was a lesson from the artists' stories".

This lesson also helped shape the book and its title, as Angela and Lindy watched their artists talk about things 'coming from here' and touching their hearts. "The artists talk like this," says Lindy, holding her hands on her heart, "which came through quite early. That really helped shape the project." *From This Place* reflects both the artists' inner worlds



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP Artwork in progress by Jenny Davis. BELOW Jena Bedson at the wheel. THIS PAGE TOP Adrienne Kneebone collecting reeds for her essence photo. MIDDLE Jena Bedson's work of birds on a roof. BELOW Gillian Farrow's hands at her heart.



and the sense of place these Upper Yarra women share, living beside the river, amongst nature.

Lindy says the empowering nature of the book can help women, in particular, who often put themselves last. "An essential nature of women is to be artistic, but we often put that aside because there are children to feed, and we do this and we do that, and we're last in the process," she says. "This is kind of a story about not being last to yourself."

Angela adds that most of these women have had to be mothers while following their creative paths, "and you can't take off for three hours and leave the kids inside the house. You have to do it while they are there".

Lindy agrees, that the blending of life and art was there for all of the



FRONT ROW Angela Rivas, Jeminah Alli Reidy, Marlee Nebauer, Sioux Dollman, Jena Bedson, Lindy Schneider, and Belinda Rogers. BACK ROW Adrienne Kneebone, Jenny Davis, Jo Rothwell, Kate Baker, Maya Ward, Indigo Perry, Shlomit Moria and Lucy Pierce. Not pictured, Gillian Farrow.



"We had the same vision and I think that's what drove it," says Lindy. "We're driven by wanting these people to do well. Because we all do well when we hold one another up and support one another."

For more information on the Yarra Valley and Ranges Country Life, visit www.yarra-ranges.com.au or call 1800 678 888.



THIS PAGE Shlomit Moria shows off her chainsaw sculpting. OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Lucy Pierce on her balcony with her dog, stones and a paint tube at Belinda Rogers studio, Lindy Schneider and Angela Rivas by the Yarra River.

artists. "We'd go into a person's home and they'd be set up at the kitchen table. The whole home was like a studio. There wasn't a delineation – I go here or I'm this person there. That was a lesson for me, because personally, I have a studio where I can go and write, and yet I sit on my bed or at the kitchen table most of the time and not in my studio."

Overall, says Lindy, the project has been nourishing in the way it has organically grown, with the various elements falling into place, and with the two women working well together, "It's been a lot of work behind the scenes, but we've had a 'build it and they will come' attitude," says Angela. "The main thing is that it's been fun."

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From This Place will be launched at 6pm at the Upper Yarra Arts Centre in Warburton on September 1, for five weeks. Books are available for purchase from www.fromthisplace.net

