

The twists and turns of textiles: Ruby Richardson



Textile artist Ruby Richardson at home in her Warrnambool studio which is a calm place full of fabric and creativity.

[dropcap style="color: #8f9f59;"] T [/dropcap>extile artist Ruby Richardson has had a life full of twists and turns, but joining a circus was perhaps the least expected.

It was while Ruby, from Warrnambool, was studying costume design at Swinburne University in the late 1990s that she secured a work placement with [The Women's Circus](#), based in Footscray, and not only created some of their wonderful outfits, but ended up being part of the show.

"I learnt to do static trapeze, which is where you do various swings around the trapeze but don't leap from it, and acrobalance," she explains.

"I was so strong back then!"



Members of the Women's Circus demonstrate the art of acrobalance as part of their show, Out of the Box, using a combination of strength, poise and balance.

Image: [Women's Circus](#).

[dropcap style="color: #8f9f59;"] A[/dropcap] circus was the perfect – if unpaid – world for Ruby, who was entranced by “the sheer visual spectacle” of costume design and human movement that allowed for so much more experimentation than mainstream fashion.

“One of my lecturers at the time used to ban the ‘f’ word and say, ‘we make outfits for characters – not for the masses!’”, Ruby recalls with a laugh.

During her course, Ruby learnt the tricks of the costume trade – from millinery to creating “fat suits” – and also tried her hand at screen-printing for the first time.

Despite her love for the field, however, the opportunities for paid work were (and remain) limited, so Ruby also became a

personal care worker for the City of Yarra, before deciding to return to south-west Victoria in 2002.

It was here that all the threads of her past and present life began to combine.



Screenprinting is one of many of Ruby's skills and she now teaches others at TAFE and occasionally at The Artery, Warrnambool.

[dropcap style="color: #8f9f59;"] A [/dropcap] child growing up in Woolsthorpe, Ruby had always been a "good drawer" at school but hated sewing classes, until she decided to try her hand at sewing her own clothes at home.

Her father, a shearer, had a sewing machine in the house to make the calico bags he used to store fresh meat: it was not unusual for old-time farmers to know how to use a needle and thread.

"I bumped him off the machine and yeah, there was a fair bit of swearing about that," Ruby laughs.

Ruby began to make and wear her own clothes; shirts without

collars, skirts without hems, a kind of rustic chic .

“It was very rough, but also quite fashionable at the time, so I could get away with it,” she says.

Ruby went on to study art and design at TAFE, before completing a Bachelor of Fine Art at Deakin University, during which refined her drawing and design skills and began to explore printmaking.

After returning from Melbourne, Ruby re-enrolled at TAFE to study screenprinting under the guidance of **Donna Dixon** and, a year later, began her own label, Pattern & Print, that combined her printing and sewing skills.

“I decided to start making things from what I was printing, little bags, cushion covers, that sort of thing,” she explains.



The raw and the complete: some of Ruby's collection of fabrics, including many sourced in Japan, a printmaking cut-out and a completed, hand-stitched

felt bag.

[dropcap style="color: #8f9f59;"] A [/dropcap] decade on and Pattern & Print is well known for its bold, geometric designs and colours that are inspired by Ruby's deep love of the natural world.

"I can spend hours just looking at a plant, examining it and looking at its structures and colours," she says.

"If you look closely, you can see how all the tiny pieces of a plant form into one piece and this is repeated over and over: I love that."

Retro images from the 1950s are another common theme and, again, Ruby uses bold, monochromatic colours and repetition to create her own unique "look".

These days Ruby has also moved from being the pupil to the teacher, and, three years ago, replaced Donna Dixon as the screenprinting lecturer at TAFE. She also continues to work in personal care, at Lyndoch, where she is known by her first name of Alison (Ruby is one of two middle names).

Like any artist, her work continues to evolve and Ruby is currently working on her first ever collaboration, with ceramacist [Clare \(Claybody\) Fennessy](#), that will lead to an exhibition of "Prints and Clay" at TAFE on October 20.

"I am loving the process of working with Clare, who's work I have always admired, and experimenting with different techniques to see what works and what doesn't," she says.

Ruby is also keen to produce larger wall hangings of her work, where the print is viewed as a work of art in itself, rather than as part of a functional object such as a cushion or bag.

"I see it as part of a natural evolution, working through processes, trying different things and not really knowing how

it may end up: that is the exciting and enjoyable part.”



The eye-catching simplicity of Ruby’s designs are captured in this backdrop that reflects patterns and images that were popular in the 1950s.

[box] Ruby’s work is available at the Warrnambool Art Gallery gift shop, The Artery gift shop, the Little Yellow Owl hair salon, W’bool, and at her home by appointment. Commissions upon request. e: ruby.rich@yahoo.com.au [/box]

[button link="http://the-terrier.com.au/subscribe-2/" type="icon" icon="heart" newwindow="yes"] Did you enjoy this story? Please subscribe here to help Bluestone thrive.[/button]



You might also enjoy...

[Inspired by clay: Clare Fennessy](#)

[A sculptor with the heart of a Lyon: Jon Dixon](#)

[Family ties behind every stitch: Sue Ferrari](#)

[The quiet contemplation of still life: Jan Allan](#)

[Home is where the art is: Karen McKenzie](#)

Spring picnic for Fletcher Jones gardens

The Fletcher Jones gardens spring picnic celebration is on this Sunday, September 14: find all the details here...

Trader levy deal...and the Jennifer Lowe factor



The controversial Warrnambool traders levy is set to be revised and relaunched in late September as a compromise.

OPINION

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] A [/dropcap]s the proposed Warrnambool traders levy rolls into another month without a resolution between the two sides, there is a burning question that remains unanswered: why is the council persisting with it?

Bluestone has been looking for clues.

As we know, [more than 100 angry traders](#) crammed into the **Warrnambool City Council** chambers for its last meeting and demanded that it quash moves to raise \$3 million over five years for **Commerce Warrnambool** via a compulsory levy on businesses.

Despite this show of dissatisfaction, Mayor Michael Neoh used his casting vote to give Commerce Warrnambool more time –

until the end of September – to try and negotiate a deal with traders.

What this means is that, behind the scenes, the push is on to split the levy between traders and the council and call it a “compromise”.

[As we wrote last month](#), instead of traders paying the full \$600,000 a year, they will be asked to pay less – say, \$450,000 – and the council will chip in the remaining \$150,000 because it has decided it really wants to help Commerce Warrnambool along.

The council’s enthusiasm is where we have our first clue about what we believe is really going on.

It is a rare day that the council finds a group that is willing to tax its own members to pay for things that the council should be doing, ie. supporting businesses and promoting the city.

If this \$3 million fund goes ahead, the council can justifiably shift the bulk of the cost (and responsibility) of marketing, promotions and supporting businesses on to Commerce Warrnambool and have the traders fund it.

Initially, the council thought it would not have to pay a cent (more about that in a moment), but even if it contributes \$150,000, all it needs to do is cut a couple of people from its marketing department and “voila!” it has broken even.



It's a rare day when a lobby group agrees to tax its own members to raise funds for work previously done by the council.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] F [/dropcap]or the council's beancounters, this is a sweet deal in the making, even if not quite as sweet as the traders being hit with the full \$600,000 a year, it is an excellent start.

Angry traders, of course, will be told that they can still vote "no" to stop the levy, but if the pressure on opposing traders is considerable now, I can only imagine what it will be like when they are seen to be objecting to a "compromise".

Given the levy idea has created such a toxic split in the business community, why didn't Commerce Warrnambool just ask the council for \$150,000 in the first place and start small? Well, it did.

Bluestone has learned that since Commerce Warrnambool began in 2010, it has approached the council many times to see if it would provide seed funding (something like \$80,000-\$100,000 a year for three years) until it found its feet and became

financially independent.

At that time, Commerce Warrnambool was primarily a business advocacy, network and support group, which is what chambers of commerce are all about, rather than focussing on the much larger role of promoting and marketing the whole city.

It was knocked back each time.

So what has changed?

We believe the clues lie in a series of events late last year.



Former outspoken
Warrnambool City Councillor
Jennifer Lowe, who was a
key player in Commerce
Warrnambool.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] B [/dropcap] that time,

Commerce Warrnambool had in its hands a proposal prepared by consultants **Peter McNabb and Associates** which, in the face of the council's persistent knock backs, detailed how a business levy could not only fund its activities, but widen them substantially.

The business levy would not be a seed fund for Commerce Warrnambool until it attracted memberships and corporate sponsorships, but virtually its *entire* fund. Its budget would no longer be around \$300,000 over three years, but \$3 million over five years.

Some (but not all) members of Commerce Warrnambool got very excited and *now* the council was also listening – for the cost-saving reasons mentioned earlier. But there was still a sticking point.

Commerce Warrnambool, at that time, was still operating under its original board of management including secretary **Jennifer Lowe**.

It's no secret to those who have watched the council for a long time that Ms Lowe, who is a former city councillor, was not universally embraced by fellow councillors and council staff during her term (that ended in 2012) because of her outspoken stand on many issues.

Imagine if Commerce Warrnambool learned that the council liked its big, bold levy idea to raise \$3 million from traders, but it didn't like Ms Lowe holding a key role in an organisation that was set to become much more influential. The money, or the secretary?

Whatever the scenario, Ms Lowe [suddenly stepped down](#) in late November, together with two other founding board members in **Darren Harris** and **Peter Watson**.

From there, the levy proposal was rolled out in something of a rush.

Within a few months, a new Commerce Warrnambool board of management was elected – with **Tony Herbert** replacing **Richard Montgomery** as president – a business plan went to council, the levy was ticked off at its May meeting, the public notices were being prepared...and then an increasing number of traders realised that they would have to pay for it and the wheels began to fall off.

As it stands, the traders are [holding off on their threatened legal action](#) pending more discussions which may or may not see Ms Lowe back at the negotiating table.

It is understood that, privately, she has made her feelings about the levy debacle well known to her Commerce Warrnambool colleagues, but is also among those keen to see the impasse resolved.

Whether somebody left outside the tent can now clean up the mess within it, remains to be seen.

[button link="http://the-terrier.com.au/subscribe-2/" type="icon" icon="heart" newwindow="yes"] Did you enjoy this story? Please subscribe here to help Bluestone thrive.[/button]



Read more Opinion pieces here...

[What about more fun for grown-ups?](#)

[Council's racing hospitality bill hard to swallow](#)

[Trader levy shaping for for legal showdown](#)

[Forget cover ups: roll right over Rolf](#)

[Community vision should extend city wide: Julie Eagles](#)

[Flagstaff Hill at \\$15 million crossroad](#)

[Scrap trader levy and start over](#)

What about more fun for grown-ups?



The Fun4Kids festival in Warrnambool is gone for another year – and the grass re-growth begins ...

OPINION

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A [/dropcap]s Warrnambool restores the grass on the Civic Green after another whirlwind

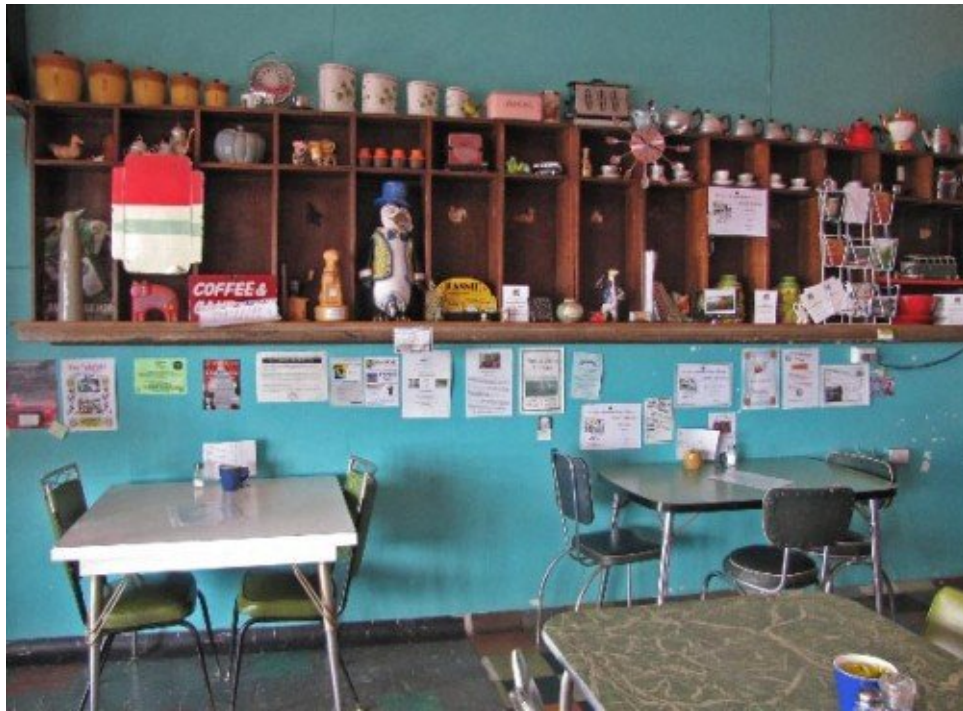
Fun4Kids festival, I can't help but wonder when we will turn our attention to more permanent attractions for grown-ups.

As one local put it, "Warrnambool is great for kids and great for the elderly, but there is not a lot for people in the middle" – and she is spot on.

Most regional cities in Victoria are coming up with new ways to attract the cashed-up, time-poor, middle-aged, middle class who want to spend their dollars on unique experiences and personal indulgence, but Warrnambool persists with "big things" that lose money.

Two of our attractions – Fun4Kids and Flagstaff Hill – cost the Warrnambool City Council around \$1 million a year to prop up. In a queer kind of logic, we continue to subsidise the cost of these attractions to ensure their survival, but still consider them successful and necessary.

It would be understandable if these attractions were just starting out and trying to find their feet, after all, every new concept needs time to establish itself. But Fun4Kids is in its 14th year – 14th! – and still doesn't break even despite the valiant efforts of all those involved and how much fun there is to be had.



Quirky shops and cafes – like this little cafe in the town of Penguin, Tasmania (popln 3924) – are what put a town (or city) on the tourist map.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A [/dropcap] report commissioned by the council last year was upbeat in its assessment of Fun4Kids. It found the event created direct expenditure of around \$1.9 million and that this, in turn, stimulates even more economic activity which – based on a series of sums and guesstimates – brings the total benefit to an estimated \$3.69 million.

These figures, however, are always hard to quantify – where does this \$3.7 million, if it exists, actually go?

From the council report, it appears local accommodation is a big winner through filling more beds in winter, but other traders are less affected.

Of the 95 traders who responded to a council survey, 50 per cent said their turnover *remained about the same for this time of year* and only nine (10 per cent) said it was significantly

higher.

Some may consider \$450,000 a year a small price to pay for an injection of winter tourists, but if we add up the total cost over 14 years – around \$6 million – you start to wonder what we have to show for the money.

Perhaps the \$6 million would have been better spent helping to establish a series of experiences that run all year round?

You only have to look at any of the recent Victorian tourism reports to see where the future lies: eco-tourism, food, wine, art, culture, boutique/quirky shops and unique, luxury experiences. In other words, fun for grown ups who may, or may not, also want to take their kids along.



Tanya Connellan and Liz Foreman from the Merrijig Inn are part of a new artisan food trail that has started around the Port Fairy district.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] 0 [/dropcap]nce again, Port

Fairy is leading the way. It is hard to believe today, but 30 years ago Port Fairy was a very cheap place to live because it was considered a dumpy backwater.

Since then, it has reinvented itself spectacularly by tapping into its natural assets – its seaside location, history, charming buildings (see our story this week on [Coffin Sally's bar](#)) and its access to the rich, fertile soils that support a boutique food and wine industry.

The same week as Fun4Kids started, for example, Port Fairy used its [Winter Warmer Weekends](#) to launch an artisan food trail.

Shane Clancey, from Basalt Wines, Killarney, has teamed up with the [Merrijig Inn](#), Port Fairy, and [Shaw River Buffalo Cheese](#), at Yambuk – among others – to showcase the fantastic food and wine that is produced in the area.

I can see Melbourne folk salivating already at the thought of driving down the Great Ocean Road, taking in the 12 Apostles, winding their way through the [12 Apostles Gourmet Food Trail](#) that incorporates the [Timboon Distillery](#), [Newton's Ridge](#), Apostle Whey Cheeses and others, then zooming on to Port Fairy to do more of the same, before retiring for the night in a gorgeous 1800's cottage with a crackling fire.

Why would they bother to linger in Warrnambool?



Warrnambool has an ecological, environmental and cultural gem on its doorstep with Tower Hill, but does little to capitalise on its potential. Image: [Travel Victoria](#).

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap] have [written before](#) about how frustrating it is that Warrnambool does not make more of its natural advantages. We have one of the most spectacular and accessible coastlines in south-west Victoria, but is there even one classy restaurant with sea views?

We have Tower Hill on our doorstep, which [has already been identified](#) as a potential tourism mecca, but what are we doing to help capitalise on its appeal to bushwalkers, birdwatchers and international visitors who appreciate our indigenous heritage far more than we do?

We have a city centre full of historic intact buildings – those that have not burnt down or been demolished – but what are we doing to assist those people trying to convert them into cafes, galleries, cosy wine bars, jazz clubs and boutique shops?

We have an incredible whale nursery, but is there a fun, interactive place for visitors to go and hear a whale sing, or

to touch its 'skin', or learn about how and why they come to Warrnambool each year?

And we have an art gallery that was one of the best in regional Victoria when it opened in 1986, but has not seen any meaningful funds spent on it since – there isn't even a cafe – and it now relies increasingly on corporate events and weddings for income.

Imagine, just for a moment, if we didn't spend \$450,000 a year on subsidising 8 days of Fun4Kids, but instead divided this money to help kickstart great ideas – food trails, artisan studios, laneway cafes, cosy bars, boutique shops, a bush tucker cafe at Tower Hill and the like.

Perhaps then Warrnambool would have some enduring funk – as well as fun – for people of all ages.



The [Whale Museum](http://the-whale-museum.com) in Friday Harbor, Washington State, is devoted to orcas and shows that a museum does not have to be big, to be interesting.

[button link="http://the-terrier.com.au/subscribe-2/" type="icon" icon="heart" newwindow="yes"] Did you enjoy this

story? Please subscribe here to help Bluestone thrive.[/button]



Read more Opinion pieces here...

[Council's racing hospitality bill hard to swallow](#)

[Trader levy shaping for for legal showdown](#)

[Traders levy takes a new twist](#)

[Forget cover ups: roll right over Rolf](#)

[Community vision should extend city wide: Julie Eagles](#)

[Flagstaff Hill at \\$15 million crossroad](#)

[Scrap trader levy and start over](#)

[Motor museum to revive Fletcher Jones](#)

Reekie to challenge Napthine for South West Coast



Warrnambool lawyer Roy Reekie will line up against Denis Naphine for a third time at the next state election.

COMMENT

[dropcap style="color: #8f9f59;"] A [dropcap]fter months of speculation, Warrnambool lawyer **Roy Reekie** is poised to announce his preselection as the Labor challenger to Premier **Denis Naphine** for the seat of South West Coast.

Well-placed sources said Mr Reekie's pre-selection had been recently finalised by the Labor Party and an official announcement would be made shortly.

Ever since returning to live in Warrnambool last year, Mr Reekie has been one of the most promising prospects for Labor because of an already-established profile on the back of the

2002 state election. In that year, Mr Reekie came within a tantalising few hundred votes of pulling off the greatest upset that the south-west has ever seen.

Then, as now, his competitor was Dr Napthine, as it was again in 2006.

The election on November 29 will see the third showdown between the pair, but this time Mr Reekie faces an enormous task, despite the polls indicating that the Coalition will lose office.

While far from the safest Liberal seat in Victoria (that honor goes to leafy Malvern on a 20.5% swing) South West Coast requires an almost 12% swing for the seat to change hands and that is highly unlikely to happen.

What will happen, however, is a concerted push by Labor to carve into that bloated margin and, at the very least, drag it back into single digits so that the 2018 state election becomes a real contest.

And this can only be good for everybody, whether you vote Labor, Liberal, Greens, Nationals or for the Palmer United Party.

Marginal seats are seats where things happen and things get done.

As I [wrote last August in the lead-up to the federal election](#), why would anybody wish to keep voting in the same party, year after year?

Such predictability makes politicians go soft in the mouth. They know they don't have to work too hard to actually deliver, because, heck, we just keep voting them back in anyway.

Judging by his extraordinary number of media appearances of late, there is no doubt Dr Napthine works very hard at his

job, but the South West Coast is suffering.

Our major roads are terrible, our education standards are embarrassing, our tourism appeal is patchy (especially compared to what is happening at the *other* end of the Great Ocean Road), and our V-Line train service is one of the worst performing in the state.

We deserve better.

Mr Reekie, together with the Greens candidate **Thomas Campbell** and all of the other candidates yet to emerge, has his work cut out for him, but let's at least hope for a robust race.

We deserve that too.

[button link="http://the-terrier.com.au/subscribe-2/" type="icon" icon="heart" newwindow="yes"] Did you enjoy this story? Please subscribe here to help Bluestone thrive.[/button]



You might also enjoy...

[Trader levy heads for legal showdown](#)

[Community vision needs to extend city wide: Julie Eagles](#)

[Forget cover ups: roll right over Rolf](#)

[What is holding Portland back?](#)

[Flagstaff Hill at \\$15 million crossroad](#)