

All words, no funding, for the Fletcher Jones story



Just like old times: the Fletcher Jones gardens came to life at the recent spring picnic, under the watchful eye of the silver ball. The next challenge is to preserve the Fletcher Jones stories.

OPINION – Carol Altmann

If there was any doubt as to how much the Fletcher Jones Pleasant Hill site in Warrnambool means to locals, the recent spring picnic has laid it to rest.

Around 1500 people flocked to the gardens last weekend to wander among the market stalls, listen to the music, stretch out on the grass and – like so many thousands of children and adults before them – take pleasure in the many garden delights that Sir Fletcher Jones created in his factory grounds.

Cr Jacinta Ermacora has leapt on this huge wave of support [to announce today in the local newspaper](#) that she thought it was “time to tell the Fletcher Jones story”, and a meeting would be held shortly between all of the interested parties to work out how this could be done.

What Cr Ermacora failed to mention, or was not reported, was that the council was first asked to collect these stories way back in 2002, when it was a key recommendation in a report it [commissioned](#) into the future of the Fletcher Jones site.

What has been done by anyone on the council since then?

Absolutely nothing.



Thousands of stories make up the fabric of the Fletcher Jones story, which is still yet to be documented from a social history perspective. Image: Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens Facebook page.

There is also a vast amount of precious Fletcher Jones memorabilia cast about Warrnambool, with some in History

House, some at The Artery, and some in people's private homes, that needs to be collated, assessed and preserved for future installations.

What has any council member done about that so far?

Absolutely nothing.

In the interim, as people age, and pass away, the stories are being lost and the memorabilia is getting harder to trace (and let's not forget that many items ended up in a skip bin when the site was first sold by the council in 2005, only to be retrieved by artists).

This is why a small group of people, led by **Julie Eagles** from the Warrnambool Planning and Heritage Group, has been asking the council for *months* whether there is any funding set aside in this year's budget to at least start the process of gathering these stories.

It was hard to get a clear reply.

Bluestone got a reply on Thursday and this is it in full:

"We have no funding specifically allocated to telling the story of Fletcher Jones in this year's budget.

However, the history of Fletcher Jones and other elements that tell the story of Warrnambool will be on the table when the time comes to look at public art as part of the city centre renewal.

Once we have the foundation stage of the renewal plan completed – which addresses issues including accessibility and mobility – we'll be engaging the community in a discussion on public art." – Nick Higgins, Manager Communications.

So how much funding is there for the Fletcher Jones story project?

Absolutely nothing.



The stories behind working for Fletcher Jones are yet to be captured.

By contrast, Melbourne University has already started work on collating and recording the business story behind Fletcher Jones and **Melinda Barrie**, [from this project](#), has shown a willingness to work with local groups to capture the local stories.

It is embarrassing, to say the least, that a Melbourne institution has been more motivated and excited by our local, contemporary history than our own council.

And by contrast to the council's inertia on what we might call the whole Fletcher Jones package – the stories, the site, the potential – last Sunday's picnic was a triumph of what can be done through hard work, passion and belief.

Not only did it showcase the magnificent efforts of resident gardener **Lex Caldwell** and his team of volunteers who have kept the gardens alive, but it was a celebration for all those other volunteers who believed that the best parts of this iconic site were worth saving.

Those who pressed hardest to keep Pleasant Hill on the public

radar – Julie Eagles, The F Project arts collective, us here at *Bluestone Magazine*, and the consequent [Save the Silver Ball and Fletchers Gardens Facebook page](#) started by Tonia Wilcox – all did so without any official backing.



The annual Christmas party picnic was a highlight of the Fletcher Jones calendar. Plans are afoot to bring them back again, albeit in a revised version. Image: Courtesy of Lost Warrnambool.

Similarly, the spring picnic was organised within weeks by The F Project/The Artery without a cent of funding and relied heavily on volunteers who pulled it all together – people like Dr Emma Charlton, Megan Nicolson, Des and Helen Bunyon, Ruby Richardson, Danielle O'Brien, the Factory Arts crew, Julie Eagles – the same names that keep coming up time after time and who continue to make exciting things happen around the city.

They don't sit around waiting for others to do something: they

just get on with it.

The F Project, for its efforts, made less than \$400 on the day from a raffle, but it was never about raising money. It was all about bringing life back to the gardens through the arts, but you can't keep expecting volunteers to do all the heavy lifting.

And so it is with the capturing of the Fletcher Jones stories.

The funding is there: it's just how the council chooses to spend it.

It recently found [\\$10,000 on short notice](#) for the Oddball movie, and [another \\$3 million](#) of state and council funds are about to be plunged into sound and light shows at Flagstaff Hill.

So unless Cr Ermacora can come to the meeting armed with a firm proposal for council funding, it is nothing more than hollow words on the back of very successful picnic and that – unlike a pair of Fletcher Jones' scissors on the factory floor – just won't cut it.

A softie at heart: Megan Nicolson

Megan Nicolson's work is winning hearts of all sizes across the south-west.

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.

A 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](#)

Fulton crosses threshold at The Artery



“Choosing a direction” is among the striking works to be included in Warrnambool artist Barb Fulton’s show at The Artery that opens on April 30.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
[/dropcap]he new exhibition space at The Artery, in Warrnambool, is already proving its worth with another top-shelf exhibition that runs until May 24 and features the works of Warrnambool artist **Barb Fulton**.

The exhibition is entitled “Threshold” and explores the themes of discovery, journey and possibility. The viewer is tempted to ask what lies beyond the threshold? What is hidden behind that door? What will I discover if I take a risk and step beyond my comfort zone?

Barb is the second artist to exhibit in the Timor St space, following the inaugural – and popular – exhibition by **Gareth Colliton**. Barb is also a much-loved figure on the local art scene, which she has been a part of since studying as a mature-age student in the now-defunct Fine Art Degree at Deakin University in the late 1980s.



Warrnambool artist Barb Fulton with *Barrier*, another of her works to feature in the exhibition, Threshold.

[box type="bio"] The Artery is at 224 Timor St. Warrnambool, and is open Wed-Sun 10am – 4pm.[/box]



You might also enjoy...

[Exploring comfort and discomfort: Jeanie Gleeson](#)

[Abb, art and the immigrant journey: Abb Marzouk](#)

[No shying away from social commentary: Megan Cheyne](#)

[Broken link prompts a fresh start: Jenny Altmann](#)

[Love and loss written on the body: Nathan Pye](#)