

When words fail, there is always art



Collin Tenney has spread his artistic wings since making his home near Casterton, where he opened a gallery in the former Sandford fire brigade shed. Image courtesy Collin Tenney.

By Carol Altmann

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rowing up as a dyslexic kid in Rendelsham, South Australia, Casterton artist **Collin Tenney** spent most of his school years in sheer terror – unless it was art class.

“I would sit there stressed out of my brain that the teacher was going to ask me to read aloud and of course nobody wanted to know the dyslexic kid, but when it came to art class, everyone wanted to sit next to me,” Collin laughs.

In one of those often inexplicable counter-balances, Collin's limitations with words – which continues to this day – was more than made up for by an artistic streak that emerged when he was just a toddler and began drawing on the walls of his childhood home, "much to the frustration of my poor mother."

As a young man, art became his solace, his spiritual centre and a crucial way of communicating with the world.

"I ended up working in Queensland and that's where I started taking lots of painting classes because if I was going to learn about making art, it had to be through tutoring rather than through reading books," Collin says.

"That was when I was around 23 or 24, but unfortunately after that, life started to get in the way with mortgages and all of those other commitments that move you away from your art."



Collin's portrait, Sam, was awarded Best in Show and Best Acrylic in the 2014 Coleraine

Art and Photography Show. Image:
Collin Tenney.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] T
[/dropcap]he pendulum swung back toward the paintbrush when Collin moved to Casterton in 2007, a town that he knew only vaguely but felt a deep connection to after driving through on his return to South Australia after looking at a property in Winchelsea.

It was shortly after the death of his younger sister from breast cancer and Collin was determined to start living the life that he always wanted.

"I felt this incredible connection to Casterton, like I had been there before," he explains.

As Collin was passing through the historic town (popln 1765), a song played at his sister's funeral came on the radio and although he burst into tears, he felt it was another gentle push toward making the leap.

It proved to be the right choice.

In the seven years since, Collin has not only returned to painting with a renewed vigour, but has been among several artists driving the small but growing local art scene around Casterton.

Now, for example, there is an [Artists of the Valley](#) group that includes Collin and other award-winning artists like painter **Julie Kent**, printmaker **Jenn White** and warm glass artist **Darryl Tresize** (winner of the Drysdale Festival of Glass prize in 2014 and 2015).

Casterton will also see the opening of a new community art gallery – the Gorman Gallery – on April 25 after the building was donated by local real estate agent **Peter Gorman**.

“There were all of these people out there doing their own thing with art and now we are all supporting and helping each other, while also building an arts community in Casterton,” Collin says.



Collin with his image of the late artist Margaret Olley which won the 2013 Clarice Beckett Art Prize. Image: Artists of the Valley.

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[/dropcap]n 2012, Collin bought the former CFA shed at nearby Sandford and opened his own studio, the **Sandford Red Door Gallery**, named for the fire-engine red door that came with the building.

“I love this gallery, I just love the space. It is an incredibly spiritual place for me, where I am doing what I love,” he says, “it is also a place I share with other

artists, through classes, galleries and all sorts of functions.”

One of Collin’s great inspirations is the late **Margaret Olley**, not only for her exceptional art, but her eccentric personality and he has produced several portraits of the artist, including one that took out the **2013 Clarice Beckett Art Award** in Casterton ([see separate story on the 2015 Clarice Beckett Art Award here](#)). Collin plans to complete a collection of 12 “Olley’s”, as he calls them.

“When I first studied portraiture, I hated it, hated it, hated it and then I did a big work of Margaret Olley and I don’t know, something shifted,” he says.

The Clarice Beckett is one of several art prizes Collin has won in recent years, including the overall prize for the 2015 **South-East Art Society’s Open Art Award**, held at the Riddoch Gallery in Mt Gambier, for his landscape depicting a typical Casterton scene during the dog trials.

“My subjects keep changing and nobody is ever quite sure what I am going to do next, and sometimes neither am I,” Collin says, laughing.



One of Collin's series of portraits of Margaret Olley who he regards as an inspiration, as much for her eccentricities as her talent. Image: Collin Tenney.

[box]The Sandford Red Door Gallery is at 6027 Portland-Casterton Rd, Casterton and is open Sundays, but please call (03) 5581 2559 to confirm. You can also find more examples of Collin's work on the [South West ArtAtlas](#) here. Entries for the 2015 Clarice Beckett Art Award close on May 22. You can find [full details in our story here](#).[/box]

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