

Young creatives: Bronwen Rose and ugly beauty



Warrnambool artist Bronwen Rose in the TAFE studio: “I want my art to be unsettling and for people to talk about it; I want it to have an ugly beauty.” Image: Carol Altmann

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"]T[/dropcap]he greatest compliment you could pay young artist **Bronwen Arnold**, who works under the name **Bronwen Rose**, is that you find her work disturbing.

Because that is exactly what she wants it to be.

“I am fascinated by a world where everything is beautiful and everything hurts,” she says.

The 20-year-old, who was raised in Dunkeld but now lives in Warrnambool, believes that art should take the viewer out of their comfort zone by twisting the familiar with the unexpected. Hence most of her works, be they digital painting, traditional painting or sculpture, look appealing at first glance: but then reveal a darker side.

Doe-eyed, pixie-faced characters are missing limbs, or have been disembowelled. Eyes are bloodshot, teeth are crooked, skin is disfigured.

It doesn't make for pretty work, but it is absolutely memorable in that it is confronting, yet clever.

"A lot of (artists) in Warrnambool are inspired by coastal scenes and while they are beautiful to look at, and you can say 'that is nice', that is the end of the conversation," Bronwen explains.

"I want my art to be unsettling and for people to talk about it; I want it to have an ugly beauty."



Bunny Boy (Paolo), digital painting. Damaged and imperfect beauty is a recurring theme in Bronwen's work. Image: Bronwen Arnold.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"]B[/dropcap]ronwen is in her second year of a Diploma of Visual Arts at South-West TAFE where her teachers include the wonderful **Jeanie Gleeson** whose work explores the boundaries between comfort and discomfort and what is regarded as "beautiful" art. (See [our earlier story on Jeanie here](#)).

Another influence – or even a hero – for Bronwen is contemporary artist **Patricia Piccinini**, whom she met while volunteering at the Warrnambool Art Gallery during Patricia's recent exhibition that, despite its confronting themes, was among the gallery's most popular.

"I love how people react to Patricia's work. One of my jobs (as a volunteer) was to invite people to touch this little furry, strange critter (made by Patricia) that I was carrying around and most people refused to even touch it," she laughs.

While Bronwen may sound like a dark thinker, she is in fact the opposite.

Her preference for wearing black, the striking arm tattoos on the soft underside of her forearm, and a 24mm gage tunnel in her ear (kind of like a sleeper on steroids) belie the fact she has an easy laugh, and the down-to-earth charm of a young woman who grew up in the country.

"My parents bought the Dunkeld Post Office which is, like, as old as old (it dates back to the 1850s), and I grew up there. Yep, in a post office," she smiles.



With my little eye, mixed media assemblage. Pieces of dolls house furniture and others created by hand contributed to this scene that looks both cute, yet chaotic. Image: Bronwen Arnold.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"]B[/dropcap]ronwen also admits that her favourite colour is not black or blue, but pink, rose pink.

“My bedroom looks like an explosion of grandma florals – pink everywhere – with my collection of teapots all around the place,” she shrugs.

This is not the space of a tortured soul, but someone who loves playing with the juxtapositions of life: the gaps between pretty and ugly; black and pink; teapots and tattoos.

Her next series of work will explore skin and its many variations. Bruises, birthmarks (Bronwen has one), discolourations, pigmentations, freckles, albinism and a condition called vitiligo, where patches of dark skin lose their pigment, will all come under scrutiny.

“I saw a woman once who had vitiligo, and she had the most chocolate, velvet skin with white patches. She was absolutely amazing, so beautiful. She looked absolutely beautiful,” Bronwen explains.

I wondered how many times that particular woman had been told, because of her imperfection, that she was “absolutely beautiful”?

And therein lies the secret to the work of Bronwen Rose.



Mica's Street (acrylic on canvas).
Image: Bronwen Arnold.

[box]Bronwen is the recipient of the Lukasz Chomentowski sponsored studio space at The Artery, Warrnambool. She will be part of Arts on the Grass at the Fletcher Jones Garden Christmas Market, Sunday December 14, 11am-3pm and you [can also view more of her work](#) on the South West Arts Atlas.[/box]

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