

Upon REFLECTION

For this abstract artist, home is where the heart is — where memories are made and artistic creation is inspired, writes NATASHA PERERA



“IT’S ALL SO SPONTANEOUS. I MIGHT HAVE 10 ARTWORKS ON THE GO AND OFTEN WONDER WHAT TAKES ME TO THE ONE I WILL WORK ON THAT DAY.”



Nostalgic moments from her past play a big part in the inspiration behind Ali McNabney-Stevens’ artwork.

“I am very triggered by memories to generate mood and colour on the canvas — those loving feelings I have for the landscapes of my home here, and my home back in Ulster, Northern Ireland,” Ali says.

Pointing to an unfinished artwork in the corner of her Sandringham-based home studio that radiates with sunshine and creativity, she shares how memory is behind the theme for this piece that captures one of her favourite walks along a beach path on the County Down coastline.

“I can see it as if it were yesterday; it’s all in my head,” she says with a smile.

“I have walked this path so many times that if I close my eyes, I can visualise each bend and how the wind coming across the Irish Sea from Scotland makes the trees turn and twist in a certain way. It is lovely to live the memory as you are painting it.”

But, Ali confesses, she never quite knows what memories may emerge on the canvas when she sits down to paint each morning.

“It’s all so spontaneous. I might have 10 artworks on the go and often wonder what takes me to the one I will work on that day — I suppose it’s just a natural pull,” she says.

“What transpires is sometimes not what I may have intended at all — it’s totally unconscious.”

LEFT: Artist Ali McNabney-Stevens.
ABOVE: Landscapes and flora form the main themes of Ali’s artistic creations.

RIGHT TOP: A brush with creativity in the sunlit Sandringham home studio.

RIGHT: The artist enjoys the vibrancy and layering style of oil paint.

FAR RIGHT: The Australian landscape inspires colour choices.

Photos: James Greer; director: Kerry Armstrong. Photos taken at Studio Gallery Melbourne.



Photo: Andrew Tauber



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CHOOSING AND HANGING ART

People buy art for all sorts of reasons, but Ali says the bottom line should always be to invest in artwork that stirs emotion and because you love it, not necessarily to fit a particular space or match the rest of your decor:

“Buy it because it makes you happy not because it is on-trend, and make sure you hang it somewhere you can enjoy it every day,” she says.

“I am drawn to artworks that have dark and moody palettes and find them quite comforting.”

When hanging artwork, be mindful not to place the painting too high on the wall. “You want it to be in your line of sight, so you can really appreciate it,” she explains.

If you are hanging the piece in a room that is quite bright, Ali advises investing in getting it framed using archival glass to reduce the reflection and shine. “It’s a bit more expensive, but worth it!”



Ali describes her artwork as loosely abstract, adding the key strengths of each piece rests in her love for intuitive line and balance.

Her two main themes focus on landscapes and flora, so it’s no surprise to find little floral displays dotted around her studio as sources of inspiration. But they aren’t what you’d call traditional floral arrangements.

“There are often dead, dried and decaying displays all over the place — I will just stick flowers and leaves in a pot and leave them there to admire their beautiful shapes and form.

“I don’t draw them literally. In fact, the moment I start to get too literal with my work I am tripped up; it just doesn’t sit right with me,” she says, highlighting her natural connection with the lines and shadows cast by these arrangements and the organic colours that once upon a time she would never have been inclined to use.

Her love for this newfound palette introduces a new direction that reflects the tones of the Australian landscape and is featured in her latest series *Heat of the Sun*, inspired by a painting workshop she recently completed in NSW.

“Up until then, I had never used an earthy colour palette like this. I’m usually more colourful,” she says.

Ali, who has an Honours degree in Design and History of Art from the Edinburgh College of Art, says she has a strong affinity for painting with oils because they allow her to explore her signature style of layering with more expression.

“Oil paints can be a difficult medium, but the paints have a vibrancy and life of their own that acrylics will never have,” she says.

Now representing herself, her first solo show — *Weaving the Here and Then* — will be at fortyfivedownstairs, in Flinders Lane, from July 18.

The collection is based on her journey as a painter and weaving memory and line, and will showcase a range of works including her new limited-edition prints on linen. ■

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