



## JOAN KELLY

Since 2004, Joan Kelly has held the remarkable position of President for the World Federation of Miniaturists from her hometown of Burnie. Joan's miniature paintings and etchings trace the tiny details of her local surroundings. For *The Partnership Project*, Joan plans to extend these works jewel-like miniatures into installation. She is documenting in black and white etched drawings the northern Tasmania coastline that welcomed her and her family to Tasmania in December, 1968. Joan writes that the practice of "partnershiping" with locals provided the basis for building a strong sense of community in northern Tasmania.

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I had a very interesting and enjoyable childhood; there were many things to keep me occupied. I always seemed to be surrounded by people from other countries whose different clothes, food and language presented never ending areas of interest. My maternal grandparents were from England and my father's parents, although born in Australia, were of German descent. Visits to grandparents were an adventure and at times challenging, as the German grandparents expected children to be seen and not heard.

My mother, who was born in England, had come to Australia with her parents when she was six years old. The family settled at Wonthaggi in South Gippsland, Victoria where her grandfather gained work caring for the pit ponies at the coal mine. The small horses were used to bring the coal to the surface. When an

opportunity arose to purchase a small farm, the family moved to Labertouche and later to Modella in South Gippsland.

My paternal grandmother, whose parents were German, was born at Woods Point, a gold mining town in Victoria and after marriage to grandfather (also with German parents), they settled at Jeparit in Victoria. My grandmother was a music teacher and grandfather worked with German relatives on wheat farms in the area. My father was born at Jeparit during the First World War and as his family had difficulty finding work at the time, they moved to Melbourne where his parents managed a boarding house and a laundry. My father completed his schooling in Melbourne and afterwards trained as a plumber.



The Depression years left many without jobs so my father joined other unemployed young men and traveled to the country in search of work in the Modella area where land was being cleared and fenced for farming. It was during this time he met my mother at a dance at Modella where her mother was the pianist. Following a four-year courtship and marriage my parents share-farmed briefly at Bunyip before purchasing a small farm at Iona on the edge of the Kooweerup Swamp which had been drained in the early 1900's and divided into twenty acre blocks as part of the Closer Settlement Act for Soldier Settlement after WW1.

I was born during these years, followed eighteen months later by a brother and five years later by another brother. My brothers and I did not see much of our father during the early years of our childhood as he was gone before we were awake and arrived home after we had gone to bed. As a result my older brother and I were kept busy as jobs had to be completed before our father arrived home. Like many men on the land at the time, my father milked a small herd of cows, grew carrots for the cannery - the Second World War had begun - dug potatoes on surrounding farms and worked shifts at a local Butter Factory.

I can remember cutting maize with a brother and placing the cut stalks into bundles for my father to collect when he arrived home in the evenings.

During the war years life changed as food and clothes rationing was in place and many food items such as sugar, flour and chocolate were in short supply. Clothing from older brothers, sisters and cousins were handed down. Women in the family began knitting woolen socks for the soldiers. School children helped make camouflage nets for the army. In answer to recruitment advertisements, my father tried to enlist but because of his German ancestry and the fact he was a farmer, he was not selected. I remember that he was quite upset as he felt he was an Australian and was certainly fit enough for the army.

The early 1940's were alarming for me; as a small child I can remember peering through a hole in the front hedge to watch Australian Army personnel training on the road in front of their house. Iona was not far from Western Port Bay where rumours had spread across the country that a Japanese mini submarine had been sighted close to shore. The whole community was concerned; I can recall feeling frightened as I watched the soldiers perform their drill and listened to the women in the family discussing what might happen if submarines landed.

I was drawing at an early age and as I began to draw the things around me, my parents provided pencils, crayons and colouring-in books. However, I preferred to

create my own pictures and always was on the look-out for paper which was scarce at the time. The local butcher wrapped the weekly meat order in white paper and I asked my mother to make sure the butcher did not put blood on it. My English grandmother also gave me the out-of-date Victorian telephone directories which contained many pages with small print. I could draw on these with a black crayon. Several years later, an aunt, who lived in Melbourne brought bundles of white paper off-cuts from a friend who worked at a paper mill.

When I reached school age, I rode a bicycle to a small country primary school at Iona. I had to ride past a large Catholic Church, Presbytery, Nunnery and primary school which had been established for the large number of small land holders including soldier settlers from World War 1 and migrants who were living in the area. Many were Catholics.

My family were Protestant and were very much in the minority amongst the large Catholic community. However, there were other non-Catholic families living nearby. I observed my surroundings with interest and wondered why the students attending the Catholic School wore neat uniforms and the teachers, who were nuns, wore long dark habits with white wimples. The scene made an impression on me, and nuns and students in uniform began to appear in my many drawings. I even imagined that I might like to become a nun. This did not please my parents, and booklets which described the severe training nuns had to undertake began to appear in the house.

When I was ten years old, my father sold the small farm and purchased a larger property at Vervale, a nearby district adjoining Iona. This was also part of the Kooweerup Swamp and in very wet winters the farm house was surrounded by flood waters. Fortunately, the house had been built on a slight rise. I made many drawings of the sun rising in the early morning and turning the water into a golden lake with trees silhouetted in the distance. I realise now that my parents were probably quite worried, but the children found it to be exciting. Further draining each year reduced the flooding.

Following the end of the Second World War, refugees began arriving from Europe including many Dutch and Italian families. These newcomers provided a wonderful range of subjects for me to draw. The men from Holland wore heavy corduroy trousers and sometimes wooden clogs in the paddocks which were flat and similar to the country from which they had come. On special occasions the women dressed in national costumes. There were also a number of Italian families living in the area and the women in these families wore black from head to toe.



The high school years offered further experiences, as children in the area travelled for an hour by bus to the nearest high school at Warragul. I enjoyed the new school, as there was much to learn. Following an entrance exam, my score was high enough to be placed in the science stream. However, it did not appeal to me and I asked to be allowed to join the technical and domestic science classes as I wanted to study art and craft. When this was allowed, I settled into the four-year course. Two teachers at the school, a science teacher and a geography teacher, were not very friendly or helpful to me. Hoping to change their attitude, I was determined to do well in both classes. I mentioned my concern to my parents, and was advised to continue to do my best. It was not until I had left school that I realised my German surname would have been the problem. However I enjoyed art classes, especially when watercolour painting, printing and book binding were introduced.

While at high school I thought it would be wonderful if I could become a teacher, especially of art. Both my grandmothers had been teachers, of elocution and music. I knew that if I could win a teaching bursary, my father would agree to my going away to teachers' college at Ballarat in Western Victoria. I attended a discussion session with the Minister for Education who was visiting the school to interview prospective teachers. He listened to my story and I assured him I would be able to transfer to the science stream the following year to study the additional subjects required to qualify. He listened to what I had to say; I can vividly remember his comment that I should not worry "as I would get married anyway". I was devastated. Ballarat Teachers College was now out of the question as my parents would not be able to afford to send me away. At the end of the year, which was the final year of the technical course, I left high school and stayed home to help with the expanded family. My mother had had four more children by then.

During my last year at high school I stayed for a weekend with a girlfriend in another district. The friend was allowed to attend dances in the local hall and invited me to accompany her. The friend's father delivered us to the hall and collected us afterwards. This was where I met Lindsay who was to become my future husband. I thought he was nice but I was not particularly interested in becoming too friendly as I didn't really want a boyfriend. I had examinations to focus on. I didn't realise he had his eye on me.

At the time I was fourth year class captain and occasionally I was asked to do messages for various teachers. Several weeks after the dance, the head mistress asked me to do some banking during the lunch break. I walked into town to the bank and there behind the counter was Lindsay. He asked if I had received his

letter. I was completely taken aback and then we both realised that it had been sent to the wrong address. Undaunted, and completing the banking transaction, he asked me if I would like to come to a family bonfire night the following week. I told him I did not like bonfires, thanked him and walked back to school. While walking I recalled that he had been a prefect at the school when I was in first year.

He soon sent another letter – delivered via his sister this time. She was also attending the school, but in a junior class. I was a little annoyed, as final examinations were near and I did not particularly want the distraction of a boyfriend. However, when I mentioned this to my mother and showed her the letter, she encouraged me to accept the invitation. My father was not consulted. When Lindsay arrived at the door to take me out, he was so well dressed and courteous and handsome, that my mother was duly impressed. Without my father's permission, we were on our way to the dance. Much later, my mother confessed to me that she thought Lindsay was too nice to risk Dad saying he could not take his daughter out. Soon afterwards, Lindsay was transferred to a bank branch in Melbourne. Outings were restricted to weekend visits every two or three weeks. Four years later we became engaged. We married in 1957 and honeymooned in Tasmania.

Lindsay left the bank to work in an office at a Butter Factory in Drouin. He was studying accountancy at the time. During the first years of marriage when I was having children, my drawing was on hold; even so, the creative spirit was ever-present in the form of cake decorating that I entered in local shows (including the Melbourne Show), sewing and gardening. Also at the time Lindsay and I experienced at first hand, the treatment of Aboriginal families who were being relocated from their settlements in the bush to towns throughout Gippsland. Lionel Rose's grandparents were moved to a house one door away and Lionel, as a boy, often played in the yard with our two young sons. Lindsay sometimes gave Lionel a lift if he saw him walking into town. Lionel later became World Champion Bantamweight Boxer. Other Aboriginal families were living in caravans near a local race course until houses became available. Lindsay and I were not happy about this, especially as winters were cold and wet in the area. However words fell on deaf ears at the time. Much later, Daryl Tonkin, a man who was closely involved and a spokesman for the Aboriginal community, wrote *Jackson's Track* which documents the story.

In 1968, as our eldest son approached high school age, Lindsay applied for a higher paying job as accountant at the Cleveland Tin Mine at Luina in northern Tasmania. The application was successful and we were soon on our way to Tasmania. This was an exciting time, and

although Lindsay was apprehensive taking his young family into the unknown, I felt all would be well. And it was; the move brought huge changes for each of us.

The small township of Luina, with a population of five hundred men, women and children, consisted of a general store, newsagent and post office, a Community Centre, a library which was a branch of the Burnie Regional Library, a hall for badminton and indoor activities, an outdoor tennis/basketball court and a Village Green. The Adult Education Board (AEB) in Burnie provided tutors for popular classes such as art and drama. Tutors travelled once a week through rain, hail or snow to conduct classes in the community centre. I thoroughly enjoyed these classes, especially the art classes that started my skills in oil painting. Word that I was an experienced cake decorator had spread, and soon I was tutoring cake decorating.

The three school-age children had to travel by bus through the rainforest on a winding road to Savage River District School for three-quarters of an hour there and back. The headmaster of the school advised us to send our two sons to boarding school after grade six. The nearest boarding school was Marist Regional College at Burnie. Every fortnight the Catholic church conducted a service in the Community Centre and a friend, who had a son the same age as our eldest son, spoke to the priest who was Principal of the College. Father Hosie visited us to meet the boys. Our eldest son attended the College first and was followed two years later by our second son. Although both boys fitted in well they always looked forward to going home to the forest each fortnight. They enjoyed living in a small town with so many children their own age where they had freedom to enjoy the forest. Children were allowed to wander in the forest adjoining the town and at sundown, mothers would stand on their porches and call their children home. Luina is now a ghost town. and when I visit with family from time to time and stand quietly at the end of the day, I can still hear mothers calling their children home.

Five years later the family moved to a five-acre block of land overlooking Boat Harbour at Table Cape. A new house was built and the small property became a hobby farm. Lindsay was working as an accountant in Burnie and I had obtained a position as Secretary at the Boat Harbour Primary School attended by our two daughters. While living at the Cape the family discovered a number of stone tools in the garden and saw a number of carvings on a large rock at the top of the cliff. The view to the west took in Rocky Cape where a cave and middens could be found. We could feel a strong presence in the area. Another resident, Dr. Ian McFarlane, who spent much time studying the area, documented his findings in *Beyond Awakening: tribes of North West Tasmania*, a book that highlights

the lifestyles of the Tommeginer people of Table Cape. While at Boat Harbour Primary School, a teacher who wrote poetry asked me to illustrate some of her poems. I accepted the challenge; *Of Fleeting Things* was published in 1986.

Eight years later the family moved to Burnie. As our two daughters were attending school in Burnie and we were also working in Burnie, we decided to sell our house and relocate to the town. I was working in the office of an electrical and furniture store and after training with IBM in Melbourne became Systems Supervisor in the newly established computer room - a position I held for four years. At the time, I was also weekend social writer for the Advocate Newspaper and completed a Freelance Journalist Diploma by correspondence.

After leaving computer work, I applied for a job as housekeeper at the APPM (Australian Pulp Paper Mill) Guest Lodge. This position allowed me more time for art work. During the eight years at the Lodge I became a member of The Australian Society of Miniature Art Tasmania (ASMA Tasmania) where I was elected to the role of President for twelve years. I represented Tasmania at the inaugural World Federation of Miniaturists (WFM) exhibition in London in 1995. I lobbied for the 2000 WFM event to be held in Hobart, attended an event in Washington DC in 2004 where I was elected President. We hosted the 2008 event in Burnie at the Burnie Regional Art Gallery, attended the 2012 event in Moscow and in 2016, the event in Johannesburg.

I'm currently President of Friends of BRAG, a member of three of Australia's miniature art societies and I work as a maker at the Makers Workshops run by UTAS. Each week I conduct an art class for retired citizens at BRAG. As a child growing up in rural Australia, my dreams of being an artist, a teacher and travelling seemed to be just that – part of a world of dreams. But art has a way of making those dreams come true.

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### **What makes the area in which I live different to other areas in which I have lived?**

I currently live in what is known as a small Regional City on the north-west coast of Tasmania. This city offers all the things I enjoy – art gallery, entertainment centre, cinema, sports ovals, beautiful parks and gardens, close proximity to rain forest and mountains and most of all, I'm surrounded by many artistic and creative folk to work with and exchange ideas.

In the past, I have lived in a rural area in South Gippsland, Victoria, in a small country town, also in Victoria and later (1968) in a small mining town at Luina (which is now a ghost town) in the rain forest in Tasmania. While living in Luina we travelled regularly to

Burnie for exhibition openings (at the Adult Education Centre) and to the cinema. This was before the Burnie Regional Art Gallery existed.

### **What might make it difficult living here?**

The only difficulty I find living in Burnie is the distance from major cities in Tasmania and the mainland when an important international art show or musical performance is advertised. Costs associated with travel and accommodation in larger cities often prevents attendance at such performances.

### **Where do other challenges lie?**

Distance from family members who are scattered interstate, and large art galleries. I sometimes miss the opportunity to be able to drop into a major gallery to view a visiting exhibition. However, these challenges do not concern me as much as they used to, as communication is easier and so much information is now available online. Although the internet cannot emulate face to face conversations or seeing a famous art work at close range or listening to discussions by informed lecturers, it suffices when it has to.

### **But are these challenges worthwhile?**

The above challenges are not currently important to me, as family members visit regularly and I have the opportunity to communicate via email with the many artists I have met during my travels overseas. The benefits of living where I now live outweigh any challenges.

### **What kind of benefits are there?**

The benefits of living here in Burnie are many, and as I am lucky to live on the edge of the Central Business District with a sea view and only a ten-minute walk to the gallery, civic centre, cinema, Makers Workshop and sporting facilities, I consider I am extremely fortunate.

### **Do you think your galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?**

Yes, I do think the establishment of the galleries such as the Regional Art Gallery and Coastal Art Group Gallery and in recent years the Makers Workshop, have shaped and continue to shape the local community. The Burnie Regional Art Gallery, which includes travelling exhibitions from interstate and, in the case of the Da Vinci and Michelangelo exhibitions (which provided excellent opportunities for a large number of adults and children to visit the gallery) enables members of the public to experience famous works of art. The Coastal Art Gallery provides an opportunity for local artists to showcase their work and the Makers Workshop is making a name for itself with artists and craftsmen and women working on site and talking about their art or craft. Their creative works are displayed throughout the building; other quality exhibitions are regularly displayed in the Makers Exhibition Space.

### **Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a**

### **place like this?**

No I did not. Coming to Tasmania in 1968 and arriving in a small mining town at the foot of Mt. Cleveland, where I found myself surrounded by beautiful rain forest and people from many countries where women who were not working filled their time by creating beautiful paintings, sculptures, printing, weaving and many other creative activities, felt as if I had arrived in a "creative heaven". As we became familiar with coastal towns, the same impression was gained - "that creative activities" were an important part of island life.

### **How does it feel now?**

The feeling continues and has grown. I feel so very fortunate to be involved in the artistic creativity surrounding me.

### **What relationship does "your" place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?**

As President of the World Federation of Miniaturists (WFM) I had the privilege of arranging the 5th WFM Exhibition in the Burnie Regional Art Gallery in March 2008. With my committee I was proud to showcase the gallery to visitors not only from throughout Australia but also from many overseas countries including Russia, USA, UK and South Africa. We invited as many townspeople as possible (shop owners, cafes and coffee shops and restaurants to become involved)... you might say it was "partnershiping" at its very best.

The large exhibitions mentioned previously were also listed as important exhibitions in various National and State Gallery publications. This information helped establish the Burnie Regional Gallery as an important venue.

### **Is it cheaper to live in the region?**

Yes it certainly is for me and also for a number of young families who have relocated from metropolitan cities to Burnie.

### **Do you think it is important to get out and come back again?**

Yes it is and for me travel overseas to various WFM Exhibitions (London, Washington DC, Moscow and Johannesburg) provided an opportunity to meet and speak with artists worldwide, to view their work, attend workshops and discuss art with professional artists. This experience enabled me to share ideas with my students and local artists in the region.

### **How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?**

Very important, and as President of Friends of the Burnie Regional Art Gallery our members would definitely support any region-to-region relationships.

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