

## THE SOURCE

meet the  
maker

PRINTMAKER  
DAVID FRAZER  
dfrazer.com

BY KATH DOLAN

Castlemaine printmaker David Frazer was forever drawing cartoons as a kid, usually based on his family's misadventures. "There'd be funny things that would happen and I'd just exaggerate things and fictionalise things – pretty much like what I still do," he says. "I liked amusing people, I liked telling stories ... and being accessible. That's what I still like. I'm not into art that's highfalutin' and inaccessible."

Frazer's grandfather, cousin and aunt were all artists. Frazer grew up in the Wimmera, where his dad was a school principal. He felt like a blow-in, and something of a misfit. He spent hours on the roof or up a tree drawing the "poetic, melancholic" landscape around him.

"I often use that image in my art – a kid or a man sitting on a roof, dreaming of flying away, maybe ... to somewhere more exciting."

When his dad transferred to Rosebud, Frazer found the loss of friends and a much larger school traumatic at first. But teachers introduced him to inspiring singer-songwriters such as Tom Waits and fuelled his ambition to reach art school. Once enrolled at Caulfield Tech (now Monash Uni), however, he found painting a struggle, and for several years channelled his storytelling ambitions into music and acting instead.

"I really wanted to write songs – really beautiful, sad songs," Frazer recalls. "I tried, but I just couldn't do it."

Chasing a dream to perform that he describes as delusional left Frazer with plenty to make art about when he discovered printmaking in 1996 at the age of 30.

"Delusion, failed ambition and confused, bewildered men – I find it's ... fertile subject matter," he says. "It's sad but also funny, which is always a great combination." Over the past couple of decades he's built a stellar reputation



Printmaker David Frazer at his Castlemaine studio; engraving tools (above left); one of his prints.  
PHOTOS: SIMON O'DWYER

for his wood engravings in particular, and made limited-edition books inspired by some of his favourite songwriters. Last year he published *Little Aches & Pains*, based on the Paul Kelly song of the same name. He's part way through another, based on Don Walker's *Silos*.

"Wood engraving is the closest thing to writing a song I've ever found," Frazer says. "It's the most romantic, intimate and poetic of all the mediums, I reckon ... its history was in illustration so it really suits narrative."