

beavergalleries

Artists in lockdown series

At home with Jenny Orchard



Q. What is getting you through lockdown?

A. My dog Suzie is a sweet companion, I talk to her a lot, and I spend hours on the phone talking to friends. I have just bought a house in Marrickville by the Cooks River and am really in love with the new landscape around me. My garden ends in a cliff so I live in an escarpment, full of lush plants and moss, the surrounding area along the river is like an enchanted forest, I go there every morning for a walk, I can't stop taking pictures. In the afternoon another (masked) walk takes me through the streets of Marrickville with its rich architectural and multicultural history.

I am inspired to paint landscapes but find I bring in strange animals, along with the crocodiles, Ibis and snakes, and so many other creatures who once dwelt and often still do live by the river. The indigenous people, -this is the ancient Gadigal land of the Eora people still feel present, as do the convicts and children who laboured to make the bricks and quarry the rocks. They float into my painting quite unannounced and remain winged and colourful.

But lockdown feels isolating and sad for everyone, I very much miss human contact and it makes it hard to find the motivation to bring new work into the world, honouring a past seems a way to cope with the era we live in now. I don't have a studio here yet, and the house needs many urgent repairs which are postponed during lockdown. So painting, mostly watercolour, gouache and pastels is what I do.

All that along with coffee is what gets me through.

Q. What is your daily lockdown ritual?

A. I rise early, at 6ish, have a coffee and a long walk by the Cooks River. I spend too much time on Instagram and these days comment on posts, it feels more like communicating with people than just scrolling. Then I try to plan the house repairs and studio building. Listen to the news (sometimes) and go to the front bedroom to paint. Bed early with my books.

Q. Where are you finding inspiration at the moment?

A. I'm re-reading one hundred years of solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, along with his short stories the magical realism seems right for the world we find ourselves in now, surreal, and hardly believable, complex and tragic. I also find inspiration in the new landscape and suburb where I live, its complex history beginning with our invasion and conflict with the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and the convicts, child workers, brickworks and industrialisation of the area. The history and stories feel so much closer when I am staying in one pace and meeting my diverse and interesting neighbours from all over the world who now make this place their home.