

# SPACE TO EXPLORE

WORDS CASSY SMALL  
PHOTOS ANASTASIA KARIOFYLLIDIS



For Margaret Ellen Turner, art certainly did not come naturally.

LOVE MAY HAVE LURED her into art, but she says her paintings are purely the products of hard work, perseverance and stubbornness. At 66, she is now receiving accolades from her industry and proving the adage that sometimes things really do get better with age.

Margaret came to art at 26 after falling in love with a sculptor. "I started to want what he had and went to art school despite not being able to paint or draw at all. I'm still in touch with my painting teacher, who now at 97 has terrible memory lapses, but loves to tell me once again how bad an artist I was," she laughs.

While her relationship with the sculptor didn't last, it was just the start of the Caloundra painter's passion for creation.



"Getting good at painting is simply about miles under the belt, you just have to do it," she says. "When I started I certainly didn't have anyone tell me I had any talent at all."

Times have certainly changed, with work within her most recent Space Invaders series winning first prize in the Kenilworth Art Prize as well as being named as a coveted finalist in last year's prestigious Sunshine Coast Art Prize. She's found both competitions to be invaluable in expanding her career and building her profile.

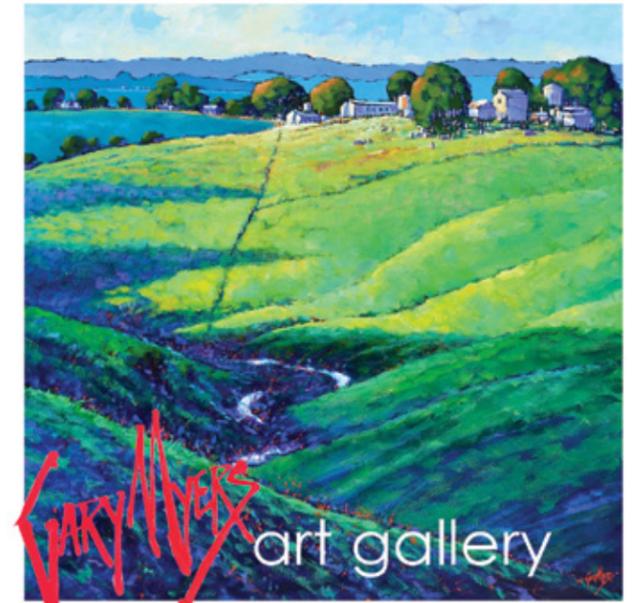
"For a regional artist it's hard for us to be seen in a national market," she says. "The Sunshine Coast Art Prize has a great reputation and they do a very good job at supporting artists with publicity and PR. I'm a little naive when it comes to the business of being an artist, but what I got from that prize was the intangible goodwill that comes with developing a reputation."

Her work also recently caught the eye of TEDx, naming her artist in residence for their series of talks in Noosa in April. With 'Space' as the TEDx theme, Margaret's Space Invaders canvases were the perfect fit.

Her work is described as non-representational, and one piece can sometimes take months to complete. Her unique process involves layering splodges of paint which she moves on the canvas with her giant squeegee.

"When I pick up a brush I feel constrained," she says. "There are a lot of people experimenting with ways to put paint on a canvas, and by using this tool I minimise the control I have on the outcome."

Each painting evolves of its own accord. It's an experience which Margaret describes as leaving her feeling "bold yet terrified". She admits some paintings have collapsed into a black hole beyond the hope of retrieval. >



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**ABOUT THE SUNSHINE COAST ART PRIZE**

The Sunshine Coast Art Prize is one of regional Australia's most respected art prizes. In its ninth year, the competition attracts a high calibre of local and national artists vying for up to \$15,000 in prize money. Judged by Queensland Art Gallery Director Chris Saines, the artists also have the privilege of having their work added to the Sunshine Coast Art Collection. All forty selected finalists will be exhibited at the Caloundra Regional Gallery between August 27 and October 26. [gallery.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au](http://gallery.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au)

“THERE’S NO UNDO BUTTON. I CAN ONLY GO FORWARD.”

“Each painting has its own potentials and it’s about taking that cautious step forward with each layer of paint and knowing if you feel you have wrecked the painting by making that move, then something new is going to have to happen,” she says. “There’s no undo button. I can only go forward, which is really what life is all about, isn’t it?”

Her acclaimed Space Invaders collection comprises 18 pieces, which she arrived at over a three-year period. The inspiration came from her fascination with science fiction.

“I’m captivated by the idea of space, being that it’s so incomprehensibly vast and we are so small. I wanted to try to grasp that idea that at a physical level there is more space inside this flesh than matter, it’s all pulsating energy,” she says.

Margaret is cautious to explain her art beyond that, preferring the viewer to elicit their own interpretation.

“I think my work can represent itself,” she says. “If you begin a dialogue then that is what the painting becomes. A lot of people want pre-digested images: that’s a beach or a garden. But for the viewer who can stand in their unknowingness and let their own impressions emerge, that makes what I do a collaborative project with the audience.”

The canvases that currently hang on the walls of her studio at her home in Caloundra are the very early stages of her next series of work. So in its infancy is it, that she’s uncertain of what it will become. What she does know is that she doesn’t want to paint what she already knows.

“At the moment I’m playing around, using the squeegee in different ways to see what will emerge,” Margaret says. “When I was at this stage with Space Invaders I was full of fear, but this time I’m less fearful and will trust the process. Previously I’ve had a goal like an exhibition three years ahead, and this time I don’t, so it will be interesting to see what comes.”



Her large studio has an air of organised chaos to it and while she admits to not being a tidy person, a brief peek inside her storage cupboard reveals a colour co-ordinated filing system. A group of local artists meets there regularly to draw and discuss art and this sharing of wisdom brings much joy to Margaret.

“I’d love to do a mentoring program to help up and coming artists,” she says. “I’ve had a lot of advantages in my life and I think it’s important to share the riches I’ve received.”

[margaret-turner.com.au](http://margaret-turner.com.au)



FOR EXTRA SALT visit [saltmagazine.com.au](http://saltmagazine.com.au) to see more of Margaret's paintings.

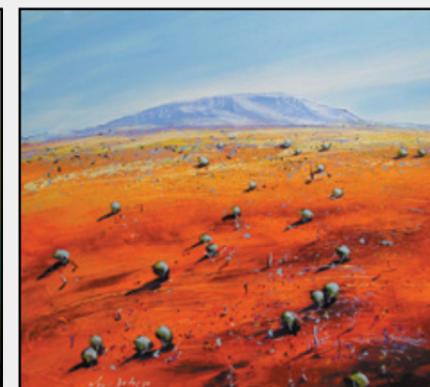
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