

LOVE IT
BUY IT
HANG IT
LIVING
WITH ART

Flying colour

Painter De Gillet undertook a bachelor of fine art a few years ago. She told *ART EDIT* that it really helped her to find who she is as an artist, by finding out what she's not.



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Painter **Debra Gillet**, better known as De, says her work is an “explosion of gratitude for the beauty of the world we live in”. Her canvases are often kaleidoscopes of colour and full of swirling movement. “Subtle it ain’t,” she says.

She is interested in the idea of simultaneity – where something is, where it was and where it will be. This is particularly evident in her paintings of flying birds. She used to live in Far North Queensland where flocks of screeching lorikeets were a common sight. “I walked with my head upturned, searching for a way to paint the colourful flow, the discordant sound and the joy of flight.” She wanted to paint that experience without necessarily painting the birds, but over time she came to include them and their “flight trail,” as she calls it. Now based in Brisbane, she has moved onto studying pelicans and their reflections on the surface of the water. She has also painted flowers, trees and the human figure.

Gillet was always creative, even as a child. She remembers being constantly busy making pictures or paintings or staging puppet shows with her family. “I was that pretentious brat who couldn’t possibly limit herself to plain old sandcastles at the beach, not when there were portraits to be carved out of the sand,” she reflects. She took a Saturday morning art class with her sister and when she saw her teacher drawing a self-portrait the die was cast. “I was so impressed by that quick sketch I vowed that one day I would be able to wow the world by doing that myself,” she says. “I remain a determined little thing.”

She taught art to high school students but it took her a while to decide to become an artist herself.



“My long marriage ended in 2009 and I realised that finally, after wanting my bachelor of fine art since I was 16, I was free to do it,” she says. “My children had grown and flown and I was ready. It was a scary thing, jumping into my little old hatchback and driving off into the unknown. I am endlessly, joyously, positively grateful that I had the courage to do so.”

Gillet says the time at university has helped her understand who and what she is as an artist – and also what she’s not. “I choose to bring joy and celebration to the world with my paintings and I choose to defy the currently widely upheld idea that high aesthetic standards and fine craftsmanship somehow invalidates meaning in an artwork. The Queensland College of Art had three years to beat a belief in beauty out of me and I’m proud to say they didn’t succeed.”

Gillet’s stubborn streak has helped her artistic practice in more ways than one. She has also spent a great deal of time developing the painting techniques that achieve her distinctive style. She often uses textured surfaces and creates a heavily layered effect with glazing mediums and ink. “I have developed many ways of creating monumental messes on my canvas as an underlayer to the glazing process. I find that having mucked up the surface entirely frees me to be loose and painterly in the subsequent mark-making,” she says. “We are all taught to colour between the lines and I believe it takes pretty much the rest of our lives to get over it.”



De Gillet, *Azure kingfisher*. Ink and acrylic on linen, 76 x 76cm.

De Gillet, *Pelican reflections*. Ink and acrylic on linen, 76 x 76cm.

De Gillet, *Frangipani bouquet*. Ink and acrylic on linen, 122 x 91cm.

De Gillet’s work can be found at The Manly Gallery in Brisbane and CWM Galleries in Sydney.

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📍 De Gillett BFA - Fine Artist