

# Lucy Culliton survey exhibition at Mosman Art Gallery



Summer Fruits, 2000, by Lucy Culliton

As the tens of thousands of people who enjoyed it already know, the recent Lucy Culliton survey show at Mosman Art Gallery was quite wonderful, and a great tribute to an artist whose contribution is already substantial but who will go on to do so much more.

In September (2014), I was lucky enough to sit with Lucy's dad Tony Culliton at a wonderful lunch to celebrate the exhibition, titled *The Eye Of The Beholder: The Art Of Lucy Culliton*. After lunch, Lucy took to the stage with compere Simon Marnie and artists Euan Macleod and Peter O'Doherty in a conversation that shed light on Lucy and her work.

Here are some observations from the notes I made that day:

**Lucy's menagerie:** People are always interested in Lucy's love of animals, and the number of creatures she has gathered around her. Lucy said she currently has 42 sheep, two pet cows, a pet pig, four dogs, a fowl and a magpie. She recently looked after a wombat while taking it to an animal rescue person.

**Lucy's new studio:** "I have just purpose-built a big studio [on her farm, *Bibbenluke Lodge*, at Bibbenluke, NSW]. I was struggling in an existing shed."



How can you resist this gorgeous horse painting by Lucy Culliton?

But it wasn't big enough so I have just built a really big, fantastic studio."

**School:** “I was hopeless at school. I dropped out at the end of Year 10. I took a while to mature.” Lucy worked in graphic design until the age of 27 when she enrolled in the National Art School in Sydney. One day, the veteran art dealer Rex Irwin addressed the students at NAS, telling them that for every 100 of them, only one would achieve. “I felt I was chosen!”, Lucy said. At this point, Euan Macleod chimed in: “We were told it was one every two years.”

**Dyslexia:** “I’m quite dyslexic. Working as a designer did not suit me. I didn’t know what to do. I just wanted to be a painter but I wasn’t strong enough to start. I needed an in. I needed a peer group. I kept horses at the Showground also, so I wasn’t a drinker.” Lucy made a bit of money while she was at art school by riding other people’s horses at the old Showgrounds, now Centennial Parklands Equestrian Centre. “I love horses,” she said.

**When did you realise you were an artist?** The artists had a question about when they realised they were an artist. This brought out a lovely bit of light banter.

“I’m hoping next year,” said Euan, who is a very prominent Australian artist.

“I think it was about 4.30 on a Tuesday,” said Peter, ever the clown.

Lucy’s answer was illuminating.

“I haven’t painted now for two months and I feel like I am not a painter.” Various life issues had kept her from the studio. Lucy has also told me in the past that, once she has finished painting for an exhibition, she normally goes into a semi-dormant stage as far as her work is concerned.

Euan added: “What Lucy says is true. You get pulled away from your work. Sometimes you feel you aren’t getting enough time to think about what you’re doing and you get back to the studio being a sanctuary and the studio being a special place.”



Simon Marnie, Lucy Culliton, Peter O’Doherty and Euan Macleod

**Routine:** “I love routine,” Lucy said. After feeding all her animals, she’s in the studio by 9am. “After lunch, I decide whether to go back to the studio or do some gardening or mow the lawn or something like that.”

Peter said he and his artist wife Susan O’Doherty tend to work until dark in their shared studio at their home in Coogee. They then put out the work on the coffee table, watch TV and have dinner and keep going.

**Relaxation:** It sounded like all three artists are incredibly hard workers. Euan said he’s not very good at relaxation, and Lucy said all her trips are painting trips. “I don’t go on holidays,” she said.

**On finding her property in rural Bibbenluke, which is a former trout fishing lodge:** “I just found ‘Lucy-land’,” Lucy said. “I found the place that suited me. It just happens to be six hours south of

Sydney. All the outdoors things suit me. The house is a bit run-down, so it's comfortable for my animals. I also found Sydney is far too social. It takes a lot to get me away [from Bibbenluke]."

**Art prizes:** There was a funny moment when we learned Lucy's work, which is hugely popular and widely collected, was recently rejected from the Bega Art Show!

Euan said he missed Lucy at NAS, where he taught, by a couple of years. "Everyone was talking about this student who was there a couple of years before."

**Finding home:** Lucy said she would still be at Bibbenluke Lodge "until I'm 80".



A Lucy painting from her Mosman Art Gallery retrospective exhibition

"I've just arrived at where I'm comfortable," she said. "It's a place that feeds me full of ideas and (where) I can make my work. And it's a beautiful garden. It's the best place in the world."

**On advice for emerging artists:** "Don't take any advice. Just do what you want to do," Lucy said.

**Elizabeth Fortescue, December 15, 2015**