





## LUKE SCIBERRAS

THE CLOSER I GOT TO THE OLD GOLD RUSH TOWN IN COUNTRY NEW SOUTH WALES, THE MORE I STARTED TO HEAR THE NAME OF ARTIST LUKE SCIBERRAS.

Down as far as the Southern Highlands, then back up in Sydney and out to the west, people would say the same thing. 'Are you going to photograph Luke Sciberras' house? You would love it,' then they would pause and smile, 'He is very charming, he will probably try to seduce you.'

I remember being stopped in my tracks by an article on him in *Vogue Living* about fourteen years ago. He was wearing a Panama hat and entertaining in his rambling backyard. The scene was intoxicating: a long table, a lunch thrown together, and a small group of artistic types, effortlessly enjoying each other's company. I had never seen the bush look so stylish and I certainly had never read about a man quite like Luke Sciberras. Whatever I absorbed from those pages stayed with me for years.

I had planned to visit a couple of people in the small village and Luke Sciberras was not on my list. By coincidence, or rather because that's how things happen in the country, his neighbour insisted I go and knock on his door, so I did. There was no answer. 'Ah, that's right,' he said. 'I think he's gone canoeing.'

I checked into the pub, paying \$40 a night for a room upstairs with a veranda. It looked just as you would imagine. The local bushies, all wearing well-worn hats as the last rays of light disappeared, had just started singing songs out the front of the old pub when the silhouette of a car with a canoe strapped to the roof slowly pulled up. Well, I reckon I know who this might be. Sure enough, a rugged man in a navy blue jumper appeared.

Inside the pub, I suddenly felt a woollen jumper brushing against my back as someone leaned in close from behind. 'Whooo are you?' a voice said, just like when Alice met the caterpillar in *Wonderland*. Surprised and matching his tone, I replied, 'Whooo are you?' knowing exactly who it was. With the widest of smiles he said, 'I'm Luke. What brings you to my town?' So I told him.

'Oh, a photographer. You must come to my house then,' he said jovially. He had the confidence of someone accustomed to getting his own way, so I replied, 'Actually, I already visited your house this afternoon and you weren't home, you were out canoeing. Honestly, I'm not sure if I'm going to waste the petrol going back'. This turned out to be the 'best worst' thing I could have said, igniting a spark.

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Page 7: Luke's studio is located in an old stone church filled with layers of curiosities: flowers from his garden, exotic Turkish kilims from his travels, and mismatched pieces of furniture, all with their own stories to tell of how they came into his possession.







I spent the rest of the night getting to know the locals in the pub's front bar, drinking too much red wine and avoiding eye contact with Luke Sciberras, who was playing pool in the pool room.

The next morning I woke up feeling a bit dusty. I fumbled around in my bag, searching for my car keys and in that moment I felt ... wool. I carefully pulled out a navy knitted jumper, handling it as if it were alive. How did I end up with Luke Sciberras' jumper? And why were my car keys missing? I ran downstairs, where the barmaid was expecting me.

'Someone didn't want you to get away,' she said dryly, sliding my car keys over to me. In that moment I realised that someone must have gone through my bag last night, putting my car keys behind the bar and replacing them with a wool jumper. So, it looked like I would be visiting the home of Luke Sciberras after all.

Later that afternoon as I was dashing out of the pub I heard Luke yell out, 'Kara. Come over here. Where are you off to all sparkly tonight?' I looked down at my sequinned top, maybe a little out of place for the sleepy town. 'I've been invited for a roast chicken.'

'Oh, that sounds lovely. With anyone I know?' he asked playfully. 'No one you know,' which was a lie; he knows everyone. 'You would never guess, I ended up with a navy blue jumper in my bag last night. Know anything about that?'

'Oh Kara, that's my jumper, it's my absolute favourite. I must have lost it last night. I've been asking everyone about it,' he said, waving his hands in the air, gesturing with a smirk to the invisible crowds behind him. 'You didn't come to visit me today. I thought you would. When are you coming to photograph my house?'

I looked at him, not wanting to laugh, but it was impossible. 'In the morning, I'll be seeing you in the morning, Luke Sciberras.' The thing about Luke Sciberras is that he gets under your skin in the most endearing, unforgettable way. His manner is charming and seductive — just like his paintings.

When I arrived at Luke's house the next morning I couldn't figure out why there was a quince on his bed. I soon discovered that his home is much like him, authentic and spirited, with that bohemian atmosphere I was so taken with all those years ago. Just as I was finishing taking photographs, he called out from his bedroom, 'Kara, come in here. Do you know what a fresh quince smells like? Maggie Beer told me always to keep a quince in my underwear drawer. Come in here and smell this. It's from my garden.'

It turns out that what they say about Luke Sciberras is true, every capivating word of it. I had no need to smell the quince. I already knew what a quince smelt like as I had caught its sweet fragrance in his garden, which had caught my eye so many years ago.

Pages 10–13: Luke is proud of his collection of Australian art, which occupies every wall in his home. There are pieces by Gary Shedd, Brett Whiteley, Ben Quilty, Guy Maestrì, Elizabeth Cummings, Max Cullen, and many, many others. Most of his artworks were either gifts from the artists, or swaps for his own art. He tells me, 'It's a very personal collection, as all art collections ideally should be. Artists put a great part of themselves into their work and my house is populated with little pieces by artists I love and admire. I wish the general public would see art in this way, rather than a commodity or status symbol.'

Pages 14–15: Luke's kitchen. Luke shares with Australian artist John Olsen, his friend and mentor, a passion for food and for what Luke calls the *batterie de cuisine* — all of the kitchen utensils, many of which are proudly on display. Luke and John both believe that work in the studio and work in the kitchen are closely connected — so the two spaces can often look quite similar.







