

LYRICAL FLOW

Being involved in the arts as a songwriter, singer and musician for most of her life, Brenda Liddiard became interested in painting around 2000. A big influence and inspiration in this discipline was her late brother, Chris Liddiard, who was a watercolour artist based in the UK. Brenda and her brother were born in Essex in the UK, Brenda now living in Auckland, New Zealand.



Waitakere Art Award 2020. 'What If? II' won 2nd prize in the painting section



'Passion III' - 500 x 300mm. Mixed media on board

With her brother's influence, Brenda started her painting career using watercolours. She attended many workshops and summer schools with well respected tutors including Allie Eagle, Cushla Parekowhai, Jane Zusters, James Lawrence, Sue Daly, Maree Wilson, Phillipa Blair and Brett A'Court.

"At age 50, finding a new creative path was very exciting for me, it opened up a whole new world. I wanted to pursue the learning for as long as possible and realised this was something I could do as I grew older."

Brenda finds inspiration everywhere - from the wonderful colours and forms of the natural world to the human made creations in the city, including the fascinating features of the human face with the multitude of stories behind the eyes, and the problems and issues found around the world.

When asked about the particular artists that have inspired her, she claims to have a very long list, conceding to mention a few here, "Gerhardt Richter - for his extraordinary breadth of artistic achievement, and that he's still painting, well into his 80s. Rita Angus - for her feisty attitude and wonderful skills, particularly her exquisite watercolour landscapes, but also her fabulous self-portraits. I was particularly inspired by one of these when doing one of my own self-portraits. Allie Eagle - who has been a faithful mentor and encourager since my early forays into art, for her tireless generosity with her wealth of knowledge and experience, and the beauty and power of her paintings. David Hockney - another extraordinarily diverse artist, endlessly curious and experimental well into old age.

"There are many more I could mention, but I'm particularly inspired and encouraged by those artists who are totally devoted to following their own path, whether or not that style is currently in vogue. I think it's important to be yourself."

One particular thing that Brenda enjoys about being an artist is the constant problem solving. "It keeps the brain working and provides a great outlet for emotions of all kinds."

She is most proud of the work done by the group she co-founded, 'Art for Change', which has had two major exhibitions at Depot Artspace in Devonport. "These exhibitions were designed to raise both funds and public profile for important causes such as resettling refugees in Auckland, and the work of the Roots of Empathy organisation which focuses on tackling bullying and other social problems in primary schools. Both exhibitions were extremely successful, and also gave many artists the opportunity to have their work exhibited, while also contributing to worthwhile causes."

Brenda has learned innumerable lessons from being involved with 'Art for Change'. "I have met so many great people and learned a huge amount about organising, networking and administrating. Stressful, but very rewarding."

Apart from 'Art for Change', Brenda also belongs to a painters collective, 'Ten Last Strokes' that consists of former members of Allie Eagle's classes at Corban Estate Arts Centre in Henderson, Auckland. This is a group of wonderful women who create regularly together, support each other in many ways and provide helpful critiques, sharing of materials, resources and collegiality. "When one person attends an interesting workshop, they will often come back to the group with whatever they have learned, and the knowledge gets shared around."

Finding herself much more observant about the world around her, and finding that creating art has tempered her tendency to be impatient, Brenda has learned that it's okay to make mistakes. "The main lesson to be learned from making mistakes is that you have to make them if you're going to do any growing. If you don't push the boundaries of your comfort zone you won't progress very far. Mistakes can sometimes end up being 'happy accidents', and I have had a number of experiences where what I thought was a fatal mistake turned out to improve a painting, or take it in an unexpected and more interesting direction."

Being an eclectic personality, her preferred subjects tend to change as she follows different ideas, ranging from landscapes and seascapes to portraiture and abstracts. As regards her favourite medium, she says: "I have different favourites for different purposes, and I've worked through

AOTEAROA ARTIST - April/May 2022



'Taakoka Island, Rarotonga' - 600 x 850mm. Oil and Acrylic on board



'Region 5: You are not forgotten' - 250 x 250mm. Acrylic on board

watercolour, acrylic, mixed-media and oils over the years. These days I'm working mostly in oils because I love the rich texture of the paint, both to work with and to look at. However, sometimes I want to work in multi layers and at some speed, and that's hard to do with oils, so then I turn to acrylics. On the other hand, I also love what you can do with watercolour, which cannot be achieved with oil or acrylics."

Brenda is very fond of her easel, finding it much less stressful to work upright instead of when she does her large abstracts on the floor, which can be very physical and tiring. Her processes of working vary greatly depending on the piece she is working on. "If it's a portrait, then I usually begin with a pencil sketch, whether working from life or a photograph. For the series of

portraits which comprised my solo exhibition at Depot Artspace in 2021, I used oil on Hahnemühle paper, with a finishing coat of cold wax.

"With an abstract, I'm just following my intuition and waiting for the painting to tell me what it needs next, so there isn't really a standard process. But if I'm working with

acrylics, when I feel like one layer is complete I will let it dry and then apply a coat of clear medium, allowing it to dry thoroughly before starting the next layer. I find this gives more depth to the piece, and also provides an isolation coat, so that I can correct mistakes in the next layer, as long as the new paint layer is still wet. I also apply a coat of clear medium as a final protective finish."

Toxic materials are a no-go for Brenda in her studio, "Golden Acrylics are excellent paints, but I sometimes use Pebeo, which are cheaper, if my budget is limited! For oils, I would love to use the very best quality paints, but quite frankly can't afford them. I find the Art Spectrum range a good compromise, also Winsor & Newton. I use Art Spectrum Brush & Hand Cleaner to clean my oil brushes. It's expensive, but non-toxic and very good, and can bring stiff, tired brushes back to life. I'm always hunting for bargains!"

As a songwriter, music with lyrics can be very distracting, so she prefers to opt either for silence, or instrumental music. At other times she'll listen to political podcasts, NPR (American Public Radio) or Radio NZ National.

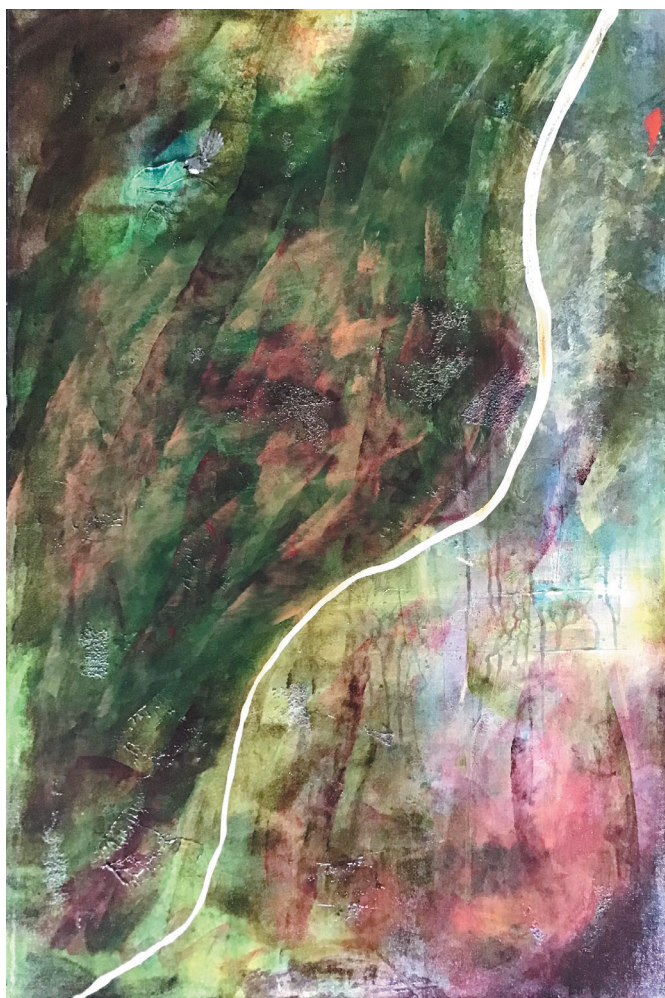
In her free time Brenda likes to walk and swim a lot. "I'm doing my best to keep the ageing process at bay! I'm very active in the folk/acoustic music scene in New Zealand, and have toured extensively all over the country, as well as Australia and the UK, with my musician husband, Mark Laurent. We have also performed voluntarily many times for various organisations/causes. I have



'Sunset on Rushlake Green' - 290 x 420mm. Watercolour on paper



'Jerusalem Window I' - 400 x 610mm. Mixed media on board




'Listen to the small voice' - 910 x 610mm. Mixed media on canvas



'Mary Ann' - 420 x 300mm. Oil on Hahnemühle paper

a daughter in Brisbane, a step-son in Auckland, and two grandchildren."

For new artists, Brenda advises to look and read about lots of different art. "Try to keep an open mind. There are so many resources available at libraries, galleries and on the Internet. I really enjoy watching videos where artists demonstrate and talk about their process and other aspects of their work. Look for classes/workshops with well respected tutors. Good tutors will also attract experienced artists, and you're likely to learn a great deal from the other participants as well. As I said earlier, don't be afraid of making mistakes – see them as opportunities to learn. Don't take other people's opinions of your work too seriously, it's only one opinion, and everyone looks at art in a different way, with different ideas in mind, so don't give up!"

Brenda has work in Australia and New Zealand. You can learn more about Brenda on her website: brendaliddiard.co.nz and digital prints (not reproductions of her original paintings) can be purchased on the FeltNZ website: felt.co.nz/shop/liddiardart 



'Hono's Home': In memory of Honotana Tamihana, 1954 - 2020 - 600 x 600mm. Acrylic & oil on board