

JOANNA POULSON

In bloom

GROWING UP, JOANNA POULSON LIKED TO SPEND time among the almond and plum blossoms at her grandparents' house at Salisbury. Earlier this year, she was among the blossoms in the temple gardens of Japan when she learnt that her grandmother Eileen had died.

"The blossoms and the gardens, the simple beauty of my surroundings, helped me to reflect on my nanna," Joanna says. "I found myself in an ideal place for contemplation and remembrance."

For Joanna, it follows naturally that she is painting blossoms, birds and gardens for this year's *Loreto SpringArt*, on September 11 and 12, where she is the 2010 *SALife Emerging Artist*. "I didn't know what or where or how my visit to Japan would influence my new works, but I was sure I wanted it to," she says. "The four pieces I'm working on are very timely. It was spring and blossoms in Japan in March, as it turns out, for a spring art show in Australia in September."

At 35, Joanna is pursuing what she wanted to do, but didn't when she left school. Back then, she started a business degree and was in the workforce well before she finished it. IT project management meant long hours and Joanna admits she was ambitious.

Apart from a WEA life drawing class, she put art aside to "follow the career path, live the material life". In 2003 she broke up her 70-hour weeks with a short course at Adelaide Central School of Art. "Life changed forever," Joanna says. "I rediscovered the joy of painting and being in a creative environment with others who shared the same passion."

Life changed forever, yes, but not completely. While Joanna soon went full-time at art school, she still had to pay the mortgage, and eat. After five months she was back in project management, only on different terms.

From then on, "I've always told employers that art is my priority," she says. "I've been pleasantly surprised how accommodating they've been." Right now that means Tuesdays to Thursdays nine to five in the city as project manager for an engineering company, then weeknights and four-day weekends in the backyard garage-studio she converted herself.

"This is my life," Joanna says. Even though her conventional day job is easier, "You don't choose to be an artist for luxury. You don't just sit and paint. It's hard work."



Hard work with rewards, that is. "Mixing paint – the science of colour and how colours work together – and getting it to do what you want it to is a real buzz," she says. "When it works it's amazing. When it doesn't it's so frustrating because you know you can do it. For me it might be because I haven't started a fresh palette. Other artists tell me I'm messy. We all work differently, some are more disciplined, but we all get there in the end. I get so involved that I don't worry about the chaos around me in the studio."

Towards the completion of her art studies, Joanna began working experimentally with other materials and not painting tightly. "I just missed painting, that real buzz," she says. So as a kind of rebellion she turned to tonal realism, or painting an object with respect for colour, light and form.

Among the objects were porcelains and tins from her nanna. "I inherited a lot from her," Joanna reflects. These she expanded to objects within objects seen through silhouettes, such as a dog with leaves. "I wanted to test myself, to see if the source object and the secondary objects are still recognised," she says. "I also wanted to create a bit of questioning for the viewer."

These paintings won Joanna the *SALife Loreto SpringArt Emerging Artist* award. "I was completely shocked," she says. "I hadn't long got back from Japan and was painting the blossom images the same day I was told. I enter *SpringArt* every year. This has upped the ante."

"When you're out on your own, an artist's life can be quite lonely. When someone else says what you're doing happens for them too, it's very reassuring. It reinvigorates."

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