



Interview with Patricia Pittman (Yuin Nation)

By Steve Dow

Recipient of the KHT Encouragement Award

The 8th Koorie Art Show (5 December 2020 – 21 February 2021)

The mullet at Millingandi, just outside of Pambula on the New South Wales south coast, were often caught by black fellas when the tide came in.

Today, the fish are fewer but artist Patricia Pittman, born and raised in Bega on Yuin Country, still takes her grandchildren there to swim in the canal among the fish jumping about.

In Pittman's acrylic and ink work *River Dreaming*, which won an encouragement award at The 8th Koorie Art Show, we see those fish, although the artist is saddened by all the roads and houses along the rivers.

Today, Pittman lives on her own in Bairnsdale, which is Gunaikurni Country in Victoria (the father of her two youngest children is a Gunaikurni man).

After her children all moved out of home, Pittman set up a home studio, with a view of her street, to make her art. There is an easel and an adjustable art desk her daughter bought her.

"I'll sit and think, I'll look at the paper for ages," she says. "Sometimes an idea will just come into my head if I'm walking around and cleaning up. Once I start, that's it. I don't stop."

Of late, Pittman has been carving a lot of linoleum prints. She recently began working on a print project with East Gippsland Art Gallery. Gillian Kline at the Freestone Press Printmaking Studio in Briagolong has printed some of Pittman's cuts.

"I just love cutting the lino out," she says. "I'm telling ya, it's so relaxing. It de-stresses ya."

"It's all cut in reverse, and I like creating dark backgrounds. I reckon the artwork stands out better. I've cut out a lot more designs that haven't been printed yet. I really want to do some large prints next."



When Pittman is in her creative bubble, unexpected visitors are politely told to return later. “You just go into a zone, like I do when I’m painting. I can sit and paint, and I’ll look at the time, and it will be three or four in the mornin’. Because I live by myself, and I don’t [usually] have any distractions.”

At other times, when the mood strikes, she will rise at 4 am to draw. “I tell you, when I lay down to sleep there’s that many ideas running around in my head. I’ll think of something to do, and I have to get up and do it.”

One of Pittman’s favourites to draw is the goanna, inspired by her late mother, a Kamilaroi woman from Quirindi in NSW, who passed away two decades ago. The goanna was her mother’s totem.

“I’ve never been up there, but my sisters went up and met Mum’s side of the family up there, who lived on Caroonna mission.

“They freaked out when they first went up there because all our cousins are ... well, this is the term I’m gonna use ... they’re as black as the ace of spades, and we’re fair [skinned].”

In primary school, Pittman decided she wanted to pursue art, and throughout high school received numerous awards for her art.

Last year, Pittman was visiting family in Bega and ended up staying a couple of months because of the bushfires. It was an opportune time to reconnect with Country, and her extended Koorie family there.

“All of us always get together,” she says. “It’s just a normal thing. While the fires were on, I was up there doing my art work.”

Returning to Bairnsdale just before the COVID-19 lockdown, Pittman enjoyed another creative patch. “I did something like 20 pieces of artwork. It was productive, even though it was a bit lonely at times. I didn’t go anywhere, but I was all right. I had my art.”

Pittman has lately been using archival paper, “the proper art paper. One side is smooth and the other side is rough. I love the rough side of the paper.

“You can use paint, ink, whatever you want on it, and it doesn’t smudge or anything. It’s the best paper I’ve ever used. It’s so easy to draw on.”



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Pittman has 11 grandchildren: eight girls and three boys. “They all love paintin’ with Nan,” she says. “The oldest one, she’s 10, and she’s pretty good.”

Soon, Pittman is hoping to work her courage up to enter the Archibald Prize for portraiture held annually by the Art Gallery of NSW.

Her subject would likely be singer-songwriter Archie Roach. “I was thinking Uncle Archie because my kids are related to him.

“I’ve actually done two portrait pictures before of Uncle Archie and one of Aunty Ruby [Hunter, the late singer-songwriter who was married to Roach].

“I ran into [Roach] at a mission. He was doing a concert there. He signed the [portraits] for me, so I’ll never part with them.”

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Patricia Pittman (Yuin Nation), *River Dreaming* 2020, acrylic and ink on paper. KHT Encouragement Award 2020 (1 of 2).