

Town & Country

Queensland

Artist's colourful journey

By REBECCA JENNINGS

THE Australian bush, with its sweeping landscapes and rich palette of colours and textures, has always been a Mecca for artists who are lured west by stunning scenery.

But for Glenmorgan's "grandmother-grazier-and-artist-in-between", Carol McCormack, the bush offers something more.

At first glance, her acrylics are a burst of colour – rich ochre hues, passionate reds, bold blues and splashes of yellow.

But look deeper, and the viewer sees a quirky, colourful impression of the Australian outback, captured by a woman who knows it so well.

Carol has strong connections to the land – she was raised on the family property Dunluce at Hughenden, which has been in the Stewart-Moore family for more than 100 years.

Her father, John Stewart-Moore, was a pioneer of Droughtmasters, and Carol and her husband of 40 years, Ed, have operated Clonlara Droughtmaster stud at Dilga, Glenmorgan, since 1969.

Although she was always interested in art, Carol did not receive any formal art education until she joined the Glenmorgan Art Group and the Flying Art School in 1972.

Since then, her resume has grown to include solo and group exhibitions, and several regional art show awards, and she is also known for her work as one of the founding directors of Myall Park Botanic Garden.

Like many rural artists, Carol has had to develop her art in and around the day-to-day challenges of life on the land and as mother to Gus, Clare and Charlie, and now a grandmother.

"My family comes first, so my art is often put on hold," she said. "I think it is important to be tough and make



Carol McCormack in her studio at Dilga, Glenmorgan.

time to do what you love – as long as the family is happy and the work is done."

In fact, some of Carol's exhibitions have been done while juggling her other roles.

"Apart from breeding cattle, my family's interest is campdrafting, but I do not compete, so campdraft time is my painting time," she said. "I've loved accompanying Ed to drafts as far away as Darwin and Fitzroy Crossing in WA – the sights seen on these trips are always turned into paintings."

On these trips, Carol is literally an artist on the move – she describes how she "sets up shop" in the cab of the truck while Ed drives, taking photos of the scenery for later reference, or even painting away the miles with a canvas balanced on a box.

"Our retirement plan is an off-road caravan that can hook up to either the truck or the wagon, and this year's trip in the wagon was to

Cunnamulla, Innamincka, Birdsville, Quilpie and points between. Ed doesn't mind a bit of domestic life in the caravan, and finds beautiful out of the way places to take me for a few days so I have time to paint while he throws in a line and keeps us fed."

Carol's latest exhibition, opening in Toowoomba next week, pays tribute to some of these journeys – to Currawinya, Coopers Creek, Clifton,

Cameron's Corner and places in between.

"For me the landscape is home, sustenance and recreation and since I was a small child I have felt its power in an almost spiritual way," she explains. "When I look at a landscape I feel there is mystery in the darks, excitement in the lights, the shapes tell me stories."

"Moving from area to area is a journey of discovery – in each place the landmarks and changing flora and fauna excite and inspire me."

Carol's use of colour sets her apart from many more "traditional" landscape artists, and she explains how her distinctive style is a reference to how the landscape speaks to her.

"When I first started painting I was frustrated by the constraints of traditional styles. But my appreciation of artists such as Sydney Nolan and John Olsen opened my eyes to the possibilities of art, and now I just respond to what I see and feel."

"I like to travel in and out of abstraction, so that some paintings will be more real, while others are reduced to lines and patterns. But my colours are never real – I exaggerate liberally. Even when I try hard to subdue my approach my paintings come out bright and strong."

Carol also has a strong sense of the history of the place she paints, and the results are striking scenes painted in response to the diversity of the landscape she sees.

The title of her upcoming exhibition, *Round and Around* is in part a tribute to this journey.

It is also a reference to a completion of artistic journeys – and the promise of new ones just around the corner.

♦ Carol's solo exhibition, *Round and Around*, opens at the Feather and Lawry Design Gallery, Toowoomba, on October 31, and will be displayed until November 28. The opening function runs from 6-8pm on October 31. Ten percent of all sales will be donated to the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

For more information, visit www.carolmccormack.com.au



Clifton harvest – acrylic on canvas by Carol McCormack.



Galahs - acrylic on canvas by Carol McCormack.

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