

Audrey Emery

“Listen to your inner voice and follow your passion”

Audrey Emery is a practicing artist who has conducted weekly children’s art classes for over thirty years in the local community, inspiring thousands of young people to pursue their art and creativity.

Audrey grew up in Gawler and first became interested in art while in high school when she found some art books, first heard jazz music and was inspired by artists like Chagall. She began to experiment at home with anything she could get her hands on; shoe polish, house paint and pieces of wood, to explore her creative inner voice.

Audrey left high school in her intermediate year as she was eager to move into the world. One of her first ventures was to open a coffee shop with a friend, the Brownstone Jazz Cellar, in Gawler. Coffee shops were a very new concept and this one, in the basement of a 2-storey building, was soon a ‘happening joint’. But success meant rent increases and so they closed their brief beatnik venture.

She then worked at numerous jobs including at the Weapons Research Bureau in office positions for a few years while also doing her own art. In her late 20s, Audrey decided to go back to school to do year 12 and chose to then go on to Art School. At that time, the art school was very male dominated environment and offered little feedback or support. Despite doing very well academically for the 4 years, Audrey did not enjoy the ethos and culture. In her final year, Audrey started working one day a week with difficult students in a western suburbs school offering art experiences and felt that she was on a track that had meaning and purpose.

By this time Audrey was bringing up her two young children and so approached a local school principal with her art and the idea of doing some work in the school. Initially Audrey helped with painting their Christmas backdrop and running some art classes, this began her life’s work as a self-employed artist. She was soon working on school projects and running after-school classes for children to enable them to explore and express themselves.

In 1987 she approached the school with the idea to do a mural for the bicentennial celebrations making panels to represent 1788, 1888 and 1988. Audrey wrote the grant application and did all of the organisation and coordination, producing a very positive outcome. This led to her applying for grants to do artwork for Come Out with schools and community displays, such as at Carrick Hill and the Botanic Gardens. She was also running up to eight private classes weekly after school with as many as 90 students, along with raising her own children.

Audrey would initiate the projects, write the grant applications, and then coordinate up to 500 children from a range of local schools to work in small groups to do murals. Success bred success and the more Audrey’s portfolio and reputation developed the more other schools wanted to get involved. Audrey has left a legacy of community murals in local schools. Audrey’s art projects usually blend science or natural environment themes with art and over the years students have become more involved in the design phases as well as the project work.

Audrey’s first private exhibition of her own work was for the Fringe at the Pepper Street Arts Centre. Her personal art has strong spiritual roots exploring life’s journeys. Audrey is a skilled

creative writer, able to describe the essence of her work eloquently and passionately. Her exhibitions have included coordinating local school students to visit the art works, discuss them and have experiences in doing their own art. Again, with hundreds of students involved in these visits.

It is Audrey's capacity to enthuse and amaze students about the natural world and science to explore in their art that has seen her successful in running art classes for over 40 years. She still runs weekly after-school classes at Stradbroke and Burnside Schools but since covid times has reduced the number of classes. Over the forty years of classes, Audrey has sparked creativity in thousands of children and joy and wonder when they get to exhibit their art in professional frames in galleries and libraries. These events are so appreciated by the students and their families.

Audrey recognises that dealing with everything by herself as a self-employed artist has been a struggle at times, requiring her to balance her creativity with business acumen. At the age when many people are considering retirement, Audrey applied to go to UniSA in City West to study printmaking and not only finished her degree but went on to do Honours.

After her daughter had returned from an overseas art conference they decided to apply to attend a conference in London. This was Audrey's first overseas trip and her presentation focused on the sublime in art, since then Audrey attended five more overseas conferences as a speaker.

Audrey has lived in Campbelltown since 1971 and loves the natural environment especially Morialta and finds the natural environment very inspirational in her artwork. Many of Audrey's students are from the Campbelltown area and Audrey has held many local workshops and exhibitions.

Success for Audrey is the sense that she has engaged and captivated the students and their families for the past 40 years and many students stay in classes throughout their primary years. Seeing the enjoyment that students have in their own abilities and the number that have gone on to study or have careers in the art sector has been very rewarding.

Her advice for other creatives, is to connect with others, join a local art group, be part of a project and let things grow from there. Finding other people to feed your passion and creativity is useful. When asked what she would tell her younger self, Audrey replied "whatever I would tell her she wouldn't listen to me"!

“My art has been my calling”

