





Brushing up on Howick

At the heart of art stands the painter with brush to fashion the world around us. And, at the heart of the Howick art scene is Helene Henare, as JON RAWLINSON discovered.

If a picture's worth a thousand words, then, despite her late start, Helene Henare should be a millionaire by now! However, the Whitford-based artist prefers her expression be directed by inspiration rather than commercial concerns.

"I started selling my work virtually straight away; it just took off," she says, "I kept thinking how I'd love to make a living from painting, but the pressure to 'be commercial' soon set in. I was painting things I thought people would like, rather than necessarily what I would like to experiment with."

Thankfully, despite working fulltime in East Tamaki, Helene is now able to concentrate on painting her way.

"If you're relying on art to provide an income, you need to spend time marketing and being a bit commercial in approach; unfortunately, the freedom to dabble is a luxury," she says.

Well-known primarily for her landscapes and seascapes, Helene has lived almost all of her life locally, including 20 years in Whitford. However, art was not to play a big role until she reached her forties.

"I didn't really apply myself enough in art class at school [Owairoa Primary School, Howick Intermediate and Howick College], which is a shame. I've always loved art, but didn't really know I wanted to pursue it back then.

"Many years later, a woman I was working with studied art at night at Edgewater College. I saw how much her work was improving so I thought 'if she can do it, so can I!'"

Taught by local painter, John Horton, Helene says she received expert tutelage.

"John was fantastic! He saw promise and encouraged me greatly. His best advice was just to keep on painting, because you learn more as you go.

That's still fitting. With each painting I learn something, whether it's a new technique or different approach.

"I'm influenced by John, but I've seen a lot of other works which I really love. There are different styles I'd like to try, but there's no one artist who influences me anymore than another; I prefer to hone my own style."

While Helene agrees life experience is beneficial to an artist, passion always comes first.

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Drawing inspiration from her picturesque surroundings in Whitford, as well as other areas of eastern Auckland, the Coromandel has also influenced her work.

"Some paintings are impressionistic, but a lot are 'quirky' – I call them quirky because I don't know how else to describe them! I use artistic licence throughout my work.

"For instance, when Cafe Paris in Howick commissioned me, I placed the cafe by the bus stop on Picton Street, which it isn't really, but they

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wanted the bus in it and maybe it should be there anyway, who knows!", she laughs.

"I enjoy all of New Zealand, really. I love the bush and sea – particularly when they're in the same scene.

"They offer peaceful settings which remind me of family holidays and what I feel this country is really about."

However, there is more yet to be captured by this artist's loving hand.

"There's actually heaps more in Howick I'd love to paint – Stockade Hill, for example – but I'll get there sooner or later," says Helene.

With paintings selling for between \$300 and \$2,400 (depending on size and complexity), and pieces now in private collections in the UK, USA, Spain and Australia, Helene has met with success.

In addition to countless local exhibitions, her work has been displayed abroad, even gracing the walls of Agora Gallery in New York. She is currently in the planning stages for exhibitions later this year.

And accolades also include two People's Choice awards at Estuary Artworks exhibitions at Uxbridge.

However, Helene remains grounded and prepared to give back to the region which has fuelled her passion for painting.

"I've given a couple of lessons to art students at Owairoa, and I also donate works to charities and local organisations, such as schools and the Howick Golf Club, for prizes," she says.

"I think it's really important for local artists to not only portray, but also support their communities."

CALENDAR GIRL MARCHES ON

While staring at the calendar waiting for the working week to 'March' on, time tends to fly thanks to Helene Henare's beautiful paintings.

Although her work has featured on numerous calendars over recent years, the local artist says it was an honour to again have worked alongside other iconic Howickians in this year's Business Builder Calendar.

"I always get a thrill seeing my paintings in calendars, because there are some excellent artists in them. I still have to pinch myself!" she says.

"I also had a few in the Howick Business Association Calendar last year, with Ron Gribble, who does the mural art in Howick, and local historian, Alan La Roche. I didn't know beforehand that Alan even painted, but he does some lovely work."



Far left; Helene with her painting Gin's Sanctuary. Above top; Mt Ruapehu in the Summertime – as featured in Business Builder Calendar. Left; Howick Village. Above; Escaping the Rat Race.