

Donna Abbati is our Red Point Artists Spotlight this month. Donna works in a range of medias, her inspiration comes from nature, science and the natural world.

Hi Donna, thanks so much for your time. I'm looking forward to hearing more about your work and your artistic background. I know your artworks do branch out into a number of areas so feel free to expand your answers to cover your different medias

- Firstly, when did you start to create, have you always created artworks or did your practice develop over time?

I studied art at high school, then basically ignored creative pursuits for years. Then I took up cross-stitch, which was a very random choice, because I can't do any normal sewing. I also started growing gourds over 20 years ago. I'm not sure why, but I might have been inspired by a Monty Python movie, "Life of Brian" – "follow the gourd!"

- In a few sentences please describe your work

I create in different ways, including my gourds, cross-stitch works, and jewellery, which includes my hand-made paper beads.

I grow most of the gourds in my garden, and prepare them myself. A lot of the decoration on the gourds is based on scientific imaging, such as microscopic cell images, anatomy and other scientific illustrations.

I also create cross-stitch items, such as cards, including my "bin chicken" Christmas cards, and pictures. I am currently working on a series of trilobite designs – trilobites are extinct bugs.

Then there's my hand-made beads, which are mostly made from repurposed decorative papers. I am also experimenting with making my own air-drying paper clay to make beads. I then incorporate these beads into jewellery, including bracelets and earrings.

- What is your background, have you worked at any other jobs whilst being an artist?

After finishing school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but saw an ad for an interesting sounding job, Nuclear Medicine Technologist. I applied

for it and got it, despite not knowing what I was actually signing up for. I have worked in the field since then – over thirty years, mostly at Wollongong Hospital. It pays for my bad habits – you can never have too many supplies in the studio!

- Did you go to art school or have any formal training in the arts?

No. I did a very short course in cross-stitch about 30 years ago, because I had to drive my mother to the course, and didn't want to sit around waiting for her.

- What media do you prefer, and how did you come to use it as your primary one?

I think it is the gourds. Mainly because I grow them from seeds in my garden, and watch them grow, mature, go moldy, get cleaned and finally turned into a finished object. This can take up to a year for a big gourd – quite often the painting of the gourd is the shortest part of the process. They're like my babies.

I was growing gourds for years, but not really doing much with them. I finally decided to clean and sell plain gourds at Red Point when they started to fall onto me from high shelves! Red Point ceramic artist Janette Loughrey also encouraged me to start doing more with them, and so I began decorating them.

- What inspires you as an artist?

Lots of things. Nature, scientific subjects, such as my fossil trilobite cross-stitch designs.

- What do you like about your work?

It gives me a creative way to express myself, and is a totally different way of working than in my day job.

- What images or things keep you company in your workspace?

When I'm working on my gourds at home – usually doing the very messy preparing and cleaning, I have the garden in front and around me.

At Studio 15, I have different scientific illustrations on the wall inspiring me – presently I have lots of trilobites stuck up there.

- What is your daily routine when working?

Procrastinate!

When I go to my Red Point studio, I usually spend the first half hour or so saying hello to everyone, ordering something from the café, cleaning my desk, and then thinking about actually working on a project. I have been known to sit looking at or fondling a gourd for a while as well – which does worry my studio buddies. Then I start to work on my current project.

- Do you have a favourite artist?

So many. I do like the work of the gourd artist Mark Doolittle. Also, the Australian cross-stitch designers Jill Oxton, Di Noyce and Jan Skinner.

- What's the best advice you would give to someone beginning their artistic careers?

Experiment with different media. Have fun!

Donna thank you for being our artist spotlight. Your work is so unique and very creative. You have certainly confirmed that it's possible to work full time and pursue your creative side too, a great inspiration for all.

Donna Abbati's Studio, 15 Red Point Artists Assn Art Precinct, 100 Wentworth St Port Kembla.

Due to the present restrictions Red Point Studios are closed, however works can be viewed through the studio windows.

Mark Donnas studio on your to do list once the restrictions are lifted!