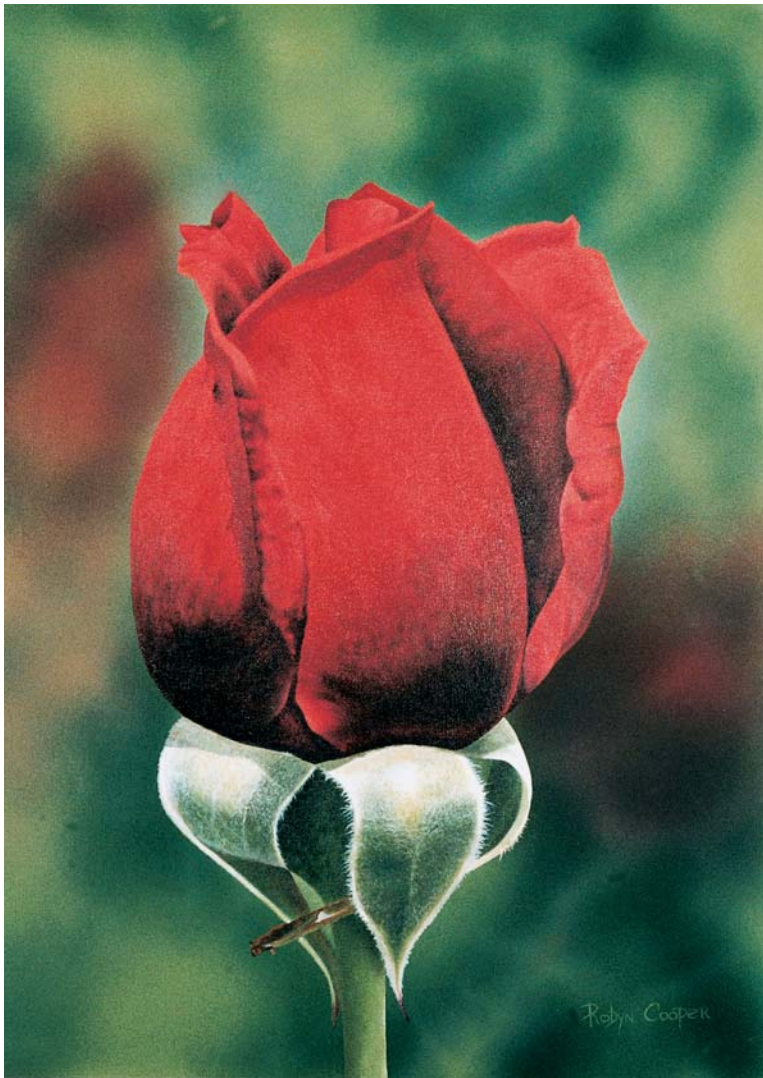


Robyn Cooper

Art Therapy

By Trevor Lang

Western Australian artist Robyn Cooper leads a hectic life in Perth's northern suburbs, where she has discovered that her love for art provides welcome stress relief.



Robyn first encountered paint as a child at St Joseph's Convent in Bunbury (south-west Western Australia) but did not commence serious art studies until many years later. After marrying and raising a family she attended decorative art classes and found a renewed passion for painting, with a special affection for floral subjects rendered in acrylics.

A move to the country put Robyn in a new situation where she was unable to attend art classes each week, so she started to teach herself. She began buying magazines, books, tutorial videos and virtually anything she could put her hands on to further her knowledge of painting, with colour theory and brush techniques as high priorities.

At this stage Robyn's paintings were all done in acrylics, but she wanted to move into oils. She was horrified to discover that the solvents in archival oils led to her developing Asthma and afflicted her with allergies. This was very disappointing as Robyn believed the colour and lustre of oils would not be able to be matched in any other medium.

Her disappointment was shortlived however, as Robyn was soon to discover an advertisement for 'heat-set oils' in an American art magazine. The advertisement claimed this product was 'non toxic and odourless' and described a process by which the paint could be dried at will with a normal heat gun (readily available at most hardware stores) and not by the climate evaporative drying process which controlled every other medium. Above all else it was safe to use inside the home, causing no discomfort to family members or pets.



It seemed almost too good to be true: An oil paint with all these qualities, that never ever dried until you wanted it to. Robyn had found that living in an extreme climate did create a lot of waste with paint drying too rapidly (or, in the case of oils, sometimes too slowly). She purchased some 'heat-set oils' and found they performed differently to what she was familiar with – but after a few days she really started to understand how to use this medium.

Robyn learned that she needed to mash the paints down each day with a palette knife to bring them to a 'melted butter' state. This meant that she rarely needed a thinning medium, and the paints went on beautifully.

With complete control of the drying process, she was able to complete a painting in one sitting. A good example

was a botanical or floral piece, where she needed to layer paint onto the subject to give depth. Robyn was able to apply a layer of oil paint; dry it immediately; then place another layer over it and also dry that immediately. This was absolutely brilliant!

With no clean-up or wastage, her palette was always ready to go, even if she was just sitting down for a few minutes to paint ... she could just pick up a brush and immediately start painting. As the paint never dried until heat was applied, she never had to worry about brushes going hard either, no matter if they sat there for a day, a week, a month or even a year. Robyn has a palette she shows to visiting artists which bears mixed colours left over from a painting done in 1998 ... these

paints are still wet and ready to work with.

About 1998, Robyn decided to undertake a correspondence course in Still Life with renowned American decorative artist Mary Gibilisco. This was quite difficult and the standard was very high. She persevered for many months and became an accredited Artisan in Genesis Heat-Set Oils, being only one of two such artists here in Australia.

In December 2004, Robyn and her husband became the national distributors (for Australia, New Zealand and Singapore) of Genesis Heat-Set Oils. This meant another lifestyle change, along with a huge commitment; and also a move back to Perth's northern suburbs where the couple established a distribution centre.



A decision was made to deal directly with artists and offer a complete back-up support system.

“We wanted to maintain a personal and friendly style of business which



reflects our own personal characters,” says Robyn.

A comprehensive website at www.genesisoilpaints.com.au was set up. It boasts the full Genesis product range and an artist gallery showcasing works by artists from all over Australia. This allows artists to shop online if they wish, outside of normal business hours; and to have their orders processed and dispatched anywhere in Australia within two to three days.

Robyn and her husband also established another art-related business at the same premises. Known as ‘The Artist Warehouse’ this business features studios for teaching daily art classes as well as stocks of art supplies and a gallery section. Last year The Artist Warehouse was honoured to receive the City of Wanneroo ‘Best New Business Award’ for 2005.

The end result is a vibrant and somewhat different approach to art teaching which incorporates the whole journey.

Visitors to the centre frequently congratulate Robyn and her husband on the style of their business which displays a touch of early Australiana ... with an old rusty 1938 International ute sitting graciously and appropriately in the middle of the showroom, surrounded by old rusty corrugated iron complete with paintings.

Today Robyn’s art is varied, but she finds her greatest joy in working with landscapes, still life and floral subjects. Her business commitments unfortunately limit her painting pursuits; and painting is Robyn’s only true passion aside from her family.

Art, in Robyn’s view, presents many opportunities and can play a huge part in today’s hectic and complex lifestyle.

“The psychotherapeutic benefits from art are unarguable,” she maintains.

“I have had discussions with some members of the medical fraternity who enjoy painting, about how I would love to create an advertisement asking



the simple question: ‘Which would you prefer? A tub of paint and a brush, or a bottle of pills?’

“As we artists know, the benefits gained through art therapy can (in some cases) far exceed a quick fix with medication.

“I am aware that a short-term course of drugs can help in dealing with depression, but long-term is definitely where the teaching or introduction of art can play a major role. We have witnessed enormous benefits to normal everyday people (as well as sick or disabled people) through an introduction to art.”

The excitement of not knowing who will walk through the doors each day, or perhaps make contact from somewhere (almost anywhere) in the world, is a wonderful part of Robyn’s busy life now. She loves talking directly with artists. Her greatest reward is having people communicate with her to thank her for introducing them to a medium which has allowed them to get back into art.

Many who have discovered Genesis Heat-Set Oils through Robyn’s influence appreciate the safety of this medium too – not only for their own health benefits but also for the benefits to their families,

their pets, or their classroom environments.

Robyn Cooper can be contacted by email on genesisart@bigpond.com ■

