

Jill Lewis

Feature Artist November 1 - 8, 2025

Art has long been considered a mirror where glimpses of life's meaning may be experienced and expressed. The intricate narratives in Jill Lewis' paintings reflect her deeply philosophical musings. Imbued with abundant layers of otherness, symbolism and imagination, the works challenge convention and category. Interior and exterior, visible and invisible, ancient and new, meld together in a visceral prose that evokes the power of enduring possibility. "Painting, for me, is a means of understanding and communicating with the world around me," explains Jill. "For influence, I draw upon various forms of ancient and primitive art and find myself particularly drawn to art from the Oceania, Egyptian and Incan cultures. Their artworks were primarily created as a means of communication and storytelling, rather than for decorative purposes. Often the images may have taken the form of pictorial histories, cautionary tales within mythology, or even as ways of appealing to, or bargaining with, the gods."



Speaking of her process, Jill divulges that she rarely begins with a preconceived idea about subject or compositional factors - it's more an intuitive approach, allowing the brushwork to guide her. She explains that "In the picture plane, I flatten figures, animals, birds and plants, and alter them to unnatural scales in order to unify them. I decorate them as a way of honouring and giving them importance in my imagined world. I "invent" new hybrid species of animals, birds and plant-forms. They simply evolve on the canvas. Within this changed spatial relativity, along with the textured, patterned surfaces, I explore the subtle and peculiar relationships between people, animals, birds, plants and the land. I'm fascinated by the traditional symbolism attached to various creatures and am conscious of this as I include each element in a picture. In this way symbolism is embedded in the overall imagery. Birds representing freedom and variation might sit next to a fish representing adaptability and determination. In other paintings, away from my home environment, a goat representing both fertility and folly, might sit near a zebra representing balance and harmony, or a horse representing strength. In the painting *Don't Stop the Silence but Don't Stop the Noise* I've employed a favourite ancient technique where I use the long, dried stems of the Agapanthus plant, to draw on the canvas with acrylic ink. The length of the stem reduces my control of the line and leads to the desired awkwardness of the shapes. The aerial view of flattened figures is to increase the puzzling nature of the imagery ...and also means the painting can be hung in any direction.

Jill's paintings are far from mere whimsical anecdotes; the works pulsate with gestural energy. Freed from perspective considerations, figurative and geometric elements conjoin in a compositional ambiguity that generates visual intrigue. Surfaces alive with colour, tactile linear markings and strange, symbolic creatures compel the viewer's participation. She says that "In an age where technology is so much at odds with the natural world, I try to convey a feeling of spiritual connection to nature. For this reason, I mostly avoid representing man-made elements other than the occasional bowl, hut or boat. Just for fun, I will often employ humour in the way I portray animal and human characters. There is so much to worry about in our crazy world and I think that artists musicians and dancers etc can help lighten the load."

Born in Sydney and educated in Melbourne with a BA Fine Art and Graduate Diploma Painting from RMIT. Jill moved to Queensland in 1987 and taught art in tropical Far North Queensland and the Sunshine Coast before returning to Melbourne in 1999. Her work has been widely collected in Australia and overseas including the Mornington Regional Gallery; Marriott Hotel, Brisbane; St Vincents Hospital, Melbourne.

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