



Brian Clinton



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Involved since the early days of Illustrators Australia, we are thrilled to have Brian's contribution to Outline. From the "halcyon days" until the present, I loved to read (and see) his overview of the changes in the industry along the way.

Outline: With a long career in illustration and art, we would love to hear an overview of your early education, career "chapters" all the way to your current projects/focus.

Brian: I did my studies in Graphics Arts at Perth Tech in WA and was offered my first job before I graduated at Art Photos Engravers in 1960, which was an art studio attached to the Sunday times newspaper. It had 3 senior illustrators whose mentoring was pivotal in the early days of my career. This was when illustration was booming and photography was just gaining ground, the studio actually had an apprenticeship which from memory was supposed to be a 5 year term.

I was lucky that a company in Melbourne, Art and Design had seen some of my work and offered me a job so I think I only did 2 or 3 years in the apprenticeship and they let me go to further my career here in Melbourne. I actually arranged to join them after I had a 3 months break and went to Sydney with a Jazz band and lived in Kings Cross. This period was a real eye opener for a 20 year old with

some fascinating experiences at that time. Then I moved down to Melbourne and started my career with Art and Design in Drury Lane in the city, they were great times in a period where a number of art studios serviced all the advertising agencies. The work was prolific with 3 reps bring in a big volume of work, we were always busy and their budgets were generous, they were halcyon days indeed.

Through this period I was slowly gaining a good reputation with all the advertising agencies for my realistic illustration. Art & Design moved studio to 602 St Kilda Rd and during this time I was considering moving to a group of freelance illustrators - to which the directors of Art & Design offered my own company within the group which I agreed to. During this time I was contacted by Australia Post to do my first stamp designs, "Famous Australian Racehorses" in 1978. This began a long association with Australia Post in which I did around 150 stamp commissions with a series "Australia Historic Homesteads" in which I travelled to every state in Australia to research and take my reference photos which was very enjoyable. I won the collectors vote

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for the best stamp designs with Christmas School Nativity and a Carols by Candlelight issues. These days most stamp design work, sadly for freelance illustrators, is done in house - the last issue I did was an Anzac Day Issue a few years ago.

The early 1980's were very productive years for illustrators with great campaigns to work on. Even the storyboard visualising side was frenetic, often on a big project you could earn a month's wages on a weekend. I remember a illustration campaign I was doing for a big advertising agency, when the Creative Director from the same agency called me in to quote on a new exciting illustration assignment... Knowing that the other assignment was wanted by the same deadline I thought just to get out of it I would quoted a ridiculous fee - and I mean really ridiculous - thinking that would be the end of it. He immediately fired back "that was fine" which shocked me, to which I outlined my dilemma and said I could not do it, he without blinking an eyelid and knowing my interest in the Society of Illustrators in New York added on top a return airfare to New York which was an offer I could not refuse. I worked around the clock with as little as a few hours' sleep for a few weeks to finish both jobs on time, I got up to 19 cups of coffee a day to keep me going which didn't have a good effect for quite a while - they were certainly were exciting and profitable days.

This led to the first of a number of trips to the Society of illustrators in New York which was truly wonderful and was the catalyst and inspiration for my working style. Meeting my heroes of this great era with time at their studios,



seeing their wonderful originals they were working on being Bob Peak, Bernie Fuchs, and Wilson McLean. At Bernie Fuchs studio I was privileged to see a new assignment he had just completed for Sports Illustrated - his artwork canvasses in oil were exquisite. Meeting other greats of the American illustration scene at the annual exhibition at the Society was inspirational and to see all the original art, including the Norman Rockwell's and Maxwell Parish's as part of the permanent art that graced the walls of the Society... Capturing the history of our great profession was breathtaking.

That Creative Art Director's offer of a trip to New York changed my career direction, and the Society with its rich history was truly inspiring and I made a lot of friends there, it was pivotal in my development in illustration. I moved to my home studio when the building in St Kilda Rd was sold I and went out freelancing solo which I really loved and am still doing.

In the following years the agency strength declined with many companies setting up their own small inside groups to handle their advertising, with the rise in





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computer generated work, illustration budgets began to decline - but the good thing with computers for illustrators was the improvements in Photoshop and Painter, two programs I worked hard on learning to increase my skill set. I was lucky to win the gold medal for illustration at the prestigious International Festival of Advertising in New York. And have been commissioned to do original art for the film posters such as *Crocodile Dundee*, *The Light Horsemen*, *Phar Lap* as well as a number of other Hollywood movies, my style and technique I owe so much to the late Bob Peak who was considered at that time to be master of movie poster art. I even have one of his beautiful original art charcoal portrait drawings I purchased from him taking pride of place on the wall at home. I have also received numerous commissions for portraits from government, including official philatelic portraits of the Royal Family, and from private individuals worldwide.

My great projects include 16 artworks for Australia Post celebrating the centenary of the AFL, and a number of original paintings for the Bradman Museum. This collection of 52 works was produced into a book *'The Art of Bradman'* which sold out 4 editions and was a great success - the whole collection which I owned was personally signed by the late Sir Donald Bradman on each artwork. I was lucky enough to sell the entire collection to a company owner and private collector; this has enabled me to set up my future financially.

This collection is going on display in an exhibition at the National Wool Museum in Geelong from December to

February during the World Cup Cricket Campaign and I am working with the owner on this and producing a possible limited edition print for the exhibition. He also wants to take this collection to India and England which I will be involved with, all very exciting.

I have produced over the years a lot of work in sports memorabilia and every year do a portrait of the inducted legend for the Sport Australia Hall of Fame which is a nice ongoing commission. My recent focus has been a collection of oil paintings for the VRC of great racehorses of Flemington which came about with a commission to paint 'The Greatest Cup Never Run' for the 150th anniversary of VRC. I have won the commission for the last two years to paint the Australian Racehorse of the year which has been the mighty Black Caviar; this has been great for me as one of the owners has also purchased two large oil paintings of this great horse from me for his art collection.

Outline: What are the biggest shifts (in taste/industries/ styles etc) you have found for your own work, or illustration in general, through your career?

Brian: My work now has shifted from Acrylic medium to oil in traditional work and digital for other works like book covers and a lot of preparative design work for my traditional work, so even at this stage of my career I am still learning and developing. I also have a large format Epson printer to produce my limited edition Giclee fine art prints, mainly sports memorabilia, which I put together in InDesign. I am now really enjoying picking the work that I



really like without the pressure of deadlines to a degree.

Outline: You were involved in the early days of Illustrators Australia. It would be great to hear more about this time - can you tell us about the initial objectives, structure and plans IA had?

Brian: My involvement in the early days of Illustrators Australia from my memory came about with a group of individual freelance illustrators namely Fay Plamka, Freddy Briggs, the late Phil Masters, Di Worland, Connell Lee, Geoff Cook (*also profiled in this edition - Ed*) and myself meeting at Fay's house for a get together and to discuss at first a dispute between illustrators and Australia Post on a degrading of artists rights. We felt we could unite as a unified group and voice to withdraw our services, to have Australia Post change their thinking on this dispute which was resolved in our favour. This progressed to discussion about forming The Illustrators Association of Australia principally to have a voice for illustrators who may be taken advantage of. I had myself always insisted I retain the original art and was selling first rights only and the original art if the client wanted it was a new negotiated fee. A committee was formed and a constitution was drawn up, Geoff Cook designed our famous 3 legged platypus logo. The meetings were generally held at Di Worland's house who was one of the driving force's as treasurer in making it work, word got around and membership began to grow from small beginning. We as a group began to organize seminars that had interest to fellow illustrators, intervening in disputes between artists and unscrupulous clients and promoting illustrator's portfolios, it also gave a chance to meet and exchange ideas as previously we as a group were very isolated. The 9x5 exhibition idea was one that was embraced by illustrators and the auction nights were well attended each year with great themes to provide a unique perspective on an idea concept, Phil Masters' auction talents on the night was legendary and very entertaining.

I was selected as President of Illustrators Australia for a term of a couple of years which was an honour. A problem

developed after about 10 years with not being able to generate fresh talent on the committee it became a bit stale, fortunately the new breed has come on board and we are regenerating into the modern era which is great to see.

Outline: You mention your love for portraiture and your experience working with governments, corporations and individuals. Can you share with us the process creating your realistic portraits, and the time they typically take to create?

Brian: As far as my portrait work go I usually meet my client and do an extensive photo session exploring many ideas to catch the personality of my subject. I then if possible do a live study to get eye, hair and complexion correct, I do a preliminary underpainting to get the structure right and refine the likeness, then it is a matter of building up to the final finished painting on the portrait which can take up to a month to complete depending how complex it is.

Outline: Who have been your greatest mentors or mentees?

Brian: During my early career one of my mentors who had a great influence on me was Wes Walters who was the head of the illustrators at Art & Design, but my inspiration came from the greats of American illustration and the trips to the annual exhibition in New York closely studying all the brilliant illustration on display. I virtually lived at the Society for the 3 weeks I spent there each time I went, I also joined the Society as an international member and had my work accepted in the annuals a couple of times. I was always browsing through the annuals of the Society of Illustrators which I had every issue since 1960, a great source to gain enthusiasm from. ●

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