

“Ninety-eight percent of people I have been lucky enough to meet on my journey of life have been amazing. The other two percent I have learned lessons from.”

Artist Anna Rubin didn't pick up a paintbrush until her 30's. The trained business analyst is now an international success and her paintings can fetch up to \$66,000.



“While living in Germany I decided I would restore the little, charming bourgeois houses from the Art Deco and Jugend Still era. Many of them were devoid of care. For my first house I borrowed money from my mother, completed the project in six months, doubled my money and paid back my mother with interest,” Anna says proudly. It was the beginning of many successful restoration projects. To see the dilapidated, old houses restored to their former glory inspired Anna, and her logical business brain was at work too.

The course of Anna's life was about to change dramatically in 2000 when holidaying in Australia. It was a chance meeting with an older Russian couple living in Bli Bli that was the turning point.

“This lovely couple reminded me so much of my own Russian grandparents. When I complained it was too late for me to start painting, the elderly gentleman kept reminding me that he had only taken up painting when he retired and that it's never too late.” Upon returning home to Germany, Anna kept in touch with her new-found friends. Sadly, a year later in 2001, the elderly gentleman died of heart disease.

“I received a phone call. The wife said, ‘he has left you something’. I didn't know what it was or how I would get it,” Anna explains. It would be another year before Anna would discover the special treasure left to her – the very thing that would catapult her into the art world.

In a twist of fate, in 2002 Anna made the move to live in Australia. The desire to paint was still in her heart, but the means to do it was not evident. “I had already studied for five years. I didn't want to do more study. It also cost a lot of money to buy the necessary materials to paint. So I just started working in business when I arrived here.”

Anna made a visit to her dear Russian-born friend in Bli Bli who presented her with the gift left by her late husband. She becomes emotional at the memory.

“He left me a little box. It was full of paint brushes, oils and blank canvases,” she recalls, tears welling in her eyes. “I went to my shed in Eumundi and painted the picture I had in my heart.” Anna walks me over to a huge print of her very first painting hanging in her studio entitled *Iris*. “This is what I painted,” she says proudly.

“Some time and a couple of paintings later, I decided to become a professional, full-time painter. But how do you make such a change? You can't state ‘I'm a lovely new artist, please exhibit and buy my art.’ You start with a statement, a deed. I decided to put together the first solo show on my own and let other people make the statement.” Anna worked diligently on her new-found passion while still working in business. In her mind she gave herself two years to prove herself in the art world. It was make or break time.

By 2006, Anna was ready to show her art to the public. She held her first exhibition at her home with 15 original works.

“I was a little fearful of how my paintings would be received.” Anna's work is distinctive. While staying true to her European roots and studying artistic traditions dating back centuries, the realism in her paintings is astounding. They are strikingly unique. “My friends were supportive, but I didn't know how other people would react to my art.” She needn't have worried. The show was a sell-out and the response nothing short of astounding.

At that exhibition, her very first painting, *Iris*, sold for \$16,500. Today it is worth \$66,000. Anna goes on to show me other works hanging in her studio which have tripled or even quadrupled in value over the past five to six years. “I am still amazed – and very blessed.” Anna shakes her head in excited disbelief.

Since that initial affirmation from an adoring public, Anna's artwork has grown in size and accolades. She has exhibited on the Sunshine Coast, Sydney and Brisbane, and her paintings are now found in numerous private collections throughout Australia.

If Anna's grandfather were alive today to see her meteoric rise into the art world he surely would be immensely proud. Sadly, he died before Anna exhibited her work and finally realised her dream of becoming a professional painter. “At least I got to tell him ‘I'm painting now’,” she reflects.

Life as an artist certainly agrees with Anna. She talks about her day-to-day existence with vigour and enthusiasm. She confesses she is a night owl and loves to stay up late reading, drinking tea and doing whatever takes her fancy. “I start painting early – about 9am in the morning. If I'm inspired I will paint for 10 to 12 hours a day. If I'm not feeling inspired I may paint for a maximum of six hours.”

An intensely sociable creature, Anna's beach home is the perfect solution to the solitude she must submit to as an artist. “I really wanted to spend more time outside. It's a great house for dogs, kids, sand, wine. It's a fabulous lifestyle. The neighbours are great. This area is sophisticated but laid back.”

Anna is clearly in a happy place as she confides, “My life is amazing”. She has set about making a few changes to bring about that joy. “This last year has been about reconciling and getting over phobias and negativity.”

“I quit bad habits from the past, started exercising properly and ran in a triathlon. I changed my diet to organic foods and I jumped 10,000 feet out of a plane to get over my fear of heights!

“Every weekend I do something childish and fun, like knee-boarding, ice-skating, or horse riding.” In fact, Anna only recently overcame a childhood fear of horses after being thrown from one as a four-year-old, breaking her collarbone.

“I loved to look at horses but I was terrified of them. Last year I met a wonderful girl and we became very close friends. I started riding lessons with her. Within three lessons I could canter. Recently I rode 40 kilometres through the countryside near Kilkivan. Horse riding makes me happy.”

Ironically, one of Anna's most prominent paintings, *Emperor's Desire*, features a striking statue of a horse which was placed in the tomb of China's first Emperor. Apparently, his desire was immortality. “I photographed the horse and thought I need to put something else in composition with it. Apples seemed the perfect choice as in The Old Testament Adam was tempted by an apple – the first symbol for desire.” Anna says she went through about 10 kilos of apples while working on the painting over a number of months. She explains that she puts the objects in a black box providing the striking realism evident in her paintings.

I asked Anna, who has lived in Australia for the past