



WORDS & PHOTOS ALISON MACKAY

ConstructionZone

ALISON MACKAY VISITS A SOUTH COAST ARTIST WHO'S EQUALLY AT HOME WELDING CAR BODIES, SAWING TIMBER OR MIXING GROUT...

This page: Tanya Stubbles' work 'Mechanic on Duty' (detail) features old car parts.
Opposite page: 'Cowra Bowlo' (detail) by Tanya Stubbles was a finalist in the prestigious Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of NSW.



THERE ARE HAMMERS AND SCREWDRIVERS AND NAILS, PAINT BRUSHES AND TUBES, DOOR KNOBS, BROKEN TENNIS RACQUETS, DOLL PARTS, AND METAL



Above left: 'Never never never give up' – the mantra that has kept Tanya Stubbles going through tough times. Above right: Tanya Stubbles in her studio at Thirroul. Opposite page, clockwise from top: Broken tennis racquets and other found objects await their re-imagining; a work from the recent exhibition 'Of the Sea'; 'Love Boat' by Tanya Stubbles; a cracked patina decorates Tanya's storage cabinets.

I've got a drawer full of eyes, right here." Tanya Stubbles reaches across to a set of carefully labelled drawers, opens one and pulls out a couple of plastic eyes that look as though they once belonged to a child's doll. She cups them fondly in her hands. "I've no idea what I'm going to make with them ... yet," she murmurs.

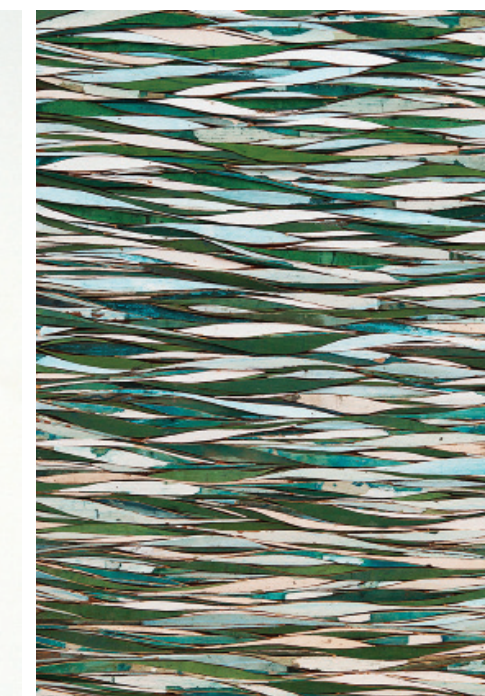
We're sitting in Tanya's South Coast studio in Thirroul, surrounded by her artworks, their component parts and the tools of her trade. The place, though highly ordered, is full of ... well, stuff. There's a band saw and a table saw along with miscellaneous other power tools. There are hammers and screwdrivers and nails, paint brushes and tubes, along with a collection of door knobs, broken tennis racquets, doll parts, pieces of wood and metal, photographic references and, importantly, a small sign stuck in the window above the work bench which reads: "Never, never, never give up".

It's this sign that reminds Tanya to keep working, regardless of how tough times are. But for this artist, living entirely from her art is how it has to be.

Tanya Stubbles describes herself as a "relief sculptor and painter working with found objects". It's quite a label, but it has to cover the diversity of work that she creates, from subtle investigations into the various yellows of acacia flowers, through rhythmic reminiscences of the sea assembled from hundreds of sawn pieces of timber, to landscape-like constructions created from salvaged car parts.

"If I call myself a construction artist, people think I'm a tradie!" she laughs.

And Tanya certainly has some tradesman-like skills – welding, sawing and working with grout,





UPCOMING EVENTS

JACOB CORDOVER CLASSICAL GUITAR CONCERT

Classical guitarist Jacob Cordover, accompanied by Oboist, Laura Karney in a live acoustic performance of classical Spanish works & 20th century classics.

Sunday 2 June

TANYA SPARKE & PETER DASENT

Jazz and Blues singer, Tanya Sparkes will be joined by Peter Dasent on piano to perform works composed in residence.

Sunday 18 August

Boyd Education Centre, Riversdale

Gates open 1.30pm,

concert 2.30pm

Cost: \$25 adult, \$20 concession,

Children under 16 FREE



CAREFULLY CUT AND PAINTED WOODEN PIECES ARE ASSEMBLED IN A PATTERN REMINISCENT OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE WAVES.



OPEN DAYS AT BUNDANON

Wander through the Bundanon Homestead and Arthur Boyd's Studio. Take a bushwalk or guided tour; tea and coffee available; bring a picnic lunch.

Open every Sunday
10.30am - 4pm

We suggest entry before 1pm

Cost: \$12 adults, \$8 concession

Children under 16 FREE

No pre-booking required

BUNDANON TRUST

to name a few. But coupled with these are other textile skills taught to her by her mother and grandmother – weaving, spinning, dyeing and knitting. It's this combination of the domestic and the tradie, plus a great eye for natural pattern and detail, that make Tanya's work unique.

"I learned to spin and knit and weave by the time I was eight and I can still see that textile background, even with the timber work that I do – it's like the timber is woven together."

Tanya Stubbles grew up on the South Coast of NSW at Cambewarra, where her family had a farm. Living not far from Arthur Boyd's property Bundanon, she vividly remembers visiting his studio as a young child. It was a revelation.

"I was in Arthur Boyd's studio while he was painting and there was a moment of witnessing that freedom of expression that he had – big, painterly gestures, being able to express yourself in that way. It was this amazing experience that changed my life, it made me think: I want to do that too."

Of course there have been other influences along the way, including renowned assemblage artist, Rosalie Gascoigne. Tanya feels a particular affinity with her.

"Rosalie Gascoigne was an early inspiration for me – not just for her work but also for her personal story. She had three kids and started her art practice late in life," Tanya explains. "I spent 15 years as a full-time mother to my four kids, but I'm also committed to my art practice. I feel like I don't really have a choice – I will always have to make art."

And there has been one broad theme to that art so far: the link between Australian landscape and culture. One series of works grew from her travels around the country visiting bowling clubs.

She met the patrons, listened to their stories, sourced materials and created works based on those experiences; the Bowling Club Series. One of these works, "Cowra Bowlo", was chosen as a finalist for the prestigious Wynne Prize for Landscape in 2008 at the Art Gallery of NSW.

More recently, Tanya was inspired by rev-head culture in her series of works shown at Rex-Livingston Gallery in Sydney called *On the Road*. Although the works conjured up Australian landscapes, they were all assembled from car parts sourced by Tanya from wrecker's yards.

She's currently focusing on the landscape near her studio – the iconic blue Australian ocean – for an exhibition titled *Of the Sea*. Carefully cut and painted wooden pieces are assembled in a pattern reminiscent of the weaving skills of her childhood, yet capturing the movement of the waves.

Where to next? Tanya says she doesn't know for sure; but wherever she does go, the personal delight in her materials will be clear.

"I think my enjoyment comes through a lot in the work," she says. "A friend said to me, 'The reason your work is so beautiful is because you fall in love with every object you use.' And I do. If I find an old door, for example, I actually fall in love with the material and that feeling resonates through. The preciousness and beauty of a rusty nail or weathered timber – it's all there in the work I make."

With that positivity fuelling her, you have to believe that Tanya Stubbles will never, never, never give up. ■

www.tanyastubbles.com.au



Opposite page, top: Raw materials waiting to be used. Bottom: From rusty metal to painted slices of wood, everything is of interest to Tanya. This page, left: There's even a drawer for eyes in this ordered studio. Right: Works for Tanya's show 'Of the Sea' take shape on the studio bench.