

LAURIANA GLENNY



The sun hits the sloping side of the Tamboerskloof tree-line and I'm no longer worried about sitting stuck in slow-moving traffic along Kloof Nek road. The negative spaces created by the tree's upper leafy limbs has me pondering the best way of capturing its mood and the emotion that stirs inside me through my brushstrokes and paint. I am transported yet again to a world of wonder and awe, whilst the cares of this world recede into the background.

As a visual artist, I've been passionately obsessed with drawing and painting for as long as I can remember. It was my mother who nurtured my creative passion and she still has the little painting of a porcupine that won me first prize at an art competition at the age of three! The moment I set foot in that Fine Art painting studio at the Technikon Natal (now DUT) and found myself surrounded by all those wooden easels, I knew I had discovered what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing. Thirty years later, I am thrilled to be living that dream, but it wasn't a straight or linear path that brought me to this point.

The inevitable hustle of trying to earn a living after graduating from art college resulted in me finding work in a variety of commercial roles from being a graphic artist to a textile designer. However, my oil paints were never far from reach and I always found time to paint. Especially when a season of ill-health forced me to abandon my commercial design career and my paints and paintbrushes became a pivotal part of the process of restoring both my physical and mental health. The paintings from this particular season resulted in my first solo show at Art Space Durban in 2010, entitled, "*En-route*".

Over the next decade, many of my artworks featured large scale botanicals such as flowering aloes, proteas and oversized succulents, probably inspired by my years spent designing botanical textile designs, plus a collection of more locally inspired cityscapes and naturescapes.

Our relocation to Cape Town in 2023, however, has provided a very different landscape, both built and natural, from which to draw inspiration.

By painting such scenes, it has been a way of situating myself here in this city and getting to know and get acquainted with the different neighbourhoods. Whilst my studio may be in the heart of the city, I live in a suburb nestled just below Lion's Head, and I find the dichotomy of contrasts between the different juxtaposed communities and geographical areas both fascinating and bewildering. At the same time, one cannot help but be inspired by the natural beauty that one is surrounded by in this historically-charged city. The light in this province is also different. It is of a clearer, brighter, more dazzling intensity than the humidity-infused, hazy air of the tropical east coast, and I find myself completely intrigued by it.

My captivation with light underlies my continuing interest in capturing my emotional response to the world around me, together with my intention of elevating the significance of a typical everyday scene. Whether that be a stroll along a nature trail in the early dawn light or the way shafts of sunlight fall across a particular building or shop front in the Cape Town city centre as a pedestrian walks past.

I have always been fascinated and intrigued by the shape of text and how letters are fashioned and formed. Perhaps it was because I taught myself calligraphy at a very young age or maybe it's thanks to my graphics on-the-job-training.

I have developed various processes - including my own collage language using embroidery stitches and French knots to form braille script across my canvas surfaces - these fragmented texts become a hidden language, a secret message embedded in the painting's membranes.

I usually layer my canvas surfaces with spray painted numbers, alphabet letters or text, sometimes including my own journaling or collaged ephemera. Journaling as a daily, meditative, prayerful practice is something that grounds and anchors both my creativity and my spiritual life, so it comes as no surprise that my journal pages, whether spray painted or hand written, somehow seem to weave themselves into my paintings at some point or another. This is something that really excites and thrills me, and helps prevent the process from becoming static or boring.

Perhaps this layering of text is also a way of merging my own story with that of the city that I now find myself living in. A city with its own layered urban thread of unspoken, unseen or unnoticed stories. By choosing to look at this world through the lens of awe and wonder, despite the brokenness we see all around us, I feel deeply fulfilled by knowing that I could possibly provide some sort of freshly inspired narrative of my own – that of hope and light through my brushstrokes.

In the words of Katherine May, “There is a tendency in times that feel very disrupted and intensely political and tense and worrying, to think that soft things like awe and wonder don’t matter and that we need to put those aside and save them for the good times. But enchantment says, “No, we need these **because** times are hard.”
