

Interviewee Name: Martin Edge

Interviewer Name: Annie Rolfe

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Length of Interview: 20:06 minutes

Transcript

Annie: Martin, can you tell us a bit about yourself? So what do you think we need to know about who you are, where you're from, and what experiences you've had?

Martin: I was born in Queensland in 1985, on the 13th of February. I've literally born and grown up in Queensland. My whole life I've lived around Brisbane in the north of Brisbane. I live in a suburb called Strathpine on the north side. I finished year 12. I attended TAFE in 2007 and that's where I started doing painting from, from there and since then I've I've done lots of shows, 17 solos, over 100 group shows. I've been represented by many galleries, At the moment. I'm represented by Anthea Paulsen, Art on the Gold Coast and Robin Gibson Gallery in Sydney and a lot of my work is in state and national institution collections and I'm also the Ambassador for Autism Queensland.

Annie: That's very impressive. When did you start doing your painting?

Martin: It was 2007 was for an art course, so it actually enrolled in a drawing course, but it turned into painting. So I wouldn't say it was an accident, but it was probably meant to be. I'd say it was because I wanted at the time wanted to be like an illustrator or do like kids books or drawings and then and then, the course, the course changing into painting. I think the first painting I did was a self portrait. It was I think we've still got them up and up, that one up in the attic. But it was like it was very it was very basic, but it's definitely changed over time. They've got more refined and neater. But I think at the time I was teaching mainly the basics caus I found using the brushes at first quite, quite difficult and all the colours and then mixing because you've got to, because when you buy the paint it's not the colour you actually want, which that, that took a little while to get used to. And now I just mixed some not even, not even knowing it just, it just comes

to me but the paint, the paintings also take a lot longer. Like usually in the early days, like a week or so, I could get one finished. Now I'm still going 6 to 8 weeks later.

Annie: Wow.

Martin: To do one to do one painting. So yeah, that's kind of the art journey and one of the first things that kind of got it going. 2008, there was it was called the Moreton Bay Art Awards, and it was actually pretty much the first painting I ever did from start to finish and that got selected. It was like a pre-selection competition. So if a judge is yes or no and that got in, and then when we got there on that night, I saw all your pictures being acquired by the council. So first, first time it got in and got and as councillors the council's still got it. I think, I think from memory I sold my first painting was my first painting I sold too, \$350. I think they got a bargain. I think now it's that same size is about \$1600, so.

Annie: Oh, my goodness.

Martin: They did all right. Yeah. So things kind of led from there. And it was feeling like different people noticed, noticed it and they kept an eye on. And then the following year it was a bit of a roll. I got into something called the Blake - an Art Prize for Religious Art, and apparently that was like a national art prize. So that was that was quite big. And then a couple and then a couple of years later, I had my first solo show in 2010.

Annie: Okay

Martin: And like, like group shows and done various different projects and then an art prize like I've been in a few times. It's entries from the Archibald and it's called Salon Diffuser and I've been in that four times and that's in Sydney at S.H. Irvine Gallery. And that's, that was quite good. And I think I've seen I think it's seen them twice or for the most recent one I got in. I couldn't go because we were in COVID and they weren't letting people cross the border. It's very, it's very exciting. So I don't enter a lot but the Morton Bay art was the one I met the first one. I think I've been a finalist in that now about ten times.

Annie: Wow.

Martin: So the Moreton Bay Council have turned into a big supporter. So it's very nice. So that's how that's how the art journey kind of started. So

Annie: So. Martin, were you still in school when you did that art course or was that.

Martin: I finished school in 2003.

Annie: Okay. So it was after you left school that you did that first art course? Yes. Yeah. Okay. Had you done any art in your childhood or at school?

Martin: I always did. Drawing. My mum's got boxes and boxes, but I never did. I never did art or anything. I always liked art. We always used to go to museums or galleries to have a look. But I wasn't really like painting or, you know, showing my stuff. Like people didn't really know me or know me as a painter and artist or anything like that. But yeah, it's it's interesting. I just it's just something I liked, I think, the way I sometimes was, but it found me. I don't know if I found the painting. I think it found me.

Annie: Yeah, that's wonderful. And we're all benefiting from that. Okay. Why do you like doing your painting?

Martin: It's quite enjoyable. Like, if I'm feeling sick or got a sore arm or sore leg when I start painting it, I feel fine. And then you just sit there, you turn the radio on the music, and it just comes through. Like, I might not actually know what I'm actually painting, but it just it just comes out like you might have a, like, a little idea, like, like a Brisbane scene. I'll draw the Brisbane scene, but I just draw the outline on the canvas like the sketch, and then everything else just comes together and then the detail. I sometimes have a look at a photo, but I'm not just sitting there like looking at the photo. It's just it's just it just comes it it's it's hard to describe. Some people have these have have looked at and try to work out where where it comes from. But it's just, it's like, it's like I've created my own style.

Annie: Hmm. Yeah. So who have you met and worked with doing painting.

Martin: Oh lots of people I've met lots of art dealers and industry people, I suppose probably too many to mention that. Quite a few I'm grateful, have given me a like a like an opportunity and, and I, a there's too many people to actually list, but my favourite artist is Ken Done and I have met him and he's very supportive, but he'd be like My hero, favourite artist. There's a bit more. I'm always meeting different people in the industry and I'm very thankful for that and I like talking and helping. So yeah, answering a question but if I had to name all of them I probably couldn't.

Annie: Okay. And have there been key people who you've worked with who have helped you with your art journey?

Martin: Yes. So there's so there's like dealers in the early days who have representative me like so like Anthea Polsen and Robin Gibson and then like the Morton Bay Council, the different curators from different projects I've worked on. So there's been people along along along the way. Like there's been some galleries I've shown with from the early days which I'm no longer with. So they've kind of, you know, spotted me along a lot along the way. So there's been quite a lot of people that have helped in that, in that process. And and it goes from like, just like art dealers to like galleries, stuff, curators, institutions, you know, various very I think some it's hard, as I say, if somebody asked me or who who discovered you, I think it probably started at around 2008, 2009. I wouldn't say I was I wouldn't say I was discovered at TAFE because I would I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that. I don't think they would want to take ownership too honest. It was a mess. So I mean the work was a mess not them anyway. But then in 2000 to the art prize and then probably a few years down the track, it started getting attention like the Moreton Bay art awards, the Blake and then the first solo show. Then I was showing like smaller, smaller group shows and then employ around, I'd say around 2013, 14, it started getting a bit of attention. Then for the last five years it's, it's like Australia, Australia wide now.

Annie: That's wonderful. Yeah, that's great to hear about. And so can you tell me, has your work changed since you've started? So you were just talking about how at TAFE you you weren't discovered back then. How has it changed since then?

Martin: I think since I think since for the last five, six years, it's definitely neater. You can, you can probably tell what it is more now than you did in the, in the, in the early

days. But I think now, like literally the detail, like the expression, if you lose sleep over you, probably you would lose sleep over it because it takes, it takes so long to do. But it's, it's good to spend time and effort making it. And people seem to really appreciate like the, the painting which is at the Postcards from the Edge at the HOTA building, it actually looks like the HOTA building. So that's probably what I'm quite proud of - the things I'm painting actually look like the actual object, but it's still in that naïve, colourful style. But yes, I think in the early days it's very abstract, bit blobby, and then it's very clean, sharp, polished.

Annie: Yes,

Martin: very bold. And even like the underlay, I build the canvas up with probably four, four weeks of just solid just plain colour and then it's all built up on the top.

Annie: Hmm. And so you were talking before about how mixing colours has changed for you as well. Can you talk through that process?

Martin: Yeah. So in the early days, if you look back at a lot of the early pictures play a lot of primary colour. So that's why I just used what was just came out of the tube and now it's all mixed. So literally use white with nearly every colour and I mix and then like bright and bright or dark. So I worked out to make things lighter you add white, and if you make things darker, you add black. Yes, but it takes a while. Because, because, because. Because they say the colour wheel. But I, to be honest, I could never work the colour wheel so I just started making my own colours up and that's where I've gone with that. Yeah

Annie: that's great.

Martin: I think. I don't really, I think it's, it's sometimes it's hard to register things, but I think I'm good looking visually. So I think I've picked it up from like seeing or working at what colour. So I think if somebody like tells me or talks about it a lot, it's probably a bit hard to understand but I'm better at visually.

Annie: Yes, so and so it's the exposure to other art that has helped, you know, seeing other artist's work has helped you develop your work, do you think?

Martin: Yeah, yeah, I think so. And also the colours and I think it's I think because when you're painting, you want to be unique and you don't want to be you don't want to be like somebody else. If you want to be like somebody else, you can just walk into an art and art gallery. You don't want to copy anybody.

Annie: So it's it's.

Martin: Better to be unique and you'd be yourself you actually getting or looking at Martin's art and not somebody. I'm trying to be somebody else. Yeah. So that's what I've always tried being, being, being unique, you know, the world according to Martin. And that's what I always, always say. So yeah. But yeah, I think I think that's I think there's been probably if you look at the work, there is influences, but it's still very much Martin.

Annie: okay. And are there different things you'd like to be able to do in the future?

Martin: I think have been very happy and very lucky. Well, it's always there's always, always think I have the expression that things just seem to happen out of out of the blue. So, you know, I don't try to plan things too much. You just you just go with which was happening. It's always nice to look forward to something. So so if you if you say someone asks, you like to have a show this day, so I'll work towards that. I don't really think about anything really past past. It was always exciting, exciting things around round the corner. I think when you put your work out there, there's always a chance of something, something, something, happening. But

Annie: yes,

Martin: I don't I don't like kind of go looking looking for it, if that answers your question.

Annie: Yes. Okay, good. So what do you think audiences you know, you're talking about the children who've written the postcards. So and the media. What do you think they think of what you do?

Martin: I think I think that it makes them happy. The joy, joyful it seems to be. Also bring people a bit of hope as well, which is nice. But I think if I see a smile, a smile on

somebody's face and I say, oh, that makes me happy, that makes me feel, feel, feel good. And, you know, just just to see the reaction, like I'm not overly a serious, serious person. I like to have a bit of a, a bit of a laugh. And, you know, so it's, you know, it's good people are enjoying themselves. That makes me feel feel good. Like, if it's if it's if it's if it's a bad response I don't want to know about it. So it's like if you don't like it, keep walking.

Annie: Okay. So do you think enough people know about what you do?

Martin: Honestly, probably.

Annie: Yeah. You're pretty well known.

Martin: I sometimes surprise myself sometimes. And yeah. So I think. I think part of why I wrote my art seems to have been lucky enough accepted in like like Australian art, because sometimes art falls into barriers and only certain drones of people. But it seems like the industry people seem to accept it, which is nice.

Annie: Yes. Yeah. So whose work besides your work is the best work. Do you think?

Martin: Ken Done.

Annie: Ken Done. Yes.

Martin: If you said he wasn't very good, it'd probably be an argument and I'd probably quote nearly everything. Like to me he is a living icon, but it's just his colours and what he brings and creates. And I know some people say he's got a design element, but that that's what he did in the early days. And, you know, he still paints very nicely and he still is still painting. He is 82 now and he's and is a very is genuinely a very nice man I think. And he does a lot of Sydney pictures, but he also does other things like yachts and out back. And it's just I always enjoy looking at it I never get bored of, of his art.

Annie: And so other artists with disabilities how do you think we could make more people know about their work?

Martin: So I think if you promote it and just put it out there as art and not always necessarily oh this is a person with a disability painting. So more promoted as I'm an artist, but I do have a disability. But this is what I'm doing.

Annie: Yes, yes. On the same playing field as everybody else.

Martin: Yeah, yeah,

Annie: So just following that question, do you call yourself a disability artist?

Martin: No, I'm just an artist.

Annie: Yeah. Okay. So. Do you think people should do this? You were saying that before, weren't you?

Martin: Caus I know my Mum always tells me, you just like blend, blend, blend in and just and I have, I have a disability and I have autism and it affects me in different ways but when you're painting a picture, it's a painting. It's not, it's not, it's not a painting of a disabled person. You're looking at the image of what the painting is.

Annie: Yes. Yes, that's great. Okay. Do you think everyone would give the same answer about that?

Martin: I don't know.

Annie: That's ok.

Martin: I think I think some some people do kind of use the fact that they've got a disability as sometimes sympathy. But to me, I'm Martin and this is who I am.

Annie: Hmm Okay. So is there something we haven't asked that we should, do you think? Is there anything more we need to know about you?

Martin: I don't know. I'm sure Janice has researched. I don't know. I find it awkward to talk about myself because I know sometimes, sometimes people say, What do you paint? I say, and I sometimes think I'm a beginner, but I do have this thing. It's quite funny. I do treat every day as my first day.

Annie: That's great.

Martin: So, yeah, so it's nice to be down to earth and you know, and and humble because sometimes I have sometimes I get reminded sometimes of what I do. So it's nice, but I just it's just a kind of just living a world, a world of my own and just very fortunate of I've done what I have.

Annie: So I've got a couple of more questions up but do you think that your art is political? And by that, I mean, does it have a message for people? Or is it about enjoyment like you were talking before?

Martin: There's always in the painting there's a there's a hidden message.

Annie: Is there?

Martin: some some people do pick it up. So every painting on the back is signed "All the best" so I'm wishing people all the best, good luck and joy. And it's kind of good. It's happy, joyful, but it's also wishing people good, good luck as well. And and it's like peace and happiness and, you know, you just be yourself and it's you take it what it is. You don't think anything more than what, what you're seeing.

Annie: Yes. Yeah. And are there other artists that you collaborate with? So do you work with any other artists?

Martin: I literally just paint, it's functional. It's literally just on my own but I have been in exhibitions with other like naive artists and artists, what do you say? They have a disabilityo I have I have had shows and that before and and I do sometimes go and do different kind of exhibitions and see other people's work. So I am aware of.

Martin: What's on out there.

Annie: Sure. And are you part of any art organisations?

Martin: No, I'm the ambassador for autism Queensland..

Annie: You did say that? Yes. Yeah. Now, that's fantastic. Well, thank you so much for your time. That's been wonderful Martin.

Martin: Thank you for having me.

Annie: Pleasure.