

Flower powers

A trip to Bali in 2008 set sculptural artist Mary Lou Pavlovic's life on a new course. "I didn't even want to go there," says Mary Lou, who runs her homewares business The Floral Artist from her home in Mittagong. "Bali had a pretty terrible reputation for beer drinking and I always thought I'd rather visit Europe. But a girlfriend talked me into it and within three days I'd fallen in love with the beauty of the place and its people. I never looked back."

Not only was Mary Lou impressed by the natural beauty of Bali – "I couldn't get over the bright green rice paddies flooded with water and the extraordinary wood carvings you see everywhere" – she was stunned by the flower and water offering bowls made by the local people. "The women fill these big bowls with water and then create intricate flower patterns that float on top. They are so colourful and beautiful, and they really turned my head."

Mary Lou returned home to Melbourne but couldn't get Bali out of her mind. She began travelling back and forth to the island every few months. Before long, she had been granted a research scholarship to Bali to complete a three-year PhD in visual arts through Monash University.

Her thesis looked at the relationship



MARY LOU PAVLOVIC'S ARTWORKS AND BANGLES MADE FROM FLOWERS AND RESIN.

between beauty and progressive ideas. "In the 1980s and '90s beauty in art was considered very uncool and conservative," says Mary Lou. "You wouldn't be seen dead celebrating beauty, especially if you wanted to express radical views. I was interested in this idea because I'm always drawn to things I'm told not to do."

Inspired by her beloved Balinese floral water arrangements, Mary Lou began making sculptures featuring flowers suspended in a non-toxic clear resin to simulate water. They have appeared in exhibitions around the world and some of her works are in a permanent collection at the National Gallery of Australia.

Mary Lou moved to the Highlands in 2015 and regularly travels to Bali to

see friends and to be stimulated by the people and environment. Her smaller flower and resin homewares range, featuring local blooms and orchids enclosed in magnets, serviette rings, doorknobs and bangles, is sold locally at Mittagong's Sturt Gallery, Berrima's The Bay Tree Gallery and Robertson's The Cool Room Emporium.

Bali's impact on Mary Lou is ongoing. "I was very confrontational before I went to Bali; always rebelling against the system," she says. "But when I went to Bali I didn't feel like that anymore. I was overcome by the beauty of the place – and that now inspires my art. I believe that when we react positively to beauty it put us in the present; we feel safe and happy. And what's wrong with that?" – **Melissa Penn**



Carving out a living

Six years ago, Bowral couple Jacqueline and Frank Loughray decided to make a swing for their toddler Rufus. Being creative, they wanted to make something special, so Frank carved his son's name into the edge.

Friends saw the swing and loved it, and the Loughrays realised they could try selling them. They came up with other wooden items like boot racks and peg rails that could be similarly personalised with carved letters, and their business, Fox Whistle, was born. It is still a part-time venture but Jacqueline says they are getting close to making it full-time.

Frank makes all the wooden objects in a workshop behind their house. All are made from Australian timbers and he hand carves all the lettering. "He's a carpenter and a very creative and artistic man," says Jacqueline. "He can make anything. He can build anything."

Their swings are not just bought for children. They are popular for weddings with the couple's names and wedding date. "We're often asked to do phrases instead of names," says Jacqueline. A

frequent request is 'I love you to the moon...' with 'and back' on the back of the swing.

The couple and their son William, now 18, emigrated from Britain 12 years ago, and moved to Bowral in 2009. "We both grew up in the country, and were drawn to the Highlands. There was nowhere else that compared with it." Their dream is to build their own home with a large workshop and studio.

In the meantime, they are busy making new products to personalise. These include 1.8 metre rulers with bevelled edges and names hand stencilled. "We have been asked to make benches, tables and house signs, as well as a display table for a store. There are no limits with names and phrases," says Jacqueline. "People come up with family mottos and beautiful lines from poetry. We love that that the buyer's creativity is an integral part of the process."

Fox Whistle products sell online, foxwhistle.com.au, and at The Green House, Moss Vale, The Potting Shed at Dirty Janes, Bowral, and The Picnic Shed, Berry.