



‘I think my bright palette comes from the fact that I have spent most of my life in Australia,’ she says. ‘My art is affected by how I feel in my surroundings, and I experienced so much light there, endless blue skies and the green-blue ocean. I rarely use black – I think it was 1996 the last time I did. I primarily use cool hues like lemon yellow, magenta and lots of blues and greens. They’re what constitute my palette.’

Jill of all trades

Describing herself as ‘a Jill of all trades’, Wendy finds that switching between styles and mediums keeps her artistic fire ablaze. ‘I create work in all genres,’ she says. ‘Portraiture, landscapes, streetscapes, gardens, buildings, abstracts, still lifes, figurative ceramic sculpture.’ She pauses and smiles. ‘I’ve tried to focus on just one genre, but find that I need constant change.’

When it comes to human subjects, Wendy – who has a visual arts degree from Edith Cowan university in Western Australia – also favours a vivid style. ‘I’d describe my portraits as bright, bold and very expressive,’ she says. ‘With people, I use cool colours, oil on canvas – but always larger than life. I met this guy, Michael Commerford – he’s a Hare Krishna who runs a gallery in Rushcutters Bay in Sydney. He would say the way I do my portraits is that I find people’s auras. I’ve certainly never gone out looking for people’s auras – maybe that’s why people in my work are painted in all sorts of different colours!’

As well as flexing her creative muscles, Wendy also enjoys the therapeutic benefits of painting – as exemplified by her multi-hued rendering of a British

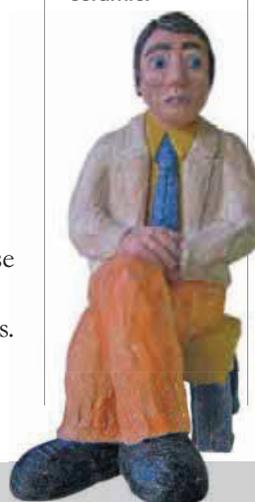
MISS BRIGHT SIDE

She works for UK Border Agency by day, and is a prolific artist by night. Demanding? Wendy McArthur wouldn’t swap her fulfilling dual lifestyle for anything

Being blessed with a colourful outlook on life is one thing – but sharing that cheery vision with others through your work is an altogether more rewarding experience. Just ask Wendy McArthur. By day a member of the Leeds removals casework team for the UK Border Agency (UKBA), the 46-year-old still manages to find anywhere between 10 and 30 hours outside of work to indulge her passion – the vibrant, striking works of art you see on these pages.

‘Since childhood, I’ve always loved doing anything with my hands – whether it’s building, arts or whatever else,’ she says. Born in West Germany in 1964 to a German mother and Scottish father, Wendy – pronounced ‘Vendy’ – moved all around the world (her father was in the military) until 1971, when her family moved permanently to Australia. These nomadic formative years fed her innate creative yen, she says. Particularly when it came to settling Down Under.

Main photo above: Wendy in her studio. Below: ‘Eugene’ – a portrait in ceramic.



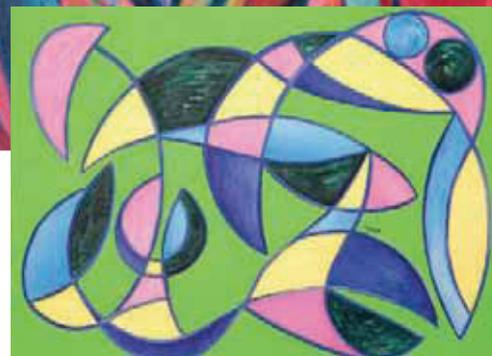
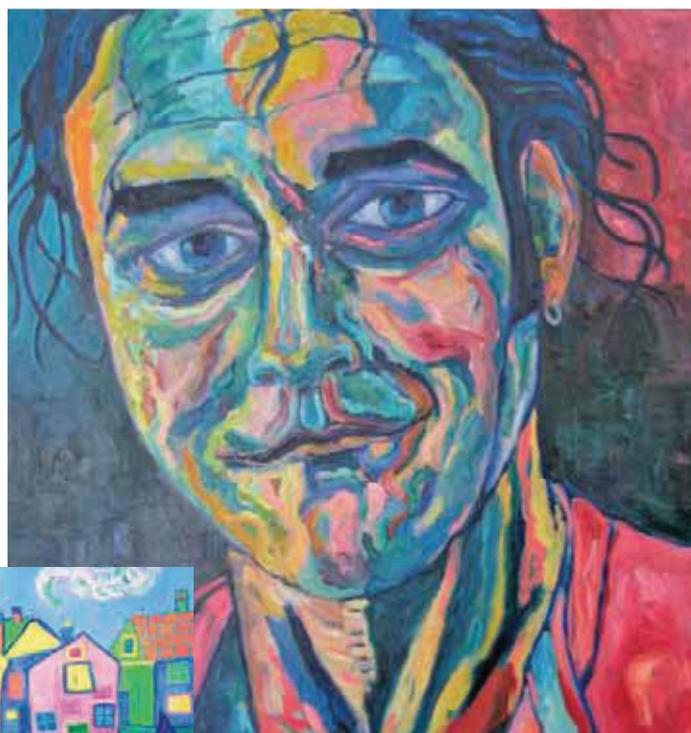
terraced street (see example on the front cover). This – Bell Lane in Bramley, West Yorkshire – is where Wendy lived when she first moved to England to be with her partner. ‘I was a bit shell-shocked at first,’ she says. ‘I had never felt so isolated. I use to go out the back door and there it was – everyone’s back yard in mine and vice versa. Endless terraces all around. I used to look at the aeroplanes and wish I could be on one that was flying to Australia. But instead of feeling down with my decision to move to the UK, I decided to paint my surroundings. It made me feel much better. When we finally left the area, I left with a fond memory, instead of a feeling of sadness and loneliness.’

Visual diary

Now firmly settled here, Wendy’s day-to-day work for the Home Office includes asylum and human rights applications. During work hours, she deals with people constantly. She’s also the Spectrum representative for north-east Yorkshire and Humber region – the Home Office’s network for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender members of staff – and is clearly enamoured with the ‘colourful, open, considerate and supportive’ people within the group. Does all this rich human interaction at work provide inspiration when she comes face to face with a canvas at night? ‘I know it sounds weird, but I keep work separate,’ she says. ‘All my work for the Home Office, interesting though it is, is also confidential and so I am afraid the answer is no.’

That doesn’t mean her working day is devoid of material to feed her inner muse. ‘I still get a lot of inspiration from the occasional walk to work – the canals, the

Gallery clockwise from top right:
 1. A portrait of Wendy’s friend, Jim – a ‘Leeds lad’ who is very special to her
 2. ‘Green Pink’ – an abstract piece, forming part of a public art commission of 15 oil paintings for a new maternity ward at an NHS Trust in Bromley
 3. A very personal picture for Wendy of her lounge in Western Australia
 4. ‘Beer And Chips’ – a still life
 5. ‘Bromley Town’ – another painting produced for the NHS Trust in Bromley



rocks, animals, people,’ she says. ‘I love it. You learn to spot details – an increased amount of litter, new bits of work on the roads, workmen saying hello – it can be anything – even someone picking up some dog mess. My work represents my life – it’s a visual diary, based on what I see and feel each day of my life.’

So is it hard to flit between two disciplines, and remain focused? ‘No,’ she laughs. ‘With art, you’re working in isolation. At the Home Office, I work with a really helpful and communicative

team who I respect so much, as individuals and as a team. The two disciplines couldn’t be more different. In fact, it’s nice to use different parts of the brain.’ Sounds a pretty good philosophy to us.

Wendy regularly has work showing at Horsforth Modern Art Limited Gallery, Leeds (www.horsforthmodernart.co.uk). Her next private viewing at this gallery is Sunday 12 December. ■

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See more of her work at
www.wendymcarthur.com.au

