

**ARTS and
ENTERTAINMENT**



Painted Delights



Many of Bruno's whimsical characters spring directly from his imagination. "I do have my own little world; I just close my eyes and visualise," he says.



The plants and other features of the garden are an integral part of Bruno's art. "Portraits always fascinated me, and combining them with nature and animals, bringing in some natural elements like tree trunks and water features," he says.



Bruno made a Waterhouse-inspired sculpture of the Lady of Shalott, including the boat in which she sits, at the suggestion of his daughter. This was one of the many sculptures that required restoration after the Black Saturday fires.

By Emily Friedel

Tucked away in a parcel of Marysville's temperate rainforest, Bruno Torfs has created a whimsical garden of characters that dwell among the trees and at the river's edge. Mythical creatures, iconic figures plucked from the pages of literary classics, and many more born in Bruno's imagination are all brought to life in ceramic sculptures that invite visitors to step into another world.

Bruno's sculptures are wonderfully expressive and possess a relatable quality that beckons the inner child – walking through the garden and finding all its hidden treasures is much like being transported into the heart of a fairytale. Bruno credits growing up in South America for the playful nature of his creations and their ability to reach even those who don't think they're interested in art.

After moving to Belgium with his family at the age of 15, Bruno had a chance encounter that sparked his fascination with ceramics.

"A young sculptor moved into one of the rooms in the same building where I was working as a signwriter, and by looking at what he was doing something twiggled in me: clay. It was very inspiring. Before that I was not interested in sculpture, it never appealed to me, but his work was something different. One day he went on holidays for four days, and I asked him if I could use his studio and try clay. When he came back, I had two life-size sculptures ready."

Discovering his affinity for sculpting with clay was the

catalyst for Bruno's decision to pursue a professional art career – a decision that even his father, a professional portrait artist, wasn't sold on. Bruno, however, had made up his mind and wasn't so easily deterred.

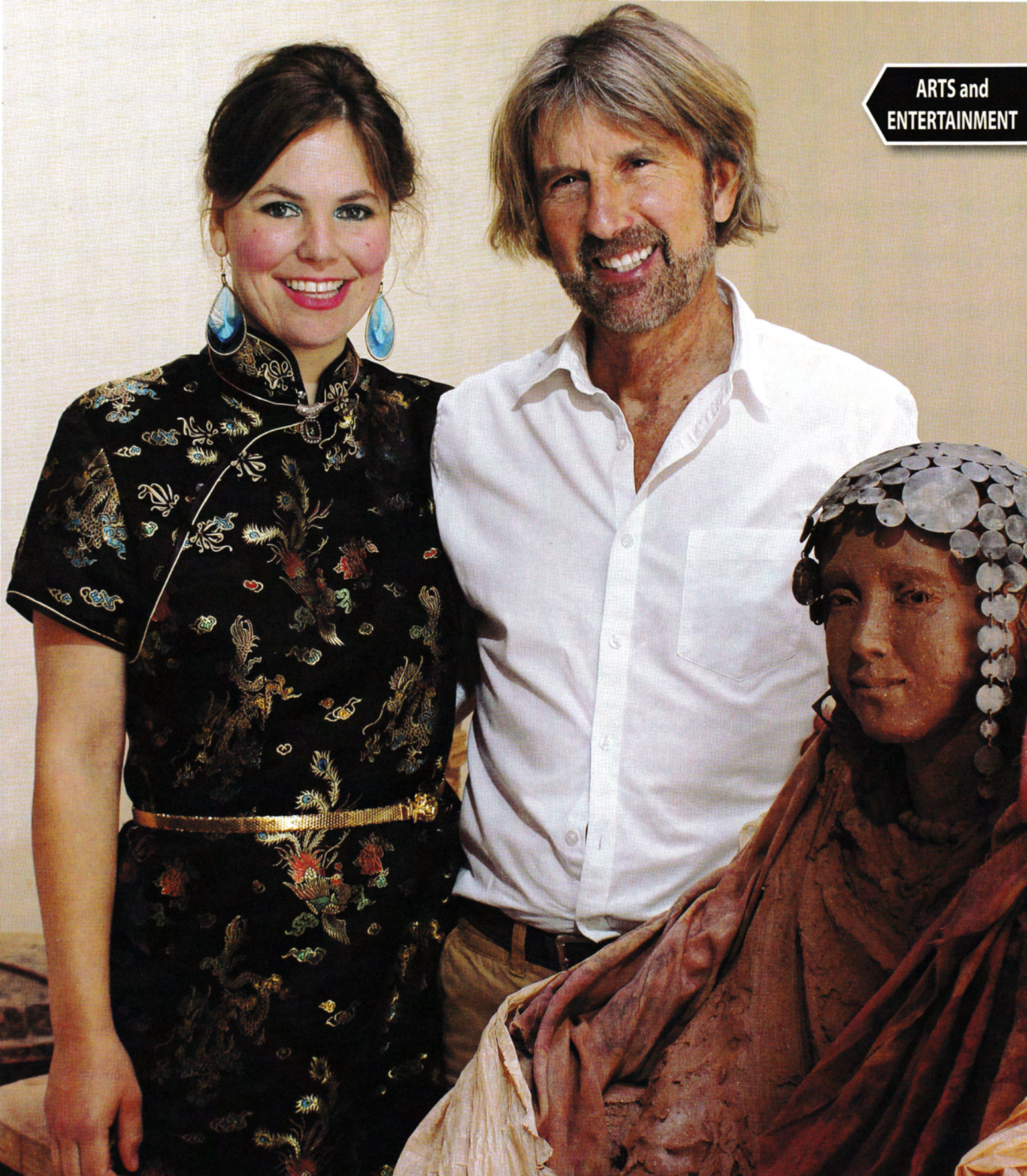
"I started travelling the world and sketching, and when I returned home, I'd create sculptures or do oil paintings. I thought of trying an exhibition which went really well for the first time, so I did another one and just kept going."

A pivotal point in Bruno's career was securing his patch of paradise in Marysville where he could embed his art. As Bruno describes it, fate had a strong hand in how it all played out.

"I had a very clear vision when I was 14 years old, still in South America, and I wrote down in my diary that one day I would end up living in Australia in this little village surrounded by mountains, near open space – the oval there – and a river at the back of the property.

"At first I thought we would never find this place because there is such a vast area of mountains in Australia, but after two and a half hours of driving from Melbourne, we ended up here in Marysville, which was the first place we stopped. The owners of the property could not sell it for two years, and the price dropped three days before we arrived so we could afford it. It was like it was waiting for us."

Then the process of materialising his mind's fantasy world began, and Bruno set about moulding his little slice of forest into a sculpture garden alongside ➤



Bruno and wife, Christina, with a work-in-progress in Bruno's studio, which visitors walk through on their way from the gallery to the garden.

a gallery filled with his paintings.

Since the sculpture garden and gallery opened to the public over 20 years ago, people have come from all over the world to experience Bruno's magical world, and it is one of the Experience Oz

website's Top 100 Bucket List attractions in Victoria.

Today, there are over 150 sculptures in the garden, including many of the original ones that were demolished by the Black Saturday fires.

Among the restored

sculptures is a favourite of many longtime fans of Bruno's work: *The Six Children*. This particular artwork touched one Healesville man so deeply that when he found out it had been smashed to smithereens by a falling tree,

he offered to help rebuild it – a task Bruno thought might not be feasible at first.

"I'm looking at this sculpture in hundreds of little pieces and thinking it has gone. I said for the moment I have got other things to do, and I do not think it's possible to ►



A favourite among Bruno's fans, *The Six Children* was severely damaged in the Black Saturday fires and then rebuilt with the help of a long-time admirer of the sculpture garden.

fix the sculpture, this thing is so badly damaged, but if you want, we can put all the pieces in a box, and you can take it home and try joining the pieces. He was really excited.

"I think together with his wife he must have spent three weeks day and night trying to solve the puzzle, and he returned with all these big pieces that he had

joined together. I thought, 'Wow this is amazing, and I think we can bring it all back by making some new parts.' It inspired me to do all the others that were so badly damaged; he gave me hope that we can bring them back."

After replanting the garden, restoring sculptures and rebuilding the gallery, Bruno has reinvigorated his

creation with many new artworks that stand proudly among the original ones.

With his wife, Christina, who is an accomplished musician, Bruno is now adding their own instrumental compositions to further enhance the experience of exploring the garden. Broadening the artistic scope of the sculpture garden by making music is a step Bruno

has long wanted to take and a sign that even the setback of the fires wasn't enough to stop the evolution of his life's passion and the joy he derives from it.

"I can't see the day that I will stop creating here; for it's just so much fun."

For more information on Bruno's Art & Sculpture Garden go to brunosart.com

SPRING ARTS & TOURISM

EXHIBITIONS

Assemble: August 3 - September 29.
Murmurations: October 4 - October 25.
Marysville Art Show: November 1 - November 5.



EVENTS & PERFORMANCES

September 7 - Melbourne Guitar Quartet Performance
September 8 - Melbourne Guitar Quartet Workshop
October 18-20 - Marysville Jazz and Blues Workshops
October 29 - Writing Workshop

Plus more to be announced
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