

LEAVING ART SCHOOL FILLED ME WITH APPREHENSION: RELOCATING from the city to Gilgandra for a new position, bundled with the additional stress of leaving the comfortable world of university, was a challenge. Aside from the lack of lattes, I would no longer have access to a wonderful studio space so taken for granted at school.

I was determined to keep making. Risking the wrath of the real estate agent, I began painting and casting in my tiny apartment. Squeezed between desk and bed, inhaling paint fumes and concerned about what it was doing to my living space (and health), I decided to find another way.

I craved a space to make and think. I desired the convenience – being able to slip across after work and cover a short distance home again. So I spread the word, asked the arts council, the

community groups and quilters groups during the day, but is uninhabited at night. The studio had access to running water, good natural light and a cool breeze. I'd found it and we fell in love. I had the keys cut and suddenly my evenings stretched out, working into the night during the hot summer.

Initially, I struck a bargain with church committee – cleaning the church in exchange for my studio. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately for them) this arrangement fell aside due to my lack of cleaning ability. After a few months we came to a more conventional rental arrangement of \$10 per week and this financed a cleaner.

Finding a studio in a new town was not as difficult as I imagined. If you are thinking of doing the same, never fear – regional communities are full of people willing to help if you ask; and regional studio spaces, once found, make perfect havens. ■

Studio daze

by MERRY SPENCER



women at water aerobics, the local teachers, everyone I knew. I checked out a few pubs, rejected them all because of the high traffic, considered investing in a house, canned that idea due to lack of finances, constantly searching. Finally the call came – I strained to hear the words over the mobile, rushing across a busy street while in Sydney: “Merryn, I think I’ve found you a studio!”

The space was in what I dubbed the ‘arts precinct’ of Gilgandra – a room sandwiched between two music teachers’ studios, part of a group of ex-Sunday school rooms opening on to the backyard of the Lutheran Church block. It’s covered with a gorgeous assortment of odd buildings constructed across the decades, nestled into the back of Gilgandra country town suburbia. Now used as a church once a fortnight, it plays host to music teachers,

RESOURCES

Arts Insurance Handbook – A Practical Guide for Artists and Arts Organisations from The Arts Law Centre of Australia.
‘Setting Up a Studio’ Professional Practice Kit booklet, \$6.60 from the National Association for the Visual Arts. NAVA also has a Professional Practice Unit online at www.visualarts.net.au.

Merryn’s Studio Space Checklist

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Does it have enough natural light? Is special artificial lighting needed?
- Is there access to utilities – electricity, hanging power points if needed, running water, insulation, heating/cooling, practical flooring?
- Is the space secure, clean, easy to access (24/7)?
- Is it big enough? Can I fit my work through the door? Is there a suitable loading area if needed?
- Do I want to share with other artists? Group studio spaces or complexes can have a real advantage in proximity to like-minded individuals.
- Is the studio far enough away from other tenants/ noise/ family members so I’m not disturbed?
- Is the rent within my budget? What will the lease arrangement be? Is the agreement in writing? Is it an agreement that suits my practice?

OTHER ISSUES:

- **Occupational health and safety:** What steps do you have take to be safe in your workspace? Do you need access to storage, or do you have particular ventilation requirements? Know the risks, use protective equipment and take precautions.
- **Insurance:** Do your research. Ask yourself: what insurance policy is right for me? Do I have to take out a special insurance policy? What about covering any equipment or particular artworks?

June

4 June

15/15 Film Festival Finalists from the 2005 competition. Art Space Gallery, ALBURY Tel 0400 472 172

8 June –16 July

Defending North Queensland in the Pacific War. Tweed River Art Gallery. MURWILLUMBAH Tel 02 6670 2790

8 June –16 July

Memories of the Island - Digby Moran Memories of Cabbage Tree Island. Tweed River Art Gallery. MURWILLUMBAH Tel 02 6670 2790

8 June –16 July

Reduce Speed - Jasna Spiranovic Council workers and their relationship with the road. Tweed River Art Gallery. MURWILLUMBAH Tel 02 6670 2790