This chilly winter morning brought a flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo’s to the regenerating bushland beside our house. The young trees bend beneath their weight as they voraciously devour seed pods, strip bark, hang upside down, squawk loudly, and then take flight on a massive wingspan. Tail feathers fan open to balance these birds as they move, and what seems like liquid gold flashes from glossy black surrounds. It was a mesmerising spectacle and reminded me that attention to the detail in our world reveals incredible creativity of design, and a deeper message: this is truly liquid gold – a moment that is there to share with my youngest son (and the only one still at home) before it slips away...

It has been a while since my last newsletter, and I could blame my computer for losing my newsletter group; or life’s journey for getting a little adventurous; or my wariness, or inability, to communicate the almost incomprehensible – but best to say less about that, rather than more, and just jump right in before this moment too, slips away 😊.

Last year was packed with wonderful experiences. Our beautiful daughter, Nikita, married Ben, and so we were blessed to gain a gorgeous, godly man as our son-in-law; and his lovely family as an extension of ours. I think the photos say more than words, so here are a few:
My trip to Darwin to craft wedding goodies with Nikita included a day in the rock pools at Litchfield National Park, feasting on antipasto delights; and an unforgettable time with her in Kakadu. We stayed in a beautiful cabin with a tented roof and perforated colourbond walls, which caught the breeze and was surrounded by lush tropical gardens. We witnessed an exquisite sunset at Ubirr, which reminded me of Pride Rock in the movie Lion King, and it was here that I heard something like audible words that penetrated my soul, “This is your land... your country. Australia is so much more than you’ve seen so far…” It felt, to me, like Holy Ground. The next morning I awoke with rock-red palms – although I hadn’t touched the rock! Nikita and I couldn’t believe our eyes. Great and mysterious things were happening...

We were blessed with two sightings of the male black wallaroo, Macrocarpus bernardus, which is so shy and elusive that efforts to study the creature have been unsuccessful – and we saw it TWICE in one day! The Bininj (Aboriginal) name for it is Barrk – and they are only found in Kakadu and Arnhem Land. Once, in the shadows, we watched as it munched on the grass; and on the second occasion, one stood silently behind Nikita, where she sat on a bench and I stood viewing the rock art (and then the wallaroo!) The Nikon refused to focus on the beautiful shadowy creature. It was too beautiful for words... Later, I read the words of the last Gagudju elder, traditional owner of Gagudju land, Bill Neitjie, who, on page 62 of his book “Gagudju Man” is quoted as saying, “All kind of animal come to you because that mean you got story, and they know your story.” He also issues this challenge: “My people... not many. We getting too old. Young people... I don’t know if they can hang onto this story. But now you know this story. You responsible now.” I was sad to farewell Kakadu – but I will return, one day soon.

Darwin held yet another miraculous encounter for me, which started at St Mary’s Cathedral on one of my explore-the-city-by-foot excursions; and ended with a 2am wake-up call for a revelation regarding art and ministry. It is something I will NEVER forget... a call and a cause which I am committed to pursue wholeheartedly with my life – a ministry by pen, and paintbrush, and His grace. This is my testimony, a story to share in painting and words, and I’ll tell you more about that shortly.
Nikita’s birthday gift to me was an excursion to Melbourne to view the exhibition of Monet’s work at the National Gallery of Victoria – and I was delighted by his paintings, the gallery, and the city. Paintings of Giverny shimmer with light and colour, and draw you into the tranquillity of exquisite gardens. The lily ponds are by far my favourite works by Monet – something resonates deeply within me, because I paint lily ponds too – just in a different style, and seen from a different perspective. I was inspired by Monet’s layering and juxtaposing of varied colour, and how he was able to achieve the unthinkable and successfully place violet, green, orange, and vivid magenta together and create a spectacular effect! I have started using broken colour in my backgrounds, instead of the solid blue-black grounds of the past, and love the shimmer and vitality it brings to the work – although I’m not so adventurous with my colour palette - yet. I purchased an apron that I use in the studio as a memento, and feast my eyes on it every time I pick it up to put it on – and think back to seeing horse-drawn carriages in St Kilda, amazing public sculptures everywhere, trees without leaves but showered in buds beside the river, and how the weather changed from icy to boiling to drenching to windy and back to freezing over the course of a single day. Melbourne, I will be back…

The year came to a close with the sad news of the death of Nelson Mandela, and the morning we heard about it, I was compelled to paint his portrait. I tried to ignore the impulse, questioned my intentions, attempted focused distraction, and eventually gave up and submitted: it took two hours from start to finish. At 9:30am I gridded up a pre-textured canvas that was waiting in my studio for its time, laid it on the studio floor beside my source photo, and leaned over and began to paint in black and white, because reconciliation was what Mandela was all about in the end. By 11:30am the portrait was finished. I took a photo on my phone and sent it to my husband – he and his colleagues were stumped (as was I!). It was an unbelievable experience, and felt like heaven just opened up over my studio, the flow was easy and unhalting, and afterwards I was totally spent – physically and emotionally – and amazed at what lay before me! Madiba is going to be part of the collection of the South African High Commission in Canberra. Handover is scheduled for later in the year.

2014 brought the decision that it was finally time to follow my heart and jump into a formal art education – something I have been considering for a long time. I am now doing my BA (Fine Art) by distance education through Curtin University, and loving every moment of it! Well, that is perhaps an overstatement, because some moments have brought tears, desperation and exasperation! It has been a huge learning curve in terms of technology – Blackboard; Discussion Boards; on-line Forums; Assessment Drop Boxes; on-line Library resources, searches, and eReserve - and time management remains a challenge. From a professional point of view, maintaining and growing my art practice remains top priority, so the studies need to fit around that. Treating studio and art-business-admin time as my 9 to 5 job helps – in theory anyway! But my grade average is around 88% - and that convinces me that I CAN do this. Persistence and perseverance will overcome obstacles.
I applied for a RADF Grant for a project called “Attention to de tale” before Uni started, and I have recently heard that my application was successful! I will be collaborating with Land for Wildlife to research the Regional Ecosystems present on the Sunshine Coast, and consider flora and settings within these that might serve as visual iconography for the region; whilst simultaneously meeting the requirements of my creative process. This investigation will feed into studio-based research, and result in a solo exhibition at the Arts and Ecology Centre in Tanawha, where it will be shown that, in the detail of creation, a story unfolds, and it is important that we pay attention to “de tale” that our habitat is telling us. It all starts at the beginning (Genesis), and the Word is an integral part of it. In the end, each of us get to choose our exit – the one option is wide-open, the other is a narrow, verdant gateway – and by our choice, we become collaborators in “de tale.” What an exciting prospect and amazing opportunity, and many thanks go to Arts Queensland, and the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, for their support of this project.

The Mary Valley Art Festival was held in Imbil last week, and I won the First place in the Abstract section, and a Highly Commended in the Human Form/Portraiture section! At times like this I still feel like I am dreaming, and am filled with wonder at how I was led from Accounting to Art! It is something beyond wildest dreaming – who would’ve thought… Anyway, these are the prize-winners:

![The Muse](image1)
![Renewal](image2)

Family news (aside from the wedding) is ALL IS WELL! Johan is heading up the Operations function at Smartline Machinery; Kyle is now in his final year of Software Engineering and has secured part-time employment at Theiss; Dillon is powering through Year 11 with the aim of studying Law (and about to get his Learner’s licence – meaning more grey hairs for me 😅); and Nikita is doing postgraduate studies involving Environmental Law, and employed by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Northern Territory (and enjoying married life with Ben).

So that’s my story. Each of us has our own story to tell. No-one else can tell our story, so if we don’t, it remains untold. The story is a testimony, and a means by which we overcome (Revelation 12:11) – but the decision to share it is ours to make. I hope that mine inspires and encourages you, and may God’s blessing, peace, and presence be with you, now and always.

Kindest regards,
Meloney Steyl