

# evoking mood

Australian artist Liz McKay tells Janice Seow how music, cinema, architecture and romantic rendezvous inspire her work

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MOMENTOUS ARTS

**YOUNG SYDNEY-BASED ARTIST LIZ MCKAY**, 33, is known for her stylised paintings which explore the mood and relationships of people in intimate surroundings such as European bars and cafés. Her works will be on exhibit at Momentous Arts till 12 May 2007 as part of *Art & About: Contemporary Australian Art*, a gallery-hopping festival organised by Australian Trade Commission, Singapore, which comprises the showcase of a collection of contemporary Australian art from 17 artists at four different art galleries in Singapore.

**Have you always been painting romantic couples, sultry jazz singers in smoky bars and European cafés? Why do you choose these as your subjects?**

I love the music and dancing from the jazz and swing era. The architectural works of Hector Guimard and Victor Horta from the late 1890s Art Nouveau to the 1930s Art Deco period is also fantastic. I guess these influences are bound to come up in my work. I also like the interaction between people in a scene. Couples, romance, dancing, secret glances — each painting has its own story.

**So do you spend your days hanging out at cafés? Where else do you head to for inspiration?**

I'd love to spend more time at cafés! Travelling really inspires new series of works as it's a chance to see the world in a new way. Cinema is also a great place for inspiration; I like to see a story unfold.

**What is your favourite movie of all time?**

I like many international movies, especially the visual style of directors such as Wong Kar-wai, Kieslowski, Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet.

**Do you have other subjects of interest?**

I tend to like to work in a series to fully explore an idea or mood. The current series I'm working on is about nostalgia, memory and love, although I'm sure the experience of travels abroad will also influence the themes of new paintings.

**What do you seek to explore through your work?**

I guess my work is about trying to capture the essence of something, be it a moment, an expression, or a memory. It has to be something that moves you or makes you feel, or that seems more important or special than other moments.

**Has your work evolved over the years?**

Yes, I think my work has changed and developed over the years. In life, you are affected by events which change your perspective on life, and I think art is a similar evolution.

**You studied animation, computer graphics and cinematography. Does any of what you've studied have any influence on the work that you do?**

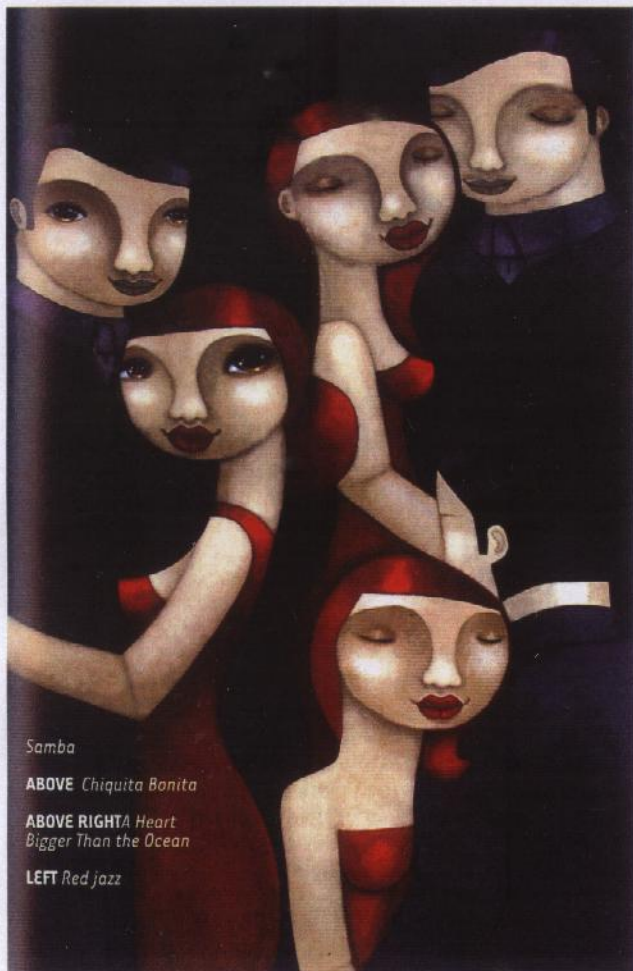
Definitely. Animation makes you think about the structure of objects in a painting, and the way people move. 3D animation in particular



Liz McKay







Samba

ABOVE Chiquita Bonita

ABOVE RIGHT Heart  
Bigger Than the Ocean

LEFT Red Jazz



makes you think about the lighting in a scene, what shadows it creates, and what atmosphere is created. Cinematography makes you contemplate what the painting is about, what happens before or after the scene in the painting, or what it is that you really want to capture in a particular painting.

**How is the Australian arts industry supporting young artists coming out of the country?**

Galleries here are quite supportive in promoting emerging and mid-career artists in Australia and overseas. There are some great art shows like the Affordable Art Shows in Australia which are a great platform for artists and new artworks.

**Is there anyone that inspires you?**

I love the photography work of Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison. It's really quite beautiful and evocative.

**What music do you listen to while you work?**

I sometimes listen to jazz and swing while I'm painting. I also listen to some newer musicians such as Bonobo, Amon Tobin, Fourtet, Caribou and Rachel's.

**What can we expect from the exhibition of your works in Singapore?**

The exhibition of works in Singapore at Momentous Arts was inspired by a journey to Central and South America. There are lots of dancing and three piece salsa bands, cats and boat trips in the ocean. I guess they're nearly all quite romantic.

**You mentioned that each painting tells a story. How would you want the synopsis of your life as an artist to read?**

I guess it's an ongoing process, but I hope it's beautiful and inspiring. **hc**

*Liz McKay's works will be exhibited till 12 May 2007 at Momentous Arts, No 20 Lor Telok (Boat Quay), #02-01, Tel: 6535 3961*