
Should your daughter be an artist?

Tuesday 25 September, 2018

Deciding on a career as opposed to making a career out of a hobby can present some people with some difficult life choices, but not for Dr Gillian Dunlop, portrait artist and Ear Nose and Throat surgeon from the Sydney Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga.

Reflecting on her own experience, Gillian said that despite her father's insistence on her attending medical school along with her five siblings, she always retained her passion and skills in the arts.

"Young women today need to have a career to build financial independence. You're not going to get that in the arts," she said.

"It was not until much later in my life that I began to appreciate the wisdom of that advice from my father, when he told me he was not going to support me for the next 35 years, and to 'get a proper job!'," she said.

Having completed her training in 1995, she began working as a Senior ENT Registrar at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, not far from the Melbourne School of Art. The combination of work and pleasure was perfect.

"I then travelled to London on an ENT Fellowship in 1997 which gave me the opportunity to visit some wonderful galleries and museums, and attend the Chelsea School of Art – my creative outlet, on weekends. I showed some of my work to my mentor Professor Valerie Lund who later commissioned a portrait".

Gillian moved back to Sydney in 1997 to set up her own ENT practice, but was still painting. By that stage she was attracting an increasing number of commissions, from actors, entertainers, politicians and the like – most through word of mouth. She was beginning to make a name for herself, '*The surgeon who paints*'. Gillian has painted the likes of Governor General, Her Excellency, Dame Quentin Bryce; Governor of NSW, Dame Marie Bashir; previous Governor of Victoria, Professor. David de Kretser; and previous Governor of Tasmania and Head of the Army, Navy and Air Force, Sir Phillip Bennett.

But her work as a surgeon involved gruelling hours with little to no time for art.

"To give myself more time for painting, I decided to restrict my surgery to rhinoplasty and otoplasty where I felt my creative, reconstructive and artistic skills could be best utilised. Rhinoplasty is the sculpture of a living body, and my work in this field is a reflection of my skill in the arts".

Gillian said that she could never have seriously pursued her career as a portrait artist if it were not for her career as a surgeon.

"Surgery leads to introductions to people seeking portraits, and secondly, my life as a surgeon has enabled me to travel the world, and to study portraiture with some incredible people."

Dr Gillian Dunlop will be presenting '*Should your daughter be an artist?*' at this year's RACS New South Wales Surgeon's month on 14 November at the Art Gallery of NSW.

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MEDIA RELEASE

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