

JENNIFER PAYNE

WOMEN ARTISTS OF MISSION BEACH VOLUME 1



BY PENELOPE GOWARD

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To capture the story of Jennifer Payne, Drs Penelope Goward and Valerie Boll interviewed the artist on 08 November 2021. Penelope wrote the story and worked with Jenn to achieve a suitable balance.

Jenn is one of Mission Beach's well-known and loved artists and has lived in Mission Beach since 1984. If you go to the Mission Beach fortnightly markets, you're sure to find her there with her tropical and colourfully painted coconuts and canvas'. Her subjects range from beach scenes, fruit, plants, sea life and people. Her style is unmistakable: bright, with strong colours and forms that reflect the tropics. Jenn has lived an amazing life, and all her dreams have come true. Her two passions: sailing and painting are what she does as often as she can. Jenn shares her life with John, Coco the kelpie dog, and Larry the lorikeet, her daughter having grown up and moved away, in a beachy cottage and studio.

Jenn hasn't always lived in Mission Beach; she came from Melbourne after realising working in an office wasn't for her. As a young girl, she had fallen in love with coconut palms, atolls in the Pacific and the tropics. In 1982, Jenn worked on Dunk Island, at the resort—now closed since Cyclone Yasi intervened in 2011. It was there she discovered the sea and sailing and bought her very own boat, a 16-foot, trailer-sailer, *Little Dream*. Jenn loved the colours of the changing sea and sea life, the tropical islands and simply sailing on a clear and sunny day. She also had the privilege of spending time with Bruce Arthur, a well-known weaver who had set up an artist's colony: *Hunger Ridge*, on Dunk Island. Over time, they became friends. Jenn also befriended the artist Noel Wood, who lived on Bedarra Island nearby. These two artists were to make significant impressions on her as an artist. But it took another twenty years before the painter in Jenn was to emerge.

Jenn was also a competent coxswain, a certificate she earned in 1990, sailing around the Family Islands and out to the Great Barrier Reef on the *MV Quickecat*. She started working on *MV Quickecat* in 1986 as a marine hostess, then coxswain and graduated to skipper in 1998. In 2000, Jenn became the skipper and tour guide of the 52-foot yacht *Neptunius*. At that time there were few if any female skippers and there was discrimination against women, so Jenn had to work hard to prove herself. In 2006, she changed to a sailing catamaran, *The Other Side*, as a skipper and tour guide until 2009.

Jenn has always drawn, made 'crafty things' and experimented with paints and painting. In 2002 she took some art classes using acrylic paint after what she called *dabbling* for many years. And then she began to paint seriously. As expected, her first paintings were of tropical scenes, this included painting on coconuts. Jenn has been attracted to and loves coconut palms, and one day she wondered whether she could paint one. Since then, she has painted over 500. They range from written messages like *Welcome to Paradise*, to tropical scenes.

In 2008, although working on a catamaran, Jenn went to *folk art* classes and her style began to change. She learned the techniques and methodology of painting, such as the use of correct brushes and brush strokes, shading, and how to mix colours. Although her inspiration was still the tropics, her painting style matured and grew. Jenn now tells visual stories with her paintings and artwork and frames some of her work with rope and coconut fibre. Jenn told us that she paints almost every day, she has so many ideas and imagined scenes she wants to paint. Her days are full as she immerses herself in her work and can't help but be *in the zone* where time slows down, and she is in harmony with her work.

In 2010, Jenn fulfilled her life-long dream when she and her husband John lived on board their sailing catamaran *Nyeki*, a Perry 43 sailing catamaran. They sailed around the east coast of Queensland mainly around the Whitsunday Islands. Jenn continued to paint and sell her works at markets along the way, and occasionally worked away as a skipper on a casual basis until 2019.

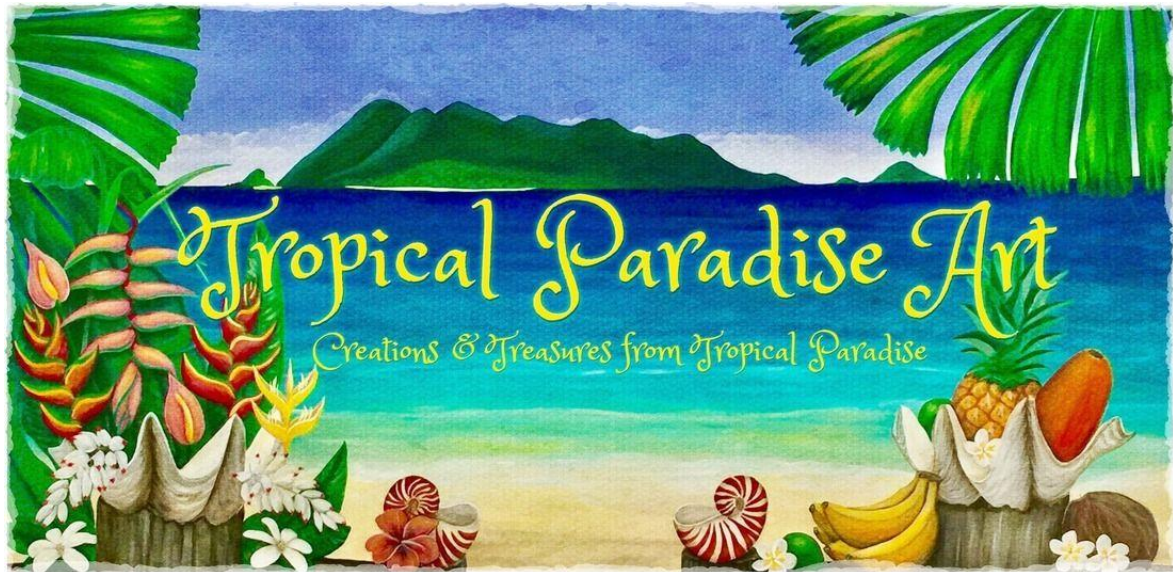
Jenn's early life was travelling; she visited the Cook Islands, Europe, Fiji, Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa, Tahiti, the Bahamas, and the United States of America. Almost four decades later in 2016, she went to Bora Bora, an island in Tahiti, a place she had visited in her early life and fallen in love with. This is where her life changed. Jenn participated in an art workshop, painting fruit and flowers on delicately woven Tahitian fabric in a Polynesian style. Also at this time, Jen fulfilled another lifelong dream, where she worked as a skipper on a 50-foot catamaran with an Australian group of Stand Up Paddle Board enthusiasts for a week-long charter around Bora Bora and Taha'a islands in French Polynesia. In 2019, she went back to Tahiti to look after a friend's art gallery with her husband, John, for six weeks and Jenn was the live-in artist. It was here she discovered the serious side of her painting, with Polynesian women as her muse.

We sat listening to her life, surrounded by her works: hand-painted coconuts and canvas' of tropical scenes and Polynesian women. One of her important themes is to paint the sea as if you were looking at it from above and through, so you can see fish, coral and turtles. Jenn said to us: *Even if I won a million dollars, I'd still be doing what I'm doing now. This is what makes me happy.* She still sails, either by herself in her little sailboat or in a tinny (a small open aluminium boat) she shares with her husband John. Our observation is that she has it all - a loving partner whom she shares her life with, her painting and sailing, and a life of living in the tropics. As we walked through her tropical garden on our way out, Jenn showed us her vanilla plants and told us how she hand pollinates them. We were impressed by this woman of many interests and talents.

Jenn also paints on commission and her works hang in homes around Mission Beach and Australia, and many of her works are held in private collections worldwide. Jenn has won several awards, including a Highly Commended prize at the Cardwell Art Society in 2008. In 2010, she was featured in the *Artist's Palette* magazine, as *Best Emerging Artist* (page 22) a Winsor and Newton Prize, Langs Gallery, and her painting *Brammo Bay and Boathouse* was on the front cover and also featured in the *Bow 2 Stern* magazine. In 2018, Jenn's artwork was also on the front and back cover of the book: *The Magic of Mission Beach*, published by Mission Beach Community Arts Centre. Following that, Jenn held an independent exhibition at Mission Beach Community Arts Centre in 2020, *Coconut Shores*, which was highly successful with a large attendance. She sold eight of her paintings, and it promoted her work to many in and around the region.

To meet Jenn, you experience a quiet and modest person, but her works show another side. They are powerful, distinctive, colourful, and vibrant, and the tropical motif unmistakable. We are left with an impression that Jenn's strength was expressed when she travelled as a young person when she was responsible for the many souls on her boats and now in her art. We conclude that Jenn's art is her gift to Mission Beach, to be enjoyed and be inspiring for other artists for generations to come.

You can see more of Jenn's original artworks: www.tropicalparadisearch.com.au



Jennifer with *Brammo Bay Boathouse*, 2010 and her logo 'Tropical Paradise Art' 2017.

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Cover image: Art by Jenn Payne, *Reef Forest*, 2022, commissioned by Penelope Goward.