

## Profile Meeting our local achievers

# Diana Adams: Hāwea Flat's unsung hero

**W PAT DEAVOLL**  
editor@thewanakasun.co.nz

Diana Adams, one of New Zealand's most renowned artists, moved from Christchurch to Hāwea Flat three years ago, where she had remained very much under the radar of the local community.

Born in Christchurch in 1969, Adams initially completed a Bachelor of Arts at Canterbury University in linguistics. By 1994 she had returned to university and gained a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture at Lincoln University. This education ultimately led and inspired her to become a full-time painter in 2001.

Adams lives and paints in Hāwea Flat and is represented by several dealer galleries across New Zealand where she has had solo and group exhibitions.

Yet she is so modest, so unassuming that after 20 years as a professional artist, she has yet to have her own website. Go figure. She is only now developing a website with local designer Jo Haines of Spiderweb Designs. So look out for it.

The Wānaka Sun chatted with Adams in her studio on the hill above Hāwea Flat and was in awe of the paintings that hung on the walls. They wanted to buy everyone. Here is a talent amongst our midst that has nationwide recognition, but is yet to exhibit in the Wānaka art galleries after three years in the district.

### So how do you paint?

I go through fits and starts. During the lockdown, I painted fairly consistently because there was nothing much else to do.

But a really big painting will take me six weeks to do. That is because with the big-sized canvases there is a lot of detail and because I do sharp outlines, all these have to be clean.

I paint it once then repaint it making it neater and smoother, and I graduate between light and dark on all the little sections.

### How would you describe your style?

It's all about the forms- I love the shapes of hills and shadows, and I spend a lot of time looking at them. When I'm in the mountains I'm looking for the forms, what it is that's making that shadow.

What I love is the feeling of being above - I love looking down. I love the feeling of being on the edge of a cliff, it's a little bit dangerous and you don't know what's over that edge. A little bit risky. I don't always manage to pull it off, but my favourite paintings have that feeling that you might fall into the abyss.

I wish I was freer and could dab paint all over the canvas, but it's not how I do it. You have your style, and that's what came to me.

I have tried and tried to change my style, but I just can't. It gets a bit boring for me, and I would like to express myself differently, but it's just so hard.

Between 2000 and now I think my paintings have gotten more streamlined, even less detailed. I tend to like to paint bigger now. I want them to take up a whole wall, they are more impressive that way, and you feel like you are right in the landscape.

### Have you always been a painter?

I took a year off painting and did a course in Wellington by distance learning. I did contemporary sculpture. But they weren't saleable. It was fun, and I got accepted for the Wallace Art Awards for that year, and one of my pieces is now in their collection. My criteria for medium for the sculptures was stuff you could buy from Mitre 10; I think because John and I were building at the time.



PHOTO: PAT DEAVOLL

Diana in her studio surrounded by her work.

### So how did you get started as a professional artist?

I didn't go to Fine Arts School, which is one of my big regrets. I decided to do law at Canterbury, but it didn't suit me, so I dropped out after two years. I finished a BA in linguistics and did lots of literature papers because I love reading, then went to Lincoln and did landscape architecture. I didn't want to be a teacher, you see.

I was a landscape architect for a while, but I just couldn't stop painting. I started painting fish with silly expressions on their faces just for fun and sold them in cafes in Christchurch. I made enough to buy more paint.

Then I thought well this isn't going to work. What's my biggest passion, it's getting out into the hills, and so I spent another couple of years trying to work out a way to represent how I felt about the landscape I was seeing. It came back to being quite pared down and simplified- trying to keep the main feel while appreciating a place without all the extraneous details. I don't generally put human-made structures in a painting because it's not about that, it's about it being somewhere at any time in history.

### How did you get your big break?

Anyway, I was painting and training for a bike ride, and went past the Little River Gallery [Banks Peninsula], saw what they had up on the walls and was impressed. I told the owners I had some paintings and would they take a look at them. I went back the next day with some work, and I was offered a show. This was in 2000 in February,

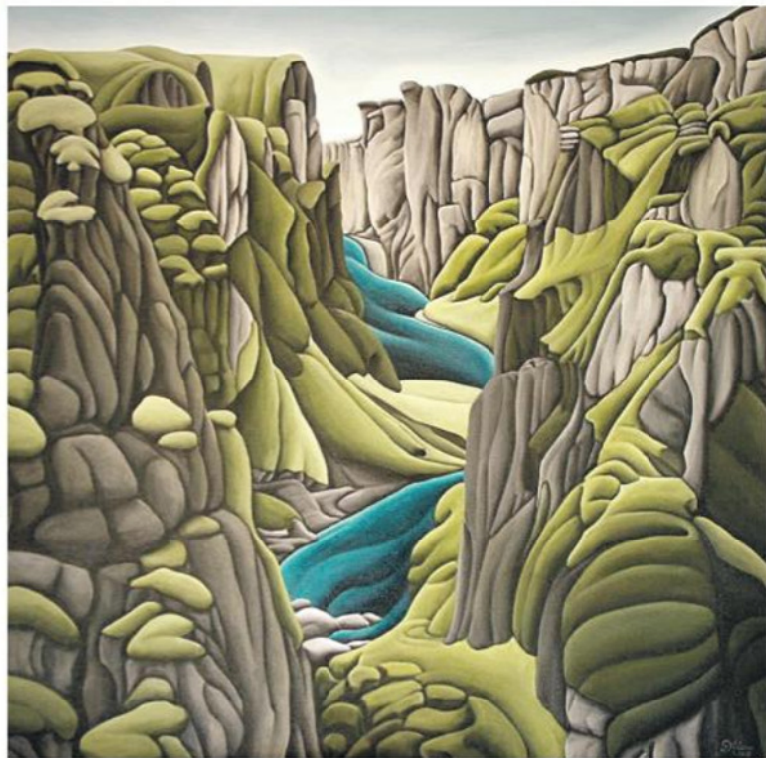


PHOTO: SUPPLIED

'The Chasm' 2018 715 x 715mm Available at The Artist's Room in Dunedin.

and they booked me in for a show in September. I had never done anything like this before, but I just painted and painted and managed to get about ten pieces together.

The show went well, and they supported me from then on with a show every year. But I stopped after a while because all my work was going to them and I didn't have enough paintings for other people. But I wouldn't mind having another show with them; it would be quite nice.

Because the show sold well, I decided to quit my job in 2000, and I have been painting full time ever since and had shows in all the main centres.

### So where do you see the future?

Since we moved to Wānaka, I haven't had any shows. John and I built a house, and it took so much time landscaping and getting a studio built. And to get a show sorted, I need at least two years to get my head around what I need to produce.

I would like to exhibit in Wānaka, but I like the idea of organising this on my own in an alternate space. The problem is there aren't the spaces here

for this. What spaces there are the costs are high. The other option is to have it in my studio, which was designed as an exhibition space.

It's actually the 20th anniversary of my first solo show this year, so I was thinking of trying to get a show somewhere by the end of the year, and it might still happen yet. I have been storing my painting for this- I haven't advertised them on Facebook. If I put them up, people will want to buy them, and I won't have enough.

### How much does your work cost?

The bigger ones about \$10,000. They start at about \$2000 for a smaller one.

Because I am thinking of having a show it's a bit of a problem, should I put the paintings out there or should I hold them back?

When my website is up, I will probably release a few to celebrate the moment. And I will have limited edition prints on it too. They look so much like the originals, and they are a good option for people who don't want to spend so much.

So as of today Diana finally has her website: [www.dianaadams.co.nz](http://www.dianaadams.co.nz).

## PROUDLY SUPPORTING LOCAL ATHLETES

### APPLY FOR A FREE MEMBERSHIP

We offer free or discounted memberships to QLDC Sport and Recreation facilities across the district to help athletes aged 13 and over achieve their sporting goals.

To find out more about the selection criteria and how to apply, including the supporting documents we require, please visit: [www.qldc.govt.nz/recreation/sponsored-athletes/](http://www.qldc.govt.nz/recreation/sponsored-athletes/)

Applications close 5.00pm, 21 June (strictly no applications accepted after this date). Successful athletes will be notified after 1 July.

Sport & Recreation  
QUEENSLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Polished  
Concrete  
Central

022 193 1080

[www.polishedconcretecentral.co.nz](http://www.polishedconcretecentral.co.nz)



Penny Fisher RN MBA  
027 343 4776

## Penny's Home Care

Professional Trustworthy Friendly Reliable

Personal care, Dementia care,  
24 hour care, Palliative care,  
Medication assistance,  
Transport to appointments.

[www.pennyshomecare.co.nz](http://www.pennyshomecare.co.nz)