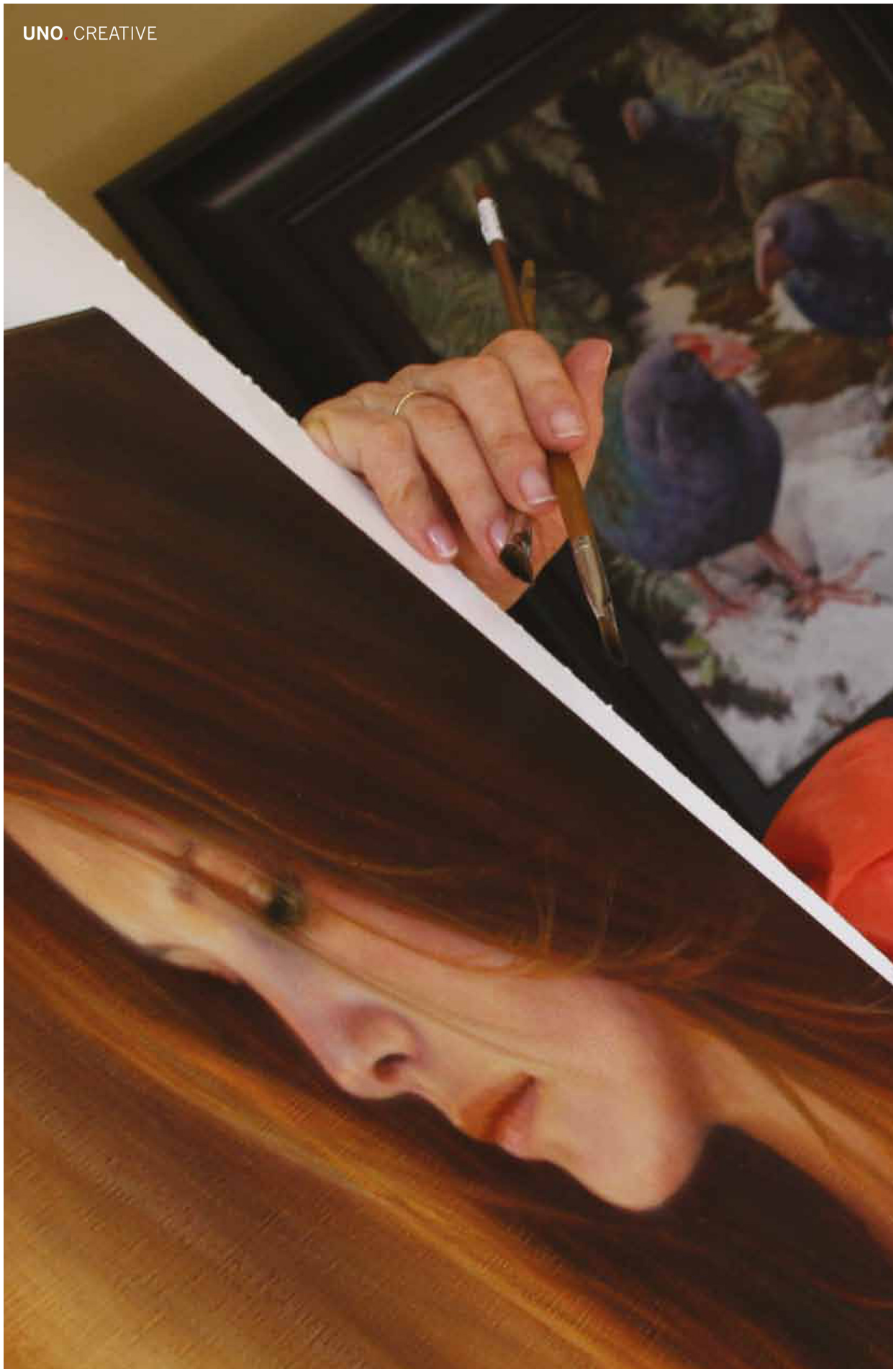


# *Travels with an artist*

DEMAND FOR THE PAINTINGS OF **SUSAN HARRISON-TUSTAIN** HAS LEAD TO AN INTERNATIONAL CAREER AS AN ARTIST. THE WIDER WORLD AND THE PEOPLE SHE MEETS INSPIRE HER WORK BUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO HER IS THAT SHE PAINTS AT HOME AND EXHIBITS IN THE BAY OF PLENTY.

WORDS LIZ FRENCH / PHOTOS ROSS BROWN











"I feel very privileged that my artistic career has allowed me to pursue my passions for painting, teaching and travel," she says, "but New Zealand is where my heart is." Her work has certainly travelled! Paintings hang in homes around the world. Over 60,000 people bought her book. DVD sales and internet and magazine exposure result in "avalanches of emails" from admirers who travel long distances to attend rare exhibitions and workshops. Susan feels lucky to have achieved international recognition for doing what she loves, painting with passion from personal experiences; described artistically as 'Naturalist Realism'.

#### THE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

Susan may have stood mesmerised in front of her great uncle's paintings at the tender

age of five, and sold her first work at six (for dramatically less than they command now!) but it took immersion in "amazing art" on a European trip in 1990 to spur her to paint professionally. So began an exhilarating 20 year artistic experience with inspiration gained from places travelled and people whose paths she crossed. Her first breakthrough came when she won the inaugural NZ Gardener Art Award in 1994. Regular covers on the magazine brought nationwide exposure. Placing some paintings in a library window generated invitations to show paintings in Tauranga's Harrison's Gallery and The Gallery in River Road, Hamilton. Her work all sold. Sellout solo exhibitions and queues followed. Things really snowballed when she wrote a book in response to an approach from a North American publisher. "When I took

the midnight call I thought someone was having me on," she laughs. 'Glorious Garden Flowers in Watercolor' sold over 60,000 copies, the obvious interest and boost to her credibility urging her to produce DVD's which are now 'five star' sellers on Amazon. On these the self taught artist generously shares everything she knows about painting. "I convey what I see, my understanding of light, tone, colour theory, mood." Demand for her tutored workshops is high. "The Australians are quick with the mouse!" she quips of the email bookings that bounce in. 'New Zealand's Favourite Painters' is one of many books and magazines her work has appeared in. A recent coup was a 15 page article in the April/May issue of 'International Artist' – voted the world's best art magazine. "That was a lovely buzz! The response has been overwhelming."





## THE WORLD THROUGH ARTIST'S EYES

Susan is not a prolific artist. She paints from too deep within her to be driven by market demands. "I become lost in my work – time becomes irrelevant."

With administration threatening to overtake creative time she was delighted when husband Richard took over managing the burgeoning Harrison-Tustain business. He produces her DVD's, co ordinates her work commitments and internet presence, and plans their inspiration gathering adventures. Travel is both pure pleasure and integral to her work. If Susan has painted it she has been there and seen it, felt it emotionally, made sketches and colour notes. "It may be the smallest thing that touches me," she says, "the light on a face, the patina of a weathered wall." Strangers often trigger deep artistic responses in her. "Like the girl

gazing into the rainy window on a bus in Provence. I asked permission, gave her time to 'forget me' then sketched her."

Susan's son, Glen, manages the Department of Conservation Takahe rearing unit near Te Anau. "I crouched in the tussock to sketch this magnificent bird and his foster family." The painting will appear in her upcoming exhibition. It will also feature works inspired by a journey through Central Otago with Richard, one inspired by a glimmer of sunlit reflection in an old Ophir window. Passing through Rangitikei she spotted a worn door on a derelict cottage, opened the creaking gate sketch book in hand when a large dog bounded out growling. "I leapt the gate like an antelope," she laughs.

A chance meeting with a Maori elder at Ohiwa Harbour inspired a painting created on flax paper. Dedicated to conservation of our land for future generations, Wallace Aramoana is a man whose impact on his

community, its youth, and the environment, is legendary. The painting is titled 'Kaitiaki' (caretaker of the land).

The very complementary Harrison-Tustain team also loves to combine Richard's wine industry experience and photographic expertise with Susan's artistic gift and share their talents with like minded people on leisurely tours they lead to favourite places in Europe. The next one begins with hot air ballooning over Loire Valley Chateaus, features a Kiwi barbeque in the Swiss Alps, wanders the Italian lakes and explores Venice, followed by a cruise to "magical places" of the Riviera. No doubt it will provide inspiration for the future as soon most of the work on her walls and lining her studio will be going to new homes.





UNO. CREATIVE

## OCTOBER EXHIBITION

In October international art collectors will travel to Tauranga for a rare exhibition. Once every four years Susan Harrison-Tustain offers a body of work for sale. This collection, named "Recollection" is eagerly awaited.

While Susan appreciates the doors international recognition has opened for her, she chooses not to exhibit overseas, preferring to stage her own event here where she has control. "It is important to me that each exhibition is a memorable experience worth the journey and the wait." While the official opening function is limited to just over 300, past experience suggests 3,000 – 5,000 art lovers will enjoy her work at Mills Reef Winery over the weekend of October 29 and 30.

Buyers from all over New Zealand, Australia and North America will mingle with locals at an exhibition which will be a very NZ affair. Susan is thrilled that it will be opened by 2010 'New Zealander of the Year' Sir Ray Avery, and that MC is respected local business leader Dr Jon Mayson.

But the music comes from Boston after an encounter at the city's Museum of Art. "I found myself drawn to strains of flute music and spellbound by the way the musician swayed with his notes, light reflecting in his glasses and highlighting his long white hair. I had to capture that moment on canvas." Ross Bachelder, 'The Flute Guy', will play at the exhibition opening before visiting Christchurch to offer his music and muscle to the beleaguered city.

"Art gives me a universal connection and passport to open an unguarded conversation with strangers I happen upon during my travels," says Susan. "At the heart of my paintings are the people who touch my life and impact my work."

The end of an exhibition brings exhilaration tinged with regret. "I go home to empty walls. My home has less colour and character. But there is also excitement that my paintings have embarked on their own journey to bring pleasure to others. Then I feel the challenge and look forward to whatever next reaches out and compels me to capture it forever."

"Recollection" Exhibition: October 29 & 30  
Mills Reef Winery, Tauranga  
[www.susanart.com](http://www.susanart.com)