

Nourishing natural skills

An award has extended the talents of a South Coast artist, **Jacqueline Williams** writes

It's judgment day for printmaker Tanja Riese: her journey of arrival is almost over. Fifteen months ago Riese was given a career kick-start when she won the 2009 Living Artist Scholarship. The life-changing opportunity has proved rewarding on many levels. The Tanja-based artist received a lump sum of \$35,000, raised by a group of Bega Valley art-lovers who are devoted to developing regionally based artists working towards national recognition.

Riese's exhibition, *Journey of Arrival*, is on show in Bega from tonight and embodies her artistic vision – a love of the natural environment and her deep concern for its future.

"I began my year with a series of charcoal drawings enlarging objects found while walking – local seed pods, leaves, twisted bark fragments, roots washed up on the lakeside, strange pods washed up on the seashore and grasses twisted by the waves," she says.

"Each of these objects has its own intrinsic beauty."

Riese has always been an artist. She went straight from high school to art school and is now a printmaker embarking on her first solo exhibition.

The surprise element of art is what attracts her. The Living Artist Scholarship has given Riese the

chance to focus on her art without distraction.

"It has enabled me to undertake this substantial project, challenging myself to work on a larger scale than I have previously, both in drawing and print," she says.

All scholarship funds were locally raised and Riese believes there is a lot riding on her exhibition. Regardless of the outcome, she has relished the chance for a sustained period of work, a luxury she hasn't had since high school.

"Normally I would run printmaking workshops in the area; I'd teach at TAFE and schools," she says. "My time was spent between these activities to bring in income."

The scholarship experience has been intense but enjoyable. She believes a person must experience that intensity to reach a successful outcome. "It's made me look at my work habits. It's easy to run away from something," Riese says. The scholarship has also allowed her to invest in new materials, a welcome change from the limits imposed by her usual shoestring budget. "In the past I've recycled and used a lot of second-hand stuff".

Regional artists are often forced to head to the big city to develop their skills. The scholarship has been critical for Riese's



Tanja Riese, in front of her work, *Wattle helix* (135x100cm, charcoal, local earth pigment, acrylic medium on paper). Photo: Jacque Haywood

professional development; the ideal conclusion would expose her work to a national audience. Riese was nervous about filling her first solo exhibition space, and believes her biggest challenge has been to adjust the scale of her work accordingly.

"My work in the past has been quite painstaking and meticulous, and so I had to be freer in the way I applied an image to a plate because I would have only gotten

eight done in a year." There will be over 30 pieces on show.

Far South Coast Living Artist president Prue Acton believes Riese's exhibition reflects a community that values art and encourages its members to strive in their various fields.

"We are thrilled with the body of work that Tanja has produced during her scholarship year," Acton says.

"The work evokes the beauty of the natural world that we on the far south coast treasure." Throughout the past year Riese has consulted mentor and renowned Australian painter Mandy Martin, who has challenged Riese to reach her potential as an artist and encouraged her to think outside the box.

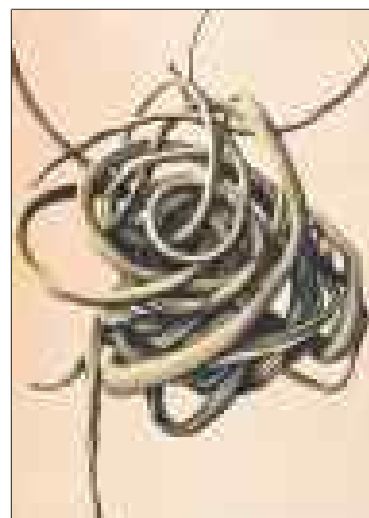
"My role as a mentor during her scholarship period has been to encourage, challenge, coax and cajole Tanja," Martin says.

Martin believes her mentorship has been easy, because of Riese's willingness to experiment.

The weight of community expectations is on Riese's shoulders and the pressure to live up to her goals has been her biggest motivator.

She feels a huge sense responsibility to the Bega Valley community and doesn't think she'd have held a solo exhibition without the aid of a scholarship.

"I don't think I would have



Riese's *Grass vortex* (charcoal, local earth pigment, acrylic medium on paper, 135x100cm). Photo: David Paterson

achieved this without this kind of support," she says. "People have put their money and energy into this and it's really disciplined me."

Riese's ideas have changed and grown throughout the past year, just as she has herself. Her next step is to exhibit outside the local area.

"I'll just wait and see what happens."

Tanja Riese will present her exhibition *Journey of Arrival* at the Bega Valley Regional Gallery on February 19 until March 20. The exhibition will be opened by Mandy Martin.

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