

Italian Sketchbook

Arts writer, Sarah Heinzman interviews Illawarra artists, Lucia Parrella, Liz Jeneid and Julia Woinarski about their ART INCONTRO trip to the Bay of Naples.

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FISHING boats, brightly coloured houses, gardens of lemon trees, monasteries - simple but potent images of life on a small island in southern Italy. And their pull was just too strong for Illawarra-based artist, Lucia Parrella who grew up in Italy 'imaginatively' from the many stories her Neapolitan mother told her as a child.

"When I went to our home town for the first time - this ancient medieval village that is not like anything I'd experienced in Australia, it didn't feel foreign at all, but strangely familiar," she recalls.

It was then she realised she had to come up with a plan to return regularly. But how? In 1997, Parrella's life changed when she had a scholarship to go to Italy to do art. She returned to Australia knowing she needed to combine her passion for Italy with her love of art.

"I started talking to friends and people interested in other cultures and art and they said to me, "We'd like to do something like you've done," she says.

By the following year, Parrella had established ART INCONTRO, offering cultural trips to central and southern Italy, incorporating creative workshops and immersion in the landscape, language and history of the area.

Liz Jeneid, accomplished artist and recently retired University of Wollongong senior lecturer in the Faculty of Creative Arts, went on Parrella's ART INCONTRO NAPOLI tour last year - an 18-day trip spent in Naples and Corricella, a quaint fishing village on the island of Procida in the Bay of Naples.

"Naples is fascinating because of the hidden areas," Jeneid says. "Out of the narrow, cluttered streets you go into these areas that are inside monasteries or churches and you've got these incredible squares. They're absolutely beautiful."

Jeneid was inspired not only by the buildings of Naples and Procida but also by the gardens of the area. She created *Due Giardini*, an artist's book in which she compares two gardens - a lemon grove on Procida with a garden in Pompeii.

"(The) lemon grove was rather down at heel but it had a lot of ambience about it," she says. "Then we went to Pompeii and, in the Garden of the Fugitives, there are figures that were caught in the lava flow and had died".

"I was looking at the past and the present in the images that you see around you. These very ancient cast figures are still with us and still affect us when we look at them."

Another participant, potter Julia Woinarski, was captivated by the architecture and fishing boats and was keen to do some printmaking.

"I've never taken so many photos in my life," she says. "I saw it from a different perspective, from a printmaker's point of view."

Another member of the travelling party had never drawn or painted before but, since her return, has been inspired to take up art classes.

"You don't have to be a practicing artist to do this trip," says Parrella, "you just have to have a curiosity about visual culture and a sense of adventure."

For more information email lucia@artincontro.com.au and request an itinerary for ART INCONTRO NAPOLI.