

Visiting **Wayne Ashton** on a warm Sydney summer day it is hard not to conclude that here is an artist who seems to be in a good space in every sense of the word. Firstly he works and exhibits on the first floor of a large terrace house that is light filled and on a hilltop. Located around the corner from one of Sydney's busiest roads, a gentle breeze moves through the rooms and from any of the many windows there are wide district views, across

to the University of Sydney and over the machinations of the buzzy inner West suburbs. Raw wooden floors and white painted walls add to the light and relaxed feel. Perhaps even more remarkably, it is so very tidy! "It's not helter skelter like Bacon's studio," says Ashton with a laugh.

In January and February the studio/gallery space, known as **The Chilli Rooms** will feature Ashton's latest exhibition *Pinski's Traveling Dive Troupe* – works from a series of 117 paintings about the adventures of a dog called **Pinski** who travels the world in a hot air balloon with an exhibition diving troupe. These exuberant, life-affirming and unashamedly joyous paintings are clearly not the work of an angst-ridden artist. The palette is aqua, green, blue and orange. The subject matter is people having fun – swimming, snorkeling, at parties, at barbecues, on boats and lilos. >

# Angst-free adventure

In the studio of painter and writer Wayne Ashton our writer *Helen McKenzie* discovers an unabashedly optimistic approach to making art.

PHOTOGRAPHS *Zan Wimberley*



LOVE IT  
BUY IT  
HANG IT  
LIVING  
WITH ART



we  
love the  
vibrant  
colours



Ashton was born in Karachi to British and Pakistani parents. His stepfather worked for UNESCO and the family travelled extensively, Chittagong, Paris, Kuala Lumpur, Lagos, London and Perth. Ashton says, "I don't know exactly what travel does but it doesn't let you put roots down for too long. It got me accustomed to lots of different places, spaces, cultures, customs and different views on how to live life. My formative years were spent in the straights of Malacca on boats, snorkeling and diving."

Ashton, who is also a successful novelist with two highly regarded

books to his name, *Under a Tin-Grey Sari* and *Equator*, is currently writing his next book, not surprisingly it is about Pinski's adventures. In conversation Ashton's love of words is clear as he grapples with the question – why are you painting and writing about happy events? "I'm not sure how I broke through that grim, sullen art standard. It happened by osmosis, accident and by organic development. It didn't happen overnight, it was an interesting 15-year journey to find these pictures. I had discussions with artists of different genres: musicians, poets, play writers, sculptors, filmmakers, other novelists and painters. I was looking at why dark stuff was intrusively in your mind, to intrusively tell you, that life is intrinsically horrible, it was continuing to reside as a primary thing when it ought to be a secondary thing – it's a real addiction to angst."

From his airy studio in Sydney, the anti-angst Ashton says that the mix of writing and painting is "the perfect place for me; not because it is expressive per se, but because it is a place for exploration, adventure, discovery of new things. Even in that tiny world of making a painting or sentences for a novel there is a huge aperture in there, an enormous big, big world of discovery." ●



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