

Carving a path

Fuelled by a huge work ethic, plenty of talent and a healthy serve of caffeine, it is no wonder Sydney sculptor Alexander Seton is such a success.

Words: Lucy Teasdale



TO SAY THAT Alexander Seton enjoys his job would be like saying that Oliver Reed enjoyed the odd glass of sherry. A slave to his craft, the air is thick with the 29-year-old's all-consuming work ethic and infectious enthusiasm for sculpture and the arts. "I was warned very early on that if you want to be an artist, there can be no doubt in your mind that it's your course in life," he says. And it seems to have stuck.

Seton is a former pupil of St Ignatius College School, Riverview, whose motto is, 'as much as you can do, so much dare to do'; a maxim which he has taken quite literally to heart. The weekend of May 20 sees the annual Riverview Arts and Crafts show – at which Seton will be exhibiting his well known 'Explorer' Astronaut (see picture right) – a project he is delighted to have been asked to be involved in. "Riverview is a classical private school so it is great the less conventional abilities are being recognised at this year's show," he says.

Saying that, it is not as if Seton was ever discouraged from his pursuit of the arts. Born into a family of four brothers – who are now all best friends

and all of whom attended Riverview – he grew up in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales without a TV, near to a marble quarry where he played with clay, stone and wood. When he began at Riverview, life didn't change dramatically.

"At school, the idea of being a Renaissance man, finding what you're really good at and sticking to it, was heavily promoted. No one ever discouraged me from my love of drama, writing, art or languages. In fact, I got away with a lot; I was left in the rose gardens to work while staff were told to leave me alone and not make me go to maths." After attending Art College at the University of NSW and realising that he was "most definitely a carver", Seton threw himself into the business of sculpture. But another creative medium snuck in.

"As an arts student, my first and only job was as official photographer at The Basement Jazz Club. It was amazing; free jazz and access to some of the world's greats, from Harry Connick Jr to John Cleary and Jeff Duff." These days, Seton incorporates photography into his work, for example shooting 'The Explorer' in incongruous locations around his home suburb of Newtown. "There was no reaction from adults at all," he says. "But kids loved it. I wanted the Explorer to be an endeavour of curiosity as there's so much to learn from the world around us."

Seton reveals that he moved to the bustling, gritty Inner West suburb in order not to lose any precious minutes when inspiration arose. "I deliberately chose Newtown so if I suddenly have a great idea, I can get straight down to the studio and get drawing. I love being here because there are a lot of my fellow artists around and I'm a caffeine addict. So when another artist from my building comes and says

'Alex, you want a coffee?' I'm like yeah! It's nice to get a break from working alone."

On group or solo exhibitions:

"It's like asking a musician if they'd like to play unplugged or with a band. But it's wonderful to display with other artists when you spend so much time alone in the studio"

On his favourite galleries:

"MoMA in New York is particularly fascinating. There's a lovely sense of inspiration within the layout, but maybe that's just New York..."

On Sydney:

"Sydney is the only city I'd ever want to live in. The physicality of the harbour makes it the ultimate exhibition space and I'd love to see more sculpture down there".

So what do his non-artist friends think about that workaholic streak? "The majority of my friends hold good nine to five jobs, and because I've been working from show to show for the last three years, they gave up hope of ever seeing me at weekends. It got to the stage where they would descend on me in the early hours of Saturday morning with beer and food and tell me to stop working".

But don't let that worry you. At Bondi's Sculpture by the Sea exhibition in 2004, Seton's unfeasibly realistic and tactile marble couch bore the words "This is no time to sit around, get up and enjoy the day". And for a man who cites astronauts, astronomy, optical illusion and the nature of human curiosity as some of his key inspirations, there will never be any danger of Alexander Seton disappearing under a cloud of marble dust. ☉

Riverview Arts & Crafts Show is this weekend / www.alexanderseton.com