

# Stephen Bevis arts

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## Art trail leads to SW studios

Creative juices flow alongside Margaret River wine and waves, writes **Stephen Bevis**

In the 1960s and 70s, the thrill of discovering new surf breaks lured adventurous board-riders to carve a trail around the capes of the Margaret River region.

The winery cellar door has added another layer of interest in more recent decades, enhanced by the blossoming dining scene and the pleasures of following the foodie circuit through the vines, forests and pastures.

The South West's beauty and relative tranquillity also has nurtured artists born and bred in the region while inspiring others to move there from afar.

To shine more light on what they do, about 100 of these artists have banded together this month for the Margaret River Region Open Studios, an annual art trail from Busselton to Augusta they hope will rival the region's other famous attractions.

"It adds to the variety of offerings that the region can put

out to tourists beyond caves and waves and wine, the usual reasons tourists come to Margaret River," MRROS chairman Bill Castleden says.

The retired University of WA professor of surgery is a keen art lover, environmentalist and avocado grower whose Redgate home is the studio for his wife Wendy Castleden. Their daughter Susanna Castleden and son-in-law Bevan Honey are leading artists in Perth.

Mr Castleden says the MRROS fortnight, now in its second year, is inspired by the success of similar trails in England, the Cambridge Open Studios and Brighton and Hove's Artist Open Houses.

"This is trying to get more members of the public interested in meeting an artist and having a look at a studio," he says.

"It is only maybe if they have bought a work at one of these open studios that they'll actually venture into an art



**Creating:** Dunsborough potter Myles Happ at work in his Caves Road studio for the Margaret River Region Open Studios.



**Busy:** Artist Leon Pericles in his printing room at his home. Picture: Stephen Bevis

gallery. Until they have talked to an artist the whole thing might be too intellectual and too difficult for them. We are trying to expand from the bottom."

Rachel Coad, who moved south from Perth last year, says opening her studio beneath her Gracetown home is bringing new audiences to her work.

people who may normally not visit a gallery.

She is working on a series of big portraits of individuals pulled from 1950s group photographs of Wheatbelt community gatherings. These commanding apparitions of the recent past will be shown at a gallery in Melbourne in July but can be seen taking shape under Coad's attentive hand this weekend and next.

A widely available map and catalogue is the trusty guide for this artistic exploration. Visitors can design their own routes around geographically grouped venues and there are clear directions for each studio.

Signs also are well-placed around the region to help the curious art-trailer find the right time to turn off Caves Road into

the Annie Brook pottery of Myles Happ, or down a bush track into the cave of wonders that is Leon Pericles studio in Margaret River, or to a shed in the Cowaramup industrial estate that has been converted into an oasis of creativity by Studio 35 artists Kay Gibson, Mary-Lynne Stratton, Robyn Collins and Simon James.

Themes of exploration, adventure, inquiry and fantastical invention run through the work of Pericles, whose masterful touch extends from quirky prints and amusing narrative collages through to stained glass, found-object sculpture, mobiles, paintings and drawings.

On the opening weekend, Pericles welcomed visitors with stories from his fictional town of Widimorphup and other artistic imaginings such as the rare moth *Losasocka pestistrutata*, which eats only one sock out of every pair.

"People will say to you they love your paintings when they really don't," he says. "But when they are laughing, 'They can't put that on. I just delight in somebody finding something that I've hidden in a piece of work and they respond to it.'"

"I think this is probably the biggest art event in WA," Pericles says. "More than 100 artists with studios open for two weeks is pretty substantial."

■ The Margaret River Region Open Studios runs until April 27. Visit [mrros.com.au](http://mrros.com.au).