

AN IMMORTAL CITY INSPIRES

Local artist David Henderson's latest exhibition draws influence from the most enchanting of European cities, writes **Paul Donoghue**

In the history of Western art, Venice deserves a special mention.

For centuries painters, in particular, have flocked there, making the quaint streets their studios and basking in the light of a city that is gracefully sinking into the sea.

"Venice I love because it's just an incredibly evocative place," says Brisbane artist David Henderson, 51, whose latest exhibition opens this Friday at Brisbane's Graydon Gallery.

Henderson spends half his year in Italy and is drawn particularly to Venice, a city that has been immortalised many times on canvas since the Renaissance and the early pioneers of oil painting.

"Artists have always gone there because of the light and architecture, the atmosphere, reflections in the water – it just seems to have been built for the specific purpose of being painted."

The streets and canals of Venice have become the main figure in this latest showing of 28 works. Henderson loves the vibrancy of the city and paints out in the open or in rented apartments.

"It's a city that seems to have many moods," he says. "Often it can be quite a melancholy place, something a little bit sad about it, which I rather like as a painter."

"Sometimes it can be a really joyful, lightly coloured, sunny place. It's sort of a constantly changing environment, which I find very stimulating."

There are also several works of classic nudes in the show. Henderson sees a distinct parallel between these two styles.

"They are both subjects that you can look at in terms of how things are constructed – the way buildings are put together and the way you construct the figure."

"There's the human side of it as well," he says. "I'm interested in people and the spaces they inhabit."

Henderson grew up in Brisbane, painting from an early age before beginning his studies in architecture. He soon drifted into painting full-time, taking commissions for works depicting old Queensland houses.

He left for Europe as a young adult and studied at the Royal Academy of Art in London.

"There's a great tradition of figure painting and painting from direct observation that I started when I was at the Royal Academy," Henderson says. "To me, that's the most interesting kind of painting there is... you can say something very specific and direct about the world around you."

Henderson says he feels lucky to be able to divide his time between Italy and Brisbane, supporting himself as an artist. Sometimes he doesn't know whether he lives in Brisbane and visits Italy or vice versa.

"I really like to stay there and become acquainted with a place, get to know it, ideally go beyond the superficial appearance of the place and really arrive at some sort of understanding of what that place is about."

David Henderson's latest exhibition at Brisbane's Graydon Gallery runs from August 26 to September 4. See graydongallery.com.au for details.



Brisbane artist David Henderson's take on the beauty of Venice in his painting *Evening Light, Rio Ognissanti*.



QUEEN OF GLAMOUR

The eternally gorgeous Joan Collins shares her secrets on beauty and shares tantalising tales from Hollywood with **Sally Browne** ahead of her one-woman show

"You can't go around like that. You look hideous!"

It's not the sort of statement you'd expect to hear directed at the glamorous and beautiful Joan Collins, but it's what was thrown her way by a spiteful director when she arrived on the set of her first Hollywood film at the tender age of 21.

It's a story she tells in her one-woman show, *One Night with Joan*, which, fresh from sell-out performances in New York and London, the dynamic diva will soon be debuting in Australia.

At 78, and with a 60-year career behind her – and still going – Joan Collins has plenty of stories to tell.

She's certainly put the numbers on the board.

She's been married five times, written three autobiographies, six novels, made countless films, and has three children and three grandchildren.

She's rubbed shoulders with stars including Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor and knocked shoulder pads with the likes of Linda Evans on *Dynasty*, where she played the formidable Alexis Carrington for eight years.

A natural story-teller, Collins is too much of a lady to dish piles of dirt, but she tells stories with a twinkle in her voice.

"I like telling the Paul Newman story," she says, down the phone line from her holiday home in the south of France.

"He was a good friend of mine, he was very funny, he was very generous, he was a fantastic actor, and I saw him right up until his death."

"In fact, the last time I saw him was at a gala charity and I said, 'How are you, Paul?' and he

said, 'I still gotta pulse', and sadly six or eight months later he died.

"But there's a lot of fascinating people I talk about: Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Bette Davis, Gene Kelly, Elizabeth Taylor, Linda Evans, a laundry list."

Collins may be the epitome of style, but the daughter of a theatrical agent who grew up with her sister, writer Jackie Collins, in wartime London, confesses it wasn't always that way.

"As a young girl, I eschewed glamour and hairstyles and make-up," Collins says.

"I did it on the screen, but I didn't want to do it in real life, and I wore blue jeans and tartan shirts and polo-neck sweaters and not much make-up."

It was that look that the director of her first picture, *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing*, threw stones at.

"From that time on I always tried to be well groomed and well put together," she says, and it's something she's gone on to master, writing a number of style and beauty books.

While she may have had a head start in life, with luscious locks and big brown eyes, Collins stresses that glamour is something that's made, not born.

"Glamour is an illusion, and an illusion is something you have to work on," she says. "You don't see glamorous babies."

In Hollywood's heyday, for the actress of the '20s, '30s and '40s, it was all about make-up, clothes and good lighting. Today, it's about Photoshop and being a US size 2.

Fashion standards have changed again in the past 20 years. When Collins was getting around in *Dynasty*, knocking over rivals with her shoulder pads as an attractive 40-something, she wore clothes that accentuated her natural curves.

Today's stars in *Desperate Housewives*, for example, wear a lot less and have a lot less flesh to cover. They're at least one dress size smaller, says Collins.

"First of all, I don't think the clothes are as flattering today.

"And there's an expression called 'fashion fat', which is if you don't fit into a size 2. Anybody over a size 2 is 'fashion fat' according to those in the industry.

"So I would be fashion fat, and 95 per cent of women are.

"And I think the clothes that some of the women have to wear on TV, which is skinny little tank tops and tight trousers only look good if you're very, very thin, whereas in *Dynasty* we had beautifully constructed suits and evening dresses that were well groomed that made us look really fabulous."

Never shy to tell it how it is, Collins is now turning her pen to a new book *The World According to Joan*, which comes out next month, as well as a regular column she writes for a British newspaper, and regular updates on Twitter.

She still does the rounds of talk shows, with her usual aplomb and wicked sense of humour. But in these modern times, the results can quickly be seen on YouTube, which is both a blessing and a curse.

"Everything's on YouTube these days," she muses.

"It used to be that every time you said something to the press, they would say, 'Oh, it's just tomorrow's fish and chip paper', but now everything's there forever, even things you did 20 and 30 years ago."

It's hard to believe that 30 years ago this year, already an icon of

stage and screen, Collins was cast in the role of ex-wife and uber-bitch Alexis Carrington; it was a relationship that lasted longer than most of her marriages.

Collins is now happily wed to theatrical company manager Percy Gibson, 32 years her junior.

The one constant in her life, though, has been her career, and since her teenage years, after training at the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, she has never stopped working, and working hard. So, in all her wit and wisdom, what advice can she give to us mere mortals? What has she learned about men, for example?

"Men?" she exclaims. "As Jack Lemmon said in *Some Like It Hot*, 'What hairy beasts!'"

"I don't think I've learned too many lessons about men other than that you've got to kiss a lot of frogs until you meet your prince, and I did and I've met mine who is Percy Gibson.

"The thing that many women make the mistake about is falling for somebody shortly after they meet them mainly because of their looks. And I think that looks are very important, but I think friendship and compatibility are the most important things to have. And if you can find a guy like that, you're very, very lucky."

And throughout life's ups and downs, it's important to be armed with a sense of humour, of which she has plenty in her show.

"I think humour is an essential," she says.

"I think the British sense of humour is one of the best in the world, and I understand, having been there, that the Australians are very good at it too!"

One Night with Joan comes to Jupiters Casino, Gold Coast, November 6.

Tickets on sale 9am August 30, at 9am, through ticketmaster.com.au, 136 100.



Dynamic diva Joan Collins has been an icon of stage and screen for 60 years and is still walking the stage at age 78 with her one-woman show.

THEATRE & VISUAL ARTS

RUSSIAN FILM FEST

Russian Resurrection, otherwise known as the Russian film festival, launched in Australia in 2004 and is back bigger than ever. This year showcases 15 films, including historical epics, moving dramas, adventures, comedies and even a 3D animation feature, with a tribute to the legendary Ludmilla Gurchenko. At the Palace Centro, 39 James St, Fortitude Valley and Palace Barracks, 61 Petrie Terrace, Brisbane, from August 24-31. Info: russianresurrection.com

FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY

Sofitel Brisbane Central presents Fashion Stills, an exciting collection of photographs of the most iconic figures and moments in fashion history. Take a peek behind the scenes at Dior, Chanel, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Yves St Laurent, Christian Lacroix and Givenchy, and spot the famous faces of Karl Lagerfeld, Carla Bruni and Kate Moss as snapped by star photographers such as Derek Hudson and Francoise Huguiere. Following a highly successful tour across Europe and North America, the exhibition makes its final stop in Brisbane from September 9 to December 26. Free. sofitelbrisbane.com.au

FILM COMP

Australian and New Zealand filmmakers have one month to enter their films in the 2011 DigiSPAA digital filmmaking competition, where this year's winner will walk away with \$15,000 cash and \$20,000 worth of post-production, plus a guaranteed screening on the Movie Extra channel and a return airfare to the CineMart International Film Festival Rotterdam. Applications close at 5pm on September 16. digispaa.org.au

POETRY FESTIVAL

Queensland Poetry Festival: Spoken in One Strange Word takes over the Judy yet again with a celebration of all things poetry. Now in its 15th year, QPF brings you poetic voices from more than 40 local, national and international artists in a two-day feast of poetic and musical sessions. August 27 to 29. Free. judithwrightcentre.com

BRISBANE - THE MUSICAL

Student theatre group Underground Productions stages original musical *The Battle of Brisbane*, about rivalry between US and Aussie forces based in Brisbane during WWII. Runs from September 1 to 10 at the University of Queensland's Schonell Theatre. undergroundproductions.org.au

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