AN AUSTRALIAN ICON

Remembering Brett Whiteley; and your cultural calendar for the month
As a dynamite docu on the life of Brett Whiteley hits cinemas, BAZAAR brings five creatives into the artist’s former Sydney studio, where they reflect on how he affected them personally and why he still has such an outsized influence on the Australian aesthetic. By ELIZA O’HARA

"WHITELEY’s devotion of ultramarine to a godlike state has been very inspirational for my work. For someone to singularly exult one colour is a reminder to consider one aspect of composition and then build a work around that. To not be disturbed and dulled by trying to say too much with too much and let drama be achieved through colour alone. "Whiteley’s lyrical expression, lack of inhibition and freedom from convention has given me confidence to explore other ways of using floral elements aside from the composed bunch in a vase; to crush a garden of colour into one arrangement, whether that be hanging from the ceiling, cascading down a wall or spilling from ledges. 

"The swirl of ecclesiastical gold above my head in this photo is how I feel towards Wendy (Brett’s widow). I think he would have felt the same for her, as she obviously inspired him in so many ways."

\[Photographed by PIERRE TOUSSAINT
Stylist by MICHELLE JANK\]

SASKIA HREWES

Global Artist, Author

"WHENEVER I THINK OF BRETT WHITELEY, I always think of the painting of the room with his reflection in the mirror [Self-Portrait in the Studio, 1976]. I loved being in the [Brett Whiteley] studio to get a glimpse into his mind. All of the photos, images, objects and influences, all of the ingredients in the studio room have an effect on the outcome of the work. It’s a wonderful and illegible map of what goes into his work, and in a creative person it’s an inspiring thing to see. It’s not dissimilar to our process in that we use up references that help shape our creative direction, often not knowing how these things are going to gel, but they are all things that are connected in some way. It’s almost like the outcome is predetermined and we are using these references to work out how to get there. It was inspiring to be in the studio space. I don’t know a great deal about the objects, but I find them fascinating and amazing."

\[George Livissianis\]

"I think Brett was a bit of a Romantic. He was a passionate, intense, emotional artist, a romantic in every sense of the word. And I think that’s why he was so successful. He was really into the world of enchantment and fantasy and that’s why he was so successful. He was a bit of a romantic, a bit of a dreamer. And I think that’s what he was. He was a romantic in every sense of the word. And I think that’s why he was so successful. He was a bit of a dreamer, a bit of a romantic. And I think that’s why he was so successful.

\[George Livissianis\]
"It was a huge honour to be counted as a finalist in the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship in 2008. The encouragement it provided to young artists is invaluable, and launches many an art career.

"Whiteley’s influence was one of the first to strike a note for me in my most formative years. I was fascinated with the way his work epitomised the bohemian soul of Sydney. His lyrical mark-making continues to echo influence on each new generation of artists.

"Brett's time in New York in the '50s still inspires me today, and after my next solo show in May at Olsen Gallery [in Sydney], I plan to follow in his footsteps. It has always been a dream of mine to paint in New York."

Bloused by Lara Jones, is at Olsen Gallery, Sydney, May 17–June 14. Follow Jones on Instagram @__lara_jones__"

“Whiteley always struck me as such a man of his times, the cool Sydney of the 1970s and, indeed, the world. Anyone who was anyone seemed to know him and have stories to tell.

"As an artist, I guess the part I relate to most are his animals. His creatures scream with character. A person may look contemplative, but an animal is positively audible in paint. Whiteley was very influenced by Francis Bacon, and Bacon’s animals too have an intensity of character that can be seen as human. In this way, the relationship to the viewer is almost more immediate — there’s not the biography of a person between the viewer and the animal on canvas. This is something I’m continually exploring in my own work."
"THE DAY ABBIE DIED.

I am not sure if I am remembering this event correctly, but I do remember feeling a sense of relief when it was over. It was a moment of tranquility, and I was able to take in the beauty of the surroundings.

Every inch of the room was filled with memories of her. The walls were adorned with paintings she had done, and the furniture was arranged to her liking. I could sense her presence, even though she was no longer with us.

The day ended with a simple goodbye, and I left the room, feeling a mix of sadness and relief. It was a moment of closure, and I knew that she was at peace, finally free from the pain she had endured.

I remember thinking that I would never forget her, and that I would always cherish the memories we shared. It was a bittersweet goodbye, and I knew that she would always be with me, in my heart and mind.