**Entrepreneur feature for FoD**

**Artist and Art Teacher Paula MacMillan Perich**

**1)Tell us a bit about yourself. Where are you from, how long you have been at Dulwich, how many kids do you have etc.**

I’m an Australian practicing artist and qualified art teacher with a Bachelor of Arts degree. I have been teaching since 1987 in Australia, UK, Singapore, US and China. My family has been expats since 2001 and with each move I have either taught art in various international schools, or worked from my art studio including taking many commissions. Our three children, Madeleine, Jack & Harrison have been with Dulwich College since 2007, starting firstly in Year Three Dulwich Beijing. We have been in Dulwich Shanghai since 2013, and my eldest daughter has just graduated with her IB Diploma with the class of 2015, and now attends Melbourne University, Australia.

**2) What is your business all about? How is it unique?**

My business, ARTS Inc. incorporates many areas of the visual arts. From formulating my own teaching programs across a wide range of ages and skill levels, developing personal design ideas and commissions, to marketing finished products, and offering courses in helping people find and develop their own creative niche. My area of expertise is drawing, illustration and painting but I also love hand carving printing blocks and block printmaking as well as silk screening and clay sculpture. I apply my designs to hand printed fabrics, art journals, canvases, ceramics etc., and I’m very much influenced by the here and now, as well as my Australian Coastal beach-life upbringing. I run multiple technique classes for all age groups, (having taught in international schools from Pre-K to IB), giving my students a strong foundation of art elements and principles of design, which develop within my program each term. My teaching program is very hands on technique based, which builds upon students’ art knowledge of all levels, and can be applied in a way which is develops the discovery of their own artistic goals.

I also have a product range of fabric items which I have engineered the pattern designs for, and have printed my original designs on. I am currently launching a 100% linen range of home wares, which is expanding from aprons and tea towel kitchen and studio accessories, to interior decorating accent pieces to bedding and tableware.

The unique part is how I bring together kindred creative’s into my functioning art studio, and allow them to discover multiple techniques and help to facilitate their creative endeavours. Everyone has a different creative purpose and direction in mind. I help to develop their artwork, as well to develop their own goals.

**3) What made you want to start your own business?**

It was an evolution. I took the profession of teaching art and my strong passion of creating art multiple hours every day, to develop a business plan, which allows me to make a living doing something I love. I had to find a way in which to fund my passion for creating. It can be very expensive buying artist quality supplies and art materials and I tried to make it self-funding. I saw what other artists were doing and knew I could do it too. I had the realization that my work was inspiring to others and my passion contagious, and I had something that people wanted to know more about. The idea I could make a living out of doing something I love with a high level of background and expertise was something I had always wanted to do. I am forever looking for larger printing companies, and book publishers so I can produce my designs on a larger scale and offer my art techniques in print that students can use as a step-by-step reference and a form of inspiration away from the studio.

Bringing students into my working studio space gives them a sense of how artists work and they instantly become inspired. They often ask me: ‘when do you sleep?’

**4) How did you get the idea for your business?**

My business grew as an evolution. It wasn’t just one day I woke up and said I was going to be an artist. That probably did happen but I was 5 years old, and every step since has developed from my lifelong passion for everything art. I was the kid at school who always asked by teachers to design the school banners and posters including designing my own graduation certificates. Growing up I constantly kept diaries, journals and music books filled with illustrations, sketches of my friends, and intertwined designs, long before the art form Zentangle was ever termed. At university one of my professors asked me to illustrate a textbook series for him. As a member of the school teaching staff, I was always the one asked to design and paint the backdrop scenery for stage productions and create costume design and masks for performances. I was taking outside commissions to design murals, mosaics, annual awards and illustrate books. I was also creating my own work for my own sideline projects, exhibiting my artwork in galleries, designing, being an artist in residence at international schools, I realized my skill set was unique and sought after, and people genuinely liked my artwork. It had always been my intention to be an artist, but now I want it to be more on my terms. I want my designs recognized and licensed. The business side of art is such a distraction from my creativity and very time consuming, and something I’m learning to develop better every day.

**5) How do you market your business?**

Not as well as I should. This definitely is my weakest link. I run weekly art classes, weekend technique workshops and overnight international artist retreats, and I often have people saying they wish they had have known about it. I have posters around and postcards in the art supply shops, but my business is not well known to many people. I have my new product designs on my lounge room floor and they should be on my website. Word of mouth has been fantastic in the school community both here at Dulwich and other international schools in the area, and I have many loyal students and clients. I use social media as a major source of advertising (often very difficult from China), by adding links to my website, and I send out a free monthly E-Newsletter to subscribers. I spend hours each week updating my website which I have built from scratch, and I’m always adding new dates and classes. This is sometimes problematic as I have clients and students in Australia, the US, UK, and Singapore and being on location to teach face to face involves a lot of int’l travel, and is not always an option. My next step is to sell my classes online and to have my designs licensed and reproduced. I have attempted many self-videoing step-out technique sessions but it’s challenging to do it all myself. I need a clone of myself.

**6) How do you juggle family life with running your own venture?**

I work from home so I am extremely lucky I don’t have to cart my art studio and supplies around too much, and I have my students come to my home studio. My family makes a few concessions but they support me greatly. Most things in life come with a few compromises and a start up business is no exception. My adult classes run during the day while my children are at school, and the afternoon children’s classes run after school, finishing before family dinnertime. Living in China has made it much easier as we have domestic help at home, which frees up so much more of my time to dedicate it to my business. My studio always has an open door and my own kids always pop in as they come home from school and always say hello to the students. I break up my week into admin days, preparation days and studio/classroom teaching days. I don’t often teach weekends, aside from my monthly weekend workshops, so my family is around on the weekend. When I am running international artist retreats I try coinciding it with family vacations, and having them close by. My Australian studio is right next door to where we live, and fully self contained so I can run workshops and holiday programs right from there, and family is just next door.

**7) If you had advice for anyone thinking of starting their own side business, what would it be?**

I would say be passionate, but have a plan. Love everything about what you do. Talk it. Live it. Love it. Enjoy it. Share it. Find what you love, get knowledgeable about every aspect of it. Share your passion. You work for the majority of your life, so find something you really like to do. There are so many ways to fail in business doing something you really don’t like, so then, you might as well fail at giving something you love, your best shot. When I eventually arrive at old age, I would like to say I lived a passionate life, and used every ounce of my creative gift I was given to make a positive difference to the world. I don’t want to die wondering what might have been if I had followed my dream. I would advise the same of someone interested in starting a new business. Be passionate. Be prepared to be vulnerable and hit many obstacles in your way and knock backs. Persevere. Nothing will come easy if the hard work and effort is not there.

**8) Do you have a WeChat/FB page/website?**

Yes! All of the above!

Website: [www.paulamacmillanperich.com](http://www.paulamacmillanperich.com)

Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/artsincgallery

Wechat Group: ARTS Inc. Shanghai

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