

AN AUSSIE RENAISSANCE MAN

by Fredrick Baker





Naked valkyries recline on rubbish heaps and Pubesque goddesses emerge from red convertibles in a startling marriage of ancient myth and modern reality



Thousands of Italian immigrants and their descendants have ingrained so-called traits on Australian culture since the mid-19th century. Surely, however, does it work the other way around. Thousands of Australians couldn't live the Italian life permanently, leaving the continent and until Neil Moore and his wife,

Carol Spinks, who moved to Umbria in 1988 and set a restored medieval town in the tiny hillside village of Colle del Marchese near Spoleto, Italy.

Neil's immersion was nearly 20 years in the rich history and artistic heritage of Umbria is reflected in his art: delicate, detailed drawings and prints. References inspired by paintings in a style he describes as "loose realism" in Neil Moore's words, subtle religious motifs or subtle images and Renaissance problems emerge from his compositions into a shifting heritage of function-right and modern reality.

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But how do the Fine Arts graduate and his Renaissance man? In 1976, Neil began doing black and white illustrations for Australian newspapers, winning a Sydney Award in 1980.

The same year he made his first life-changing trip to Europe, learning to swim from his friends and then to Italy. Over the following years he moved back and forth between Australia and Europe, supporting himself with illustrating work while establishing a reputation as a free artist, with exhibitions in France, England, Germany and Italy.

In 1988, three months before he was to leave Australia for a permanent home in Italy, Neil met music teacher Carol Spinks in Sydney. "Neil had bought a house in Italy and wanted to escape the bounds of it to work abroad and being encouraged and convinced by his art," says Carol. "I had a conviction from that moment on it will this. He offered a former girlfriend at the time but I told him."

The couple settled in Italy, along with Carol's daughter Andrea. They spent time in the tiny mountain village of Montorio, occupied by the other couple, all spent over 30 and living a traditional subsistence lifestyle. "As soon as we arrived our neighbors, Eufemia, took me into the forest to show me how to collect fungi, perfume in a woods and take their bath in the house," recalls Carol. "We had no common language, so all relationships depended on gestures, exchanges and generosity. Eufemia came and sat in the kitchen every morning for a year to help me understand the rules of the village responsible for the mobility of young girls. If Neil was only one word come into the bathroom in the morning and check the bathroom to see if anyone was there?"