

Paris en hiver (Paris in winter)

Braving the bitter wind, rain, snow and fog of Paris in winter, Julie Podstolski finds a new muse.

For almost a decade, with her unusual medium of coloured pencils on paper, award-winning artist Julie Podstolski has held a visual microscope up to the intriguing life of Kyoto's geisha, to the exclusion of all other subject matter. She visited the country of her obsession often, avidly following the careers of individual geisha. A chilly month in Paris, brought about a pivotal change to her muse, with the result on show at Elements Art Gallery in Dalkeith.

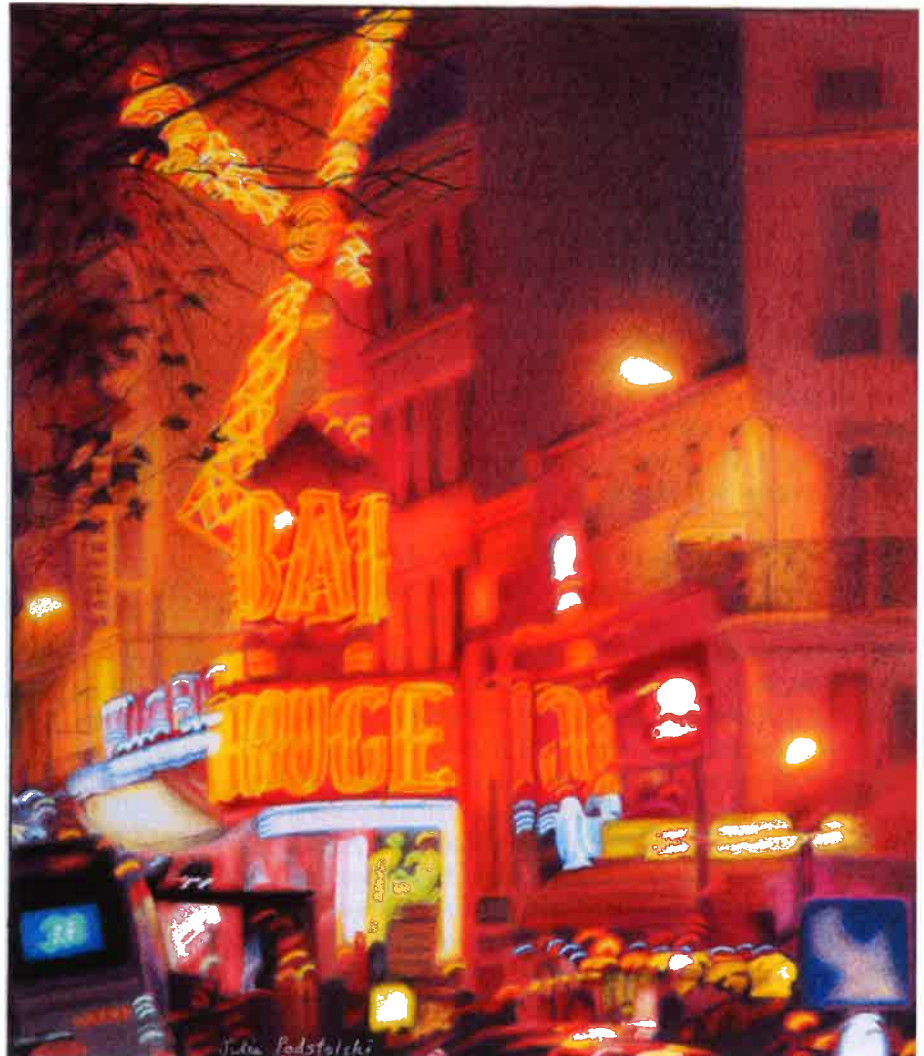
"I thought it was time to move on. While conceiving the trip to Paris I had the hope there would be great inspiration for art. But, being December, when it wasn't raining it was snowing! I spent most of my time exploring on foot, searching out subjects for drawing, freezing to death in my quest. I wasn't going to waste the opportunity, so I'd get up very early before dawn and just get out there in the streets. One good thing about constant rain is wet streets. That's what I would tell myself every day when it rained yet again: to look at the gift of wet streets shimmering and reflecting off the street lights."

Shying away from the usual tourist monuments, Podstolski looked for contrast in a city she discovered was not a museum of relics, but a living, pulsing, vibrant metropolis teeming with life. Giving this notion a broad scope, she portrays the seedy, down-at-heel, as well as the elegant, cool, cultured, formal and dignified. Traffic congestion, cafés, every-day street life, and the ever present rain seen through windows, create a collection of images visitors to the city will find familiar, but imbued with an artist's enthusiastic voyage of discovery.

"I felt like the place was enchanted but it was probably me who was enchanted. While many dark clothed people trudged to work, hands thrust in pockets, I was in a cloud of pure bliss. Because of this there were two different moods at play; the miserable moods of cold people going about their day and my mood of complete exhilaration," she says.

After studying at New Zealand's University of Canterbury in Christchurch, Podstolski moved permanently to

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'Moulin Rouge,' pencil on hot pressed printmaking paper by Julie Podstolski. Photo Victor France.

Australia in 1982. Working with oils, she began experimenting with coloured pencils in 1994 when her children were small, finding the dry medium a time saving and less messy alternative. From 2003 she has worked exclusively with pencils, using a technique which builds up complex layers of colour.

She says people often ask about the materials she uses. "They're artist quality wax-based and oil-based pencils compatible with one another and light fast. The brands I use are Faber Castell Polychromos from Germany, Caran d'Ache Luminance 6901 from Switzerland and Holbein Artists Pencils from Japan. Neither solvents nor water are used in the process. It's totally dry media. The paper is a heavy hot-pressed printmaking paper from Italy called Pescia, which has to be able to withstand a lot of pressure from me."

Paris en hiver is on show from 13 - 30 September. Visit www.elementsartgallery.com.au