

# FACE VALUE

Her art books may be found in galleries and art museums around the world, but for Amber Creswell Bell the biggest satisfaction is creating a beautiful piece of work.

**WORDS MICHAEL McHUGH**

Amber Creswell Bell says she has always been good with words, and that her talent for writing was identified early on. In high school, she was the editor of the school newspaper and was already winning writing competitions. “I got good marks for my essays and my teachers seem to be moved by my writing,” Creswell Bell says. “Some people are good at gymnastics, words are my thing.”

Creswell Bell says that she didn’t know the steps from being a uni student and then falling into a corporate career to how she could possibly be editing art books.

“It is the manifestation of everything I could have wanted it to be for my day job,” she says. “Better, because there is so much more creative freedom in it than I would have imagined. I am so blessed with Thames and Hudson for pretty much not interfering with my process.”

So what is it about being an art book author Creswell Bell loves the most? “It sort of reminds me of the same satisfaction of putting together a really good school project,” she says with a grin. “Where you would do beautiful headings and find great illustrations and you put borders around

things and then you would hand it in, it’s the same sort of satisfaction and pride but of much higher production quality.”

There is, however, no time for navel gazing. Creswell Bell is busy. And with good reason.

She juggles parenting three children, her role as director of Emerging Art for Michael Reid Galleries in Sydney, her duties as Curator of the National Emerging Art Prize and her work as an award-winning author producing seven successful art books sold around the globe.

Walk into any big-name art museum or gallery and there, sitting on the shelf, will be at least one of Creswell Bell’s books. “Internationally I really felt like I had to sing for myself and do the whole dance when I first started,” she says. “But now when I contact an artist they already know me and usually know my previous books or tell me that they give my books away every Christmas to their friends and family, so that’s really nice.”

This time round her focus is the portrait. *About Face* showcases contemporary portrait painting in Australia and New Zealand, where each

artist conveys their own personal message – whether political, social, environmental or simply to evoke the human experience.

The author begins with a spreadsheet and wish list, submitting it to the publisher. “Through the writing process I’ve been able to meet and interview artists that I never would have dreamed that I would know or would know me – ones I heroed in my prewriting career – so for that reason it has been incredible.”

Creswell Bell is a big supporter of emerging female artists. “I think they have to work a little harder,” she says, explaining that it is more common for male artists to be able to work on their craft full-time.

“You can have a husband and wife who are both artists but the raising of the children and the running of the household often falls to the female artist so they become a part-time artist and their career just becomes that little bit harder or it goes on pause ... that’s why those underdogs are my soft spot.”

***‘About Face: Contemporary Portrait Painting in Australia and New Zealand’ (Thames & Hudson) is on sale now.***

## EDITOR OF ART

In Amber Creswell Bell’s latest book, she goes behind the scenes with contemporary portrait artists in Australia and New Zealand.

PHOTOGRAPHY: NIKKI FENIX

