

**IN THE AIR:** Artist Monica Rohan (inset bottom) and her work, *Stilted* (inset below); and *Look Down At The Ground* (main picture).



# LIVING THE DREAM

## Rohan may look down at the ground but the only way is up

**FIONA PURDON**

EVER since Kelvin Grove artist Monica Rohan sold out her university graduation show six years ago she has become one of Queensland's most in-demand artists.

Rohan achieved an Archibald Prize finalist nod last year for her first attempt, impressing with her colourful and evocative portrait of Brisbane designers Pamela Easton and Lydia Pearson.

So, it is no surprise that Rohan's latest 13-work show *Look down at the ground*, at Jan Murphy's Gallery at Fortitude Valley, is already

sold out. The shy and humble dairy farmer's daughter grew up fearing that she would never make a living from her artistic passion.

She is grateful to live her dream of being a full-time artist.

"I didn't expect people to notice me like they have," Rohan said.

"I sold out my grad show in my honours year at uni, which is something that rarely happens.

"While growing up I didn't think being an artist would be possible. All I wanted to do was drawing (as a child).

"I was really lucky to

have supportive parents."

Rohan's Archibald success was especially rewarding after Easton and Pearson gave her access to their full back catalogue of designs.

"It was so exciting the painting got in. Pamela and Lydia were so generous in letting me use their images and I went through their backlog of fabric ... I got to dig around and pull out things that I could use," she said. "I wanted to make a homage to their work and their impact."

Rohan, 27, has introduced a new element to her third solo show at Jan Mur-

phy's, as she has become fascinated by observing nature from an airborne point of view.

Her exhibition features several airborne figures, including in the title work of a giant and untamed magenta bougainvillea.

Rohan said the tree was on the property neighbouring her family's dairy farm in Kerry, 14km south of Beaudesert, in southeast Queensland.

"I love the bougainvillea, it's so invasive and monstrously big and all of its tendrils are reaching towards the sky. Everything else around it is neatly cut. It was

exciting to paint," she said.

"It was my first painting and I loved the title *Look down at the ground*. It was a way to base the rest of the series. I started painting in August and September when there were a lot of beautiful flowering trees."

All of the show's 13 works feature Rohan's trademark colour palette, which is drawn from nature.

"I love the power of colour, how it takes over and vibrates; the colour gets inside of you," she said.

Monica Rohan's show *Look down at the ground* is at Jan Murphy's Gallery, Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley, until August 12.