

FIONA PURDON

Artist Michael Muir captured his own unique version of Italy in his quest to find tranquillity away from the tourist hordes.

The Sydney-based artist was determined to portray an unpredictable Italy as in the work *Electrified*, which features Florence's famous skyline including the dome of the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore (the Florence cathedral), in the background. As seen in this month's 12-work show *Proximity* at Jan Murphy Gallery, Muir found a beautiful multi-tiered garden and spent three to four hours painting watercolours that he could use for his larger works once he returned home.

"I was quite happy to go to places which were lesser tread," he says. "I would go wandering around aimlessly until I would find something of interest. The park seemed to be a local dating spot, it seemed to be lonely hearts club. I try to find that enigmatic quality, some intrigue, with all of my work. I want the viewer to be transported to Italy with my show."



Muir, a Mosman Art Prize winner, also went to Siena, Bologna and Rome, where he was inspired by the Colosseum for the work *Day is Done*.

"I found a shaded spot to draw in the crowded street, I was leaning up against a sculpture while everyone was walking past in a rush. It was another of those little moments where I got to escape the chaos."

He enjoyed the challenge of a softer and more subtle palette for his Italy-inspired show, after using brighter and bolder colours, including saturated yellows and whites, in his previous exhibition, which focused on the Sunshine Coast.

"I wanted to create the sense of that softness of light, that feeling of being somewhere else," he says. "This has been my most challenging show. Because the colours of Italy and the buildings were subdued, I knew I had to make the figures colourful. I'm more of a colourist. I work with composition. I'm doing a lot of things intuitively. I push colours together which shouldn't go together."

The Wynne Prize finalist also stayed in Rimini, on Italy's east coast, because it is the location

Scapes lesser read

Michael Muir took great pains to get away from tourist haunts to depict his version of Italy



where his 13-year-old son Liam's club was playing in a football tournament.

When not attending his son's matches, the father-of-three was inspired by seaside scenes, including the rows of deck chairs on empty beaches of the resort town.

"It was such a great father-and-son experience which we couldn't say no to, it was special for my son, whose whole world revolves around soccer, while I got to live out my artist dream, I've always wanted to go to Italy," he says.

"Most of my paintings are nothing like the photographs. Most of my work is done from imagination, I change the composition if I think it would make a better picture."

Muir, who started using this technique some 15 years ago, creates work that looks smooth from a distance despite the paint being textured and thickly applied with a palette knife.

Michael Muir's *Proximity*, Jan Murphy Gallery, 486 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley, May 28-June 15.

TEXTURE AND COLOUR: Michael Muir (inset) visited cities such as Florence and Bologna to capture the landscapes and cityscapes with a structured geometric and architectural focus; (clockwise from main) some of his works *Electrified*; *Night Stands*; and *Hard to Change*.