

the

THE BEST OF FILM / STAGE / MUSIC / ART

THE BEST OF

February
highlights



Words/
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Photography/
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Art Nicholas Harding

In a loft studio in the old Westons biscuit factory in Camperdown, Nicholas Harding is trying to find a clean chair to sit on. Everything in the room – the easels, his shoes, the floor – is covered in dollops of dried paint that appear to be building up like a coral reef.

Paintings adorn the walls. Landscapes of jagged cliffs, tranquil tidal pools and hot, spiky coastal bush. In one, a straggly, fibrous pandanus tree reaches for the light. In another, a boy and a man play bat and ball on the sand.

Harding, 56, finally locates a chair, sits, and looks around. These paintings, all part of his new self-titled show, are celebratory, he says. "They celebrate the wonder and excitement I felt as a boy when I first came to Australia from Kent, the garden county, in the UK," he says. "I was eight when my parents made a decision to bring four children to the other side of the world and settle here. The older I get, the more I appreciate what they did."

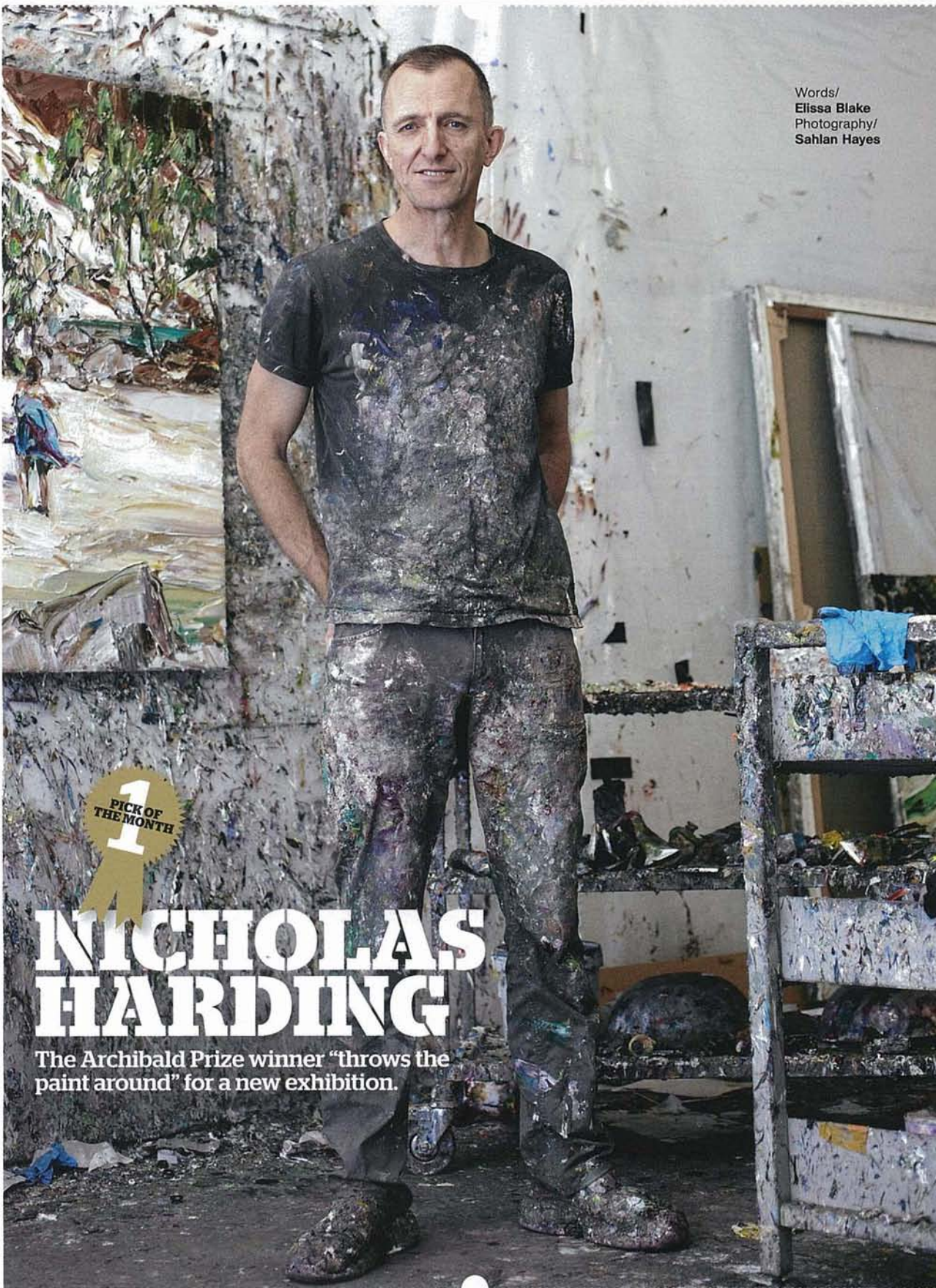
Growing up in Normanhurst, some 23 kilometres north-west of the CBD, Harding fell in love with the scrubby bushland around his home. Later, when he met his wife, Lynne, whose grandfather had surveyed land around Woolli on the NSW north coast, he was drawn to the nearby Yuraygir region. Most of the new paintings are from sketches made around the estuary at Woolli, where he and Lynne and their son, Sam, 19, have been holidaying for decades.

"It has wonderful beaches with tangles of scrub and flora, some of it native and some of it introduced, but there is a sense of them coming together that interests me," he says. "The thing I love about the Australian beach is it's a great leveller. It doesn't matter what your social status is – at the beach, we are all the same."

Harding was passionate about drawing as a young child. But his eyes were opened to painting as a 12-year-old when he watched a film about Francis Bacon's life and work. "I was sitting in an old community hall, a weatherboard shed, really, watching a film about Francis Bacon, and it was a really humid, stormy night. The projector was going clackety-clackety-clack and lightning was flashing on these faces of screaming popes and something inside me just went, 'Wow,'" Harding recalls. "A couple of years later, I read an interview by David Sylvester where Francis Bacon said, 'You just have to throw the paint around and see what happens.' That led me, in some ways, to paint the way I do."

Harding uses palette knives and sometimes pastry-making tools to apply thick layers of colour. He says he's always had a fascination with paint. "I like its fleshy qualities, the way it skins and scabs, its corporeal ooze," he says. "I like to make marks that are succinct and swiftly done, but are layered over time. You can feel the passing of time in the paint."

February 20-March 10, Olsen Irwin, Woollahra.



PICK OF
THE MONTH
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NICHOLAS HARDING

The Archibald Prize winner "throws the paint around" for a new exhibition.