

Brush eases bitter blows

By Lexi Cottee

When Karen Robinson's husband was diagnosed with cancer in 2008, she decided to pay her local artist supply shop a visit.

As a child Ms Robinson was an avid painter. But her passion for colour and creative expression took a backseat when her career in the bridal industry took off and later with the arrival of two children.

But her husband's diagnosis shifted priorities for the family of four. Ms Robinson took a year off work to care for her husband and then took up painting to deal with the emotional rollercoaster of chemotherapy and the debilitating effects of the disease.

"We didn't know if he would live or die," she said. "Art became critical to staying sane."

While her husband's cancer was successfully treated, tragedy struck the family less than a year later.

Their 25-year-old son, Ben, was killed while driving home from a night out in Bendigo. Police believe he was speeding when a kangaroo crossed his path, causing him to lose control of the car and slam it into a tree about 4.30am.

Solace for Ms Robinson was again found through a paintbrush in hand.

"At that time I found it very difficult to process what I was thinking so I used art to express deeply felt emotion. It helped me verbalise the trauma I was experiencing."

Since 2008, Ms Robinson, of Attwood, has produced 60 works of art, all searingly honest and surprisingly colourful. Fifteen of them will be on display in her first solo exhibition at the Gee Lee-Wik Doleen Gallery at Craigieburn from May 7.

When Words are Hard to Find, as the exhibition is titled, is the artist's interpretation of family life, through times of grief and



Karen Robinson in her studio. (Joe Mastroianni)

trauma to travel adventures and career milestones.

Hume mayor Adem Atmaca said Ms Robinson's work explores how it is possible to come from a point where words are hard to find to a place where everyday joy is refound.

"The paintings offer a profound glimpse into her psyche," he said.

When Words are Hard to Find opens Wednesday, May 6, 6-7.30pm, at Gee Lee-Wik Doleen Gallery, Hume Global Learning Centre, Craigieburn. The exhibition runs until June 27.