

Art transplant

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Nola Diamantopolous has swapped her
career as a financial adviser to become
an artist and teacher

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When Nola Diamantopolous talks about finding "the artist within" at one of her workshops, you'd better listen. Without any formal training or real idea of what she wanted to do, Nola threw in her successful job as a financial advisor five years ago to become an artist.

"I was becoming bored," she explains. "I'd been doing the job for 10 years and I thought 'Now what?'. But I knew once I made the decision that art was my calling."

One of her brothers said at the time his sister was "looking for herself", but Nola says her mum reserved judgment until she'd held her first exhibition.

"My mother didn't realise the people who bought my art didn't know me," she says. "Now, if I get too caught up in the business, my mother comes in to remind me that I did this for my art."

After two years at the famous Black-wattle Studios in Glebe, Nola set herself up in a studio in the inner west where she can work and indulge her other great passion – teaching.

"After I set up Mosaic Madness [to teach mosaics] I discovered I love to teach," she says. "I thought to myself, how do people learn as opposed to how do I teach?"

Nola now runs a variety of classes, including mosaic, painting and drawing. She also holds corporate days, where she helps business people unlock their creative sides.

MY FAVOURITE THINGS

[a] My studio: This is my favourite space and it's hard to get me away from here. My friends have to bring champagne and food to me. This is where I get to explore and play, discover and create, without anybody's judgment. The studio is open and I don't care what you say about my work because I'm not doing it to please you. **[b] Bouzouki:** I muck around with it. I studied it for a year and I still pick it up every couple of weeks. I love this instrument but then I love all string instruments. I used to do Greek dancing so it's in my blood. I learned to play it so I could understand it better. **[c] Art materials:** My oils are my favourite medium because of the vibrancy of the

colours. With acrylics, there's pigment mixed with plastic but with oils there's nothing else in there. I love working with them. **[d] Owl collection:** Owls are a symbol of wisdom from Ancient Greek times. I find it inspiring to see how many ways you can make an owl. I don't know how it started – you pick up a couple and someone thinks you've started collecting. **[e] Music:** I enjoy a wide range, from the *Bridget Jones's Diary* soundtrack and Shakira, to traditional Greek and Arabic music. I like to inspire all the senses. The whole environment of a place is important and



there's good energy here. **[f] Bravo Greek coffee:** The brikki [coffee maker] and coffee cup are from Greece and I have to use my special spoon. Making coffee is a mental break and I've only been drinking Greek coffee since I became an artist. It's a ritual for me. Sometimes I don't even drink it once I've made it.

[g] Art books: I can't get enough of them. I'm currently interested in the work of Fotis Kontoglou, a Greek artist from the 1930s. Art books are inspirational and transport-able. Opening them and seeing someone else's work gives me the energy to go back to my studio. There's so much learning to be gained from looking at



someone else's work – not to copy but to inspire. **[h] My first bronze:** I made this of Matina. She's Greek and doing her PhD. A lot of my friends sit for me but I always pay them. I like that my friends pose for me because it documents my life; it records the people around me. **[i] Incense:** I like to engage all the senses and I use uplifting scents such as citrus-based ones. I like to mix them myself. The sense of smell is the first to impact on the brain so it's important to the whole experience. **[j] Sculpture of my brother, Johnny:** He's one of my favourite subjects. When he was a year old he was immunised and was poisoned. He's 48 now but has the mental age of a one-year-old. He can't talk but sometimes you think he's saying something to you. When I begin work I always start by drawing him.

