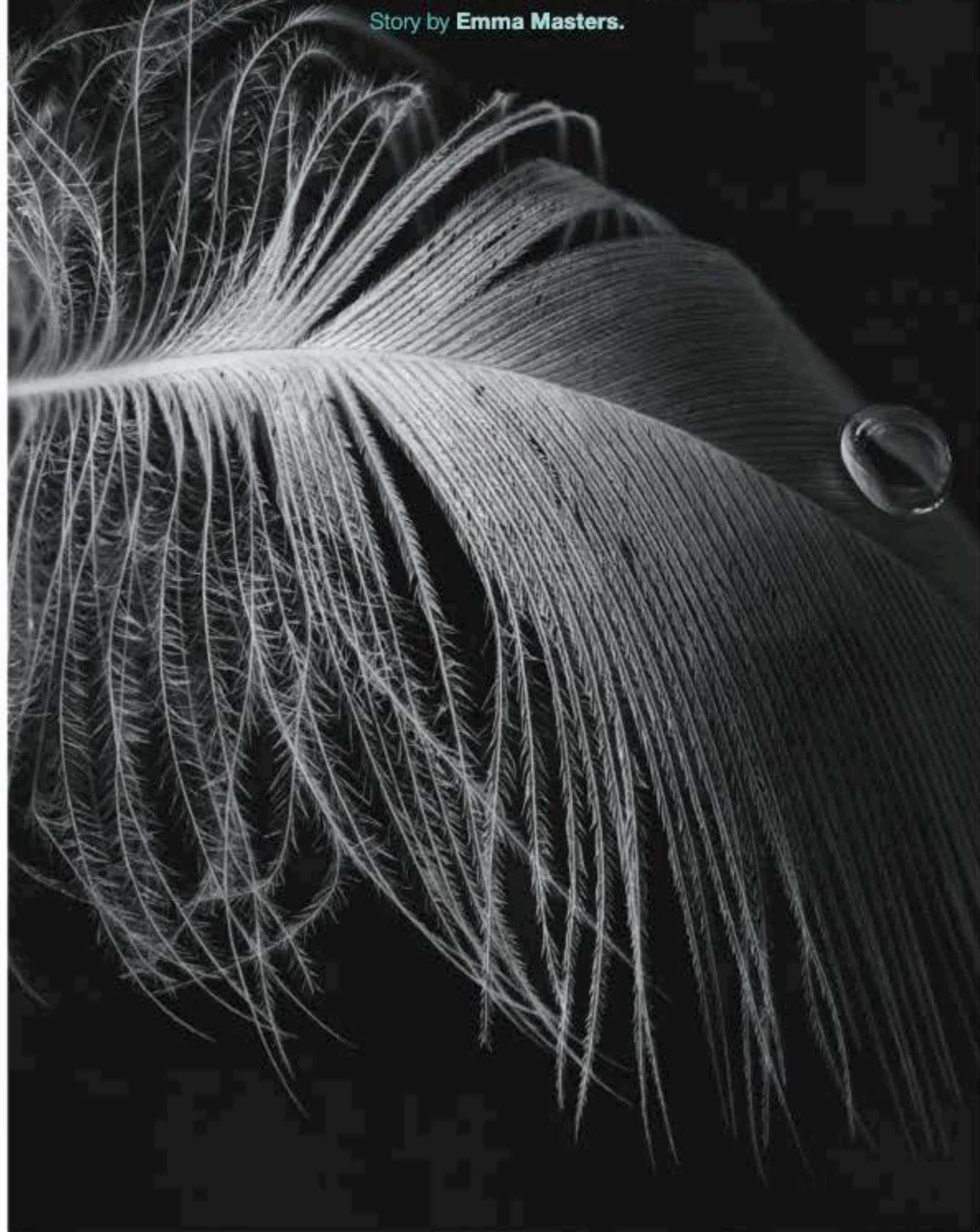


Realism in focus

Story by Emma Masters.



Page left: Detail from 'Gravity'. Above: Chris working on 'Biometry'.

Tiny shells, sun-baked crab legs and gnarled pieces of driftwood are just some of the offerings Fleurieu artist Chris Summer finds left on the front porch of his beachside home.

They're gifts from locals with an intimate knowledge of Chris and his art, a practice where he magnifies the intricate beauty of some of nature's smallest objects in a monochromed layering of black charcoal and white ink.

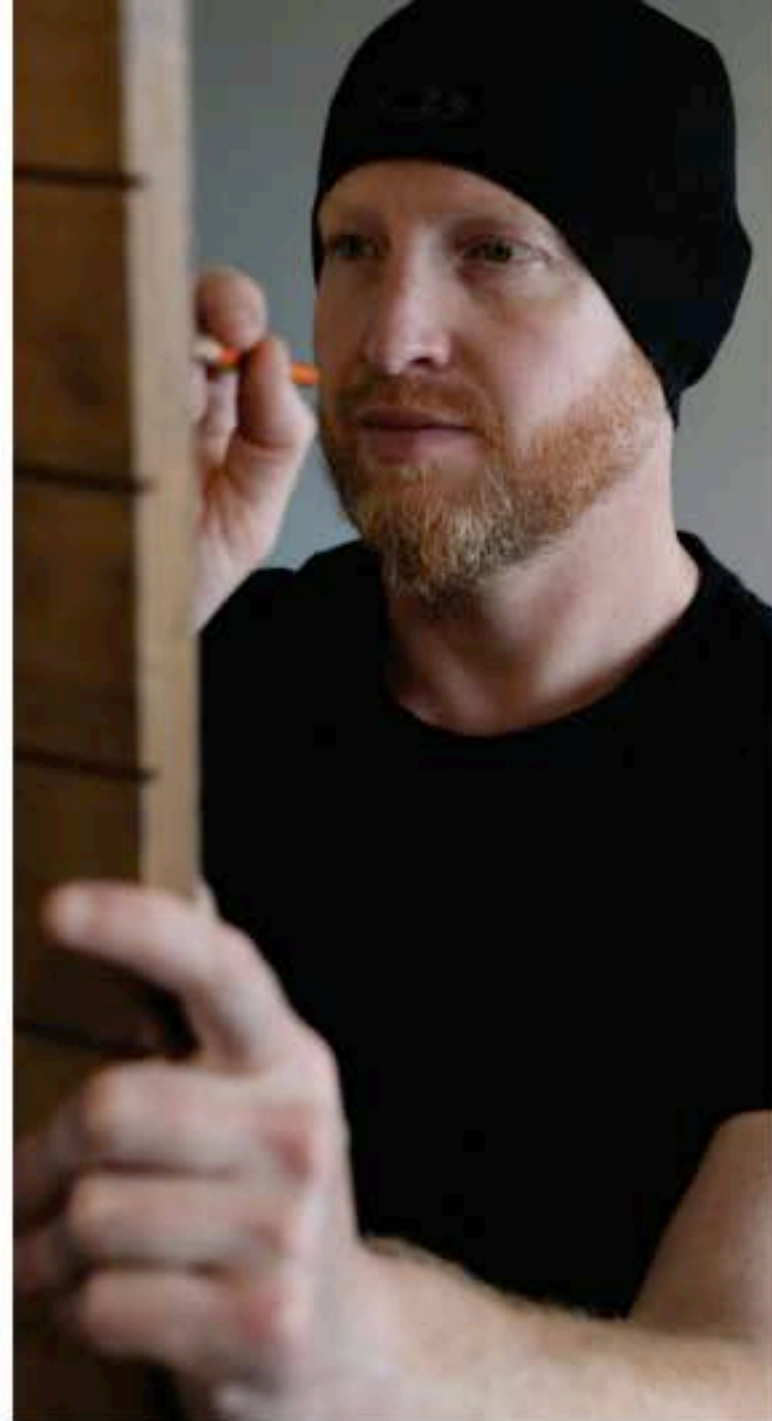
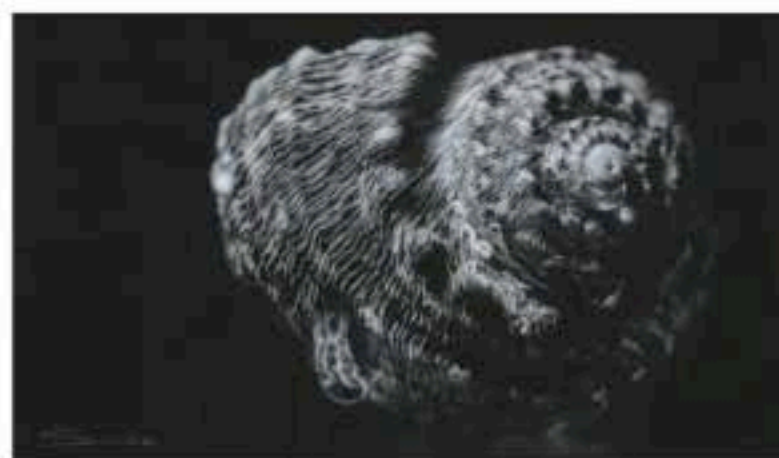
'I'll turn up after going for a walk and there'll be random new objects on the bench or doorstep outside,' Chris explains. 'I get feathers and lots of things – I love it.'

And there's every chance these objects could end up immortalised by the 43-year-old artist. His recent works have included a sea urchin and a white feather in still-life depictions that draw attention to tiny detail.

Nature has been central to Chris's work since he began his art journey as a self-taught wildlife artist more than a decade ago, but he's keen to avoid being typecast. 'I don't want to make the statement that things can be easily overlooked, but it's a bit of self discovery for me to study things around us. Nature is the medium I use to describe variance in detail and form, with light a big part of my work,' he says. 'I just really wanted to do each thing with more detail and to do this it has to be bigger. I'm a minimalist at heart and focusing solely on a single subject can be really powerful and inspire emotion.'

At first glance, his works look like expert macro photographs, but Chris reveals a detailed creative process that combines many mediums to create a hyperrealistic work. He begins by placing an object in a lightbox and taking a series of photos, methodically moving light sources around to highlight different sections.

'Each subject takes me one to two hours to photograph and I'll go through all those images and pick the best lighting for each section and end up with half a dozen images on a tablet, which I'll reference, bringing them together to make an image which I think represents the subject at its best form,' Chris explains. 'Hyperrealism isn't >



Top left: 'Molecular'. Middle left: 'Aqueous'. Bottom left: 'Edificial'. Above right: Artist Chris Summer.

about making a copy of a photo, there needs to be room for creativity and interpretation. But I love the fact that people think it's photography when they see my work.'

You'd be forgiven for thinking Chris has monk-like levels of patience, such is the time it takes to to draw and ink one piece. But he says it's a combination of a deep love of the process and sitting at the easel every day.

'I do get lost in the detail. It's quite meditative so it doesn't feel like patience. The value is the process of creating the work because I love drawing, painting and creating,' he says. 'Routine and discipline are a big part of spending so much time with one image. My calendar is the most ridiculous, detailed roster. I set my own targets for each week in terms of hours that I spend.'

With each work taking up to 200 hours, Chris doesn't produce as many finished works as other artists throughout the year, but he never struggles for an image or an idea of what to draw next. He adds that after leaving the bustling metropolis of London, backpacking around Australia and eventually settling in Victor Harbor, he's found the perfect conditions for his work.


'My community in Victor is like a family – lovely people working hard, doing their thing and living good lives. People aren't living crazy city lives. It's such a beautiful, peaceful place where there's space to create,' he says. 'When you live in a busier area, there's so much

distraction but the community here has helped me find a balance between connection and the space to do my work.'

It also gives him room to experiment. When I visited his beachside home studio, he was testing a new approach, putting the charcoal and ink to one side and dabbling with paint. 'I want to see if it offers me an opportunity to represent subjects in a different way. I don't know if it'll be different for the viewer, but the difference is my interaction with the work even when some of the process is the same – still the same paper, same image, same reference photography in black and white,' he says. 'It's one picture to see how it goes, to see if I can learn something to either reintroduce to charcoal or move on.'

But one thing Chris doesn't expect to change is his love of monochromatic images. 'Never say never, but for all the things that I've changed – charcoal to paint, urchins to feathers – the one thing I haven't changed is black and white,' he says. 'When you hear of people who lose their sight, their other senses are emphasised. For me, art is the same with colour.'

'We love having colour in our lives. But when you take colour away, composition, texture, detail, form, light are all emphasised. Every other aspect of a painting is highlighted because of the loss of colour,' Chris says. 'And I like that.'

Chris's work will be included in the Strand Gallery's summer exhibition in Port Elliot celebrating light, lustre and pearlescence. 



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