

# My space Marise Maas



**INSIDE** a narrow whitewashed carport attached to her Altona home, Marise Maas is surrounded by paintings. Working on up to 10 canvases at a time, she renders horses and domestic objects in bold, engaging works that emerge from a meditative state that is forged in solitude. The mother of two young boys, Maas uses her morning walk to define the line between her domestic and creative lives.

## Describe the space.

It took me quite a while to get used to this long, narrow space, because I can't stand back the way I'm used to doing. It was just meant to be for a year while Fred was really little — that's my second son — and 2½ years later I'm still here. I will probably have to move on, because I like to work bigger. I work on quite a lot of paintings at once, so while they're drying I have to move them into the house, which is a bit of a nightmare.

## Why do you work on more than one painting at once?

It's mainly so you don't overwork. I almost work on the canvases like they are pages of a sketchbook. I really love painting once I get going, so if I worked on just one it would become really, really thick.

## Why do you need to walk before you come in here of a morning?

It's mainly to get into that head-space of the beautiful solitude that I like. Before I walk, I bring my tea and whatever I'm going to eat in here so that when I come

back, I don't actually have to talk to anyone. I usually have an aim, because I have a problem with walking aimlessly, so it might be getting some bread or the paper. I'll be thinking about my work on the way back. That's the best thing for me to do, because it's less likely that I'll start gardening or cooking. You have to fight for that head-space, and if you don't have that nothingness, you can't come up with anything. Similarly, I can't work with other people around me; I've got to be alone. That's probably why I like painting so much, because it allows me to be alone quite a lot. When I was working on the other side of town, I would use the time it took to get there to get that sense of emptiness that I could start from. When I start painting, it's almost a "do, don't look" process. It's almost a meditative start. I think that's what I'm in love with, it's like forgetting yourself. I don't think or analyse too much about what I'm going to paint once I've gone through that. It's as close to meditation as I get. Then I'll stand back and look at it and read into it whatever I wish to. Then I'll get back to it and try to resolve it. That will be a much less meditative state. I'll see whatever story comes out of it. I'll paint whatever has come to my attention within my fairly small world. Very banal or ordinary objects get glorified.

## Tell me about the horses.

I've always done a lot of horses, mainly because they're so beautiful. I was quite a horsey kind of girl. I had my first horse

when we emigrated to Australia [from the Netherlands] but I used to ride a lot before that. Horses were the first thing I drew. I don't do people, so when there are horses in the painting, I'm most likely depicting some overheard conversation, things that involve people, but I use horses instead of people. It keeps it more anonymous, because otherwise you read into it, who could that be?

## You have images of teeth on the walls, tell me about that.

I was doing quite a lot of teeth in the body of work before this one. That grabbed my attention for a little while. I've got quite weak teeth, and I think maybe that's why I'm fascinated by it. My parents kept all our milk teeth, and maybe it had something to do with the fact that the kids were getting their teeth, I don't know, I don't read too much into it.

## How does this space compare to others you've had?

It's smaller, but I can paint anywhere, because it's all about the head-space. This is not ideal, but I've gotten used to it. When I was in my late teens, early 20s, I used to work from my bedroom. I wouldn't have been too healthy, but I was just as productive. Here, I have to be much stricter on myself. I find it harder to start. Because you've got your home life next to you, it's easier to put off starting, you'll start cooking or gardening. Even when I come in here after my walk, I usually don't start till 12 or one. It's probably a leftover from when I used to party

all the time, when you're more productive towards the end of the day or night-time. I've tried hard to shift it, because you need your sleep when you've got two little kids, but I just seem to be a bundle of energy at night.

## So how does the time unfold in here?

I'll come in here and read for hours. Mainly novels, new writers a lot of the time. Family dramas and epics. I like checking out new writers, I like bookshops a lot. If it's a really good novel, I'll waste a lot of time, because I'll finish it on the days that I should be painting. It's yet another delaying thing.

## What would your ideal studio look like?

It'd be a big studio, overlooking the water with really high ceilings and a big fireplace. Somewhere I could do really big paintings that were 10 metres long and I would need a ladder to get up to the top. I'd like to work really big. I like working small too, but I find smaller works a lot harder to work on. Maybe it's because of the way I do my line work, you'd have to get a lot more fiddly and that would restrict the flow of the line. I like the idea of putting my brushes on the end of broomsticks and getting right back.

Marise Maas' latest show is at Flinders Lane Gallery, 137 Flinders Lane, city, November 10-28. [fig.com.au](http://fig.com.au)

A multimedia presentation on Marise Maas appears at [nationaltimes.com.au](http://nationaltimes.com.au) on Monday.

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