

ROBERT HOLLINGWORTH – ARTIST & WRITER

Author of the new novel, **The Colour of the Night (Hybrid pub 2014)**

Robert Hollingworth stands with his feet in two different worlds, one of nature, the other of culture. Born in the budding coastal village of Lorne on Victoria's West Coast, he grew up in the bush but moved to Melbourne's inner-city to become a writer and artist in the 1990s. He currently lives in a Fitzroy warehouse apartment, but still owns a secluded country retreat on a wild, rocky mountain north of Melbourne where he enjoys his time as an amateur naturalist, keeping detailed records of the seasonal changes and of the native flora and fauna.

Hollingworth's great-great grandparents pioneered West Coast Victoria, particularly around Lorne. His great grandfather was one of the first to settle there in the 1870s when no roads existed. Eastern View, a region near Lorne, is the name of his great uncle's original coastal property. Hollingworth's first book, *Nature Boy 2004*, tells the story of these early pioneers.

In the 1950s, Hollingworth's parents moved the family from Lorne to the wilds of Gippsland when the author was just a boy. Hollingworth writes about the austerity of "living in isolation on a run-down dairy farm without power, gas or refrigeration, without books, magazines or newspapers, where mosquito larvae wriggle in each glass of drinking water."

But Hollingworth wanted to be an artist. Defying many generations of his working class predecessors, he was the first to undertake a tertiary education – he was Dux of his form at school so his parents could hardly deny it. Yet it was not until his thirties that Hollingworth finally began pursuing his dream and has since won major national awards for his work and held more than 35 solo exhibitions of paintings across Australia and overseas. (He currently exhibits regularly with the well-regarded Melbourne gallery, NKN.)

On moving to Melbourne in the late 1980s, Hollingworth also undertook a Foundations of Professional Writing course at RMIT University and became a close friend of the course's principal, the well-known writer, Antoni Jach. Hollingworth wrote *Nature Boy* soon after, followed by *They Called Me The Wildman* 2008, which was published by Murdoch Books and received critical acclaim across the country (it was shortlisted to five for the S.A. Premier's Literary Awards in 2010, won by David Malouf).

The Colour of the Night is Hollingworth's fifth book. This new work asks the question, "Can nature and culture ever be reconciled?" The story centres around the clash between the city and the bush. In our ever-expanding digital world, where synthetic, machine-made products replace everything organic, who needs nature? This topic is dramatically reinforced in the novel using the subject of bushfires. The main protagonist, eleven-year-old Shaun is orphaned by one, and the question is asked, do modern humans belong in the bush? The author has extensive experience of bushfires, his parent's landmark dwelling at Lorne was lost in the Ash Wednesday fires and his current bushland retreat was within sight of the horrific Black Saturday fires.

The Colour of the Night also asks another important question: has our fast-paced, disposable, online world created a pervasive unease in society; are we any happier, more secure or more generous? Or are some of our modern ailments like obesity, diabetes and depression indicative of a society out of kilter, one that is still lonely, disconnected and suffering from a self-absorbed narcissism that might be doing more harm than good? And if so, what can be done about it?



“White Gables” built by Arthur Hollingworth at Lorne in 1953. Hazel Street in the foreground is named after the author’s mother.

The residence was burnt down in the Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1983.

