

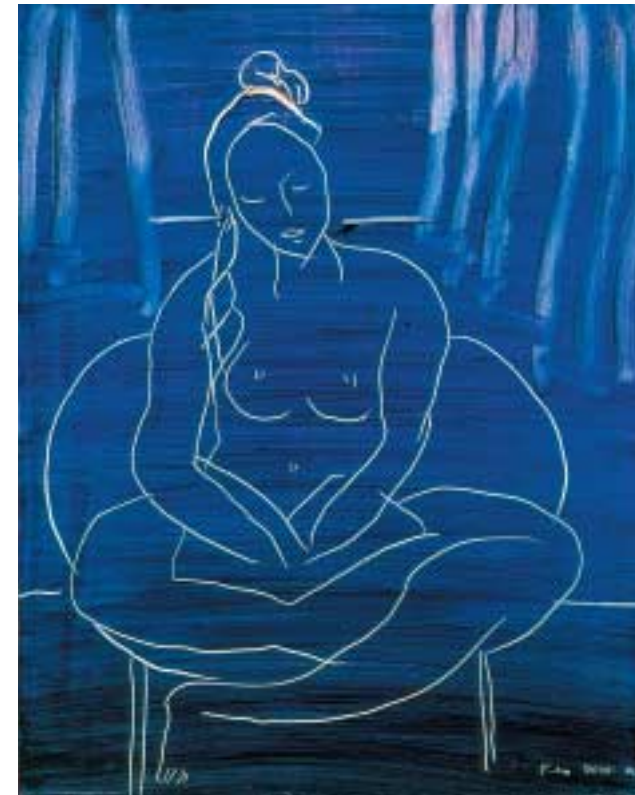
# Ken Done

One of Australia's most famous mavericks, this 63-year old artist makes no apologies for his success.

story & photography by Sean Francis Martin

In 1980, Ken Done designed silk-screened T-shirts to promote one of his first solo exhibitions. In art circles that may be considered a little gauche but it is permissible. Artists have to make a living, after all. But the T-shirt was a hit. Staffers at Vogue Australia got hold of it and gave it their enthusiastic stamp of approval. Sydneysiders clamoured for more and Done gave it to them.

In 1983, he set up Ken Done Down Under to licence his images, which began appearing on posters, greeting cards, calendars, mugs, T-shirts and more. And he did it so that he could continue to pursue his art while supporting his family.



Done has spent the last quarter century achieving artistic and financial success. Critics, meanwhile, have raked him over the coals for being, well, popular. In her 2002 book, *The Art of Ken Done*, art historian and artist Janet McKenzie says "The most common criticism of Ken Done, in the light of his remarkable business success, is that he has 'sold out' on his artistic integrity."

His seeming indifference to the lambasting is better understood once you know the backstory. Born in 1940, Done enrolled in the National Art School in East Sydney when he was 14. He was a top student who specialised in design and illustration. He worked part-time for a design studio in his senior year, and included mostly his commissioned work when he handed in his fifth year portfolio. He was failed because he didn't adhere to the set curriculum. That's a kick in the pants for a 19-year old. In hindsight, it may also have been the making of the man. He probably could have appeased his teachers, but he didn't.

Done opened his own design studio and began making a name for himself in Sydney's graphic design community. He moved to New York in 1964 and freelanced for several big-name agencies. Within a year, he had landed a plum job as art director at J.Walter Thompson in London,



The beauty of a Done is that you can wear it or hang it on your wall. Now Done products are moving into the North American market.







England. Accolades came his way as he moved quickly up the career ladder. In 1968, one of his commercials won a Gold Lion Award at Cannes and the London Designers & Art Directors Association Award for Cinema Campaign of the Year.

At the height of this success, Done moved back to Australia and took over as Creative Director at J.Walter Thompson, Sydney. As his professional star continued to shine, his personal focus began to shift. Done had married his long-time sweetheart, Judy Walker, in 1965 and by 1976 they had a six-year old daughter, Camilla, and newborn son, Oscar. Now he wanted more time for his family and his art.

Driven by his passion, Done found a way. He set up his own studio and freelanced part-time in order to leave himself time

Much of Done's inspiration comes from his home and studio on Chinamans Beach. Here, he creates work of simple but vibrant imagery that seems to capture the essence of a place or object



to paint. And paint he did. In 1975, he reintroduced himself to the Sydney art world when one of his works, Postcard from God, was exhibited in the prestigious Blake Prize. Since then, his works have been shown in the Archibald, Sulman, Wynne and Dobell Prizes.

1980 turned out to be a pivotal year. He found his muse in an old fisherman's cabin overlooking Chinamans Beach at Mosman. He'd known about the cabin for years and when by chance heard it was up for rent, was relentless in chasing down the lease. He bought it outright in 1985.

Then came his first solo exhibition at Sydney's Holdsworth Galleries, followed by his opening of the Art Directors Gallery in North Sydney with a solo exhibition. He did the T-shirts to

promote this event. Public response gave him the opening he needed. As a successful art director, he had the experience, the knowledge and the creativity to develop markets for other people's products. The turning point was deciding to use his skills to market his own art and sustain both his family and his passion.

Since then, Done has become a household name in Australia. A growing number of Done Stores market Done Designs and other products to a receptive public: swimwear and clothing for women, men and kids, accessories, housewares and more. He was the first non-Swede to be commissioned to design glassware for the 300-year old Kosta Boda company. BMW commissioned him to paint an ArtCar, putting him in the ranks of Andy Warhol, Frank Stella and Roy Lichtenstein. He painted







the Garden Restaurant in Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, and created the Opening and Closing Ceremonies programmes for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. He's used his distinctive style to benefit Canteen, the Australian Teenage Cancer Patients Society, and he's been Australia's honorary Goodwill Ambassador to UNICEF since 1988. In 1992, he was named a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to Art, Design and Tourism.

So the real rub, for critics, is that instead of waiting for his genius to be discovered post-mortem, Done grabbed hold of the opportunity and has run with it all the way to the bank. He's unrepentant. In fact, he thinks art should be more and not less accessible. Art is still art when it's appreciated and enjoyed by the masses.



Over the past thirty years, Done has been producing a solid body of work and this, perhaps more than anything, has helped calm the critics. The ones who can't get past the commercial success are growing fewer and fainter. Meanwhile, praise for his energetic, distinctive style is growing.

The superb Ken Done Gallery in Sydney is the main showcase for his art. He has had exhibits in Australia, Japan, Korea, France, Philippines, Sweden, the USA and UK, and his pieces hang in private collections in Europe, the Far East, Middle East and North America. In 2000, he broke into the US and UK markets with shows in Los Angeles, California and London, England. The London exhibit was so popular they had to ship over more artworks to meet buyer demand.



Today, Done Art and Design has evolved into a family enterprise. Ken shares the credit for its remarkable success with Judy, who also designs the clothing lines, with Camilla, now creative director, and Oscar, business development manager. Take a virtual tour of Done's gallery work at [www.kendone.com](http://www.kendone.com), or check out the latest fashions and stores at [www.done.com.au](http://www.done.com.au). 🐾

*John's*

FOR A FINE DINING EXPERIENCE

401 -21st Street East Downtown Saskatoon 244-6384

YOUR VIEW  
YOUR NEEDS  
YOUR CUSTOM PORTFOLIO

**WATERFRONT**  
MANAGED INVESTMENT PROGRAM

Exclusively for:

**WELLINGTON WEST**  
*C a p i t a l I n c .*

One of Canada's largest independent full service investment firms.

**1-866-844-4400**

Todd Degelman, M.B.A.  
National Sales Manager