

Marco's creative odyssey

By Andrew Mole

Internationally acclaimed Australian artist Marco Luccio doesn't just enter Echuca's Foundry Arts Space, he explodes through the door.

It's after dark, he's one of just three people in the place, and the other two are looking around for some room, somewhere, to stand.

Marco is surrounded by 82 of his works – on the walls, on pedestals, under glass and behind the counter. There are also posters, prints, brochures and books.

This artist does it all, he's a writer, photographer, publisher and promoter.

And he wants to tell you about every one of them, preferably at the same time, and only if you can keep up.

His passion is priceless as he fast-tracks his own artistic story – from his first foray with brush and paper as an eight-year-old to the 54-year-old today represented in 42 public and corporate collections, including the New York Public Library, the Museum of the City of New York, The New York Historical Society, The National Gallery of Australia, The National Gallery of Victoria, The State Library of Victoria and The City of Melbourne.

And has a studio atop the art deco extravaganza that is New York's Chrysler building – the city to which this Italian born, and Australian raised, artist may, or may not, but almost certainly will, be permanently moving in the not-to-distant future.

But back with his feet (at least temporarily) on the ground in downtown Echuca-Moama, Marco still isn't wasting a moment as he continues explaining, espousing, expanding, even educating, the every little who, what, where, why, when and how of each and every piece he has selected as the Foundry's 2023 feature solo exhibition.



Creative: Marco Luccio at his Foundry exhibition. His backstory is as fascinating as his artistic ability – together they make him one of a kind.

As stunning a collection as it has seen since the doors first opened in 2015; of life size pieces down to postcard formats – and a teasing taste of his latest, an innovative pure, black ink format somewhere in size between those postcards and a postage stamp.

Also, for someone so keen to tell you everything, the way in which black becomes white, and every shade between, with these miniature moments remains his secret.

Marco offers little more than an enigmatic grin when pressed for detail for fear some unscrupulous interviewer might also broadcast his most secret artist's business.

"It is interesting you should ask, since I did those a lot of people have, and it is the only thing I do that I haven't explained to people, and don't plan to anytime soon," Marco smiles.

"The closest anyone has come was a student in a class I was running, and I think he guessed because of what he didn't know, not what he did," he explains.

But there are more mysteries to answer, which happen to also be ones Marco is more than delighted to share.

It started with a 2007 stoop sale in New York (where all Marco's roads lead), when he saw two gents of elderly

EXHIBITION ON NOW

Italian born Australian artist Marco Luccio – who has a global pedigree of artistic achievement – is staging *Cities & Stories*, a one-man exhibition in Echuca-Moama's Foundry.

An exhibition giving locals a rare chance to immerse themselves in an innovative, even unparalleled, journey from a little boy who dreamt of one day standing on a New York street, looking up at the Chrysler building's art deco crown to the man who now has a penthouse studio in it. The exhibition runs at 13-17 Murray Esplanade until November 7.

The Foundry is open from 10am to 4pm every day except Tuesday.

disposition, selling their own collections of postcards.

"Every time I passed them I would stop and buy a few, and it wasn't long before I became absorbed by them, immersed in their history – to me, postcards are beautiful artifacts, remnants of the past preserved in small and fragile time capsules," Marco said.

"Soon I had graduated from the stoop sale to flea markets, trash and treasure sales, bric-a-brac shops, even antique shops and museums, always acquiring more and more of them – the worn patina of the paper, and the beautifully handwritten messages were instantly appealing.

"I had collected stamps as a child, so those fascinated me too, they came in all colours, some featuring the Statue of Liberty, others a jet plane, some Eisenhower, some Lincoln. I loved the postmarks as well. I was really inspired and excited by their potential.

"Yet the first time I drew on one of the postcards I felt a combination of excitement and trepidation."

Trepidation because Marco admits working over the often touching, personal messages felt like "vandalism" but, and for him a big but, he sees the end result as a preservation and elevation of ephemera into enduring art.

And what art; from globes surrounded by postcards (possibly postcards from the edge) to individual canvases becoming the whole canvas,

with the occasional stamp, franking or imagery peeking through the painting above to reconfirm the link between artist and authors long gone.

A stroll through the Foundry, once Marco's one-man tour has spluttered out, gives you the chance to marvel at the number of ways he has been able to incorporate his cards into his art, a kind of reverse archaeology using the stories he has painstakingly excavated en masse from dusty and long-forgotten boxes across New York city.

Cards now layered with sketches, paintings and prints, which see interpretations of Picasso, Modigliani, even a dash of the classics, with Greco-Roman sculptures in striking juxtaposition to famous, but nowhere near as old, US presidents and celebrities on their faded stamps.

With juxtaposition fresh in your mind, there is more to Marco than postcards and art.

He is also a global wanderer, a teacher, someone who has completed artist residencies and study travel trips in New York, Paris, Italy, and around Australia.

He is a serial guest lecturer here and overseas, has taught drawing, painting and printmaking at various institutions, including a decade running the successful Sketching in the Gallery sessions at the National Gallery of Victoria,

which at the time became the longest-running public program the gallery had run.

Marco has mentored artists one-on-one and established and running the popular Luccio studio school for drawing in Eltham, as well as being invited as a guest lecturer at colleges and schools as well as judging award shows, writing in journals and providing feedback on current printmaking practices by artists and curators.

In 2021 he launched *Tales from the Greek*, his 401-page hardcover book and exhibition with the same name, featuring work inspired by the writing of award-winning author John Hughes.

The exhibition is currently traveling to regional galleries throughout Australia.

Two years earlier it was the New York Postcards book and exhibition.

With it all beginning in 2013 and his collaboration with John Hughes to create the book, *The Garden of Sorrows*, featuring 60 of Marco's etchings.

It would take another book to cover his work in copper etchings, his role as a champion of the modern cityscape, even the brutality of his style, those times when he attacks his copper sheet etchings with such abandon he ends up with soft tissue damage to his arm.

It takes all that to become Marco Luccio.

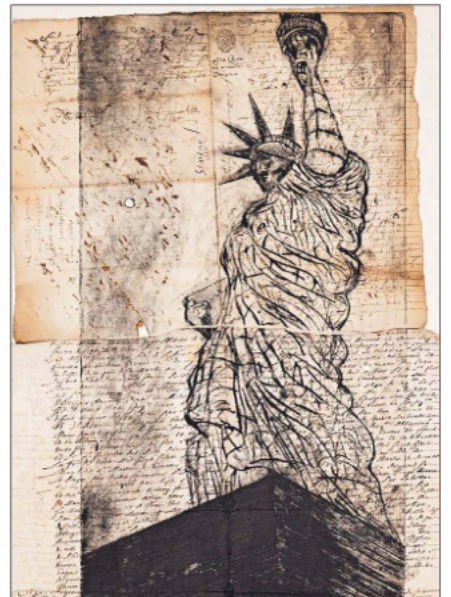
It takes everything.

Reaching down into his soul, tearing his view of the world out, exposing his innermost thoughts to the critics, the customers, the world, a world where anyone and everyone can have a crack, a cutting comment, or worse – and better.

Then waking up tomorrow, and doing it all again.



Outstanding: Marco's interpretation of the ill-fated Melbourne Star observation wheel at Docklands.



Connection: The Statue of Liberty figures in several of Marco's works, reflecting his strong connection with New York.