



Alan Jones with his work and (below) a photo of the artist's head sculpted in plasticine. Picture: Bob Barker

First Fleet heritage guides artist's brush



ELIZABETH FORTESCUE
VISUAL ARTS WRITER

Had convicted thief Robert Forrester been executed in 1783 as decreed by an Old Bailey judge, the exhibition now showing at Watters Gallery in East Sydney would never have come about.

But history records that Forrester's death sentence was commuted to seven years' transportation on the First Fleet, and he arrived in Sydney aboard the *Scarborough* in 1788.

Forrester's direct descendant — Bondi artist Alan Jones — was born in 1977.

Like many people descended from a First Fleeter, Jones became fascinated with ancestry.

He discovered that Forrester had settled down with fellow convict Isabella Ramsay and raised a large family in Windsor, helping to lay the foundation stones of modern Australia.

Jones created the artworks for his current exhibition, *New South Wales*, in the same spirit other people compile family trees — “trying to learn about where I come from, and make sense of the past a little bit”.

In April this year, while on a studio residency in England, Jones visited landscapes and buildings that would have been familiar to Forrester and Ramsay before they were transported.

Jones focused his search in and around Carlisle in northwest England, where both

convicts were thought to have started their lives. He used his drawings and photographs as the basis for a body of work which, Jones says, “seeks to read as a documentation of my family heritage”.

One of these landmarks was a church at Kirkandrews-upon-Esk, where Forrester is thought to have been christened.

Jones likens the environs of the church to the landscape around Windsor, where Forrester is buried at St Matthew's Anglican Church.

There is a painting of Kirkandrews-upon-Esk in the exhibition.

Another landmark was St Giles in the Fields — a church in the West End of London.

Forrester lived near St Giles before being convicted of stealing six guineas.

“It was a moving experience visiting the area where Robert spent his last days of freedom in London,” Jones says.

“It's Australia's history as well, which I find fascinating. Yes, it's my story. But it's kind of everyone's story.”

The exhibition includes a self-portrait, portraits of Jones' partner Brooke and their baby Ingo, a collaged photograph of the interior of St Giles in the Fields, and landscapes. Also on view are photographs of Jones' head, sculpted in plasticine, and situated near sites of relevance to his convict ancestors.

elizabeth.fortescue@news.com.au
twitter @Ozartwriter

Watters Gallery, 109 Riley St, East Sydney; November 17, 9331 2556, wattersgallery.com

ART
Alan Jones: New South Wales
Watters Gallery