

In The Studio: Nikky Morgan-Smith

[Billy Walker](#) August 10, 2018

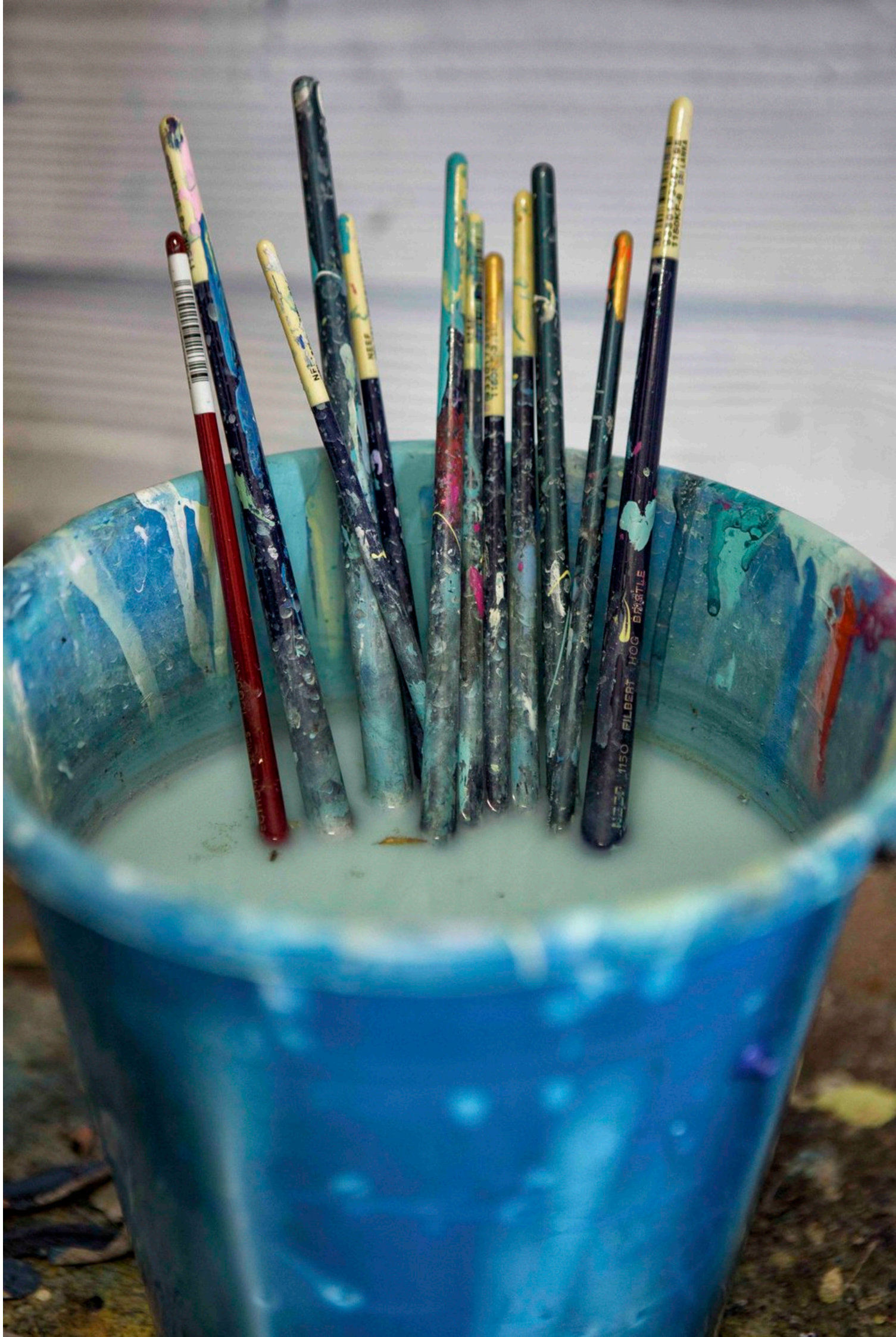
Gallerist Nadine Abensur visited painter Nikky Morgan-Smith in her Eureka studio for a glimpse into her artistic process. Nikky Morgan-Smith will be featured in the *Art 4 Art's Sake* gallery and exhibition at the Federal School of Arts from 29-30 September, 2018.

Photography by Natalie Grono.



Nadine. Where were you brought up? And how do you think this affected your artistic career?





Nikky. I was brought up in Eureka. The space, the hills, the weather, the mess, the damp — it all has an effect. For example, working on paper always seemed hard to manage because of the weather and lack of control over the environment. I would wake up and my paper would have

muddy cat footprints, or the damp made it behave differently. I never liked the fragility of paper and canvas. Early on I chose wood as my mount because it's solid and forgiving, it doesn't rip or stretch out of shape. I could paint on it and know that the next morning it would still be there, unaffected by external forces.

Nadine. Did you always want to be an artist?

Nikky. I never wanted to be an artist, but having both parents as artists and art lecturers, art was inherent in our family — part of the air we breathed — not necessarily a career choice, but just part of day-to-day life. It wasn't until I was about 18 and in between school and jobs and a bit bored that my mum said I should do some painting. She showed me how to use dioxazine purple over yellow to create shadows. She talked about being able to tell a story through painting. I will never forget the way the purple affected the yellow, the depth it created. It was like I had experienced alchemy for the first time. My painting came alive in front of me and I was in love. It was like finding words for the first time. I could communicate without having to worry about spelling and grammar! I painted obsessively in the following weeks and produced my first body of work. I was hooked. After that I decided to study art.



Nadine. Where do you think your ideas come from?

Nikky. I feel like my practice is one big body of work that leads on from the last painting; it is evolving and growing, but still connected to that

original work. My ideas mostly come from my painting practice, I will see the way a certain colour looks next to a texture, or an image that feels like it has more to say. I just listen to my practice and let it lead me.

Nadine. Describe a typical day. Do you have a routine?

Nikky. A typical day would be get up, wish I was more organised, find food, ignore mess, find clean school uniform/socks for child, get child to school without a tantrum. Go to studio. Paint. Get distracted by carpet snake shedding its skin at my studio door. Paint. Have array of emotions about my practice that swing from inflated ego to extreme self doubt, question everything from why I am painting to why am I wasting my time questioning why I am painting and not just painting. Paint. Decide I can't paint any more unless I have a new paint brush, realise I can't afford a new brush unless I finish painting and sell it. Paint.

Nadine. What inspires you to keep painting?

Nikky. I am inspired by life and people and the accidental beauty of it all. I keep painting because I have to. Without it I would have no language.

Nadine. Tell us about your process from the start to completion of a painting.

Nikky. I work on plywood, so I start by sourcing the best quality ply I can find, then I have it framed, backed. I don't prime or underpaint because I like the texture of the wood. I will have an idea but nothing solid, I don't keep journals or have any working drawings. It all happens as I am painting. I draw from memory. I don't use projectors or images. At the beginning I just have my charcoal pencil and white paint and I start to draw. When I'm happy with it I start to use colour, and build layers. There is a lot of layering in my process because of the lack of planning. I will do something, paint it out, then work over the top. But I always leave a trace of what came before, even if it is just a tiny fleck of colour or a pencil mark ... it is all just as important as the more contrived stuff, it makes up a whole that speaks of a past.

Nadine. What's the most exciting thing about being an artist?

Nikky. The most exciting part of being an artist is that no day is ever the same. I go into my studio and am excited about what I might discover in my practice. Also, the opportunities like artist-in-residence programs that become available.

Nadine. And the hardest thing?

Nikky. The hardest thing is being broke.

Nadine. What would you do if you weren't an artist?

Nikky. If I wasn't a painter I would be an art therapist or dead.

