

Art classes are no longer just for Da Vinci wanna-bes. They're taking on a new flavour in the western suburbs, where the romantic sexiness of cabaret is being fused with art.

You may not expect to see top hats, corsets, tattoos, nipple pasties and tassels at your average art class, but that's precisely the point of the latest craze to hit Newport. *Ink and Lead* have done away with the silent models, replacing them with bodacious burlesque queens in their new life drawing nights at the Junction Hotel.

Keen to hone in on her love of burlesque fashion, local artist Helen McLean is behind these new fun-filled nights of drawing and entertainment. She says she wanted to spice up the colour palettes of artists, and see sketch pads fill with scantily-dressed ladies striking risqué poses.

McLean admits this is far from your traditional drawing class – there are no teachers, no easels, no paints, no berets and no nude bits flappin' in the wind! "Hell, you don't even need to be good at drawing! If you are the arty type, it's a great excuse to refine your skills while having a fun night out with friends."

Artists are treated to a soirée of pin-up models, burlesques dancers and circus performers, protecting their modesty with elaborate costumes and vintage props. Among the entertainers is Vesper White, who enjoys working nylons, Japanese ropes and bondage into her routines. "Ah burlesque! I love that it fuses the power of sexual expression with theatre - it really is performance art's dirty little sister!"

Vesper is a playful creature, who sleeps through the day and comes out to play at night. She paints relentlessly in her spare time, hence her enthusiasm to get on the *Ink and Lead* stage. "It really allows artists, whether they be a Da Vinci or a Mr Squiggle, to get up close and personal with some of Melbourne's best burlesque and vaudeville artists, while mucking around with drawing materials."

Another of the regulars is Miss Nic, who has graced many tattoo covers – from *Tattz* and *Tattoo Candy* to *Australian Tattoo* and *Skin and Ink*. But Miss Nic is about more than just the artwork that adorns her skin. She has a passion for burlesque and frequently slips into a corset and thigh high boots to perform her raunchy routines.

While Miss Nic has lost count of how many designs embellish her body, she says her favourite is "Pretty in ink". "I love being able to look at my tattoos because they make me smile. I never realise how many there are until I catch my reflection," she says.

Vesper and Miss Nic are not alone in their love of burlesque. This vintage entertainment is enjoying a worldwide comeback, thanks to pop stars such as Pink and Christina Aguilera, who both draw inspiration from burlesque in their stage shows. But it is Dita Von Teese who has become the burlesque icon, thanks to her famous cocktail-glass routine.

Burlesque's wave of glitter and nostalgia has well and truly hit Melbourne – first it was live shows, now it's art classes. So if you're keen for loads of eye-candy, plenty of bare skin and a shimmy here and there, don't miss *Ink and Lead Life Drawing* at the Junction Hotel, Newport, the second Wednesday of the month from 7.30pm.

Ink and Lead – Life Drawing

Date: April 8, then the second Wednesday of every month

Time: 7.30 – 9.30pm

Venue: The Junction Hotel, 15 Hall Street, Newport

What to Bring: A sketch pad, pencils and your imagination!

More info: www.inkandlead.com.au

At *Ink and Lead* art classes, it doesn't matter whether you draw for your dinner or just for fun. Forget your easels and inhibitions, just bring a sketch pad and your pencils, and let the cheeky beauties keep you and your friends entertained at the Junction Hotel.

- Tamra Mercieca

Media contact: Helen McLean 0417 --- ---