

## Diana Webber Sculptress

*Six sons, three at home.*

Most people raise their eyebrows in surprise when sculptress Diana Webber mentions that she has six sons. Doesn't she have enough to do running her home and coping with the family, they always seem to ask?

A few years ago, she'd probably have agreed. But now, with the three eldest boys, John, 24, Greg, 22, and Monty, 21, living away from home, life in the large rambling Webber home is somewhat quieter. Although there's still Daniel, 17, William, 12, and Ben, 11, in residence.

Diana and her husband John work from home. John previously ran a print making/framing business but a back injury forced him into semi-retirement. An accomplished sculptor and artist himself, he's now studying philosophy at NSW University.

Their home is an obvious extension

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY TONY MERRICK

*Diana Webber. Her life drawing classes led to making sculptures in bronze.*

of their creativity — all kinds of paintings and drawings festoon the walls, and sculptures and pieces of pottery can be found in every nook and cranny, even the garden. Everyone works with their hands — even the youngest boys were busy shaping surfboards when we called.

"I've always made things to sell," said Diana. "I've made soft toys for department stores, tables, children's clothes, wall plaques and I even painted for a long time. In fact anything that could be made and then later sold commercially."

A few years ago she decided to attend life drawing classes at East Sydney Tech. There she discovered the bronze foundry and learned how to create sculptures in bronze.

"I'd modelled in clay but bronze casting is different — it's a fascinating, painstaking process. But it meant that I could do my modelling at home and use the facilities of the foundry whenever I could find time — I work in the kitchen, actually. And occasionally I mess up the stove by heating knives on the gas jet."

Her works in bronze have had considerable success and won critical acclaim. Last year she had an exhibition at Sydney's East End

Gallery and she plans to exhibit again this year.

She is frequently asked to do work "on commission" and has sculpted the heads of Lloyd Rees, John Laws and Trent Nathan. She has also appeared on TV demonstrating the processes of bronze casting.

But it is only recently that she has had any amount of time to herself. "It's really only since John has been at home — before that if I tried very hard I could afford half a day a week to myself, and then you couldn't plan on that because one of the boys might be sick, or something."

Was it difficult when the children were small? "Awful," she said cheerfully. "If a woman has a lot of children close together and there's something else she wants to do, it can easily fester away if she shelves it. I can remember getting very easily upset at that stage.

"I realise now it was because I wasn't satisfying my creative impulses. But I don't think I had that potential as a young woman; I wasn't as inspired as I am now. So having waited is important."

She does not rely on any set domestic routine and nothing is particularly planned in the household. "John automatically helps around the house. After dinner, for instance, I do absolutely nothing — and the boys are around to help. Even the older ones come back frequently to do odd jobs and their girlfriends often ask if they can do some ironing. Imagine me saying no!"

Shopping for such a large household presents few problems, mainly because their house is located in a very central part of the city and everything is close to hand — shops, public transport, and schools. "And I've always encouraged the boys to do things on their own. But I suppose I'm a bit more frugal around the house than most people."

If Diana Webber makes it all sound so easy, it is probably because she derives so much satisfaction from being able to express herself creatively.

"Being creative means that you've always got a place to go to in your mind. When you have industrious children like mine, there's *always* a mess — you learn not to be aware of it. I don't think there has ever been a day when any of the boys has said 'What can I do mum, I'm bored?' We *all* get pleasure from the things we make..." □