

Room for a budding artist

An offer of studio space will be a springboard for someone's creative career, writes **Harbant Gill**

THE hot-pink door with the number 10 at Richmond's Appleton Street Studios has been locked since artist Sandra Bardas died on December 27, 2007.

Her series of paintings inspired by the plight of asylum-seekers covers the wall outside.

Now her husband, David Bardas, and Appleton co-owner Jeff Martin are opening her studio as a free space for one young artist each year.

The Bardas family, which includes six children and 10 grandchildren, will also give \$5000 in art materials to one lucky artist every year.

"We would like to encourage young, beginning artists," Bardas says of the Sandra Bardas Studio Grant.

"Sandra was always good at encouraging people, and I am too.

"It would be good to encourage a young superstar, the Brett Whiteley or David Larwill of tomorrow."

Inquiries are already pouring in about the free space in the two-storey building, which has 16 studios, a dining area where artists meet for lunch and a lounge where ideas are exchanged.

Jeff Martin and gallery owner Robert Gould will draw up a shortlist of applicants and hand it to the Bardas family.

"The family will make more of an emotional decision based on what Sandra would want," says Martin, who is busy preparing an exhibition for the Sydney food festival.

Sandra Bardas and Jeff Martin set up the studios in 2005 when they couldn't find premises to suit their needs.

It grew to become a vibrant community of artists that included Andrew McLroy and Bill Burrows.

Sandra Bardas, daughter of Victor and Loti Smorgon, was on the boards of the Royal Children's Hospital, the Playbox and Malthouse theatres and the Centre for Contemporary Photography.

She was awarded the Order of Australia in 2004 for more than 30 years of work with indigenous groups.

Martin says: "Sandra was very intuitive and very good at joining people with people.

"She said to me once that if we're ever in a position to set up a grant for



To her door: David Bardas (left) and Jeff Martin. Picture: MIKE KEATING

young artists, that would be a good thing to do. Without Sandra's encouragement and hand on my back, pushing me occasionally, I wouldn't be where I am now.

"I couldn't bring myself to rent out her studio, so this was a natural progression. It seems like the right thing to do, and it's the right time.

"With commitment and an

understanding of the responsibility of working in a communal space, the chosen artist can fulfil a dream while getting a kickstart for their career."

Grant applications are open to artists under 30. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait island artists are encouraged to apply.

“ It seems like the right thing to do, and it's the right time

The winner will be announced on October 5 each year, Sandra's birthday, for the grant beginning in January.

David Bardas finds it emotionally tough to enter her studio.

"We were together 48 years. I used to drop in here once a week," he says, eyes moistening. "Just to make sure she was working," he adds with a smile.

The colourful SANDRA sign above the studio door, painted by the artist's grandchildren, will remain.

SEE 2 Applications for the Sandra Bardas Studio Grant close on Sept 1. www.appletonstreetstudios.com

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