



# Drawing success from passions

By **DEBORAH WILLIAMS**

COMBINING her two passions has led to success for Dawesville artist and speech therapist Susan Merli, with the opening of her new business as well as an exhibition at Fairbridge's Exeter Gallery.

It is the first solo exhibition for Merli who uses acrylic, often mixed with textiles, to paint on wood, canvas or corrugated iron panels to produce her bright and colourful paintings.

"Floral scenes seem to be a universal image," she said.

"This exhibition is mostly florals – abstract floral landscapes which are decorative and I find they appeal mostly to a female audience.

"I do art because I am curious about the untapped images in my mind. The images become accessible to me via the visual art process.

"I love Fairbridge and I am delighted to have an exhibition there."

As a qualified speech therapist, Merli is a firm believer in using art to help children who need speech therapy.

"I think it is good to marry the two and the therapy sessions are relaxed and fun,"

she said.

"I encourage children to create their own art and then that art is used as a basis for learning – it could be making a new sound or something else.

"I am a visual person myself, so whatever the task is, I find art helps them.

"Using images and symbols is a good way for children to learn information and art-based therapy is a great approach for kids who find it difficult to settle or to focus attention on tasks."

Merli's exhibition, Canary Candy, is attracting attention, with a number of pieces selling before the exhibition opened.

Fairbridge artist-in-residence Jane McIntyre praised Merli's work and said commission from the sales had helped young people in need.

"Susan's work is influenced by Claude Monet and Jackson Pollock and is delightfully colourful and whimsical," she said.

"This is an exhibition that is really generating a lot of interest."

Canary Candy is on until June 15. Visit [www.wildflowersgallery.net](http://www.wildflowersgallery.net) for more information on speech therapy.



Artist Susan Merli says she does art because she is curious about the untapped images in her mind. Picture: Jon Hewson [www.communitypix.com.au](http://www.communitypix.com.au) d355460