



Richmond's Andrew McIlroy explores the wonder and terror of diving and currents in his latest exhibition.

Underwater dreaming

Paintings | Gene Swinstead

RICHMOND artist Andrew McIlroy lives by former US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's belief that "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams".

As a boy McIlroy dreamed of the sea, diving off the pier at Portsea and tumbling and twisting in the water whenever he could.

This ultimately led to him reading Tim Winton's *Breath*, in which two young boys conquer Western Australia's huge surf.

"I try to recall how I felt underwater and incorporate it on canvas. Most often I ended up with water up my nose and thinking of sharks and stingers, of even drowning," said the artist, 43.

"I thought of not being able to reach the surface before running out of breath, but mostly of the stillness and darkness and the muffled sounds from above. I try to capture on canvas the movement, the tumult and desperation before reaching the surface."

McIlroy said many of his paintings were inspired by

Winton, notably *Against the Tide* and *Azure Descent*. They will be among 15 in McIlroy's exhibition this month, *Against the Tide*.

Educated at Melbourne University in the years of the D-generation, McIlroy soon grew tired of corporate life as a young graduate and in 2001 took advantage of downsizing to become an artist.

"It has been an extraordinary ride," he said.

► **Against the Tide is showing from February 16-28 at Axia Modern Art, 1010 High St, Armadale, 9500 1144.**