

Enter realms of fantasia

Gold Coast artist Joel Rea has exposed his different sides in his \$30,000 piece *Monumentum*, writes **Ronnie Girdham**

JOEL Rea is one young artist who keeps his feet firmly on the ground while his mind takes flights of fancy.

He's a man who can imagine weird concepts and has the skills to recreate them on canvas but has the nous not to tell a viewer what they represent. That would spoil all the fun.

"I'd rather let the viewer decide, let them figure it into their own lives or backgrounds," says the Gold Coast man whose discipline has allowed him to paint professionally since he graduated from the Queensland College of Art in 2003.

"I've always been fascinated by the surreal and I try to recreate what I see. Fantasy stuff is really cool, like a science fiction movie with special effects."

Rea, 27, has been involved in three mixed and solo exhibitions every year since graduating and a solo showing opened in Brisbane last night.

The largest work, titled *Monumentum*, measures 180cm by 120cm and will knock your socks off. What is that massive organic structure? A rock? A stone carving of a wave? Is it a threat? And who are all those dudes running around it – some in business suits, some in jeans and hoodies, some even vandalising the structure with graffiti.

What Rea will reveal is the dudes are him in both contexts of his life – he is a professional artist, perfectly at ease in a suit, and he has zipped around on a skateboard.

But, he adds quickly, he has never been a graffiti vandal.

"And I'm a lot more careful on a skateboard now," he says.

"What if I broke my wrist and couldn't paint? I'm paranoid about that. I've always been disciplined with my painting.

"And I like putting myself in my paintings, painting me in my world. It looks like dual personality – a savvy businessman who's also a young guy in the counterculture."

Rea has enjoyed painting since he was a kid and his talents were recognised by his Gold Coast high school art teacher, who helped with his application into art school.

Because of his dedication and attitude, he has been able to make a living out of art.

"I was reading a survey recently and so many artists have to take on other work," he says, grateful he has not been forced into a position where



he would have to flip burgers or pull beers to pay the rent.

"I've been well represented by my gallery and they've given me exposure interstate.

"If you don't have that discipline, you can fall through the cracks."

He has also strictly adhered to what he calls "the old-school stuff – oils on canvas; I like working in the traditional old-school technique".

Last November, Rea and his girlfriend of 10 years, Liz, an airline flight attendant, married and they moved into a house near Bond University. It was the garage, used as a dance school studio, that sold him on the property.

"It's perfect for painting," he says. "Plenty of natural light, down-lights and one whole wall is a mirror.

"I go there every morning and work all day. I've usually got an old movie in the background – something like *Forrest Gump* or *The Godfather*. They're not noisy and the dialogue is harmonious. They're not distracting."

He'll work until late in the day when he'll take a break and strum his guitar to relax, then for he'll go for a run and later pick up the weights.

"You have to have the physical stamina to give you a strong mental edge," he believes. "I plan my paintings well ahead and if your body's in tune, so will your mind be.

"Liz is the quintessential Aussie girl. She's my best critic and she's the one who usually says let's go for a run. It's all part of the fitness culture of the Coast. And we've got a boxer

dog, Jack. He's my other running buddy."

Rea can also talk at length about the Gold Coast Titans team – currently second on the NRL competition ladder – and gets to games at nearby Skilled Park at Robina.

"I'm also loyal to the Broncos because they were our first Queensland team in the comp and I follow Melbourne because of all their Queenslanders in our State of Origin team."

As well as the large *Monumentum*, there are several in the same genre, with *Monument to Myself* presenting a lone bloke atop an equally bizarre structure, peacefully reading a book while his trusty dog Jack barks and bounces below.

Rea has also painted 16 miniatures

Surreal: Joel Rea's *Monumentum* (above) and *Monument to Myself* (top)

of the same fellow measuring 10cm by 10cm.

Monumentum has a price tag of \$30,000. The smaller works are \$3300, while the pairs of miniatures are priced at \$1500 and singles from \$770. There are 27 signed, limited-edition prints of *Monumentum* for \$550 each.

Monuments and Miniatures runs at Lethbridge Gallery, 136 Latrobe Tce, Paddington, until September 26; 10am to 5pm on weekends and privately by appointment, phone 3369 4790 or go to lethbridgegallery.com

* VISUALS

Rolling Stone: The Covers

1972-2010 Showcase of 300 of the greatest covers, spanning over four decades of *Rolling Stone Australia* magazine. Artisan, 381 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley. Tuesday-Friday 10.30am-5.30pm, Saturday 10am-4pm; from Thursday until October 2. Free. Details: 3215 0800.

Still Live

Sculptured clay figures by Els Houwen with choreographer and performer Jean Tally creating a theatrical response to the works. Tony Gould Gallery, QPAC Cultural Centre, South Bank. Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10am-4pm, from Tuesday until September 11. Free. Details: 3840 7444.

All is Calm

Works by Dorothy Napangardi, Jenny Fraser, Joanne Currie Nalingu, Kathleen Petyarre and Abie Loy Kemarre. Fireworks Gallery, 52a Doggett St, Newstead. Tuesdays to Fridays 10am-6pm, Saturdays 10am-4pm; until October 2. Free. Details: 3216 1250.

Out & About

New works by Brisbane painter Kylie Farrelly featuring Brisbane landmarks and vistas. Gallery 2120, Shop 2A, 9 Doggett St, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane. Wednesday-Sunday 10am-5pm; from Thursday until September 18. Free. Details: 3254 1192.

Energy More than 150 works

encompassing digital video, art, installation, painting, drawing and photography from young and emerging artists in the region from Tully to Thursday Island. Tanks Arts Centre, 46 Collins Ave, Edge Hill, Cairns. Daily, 10am-4.30pm, from Friday until October 1. Free. Details: 4032 6600.