

# New Gen

A new generation of talent is emerging with Gold Coast photo-realism artist Joel Rea.



There has been some talk of painting becoming a deceased art form. But young emerging talent, Joel Rea's work is quashing that notion with one swift brush-stroke. The young virtuoso is nothing less than extraordinary. Born in 1983, the Gold Coast local graduated from the Queensland College of Art with a Bachelor of Fine Art in 2003 and was awarded Golden Key International Honour Society membership along with the Griffith Award for academic excellence in Fine Art.

Joel's outstanding scholarly achievements and skilled brush work were soon recognised by modern art enthusiasts around the world. Immediate success and acclaim for his meticulous detail and vivid concepts followed and before long, he was smashing record high prices for single paintings, including an original, 'Killing Me Softly', which sold for \$30,000.

Recently, Joel has been a finalist in the 2010 Metro Art Award in Victoria and in the Redland Gallery Biennial Contemporary Painting Competition in Cleveland.

As a child of

the '80s does that era influence your artwork?

Growing up, I remember being glued to morning television cartoons like *Astro-boy*, *The Smurfs* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I would obsessively draw the characters and give myself art projects to complete around those themes. I once constructed a rainbow to cover my entire bedroom, it was made from small pieces of paper that would join up in colour and looking back, it was a pretty ambitious project. I think my inclination to endure time-consuming artistic endeavours came from then.

You've received numerous awards, how has that affected your career?

In my final year of university I received The Griffith Award for high academic achievement, and it was towards the end of uni that I really began my love affair with oil painting. That helped me stand out and, along with referrals from my lecturers and a strong portfolio, I immediately began a private painting mentorship after university (with Lethbridge Gallery director and esteemed artist Brett Lethbridge). In the

Is there one thing you strive to create?

In my fine art practice I strive to produce technically-striking oil paintings in the realm of photo-realistic/surreal painting. The imagery in my paintings primarily comes from my photography and study of nature, the figurative, still-life and landscapes while exploring themes of the human condition and a young artist's place within society.

Like many great artists, does emotional turmoil fuel your creativeness?

Absolutely! When I was borderline about going through with an art career, I was also working two jobs – one at a takeaway shop and the other at a nightclub. At the nightclub I was surrounded by alcohol and drugs and although there was a lot of fun times, by the end of most nights there was a dark side of violence and addiction. In that industry there were no decent role models. I'd hear a lot of 'talk' from people but I could see no commitment, [just] a wasteful side to my generation that would give me much inner conflict. I had to take myself away from the



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following years I had sold every painting I had made. In 2010, I decided to hold back some work to enter in prizes. I was selected as a finalist for the Redland Contemporary Painting Award and also The Metro Art Award, the richest art award in Australia for under 35's. This has encouraged me to enter more prizes in the future. The events introduce you to a lot of great people in the industry and give you a great reason to leave the solitude of the studio.

safety of the crowd and do my thing on my own. The Gold Coast had a very baron art scene at the time and I could hardly find any culture to embrace. I created my own scene in my head where the art was most important. I painted constantly and avoided distractions that would slow my progress. Soon enough I had developed enough self-discipline to treat painting like a real job and by doing that, it became a real job.

A recent survey revealed a possible link between madness and creativeness. What is your take on this?



It can be the case, but usually madness only enhances the art if the technique suits. My painting style requires the concentration of a maths test so I have to be calm and sharp. My ideas can seem crazy and 'out there' but they mostly come from my immediate surroundings – like the giant dog – he's my dog, Jax. Making him giant is fun and reminds me of childhood fascination with dinosaurs and movies like *Gulliver's Travels*. I'll admit, as I often show in my paintings, that as an individual I'm torn between the business savvy side and the artistic skater boy within me. I paint myself as these dual identities to show my inner conflict but it is a healthy duality I enjoy discussing and painting about.

**What's your favourite medium and what do you base most of your work around?**

Oil on canvas seems the best picture-making method for me. I enjoy painting classical themes like drapery, figures, places, landscape/seascape and objects, but I also like to blend in modern culture – like graffiti and the hoodie character of myself.

**What is something people would be surprised to know about you?**

In the early years people would be surprised how young I was to be achieving such great technical painting results, but now it's been six years full-

time. It's surprising I have never had to pick up a side job to support my art career. I acknowledge I'm still very young in my field but I've done thousands of hours at the easel now and feel very qualified and settled as an artist.

**What tools do you use to create your artworks?**

Camera, PC with Photoshop, printer, mineral turpentine, brushes, paint and canvas.

**Which artists or creators do you turn to for a quick boost of inspiration?**

Salvador Dali, Mark Ryden, Ron English, Mark Tansey, and a handful of oldies like; Ingres, Jerome, Rembrandt, Davide and Caravaggio.

**Tell us about hosting your own workshops and exhibitions:**

I have been exhibiting in Australia since 2005, with shows concluding with many national and international acquisitions. I have also conducted painting workshops specialising in oil painting techniques. The workshops aim to offer beginner painters the techniques and study of oil painting that I have had the honour and privilege to embrace in my day-to-day vocation for the past five years. I aim to expand consistently, my practice of painting, and to share my art practice insights with a wider audience. My goal is being able to entertain, inspire and encourage viewers, artists and students alike.

**What's hanging on your walls at home?**

I have a few pieces by my mentor Brett Lethbridge. They're brilliant, like all his work.

**What would you tell an aspiring artist who wants to break through to the next level?**

Dali would say: 'to become a genius you must act the genius.' It's a great logic for art because it's an unregulated industry. Anyone can be an artist, there are no rules but certain things work and have always worked for a reason. If you're enthusiastic enough you'll submerge yourself in your chosen medium and the path to succeed will be clearer than if you just bite around the edges.

With each exhibition, Joel continues to expand his career and has earned a reputation for being an artistic genius. With the skills of a master, he possesses an intuitive understanding of human nature with such jaw-dropping clarity that it has to be seen to be believed. His talent has been able to assure avid collectors and art enthusiasts alike that painting is one art form that is most certainly not extinct.

Head to Lethbridge Gallery next month and check it out for yourself. Up and coming exhibitions include: Lethbridge Gallery, Brisbane: opening May 7; and Astras Galleries, Gold Coast: opening November 4.

**Words: Adele Rowlands-Dealey**