

enter the dual worlds

of Joel Rea

Inspired by epic films, comic books and Salvador Dali, Gold Coast artist Joel Rea paints dramatic dreamlike scenes with subjects he relates to – waves, clouds, dogs and self portraits. But there's also a battle of duality in his art – between the creative and the business.

Some wear suits and others wear hoodies, but they're all Joel Rea.

On a seemingly endless plain taking cover behind the legs of a giant dog, a Jekyll and Hyde-style struggle takes place between these two sides of the artist. It is Rea's painting *Killing me Softly*, which sold for \$30,000 in 2007.

The 27-year-old is still finding the balance between his creativity as an artist and the pressures of building a career and financial stability.

"The hoodie guy in my paintings represents that side that's out there having fun and the business one is about the competitive side of the modern art market which I'm entrenched in, where it's all keeping up appearances and being savvy like the people who buy paintings," he says.

"There's a duality. I have the youthful side which has both the creativity and freedom that comes from painting and also the things you can do while you're young like skating and surfing, but then there's the other side that I have to do it for money."

Rea has built a reputation from exhibitions in galleries around the country, which he will continue to do, but with a stronger focus on entering his art in competitions. "In 2010 I decided to reserve some of my work to enter

competitions and after having the success to be a finalist for the Metro Art Award, I've been encouraged to take that on more seriously," he says.

"I haven't decided whether I'll go for the Archibald, portrait or landscape awards, but I'm also working on paintings for the next series and private commissioned works."

With his roots in the art of youth culture like graffiti and comics, Rea combines his technical skills as a painter with dramatic surrealist scenes.

"When I was a young kid I didn't notice paintings per se, but a lot of my interest came through comic books and illustrations from new genres," he says.

"My awareness came from that and I was interested in graffiti works and as a skater I was interested in art on skateboards and the coolness of fashion design. It wasn't until high school with an adult to point me in the direction of art that I became interested in painting."

With a bit of Dali and what Rea calls a 'Gulliver's Travels vibe', his work reflects the often dramatic content of modern digital media combined with classical oil painting.

"What Salvador Dali did got me into working with oil painting because of the technical finish you could get with



'The Pursuit of Desire' 2008

oils, because I was always driven by what was technical, painting something realistic that comes across as really vivid," he says.

"I do create paintings that look like epic movies, and I'm inspired by things like the new wave of special effects in movies, the high definition and as a painter I'm always intimidated by how crisp the special effects come up on the screen. For someone who spends 100 hours on one shot, it feels like there are a million paintings all at once.

"One of the first lessons I learned was that I had the technical ability to paint most things I could attempt to

paint, but what do you paint in this world full of images? I learned from Brett Lethbridge to paint what you know and that honesty will resonate from you doing so.

"I learn a lot about myself by painting the things I love and I feel an urge to do them justice and treat them with a level of respect and compassion. I paint the things I know in a way to make them surreal or dreamlike, into something you couldn't take a photo of."

Rea's work is displayed and sold at Astras Galleries Main Beach (Gold Coast) and at Lethbridge Gallery, Paddington in Brisbane. **G**