

I USED TO COULD

KAREN STEPHENS

June 21 – 2 July 2016

(A solo exhibition of *plein air* paintings)

I Used To Could is a series of fourteen contemporary *plein air* paintings that investigate the machine in the remote landscape. They were painted in January this year in Winton, Queensland and its surrounding areas. Temperatures during time can reach well above forty degrees.

The paintings were produced by thinking about our human relationship with the machine. With whispers of the driverless car it feels strange to study these subjects from a human perspective. The artefacts were once of service but now reside within the landscape on a permanent vacation. It does intrigue me that the 1960s FB Holden Hearse is still employed and in perfect working order.

Many of these machines have belonged and still belong to significant people of Queensland. For example - long haul Australian truck driver Thora Daphne Holzheimer (1934 – 1992) better known as 'Toots.' There is something of her spirit that still lingers when encountering her M.A.N. diesel dubbed the 'Old Girl' that negotiated the Cape York terrain. In her biography written by her daughter, Toots stated "for her driving trucks was never about gender, but - attitude" (Vawdrey 2011).

Painting in the remote environment is challenging and the works reflect the speed at which I move. I find the direct contact with the subject allows for a more faithful rendering and understanding. There is something in the way in which I paint that allows me to consider the urgency of time through my own gestures.

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(Reference: Vawdrey, Donna. 2011. *Toots: Woman in a Man's World*. Tamborine Mountain: Ecoprint)