

# BORN OBSELETE

Exhibition dates: 4 October – 15 October 2016  
Woolloongabba Art Gallery

## KAREN STEPHENS

(A solo exhibition of plein air paintings)

*Born Obselete* is a series of contemporary *plein air* paintings that investigate the displaced object in the urban landscape. My subjects are remnants caught in the cycle of consumption and disposal. Their position highlights changes and patterns within society that are most prominent in areas of dense population.

The works were produced at the same time I was reading articles about digital automation, post humanism and the end of work. In between these larger issues were advertisements that instructed me to 'buy' (at crazy prices) 'overstocked and discontinued' items 'now' or I will 'miss out'. I empathise with the items I paint that have been dedicated to efficiency. It's much harder to find a permanent job these days and the discarded objects force me to question my own worth and skill in the age of the intelligent machine.

My subjects form a commentary about a quiet revolution that is largely unnoticed on our streets. I use the incomplete jaw bone to comment on endless consumption. At the time of painting *Skull and Coke* (2015) I researched Coca-Cola Amatil's forever changing slogans. For example 'consume' (2015) and 'taste the feeling' (2016). The financial pages demonstrated yearly profits were dismal for *Coke* and that the soft drink King was slowly losing its crown to healthier beverages such as bottled water.

Painting in the urban environment is both challenging and exciting. People are suspicious of cameras but the medium of paint quietly slips through these boundaries. My method is not about the ability to capture light and atmosphere but to work directly to expose an invisible pattern and a larger contemporary issue. I only have a small window of time to work upon spotting a subject. My momentary visibility invites conversation from passers-by which usually starts with "Wadda ya paint'in that for?"

### References:

Müller, Christopher. 2015. "Critical Posthumanism. We are born obsolete: Günther Anders's (Post)humanism." Accessed 30 August. [http://www.criticalposthumanism.net/?page\\_id=433](http://www.criticalposthumanism.net/?page_id=433)

Thompson, Derek. 2015. "A World Without Work." *Atlantic*, July/August 2015, 51-61.

Watkins, Alison. "Coke battles to get ahead of the curve as consumers' taste for soft drinks fizzles out." *The Australian*, Business, 27-28 August 2016, 25 and 30.

(*Obselete* intentionally spelled 'Obselete' by the artist to manually override the automatic spell checking system ☺)



*Skull and Coke* 2015  
Oil on Polyester  
60 x 50cm



*7301280X1 Payphone 2015*  
Oil on Polyester  
60 x 50cm



*Laundered* 2015  
Oil on Polyester  
60 x 50cm



*Stripped Speakers* 2015  
Oil on Polyester  
50 x 60cm



*Roadrunners 2015*  
Oil on Polyester  
50 x 60cm



*Open Jaw* 2015  
Oil on Polyester  
50 x 60cm



*The numbers are always changing 2015*

Oil on Polyester

50 x 60cm





*Kerbside Arrangement* 2015  
Oil on Polyester  
50 x 60cm



*Anxiety I can't see who is watching but I know they are* 2015

Oil on Polyester

50 x 60cm



*The Forceful's Propellor* 2015  
Oil on Polyester  
50 x 60cm

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Karen Stephens (b. 1974) is an emerging Queensland artist who was born in Townsville and raised in Winton, remote Central Queensland. Karen investigates 'the self' through landscape and comments on contemporary debate and societal changes through the lens of landscape painting. Her Honours research investigates contemporary landscape painting in the digital era. Her works are both undertaken inside the studio and *en plein air*.

Karen has produced two solo exhibitions of paintings since her graduation from Griffith University Queensland College of Art in 2015. She has been the recipient of a number of awards and her work is represented by private and public collections within Queensland. Karen was awarded the *Art for Life Award* as part of the 2016 Queensland Regional Art Awards and Flying Arts Queensland. Her controversial landscape painting *Noogooraville* (2015) responds to the 'Colours of Queensland' and will tour at the Judith Wright Centre and Queensland Regional galleries throughout 2017.

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

### **Education**

- 2016 **Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours** (current) (deferred)  
2014 - 2015 **Bachelor of Fine Arts** Major (Painting) and Specialisation (Art Theory)  
Griffith University - Queensland College of Art (GPA 6.813 out of 7)  
2012 - 2013 **Diploma of Visual Arts and Contemporary Craft** – (SBIT)

### **Awards**

- 2016 **Flying Arts Arts for Life Award** Queensland Regional Art Awards  
2016 **Redland Art Prize** - Finalist  
2015 **Bonnie English Memorial Art Theory Award** – Griffith University  
2015 **Bruce Heiser Book Award** for Highest Average Grade for Painting  
2014 & 2015 **Griffith Award for Academic Excellence - Bachelor of Fine Art**  
2013 **Brian Tucker Highest Achievement Award** – (SBIT)

### **Acquisitions**

- 2016 QRAA Flying Arts Collection, Queensland

### **Solo Exhibitions**

- 2016 **Born Obsolete** (October) Woolloongabba Art Gallery – Brisbane  
2016 **I Used to Could** (June) Woolloongabba Art Gallery - Brisbane  
2014 **Inherited Memories** - Ipswich Community Gallery, D'Arcy Doyle Place

### **Group Exhibitions**

- 2016 **Colours of Queensland** – Queensland Regional Art Awards State Touring  
Exhibition – Flying Arts Queensland.  
2016 **Something like this but not this** - Laundry Art Space (Brisbane ARI)  
2016 **People – Place** - Ipswich Regional Art Gallery  
2015 **Cream of the Crop** - Queensland Regional Art Awards State Touring  
Exhibition - Flying Arts Queensland  
2015 **Griffith University Queensland College of Art Showcase Exhibition**  
(Graduating Exhibition November 26 - 30)  
2015 **John Villiers Waltzing Matilda Art Prize** – Winton Regional Gallery  
2014 **Drawing {a, b}** The Hold Artspace - Brisbane

### **Residencies**

- 2014 Artist Residency Award – Ipswich Art Awards