

IAN SMITH



SO YOU WANT IT IN BLACK & WHITE

Exhibition Catalogue
23 October – 28 November 2020

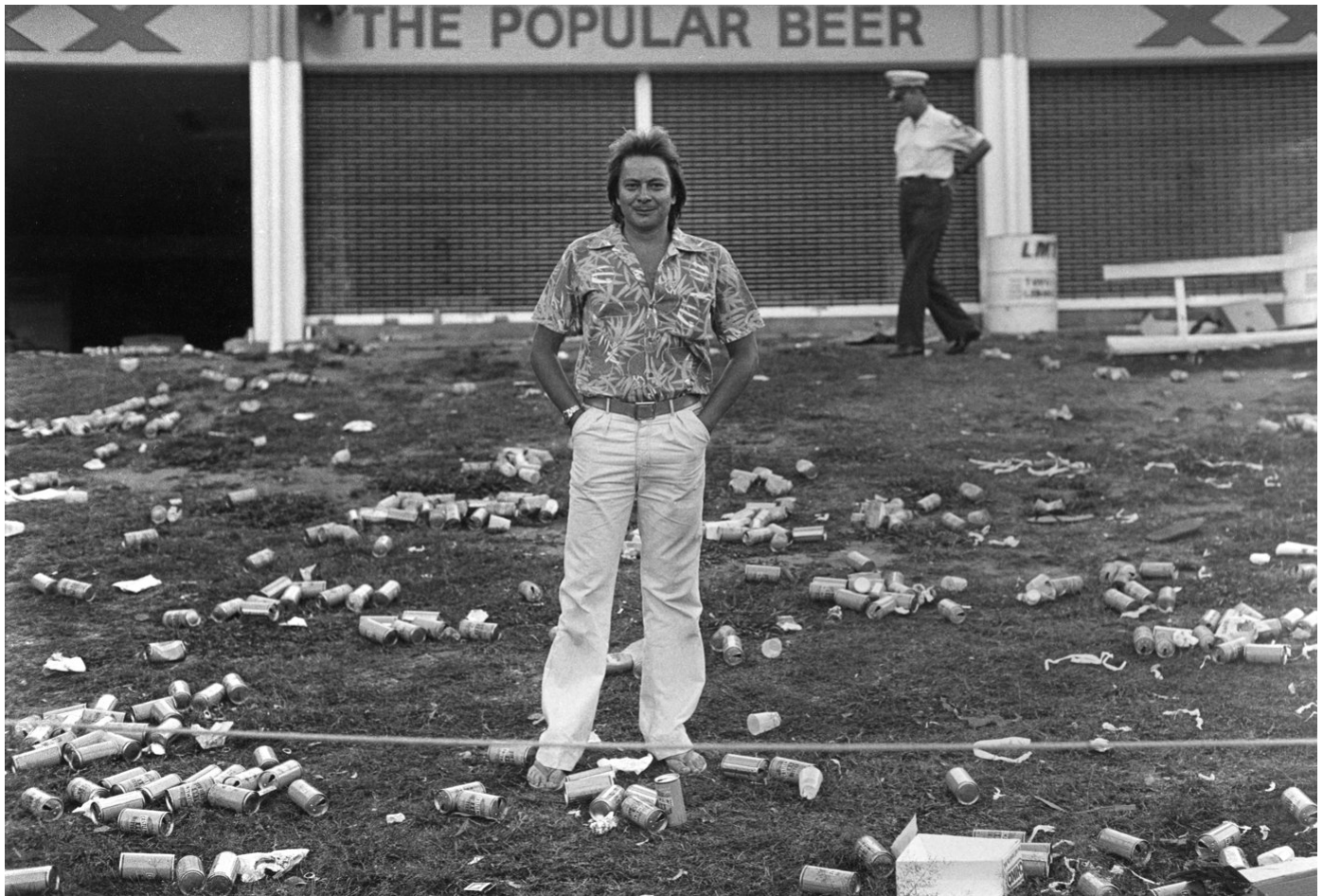
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cover image (augmented): *6 noses* 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 58 cm



On The Hill At The Gabba, Brisbane 1979. Photograph Robert Mercer



Couple, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 53 × 42 cm



Moor-OO-OO-ka 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 122 × 76 cm

SO YOU WANT IT IN BLACK & WHITE

In this fateful year, the outbreak of viral pandemic infecting our common flesh has been paralleled uncannily by an outbreak of social affliction in our common soul. I say 'outbreak' deliberately because viruses, like racism, are not new. Both always lurk there under the tenuous surface, waiting for biological or social triggers. Similarly, while my exhibition 'SO YOU WANT IT IN BLACK & WHITE' took on sudden *new* pertinence from this year's world events, its inspiration, on the contrary, started much earlier from a mundane idea and moved more slowly. The life-imitates-art-imitates-life cycle followed faithfully along. For the past few years, I have been 'infected' by a growing desire to put aside the comprehensive colour range for which I'm known [and probably admired] and limit my palette to darks and lights. I felt I'd done enough coloured ones for now, I half-joked with friends; and still had hundreds of them in my storehouse anyway, if anyone was interested!

As usual with the mind games I play to 'reinvent' myself, the strategy for change lay in my hands-on practice and studio 'housekeeping' – not in grand intellectual [much less topical] themes. Just such a reinvention via change of colour palette began last year as I wrestled with multicultural, mixed racial subject matter for my exhibition 'The Beenleigh Line' at Logan Art Gallery pre-empting this year's global events of our common flesh and common soul.

Once upon a time we were children with crayon sets. We would use up all the bright primary colours, irresistible purples, aquas and oranges until only stubs of black and white, grubby browns, drab greens and sad greys remained. These would be discarded somewhere and the cycle recommenced with a new set of crayons. Recently I arrived at a 'grown-up' version of this cycle, but decided to break it now having developed a taste for odd browns and avocado greens [speaking of tastes acquired with age]. Even when I painted in oils, I've always kept a stock of many tins of acrylic house paint, picked up here and there, with every colour of the rainbow and numerous shades of brown and grey. Gradually I've used it up and now all the 'pretty' colours are gone. But this time, rather than a handful of grubby children's crayons, I'm left with 4-litre cans of serious yet subtle dark coloured paint, which my instinct for studio economics make me determined to use. I'm known to throw layers of paint into my paintings, but I hate to throw paint away. So studio housekeeping ended up in a symbiotic clinch with my desire for stark contrasts and monochromes. As well as black, I've used dark greens, blues, browns and even burnt red with white, retaining the extreme graphic dynamic of black & white if not the racial or legal connotations [which are not my primary aims anyway]. The works still present a 'blackish & whitish' cast a word with 56 meanings/usages [as noun or verb] in my dictionary meanings from 'glancing across', to actors in a film, to forming sculpture by pouring molten metals – many of which apply literally and metaphorically in these paintings and drawings here.

Along with "That'll be the day!", one of the legendary script-lines now enshrined in our vernacular from John Ford's film, 'The Searchers', has John Wayne drawling, when pressed to describe his sight of young massacre victims: "Do you want

me to paint you a picture of it?!" Fixed in my brain in the same way, though I can't recall where or when in youth I first heard it, is: "SO YOU WANT IT IN BLACK & WHITE" The more I savour this succinct line the more it says – without descriptive, evocative adjectives or qualifying, 'escape-hatch' adverbs – about the world and our unwritten contract to live in it. Taken apart, each word balloons with implications.

SO: in one inflection suggests an outcome – in another asks a question, in the same way that 'how', 'when', 'where', 'why', 'what' and 'if' do. So! So? So what . . .

YOU: primary identity, opposite or beside 'I', 'me'. 'You' . . . 'you'. Who are you? Helper, glad receiver, lover – or protagonist, source of problems? Inseparable from or repulsive to 'I'.

WANT: notionally the biggest First World problem – as NEED is the biggest Third World problem . It can be an inspiring motivation or destructive scourge. 'Want' has strong links to speculation of what is 'wanted'.

IT: elusive yet definitive item. What is it? This is it! Now 'it' is Information Technology.

IN: opposite to 'out'. Belonging to, yet captive of. Desired or dreaded. In fashion, in demand. In trouble, in jail.

BLACK: beautiful colour, infinite...an emotive, suggestive, connotative idea. Fill in your own...

&: ampersand [contraction of 'and per se and'] elegant symbol for the most common word of inclusion.

WHITE: same as for 'black'. See above.

For an artist black & white *are* colours, as far as I'm concerned; and come from the paint box in as many variations as skin colours on the human race – where the two words are used to socially classify with brutal, generalized simplicity. In my eight panel, word by word 'Title Track' painting, black & white invade the brighter colours, echoing my current mood as they literally overtake or take over from a cut-up previous painting in which I'd lost interest. The other paintings in this show map a history of black & white gradually encroaching – as human images or other elements – pushing the spectral colours sideways, down and away into cameo roles. From life drawings [where black & white is a charcoal and graphite given] and the 'Hometown' drawings in classic Indian ink, through gum trees in landscape and white lilies in ritual flower arrangements to the underwear in my 2012–14 series from junk mail advertising. '2014 Genre Painting' [never previously exhibited] is the largest work from that series where I pondered the re-emergence of lingerie advertising trading on sensual allure, earlier versions of which people my age saw virtually outlawed during 1970s Feminism. [See my 2013 essay: 'Unavoidable Images:'] Since my work for 'The Beenleigh Line' at Logan Art gallery earlier this year, black & white saturation now culminates in 'BENDING FIG(ures)' and 'LANDSCAPE WITH FIG(ures)', 2020. Wherever fig trees stand, these multi-faceted botanical giants are possessed by and define themselves by the [black] mass of shadows in their hearts, more than by the [white] light's spectrum of component colours – pushed out to the edges.

IAN SMITH, *Brisbane, 2020*



Logan Art Gallery Collection: *Our Common Flesh* 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 140 × 140 cm



Back from life 1972, Charcoal on paper, 66 × 59 cm



Poised 1999, Graphite on paper, 66 × 48 cm



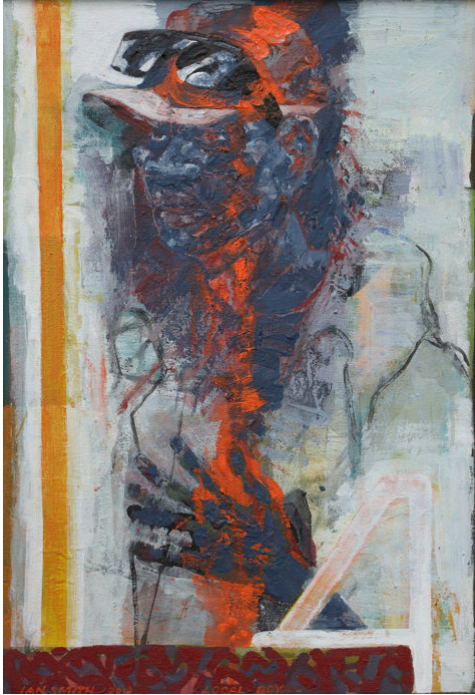
Painting of a diary page 2006, Oil & acrylic on canvas, 121 × 117 cm



...and Stay Behind the Yellow Line 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 98 × 74 cm



Waiting 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 97 × 77 cm



Local boy 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 40 cm



Local boy with mobile heart 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 40 cm



Another local boy 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 56 × 35 cm



Bending fig(ures) 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 180 cm



Landscape with fig(ures) 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 180 cm



One behind the other 2007, Oil & acrylic on canvas, 121 × 117 cm



Rust in peace 2001, Acrylic on canvas, 98 × 98 cm



North Island - South Island 2009, Oil & acrylic on canvas, 102 × 152 cm



Across the Cairns inlet 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 131 × 80 cm



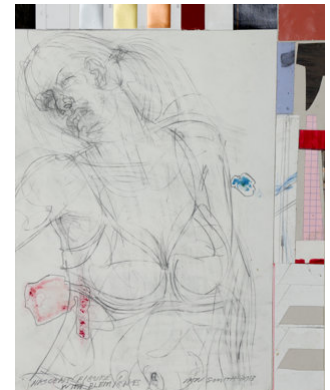
Guyala - Cairns 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 122 cm



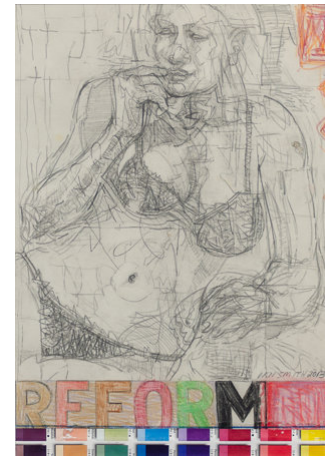
Cairns Inlet - Dry Smoky Summer 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 100 × 90 cm



Feminine Lace 2013, Graphite on paper, 28 × 38 cm



Nascent figure with blemishes 2013, Graphite & collage on paper 30 × 24 cm



Reform 2013 Graphite & collage on paper, 38 × 27 cm



Genre Painting 2014, Acrylic on canvas, 160 × 240 cm



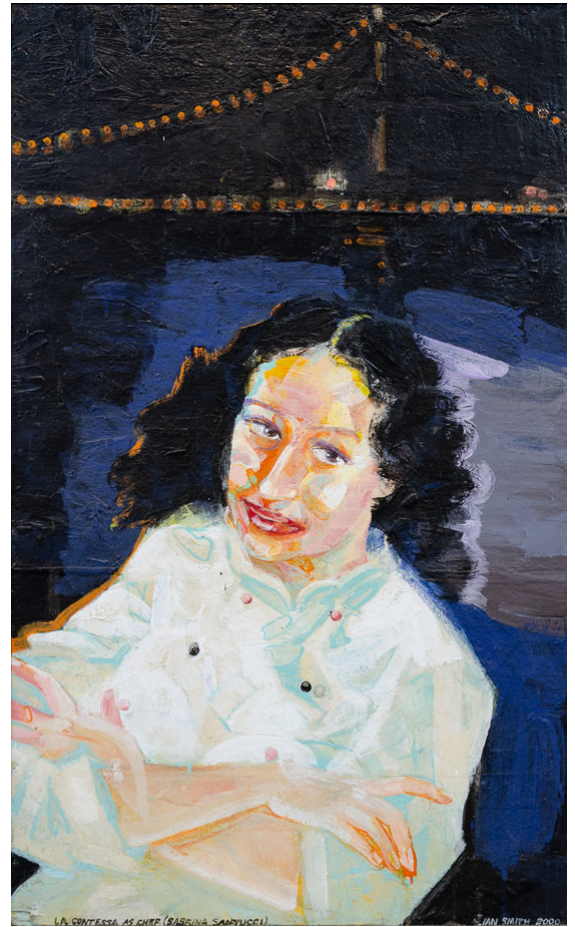
Drawing towards... 1983, Graphite on paper, 56 × 76 cm



Title Track Painting 2020 (Work In Progress), Acrylic on 8 canvases



Bearded Man with Cat 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 62 × 62 cm



La Contessa as chef (Sabrina Santucci) 2000
Acrylic on plywood, 98 × 60 cm



Happily Ever After in Toowong 2012, Acrylic on canvas, 76 × 61 cm



Once upon October in Toowong 2012, Acrylic on canvas, 76 × 61 cm



Painting of a drawing of a woman in a bath 2007, Oil & acrylic on canvas, 118 × 100 cm



Painting of a drawing of a woman in a shower 2007, Oil & acrylic on canvas, 121 × 100 cm



Tropical Colour - Rainy Day Cairns 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm



Up from Dutton Park Station 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 122 x 78 cm



Yeronga on the way back 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 110 cm



B&W Yeronga 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Lota 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 84 cm



Lota on the way back 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



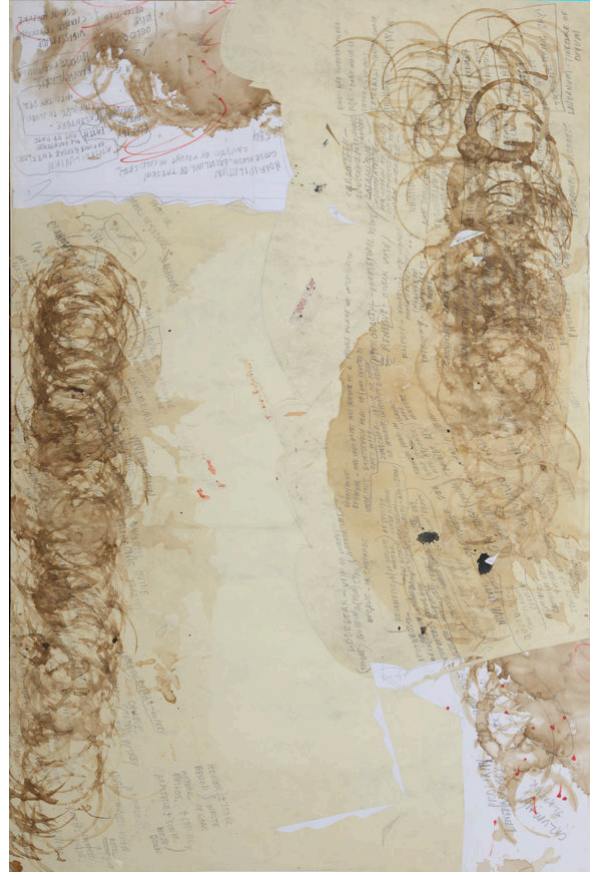
Thicket with plum moon 2010, Pastel & acrylic on paper, 47 x 65 cm



Thicket & black pool 2010, Pastel & acrylic on paper, 47 x 65 cm



Fig 2002, Acrylic & pen on paper, 61 x 73 cm



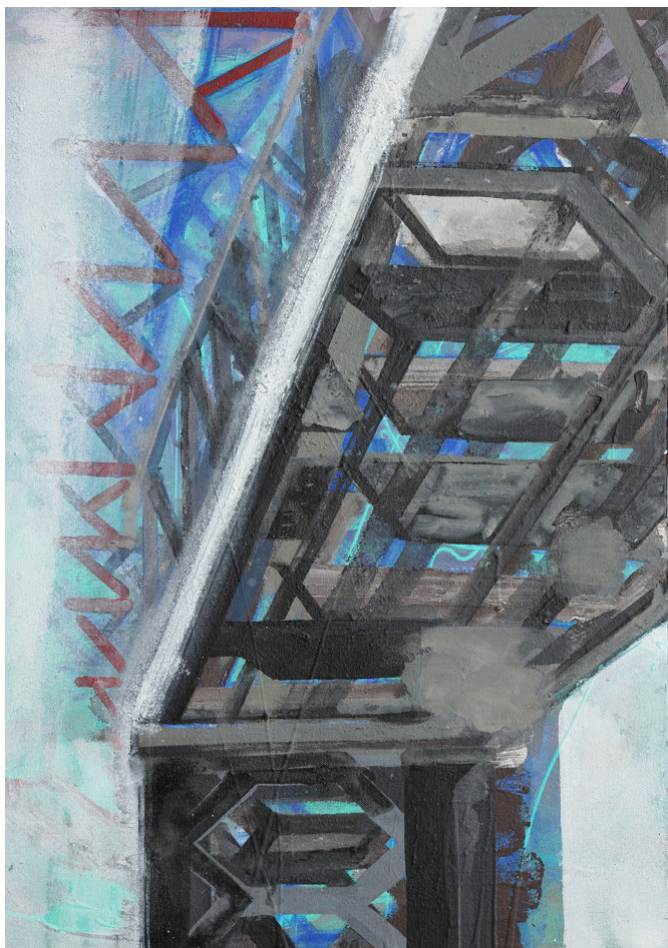
Morning reading bedside table 2019, Pencil & coffee on paper, 50 x 75 cm



Delta question - Delta answer 1986, Collage & acrylic on paper, 50 x 76 cm



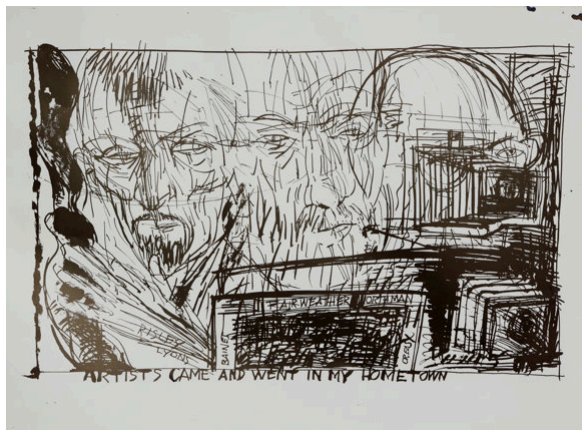
Studio floor, Pastel & glue on paper, 93 x 67 cm



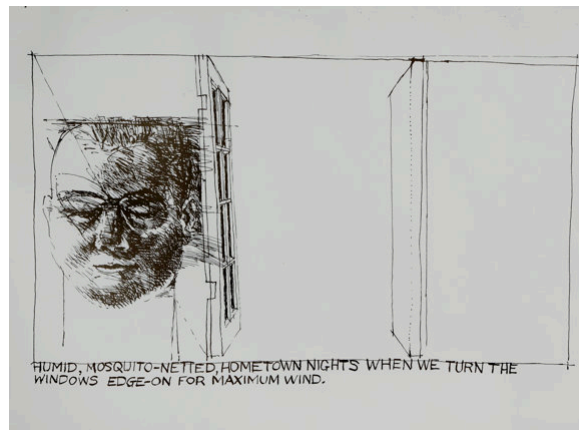
Under the bridge (2) 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 57 × 40 cm



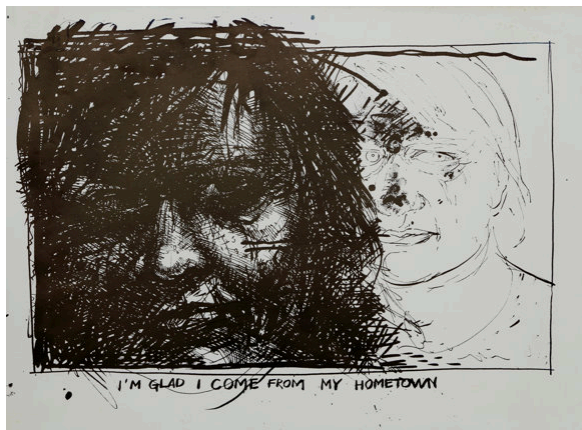
Under the bridge (3) 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 57 × 35 cm



QAG Collection: *Artists came and went...* 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



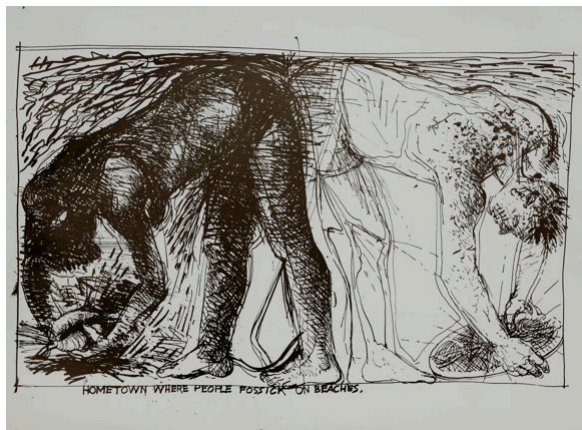
QAG Collection: *Humid mosquito-netted hometown nights...* 1983
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



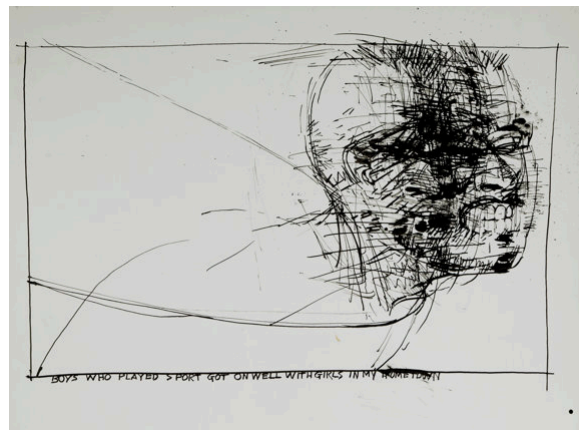
QAG Collection: *I'm glad I come from...* 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



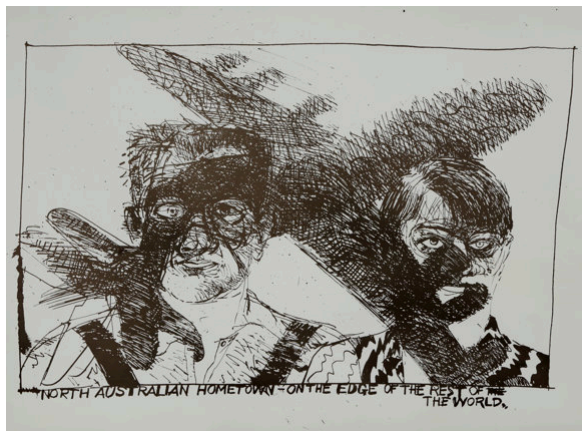
QAG Collection: *Tolerant old hometown* 1983
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



QAG Collection: *People fossicking* 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



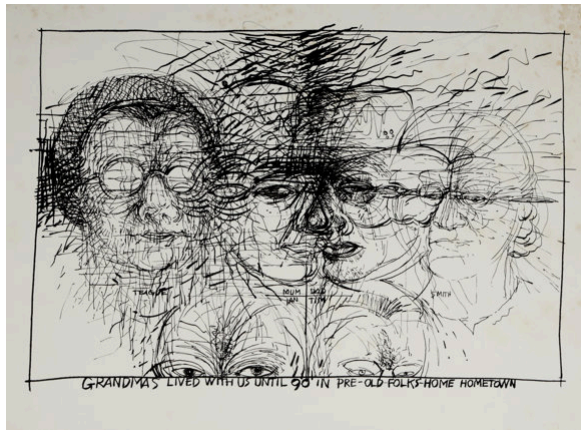
Boys who played sport... 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



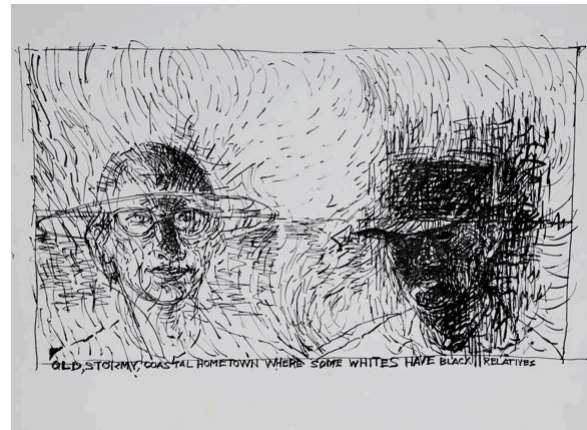
QAG Collection: *Edge of the world* 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



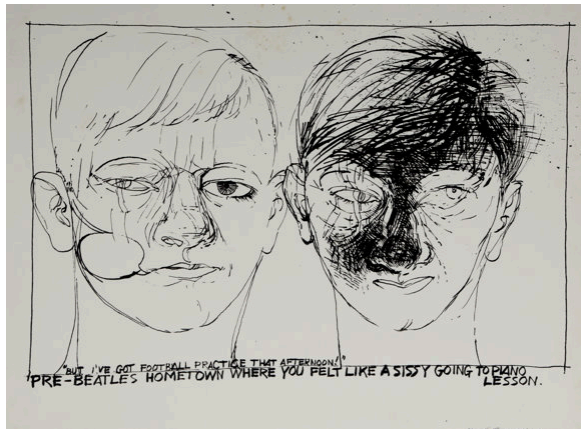
'50s country and western... 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 × 38 cm



Grandmas... 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 x 38 cm



Old, stormy coastal... 1983
Indian Ink on paper, 28 x 38 cm



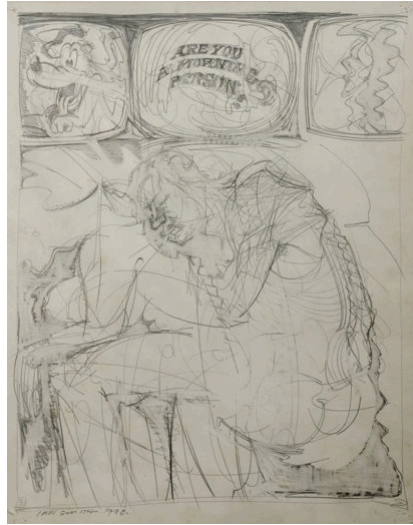
Pre-Beatles hometown... 1984
Indian Ink on paper, 28 x 38 cm



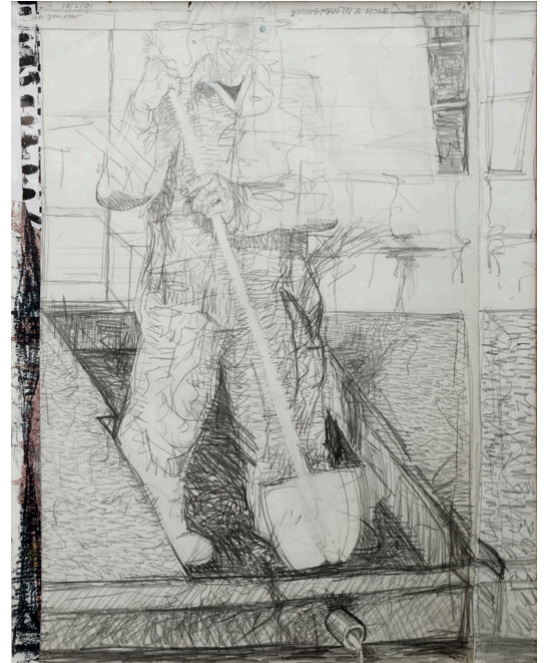
Brothers are neighbours 1983
Indian Ink on paper, 28 x 38 cm



Left woman tearing up coasters 1990
Graphite on paper, 47 × 37 cm



Are you a morning person? 1990
Graphite on paper, 47 × 37 cm



Young man in a hole 1991
Graphite on paper, 53 × 42 cm



Gundagai (3) 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 20 × 60 cm



Sky bridge 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 16 × 30 cm



Ghost bridge 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 20 × 60 cm



Bridge over moon 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 30 × 40 cm



In nature (1) 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 25 × 40 cm



Inevitable story 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 23 × 50 cm



B&W (1) 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 23 × 50 cm



Gundagai (2) 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 21 × 66 cm

IAN SMITH - Biography

Australian Collections: NGA, Canberra; NGV, Melbourne; QAG, Brisbane; GNT, Darwin; Regional and City council Galleries: Hamilton, Vic.; Karratha, WA; Cairns, Stanthorpe, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Gympie, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Townsville, Logan and others; University of Qld, QUT, Griffith University, Brisbane; JCU, Townsville; Uni. Central Qld., Rockhampton; Parliment House, Canberra; Student Unions Sydney Uni., Uni. NSW, Sydney and Melbourne Uni. etc.

Overseas Collections: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Shenzen Art Museum, China; National Collection Ghana, Emmen City Cultural Centre, Netherlands. Private collections in USA, UK, Netherlands, and Belgium – particularly in Antwerp – where Smith lived for 7 years with his Belgian wife and 2 Australian born children; 1988 to 1994 when he returned to Australia alone and lived Brisbane/Gold coast/Moreton Bay Islands, making frequent trips to Sydney and Cairns.

Born Cairns, 1950, he lived a working class, bush and beach yet artistically active boyhood. In 1968, on a Commonwealth Scholarship, he did one year of Architecture before dropping out, working in a bank for a year then moving to Melbourne to do a Diploma of Art & Design at Prahran College [1970 – 1972]. 1973, painted TV sets at Channel 9, then mid-year returned to Brisbane to teach painting and drawing full-time at Qld College of Art until 1979 when he quit and has painted full-time ever since. He has staged many one man shows and been invited or contributed to numerous group shows here and overseas.

Exhibitions since 1972 in Australia and Overseas: include +/- 25 solo shows, Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane/Sydney 1972-2006; +/- 7 solo shows, Heiser Gallery, Brisbane 2006-2017. Now represented in Brisbane by Woolloongabba Art Gallery with: 'Best Of Ian Smith Works On Paper', 2018; 'Big Paintings - Small Paintings', 2019. While living in Europe, involved in many exhibitions; most notably solo shows at Campo & Campo, Antwerp and Emmen Cultural Centre, Netherlands.

Curated solo exhibitions include 'Ian Smith - Survey', MOCA, Brisbane 1988; 'Since I left', 1996 Cairns Regional Gallery then touring; 'On and off the Road', 2010 Gold Coast City Art Gallery then touring to 8 regional galleries, ending appropriately in Cairns. 'Homegrown Images', KickArts Cairns 2016. 'The Beenleigh Line', Logan Art Gallery 2020; 'Flesh & Bone', Noosa Regional Gallery 2020.

In a career which really started as a schoolboy, his work uses images of everyday even mundane existence from cane toads to grand bridges, from explicit sexual scenes to blank roadside billboards in landscape all evoking universal issues. He has won many prizes including Tattersalls Landscape Prize, Brisbane, 2012; and been an Archibald Prize finalist 9 times over 4 decades [first time 1977, most recently 2010]. Also hung several times in the Salon des Refusés, Wynne and Sulman Prizes.



Ian Smith in his studio 2020. Photograph Kerrin Smith.

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Woolloongabba Art Gallery

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