

kirsten chambers

Surf 'N' Turf

December 7 to December 20, 2024

Federal-based Kirsten Chambers describes the exhibition's paintings as depictions of local areas that she has a visual and environmental affinity with. Often presented from an aerial perspective, several works reconfigure vistas observed from hinterland roads. Although the paintings take their source of inspiration from such encounters, they transcend any sense of literal location. The scenes embody aesthetic qualities beyond the classical landscape tradition.

Chambers relays that her process for the larger works involves going on site to take photographs and sketch. "I tend to draw until I know the scene by heart so that when I'm actually painting, it is all about the canvas. I think one has to toss aside reference material before the work can take on a life of its own. The rendition must be free flowing as I work."



The motivation for the *Possum Shoot Road* painting was the memory of Gallery Director Anthea Polson's ordeal on the way to visit Chambers' farm last year. "Her vehicle's 'Navman' sent Anthea up Possum Shoot Road which is scenic but terrifying to drive," Chambers relays. "The vivid account has remained with me so I decided to translate the event onto canvas. Anthea's van is just visible up on one of the twisting roads." In Chambers' work a verdant green hill plunges down towards the ocean far below. The road at times disappears from the image as it turns and weaves around the slope. Even the clouds are swooping down in emphasis of the locale's steepness.

A vista of Belongil Beach, just north of Byron Bay, is captured in the *Boags Lost At Belongil* painting. Divided vertically into three abstracted panels of sea, long sandy stretch and landform it is compositionally united by the distant view of the Byron Headland. "This work is about our Bull Terrier, Boags, who once disappeared into the dunes at Belongil overnight," Chambers reveals. "It depicts his epic overnight adventure and the massive search effort that went into eventually finding him."

Chambers' design aptitude is also evidenced in what she calls her townscapes, albeit they are rendered in a less abstracted format. The *Station Street* painting evinces her ongoing attraction to the many historical building facades in the hinterland town of Bangalow. "I have always loved its main street and have done a few paintings of the place since permanently arriving in the area 25 years ago," she tells. "I was down there drawing it one day and decided to do an elevated streetscape. This is the view up Station Street to the iconic Agriculture & Industrial Hall."

Prevailing sociological issues engendered the imagery in other paintings. *Battleaxe Blocks* shows variously coloured, geometric houses on manicured blocks, the roadways angling up to the seashore's horizon. "There is a bit of a trend in Byron to add a smaller house at the back of the block in order to capitalise on the space," Chambers informs. "The work is actually an imagined streetscape depicting such. I guess this is a bit of a visual commentary on the way people are choosing to live in the housing crisis. Also, I love old Fibro Houses and am always on the lookout for authentic versions that haven't as yet been renovated."

A similar theme is conveyed, although quite differently, in *The M.O* picture. Chambers explains that the title's initials stand for Multiple Occupancy. "The practice usually involves an old farm that has been bought by a group or collective. Various dwellings are subsequently built - often very ad hoc and not council approved - upon the land. There are a number of these around the Byron Hinterland and Tweed Valley. It is a way that lower income people have managed to buy into property up here."

The subtle compositional relationships at play within the various scenarios assist the viewer's participation in Chambers' encounters with the local townships, land and seascapes that give her immersive pleasure. Although her exhibition works do depict oceans and grassy expanses, Chambers discloses the show's title, *Surf 'n' Turf*, is also referring to the meal featuring an unusual combination of seafood and red meat. "It's a light hearted bit of Aussie humour," she quips.

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