

Self-taught artist Susan Schmidt at her home on the Sunshine Coast.

banking on colour

In the Queensland country town of Kin Kin you'll find just one pub, a general store and artist Susan Schmidt's Artbank Studio, which screams colour and speaks volumes about her vital, daring approach to art.



WORDS LUCINDA DEAN

The studio space is actually a renovated bank that joins onto Schmidt's Queenslander-style home. Large portraits of indigenous Australians in coastal and desert settings hang on the lounge room walls and feature primary reds, blues and yellows that all leap out at the viewer. But what is perhaps most arresting about the portraits, is the way Schmidt has captured the mood and personality of her subjects.

"I love colour," explains the 47-year-old self-taught artist. "I'm always trying to push the boundaries with colour, and I like to exaggerate it as much as I can, but still have it look convincing. I would describe my work as realism, but not in the traditional vein."

Schmidt knew she wanted to be an artist from a young age. "I got my first set of brushes and acrylic paint when I won first prize in an art competition on a kids' television show in Adelaide," she recalls. In her mid-20s Schmidt moved from South Australia to Queensland and embarked on an advertising career in Brisbane, where she worked as an illustrator. "Being a graphic artist was a bit of a compromise," she says, "but it was still art and something I could earn a living from."


In the 1980s Schmidt and her partner Greg moved to the Sunshine Coast where her career took off after the birth of her daughter Amber. "My early themes were tropical, and my first painting was

of a Pandanus palm, which I had framed at an art store in Noosa. I wasn't sure if I wanted to sell it, but it was snapped up within hours of being put on display!"

After such an auspicious start, Schmidt has notched up seven solo exhibitions, and has permanent hanging space at the Noosa Sheraton. Her first Brisbane exhibition, *Streetscapes*, was held at the NeoGallery in Fortitude Valley.

"The Valley is an exciting part of Brisbane," states Schmidt, who credits the suburb as being her muse for the urban-themed collection. "I was looking for old Brisbane [but] it's getting harder and harder to find because it keeps getting pulled down and replaced with contemporary buildings that lack character. It's almost a race to photograph things and paint them before they are gone!" (Ironically, it was a property developer who was among the first to purchase a painting from the collection.)

Peeling facades are captured in *Streetscapes'* textured, acrylic, impasto paintings, which reflect the multi-layered history of the rapidly evolving suburb. "*Streetscapes* is wild, sharp and hard-edged," adds Schmidt. "Complementary colours really zing and vibrate."

Schmidt anticipates an urban-themed series will follow *Streetscapes* at the NeoGallery in 2008. Watch www.artbankstudio.com.au for more details or try www.neogallery.net. 



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