



steve  
smith

Where Are The **strong?**



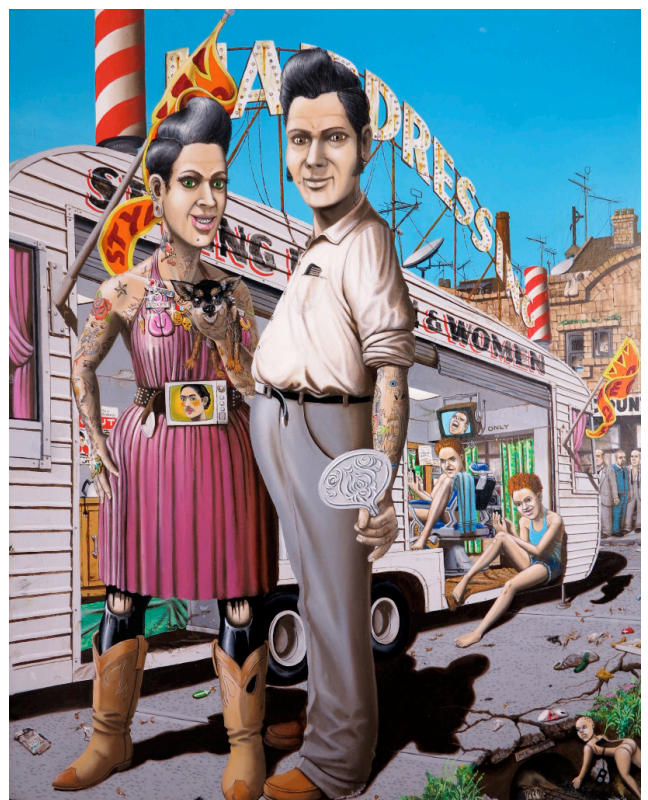
The essence of Steve Smith's images and the dream-like entities in his paintings and drawings are not taken from fiction but are a reality that he observes on his daily travels around his beloved Bondi and beyond into the suburbs of Sydney. The imaginary pre-apocalyptic propositions in his art works have evolved from his fascination with comics but also from his observations of street life from the viewpoint and anonymity of a sign writer who disappears into the world within the looking glass.

The placement and staging of his survey exhibition, *Where Are The Strong?*, at Cross Art Projects, one of Sydney's few real project spaces, is a totally appropriate choice of venue and location for an artist who's aesthetic links hours of dedicated studio practice to the pavement.

Steve Smith apportions his time between the daily rigour of the studio and working as a sign writer. At street level, on the pavement, the reflection in a large glass, of a vista beyond, plays tricks with reversals on the immediate world behind and offers a perverse view of the outside superimposed upon the inside - a double vision with cluttered perspectives.

Perhaps it is this view that enables text to play the important role that provides a backdrop narrative often revealing the key to the many layers of meaning in his work.

In many ways his artworks have a foot on the non-existent streets of Bondi that our faint memories continue to attempt to recapture, somewhere between lines of white powder and green bags of grass where there is a universe that is inhabited by his objects and not-so-loyal subjects. Smith presents us with a shimmering acidic haze between the interchangeable states of reality and fiction where colours of tattoos become more predominant than the colour of the sky, where buildings change their meaning, where dogs snootle one another for the ultimate orgasm and where there is more happening below the pavement than above it.



*Hairdressers*

It is Steve Smith's intimate observations and attention to detail that ultimately deliver his view of a society that seems to be on the verge of a cataclysm.



*Skate Angels with Skate Goddess at a Cake Shop*

His angels on skateboards offer mercurial hope; his aviators represent heroism and an implausible means of escape; his rockabilly hairdressers proffer vanity; his astronomers surrounded by the detritus of abandoned projects clutch at yet another straw and the recurrent duality of personalities throughout express a bi-polar and tantric state of ultimate androgynous bliss.

The tantric state of ultimate bliss is a transcendence of dualities male-female, Shiva-Shakti, in the works of Steve Smith it is this duality that becomes a predominant theme and symbolizes a sense of oneness amongst his diverse figures. How can two beings be one? How can opposites co-exist from the same seed?



*Bongo Twins with Parents*

Joined together at the hip physically and spiritually, there are few gaps in between and Smith delivers a gritty intimacy. Even in his representations of crowds there is either a resigned claustrophobia as portrayed in Peace Love & Understanding or a glutinous passion and theatrical abandonment as depicted in Pizza Dance Club.





*Pizza Dance Club*

Somewhere in a hazy past the descriptor of Steve Smith as “The Bruegel of Bondi” conjures up gothic scenes where peasants are replaced by a coterie of colourful characters that include spics, dominatrices, warriors and zombies all of whom are universally ignored by the woman walking her vacuum cleaner.



*Walking the Dog*



*Evolutionary Duet Part 1*

The reek of a pervasive level of eroticism strays through an amorphous jumble of poor, improbable human life where a filmic play of power and ordinance, endlessly looped, is projected through a splintered prism onto a warped screen.

The influence of underground comics from the 1960's and 70's have left a profound and lasting impression not only on Steve Smith's message to society, but also on his mark-making. Forty years later, his painting style lies somewhere between Mandingo and Zap with a cock-eyed sensibility that emerged on the early art school covers of Chimaera magazine. The mirror that he holds up reflects a society that seems to exist at a point in time just prior to Ridley Walker by Russell Hoban of which The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists stated ...“The force and beauty and awfulness of Hoban's creation is shattering”.



As in comic art and graphic novels, there is a strong reliance on text to get the message across. The title of this exhibition derives from a quote from the Jimmy Little version of a Nick Lowe song "(What's so Funny About) Peace love & Understanding" and is woven into the text for the protesters' banners in the drawing - Peace Love Understanding. In Steve Smith's works the thought bubbles that play such a predominant role in comics are shunted into a siding and replaced by elements from his sign writing, often in the background of his works phrases that chuckle at establishment appear on banners or on buildings - The Institute of Scientific Fortune Telling, Love Healing, Your Autonomous Nervous System, Learn to Trust, Free Clinic, Temple of the Inner Outer, Psychic Karaoke Tarot Readings, Psychic Burger with Reading & Chips and of course Tattoo Available.

Where are the Strong, Who Are The Trusted are questions that are also laced with paranoia and

the search for security. What is it that makes these phrases so pivotal in the drawing, Peace Love & Understanding that gives this mini survey exhibition its title? Maybe it is from the shadows of text that Steve Smith calls with his angels on skateboards, his aviators, his dominatrices, dualities and zombies.



Flying Doctor with Pilot

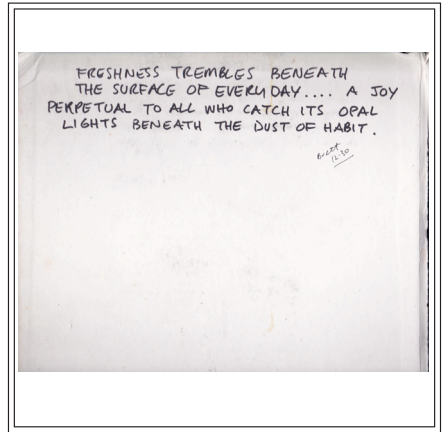
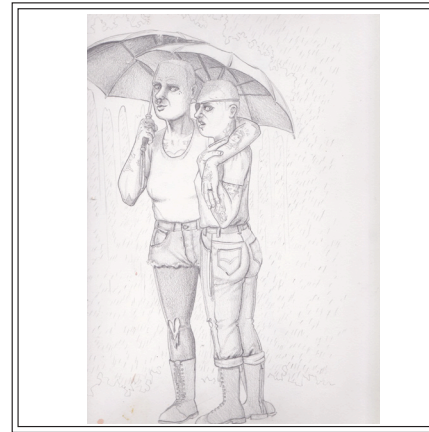
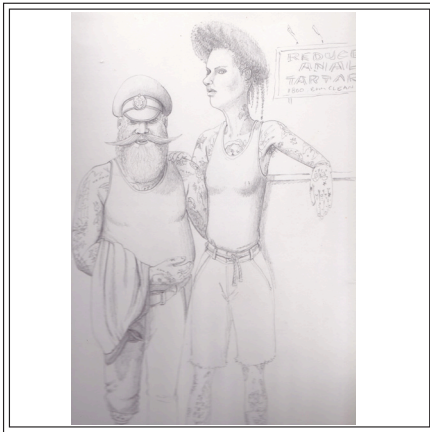
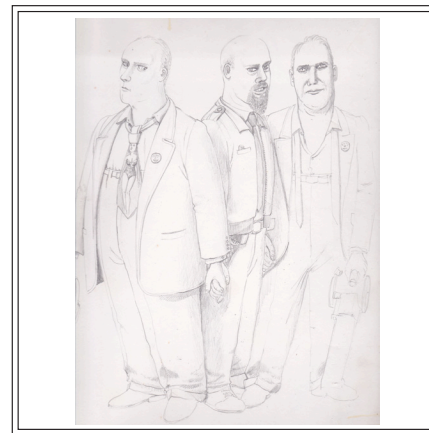
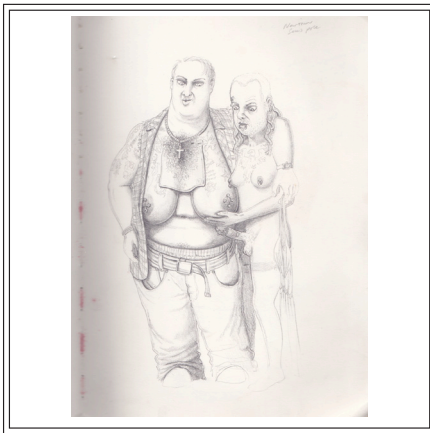
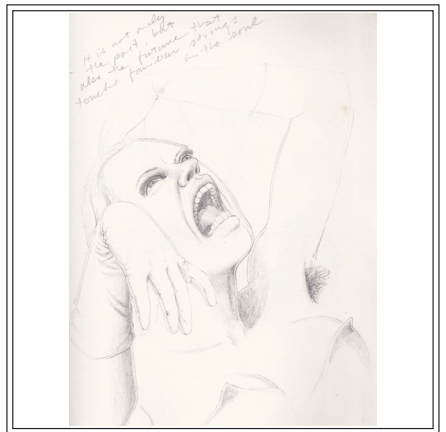
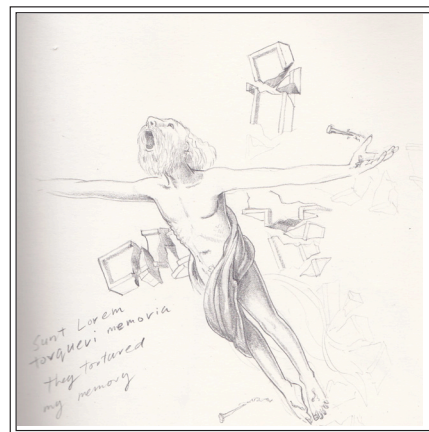
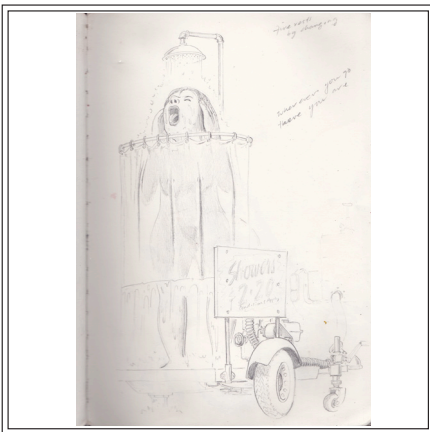
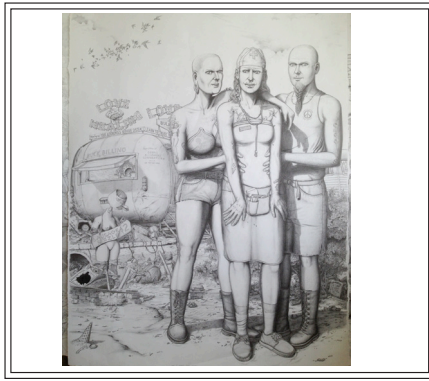
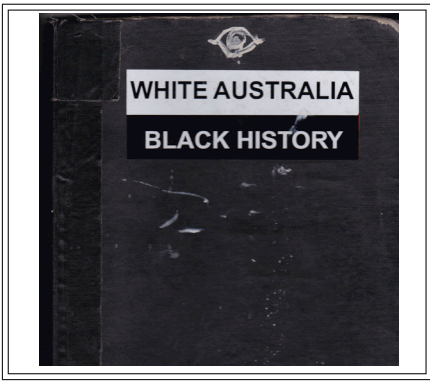
As I walk thru  
this wicked world  
Searching for a light  
in the darkness of insanity  
I ask my self  
if all hope lost  
Is there only pain  
& hatred  
& misery  
And each time I feel like this inside  
There's one thing I wanna say  
what's so funny ..... (2)  
As I walk on  
thru troubled times  
my spirit gets so down hearted  
Sometimes  
So where are the strong  
and who are the trusted  
where is the harmony  
sweet harmony  
Each time I feel it slip away  
there's one thing I wanna know  
what's so funny .....  
where .....

Maybe it is from the reflection in the glass where the woman walking the vacuum cleaner was a mere parvenu during a sign-writing session.

Maybe it is from a crack of dawn side street in the sleeping suburbs of East Sydney, where salvation is either just a kiss away or just a shot away that we find the real Steve Smith.

If dreams were drugs, Steve Smith would be a junkie.

Nick Vickers



Steve Smith, selected images, diary entries



Jo Holder, Director  
The Cross Art Projects

Where Are The Strong  
Steve Smith  
Exhibition Dates  
Sat 24th Nov-Sat 22nd Dec 2012

The Cross Art Projects  
Contemporary Art and Curatorial  
Platforms

8 Llankelly Place  
Kings Cross Sydney 2011  
Hours: 11 to 6 Thurs to Sat or  
by appointment T:(02) 9357 2058

Travis Grace Photography  
Nick Vickers: Catalogue Essay  
Anita Lever: Catalogue Design

Nick Lowe  
Brinsley Schwarz  
(What's So Funny 'Bout)  
Peace Love & Understanding

Gimme Shelter, Jagger/Richards  
1971, Decca Records ABKCO

'Bruegel of Bondi' as quoted in:  
Tv Artists Look At Life In  
The Living Room  
Sydney Morning Herald  
Thursday July 28, 1988  
Brownyn Watson

Cover image :  
Peace Love & Understanding

Back image:  
Songwriting (duet)



steve  
smith