

Speaking With Kristi Chua

Interview by Claire Bushby/Images courtesy of Kristi Chua



This month I had privilege of interviewing a very talented painter, Kristi Chua. I'm also lucky enough to be able to say she is a studio neighbour of mine. So I get to regularly admire her work on the walls of our shared hallway and sometimes get a sneak peek at what she is working on in her studio.

Tell us a little about your background and the kind of work you make.

I've spent a good deal of time working in and around the Aboriginal community of Perth, and I think my work reflects this, often inspired by landscapes I've experienced, people I've met and things I've learned along the way. I'm home-schooling my son and I often find my smaller works reflecting ideas and thoughts around the natural learning process (using observation and exploration as the creative process is also a learning process). My early works were with found objects and acrylics primarily, I have since moved to oils and a combination of graphite and oils after two years playing with watercolours.

Are you self-taught, formally trained? Acquired skills from family/friends?

Although I attended Kalamunda Senior High School which had a very comprehensive art program, I am primarily self taught. I am interested in pushing the boundaries when it comes to combinations and techniques for expression. I apply what I have learned from one medium to another, for example my current work with oil and graphite employs techniques and observations I discovered while working with watercolour. I am also learning much from other artists through conversation and observation, I feel very lucky to be working with Bibbulmun elder and artist

Toogarr Morrison at the moment on a tile mural. I find artists to be very generous with their knowledge and I hope to work with other people more in the near future.

Did you always want to be an artist, or did it come later in life?

I have always wanted to be an artist, although it was never seen in my family to be a "career" choice. It's only recently that I have made the commitment to my practice, ensuring I make it a priority in my life. My mum reminds me that when I was younger I told her I didn't need to go to school because I was going to be an artist when I grew up, funny enough that's exactly how it turned out. I left my masters in Education last year because it was interfering with my art!

What is your earliest creative memory?

Making pictures with coloured spaghetti at a family day care. I still think its fun.

What drives you to do what you do?

I feel like when I am painting or drawing, I am being authentic to myself. I am happy in my own skin when I am creating, and to "not" create usually results in me feeling unwell and depressed. Its just something I have to do, like breathing.



"Boab"

Who/what are some of your creative influences?

I don't have to look too far for creative inspiration. Country and family and friends inspire me, my own bioregion, my garden, my son, all inspire me and influence my creative process. In terms of other artists I love the work of Jo Darbyshire, Toogarr Morrison and Peteris Ciemitis. Lyn Franke, Julie Dowling and Kimberley Kohan are also some of my favourites.

What are some of your creative goals?

I really want to travel and paint, particular up to the Kimberley, our homelands. I would love to just go and observe and explore, and create a body of work based on my experiences of place there. Another goal of mine is to move into public art, I have a great interest in how people interact with their environment, particularly children and young adults, how they explore and

move in spaces. I'd love to be involved in creating public art that not only has people reflecting on what it means to be in "place" but also art that gets people moving and exploring these spaces.

Are there constant themes you are attracted to in your work?

There are definitely themes that I return to regularly. Interaction with the natural environment and how we process our understanding of that. Sometimes this is something that isn't explicit in my work (for example most people would just see a landscape) but other times its more obvious, well I think it is. My work based on my synaesthesia I think is more "out there" for people, I get asked more questions about my process with that particular body of work. I'm also interested in how people interact with our shared history, although I have not produced a large number of works in that theme, it is on the cards.



"Synaesthesia"

What do you like about Perth? How do you think living in Perth has influenced your work?

How can Perth not influence my work? While my mob come from the Kimberley, I have primarily grown up in Perth and surrounding areas. So I am most family with the plants, animals, people and places of Perth, our bioregion, our country. The small things of home, like the candle banksia flowering, or the bigger things of our home, like the shifting of our seasons influence every aspect of my life, including my art work. As they do for all people living here, just some seem to have forgotten the importance of it.

Do you listen to anything when you are working? If so, what?

I love to listen to music while working, although I can loose track of time this way! I listen to JJJ or Noongar radio most of the time, but I have a varied taste in music depending on my mood, anything QOTSA, prodigy to Joanna Newsom gets played. On some rare occasions when I'm completely alone, I prefer just the sounds of what is going on outside, birds singing, people

walking past.

Any future shows coming up?

I have put my hand up for a few things this year but am patiently waiting for news back. Hopefully a show in Ellenbrook and I hope to be involved in the heritage week in Perth.

Where can people find out more about your work?

The best place to keep track of me is on my facebook group [Kristi Chua Art](#), any events I am involved in or shows will be posted on my page. People can also track me down through [Artsource WA](#).

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