

SAM FOLEY THE GREEN BELT



Walking Track, Jubilee Park, Oil on canvas 145x112cm



The One Way off Newington Avenue, Oil on canvas, 126x95cm

The Town Belt

By Richard Reeves

To go 'left' – that is, to pass there as
every morning, and hear, no religion

but the camaraderie of birdsong.
The city below, snuffling through

undergrowth. I listen, and many a time
have been half in love with rotted twigs.

New Zealand breaking out of the tar.
And then Cargill, severing the mist.

THE GREEN BELT – SAM FOLEY

By Richard Reeve

Replicating the civic plan of many British municipalities, Dunedin is banded by a region of native vegetation, the Green Belt, which forms the focus of painter Sam Foley's present exhibition. In its profusion of epiphytes, ferns and trunks it resembles nothing so much as the temperate rainforest of old New Zealand.

Foley's often hallucinatory, perspective-driven paintings witness enduring tension between this primordially and the pragmatism that has rendered it into an amenity. While the painter's interest in detail is obvious, his canvases typically capture a primary struggle of basic forces: the linearity exemplified by a walking path or road runs against foliage, a street lamp fights off the encroaching darkness of the canopy, or stairways direct the viewer onward through a crowd of branches. It would be wrong to presume clear-cut references to isolated issues or themes in the elements of his paintings, but symbolist influences are certainly at work. Foley's oil-paint canvases attest a wrestling match between civic strategy and the intransigent chaos of the natural world.

Still, it must be said that nature in *The Green Belt* is no longer *that* threatening, having been substantially forced to submit to the designs of engineers and surveyors. There is ironic, even comfortable, detachment in many canvases: in Foley's realism we are told to take charge, self-consciously undergo the mental act of feeling privileged to observe this phenomenological gathering, perhaps put our privilege to use (make art?). *Path down Queen's Drive*, exemplary of this manipulation, insists on the epistemological play-ground available to us all, emphasising the steepness of the path's descent through bush and how this steepness leads us to recharacterise the foliage from a depth-perspective. A blink and suddenly we are not quite in the tree-tops. Yet any such fleeting suspension of belief is a game—a snapshot from the corner of the eye—absorbed into the narrative continuum as the viewer emerges once more among the houses of suburbia.

It is hard to avoid extrapolating on the significance of illumination in Foley's paintings. Benighted clearings, tar-seal lit by a suspended bulb and limned by the forest, look like philosophical assertions made by the painter about the deeply contextual, existential geographies we



Top of the Path off Maori Road, Oil on canvas, 77x105cm



move in. More than merely the method by which colour and tone are commonly justified, street lamps invoke a sense of transcendental, though not necessarily deific, guidance, leading the viewer along a tortuous path which they promise will eventually break out into the open. Without those trusty plasticated, fluorescent bulbs – and by distant implication the sun that refracts through Foley's daylight foliage – the opening which each canvas presents wouldn't exist.

Where, or what, is humanity in this littoral of concrete and root? The evidence is everywhere, yet there are few human figures *in* Foley's paintings, and where people do appear they are often alien or removed. The faint glow of a cigarette or joint, viewed in *Queen's Drive* through the dark windscreen of a parked car, suggests quiet anxiety, a slightly uncomfortable intrusion on someone else's privacy, as much as the dark warm interior of the car itself. Foley's journey is a egocentric, strictly one-person affair; the perspective suggested is expressly that revealed to 'me', not 'us'. And 'you', him, she are ultimately points of negotiation, intrusions of the reality beyond the Green Belt on the private view presented by each painting.

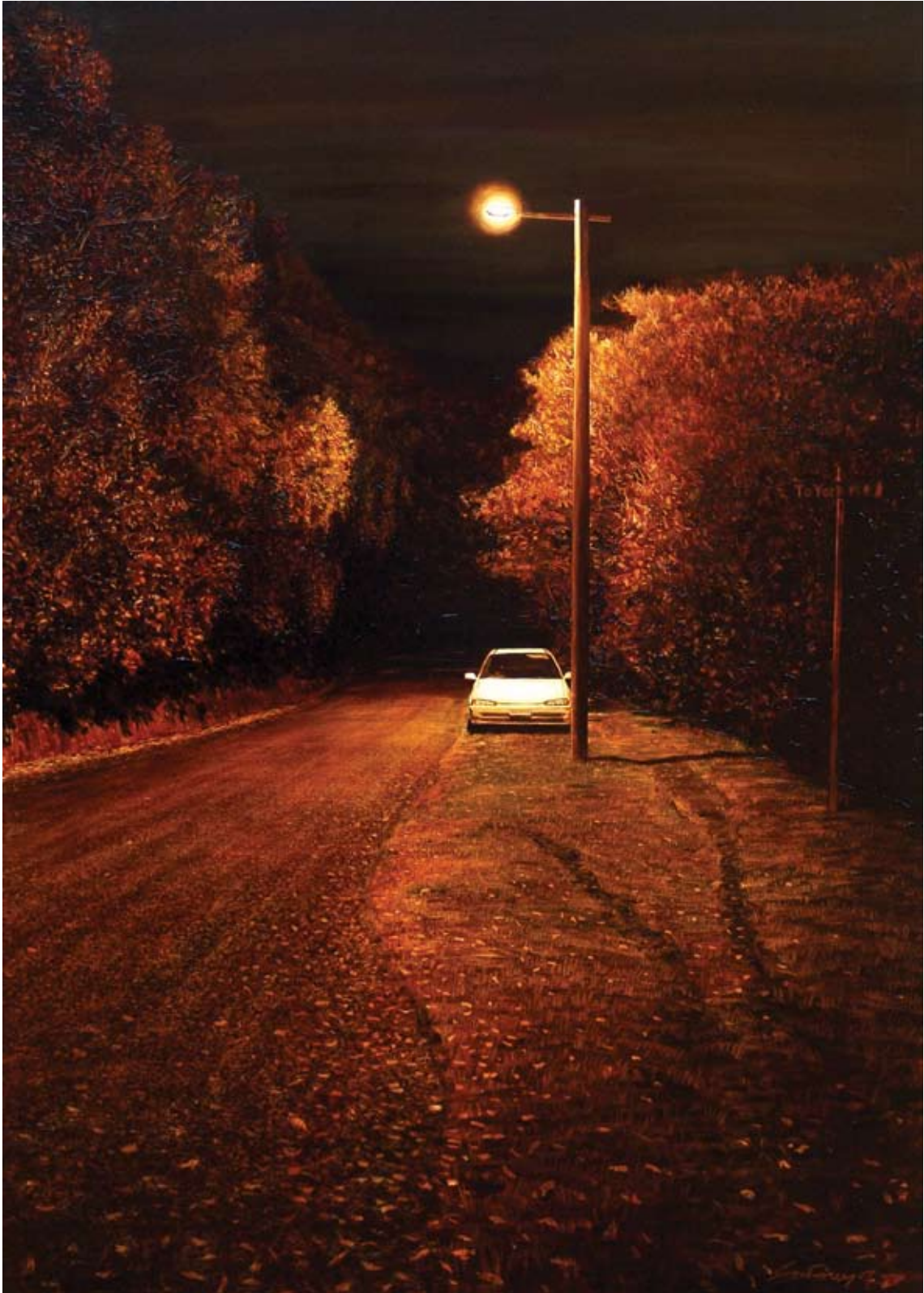
Foley is an accomplished craftsman, at home with photographic realism, yet many of his most enjoyable paintings for me are those where the fluency with which detail merges invokes a sense of final distance, lostness, as if the painting itself is merely part of a lightless vortex of decaying memory-fragments. *Queens Drive off Duncan Street* epitomises this union of the craftman's precision and the artist's emotional expressiveness. There is movement in the picture: an impressive accumulation of brushstrokes flings light across foliage, lawn and road. Indeed, fragmented light is a marvellous, secret, hopeless joy to the ostensible viewer, who, if the mysterious boughs are any indication, may be slightly intoxicated and solipsistic.

A region of contrasts, the Green Belt is neither entirely urban reality nor uninterrupted wilderness, light nor dark, yet the exhibition itself insinuates its intractable, context-structured reality as a zone of transit and ephemerality. And perhaps this intractable 'is' is how Foley ultimately justifies his persistence with realism in the face of modern photography; the replication of features and contexts in paint draws attention to a knowing that underscores this gathering within the canvas. And this knowing, which much photography cannot convey, is what the fuss has always been all about.

ABOVE. *Braid Road*, Oil on canvas, 141x97cm

PAGE 03. *Path Down from Queens Drive*, Oil on canvas, 85x120cm





Queens Drive, Oil on canvas, 98x140cm



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1. *Track by Jubilee Park*, Oil on canvas, 50x65cm
2. *Path up to Queens Drive*, Oil on canvas, 75x87cm
3. *Path Down from Maori Road*, Oil on canvas, 45x56cm
4. *Path Down to Ross Street*, Oil on canvas, 50x65cm
5. *Path up to Queens Drive*, Oil on canvas, 75x87cm
6. *Path Down from Queens Drive*, Oil on canvas, 85x120cm
7. *To Stonelaw Terrace from Queens Drive*, Oil on canvas, 125 x 161cm
8. *Queens Drive Near Prospect Park*, Oil on canvas, 150x125cm
9. *Path up to Maori Road*, Oil on canvas, 44x55cm
10. *Queens Drive off Braid Road*, Oil on canvas, 56x45cm

SAM FOLEY

POB: Wellington, New Zealand

DATE: 31/5/1977

QUALIFICATIONS:

Tertiary level: 1995-1998, Bachelor of Fine Art,
Otago School of Art, Dunedin

Bursary level: 1993, Painting (A), Printmaking (A), Art History (B),
Graphics and Design (B), English (B)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2006- *Green Belt*, Soho Galleries, Sydney, Aus
- 2005- *The Green Belt*, Temple Gallery, Dunedin
- 2004- *The Litoral Tourist*, SoHo Galleries Sydney
- 2001- *Tracing The Remains*, Grantham Galleries, Auckland
- 2000- *New Works*, Chiaroscuro Gallery, Auckland
- 1999- *Sanctuary*, Chiaroscuro Gallery, Auckland

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2006- *Works on Paper*, The Artists Room, Dn
- 2006- *Parklane Art Awards*, Artis Gallery, Ak
- 2006- *Flax Roots*, Ashburton Art Gallery
- 2006- *Large Art*, Cleveland Living Arts Centre, Dn
- 2005- *Christmas Show*, Rosslyn Gallery, Dn
- 2005- *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dn
- 2005- *A Group Show*, Dowling St Studios, Dn
- 2005- *Large Art*, Cleveland Living Arts Centre, Dn
- 2004- *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dn
- 2004- *The Sydney Affordable Art Show*
- 2004- *The Melbourne Affordable Art Show*
- 2004- *Large Art*, Cleveland Living Arts Centre, Dn
- 2003- *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dn
- 2003- *Summer Catalogue*, Milford Galleries, Dn
- 2002- *Private Art Showing*, University College, Dn
- 2002- *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dn
- 2002- *Group Exhibition*, Gallery 33, Wanaka
- 2001- *Eight Is Enough*, Cite Gallery, Auckland
- 2001- *Miniatures Exhibition*, Grantham Galleries
- 2001- *Cite Christmas Sell Out*, Cite Gallery, Ak
- 2001- *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dunedin
- 2001- *One Year Later*, Cite Gallery, Auckland
- 2000- *Group Exhibition*, Cite Gallery, Auckland
- 2000- *Fine Art By Design*, Greenlane Event Centre, Auckland
- 1998- *Peep Show, a selected preview of fourth year painters*,
The Temple Gallery, Dn
- 1998- *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dn
- 1998- *Southland Young Contemporaries*, Invgl
- 1997- *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dn

PRIZES AND AWARDS:

- 2006- Highly commended, Park Lane Art Awards Auckland
- 2005- The Downie Stewart Peoples Choice Award,
Cleveland Art Awards, Dunedin
- 2003- Peoples Choice Award, *Cleveland Art Awards*, Dunedin
- 1998- Merit Award, Oil on Canvas, *Southland Young Contemporaries*, Invercargill
- 1994- Excellence in Painting, Excellence in Printmaking, Damlier
Club Prize for Best Overall Graphics and Design Student,
Merit in Art History – Logan Park High School, Dunedin

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- 2005- Technical Assistant, Dunedin Public Art Gallery
- 2003- Invitational Judge, Salmon Hall Art Competition
- 2001- Gallery Director, Cite Gallery, Ponsonby Rd, Auckland
- 2001- Artist in Residence, Diorama Painting,
Puzzling World, Wanaka
- 2000- Formative member of CITE Artists Collective,
Ponsonby, Auckland
- 1998- Visiting Artist, Logan Park High School, Dunedin,
New Zealand
- 1994- Art Department Technician, Logan Park
High School, Dunedin

COLLECTIONS:

- Dunedin International Airport
- Dunedin Public Hospital (loan from private collector)
- Historic Places Trust of New South Wales, Australia
- The Wallace Trust, Auckland
- Central Library, University of Otago
- University of Otago Office, Auckland
- University College, University of Otago
- Salmon Hall, University of Otago
- Knox College, University of Otago
- Private collections in NZ, Australia, and the U.S.A.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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Otago Daily Times, 13 August, p17
- 2006- "*Dunedin artist wins award for portrait*", Otago Daily
Times, 10th May, p 31
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- 2005- James Dignan, *Framed – Critics select their best*,
Otago Daily Times, 22 dec, Pg 29
- 2005- Bridie Lonie, "*Great southern land*", The Listener,
June 25th, pg 46
- 2005- Richard Dingwall, "*Shifting images stand still...*",
Otago Daily Times, 8th Dec, pg 38
- 2005- Katrina Megget, *Nocturnal facade appreciated by
public*, Otago Daily Times, Oct 26th
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- 2005- Ralph Body, *Sam Foley: The Green Belt*, The
Critic, Issue 11, 16th May, pg 47
- 2005- James Dignan, *Light touch the hallmark of Foley
and Beran*, Otago Daily Times, 5th May, pg 30
- 2005- ARTYFACTS, *Artist's Town Belt influence on
show*, Otago Daily Times, 28th May, pg 30?
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display*, Otago Daily Times, April 7th, pg 30
- 2004- James Dignan, *Wide-ranging show of southern
talent*, Otago Daily Times, Oct 1st, pg19
- 2004- *Gallery goes big, very big*, Otago Daily Times,
Feb 5th, pg 23
- 2003- Jane Smith, *Art work admired*, Otago Daily Times, Oct 22nd
- 2003- Jane Smith, *Art works drift north*, Otago Daily
Times, Oct 11th
- 2002- T.J. McNamara, *What the critics say*,
The New Zealand Herald
- 2002- Victoria Warman, *Puzzling Passion*, North and South, May
- 2001- *Best Cite in Town*, Art News, Summer Issue
- 2001- Brenda Harwood, *Cleveland works on show*,
The Star, Oct 14
- 2001- Chris Johnston, *Toilet diorama set to turn a few heads*,
The Mirror, 9 Jan
- 2001- Dave Smith, *Mural latest il-loo-sion in a Puzzling Place*,
Otago Daily Times, 3 Jan
- 1999- T.J. Macnamara, *Spot the talent*, New Zealand Herald
- 1998- Nicola Much, *Painters' works exploring meaty
issues of art theory*, Otago Daily Times, 27th Oct