



Titirangi Study IV, oil on canvas, 150 117cm

SAM FOLEY – THE TITIRANGI STUDIES – WHITESPACE – NOVEMBER 2009

Flickering sunlight strobing through the branches and leaves of the twisting trees and parallel trunks. The smell of damp wood, moss and over turned earth. Am I alone in this humid bush or is someone else watching through the leafy camouflage?

Sam Foley's paintings show a recognisable landscape, they are part of home. His paintings talk of the foliage on the edge of the city, previously focussing on the town belt of Dunedin, Foley visits the native rain forest in Titirangi, bordering the metropolis of Auckland. He makes accessible this often unvisited and unexplored area that lies minutes away from the urban environment.

Captured in time, his paintings depict the tranquil beauty of New Zealand Native bush. But there is something a little unsettling about these works- what lies beyond the trees? The next urban development, the lights of an ever-increasing modern city, a road carved into the seemingly untouched landscape, a figure peering through the branches?

A short pause while moving through the wilderness- Foley places the viewer in the painted environments. 'Titirangi Study V' draws the eye in and around the work and one feels as if they are literally standing amongst the dense scrub ready to negotiate their way through the painting, around majestic trees and twisting vines.

Within the illusionary space, light flickers and shadows seem to move. Light streams onto the treetops of 'Titirangi Study IV' describing the time of day when the shadows start to appear and morph into undecipherable shapes. These paintings glow with

the contrast of dark and light and his photo-like imagery, makes the experience very real.

But unlike photographs, the mark of the maker is ever present (maybe Foley is the uneasy feeling, looking over your shoulder?). Translucent layers of paint are married with thick opaque oil dabs, expressive brush strokes give way to tightly rendered areas. Bright, lucid colours juxtapose dull, deep, shadows. There is a push and pull of the painted surface- from the real space of paint and canvas to the illusionary space of the subject matter.

A human presence is never far away. A path carved through 'Titirangi VI' reminds us that these landscapes, seemingly untouched, are ever changing in the face of the modern world. The threat of development looms within the saturated light between the native trees.

Foley's landscapes recall the works of Gustav Klimt's beech forests, the bright and detailed landscapes of the pre-Raphaelite Millais and connections can be made to Peter Doig's paintings in which the contemporary world peeks through woodland trees.

It is easy to be enticed by Foley's urban landscapes; from the rich application of colour and paint, to the quite solitude found in the subject matter, Foley's paintings urge you to stop, take in and appreciate the environment- but always keep an eye out for what may be lurking in the undergrowth.

Eva Burns



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