

Solo Exhibitions:

2008 - On the Surface, Whitespace, Auckland
2008 - Passage of a Shadow, Temple Gallery, Dunedin
2007 - Sanctum Viridis, Whitespace, Auckland
2006 - Green Belt, SoHo Galleries, Sydney, Australia
2005 - The Green Belt, Temple Gallery, Dunedin
2004 - The Littoral Tourist, SoHo Galleries Sydney
2001 - Tracing the Remains, Grantham Galleries, Auckland
2000 - New Works, Chiaroscuro Gallery, Auckland
1999 - Sanctuary, Chiaroscuro Gallery, Auckland

Prizes and Awards:

2008 - Peoples Choice Award, Norfolk House Realist Invitational, Dunedin
2007 - Merit Award (1st equal), Parklane Art Awards, Auckland
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

Collections:

Dunedin International Airport
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

Qualifications:

1995-1998, Bachelor of Fine Art, Otago School of Art, Dunedin



On the surface 2, oil on canvas - 170 x 100cm



On the surface 6, oil on canvas - 190 x 112cm



whitespace
contemporary art

12 Crummer Rd. Ponsonby Auckland New Zealand
Phone 09 361 6331 www.whitespace.co.nz
Thu - Fri 11 - 6 pm Sat 11 - 4 pm



SAM FOLEY
ON THE SURFACE



On the surface 3, oil on canvas - 190 x 112cm

ON THE SURFACE

EXCURSIONS IN PAINT, PROJECTION AND OTHER WANDERINGS
NEW WORKS FROM SAM FOLEY

A little while ago Sam Foley made an innovation in his practice the fuller implications of which are starting to become clear. Known for his large, atmospheric studies of urban landscape, including urban parkland, his earlier oil paintings captured the pregnant stillness of sunlit glades and the quiet of the black-top at evening where roads run ominously under trees. Those images are characteristically empty. A parked car is a rarity. A street light glowing in the dusk reminds us pedestrians come this way. Yet Foley's paintings are full of their ab-

sence. We are very aware people have passed and may come again. His work has mined this aspect of visual experience but recently he took the process further. Now these latest works exemplify that and point to further developments. A large oil painting, *On the Surface 5*, shows a path in filtered light, descending under trees, disappearing in a hairpin to the right, with Foley's usual, arresting detail. But as we look we notice it glowing, almost unnaturally. Until we realise, the effect is entirely natural: that this is the familiar kineticism of real-life visual experience. It is only unfamiliar because we're standing in a gallery looking at a painting in oils. Is this a trick of the gallery lighting? Are the spotlights incandescing? Is there something here that's reflecting? But then we observe more pronounced effects: the dappling of light as

it shifts below wind-touched foliage. Our lost sense of wonder at the apparent magic of illusionism is suddenly renewed. Our pleasure in the rich variety of actual visual experience is restored. And we are still enjoying that new, familiar yet unfamiliar sensation, when a ghostly figure jogs down the path disturbing our complacency again. There's an element of irony here. The artist is playing with us, not unkindly, but acknowledging our surprise and letting us know he knows we'll twig to his game. With the jogger the magician is giving us a modest salute, perhaps only fully comprehended when the runner disappears. What has happened is that Foley has made a film which has been digitally projected onto the painting. The fit and illusion are complete. The static oil painting is animated by first the

shifting light, then the passage of the jogger. After the surprise of experiencing this combination it all seems perfectly natural. Foley's paintings have been highly suggestive of presences before and after the moment and this new device merely extends that. One supposes such a natural collage of two major visual media must have been tried before, although it's difficult to name a precedent. The marrying of the two is skilful, with the static and dynamic each retaining their distinctive pull while successfully interlayering. This is something it would be easy to do *gauchely* and Foley does it well. But the innovation also opens up a peculiarly fruitful vein of visual exploration. It was said of Monet "He was only an eye. But what an eye!" As a summary of Impressionism this compression leaves out



On the surface 8, oil on canvas - 190 x 112cm



On the surface 1, oil on canvas - 190 x 112cm

the transition from narrative – every picture tells a story – to observation, which in Monet's case was focused on light. Foley is similarly engaged with the processes of seeing and picture-making and how you render complex experience. Visual perception is conditioned by memory and imagination. We don't just see things; we remember them and have anxieties and expectations about how they will be. This makes seeing fraught. Foley re-creates that and fleshes it out with his subtle and ghostly phenomena. Some of this is observation. It represents what actually happened at the site while the artist waited with his camera. Some of it is staged, the interventions being contrived by Foley. All of it registers as completely ordinary, yet disturbing. He has used the technique to produce twilight scenes, the most obvious settings for menace. Rightly or wrongly we associate the dark with a propensity for evil. Objectively a car passing by in the dusk is more likely to accidentally hit us so our heightened awareness of danger is perhaps not misplaced in such conditions. But then there are sun filled works which are strangely troubling. Because they are light they should be benign, yet they are not, entirely. The present works are dappled: light filters through, sometimes intensely, but there are also shadows and obscuring foliage. They show us spaces with ways through, but which are also enclosed. Would anyone know if we were in trouble here? One, *On the Surface 5*, has a barrier. Does it deny a shortcut, or steer us from a hazard? *On the Surface 4* has a tree bole prominently at left, apparently stepping down on to

the path, in danger of tripping us up? And 6, which shows us another sloping path, has a stump at the left whose truncation seems disconcertingly prominent, even savage. There is grace in these scenes, and also calm, but it isn't difficult to suspect menace. That impression is heightened in the kinetic images with their sparkling and shifting light. By eliciting our sense of the actual, Foley's innovation activates our sense of danger, which for contemporary people is usually in shutdown when we're in a gallery – or at the movies. This is the phobic effect of his animation, its playing with imagination and memory. But there is also another more cerebral aspect, now subtly coming into play. Because the artist can conjure us, very deftly, into and out of different modes of apprehension - the contemplative picture-viewing sort on the one hand, and our more lively, less thoughtful, kinetic experience of life on the other - he can not only remind us of these different conditions but has given himself a rostrum from which to demonstrate as well as conjure. And here lies the possibility of exploring truly new ground: a meta-space from which our modes of seeing are as plurally visible as the windows on a laptop. What will Foley do next? Who can say. But the possibilities already exploited have resulted in images as probing of visual experience itself as they are richly alluring.