

# SAM FOLEY

ACROSS THE TRACKS



*The Maltexo Building*, oil on canvas, 140 x 90cm, 2006

## ACROSS THE TRACKS

Returning to an old subject can be a little like walking down a familiar track. Not that I'd necessarily call the area south of the train tracks an old subject, but I do remember after painting *The Maltexo Building* back in 2006, thinking there might be more paintings 'over there'. For this new series I am picking up my old painting to see where it might lead.

Train tracks have always appeared in my works, and with even more regularity in my last series *Rural Drift*, as the graffitied areas I depicted often fell beside or close to a transit route. The first in this new series goes directly to the source. I was kindly admitted to have a look around the rather extensive yards of the Hillside Road Workshops last year, before the big sheds were demolished to make way for the new build.

This is the start. What lies around the bend? On the last Friday of every month of 2023 I will be releasing a new painting, hanging it at The Artists Room that afternoon, and in the gallery for an hour or so to have a chat with any who may feel so inclined. I hope that by departing from the usual exhibition format, to engage with my audience more often, and to gain an insight into how the new works are received, one at a time.

There will also be a finissage at the end point to look back on the series. This will be fun.

**March 2023**



*Old Hillside Road Workshops*, oil on canvas, 150 x 110cm



2

The 2nd painting to drop from my latest series *Across the Tracks* is one of the more pop-art influenced paintings I have produced. The repetitive text above, clean crisp outlines against bright primary colours, and the hint of graffiti; all of which lend a pop sensibility to this otherwise industrial facade.

The red hilux brings a certain nostalgia into the frame, reminding me of a time when a ute was actually a utility vehicle, and less of the 'monster' ute so popular today, that seem to be mainly used for clogging up our inner cities, rather than anything truly useful.

My grandad was an auto mechanic. I'm not sure what actually happens in this workshop, but the open door and invitation to catch a glimpse of these interior workings has a familiarity that talks of a kiwi experience. The smell of machine oil, dusty rags and turpentine almost waft out from the garage, speaking reassuringly of another time.

**April 2023**

5 Willis St, oil on canvas, 132 x 100cm

### 3

In this 3rd installment from my current series *Across the Tracks* the focus shifts slightly back to the surrounding city.

On recent wanderings I have been struck by the way in which a view of one or more of Dunedin's more obvious landmarks would appear through the openings between the buildings. Most of the architecture leans to the industrial, built in a similar style and period with a largely uniform height. When this artificial horizon-line breaks, I found myself actually surprised by the city views that jumped through the gaps. The above painting speaks to this, with Mt. Cargill holding the backdrop and wearing the 'Blueskin Bay Blanket' it is so often shrouded by.

Another aspect of our port-side industrial area that interested me, is that despite the weathered and at times faded and cracked facades, almost all are occupied and harbouring what are clearly thriving businesses. There is possibly a general presumption that the area is run down and a little neglected, but this runs contrary to my experience after legging it around this energetic business district, leaving me feeling vaguely reassured, perhaps even optimistic.

**May 2023**



*Corner of Devon and Sturdee St, oil on canvas, 132 x 100cm*



*Devon St*, oil on canvas, 132 x 100cm

## 4

The 4th work in the series can be described as a companion piece to the previous release. It's the same building but with the facade now the central focus, and with the composition split 3 ways on the frontage, street below and sky above.

In this painting I'm playing with the pictorial elements in a more abstract way, concentrating on the repeated lines, patterns and shapes that all echo within the pictorial frame. I have always enjoyed the way painted road markings can add to a composition. The artist Jeffrey Smart, who has always been a strong influence on my urban landscapes, was an expert at implementing these seemingly banal elements to strengthen a composition. The angular cloud formation above also mirrors the sharp shadow that falls across and away.

As in the previous work, there is a hint of activity behind the crumbling facade with the semi obscured outline of a gantry crane visible. Presumably it houses a maritime related industry, given the location of our nearby harbour, backed up by the faded outline of a business name still visible, but seemingly no longer current. Not all is revealed in this deliberately obscure work.

**June 2023**

## 5

The shift from day to night. I often balance dark against light throughout a series, and with the months of winter this change took place in the work and in the direction the new collection takes.

Painting number 5 focuses on another facade. The building is far more modernist than what you would typically find in the area, and consequently brings to mind a painting by the Dutch abstract artist, Piet Mondrian. Strong dark outlines around blocks of pure colour, against what is clearly a realist subject, blur genre lines leaning this work ever nearer towards abstraction.

The reflected spiral walkway of the Cumberland St overbridge locates the work, and invites an opportunity to investigate the structure in an oblique way, allowing it to be present within the picture frame but still slightly ephemeral. I'm playing with the tension between a loosely painted reflection of a curved structure, against the contrast of hard-line architecture. The cast shadow of the handrail also hints of what happens outside the picture frame, while further locating 'we' the viewer.

**July 2023**



*Seafarers Centre, oil on canvas, 145 x 95 cm*



*Steamer Basin*, oil on canvas, 140 x 100 cm

## 6

Kō Otakou te Moana. I grew up beside our harbour in the suburb of St Leonards. In this 6th release water is front and centre, as it should be in a painting of the history-rich geographical marvel that is the Otago harbour basin. This is literally where the city meets the sea.

Whilst painting the previous work in this series, *Seafarers Centre*, I remembered how much I enjoy painting reflective surfaces, in that instance the windows of that modernist facade. This led to a desire to go further with my next work, in looking at a reflected wharf, combining this with a love of painting water. I used to do a lot more of this back when my subject was mostly land, sea and sky.

Almost half the composition is dominated by a reflection, once more set inside a hard, angular modernist frame. In the extreme distance we can see the previously painted *Seafarers Centre*, paired with the overbridge and a hint of the spiral walkway, a nod to the last painting and where it led me, which was in fact, right here.

**August 2023**



Every so often I notice my palette change over the course of an extended period, and sometimes only noticeable with the retrospective stare of a decade or so. This latest work is a prime example of a gradual shift that has taken place. It's perhaps most noticeable here, along with the other works that depict the night in this series.

The drift in hue really started to become apparent with my 2022 exhibition, *Last Light in the Garden*. Although those works were tempered with dark greens, deep blues, dusky reds, and verdant aquamarines, here in this painting all colour is ruthlessly stripped back. Whilst browns, greys and a rather jarring yellow are all present, if pressed to pick the dominant colour, for me an inky purple permeates the scene.

Sometimes the subject really is just a vehicle for an approach. In the same way that Edward Hopper simply stated "What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house", what I wanted to do was to paint an industrial street scene at night, with all of its quiet, distilled under a sharp fluorescent snare.

**September 2023**



*Fryatt St Night*, oil on canvas, 132 x 100 cm



8

*As dark falls the quiet is near absolute.*

*This street bustles through the day more than most in the area, yet here now, not so.*

*More so these streets lie quiet across the tracks, away from the busy sounds of a city centre echoing up on into the dusk.*

*Look up to behold that deeply darkening sky with the spectral flash of cloud that ghosts the edges. The off-yellow facades practically polar opposite, making that evening sky total in its descent towards night.*

*Hush... quiet your foot-fall.*

*Slumbering mechanical beasts wait behind, lying till dawn to roar diesel into the day, crying of animal and machine.*

**October 2023**

*Corner of Willis and Fish St, oil on canvas, 140 x 100 cm*

9

This open driveway serves as a compositional invitation. Please step forward and enter this painting. Although, it is night time and it looks a bit dodgy, so perhaps not...

The work is an example of a pictorial tension that my work often plays with. At what point does a well rendered painting transcend the mundane, banal or outright ugly scene or landscape it represents? The composition is well-balanced, the colours also complimentary. Once again, it's almost covertly using the realist genre as a vehicle for an idea more abstract in picture-making than painting beauty. The last reaction I'd expect to a painting like this 'I know that spot, and I love it'. However, I'd like to think it's still an arresting painting and primarily because of this underlying concern.

I have probably found the brink at which a painting does in fact become unattractive.

It may even be this one.

**November 2023**



7 Willis St, oil on canvas, 140 x 100 cm



*Untitled*, oil on canvas, 132 x 100 cm

10

Into the harbour, but the way is obstructed. The street lights barely reflected against the water with night echoing across the expanse. It's more the dark that keeps me from the water's edge, than anything physical. Stark bleeding light onto an empty gravelly grass covered lot, with the harbour's mouth yawning before me. Exit stage right down the hint of a track.

Such an odd transitory space. Who even uses that glimpsed boat ramp in the middle ground? There's a clue if you know the business that silent building houses, but otherwise it's all a bit of a mystery with the information intentionally withheld.

I am dropping the last two works together at the finissage. The work to the left deals with an absence in the space between, whereas the following work is full to bursting. Even so, the compositions are very similar.

**November 2023**

When I think of our industrial area over those tracks, this facade always jumps to mind. Most likely because the building on the left is one that I have been to more than any other in the area.

Hall Brothers Transport has long been my favourite source of recycled timber. Namely the rimu that I use from time to time, to craft furniture when I'm in need of a special fit, something bespoke. Oftentimes it is when my painting practice just gets too much. I'm simply over it, but still need a project to occupy, or an outlet for creativity. Paintings are inherently useless objects. There's nothing quite like working with wood, and the making of a more practical object. A thing of actual use like these pragmatically constructed buildings.

The sunlight falls across that aged stucco surface, coloured from last century. It is absolutely 'of' a time and place, quintessentially *Across the Tracks*.

**December 2023**





*Old Hillside Rd Workshops,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



*Corner of Devon and Sturdee St,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



*Devon St,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



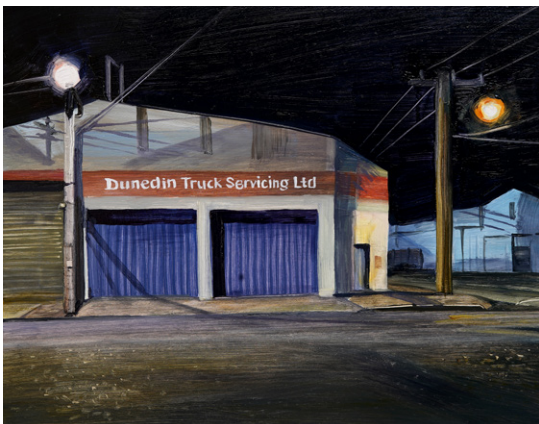
*Entrance K,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



*Thomas Burn St,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



*5 Willis St,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



*Dunedin Truck Servicing Ltd,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



*Corner of Thomas Burn and Willis St,*  
oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm



*Kitchener St, oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm*



*Fryatt St Night, oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm*



*Fish St, oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm*



*Fish St II, oil on board, 30 x 23.6cm*