

Sam Foley



Nocturne

Selected Wanderings 2004–2019

Sam Foley • **Nocturne**
Selected Wanderings 2004–2019
(with a text by Immi Paterson)

All Artworks by Sam Foley
Text by Immi Paterson

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Artist's Foreword

It is night. The path before me stretches down, and with a weight bearing on my shoulders I follow its course with staggered steps. The sienna glow of street light filtered through leaf and branch obscures, yet points the way. I follow the path. It is all I can do.

I still remember the dream, the day I chose to act it out on canvas and my practice took a darker turn. It was cathartic. At the time I was going through a serious relationship breakdown and it hurt. The dream felt very connected and the motivation was painting as exorcism. I have never looked back.

Revelation. Up until that point, and with hindsight's benefit it's obvious, I had been searching for a subject, a subject I could really sink into. Dunedin's Town Belt became the matter and formed the basis for a new way of working. Until then I had been using oil paint almost like a water-colourist, applying very thin layers, emulating a photograph with fine coats of colour over a white background. When forced to describe areas of deep shadow, through the winding roads and laneways of the streetlamp-lit green belt, texture became my companion. Impasto. Thick layers of dark paint that reflect and shimmer, perpetually changing as day gives way to night.

This was the way back to the light.

– *Sam Foley, 2019*



Pathway off Maori Rd, Dunedin
2004 (oil on canvas, 80 x 92 cm)

Nocturne
Selected Wanderings 2004-2019

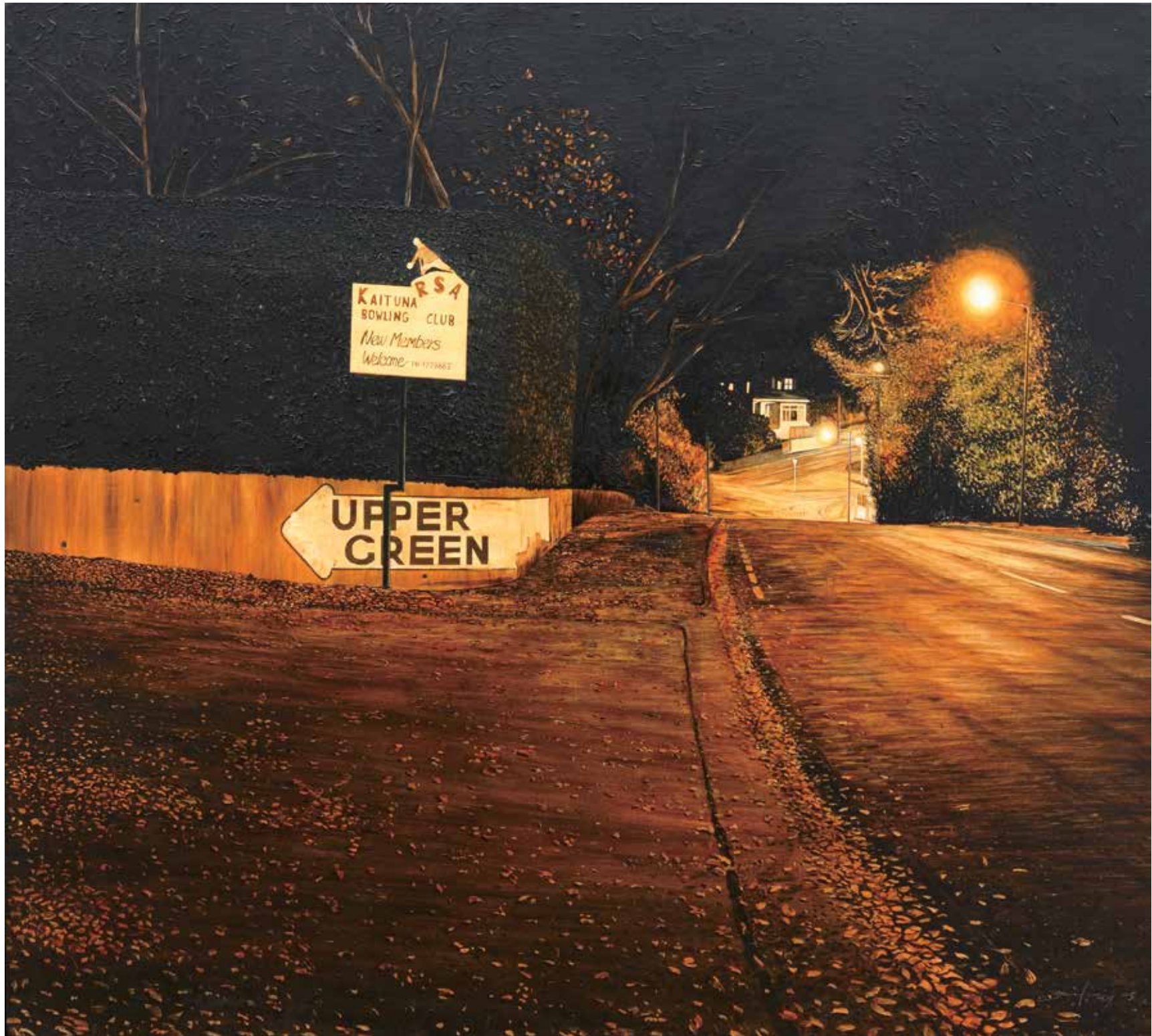
Nocturne – Selected Wanderings 2004-2019 is a survey of Sam Foley's night works, spanning sixteen years. It features eighteen paintings from public, private and artist collections. Since his first foray into the leafy monochrome of Dunedin's Town Belt he has kept coming back to the theme of 'Night'. From the alleyways of his hometown Dunedin, to a snow-swept hill in Edinburgh, to the friendly corner bar in Berlin, Foley explores darkness in all its various landscapes. These works were exhibited at the Wallace Arts Trust Pah Homestead during the summer of 2019-2020.

Maori Rd, Dunedin

Foley's mother lived in the Dunedin suburb of Mornington in the early 2000s, and once per week he made the night-time walk through the Town Belt and Jubilee Park for a home-cooked meal. He has perfectly portrayed the cold loneliness of an empty Dunedin street during winter, the streetlight casting an otherworldly glow upon a world half unseen. Impasto strokes blur treetops into the lowering sky, while an icy breeze scatters leaves about our feet as we walk. The journey forward suggests a prolonged trudge down barren roads, juxtaposed by the cheerful 'welcome' sign and arrow pointing left, perhaps to a brighter, warmer place.

Maori Rd, Dunedin was the centerpiece for Foley's 'The Green Belt' exhibition at Temple Gallery in 2005. Originally a synagogue and later a Masonic Lodge, Temple Gallery's intimate and brooding interior accentuated the sense of mystery found in the twisting roadways of Dunedin's Town Belt. Foley considered this a breakthrough show, as it was the first to receive critical attention. He even received a compliment from Ralph Hotere, no small gift of inspiration for the young and earnest artist.

Maori Rd, Dunedin
2004 (oil on canvas, 140 x 125 cm)



Old Garrison Hall, Dowling Street, Dunedin

Over the years, Foley has captured a number of iconic Dunedin buildings in his art, including the University Registry Building, First Church, Dundas Street Dairy and Modaks Café. This ornate archway can be found only a few doors down from his studio on Dowling Street, where he has lived and worked since 2002.

Having recently taken the leap into nightscapes, Foley became increasingly fascinated with the study of chiaroscuro. Reminiscent of Grahame Sydney's night works, the apposition of light and shade plays a crucial role in Foley's compositions. Not only does it direct the viewer where to look, but by picking out intricacies from among the shadows, it forces us to look more deeply at details we might otherwise pass by. In reality, one must look upwards to view the sculpted royal arms of the Old Garrison Hall facade, so when contemplating the painting on the wall directly ahead, a bizarre change of perspective occurs.

This painting won the Downie Stewart People's Choice Award, at Dunedin's 2005 Cleveland Art Awards.

Old Garrison Hall, Dowling Street, Dunedin
2005 (oil on canvas, 160 x 120 cm)



Town Belt Study 20, Dunedin

Foley likes to take us on a journey: down forest paths, up city streets, through alleyways, across intersections. There is often a feeling of inevitability; one cannot diverge from the road laid for them. Until this point Foley had exclusively worked with oil, resistant to other mediums, however he soon found the quicker turnaround between acrylic paintings liberating. The smaller scale painting draws you in close for an intimate viewing.

Although his childhood home was in the West Harbour suburb of St Leonards, Foley spent most of his formative years living in and around Dunedin's Town Belt. As a young adult his main mode of transport into town was skateboarding down its lanes. Covering a total of 490 acres, the Town Belt is a living, breathing part of Dunedin. Foley has produced over fifty paintings set within its trees. The daytime depictions conjure up feelings of freedom and tranquility, birdsong, sunlight through dappled leaves and a thousand hues of green. At night the dark paths take on a silent, watchful feel.

Town Belt Study 20, Dunedin
2006 (acrylic on paper, 16.5 x 21.5 cm)



"Town Belt Study # 20" Jan Feary 06

John Swan and Co., Bath St, Dunedin

Edward Hopper's influence on Foley's work is evident in this painting, the urban scene momentarily frozen in time, echoed compositionally by flat storefront facades. This piece was commissioned, yet it fits perfectly with the cityscape themes he was exploring at the time. The image is devoid of people, provoking an unsettling sensation of spying on a sleeping world. The minute photorealist details transform what would otherwise be mundane into something exquisite.

The street itself used to be home to one of Dunedin's legendary night clubs (also named Bath Street). One can easily picture the weary, late night voyeur pausing for a moment to peer through darkened windows, before stumbling onwards into the night.

John Swan and Co., Bath St, Dunedin
2007 (oil on canvas, 98 x 74 cm)



Intersection, Canongate and Serpentine Ave, Dunedin

This artwork is significant, as it was Foley's first multimedia "moving image painting", in which he overlays digital projection onto the painted landscape. He had recently arrived home from a highly influential art pilgrimage, visiting over thirty major art museums across the UK, North and Western Europe and Scandinavia. Moving image was an accepted medium at all the top galleries, and he wondered how he could incorporate it into his own work. It was while travelling on a bus from Bilbao to the French border that he had a eureka moment.

The bright orange tones in this sleepy suburban scene evokes the ambience of a movie set, and in fact art critic James Dignan coined the phrase "Cinéma Illustré" when referencing Foley's art. The movie comes to life with the projected image of traffic passing through the intersection, and a spectral figure exiting the house and walking down the street.

The painting won the People's Choice Award at The Wallace Art Awards in 2009. The work caught the attention of the awards sponsor, Sir James Wallace, who promptly saw reason enough to add it to the Wallace Arts Trust.

Intersection, Canongate and Serpentine Ave, Dunedin
2008 (oil on canvas, 160 x 112 cm)



Alleyway up from Pequeno, Under the Savoy, Dunedin

In 2002 a small lounge bar called Pequeno opened in Dunedin and quickly became Foley's local. Although the bar isn't depicted in either this painting or its companion piece (*Alleyway down to Pequeno*), the alleyway has become synonymous with it. Foley's fascination with illuminating the uglier parts of cityscapes can be traced to this period of his work; back exteriors of buildings, dim alleyways and graffiti are rendered meaningful under his careful representation. The light bouncing from the smooth brick is so convincing that if we stop to listen we can hear footsteps echoing through the tunnel.

Alleyway up from Pequeno, Under the Savoy, Dunedin
2009 (oil on canvas, 150 x 125 cm)



Calton Hill Study V, Edinburgh

Bleak. Desolate. Chiaroscuro comes into effect prominently in this piece, with sections of the landscape missing entirely. The streetlamp's halo, hazy in the icy air, beckons to the monument behind, yet in this deserted world these human objects have surely been forsaken.

Foley said of this painting: "I was in Edinburgh for Hogmanay, the Scottish Festival celebrating the New Year. After spending a long night out with friends, I found myself on New Year's Day wandering the snow swept streets of Edinburgh alone. Not feeling too debauched, I decided to climb Calton Hill, where my tourist map said was a good view and an architectural folly - an unfinished replica of the Parthenon in Athens, also known as 'Edinburgh's Shame'. This sounded about the right place to visit in my frame of mind. Atmospherically, it was the perfect subject for a small series of paintings."

Calton Hill Study V, Edinburgh
2010 (acrylic on paper, 20.5 x 27.5 cm)



"Calton Hill, Edinburgh Study IV" E. Atkinson 1910

Tiergarten VIII, Berlin

Berlin is Foley's second home; since he first visited in 2007 he has kept coming back. In 2011 he had a studio just off Ku'damm on Goethestraße, in Charlottenburg, and was attending the Goethe-Institut with a German language scholarship. A friend from Dunedin was living at Prenzlauer Berg at the time, and he would cycle through the Tiergarten to meet him.

The large urban park is a major thoroughfare during the day, teeming with cyclists and picnickers, teenagers and tourists. Night reshapes familiar scenery into a domain of secrets and mystery. In this work we are drawn to the solitary lantern like a lost wanderer to a will-o-the-wisp. There's an element of the fairytale to the glade, and like children we peer in.

Tiergarten VIII, Berlin
2011 (acrylic on paper, 25.5 x 20 cm)



"Trevorgarten Study VIII"

Sanford H.

Tilting at the Heart of the Beast, Berlin

Foley was back in Berlin, forgoing another Dunedin winter. He completed most of this painting in the mezzanine of his good friend Pete Wheeler's studio in Uferhallen, Wedding, a now well-known studio complex along the Panke Canal. The still image of the Rosenthaler Platz intersection has the eerie appearance of a town suddenly abandoned, but normally it hums with life and movement. Foley considers it to be something of the heart of the city, away from the touristy Ku'damm.

The title hints at the quixotic term 'tilting at windmills.' Foley says of the name: "With Berlin being the perceived epicentre of arts then, and possibly still now, it referred to the almost clichéd pilgrimage that artists all over the world were making there, myself included. There is something naively romantic and idealistic about going to Berlin in search of art and culture, but there could also be a distinct misplaced heroic or a vainglorious goal."

This is another moving image painting, and was Foley's most ambitious to date. Translucent trams, cars, cyclists and pedestrians drift across the landscape like ghosts, pulsing in and out with the rhythm of a heartbeat. It won the Kaipara Wallace Arts Trust Award in 2013.

Tilting at the Heart of the Beast, Berlin
2012 (oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm)



Port Chalmers

Foley grew up on the harbour, not far from the historic township of Port Chalmers. His family visited it regularly, buying chips for a dollar, walking Back Beach, passing through on their day trips to Aramoana, Long Beach, Purakaunui or Mapoutahi. The former BNZ building, which sits on the left side of the intersection, used to be home to Ralph Hotere's studio. As a young teenager Foley heard that there was "some artist" living there, and he and his friend, who lived next door, would peer through the windows, hoping for a glimpse of the mysterious rituals occurring inside.

This work triggered a whole collection of paintings inspired by the Otago Harbour. Five streets converging; a choice of journeys. The vivid black sky dominates half the composition, creating the impression of expansive, world-like proportions. We could step right in and we'd be there. In the moving image that overlays the artwork, a series of logging trucks roll down the hill, rumbling past and into the port behind.

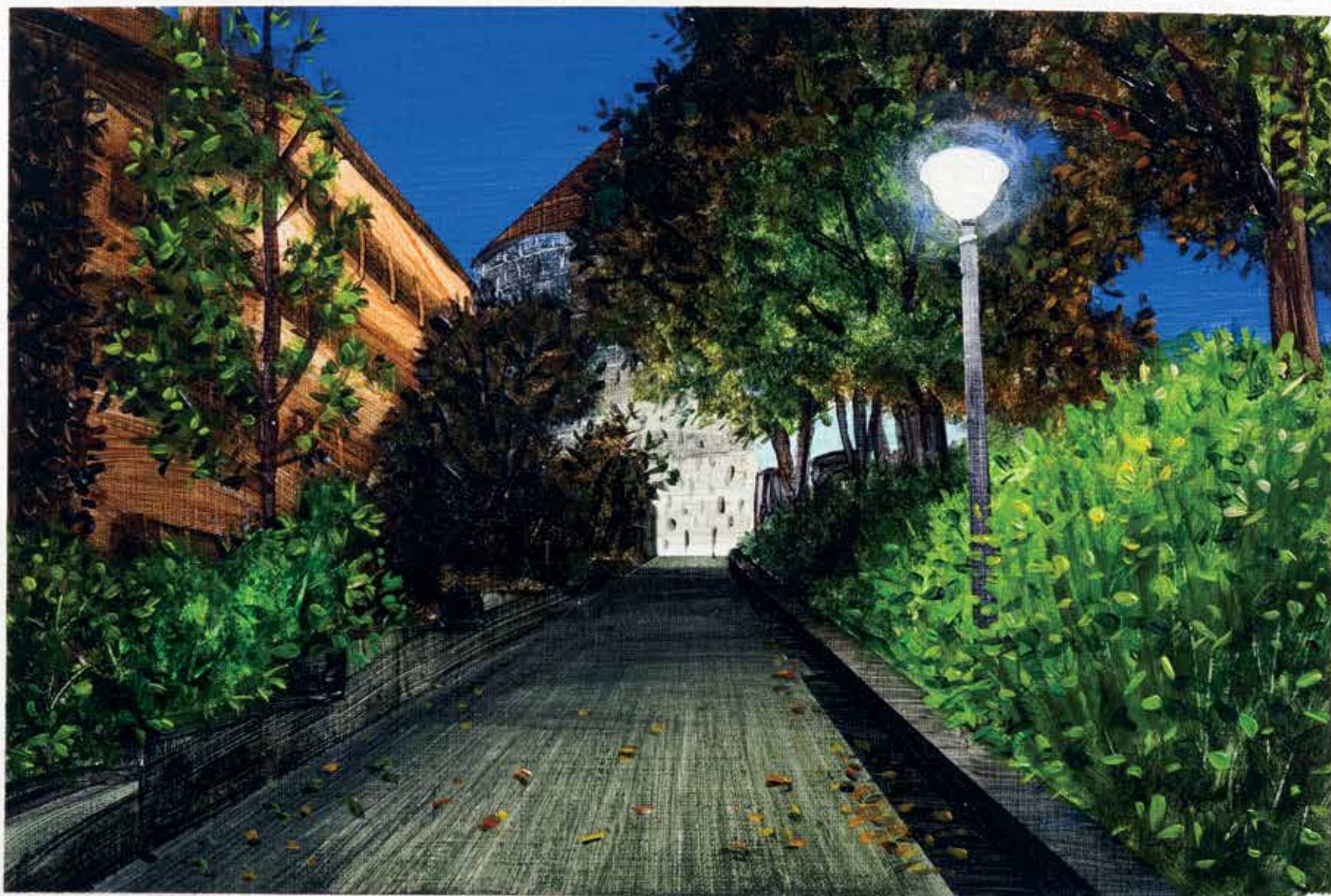
Port Chalmers
2013 (oil on canvas, 200 x 118 cm)



Bastionweg, Solothurn, Switzerland

The striking cross through the centre of the painting draws our eye towards the Riedholz Tower. Solothurn's Old Town, a beautifully preserved baroque citadel, still retains the medieval bastions of the town defenses. Foley spent five months there in 2014, attending a residency programme at the cultural centre Altes Spital, awarded to him by the Kaipara Wallace Arts Trust. During that time he painted a dozen small acrylics and three larger moving image works. The following year he was kindly invited back by the owner of the gallery that had hosted his end of residency exhibition, and he lived and continued working in Solothurn for another four months. The gallery backed onto Bastionweg, the street depicted in this piece.

Bastionweg, Solothurn, Switzerland
2014 (acrylic on paper, 29 x 19 cm)



"Battleground, Solothurn"

Switzerland 19

Motel

Foley was travelling around the Queenstown Lakes District searching for material when he drove past this Arrowtown motel. The ornamental fairy lights, the sandwich board, the bright and shining signs are all designed to invite the tired traveller, yet somehow we don't want to go inside. Reminiscent of an Edward Kienholz assemblage, innocent objects take on macabre qualities when in proximity. Something quiet and ominous lurks within the motel, a timeless threat evident by the heavy, antique farm implements parked on either side of the gate's open mouth.

Motel
2015 (oil on canvas, 150 x 102 cm)



Alt Berliner Eck

Unlike most of Foley's works, which induce the lonely sense of being the only person awake in the world, it feels like the subject of this painting has only stepped out of frame momentarily and will be right back. There is a homely familiarity effectuated by the warm amber glow, the bag lazily left hanging from the bicycle's handlebars, and the 'open' sign in the centre.

At the time he painted this, Foley was subletting a studio in Uferhallen. He says of his time then: "Living less as a tourist and in a quieter neighbourhood, I found myself paying more attention to the local Kneipen or pubs. Cosy and kitsch, these bastions of the blue collar speak of a more laid-back vibe. I soon found it was a better environment to test my fledgling Deutsch on the natives as their lack of English was of a comparable level. Cultural exchange easier after a few beers, this trip was a study of the real Berlin."

In the moving image component of this work, Foley's partner Emily shares a conversation with Pete Wheeler. Usually the people captured on the street in similar works are complete unknowns to Foley, which is why this painting is particularly special to him, and hangs pride of place within his own living room.

Alt Berliner Eck
2016 (oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm)



Akerselva Night Study I, Oslo

In 2012 Foley was commissioned by the Norwegian Government to capture the essence of their regional parks within the works of large scale paintings, as part of a tourism initiative. For four years he toured a large body of work through various locations around Norway, and in 2016 finally brought the collection to the capital city. Foley had naturally spent a great deal of time in Oslo over these years, and this study was born from his desire to record a response to the city, not found in the regionally-based paintings. Having shortly arrived back, he laced up his running shoes and headed off towards the Akerselva, or Aker River.

Foley says of the piece: “Living across from Sofienberg Park, in Grünerløkka, the Aker was not far away. It is a fast-flowing river that falls down from the large reservoir lake above Oslo, slightly unusual for a capital city, I would think. This body of water captured my interest, much the same as the other waterways of Norway had inspired the subject of the earlier large-scale oils. The way the city met the water, the street light and colour echoing on a dusk blue mirror like a rorschach inkblot test.”

Akerselva Night Study I, Oslo
2016 (acrylic on paper, 29 x 19 cm)



Strip Club

This work stands out in Foley's wider collection as an anomaly: it is an interior, and the scene is entirely human, without even the sky as relief. However, thematically it fits with his consistent attempt to render the unattractive into something beautiful, thereby transcending the subject. As he put it, "there's not much worse than an empty Dunedin strip club as a subject". This results in a tension for the viewer as they reconcile the inherent beauty of the piece — the harmony of reds and blues — with the repellent nature of what the piece portrays. As a moving image painting, the lazy spiral of the pole dancer is mesmerising. The scene could be taken straight from a David Lynch film. It was awarded Finalist of the 2017 Wallace Arts Awards.

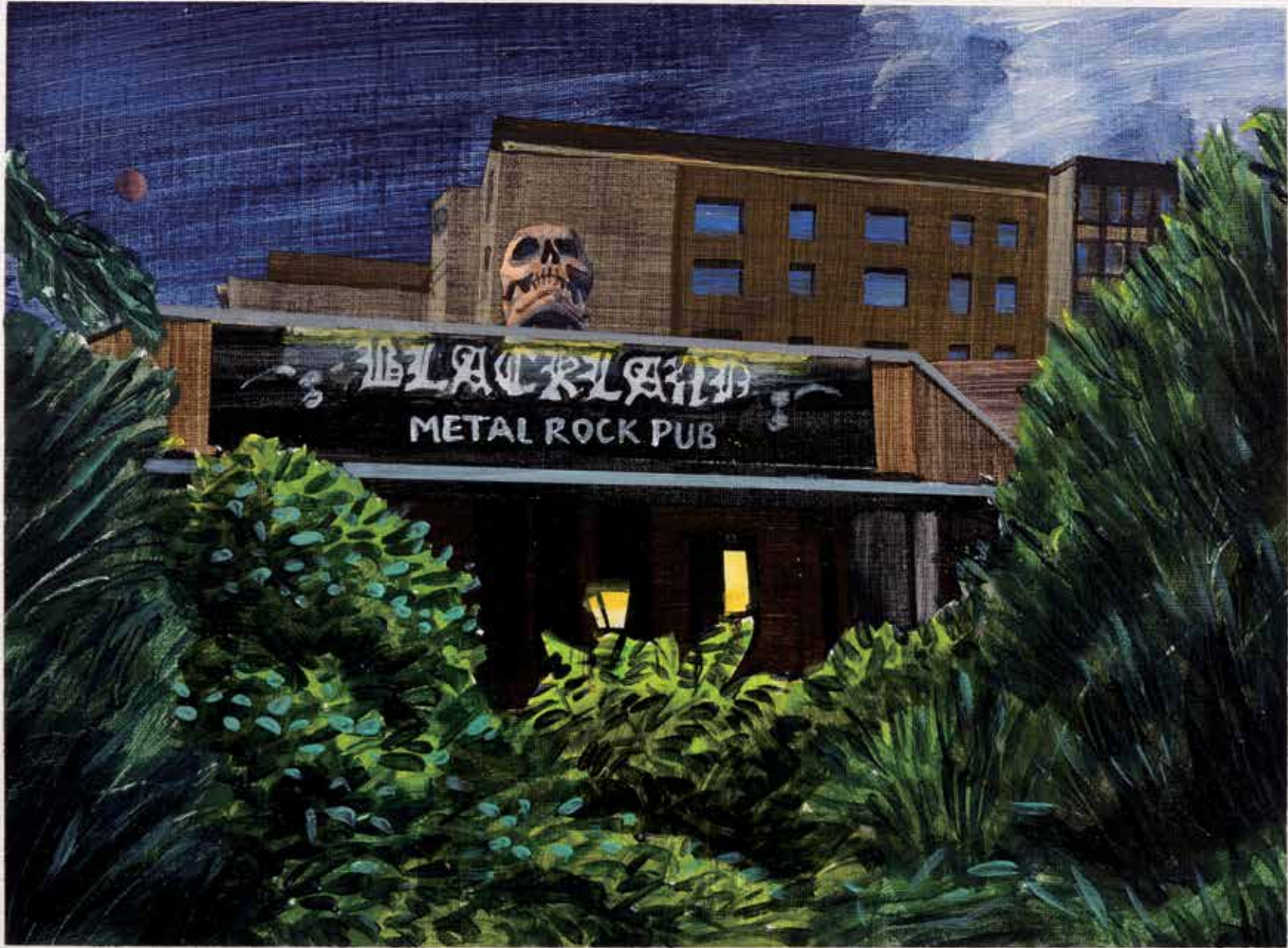
Strip Club
2017 (oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm)



Berlin Rock Bar

Foley cites Pete Wheeler as the main influence for this work, as Wheeler's compositions often include skulls, eagles and other iconography associated with rock music floating upon large, abstracted colour fields. They frequented a few of the local rock bars during this period, and this one was dedicated to the heavy metal theme to the point of parody. This painting has a two-dimensional quality, analogous to a montage of buildings and shrubbery cut from card. There was a full lunar eclipse around the time Foley painted it, recorded in the blood moon hanging in the left of the sky.

Berlin Rock Bar
2018 (acrylic on paper, 25 x 18.5 cm)



"Blackland, Dinosaur Area Study II" - September 13

From Grafton Bridge, Auckland

After graduating from Dunedin Art School in 1998, Foley moved to Auckland, where for the first year his father kindly gave him board and use of his garage as a studio. The following year Foley, Angus Collis and a number of other artists moved into and set up studios and a gallery in the back of the old Allen Calendars factory, a large warehouse space on the corner of Ponsonby and Richmond Rd. Even now, a favourite walk of his is down K' Road, across the Grafton Bridge, and into the Auckland Domain.

The view from Grafton Bridge down Grafton Gully is iconic, the North-Western Motorway dissecting the Symonds Street Cemetery from the lush vegetation on the opposing verge. There's a tension between the photorealism portrayed in the image and the improbable lack of cars on the motorways. It elicits an uncanny suspense, as if we stare upon a post-apocalyptic world.

This work epitomises Foley's motif of merging nature with human construction. Trees and motorways vie for dominance, the myriad of urban passageways feeding into a heart of green. As Foley says of this painting, "it could be nowhere else other than Auckland".

From Grafton Bridge, Auckland
2019 (oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm)



From Hopetoun St Bridge, Auckland

This painting is a companion piece to *From Grafton Bridge*, featuring the other end of Auckland's famous 'Spaghetti Junction', where three levels of motorways cross in several directions. While living in Ponsonby in early 2000, Foley traversed the arching Hopetoun Street Bridge on his way downtown. He wanted to capture the view as it is now, since it has already changed so much. Apartments have sprung up. Old roads have made way for the new 'Light Path', the pink cycle lane built upon an unused section of motorway. At night the lane is lit by different hues of light that ebb and wane, the changeability of Auckland's landscape also depicted by the omnipresent cranes. If Foley's work among this collection can be summarised as an exploration of pathways, this final work promises that the journey will continue.

From Hopetoun St Bridge, Auckland
2019 (oil on canvas, 180 x 130 cm)



About the Artist

Sam Foley was born in Wellington in 1977. He grew up in Dunedin, where he attended Otago School of Art, receiving a Bachelor of Fine Art in 1998. Over the last decade, he has split his practice between Dunedin, Berlin, Switzerland and Norway. In 2013 he was the recipient of the Kaipara Foundation Wallace Arts Trust Award, which included a four month residency at the cultural centre Altes Spital in Solothurn, Switzerland.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2019 – *Nocturne*, The Wallace Arts Centre, Auckland, NZ
- 2019 – *Graff*, The Artist's Room and Dowling St Studios, Dunedin, NZ
- 2017 – *Dowling St*, The Artist's Room and Dowling St Studios, Dunedin, NZ
- 2016 – *LAKE*, Artbay Gallery, Queenstown, NZ
- 2016 – *Rennande Vatn* [Running Water], S9 Galeri, Oslo, Norway
- 2015 – *Moving Image Paintings*, Pataka Art + Museum, Porirua, NZ
- 2015 – *Something About the Water*, Galerie 9, Solothurn, Switzerland
- 2014 – *Harbour*, The Artist's Room and Dowling St Studios, Dunedin, NZ
- 2014 – *Kontraste*, Galerie 9, Solothurn, Switzerland
- 2012/14 – *Rennande Vatn*, Tours various locations around Norway
- 2013 – *Into the Deep*, Whitespace, Auckland
- 2012 – *Running Water*, Dowling St Studios, Dunedin
- 2011 – *Tiefschwarz*, The Artist's Room, Dunedin
- 2011 – *Tiefschwarz*, Atelier Bar-Am, 2 Goethestr, Berlin, Germany
- 2011 – *Domain*, Whitespace, Auckland
- 2010 – *Otira*, Centre of Contemporary Art, Christchurch
- 2010 – *Detour*, Ashburton Art Gallery
- 2009 – *Get Real*, Whitespace, Auckland
- 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

2013 – The Kaipara Wallace Arts Trust Award

2010 – People’s Choice Award, The Wallace Art Awards, Auckland

2009 – People’s Choice Award, The Wallace Art Awards, Auckland

2009 – People’s Choice Award, Norfolk House Realist Invitational,
Dunedin

2008 – People’s 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 People’s Choice Award, Cleveland Art
Awards, Dunedin

2003 – People’s Choice Award, Cleveland Art Awards, Dunedin

1998 – Merit Award, Oil on Canvas, Southland Young
Contemporaries, Invercargill

Acknowledgements

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As always, love to my family and friends for endless encouragement, assistance, and moral support.

