

Fred Fowler

This is water

4 – 24 August 2020

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes “What the hell is water?”

David Foster Wallace

The above story, taken from David Foster Wallace’s 2005 commencement speech at Kenyon College, captivated my imagination and has become a mantra that I try to live my life by. It’s a constant reminder that the most obvious and important realities are often overlooked because we don’t have the perspective to see them for what they are.

After the bushfires last summer when it felt like the whole country was on fire, it made me think about what is really at stake as we experience a climate crisis. The waterholes and caves that animals need to seek refuge. The specific habitats and ecosystems that threatened species need in order to survive. The fact that in some places if the temperature of the ocean rises by a seemingly insignificant degree, that we stand to lose a species of coral, giant forests of kelp, or permanently disrupt the breeding patterns of marine animals. Life that was thriving only a few years earlier could be gone forever.

I think paintings are an art form that can be visually seductive but also laden with potent symbology, and once you’re drawn in you can find deeper meaning beyond the allure of the surface. Hopefully by looking at my paintings, you feel like you’re gazing out of a window somewhere remote, unfamiliar and beautiful. Where the more you look, the more you start to notice interactions between flora and fauna, nature and the man made, and the impact that our way of life is having on the environment.

Sometimes when I’m bushwalking or at a remote beach, I stop for a moment to look around and can’t see any people, cars, houses or man made structures. There is an otherworldly sensation that I would be seeing the same thing if this were 500 or even 5000 years ago. The feeling of time standing still and being surrounded by nature is truly magical. We are more than lucky to live in such a vast and wondrous country. This work is a celebration of what we have and what we need to protect. This is water.

Fred Fowler, 2020

ABOUT THE ARTIST

This is water is Fred Fowler’s second solo exhibition at Jan Murphy Gallery. Fowler graduated with a Masters of Contemporary Art from the Victorian College of Arts in 2012 and has since been awarded the TWIG regional art residency in Swan Hill, Victoria (2014), the Sculptors in Schools Residency for the Lorne Sculpture Biennale, Victoria (2014), and the Artist in Residence in Clayarch Gimhae Museum, South Korea (2015). He has created murals and public artworks in Sydney, Barcelona, Berlin, Paris, Lyon and New York. His work has been acquired by the National Gallery of Australia, Artbank and private collections in Australia and overseas.