

Fred Fowler

The Island

27 August – 14 September 2024

Fred Fowler's paintings build up a symbolic order through a type of painterly wordplay. His paintings find delight in disguise: doors, vessels, creatures, and nature recur throughout these works, evoking a sense of place, concealment, and transformation. These tropes suggest unseen truths, carried into being by illusory landscapes – but the symbols are all we see.

Fowler's new work builds up imagery in layered constructions that repeatedly reorient the picture plane, resulting in seemingly floating compositions. Painted onto hard boards, on which the artist builds and conceals layers of colour and symbols, the works become compelling tableaux, revealing new layers of meaning behind every surface.

The notion of the myth is integral to Fowler's play of symbols. The exhibition takes its title from the way locals refer to Stradbroke Island (Minjerrabah) as simply 'the island'. But in this case the artist is also using the mythology of 'the island' in a broader sense as well. Entombed foreign vessels, buried treasure, strange creatures and unique ecosystems are examples of the jumping off points for the iconography in these paintings.

Fowler's works are painted paradoxes, deceptively spirited compositions that blend embellishments toward a contemplation of meaning. Setting up the tension between the figurative and abstraction, Fowler reframes decoration as a site of philosophical inquiry. His symbols are, on the one hand, sites of false flags and diversion; and on the other, they are sites of creation, truth and depictions of a human story. Like an island, Fowler's work makes visual the rhythmic dissonance of life's primal forces.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Fred Fowler graduated with a Masters of Contemporary Art from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2012. In recent years he has been awarded the TWIG regional art residency in Swan Hill, Victoria, the Sculptors in Schools Residency for the Lorne Sculpture Biennale, Victoria and the Artist in Residence in Clayarch Gimhae Museum, South Korea. 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, City of Melbourne and private collections in Australia and overseas.