

SPOOK

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THE DEAD WEATHER
ANTON NEWCOMBE
MARC FREEMAN
TOKYO VICE
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ART
MARC FREEMAN

STUFF ON STUFF

When asked to describe his work, Melbourne artist Marc Freeman explains he just puts **"real stuff on other real stuff, to make imaginary stuff, which is symbolic of other stuff."** We reckon he's a bit smarter than he lets on.

Marc Freeman is a painters' painter. He makes paintings that are about painting; about the actual stuff of paint, the history of painting and the power of the painted mark.

Freeman's paintings consider current contemporary art trends in relation to the "seriousness" of abstract expressionism and its proposition that instead of being a clever way of hiding subject matter within symbols, abstraction could be an end in itself.

Freeman came to painting with certainty and quiet ambition. He wanted to know why painting matters, if at all. After his honours degree in fine art at Melbourne's RMIT and a residency at New York's School of Visual Art, Marc did what many of his peers didn't do—he kept painting, remaining pretty faithful to his investigation into abstraction.

Abstract expressionism rose out of the rubble of WWII. As Robert Hughes wrote in *The Shock of the New*, "Human dignity and spiritual aspirations had been appallingly injured between 1939 and 1945, and an art that set out to transcend the physical might

be one way to heal the trauma." Although the styles and intentions of the abstract expressionists were wildly varied and resist the classification bestowed upon them, artists like Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman certainly had a tendency towards the metaphysical and removing almost all reference to form or symbols so that their paintings became—in their eyes at least—expressions of some kind of elemental power.

Freeman likes the idea that the abstract expressionists represent a time when people still believed in the spiritual power of art and held hope for its ability to somehow benefit mankind. He laments the educated cynicism that crept into art and is still pervasive today. But he's not lost in the intellectual nihilism and notions of artistic genius that plagued some abstract expressionists and, in his words, "largely became (their) own undoing." He does, however, share the movement's preoccupation with the physical structure of the canvas, the painted mark (or sometimes the elimination of it) and an egalitarian treatment of the picture plane.

There is a playful evidence of process in Freeman's work. He makes informed formalist decisions: surprising juxtapositions of colour and reflective surfaces next to areas of raw unpainted linen. He gets a kick out of seeing a certain blue resonate with a certain grey, or the effect a ragged white outline has on the integrity of a floating amoebic shape.

With upcoming shows at Platform (opening 4 June) and Nellie Castan Gallery (opening 10 June), Marc Freeman is busy. But he's pretty relaxed. It's not a bad job. "A lecturer at art school once told me that at least by being a painter he wasn't doing anything bad to the world. I liked that. I just have the desire to make these paintings, if something comes from that, that's pretty good."

Nellie Castan Gallery
Level 1, 12 River Street, South Yarra

Platform Artists Group Inc
Degraes Street Subway, Melbourne