

Hot Bargain and Milk, William Breen

by Inside Out



Can you tell us about some of the places that inspired your 'Hot Bargain & Milk' exhibition (particularly the store that the show is named after)?

A few years ago, we used to live around the corner from **Hot Bargain & Milk**. It was basically our local milk bar, which used to also sell lots of eclectic items. I always liked the name, because it sounds quirky and suburban – which I find an interesting mix. I am attracted to the landscape, the buildings and facades themselves and the ambience they create, rather than the people who run or frequent them. The buildings are all familiar to me as I have intuitively established a connection to them over the years. I feel these buildings are part of my visual language. I also feel that over time, nostalgia has crept in and established itself in the work.



Your paintings focus on the suburbs of Fitzroy, Collingwood and Northcote, an area you've worked in for the last 20 years. Can you give us an idea of what this part of Melbourne was like two decades ago compared to now?

Working this area for 20 years – that makes me feel old!! But, yes, it has changed. Slowly, but surely. It is a lot more gentrified these days. It is getting harder to find paintings among all the modern development. When I was at art school in the early '90s, every second shop had the potential for a painting. I have always been attracted to the shops that seem like they are in transition: not quite sure if they are coming or going; shops where you can see the history showing through in layers; buildings that have had many lives. These kind of places – filled with character and history – are becoming fewer and fewer.



In the paintings I've seen for the show, I really like the way you depict signage. Are you often drawn to shop fronts and business signs?

I do like signs, their graphic nature, and the way they can evoke an era. I also enjoy the problem-solving involved, because trying to assimilate text into a painting can be really quite challenging.



What do you have coming up next?

In 12 months from now, I will have a larger exhibition at Flinders Lane Gallery, which will combine my urban paintings with my rural landscape paintings – I think they will compliment each other nicely.


Hot Bargain & Milk runs from November 2-November 19 at **Flinders Lane Gallery**, 137 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

Lee Tran, deputy chief sub-editor

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