



JUAN
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dianne tanzer gallery + projects

Juan Ford has always sought to pioneer a path through and beyond various predicaments of painted representation, in a constantly evolving series of projects. For the past 6 years he has focused on inverting paradigms of the Australian landscape tradition, while genuinely seeking engagement with it. In what began as an experiment, the conventions of landscape, botanical illustration and figuration were seized, upended and collided energetically, producing new and unexpected results.

Thus from the ashes of these stale and defiantly outdated traditions of painterly realism, new possibilities arise. In this series, native Australian flora have been collected and bound crudely to form rudimentary figures, confusing the distinctions between portraits, landscapes and botanical representations. From these rearrangements of genre, painstakingly rendered paintings are created.

Ford challenges the viewer to refuse the artificial distinction we create between homo sapiens, and the natural environment. We may have complex, strained and challenging interaction with nature, but in these works he implores us to recognize once and for all that we cannot exist in its absence. Unfortunately for us, the inverse does not apply; we are products of natural processes, but life can easily go on without us.

In *The Reorientalist*, like his flora subjects, the artist himself is exposed to the same assault of emergency tape, clear wrapping and paint. Standing strong, grasping staff-like branches as if to communicate his allegiance to nature's side of the war. Bound in industrial detritus, this figure wears a tribal outfit that might be conjured from a Mad Max film, like a lone-warrior of both painting and the wild - and a caricature of himself as the artist. The title itself suggests a challenge to the colonialist tendencies of the painting traditions he seeks to subvert, redirecting their Orientalist imperatives into the wilderness; an exorcism performed by an Absurdist shaman.

For Ford, the process of painting is taxing, sometimes torturous and underpinned by an introspective searching. While the ideas generated from these works are manifold and complex, they ultimately draw inspiration from the folly of our attempts to destroy or control nature. These paintings address notions of creative imitation, of the interplay between the controlled environment and the real. Ford accepts the parameters of painting and the absurdity of attempting to re-create the natural world, yet he believes that this is the ideal platform for him to generate his version of an imperfect environment. Ford's desire to form contemporary art from very unfashionable ingredients is somewhat subversive regarding the traditional canon of painting - a dialogue that is crucial to this generation of painters.

Juan Ford Biography

Juan Ford studied at RMIT University, Melbourne, graduating in 2001 with a Masters of Fine Art. Since then he has exhibited widely in Australia and internationally. In 2011 Ford undertook a residency at the OMI International Arts Centre, New York and in 2012 was commissioned to create work for Hotel de Immigrantes, a project in Manifesto 9, the European Biennale Belgium. Ford's work has featured in many exhibitions, including at the Gallery of Modern Art Brisbane, National Portrait Gallery Canberra, The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The Australian Embassy Washington, The National Gallery of Victoria, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Juan Ford, *The Reorientalist*, 2013, oil on linen, 91x71cm

Ford has received numerous awards, including People's Choice for the 2010 Basil Sellers Art Prize, the 2006 Fisher's Ghost Art Award and the 2004 Fletcher Jones Contemporary Art Prize. In 2012 Ford was a finalist in the Wynne Prize and Archibald Portrait Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

His work appears in significant collections, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Gippsland Art Gallery and the Victorian Parliamentary Collection. His work features in private collections worldwide.



Australian Government



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