



For immediate release

Michael Morley
Faint Harbours
16 March – 16 April 2022
Sumer, Tauranga

Sumer is pleased to present *Faint Harbours*, recent paintings by Dunedin-based artist and musician Michael Morley. This is the artist's first solo exhibition at the gallery.

Foremost known as an experimental musician, Morley is a member of seminal noise rock band The Dead C (together with Bruce Russell and Robbie Yeats). Formed in 1987, the band has been championed by influential American musician Thurston Moore, along with many others. He also established the record labels Precious Metal and Language Recordings; and produces music under the moniker Gate, as well as other side projects.

Over these past four decades, running parallel with his musical career, Morley has maintained a studio practice as a painter. And while the importance of music to Morley is certainly apparent in his painted subject, as well as his approach to painting as a whole, he stresses that he considers his art practice as distinct and separate from that of his music.

Morley's paintings have been shown infrequently in recent years, and thus it is perhaps not surprising that his work remains somewhat lesser known. Nevertheless, with its defined style and approach, Morley's painting practice, like his music, remains one that is highly regarded by many within discerning art circles here in Aotearoa, particularly among his artist peers.

In the work of Morley we see an artist approaching painting in a manner consistent with many painters working today, both here and internationally. These are paintings where a conventional understanding that places abstraction and representation in opposition, as binaries, seems decidedly outmoded; or rather shows itself as a notion that is no longer plausible, if indeed it ever was.

Morley's paintings, despite their simple appearance, defy clear explanation. They are works which wilfully obfuscate—turning away from both spectacle and good taste (at least in a conventional sense). And yet they nevertheless remain joyously playful and camp in their palette, form and materiality. Morley largely applies paint in a cursory fashion—they are certainly neither careful or fastidious. At times his brushwork can appear brutish or even vulgar, other times they are hazy and amorphous, and altogether tender and lovely.

What is most clear is that these are paintings that situate themselves within, and in response to, the contemporary everyday. An everyday which we all know to be drenched in media of all types, both social and anti-social. Presenting a reality which is increasingly virtual, augmented, remote, and fantastical. It is also painting which shows a clear understanding of what has come before. His works know both their current social conditions and their histories. They know those paintings which precede them—be they Old Masters or abstracts. They also know the internet—Twitter, news websites and online gaming. And as they reflect Morley himself, they of course riff on a diverse array of music.

Indeed, when Morley speaks of his paintings the conversation is broadly discursive. He talks of paint, of canvas, and of the act of painting, and formal considerations such as composition and form. Yet he also speaks of pictorial landscape, living in Port Chalmers, mainstream film, psychedelics, organ music and even Minecraft. And what is perhaps most striking is the lightness in which he speaks of painting, of their fun, their humour; even though some works bear titles which have an altogether ominous and violent tone. Titles like "Who Makes the Nazis?" or "Two Destroyed Towers" read as all too closely tied to current geo-politics and recent history; even if it coincidental—the former is borrowed from the 1982 song by The Fall. As for the other title, I'm not sure if it's made in reference to 9/11, or is borrowed from a computer game or some other song.

Morley speaks of the importance in painting to remain oblique, its right to be unexplainable. That the efficacy of the medium being tied to this denseness, its lack of clarity. And by saying this there is no attempt on his behalf to be some idle edge lord, far from it. Like with much of the best art, it gestures towards things rather than dictatorially attempting to present something concrete. His paintings embody both sincerity and jest, abjection and beauty. They are problem paintings.

Morley currently teaches at Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic.