







**"I just got sick of the seriousness of the whole painting/art practice thing," he says.**

This page top: Juan Ford, *In the Mind of the Painter*, 2006. Oil on wood, paint gun, 45 x 60 x 60cm. Artbank Collection. COURTESY: THE ARTIST.

Bottom: Juan Ford, *Cleanliness, Godliness*, 2006. Oil on wood, toilet brush, 40 x 60 x 60cm. Private collection. COURTESY: THE ARTIST.

Opposite page top: Juan Ford, *Terror Australis*, 2007. Oil on linen, 102 x 87cm. Private collection. COURTESY: THE ARTIST.

Bottom: Juan Ford, *The Last Enemy*, 2007. Oil on linen, 122 x 107cm. COURTESY: SULLIVAN & STRUMPF FINE ART, SYDNEY.

avoidance of acknowledging the environmental Armageddon Australians were creating on their own shores.

The shadows on the faces could also be read as tribal tattoos which crosses over with Fords' fascination with Death and Black Metal, an interest shared by a number of his contemporaries such as Nick Mangan, Tony Garifalakis and Stieg Persson. Such facial rendering is known in Metal circles as "Corpse paint."

"The shadows on the faces can be read in many ways," he says. "The sub-genre of Black Metal moves the anger, aggression and fighting quality of metal generally into misanthropy. It is about disillusion, mistrust and surrenders the impulse to fight back – this is why weedy types are often into it. I've tried to get into it without success so far, but I love other types of metal; stoner, doom, thrash, speed, grind, death metals, to name a few. They often paint their faces up in a manner reminiscent of the shadows on my faces. I wanted the Black Metal reference there to deflect the reading with a suggestion of misanthropy; a mistrust of humanity to want to and be able to fix the huge environmental problems we've spawned through overpopulation and idiotic greed."

In 2006 Ford unveiled a new series of works at the Dianne Tanzer Gallery in Melbourne titled *Revelation*. These sculptural works used found or readymade reflective cylindrical objects, manipulating the reflections to extraordinary ends. In *Cleanliness Godliness*, using oil on plywood to paint the image that was to be reflected, Ford utilised a stainless steel toilet brush to recreate Duchamp's urinal. In *In the Mind of the Painter*, a spray-paint utensil reflected a skull. The works were like magic tricks, reflecting images that weren't there. Powerful and unnerving, they proved that Ford was as adept at manipulating space in sculptural forms as he was in painting them.

*In the Mind of the Painter* was the most powerful of these works, both because of the subject and its title. "It's simultaneously about thinking about mortality, and it is an x-ray depiction of the inside of the skull," says Ford. "You can't see the thought in question, so therein lies the neuropsychological joke. It's saying that all the thinking about big questions adds up to nothing quantifiable, and yet this is often a precondition for the creation of art. So this is what is in the mind of the painter. Then it plays off the object itself in a punny way – the paint gun – having a bit of a laugh at the seriousness of the whole practice of painting. It also refers to my use of the heads in profile, another pun."

For all its haunting intensity, *Revelation* maintained a playful aspect, a wry humour. "I just got sick of the seriousness of the whole painting/art practice thing," he says. "I often can't stand art that takes itself too seriously for this reason. After all, humour is one of the highest forms of language. The inclusion of humour can set up tensions within a work, opposing, conflicting and best of all, contradicting more serious intentions."

Juan Ford's next exhibition is at Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne from 3 to 31 May 2008.



**The works were painted while the nightly news was flooded with apocalyptic talk of drought.**

