

FRONT

"...there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left."
Matthew 24:40-41 2004
acrylic on canvas 167 x 152cm

God and Sam Colt make all men equal 2005
acrylic on canvas 91 x 122cm

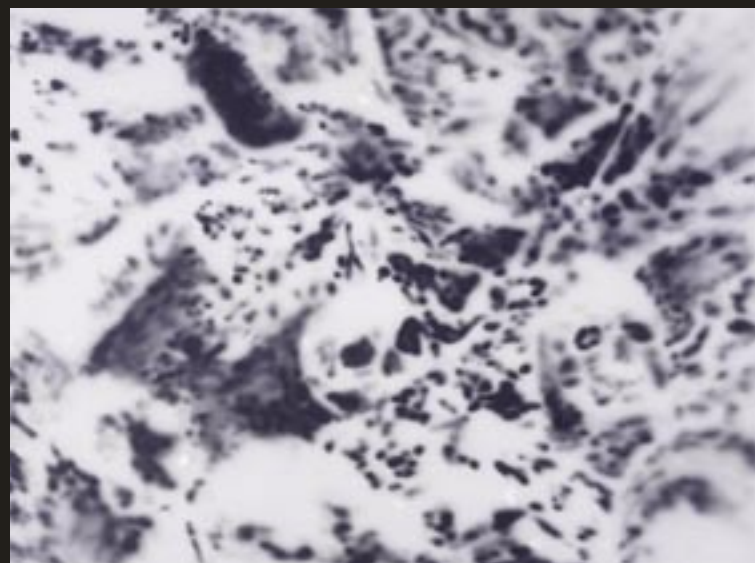
INSIDE

when freedom is outlawed only outlaws will be free 2005
acrylic on canvas 167 x 152cm

BACK

"But know this, if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house broken up". Matthew 24:43 2004
acrylic on canvas 121 x 152cm

Only the strong survive 2004
acrylic on canvas 152 x 183cm



Fiona **Lowry**



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Fiona Lowry 'Left Behind'

We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies... We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colours our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism.

— Murray Jay Siskind to Jack Gladney in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1984)

It pulses like a secret heartbeat across the history of the west. With its roots in ancient times as a means by which religious groups consoled themselves against occupation and oppression, the tradition of apocalyptic prophecy had, by the Middle Ages, become a fully-blown revolutionary imperative. But if millenarian eschatology saw the down-trodden and disenfranchised take it on themselves to prepare for the 'end of days' by carrying out their messianic judgment on king and clergy, it would, despite a gradual secularisation of the state, soon take on a cautionary tone as a sophisticated method for maintaining social order and ensuring strict adherence to the Faith. It's a question that resounds in every cataclysmic media event, every Nostrodamian foreboding, in even the crassest Hollywood disaster movie: if the souls of the Chosen are to ascend to a kingdom of righteousness lasting a thousand years, then what horrors await those who are left behind?

The landscape of Armageddon illustrated in the work of Fiona Lowry is a world composed wholly and disconcertingly of images of our own world. Some are recognizable instantaneously through their familiarity from newspapers and television; others are more enigmatic but retain their sinister air through the artist's careful manipulation of cinematic and journalistic composition.

Lowry's stark, near-monochromatic palette and her sparing airbrush technique create a visual push and pull that challenges the eye as much as the sites depicted in her paintings unsettle the mind, achieving – perhaps paradoxically, perhaps not – a pictorial harmony that is held together by the tension between its constituent parts, in some ways akin to the beautiful and terrible silence that inevitably follows acts of great violence. And indeed, these are images of locations unmistakably coloured by such violence: the Killing Fields of Pol Pot's Cambodia; Belangalo State Forest, the final resting place of the victims of 'backpacker murderer' Ivan Milat; the plot of land in backwoods Montana where the tiny cabin of Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, once stood, now removed for scientific and museological study, leaving nothing, a blank, a 'non-place'.

For a contemporary Australian painter, landscape is a genre fraught with contradiction and an acquired and unavoidable history of meaning. But Lowry's practice is not concerned so much with the conventions of landscape painting as it is with the politics of representing place, both as a process of picture making and more broadly as a social phenomenon. Lowry's paintings treat of what she describes as 'paranoid spaces', locations whose menace, whose hauntings are inscribed not by their gruesome histories, but by a well-instituted practice of cultural association. Her work draws disquieting parallels between the chastising admonitions of apocalyptic prophecy – toe the line, repent and believe – and the subtle machinations of the contemporary spectacle and its economy of images. In her pictures of the end Fiona Lowry makes tourists of us all.

Reuben Keehan
February 2005

