

IKON

Exhibition Guide

Tim Maguire *Snow, water and flowers*
29 January – 24 March 2008
First Floor Galleries and Tower Room

Acclaimed Australian artist Tim Maguire has taken the printing process to the core of his work as a painter, making both figurative and abstract paintings using the layering of colour according to the conventional method of commercial colour printing. For Ikon he has produced new works based on photographs and video imagery; huge digital prints hanging directly onto the gallery walls. The three rooms of the exhibition are each dedicated to the different subjects chosen by the artist. The *Refractions* series in the first room depicts water. *Falling Snow* in the second room is in sharp contrast to the brightly coloured *Poppies* in the third.

In order to realise his *Snow* and *Poppies* prints, Maguire produced a series of paintings based on digital photographs. Each photograph was separated into its constituent primary colours and printed out as black-and-white tonal studies which served as a basis for subsequent paintings. Successive layers of pure transparent colour, yellow, magenta and cyan, which in various combinations and intensities combine to give the full chromatic range, were applied to a series of transparent films. Sometimes the addition of solvent at this stage creates 'holes' in the layers of colour, allowing light to shine through. In this way Maguire can be thought of as mixing light instead of pigment. These see-through paintings were then scanned at high resolution and finally reassembled digitally before being printed at a magnified scale.

The effect is disarming. Fragments of landscapes – flowers, water and snow – provide enough information for us to read the image as real whilst appearing strangely dreamlike, sometimes even hallucinogenic. The transparency of the process betrays the means of their production yet through traces of the artist's physical actions, the passage of time and the technology involved, each print retains a personal eloquence and integrity. The same is true of Maguire's new video work, where video footage has been split into its component colours before being digitally remade. Depicting the surface of the canal near Ikon, extraordinary effects arise out of the movement of an essentially transparent medium. The images of water in the *Refractions* series thus are like video stills.

Translucency is a quality that often characterises Maguire's subject matter. Poppies are particularly delicate flowers; their petals capture a light that is constantly changing. Like snow and water, their appearance is fleeting and thus Maguire sends a message of 'memento mori' (*remember that you are mortal*), drawing on the rich heritage of such representation throughout art history. This ephemerality is reiterated by the virtual nature of digital information and the actual 'thin-ness' of the resulting prints, the fact that the image has no substance.

In a recent interview, Maguire made the following observations on the relationship between painting and printmaking in his artistic practice overall,

For some time now, painting and printmaking have played off each other in my work. Frustrations in one area are often solved through investigations in the other... Printmaking – drawing from experience of the processes involved in printmaking – for example, often helps me think again about how I might make a painting, and vice versa. So it's not surprising that I'm working intensively right now with printmaking. My preoccupation with digital printing, specifically, springs from efforts to define the distinction between randomness and what is controllable.

Printmaking has always been attractive to me because there is a wonderful randomness about it. You work in a precise way but the results are usually unpredictable. Imagery is created outside one's expectations.

Maguire's *Falling Snow* series exemplifies this tension between randomness and what is controllable, revealing the impact of chance most clearly. Colour in what might be expected to be a colourless work, occurs through the artist's subjective judgement and inevitable inaccuracy. Also, a snowflake further away from a light source will appear darker and therefore contain more pigment when digitally reproduced. As the painted films are repositioned one on top of another, these pigments reveal themselves in the midst of a dark night sky. Both ambiguous and sumptuous, we are enveloped by the deceptive simplicity of Maguire's images.