

Felix Harris



RDS GALLERY

2020

**RDS GALLERY,
6 CASTLE STREET, DUNEDIN**

**LIFE PUZZLE
IN TECHNICOLOR**

FELIX HARRIS

Cover Image:

Rita (Felix Harris, 2019, acrylic on canvas paper)

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Felix Harris

Felix Harris's contribution to 'Life Puzzle – in Technicolor' comprises works that riff on city living. Produced over the last year from various locations, and with a touch of influence from the hand of his mother Joanna Margaret Paul, Harris presents suburban scenes that were observed from his abodes in Auckland and Wellington. Through the theme of the house or suburban community, Harris reflects on implicit social inequalities, and includes philosophical inflections, imagined or dream-like spaces, as well as a simple visual interest in architecture.

For Harris, the series began with the work entitled *how did it happen?*. This image depicts a woman running from a burning house in the central pane, bordered by another house on fire and accompanied also by the enigmatic phrase 'FUN FOR NEEDY ARTISTS' (which is a spin on the literary fund 'Society for the Aid of Needy Writers and Scholars', that Harris came across while reading Fyodor Dostoevsky's letters). In this work Harris contemplates a duality, intimated by the image within an image and inspired by Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), a film that portrays the connectedness of twin souls living parallel lives. In this work the house reads as a symbol for the self, and frames the question 'How did it happen?' as an existential reflection on life: could things have turned out differently?

This reflection on duality is expressed more directly in the work *Rita*, that depicts the character of the dog in Kieślowski's *Three Colours: Red* (1994) transposed as a two-headed dog. In the film, the dog Rita acts as a catalyst that brings the two main characters together – in the scene the camera tracks the dog looking from one person then to the other when they meet for the first time. Harris adds a mystical aura to the dog in his work *Rita*, musing on the idea that she knew something that the characters were yet to discover.

This existential theme is intimated again in the form of a memorial in *High Hopes*, where personal symbolism becomes poetry for the viewer. Echoing the practice of his mother, this exhibition of works is a personal journal of sorts, enfolding daily life within coded interconnected forms or imaginative tangents inspired by his observation of current events. Harris works on multiple levels: socio-political themes take turns with a personal poetry and a material celebration of colour and form.

Harris's paintings on location are socio-political observations and a way of making a connection with the cities he lived in. The house featured in *Social Inequality* and *Owens Rd [Spying]* formed the outlook across the road from one of Harris's temporary residences. In one of these paintings, Harris includes the outline of an erased car as a cypher for reality: the struggle that some people have to keep a car running, or of having to leave a city due to rising house prices or rent.

Other works explore more introspective or interior spaces. *River Community*, for example, was inspired by Harris's memory of kayaking on the Whanganui river, recalling a spiritual connection that the artist feels with that place, as well as the idea of a community in connection with the land. Other works, like *Dry Spells*, is a celebration of unusual architecture Harris came across while reading the *Guardian*, of a dry cleaners outlet Pride Cleaners in Chicago, Illinois, designed by architect Gerald Siegart in the late 1950s. And on another level, *Troll Factory* is an imagined house, standing on its own in this series as well as referencing his previous *Trolls* (2018) series.

Harris has a way of deftly enfolding philosophical, socio-political, personal/poetic and playful elements in a single body of work where the depth and range of lived experience is transposed in vibrant colour.

Joanna Osborne

Dunedin, April 2020

Felix Harris (b. 1978, Dunedin, New Zealand) graduated from the Elam School of Fine Arts in 2006. A visual artist, he also has a strong interest in contemporary music and works as a producer/emcee under that name “fatigue”. He currently lives in Wellington, but travels extensively.

References: <http://gilberdmariottgallery.weebly.com/felix-harris.html>;
<https://www.thebigidea.nz/profile/felix-harris>; <https://www.thebigidea.nz/show/pictures-paintings/75485-asylum>; <https://www.thebigidea.nz/showcase/194823-rocky-road>

Joanna Osborne recently completed a doctoral thesis that considered the nature of interdisciplinarity at the nexus of art history, religion, and theology, titled ““Black light” / “Whiteness rests my mind”: Evocations of the Spiritual in the Art and Practice of Ralph Hotere and Joanna Margaret Paul’ (University of Otago, 2019). She has published on Joanna Margaret Paul, Ralph Hotere and Allie Eagle, most recently ““The flowers remember / the sugar bowl remembers”, Quotidian Wonder and the Painter/Poet Joanna Margaret Paul’, in *Thresholds of Wonder: Poetry, Philosophy and Theology in Conversation*, ed. Jennifer Reek and Francesca Bugliani Knox (Routledge, 2019).