

ARTICLE No.05

ART | PAINT + SCULPTURE

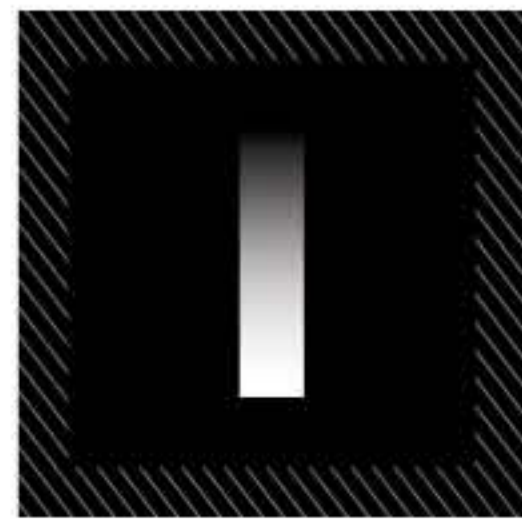
# Artist Paul Davies

PROFILE BY  
INGMAR APINIS

PORTRAIT BY  
CHRISTOPHER PHILLIPS

**Standfirst—**

Modernist homes and a bright colour palette caught our attention, but it's what Australian artist Paul Davies is not showing us that has kept us interested

**Starts—**

If you're familiar with British artist Rachel Whiteread's inside-out house sculptures, you'll be familiar not only with her ability to turn negative space into positive, but also her knack for exposing the private histories of these spaces. Beneath the cool exterior there's something far more haunting and emotional.

Australian artist Paul Davies mentions Whiteread as a contemporary source of inspiration for his multi-layered paintings of modernist homes within natural landscapes. The link isn't as tenuous as you might think; Davies has a background in sculpture. Beyond that, his vivid colour palette—from pop-art fluorescence to wintry aloof—and ability to dance between faithful representation and layered abstraction also create an emotional plane for his hard-edged subject matter.

A reoccurring theme in Davies's catalogue is nature verses man-made. If you're so inclined,



GREEN SKY, GREEN POOL  
ACRYLIC ON LINEN; 187 X 153 CM; 2009



consider the retro–futuristic questions posed by his interest in modernist homes. But it’s much more open–ended and exciting to contemplate the more philosophical themes in his work. Such as the point where emotional space overlaps with physical space, where private [the home] becomes public [the landscape].

In particular, it’s interesting that Davies uses a two–dimensional medium to examine a practice rooted in three–dimensionality: architecture. When I question him on this he talks about a childhood fascination with Jeffrey Smart, whose “paintings were introduced to me by my dad. He also appreciated the artist’s composition, attention to detail and urban subject matter. For me the colour and perspective is most impressive, and I remember reading that, for Smart, the figure was only added to his canvases to give the scene proportion. I made many amateur sketches of his work throughout school and this has stayed with me since.”

Smart’s sense of colour is definitely present in Davies’s work, and both artists use their palette to create mood and narrative. However, Davies’s work has the added dimension of landscape, a passion born from another childhood interest in Ansel Adams.

“Painting is a process that, for me, encourages the artist to respond immediately





to their surrounding environment. I often, while on research trips, make preliminary sketches and watercolours of particular buildings that interest me. These descriptions, together with photographs, provide a base for the paintings. I select images from various locations and combine them, on the canvas, to create fictitious scenes, devoid of human form, to invite the viewer to generate their own response.”

As a painter, Davies also borrows stencilling techniques to create these fictitious scenes which raises questions about fine art verses urban art and art for the elite verses art for the people. More recently he has begun to experiment with turning the stencils themselves into beautiful, fragile looking bronze sculptures. Here Davies takes the leftover detritus of his practice and turns it into

art. Some might say a stencil is a weapon used to damage private [yet public] property, but Davies turns them into wondrous objects in their own right.

These stencil sculptures suggest a closer connection to the work of Rachel Whiteread than we may have originally thought. Stencils function through their ability to leave an imprint of negative space. But like Whiteread, Davies's stencil sculptures emphasise their positive space. The viewer begins to think about the stencil's history, and what is was used to produce. Just as his paintings raise questions about the personal and public histories of their architectural subject matter.

Paul Davies and his work inhabit a place of shifting views and unanswered questions.

It's a very interesting space indeed. ■

**—Ends. Sad face.**

### Contributor bio—

Ingmar is an art school nerd turned corporate ho living in Melbourne, Australia. He likes Noise, pomme frites and long walks on the beach.

# Gym Class



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