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## Marisa Purcell: *Halo*

by Jillian Grant

Ethereality is inherent in Marisa Purcell's latest body of work, aptly titled 'Halo', presented by Tim Olsen Gallery, Sydney. Her series of oil paintings are contemporary meditations on pre-Renaissance sacred imagery, responding particularly to the work of Fra Angelico in Florence's San Marco monastery, which took Purcell's interest during her residency in Chianti, Italy earlier this year.

Purcell takes a holistic approach to painterly practice, an encompassing process that sees her consumed entirely by her work. It was this aspect, she says, that drew her to Fra Angelico. "I became transfixed with the devotional aspect of them... to the act of painting itself as a means to create an intimate space. I aim to make paintings that, for me, are sacred – not in a religious type of way, but in an honest way that deals with the multiplicity

of experiences across time", she explains. The physical, bodily act of painting is, for Purcell, a spiritual experience: non-cerebral, almost subconscious. It is about evoking the otherwise unarticulated or inexplicable. The spirituality of the Fra Angelico frescoes to which she is responding goes beyond sacred subject, down to the reverence the artist has for his craft, the painted object not as sacred, but as the physical incarnation of his own spirit.

The attention to light, tone and colour in Purcell's work is testament to the personal rigor of her painting process. The paintings emanate heat: pulsing, dynamic, light infused works in which one can almost see the rolling hills of Tuscany. Purcell observed that the light and colour in Italy was far removed from the light she was used to, and took great inspiration from it. "These recent works come from paintings I made in Italy where the light and colour was so warm and luxurious I wanted to bathe in it. Upon my

return to the studio I think I have taken the 'feel' of this light and translated it into work that is spacious and weightless", she says.

The paintings are experiential; physical records of the artist's consciousness. The throbbing, expressive forms are drawn from Purcell's own surroundings and her psyche. The paintings do reference the physical landscape of Tuscany, with its distinctive golden hues– in *Trinity* one can almost see the dark form of the Cypress tree, and darting red poppies– but these are not literal, nor are they impressions, though there is something of a likeness there. The pre-Renaissance understanding of space manifests itself in a reductive approach that prompts a sensorial, intuitive response. The paintings are distillations of her experience, featuring essentialised forms; abstracted and simplified.

With the emphasis ever on subjectivity, Purcell does not want to prescribe a reading of her work. She hopes that the viewer will respond to the paintings in their own personal way, thus establishing an imaginative discourse. "Each person who encounters the work will have their own set of memories and experiences to bring to the work, thus activating the painting in an entirely unique way", she suggests. The works embody multiple realities, reflecting a variety of experiences; and with a life of their own, metamorphosing for the viewer - and the artist herself perpetually reacting and changing.

Evident in this ambitious project is Purcell's dedication to her craft. It is clear to this viewer that, as Fra Angelico revered his practice, Purcell loves painting, and submits herself wholly to it. The result: a mature, beautiful, dynamic body of work that will delight its audience.

**Tim Olsen Gallery**  
**October 17 to November 4**  
 Sydney

1. *Sifter*, 2012, oil on linen, 153 x 137cm

2. *Trinity*, 2012, acrylic and oil on linen, 120 x 95cm

3. *Punctuated*, 2012, acrylic and oil on linen, 120 x 95cm

Courtesy the artist and Tim Olsen Gallery, Sydney



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