

Dark Victory

Nigel Milsom Profile

Painting, we are told, is variously 'dead', 'alive' or 'back'. Despite a lack of consensus, the work of Nigel Milsom, winner of the 2012 Sulman Prize, provides a timely opportunity to check the pulse of painting in Australia.

Awarded for the best subject painting, genre painting or mural project by an Australian artist, The Sulman Prize accompanies the Archibald and Wynne as one of the most prestigious Australian art prizes. Previous winners include luminaries such as Brett Whitely, John Olson and Noel McKenna.

With a seductively obscure title, Milsom's winning painting, *Judo House pt 4 (Golden mud)*, is a sublime, brooding example of the artist's work at full potency. Ominous and enigmatic in equal measure, it recalls the work of legendary painters like Francis Bacon and Gerhard Richter. While *Judo House* resounds with darkness and melancholy, it is a painting that also depicts a touching personal encounter. Like many of Milsom's works, it crystallises personal experiences into masterful investigations of the painted surface. The basis for the painting was an encounter between the artist and an elderly man at a bus station. The work immortalises a chance encounter with a stranger, while also reflecting on the artist's relationship with his own grandfather. Transforming an everyday conversation, Milsom's biting, almost monochromatic, canvas forges an estranged, hallucinatory terrain tempered by the heart-breaking solitude of the lone figure.

RIGHT Nigel Milsom, *Judo House Pt 4 (Golden mud)*, 2012, oil on linen. Courtesy: Yuill Crowley Gallery, Sydney.



Nigel Milsom also featured as a finalist in the 2012 Archibald exhibition. His dark, angular portrait depicts Kerry Crowley, his art dealer and director of the Yuill/Crowley Gallery in Sydney. Awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2008, for her contribution to contemporary art in Australia, Kerry is a distinguished figure within the arts.

Milsom's *Untitled (Kerry)* showcases the work of a painter who is compelled by the act of painting, and his work reflects a fascination with technique and the materiality of paint itself. His work channels an acute awareness of art history and speaks to the enduring importance of painting practice. Much like the enticing titles of his work, the strident brushwork and graphic, monochromatic sensibilities work to instil ambiguity into his canvases, rather than create painterly illusions.



ACROSS Nigel Milsom, *Judo House Pt 4 (Golden mud)*, 2012, oil on linen. Courtesy: Yuill Crowley Gallery, Sydney.

LEFT Nigel Milsom, *Untitled (Kerry)*, 2012, oil on linen. Courtesy: Yuill Crowley Gallery, Sydney.

BELOW Nigel Milsom, *Untitled (Judo House Pt 2)*, 2009, oil on linen.



Milsom's Sulman Prize win adds to an already impressive resume. Milsom has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) and a Master of Fine Arts from COFA. He has had seven solo exhibitions since 2002 and has been represented in various group shows. After winning the prestigious Fisher's Ghost Open Painting Prize in 2008, Milsom was a finalist in the 2010 Archibald Prize with a portrait of artist Adam Cullen. His work has been acquired by both private and public collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Art.

The work of Nigel Milsom it seems, like painting itself, is here to stay. Melancholic, elegiac, yet profoundly contemporary, Milsom's work demonstrates that the enduring potency of painting lies in its balance of technical mastery, history and the contemporary.

Vaughan O'Connor

SOUND BYTES

NIGEL MILSOM WINS 2012 SULMAN PRIZE



Nigel Milsom, won the 2012 *Sulman Prize*. The Sulman Prize is awarded annually for the best subject/genre painting and or mural project by an Australian artist. It's a well-respected award, but Milsom took it in his stride with a characteristically

laconic Aussie attitude. He said, "No, I didn't think I'd win, but I kinda felt the painting I entered was an OK work." Milsom has both a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Fine Arts from COFA.

Watch Nigel Milsom discuss his winning work: youtu.be/4DBW2QWPeeU