

Shaun Tan: Suburban Odyssey

Fremantle Arts Centre

Saturday 19 May – Sunday 15 July 2012

Curated by Dr Ric Spencer

Exhibition opens Friday 18 May 6:30pm, free event

Meet Shaun Tan: gallery talk, screening of *The Lost Thing*, Q&A: Saturday 19 May 4:30 – 6:30pm, rsvp by Wed 16 May rspv@fremantle.wa.gov.au (numbers are strictly limited)

I don't think it would be possible to keep my illustrative work energised without the kind of visual and emotional training that can only be acquired through routine sketching from life. Of course, the boundaries between the illustration and painting frequently blur – and they are already vague, arbitrary categories. Perhaps the main difference is that a painting is more self-sufficient as a singular idea, outside of any other narrative. A good painting is its own silent statement.

Shaun Tan 2011

Shaun Tan has won the world's most prestigious prizes – an Academy Award for his short film *The Lost Thing*, and the Astrid Lindgren Award for his work as a children's illustrator, but he describes himself as 'a painter who fell into illustration and book publishing'. Fremantle Arts Centre is delighted to present for the first time a collection of Tan's never before seen paintings along with original drawings and preparatory sketches for the film "The Lost Thing". Exhibited together, these works create a vision of Shaun Tan as an artist whose work across genres is built on close observation of the real world through painting and drawing.

Shaun Tan: Suburban Odyssey comprises a number of large scale paintings created during a formative period in Tan's twenties and smaller more recent works he has used as a starting point for his illustrations. In combination with video storyboards and personal diaries the exhibition traces the evolution of one of Australia's finest artists. An accompanying public program includes a screening of *The Lost Thing*, and a guided tour and Q&A by Tan.

Shaun Tan was born in Fremantle in 1974 and grew up in Hillarys on the North coast of Perth. "The exhibition highlights the relationship between Shaun's suburban observations, as they began in Perth, and the place they create for his internationally popular illustrated books, short stories and animations," said curator Ric Spencer who travelled to both Tan's parents home in Hillarys and his Melbourne studio to work with Tan on the exhibition. "He has a longstanding relationship with observational painting, indeed lots of his books work in this area of observation, and there is a sense that through his painting he tries to make sense of where he was from. His work has both an intimacy and a conversational quality."

Shaun Tan creates illustrated books that deal with social, political and historical subjects through surreal, dream-like imagery. He won a 2011 Academy Award for *The Lost Thing*, Best Animated Short Film and in the same year was awarded the prestigious 2011 Astrid Lindgren Award honouring his contribution to international children's literature.

His books, including *The Rabbits*, *The Red Tree*, *Tales from Outer Suburbia* and the acclaimed wordless novel *The Arrival* have been widely translated and enjoyed by readers of all ages. He worked as a concept artist for the Pixar film WALL-E, and directed the Academy Award winning short film *The Lost Thing*.

Although I'm often recognised as an illustrator of stories, in private I see myself primarily as a painter of landscapes, particularly the suburban streets in which I grew up and continue to spend most of my time. This world is the bedrock of my imagination - a shoreline of light, space, restless silence - and my suburban paintings of the past twenty years are perhaps more self-defining than anything else I've created as a book or film maker. Collecting them together under the roof of Fremantle Arts Centre (a place I visited often in my youth seeking inspiration and direction) is a terrific privilege and opportunity. I hope that exhibition visitors might enjoy the same realisation as I have during my local wanderings with a sketchpad or paint-box: that the most ordinary places can also be the most mysterious.

Shaun Tan 2012

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