



Vision 1996
oil on canvas 150 x 116

Howard Rogers has painted high-rise blocks before. Although mostly seen in some kind of daylight, those towers were dark, brooding things, forbidding and impenetrable. Although painted if not from life then from memory of it, they carried the atmosphere of a post-apocalyptic vision, standing sentinel over the scorched, deserted landscape of a devastation whose only survivors were daffodils, whose only witnesses were the patrolling helicopters, and a lone artist. There are traces of this mood in 'Tower' 1994, in which the building rises from a turmoil of boiling paint, solitary and monolithic.

The new tower block paintings are different. Seen against the flat black of the darkest skies, these are unmistakably office blocks, Watergate buildings, viewed with the elevated perspective from the opening moments of countless American conspiracy movies. Close to, we see only sections of the buildings, and we see inside them, through the impossibly pure geometry of their windows to where, in expectation of the resumption of work tomorrow, international business machines maintain their vigil under harsh fluorescence.

Lit from within like Japanese lanterns, by a glow which transcends their storeys, the contents of these buildings are depicted in a soft, painterly manner, conveying mainly a sense that those contents are specific and varied, not serried ranks of identical work stations, but the scenery for very specific but unknowable events. Whereas the earlier paintings implied the loneliness of desertion,

the desolation of barren wastes, these suggest the loneliness of access denied; lives and business are being conducted here, but not at times when we can see in, and not in ways we are permitted to understand. These are not studies of architecture, or of the spaces in between; they are examinations of surfaces, made suddenly transparent by the enclosing night yet still unyielding, the forest of pillars and cabinets within, mimicking the high-rise landscape without. We look, but our gaze becomes a glance, silently deflected into the abyss.

The daylight paintings here are of distant noise. No matter how early in the morning you go out, no matter how late your evening stroll, the steady growl of traffic will always be your companion, in the city, and even in most rural settings. Common experience, and most film representations of it, make that sound the accustomed backdrop to the standard street lamp or the tower block. Stop to listen to that sound, and you will notice that even though it is generated mostly by dual-carriageways with traffic flowing in two directions, it overwhelmingly conveys through its insistence the sense of forward movement, of an onward rush of travel. These paintings make us hear that sound anew. The orthogonal construction of their compositions and the perspectival convergence of parallel lines give the sense of common direction to the lives of others around us, heard but not always seen.

A moving car cushions and insulates its occupants, muffling the sound of other vehicles. Advancing together, the cars produce only the reassuring hum of apparent stillness. The car ahead, the car in the rear-view mirror, all are going to the same place, and this feeling lessens the sense of speed and dangerous drama which is always just a breath away. The vapour trail across the sky, the silent spearhead, similarly conveys the sense of invisible and insulated lives, sharing a common destination. The sense of movement is again slowed down, so that the fact of travel remains, with no fear, no haste, no beginning or end, only destination.

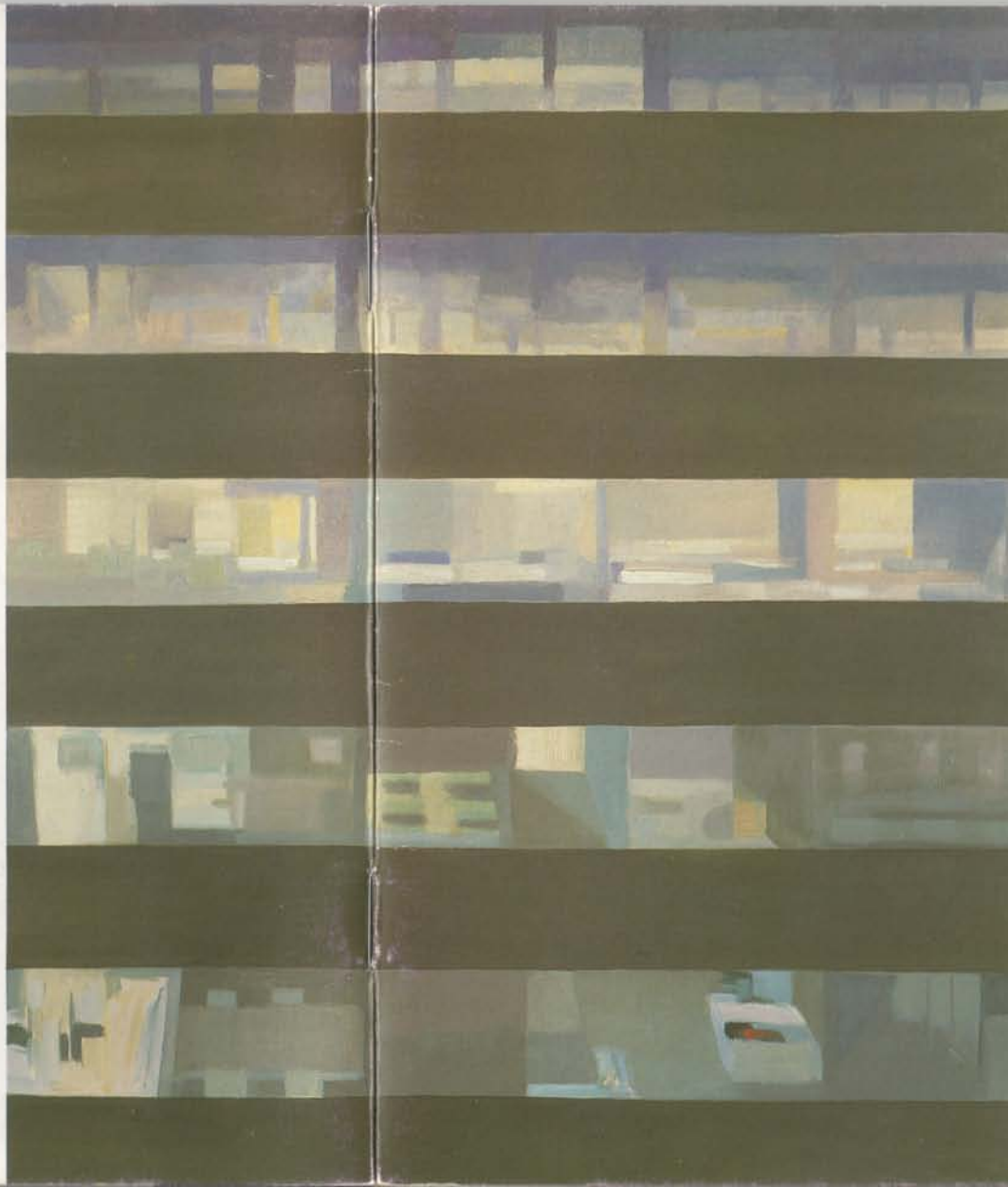
These are works of integrity, and we attempt to decode their meanings in spite of the recognition that they are driven mainly by a passion for painting. The artist is wary of the science-fiction connotations which the emphasis on the sky in his paintings might suggest. If there is anything in them, it is not War of the Worlds stuff, but a hint of the future, the Future of the 'fifties and 'sixties. This future is where we live now, occasionally bleak, occasionally dramatic, mostly full of the lives of others, rushing forward, viewed from a distance, kept at bay. The sense of loneliness that is never far from the surface is not overwhelming or all-embracing. It is the loneliness of the singularity of a moment of perception, when, through the rush of the breeze or a change in the light, the world is transformed.

John Gillett

left: The Bridge 1995 oil on canvas 127 x 162



Slot 1996
oil on canvas 150 x 116



HOWARD ROGERS

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SOUTHERN ARTS
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