

Imants Tillers

Remembering the unknown

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

27 October – 25 November 2021

“Critical Forests” is the evocative name of a gently meandering essayistic text on aesthetics by 18th-century German philosopher Johann Herder; it is also the title of Imants Tillers’ new series of paintings that define this exhibition. Like Herder, Tillers takes us on a journey, not only through clear regions, but deeply thicketed tracts of country, along meandering paths that dead-end themselves just as often as they continue. Each work shows us a different guise of forest: closed or open, wintery or vernal. Regardless, the forest Tillers paints here is always complex, messy, even, and intensely intricate.

Citing image and text sources ranging from Richter and Arakawa to Herder and Heidegger, *Critical Forests* delivers a deep-thinking passage through age-old conundra: time, transience, death, being. And, with regrettable prescience, gives breath to sorrow that accompanies destruction, loss and uncertainty. Yet, persistent throughout these works is the reassuring and most basic sense of nature’s uncontrollable ongoing-ness. Here, visioned in Tillers’ paintings in its entire stages of life, death and rebirth, the forest appears *time-rich*, and as such, our own slowing down renders itself a welcome possibility.

Despite it all, then – in the face of conflict, disaster, breathlessness; our era’s crises – a bath of forest pertains here, enfolding, absorbing us into what is a quietly attentive, infinitely affirmative organism. With his *Critical Forests*, Tillers creates, as his text suggests, a “forming space” in which “nothing arises, nothing ceases”, but where, amongst the solid trunks and thickets and leaf litter, we may, just perhaps, “remember the unknown”.

These works promise, if not a silent solace, at least reprieve; drifts of snow, banks of trees, insulate against our cacophonous world. All there is to do, whilst here, is *settle*.

Clare Fuery-Jones