

Tree House 360°
New painting by Nick Miller
Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

Nick Miller's exhibition is a work of material liberation, and a deliberate retreat from worldly concerns into the microcosm of a woodland Tree House experience.

***"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately,
to front only the essential facts of life,
And see if I could learn what it had to teach,
And not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived"***

"Walden" Henry David Thoreau 1854

Without much detailed forethought Nick Miller found himself uprooted to Connecticut, in the North East of the USA, to undertake an artist's residency at the renowned Josef and Anni Albers Foundation during the fall of 2009. He was initially unsure of the value of working so far from his usual concerns and with no fixed plans. Furthermore, according to the Foundation's executive director Nicholas Fox Weber, "Anyone who comes has to be the sort of person who can not only survive a degree of aloneness, but who can thrive with it". On his first evening he explored the woods surrounding the remote residential studio. In the fading light, Miller came to a large Tree House or rather a platform constructed between two White Pine Trees 23 feet in the air. Tired from the long flight, he climbed up and briefly fell asleep. He woke, surrounded by trees on all sides, to the sounds and sights of the evening. In that place, strangely not so far from Walden's famed pond, Miller felt a sense of homecoming to nature and to the self that he describes as "a rare epiphany".

Miller spent the next two months working with sustained urgency, aware of the limited time available and the complexities of trying to record the fullness of such experience. He immersed himself in the woods, adopting the Tree House as a temporary outdoor studio in the daylight hours, slowly coming to terms with the wondrous 360-degree view from a height.

His landscape work has long been rooted in the particular and the local in. The "Truckscape", made from back of his mobile studio (a converted truck), have been shown to acclaim both in Ireland and the USA and were marked by the inclusion of the narrow frame of the doorway that defined the artist's view and the borders of the paintings. The Tree House, like the truck, was an adapted entry point for a meeting with nature and painting, but it was 23 feet in the air and free from the constraints of the narrow view that had defined the earlier practice. In a further break with past habits, he began using an unfamiliar paint medium – Casein Paint on very heavy Arches watercolour paper (the pigment is bound in milk proteins - an organic, lightfast and archival medium around even in Ancient Greece). The paint has 'organic' qualities of both watercolour and oil, but dries to an intense flat velvety finish.

Over the weeks a number of intensely observed works evolved, but primary focus was on one major piece (2.33 metres x 5.12 metres), made from 27 individually worked and interconnecting panels. In the 'normal' residential studio he slowly assembled the 360-degree view from the Tree House platform, growing the image, panel by panel over 8 weeks. It was a spontaneous evolution, starting with a central panel and expanding clockwise in rotation. The unusual double A-Frame format for the final work emerged as an attempt to solve the unfolding spherical view into two dimensions.

The final work and associated pieces are archival mounted, unglazed on rigid aluminium panels, keeping the fragility of the paper edges and allowing the viewer unmediated entry to the experience. Tree House 360° is a work of sustained attention and engagement with a subject. It follows a clear line in Miller's work in both landscape and portraiture that addresses the meeting point of seeing, being and doing in his own particular way.