

Alicia Paz

The RCA graduation show is a jumbled, crowded space that resembles an art fair more than a white cube. So it is rare that an artist can draw you close, push you backwards to view from a distance before tempting you to step back in again.

Paz's chosen motif of a single tree set against a coloured ground is reminiscent of mural traditions such as the Tree of Jesse, Pompei's domestic wall decorations or the Mexican temple's Paradise of Tlaloc.

The paintings work on several levels, often literally. At back is a thin wash, animated by drips and splodges. Each tree is painted more thickly and pushed near to the front of the picture pane. On one branch grow leaves collaged from botanical books, some painted and some stencilled on.

Within this narrow world, reminiscent of Chinoiserie wallpapers, creatures move amongst foliage. The eye flits around the shallow space with the same movement as the trembling leaves or hopping birds. Christmas baubles dangle amongst the cobwebs. Three beautiful witches flutter their eyes at a skull in the branches.

But despite the jauntiness, these eco-systems are under stress. One tree seems only held together by nailed planks of wood. Two black sheep gaze sorrowfully up from behind a fence. Another tree whispers conspiratorially to a sketchy snowman. A third seems to be woven out of bright wool – which is unravelling. The three sisters of the coven stare sadly as the cartoon birds tug at the threads for their nests.

Paz is an artist with a body of consistently interesting work behind her. Her incorporation of detail and references from high and popular culture ensures that the longer you look, the more you will see. On one level a swim in the pleasure of mark and colour, and on another level full of narrative incident.



Image - *South of the River*
Oil and acrylic on canvas,
2007
210x170cm

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