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## **RICKY HOWELL - *Before & After***

Opening: Saturday 27 August 2 -5pm  
Exhibition: 27 August – 18 September 2005

After an 11-year hiatus from the commercial art world, St Kilda-based artist **RICKY HOWELL** will showcase some of his finest recent works. The six paintings and a selection of etchings to be exhibited reveal an intriguing commitment by Howell to art as process, rather than art as wholesale production.

It has been his reluctance to take part in the politics and commerce of the art world that has kept Howell away from galleries for the past 11 years.

“The last proper show I had was in 1994,” Howell said.

“I dropped out, I’ve kept painting to keep my hand in, but I hadn’t been working towards a show...I paint just to do it.”

The title of the show ‘Before and After’ is a reference to Howell’s development as an artist during the past decade. The works reveal stylistic elements from older periods of Howell’s work combined with new images and inspirations. The break in the exhibiting hiatus was the result of BRIGHTSPACE, who were keen to exhibit Howell and had provided him with studio space in recent months to work towards an exhibition.

Howell has predominantly used ochre, orange and yellow in his paintings to present an almost burnt-out view of the world. A central image in one painting focuses on a car covered in cloth. “There can be a war or a flood going on, but people will think more about protecting their possessions than anything else,” Howell explains. Another particularly striking painting is ‘King Rat’ which focuses on some seven rats stacked upon each other with their tails knotted together.

“They’re pretty smart,” says Howell of rats. “In plagues it can happen that two or three rats can get their tails knotted up, they can’t escape and they die of starvation. In a way rats to me symbolise development – you could say yuppies are the king rats, they’ve moved to St Kilda, and they’ve taken over.”

But don’t make the mistake of calling Howell a surrealist. While he concedes that there is an element of surrealism in his work, he has problems with the word, or rather, the label. Howell prefers to describe his work as representational. You can see what the images are, he explains, and there’s always a thought about what’s going on in the world and what’s happening.

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