

SAMIR HAMAIEL

Finalist: Contemporary Art Awards 2017

Places of Essential Exchange and Activity

By Annette Ong

Brisbane-based artist and architect Samir Hamaiel (b.1979) is a finalist in Contemporary Art Awards 2017 for his work *Tunnel* (2016). The painting captures an empty Clem7 tunnel that connects Brisbane's inner north to the southern and eastern suburbs. The subdued palette, absence of natural light, and clean lines present a practical and masculine aesthetic. The tunnel is a public space used for the sole purpose of transport; a man-made, sheltered passageway of continuous movement. Hamaiel describes it as "an in-between urban space". The linear aspect and reflective surfaces, plus the length of artificial lights running overhead, create a mirrored effect, making the tunnel appear as an endless vacuum. The indecipherable signage, its meaning 'extracted', adds to this sense: without signifiers the tunnel could be a threatening and confusing space. The painting comments on transience and modernity within an urban setting. It explores humanity's desire to control and enhance the environment to suit its needs. Tunnels are designed to allow unhindered movement from one place to the next; they are not designed to restrict mobility. Hamaiel's work depicts the heavily utilised and somewhat clinical spaces that most people frequent every day without taking a concentrated look at them. Hamaiel invites us to examine *Tunnel* in order to see with a new perspective; he highlights what is other-worldly and alien about these familiar spaces when they are not populated by human bodies.

There is a similar theme in his work titled *Invert* (2016). The painting is of an inner city busway. Adopting an unearthly palette, the muted greys and blues of the bus carriages work as a contrast to the darkening burnt orange sky. Lamps and signposts stand tall over the busway; their

angles appear foreign and inquisitive. *Invert* (2016) is similar to *Tunnel* (2016) in the way it represents a significant in-between space. At first it seems like nothing important happens here; however, further inspection reveals it to be a place of essential exchange and activity.

Hamaiel's background in architecture overlaps with his art practice by informing and inspiring his interest in the "celebration of the everyday." He has described his art as "a reaction against the architectural approach that seeks to both design and control." Both *Tunnel* (2016) and *Invert* (2016) are representations of highly functional public spaces in modern urban environments; frequently used, yet frequently dismissed. We do not pay attention to the design of these places, therefore we miss the aesthetic embedded in the design. Although tunnels and bus stations are places of constant movement, the artist is encouraging us to engage with the multitude of spaces we inhabit by being still and taking a focused look at our surroundings.

Samir Hamaiel has more than a decade of architectural experience, studying and practising in the UK, the Netherlands, Hong Kong and Australia. He has been a finalist in Contemporary Art Awards (2015, 2016, and 2017) the Calleen Art Award, the St George Art Prize, the Milburn Prize and Moreton Bay Region Art Awards. His work, *Growth* (2015), on a Traffic Signal Box in the Brisbane CBD, won the 2015 Art Force Awards.

On this page, *Tunnel* (2016), acrylic on canvas, 60 x 42cm. *Invert* (2016), acrylic on canvas, 61 x 61cm

Images courtesy of the artist

Samir Hamaiel's artworks can be viewed at:
<http://www.samirhamaiel.com>

