

The persistence of painting

In this era artists are no longer defined by their media, and often approach their choice of medium as part of a broader conceptual practice. Artists are therefore free to use the idea of paint, or the actual medium itself, in ways that challenge its presuppositions.

1717 Painting/not painting follows an interest in artists that use the idea of painting, or the application of paint, in new and unexpected ways. The seventeen artists included in this exhibition illustrate a process of enquiry that is the result of an ongoing dialogue with the medium.

Kevin Chin's practice reflects on his experience as a migrant to Australia, contextualised by our current global refugee crisis. His fragmented paintings are created from imagery drawn from developing and developed worlds to question nationalist ideals. *Hole in Paradise* considers the failings of consumer tourism. It reflects on the flawed idyll of holidaying in exotic tropical locations, where, once the tourist leaves their resort, they might witness the economic inequality of the region. The apocalyptic holes in the sidewalk and saturated colour heightens the absurdity of these opposing life circumstances.

Fernando do Campo's *White-throated sparrow* sets floating orange letters against a diamond-patterned grid of blues, pinks and black. One panel is an inversion of the other, that together reads 'only when you feed can I look for your yellow'. The work is drawn from the artist's *I always hear you before I see you* series, which was completed during a residency in New York, and considers the idea of displacement in the foreign landscape. He cites birds as one of the main variables in unfamiliar places. Bird identification can also be separated into native and introduced species, tracing that place's colonial history. The text in do Campo's paintings document the birds that he could not identify, missed, or failed to perceive. They are wistfully written, as though dedicated to a missing lover or unattainable dream.

Following similar themes of migration and displacement, Neil Haddon's *We'll bring our own trees* explores the fraught relationship that the British migrant has with Australia's colonial history. Feelings of guilt and blame are carried through the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Upon a print depicting a scene from the story, Haddon has painted a large pink geometric form. Futuristic in shape and appearance, the form looms among his other painted additions: apple-tree saplings, red silhouettes of trees, hovering circles and lurid pink growths. Invoking Adam and Eve's remorse after their banishment from the Garden of Eden, the work offers a metaphor for the grafted experience of migration.

Will Cooke uses abstraction to connect the body and mind. Interested in the invisibility of memory, he paints thoughts and recollections in an effort to externalise them. His illusory paintings, made on various substrates including aluminium, canvas and paper, have a sensory effect on the viewer. *Operation Hypnosis* explores this effect through a grid of painted silver, pink, purple and orange dots. The dots form dancing, hazy bands that range from intense colour to faded pastel, as though a magic eye illustration or eye chart. Cooke's works rely on the naked eye to appreciate that which cannot be seen on a screen. His use of optical illusion forms a quiet revolt against our digital dominion.

Daniel Hollier's works begin with a chance encounter with a discarded object - be it a scrap of paper or personal remnant. His sculptural paintings are formed in the shape of these found fragments, exploring geometric abstraction through surface and ground. Like Cooke, it is pure abstraction and optical illusion that engages the viewer in Hollier's work. *GrnWht Construction #39* adopts a shape similar to a spliced rock or gem. A dark green border frames the shape's edges, with jagged aerosol lines sprayed across the picture plane. By applying varying degrees of pressure during the mark making process, the busy lines advance and recede to manipulate the viewer's perception.

Ian Williams' practice also engages with visual perception in our digital age. His works follow two streams: representational paintings drawn from scenes in video games, and their cerebral interpretations. The latter replicates the gestures of the former to reference the virtual side of the screen. *Fallout* is the cerebral partner of such a pairing. This loosely-rendered painting sees an ancient, or perhaps futuristic, land, captured in sepia tones and heavy chiaroscuro. The forms are abstracted to their simplest gestures and bathed in glowing light.

Ollie Lucas explores the language of contemporary signs and symbols in his work. Posters, billboards, flags and signals are translated into paintings that attempt to explain our current urban consciousness. In Lucas' works, neon colours merge with dark tones to create patterns that emulate nature, such as flickering flames, clouds, waves and sunset gradients. *Flood (2)* sees a central, rectilinear form of orange and grey haze, bordered with black and purple cloud-like patterning. The central form billows into folds at the base, as though a flag flapping in the wind.

Belem Lett's paintings experiment with environmental studies such as geography, geology and meteorology to create 'pointless mappings of spatial relations'. Lett maps random walks into GPS-driven drawings, which are then transformed into paintings. By translating these lived experiences into paint, he aims to provide an antidote to life's uncertainties. *Triffids* recalls the psychological studies of the rorschach ink blot or Rubin's vase. The painting engages symmetry and repetition to merge abstract shapes into fluttering butterfly-esque forms. Contrasting tones create the illusion of depth and light, emulating nature in both concept and form.

Like Lucas and Lett, Tricky Walsh's practice engages with themes surrounding communication and space. *Dark matter* is a multi-panelled painting that explores astronomy through geometric abstraction. The panels are inconsistently spaced, with holes and tunnels

drilled throughout, as though a constellation. The N55 constellation that it depicts is a recently discovered nebula in a satellite galaxy of the Milky Way. Its remnant gases are set in a pink hue by the presence of brilliant blue and white stars. The painting is accompanied by the sculptural work, *flesh matter*. Three ceramic forms, one on the floor and two propped on handmade timber stools, adopt the appearance of vessels, with colourful blobs painted within.

Stefan Dunlop merges history with fantasy in his work, *Kiepenkerl*. A Baroque figure is pictured at the centre of the picture plane, and in place of a head its neck spills a fragmented fan of colour. Dunlop suggests that the age in which we live is 'visually Baroque' - a heightened emotional, sensory and image-saturated state. Referencing art history through the fragmentation of space, form, image and colour, his work both respects and subverts these traditions.

Like Dunlop, Irene Hanenbergh's landscapes fuse history with the imagination. Her paintings can be seen as portals to out of reach places, both physical and fictive. Hanenbergh's otherworldly works reference the Baroque and Romantic eras while morphing between figuration and abstraction. *Though encumbered everywhere, I am free (1866)* is a small yet intricate Turner-esque painting. A fiery haze wrestles with a turbulent sea, billowing smoke into the sky. The work comes from her most recent series, *Libertine, Celestine*, which charges classical landscapes with fantastical narratives.

The themes and imagery within Brent Harris' practice reflect on history, fantasy and the psyche. His paintings are process-based, rubbed back and re-worked until they develop their own voice. Harris' strange shapes and figures mine the psyche, but also engage the religious imagination by expressing notions of the devil or the divine. *Night* forms part of the artist's most recent body of work, *the small sword*. A central character is surrounded by black tar-like goo. This character could be the artist, or the viewer, and is portrayed in the moments before the dark thoughts of night begin to descend.

In Megan Walch's paintings, colours war with each other until one eventually gives way to the other. Her works adopt the viscous, plastic and fluid materiality of paint. Walch leaves the outcome of her paintings to chance, starting with a substrate, placed horizontally, upon which enamel paint is spilled, pushed and pulled. In her performative 'resin floor spills' the artist directs the paint, and the paint directs the artist. Walch's three-part *The sumo of colour* series explores the meaning of colour and importance of touch in our digitised era. The central painting, *Yellow versus Black and White*, considers the combination of yellow and black in nature, which signifies poison or danger. In *Red versus Blue* and *Blue versus Red*, globular colours war against each other among finely painted floating sumo wrestlers.

Matthew Harris' bold, colourful paintings employ pattern to explore suburban interiors, domesticity and queer life. His camp sensibility at times veers into the retro - for example, his repeated daisies in *Pink dollar* are reminiscent of soft furnishings of the 1970s. Harris' painting included in the exhibition, *Bossy Bottom*, depicts a naked man on all fours, looking back and smiling at the viewer. The interior setting, complete with taxidermy tiger skin, is depicted in bold, saturated colour. A pair of eyes peep in from the darkened window, adding to the voyeuristic effect of the work.

Tara Marynowsky's practice offers an otherworldly interpretation of historical imagery. The images comprising her mother and baby series were sourced from the Victorian era. Many were published in *The Hidden Mother* by Linda Fregni Nagler, where over 1,000 photographs were collected that each depicted a child held by their camouflaged mother. Missing from the scene, they are concealed by a rug, cloth, or piece of furniture. In Marynowsky's adaptations to these domestic pictures, the child has been painted over with a patterned sculptural shape to represent the mother's art or craft, and in some ways its loss through the demands of motherhood.

Nuha Saad's installations engage with domesticity through wallpapers and upholstered and furniture-based sculptures. Her practice is concerned by David Batchelor's argument in his book *Chromophobia*: that colour is often degraded in Western art and culture by its association with the terms 'femininity', 'orientalism' and 'ornament'. Saad offers a counterpoint to this argument in her work by combining colour (feminine) with architectural form (masculine). *Velvet Constellations* traces the histories and memories of the Victorian era by re-imagining a domestic interior. Flock wallpaper is accompanied by three sculptural forms, which take the form of ornate satin stools with extruded Victorian legs.

Similarly speaking to what is traditionally perceived as domestic or feminine are the works of Kate Tucker. Tucker's practice combines the materials of craft, including ceramics, rope and fabric, with the devices of domesticity, such as shelving and picture supports. The small paintings on board from her *Holding Pattern* series are built from an accumulation of off cuts, leftovers from previous works, and failed paintings. By detaching the materials from their previous contexts, the works are layered with new versions of themselves, but given the weight of history with their underlayers. The layering of mediums gives the works a luminous, almost waxy quality. The paintings rest on bronze supports and their wrapped fabric edges give the illusion of a border or frame.

The seventeen artists in *1717 Painting/not painting* challenge the medium and practice of painting through a variety of approaches. The themes that run through these works are demonstrative of our contemporary social, political, physical and virtual environments. Through each artists' conceptual outset, they demonstrate that painting persists.

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