Imogen Taylor

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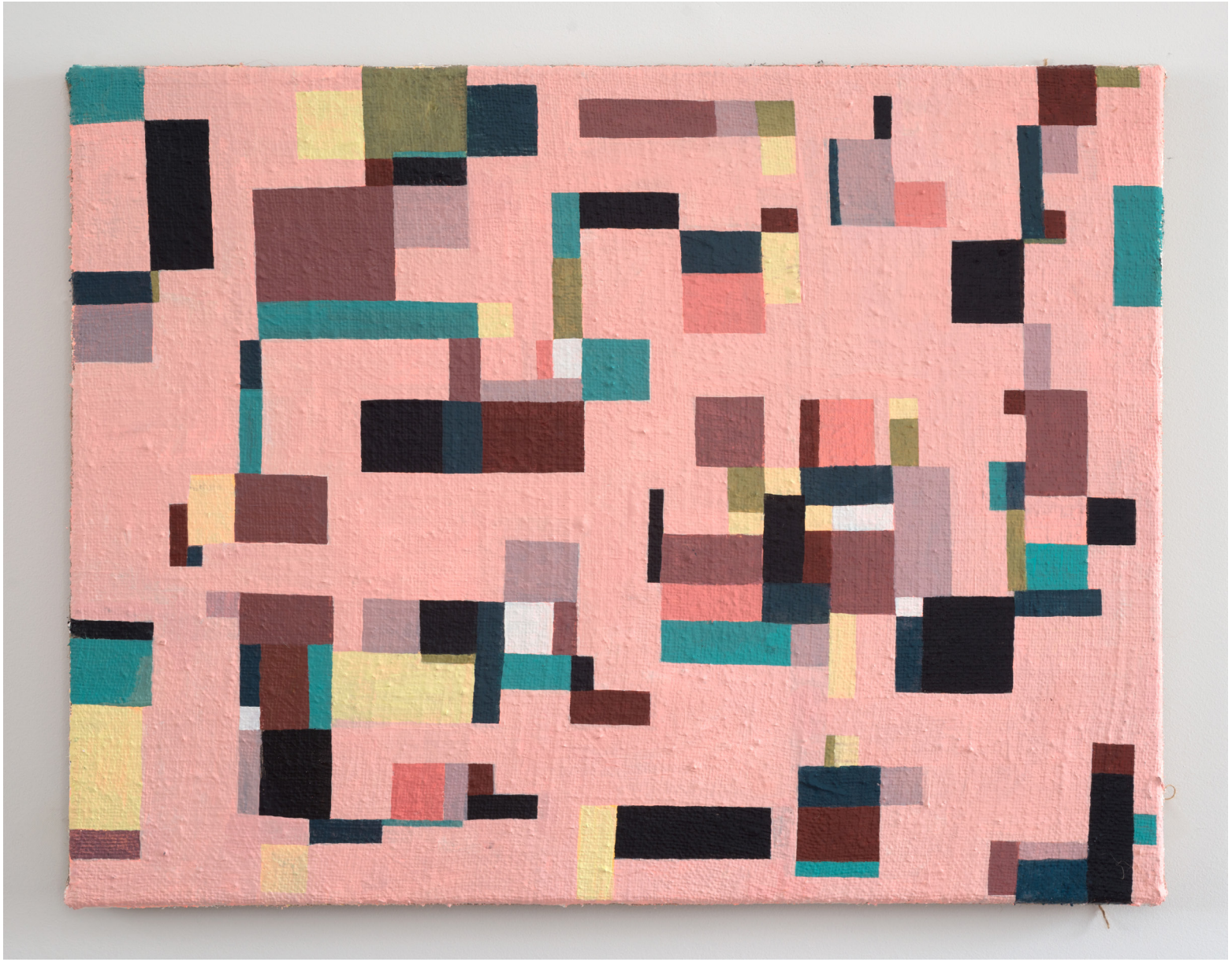
Imogen Taylor
Burgundy Apricot
2018
acrylic on hessian
510 x 610mm
IT5253

Imogen Taylor
Pocket Histories
Installation view
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery
March 2018

Imogen Taylor
Pocket Histories
Installation view
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery
March 2018

Imogen Taylor
In & Out
Installation view
Michael Lett
July 2016



Imogen Taylor
Borderline
2016
acrylic on hessian
600 x 750mm
IT4542-1

Imogen Taylor
The Village
2016
acrylic on hessian
600 x 500mm
IT4540-01

Imogen Taylor
In & Out
Installation view
Michael Lett
July 2016

Imogen Taylor
Blue Fires
2016
acrylic on hessian
1080 x 1000mm overall
IT4646-01

Imogen Taylor
BODY LANGUAGE
Installation view
Artspace, Auckland
December 2015

Imogen Taylor
BODY LANGUAGE
Installation view
Artspace, Auckland
December 2015

Imogen Taylor
Glory Hole
Installation view
Michael Lett
October 2014

Imogen Taylor
Hot Mess
2014
acrylic on hessian
1600 x 1300mm
IT3893-1

Imogen Taylor
Internet Cafe
2014
acrylic on hessian
400 x 350 mm
IT-3894-01

Imogen Taylor
Untitled
2012
drinking straws, string, acrylic on canvas
400 x 300mm
IT2459-01

Imogen Taylor

Born 1985, Whangarei, New Zealand
Lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand

EDUCATION

2010
Post-Graduate Diploma of Fine Arts, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

2007
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

RESIDENCIES

2017
McCahon House Artists' Residency

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2018
Social Studies, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt (solo)
Imogen Taylor & Diena Georgetti, Stolen Leopard, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)
Pocket Histories, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, Auckland (group)

2017
Open Air, Still Life, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin (group)

2016
In & Out, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
Painting: A Transitive Space, St Paul Street Gallery, AUT, Auckland (group)
Certainly Very Merry, Tim Melville Gallery, Auckland (group)

2015
BODY LANGUAGE, Artspace, Auckland (solo)
Two in the Pink, North Projects, Christchurch (group)
Spring 1883, The Establishment Hotel, Sydney (group)
Implicated and Immune, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)
Puis-je utiliser votre toilette, Fuzzy Vibes, Auckland (group)

2014
Glory Hole, Michael Lett, Auckand (solo)
Girls Abrstraction, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington (group)
Two in the Pink, North Projects, Christchurch (group)
From the Vault, Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland (group)

2013
New Paintings, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
Blow Hole, Kalimanrawlins, Melbourne (solo)
Scraps, Artstation Cellblock, Auckland (group)
Porous Moonlight, Papakura Art Gallery, Papakura (curator)
Puahi, The Suter Gallery, Nelson (group)

2012
The New Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Melbourne (group)
Walk of Shame, Ferari Gallery, Auckland (group)
Man Hands, TCB Gallery, Melbourne (group)
Space is the Place, In House Gallery, Auckland (group)
Nap Time, ABC Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand (group)
Balls Deep, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)

2011
Pearl Necklace Patio, Personal Best Gallery, Auckland (solo)
Caraway Downs, Artspace, Auckland, with Richard Frater, Tahi Moore, Patrick Lundberg and Rebecca Boswell, curated by Roman Mitch (group)
Economics, Ostrale '011, Dresden, Germany, curated by Window Gallery, University of Auckland (group)

2010
Surf 'n' Turf, The High Seas Gallery, Auckland (solo)

2009
Beef Taco, 448 Gallery, Auckland (solo)
100 Clams, The High Seas Gallery, Auckland (group)
Now, Plaything Gallery, Auckland (group)

2008
See Saw, Cassette Number Nine, Vulcan Lane, Auckland (solo)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2015
Victoria Wyne-Jones, Body Language (exhibition text), Artspace, November 2015
John Hurrell, ‘Imogen Taylor at Artspace’, Eye Contact, November 2015
Virginia Were, ‘A not so hidden agenda’, Art News New Zealand, Summer 2015
Owen Connors, “Give and Take: Imogen Taylor’s Glory Hole and Political Camp”.
Pantograph Punch, June 2015

2014
Warren Feeny, ‘Provcative exhibition entertains and amuses’

2013
Edward Hanfling, ‘Exhibitions: Auckland’, Art News New Zealand, Issue 148,
Summer 2013-14

2012
Ashley Crawford, ‘Imogen Taylor’, Australian Art Collector, Issue 59, 2012

IMOGEN TAYLOR: IN THE WAKE OF

Painting's legacies and the ongoing questions of its relevance sit like a monkey on Imogen Taylor's shoulder. And the monkey is muse. New terms like 'precariat' have been invented to name the insecurity which Taylor's generation faces. Imagine being a painter her age now. The status updates on painting's health are like those collapsible wooden toys that you stick your finger up – one minute it's limp, buckled-in on itself, the next it's spry, upright. If painting *is* dead, imagine what the funeral – probably at MoMA – would look like: Paul Delaroche, Andy Warhol, Donald Judd, Marcel Duchamp as pallbearers? In a 2015 discussion on painting's relative wellbeing, critic Jason Farago identified the medium's pluralisms: the recent uplift of figurative painting; work that's moved off the canvas; artworks that combine painting in installations. Farago argues that painting which 'acknowledges the challenges the medium has faced and builds from there is doing very well indeed'.[1] The evolution of new painting sub-species – the figure in frame again, the painting playing with its frame and, in some cases, joining a room of other stuff – may be a sign that hybrid vigour will keep things spry and upright. But when I look at recent painting, it's those painters whose DNA is visibly located in modernism which hold my attention and signal health.

Taylor is a painter who finds reserves in a range of visual modernisms. Her plumbing of local art history has been widely discussed, sometimes shallowly as an unthinking homage to formalism.[2] But close looking reveals Taylor's thoughtful, broad sampling and remixing process in which pieces of geometric abstraction from early and mid-20th-century art are overlaid and recharged. Her 2016 exhibition *In & Out* at Michael Lett Gallery presented a selection of works that refracted colour, shapes, form and space. In *Orbit Around*, 2016 (fig.1) De Stijl-like pixels awkwardly interact on the canvas with Delaunay-esque arcs. Your eye jerks across different layers; sections emerge and interrupt each other on the plane. One minute you might be in an industrial city; the next you're close-up to a piece of fabric. Clanging, sometimes discordant colour harmonies intersect with divided orbs and colour swatches in *Charlie's Bar*, 2016 (fig.2). The lack of compositional equanimity means that you *work with* the paintings to achieve what's often just a fleeting stable reading. In the homage to local Cubism, *Full Moon/King Tide*, 2016 (fig.3) Colin McCahon's 'little squares' dance at you and drift away inside a field of overlapping shapes. Parts of the structure resemble – vaguely – solid forms; while in other areas, which are more open, flattened beams lean and lurch, overlie and tuck behind. These paintings are uneasy: it's difficult for the eye to find fixture when pitching into something close then jerking back out. The exhibition title – *In & Out* – might be seen to reference both this pitching effect and the questions: "What's in and what's out"? Is Taylor alluding to the formal mechanics in which forms are revealed and concealed, or maybe her relationship with modernism and its new blush? Is she talking about making love – or passing through passion?

1. BBC: Jason Farago: Is Painting Dead? 18 February 2015. http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150217-is-painting-dead, accessed 21 Jan 2018.

2. New Zealand Painting: Stealing the Show: Implicated and Immune: Historical Revisionism http://www.newzealandpainting.co.nz/2015/02/stealing-the-show-implicated-and-immune-historical-revisionism/comment-page-1/, accessed 21 Jan 2018.

Resonant with Cubist legacies, *Full Moon/King Tide* anticipated Taylor's latest body of work, which itself represents a continuation of ideas developed during her McCahon House residency in 2017. Out in Titirangi, suspended in the bush, Taylor was closer to a home-grown source of her sampling. Like housesitting for Gertrude Stein, immersed in French Bay and its environs, she was surrounded by a memory of modernism. More than 60 years earlier, McCahon had been in the midst of a transition towards overtly modernist forms. He made this move there by way of Cubism. His merging of cubist elements with kauri, religious texts and views of the bay at the end of the road represented a period of development as well as a bedding in. A modernism with strong links to its European genesis was taking root as Cubism helped McCahon break open his painting and relinquish mimesis. The cubist-inspired hybrid painting produced in the 1950s reflects his largely independent and isolated study of the development of abstraction, which of course had happened elsewhere first. The cubist style was for him a toolkit which he used to understand non-naturalistic representation. Yet his work remained anchored in the reality of his everyday life and its translation of optical perception. Taylor's motivations, separated scores of years from McCahon's, may appear very different. Are they? Exploring visual modernisms, including Cubism and post-cubist styles, she translates modern elements into her own restless abstraction. Informed by revolutionary theories of time, cubist painting had its beginnings in the transformation of perceptions of objects in space through the fusion of multiple views within a single image. Back out at the McCahon House in 2017, Taylor wasn't busy swatting Cubsim's handbook – *Du 'Cubisme'*, 1912 – or applying stringent theories to the construction of still lifes. She was intuiting Cubism's geometric and often organic-looking forms, reimaging pockets of modernist vocabulary.

In the robust and explorative *Foot Hills*, 2017 (fig. 4), emphasis shifts as the networks of flat planes and pattern in the earlier *In & Out* works are replaced by more heavily rendered curvaceous shapes. Folded and sliced, the forms of *Foot Hills* simultaneously elide and divide. This brings the work of North American painter Lesley Vance to mind: her compositions were not predetermined but were instead the results of finely poised arrangements 'built on the logic of suspension'.[3] And like McCahon, Taylor uses straight lines and curves to construct a stratum of interjecting shapes which seem in parity with each other. Unseen forces push and tug at forms which are pricked, flaccid or puffed-up. The chaotic equilibrium of *Foot Hills* is also reminiscent of the movement in German artist Florian Baudrexel's angular sculptures and the pointed elements of the Umberto Boccioni bronze *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913. It's worth at this point noting that painting wasn't Taylor's art-school major.

3. S. Hudson, *Painting Now*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 198.

Foot Hills' physicality, which transcends 'sampling', recalls the works Taylor presented in the suitably named 2015 exhibition *Body Work* at Artspace, where a sense of the abject found expression in a messy yet measured churn of modernist leitmotifs, bulbous shapes and holes. Transgressive and trypophobia-inducing, the *Body Work* paintings merged forms evocative of body parts with the taut language of geometric abstraction. *Slip*, from 2016 (fig. 5), is also characterised by this '"pretty/ ugly" mix',[4] but with more explicit imagery as a black column/baton pushes down on the centre of the pillow and threatens the balance of the stack of parts beneath, bringing to mind the fragile delicacy of the human head. *Slip*'s dark humour announces a degree of forcefulness and menace not present in Taylor's more 'decorative' work.[5]

Textures of local modernism, as well as those of European modern art, are props in what I would call 'Taylor's tragicomedies'. In the exhibition *Body Work*, we found Picasso's rope, unfurled from the oval edge of painting's first collage – *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912 – to be used as a hanging device and dangled through holes which punctured Taylor's compositions. The hessian surface of *Foot Hills* echoes the back-of-the-Masonite-board period feel of a 1950s John Forrester still-life painting (fig. 6); or, somewhat perfectly, the temporary partition walls visible in the installation images of the 1954 exhibition *Object and Image*. Curated by McCahon and featuring work by him and other New Zealand cubists, *Object and Image* represents an opening up to international art and a pivotal moment in New Zealand's evolving conversation with abstraction. Taylor, working in the 21st century and connected beyond measure with the international through technology and easy travel, is informed by an entirely different set of conditions. Although her works may hover 'between authenticity and appropriation',[6] and sometimes issue uneasy jibes, her understanding of the ramifications of geometric abstraction's impossibly male-dominated history – its painters and critics alike – is clear. If you want this further elaborated, ask her to write you a zine about it.

4. Noted: Julie Hill: Auckland Artist Imogen Taylor Contemplates the Art World Sausage-ocracy http://www.noted.co.nz/culture/arts/auckland-artist-imogen-taylor-contemplates-the-art-world-sausage-ocracy/
5. Ibid.
6. Mark Godfrey, 'Statements of Intent', *Artforum*, (2014): 295.

Fig.4 *Foothills*, acrylic on hessian, 2017
Photo: courtesy of Michael Lett Gallery

Fig.5 *Slip,* acrylic on hessian, 2017
Photo: courtesy of Michael Lett Gallery

Fig.6 John Forrester, *Still Life*, 1952
oil on canvas
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of the artist

After Obama became president, Joan Didion stated that irony had become 'not the preferred way' of viewing events.[7] The same cannot be said for Taylor's Instagram, which may well offer a useful perspective on her practice. In a photo uploaded with the caption 'Our very first family portrait', the artist poses in a shiny puffer jacket. Beside her stands Sue, who is dressed in a multi-coloured patchwork ski jacket from the early 1990s. Does the lampooning of heteronormative traditions flow into the art? Is Taylor's referencing of visual modernism poking fun at the 'authentic gesture' of mid-century painting? Perhaps an answer lies in her finely applied brushstrokes and in the complexity of her compositions. Her carefully crafted paintings may slip between the poles of homage and irony, but in her uneasy abstraction and hectic attitude towards form I find certain and knowing sincerity.

In combating, or at least working within, a disillusionment with painting, Taylor looks to history – to 20th-century European Cubism and its southern-hemisphere offspring. At its inception, Cubism transgressed bourgeois rationality to create a style of disruption and discomfort. Those analytic masterpieces of confusion, all in differing shades of grey, were full of eye-trickery, word play and humour. In the later work of New Zealand-based cubists, struggle lay on the surface, visible and attention calling. Each hard-edge line, flattened plane or translucent screen of colour reached towards new painterly possibilities. Merging McCahon with his influences, Taylor, in a very 21st-century, all-things-connected manner collapses the distance between the local and the international, while feeding the local back to the international. Her ironic sensibility – 'the detachment of mind, the appreciation of the folly of taking things at face value' – reminds us that the modernists' utopian prospecting may have fallen short.[8] Didion cautioned against living in an 'irony-free zone' in which 'naïveté, translated into "hope" was now in' and where 'innocence, even when it looked like ignorance, was now prized'.[9] Thankfully, Taylor's refracting and ironic lens breaks the path to easy viewing, disrupting the potential for cosy or nostalgic or innocent readings of mid-century formalism. Her bent forms show a knowing understanding of the politics of painting and its histories, which alerts us to the wider risks of simple and blinkered looking.

Julia Waite

7. New York Times: Andy Newman: Irony is Dead. Again. Yeah, Right. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/fashion/23irony.html, accessed 21 Jan 2018.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

YOU'RE EQUAL

From a studio beside Colin McCahon's former Titirangi home, artist Imogen Taylor contemplates the art world sausage-ocracy, her pretty/ugly work and having a parent in the Act Party.

TEXT **JULIE HILL** — PHOTOGRAPHY **TODD EYRE**

"It's really hard to make people laugh with art. Or it's like a one-liner and you laugh once, and then it's gone."

Imogen Taylor is speaking about the very funny zine *No Idea* that accompanied *Body Language*, an exhibition of her paintings and drawings at Artspace last year, which quite openly and slanderously mocked various local and highly recognisable "WMAs" (white male artists) and industry types, while drily pondering the double indignity of being female and lesbian.

Taylor has been making zines since she was a teenager, selling them at feminist bookstore Cherry Bomb Comics as a way of getting her art and ideas about, on the cheap. "When it came to doing the Artspace show, I always found that their text [accompanying exhibitions] was really heavy. The zine was a really good way of having something autobiographical, subjective; something to comfort you through the space and make you laugh."

Those who weren't laughing so much were the WMAs who encountered none-too-subtle depictions of themselves. "Things got a bit cool with some people. But most people got it." She says the art scene in Auckland can be blokey, and art criticism in Auckland, with the exception of excellent newer websites like The Pantograph Punch, can be tediously sexist. Mentorship, thus, is often a sausagefest. "I'm always amused by the relationships between older male artists or professionals in the industry and younger male artists. That 'standing round the barbecue' vibe: you see it start at art school, and then it keeps going."

Speaking her mind is a talent Taylor learned as a babe, growing up as the progeny of former Act Party politician and journalist Deborah Coddington and controversial publisher Alister Taylor. But while as a teen she often fervently disagreed, particularly with her mum, she says it was an invaluable grounding in formulating and articulating her views. "It's actually quite amazing having your parents do something that you disagree with so much, because you have to voice your own opinion against someone who's really articulate. It would be helpful if everyone had to learn how to do that. So I can see the positive side now. But man, a parent in the Act Party. Whew."

After art school, Taylor spent a year touring the world as a keyboardist in the excellent Auckland band The Ruby Suns, which signed to US label Sub Pop, and which turned out to be the perfect primer for a career in painting. "Music, in terms of the process, is way more visceral and open. You don't have to think about every single step, or contextualise it or conceptualise it, so it was

Right Auckland-based artist Imogen Taylor in her studio at Parehuia, Titirangi's McCahon House residency.

Michael Lett

Above Taylor in the studio. Parehuia was designed by architect Pete Bossley and is adjacent to Titirangi's McCahon House museum.

really great for going back to painting and going, 'Oh, I can totally improvise this'."

Her paintings are what she calls a "pretty/ugly" mix of Cubism and Regionalism that somehow blend geometric forms with bodily functions. Her shows have rude titles like *In & Out*, *Glory Hole* and *Balls Deep*. "I got really inspired by *Notes on 'Camp'* by Susan Sontag. I liked how she related a queer sensibility to aesthetics in art; I thought that was really clever and nailed all these things I'd been thinking about, about what's good painting and what's bad painting, and blurring those boundaries."

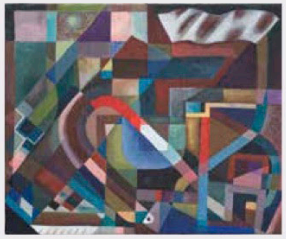
Taylor is currently holed up at Parehuia, the artist's residency next to the wee house in Titirangi where Colin McCahon lived in the 1950s. Outside are the very subjects of McCahon's 'Kauri Landscape'; Taylor shows me how a large window at the back of the studio chops the trees' tops and bottoms off so they turn into weird static lines. With space, time and money for flash materials, she says her work is improving rapidly. "This is the biggest opportunity I've ever been given in my career, the most amount of space or privilege or ease. And it's the first time I've not worked since I was 13."

While Taylor has often paid tribute to mystical bohos Tony Fomison and Philip Clairmont for shaping her style, she has hitherto wasted no love on Aotearoa's saint of paint McCahon. Before the residency she was a fan neither of his minimalism nor his religiosity, and found his work too manly. "I always grew up kind of hating McCahon and not wanting to be like him." But since moving in next to his old house, now a museum, and poring over the work he made there, she realises that she and McCahon are actually pretty similar, in terms of style and use of materials like hessian, not to mention their Cubist tendencies. And it's the paintings McCahon created on the very spot she now works, such as 'Titirangi, Winter, 1957', that seem the most consonant.

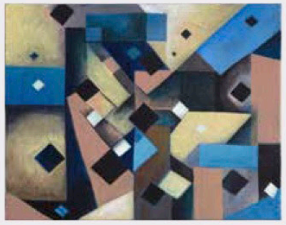
All the kauri and kererū action is "encouraging the elements of nature that I'm interested in, in my work. I think the colour's changed quite significantly – but

PRETTY/UGLY

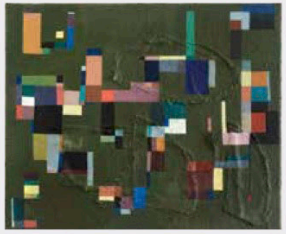
Taylor's paintings mix geometric forms with bodily functions.



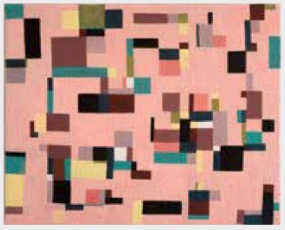
Above 'Moon on Tapestries', 2016



Above 'Full Moon / King Tide', 2016



Above 'Camel Toe', 2016



Above 'Borderline', 2016. All images courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett Gallery.

I don't know whether that's because I can afford really good paint now." McCahon too, embraced new hues during his time out west. "I've been in the museum and looking at those French Bay works, and his use of colour was probably the most diverse out of his whole practice."

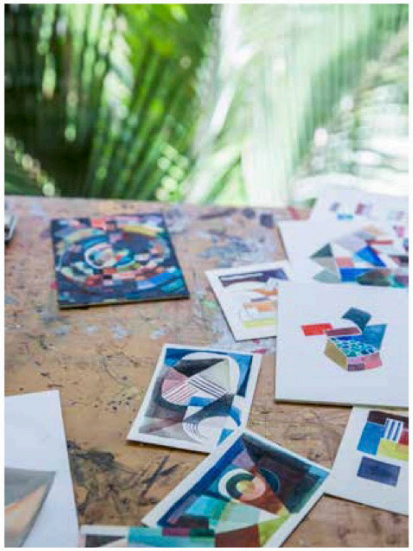
We reflect on the fact that bush life must have been hard for McCahon's wife Anne, who was often out there alone with their four children, in a home so tiny that sleeping was sometimes a bit improvised. But Taylor says it's an experience none of them forgot. "Everyone always says 'Oh, his kids slept outside underneath the house', which is full on because there's so many mosquitoes around here, but apparently they looked back on that time really fondly, because they could go down and play on the beach and they had a lot of freedom."

"This is the biggest opportunity I've ever been given in my career, the most amount of space or privilege or ease."

Having architect Sue Hillery for a partner has, says Taylor, changed her perspective. "I do think about architecture a lot now! She trained as an artist too and she's probably the first person to look at my paintings and say stuff. We talk about space and scale a lot." Hillery says the residency has given Taylor a chance to "knuckle down and celebrate the isolation of such an amazing place. In a very subtle way, knowing that Imogen is immersed in her painting practice… I can only be competitive and ensure my practice has a similar discipline."

While in Titirangi, Taylor plans to make "something that's maybe more for the community than about the community". But there won't be another issue of *No Idea*. "It definitely made a lot of people laugh, but it would be good to learn how to do that in a different way so it's not at other people's expense." And the art world sausage-ocracy? "For me as a now-not-so-much-of-a young female artist, it's about taking it into my own hands and creating more communities for artists to connect and pass on ideas.

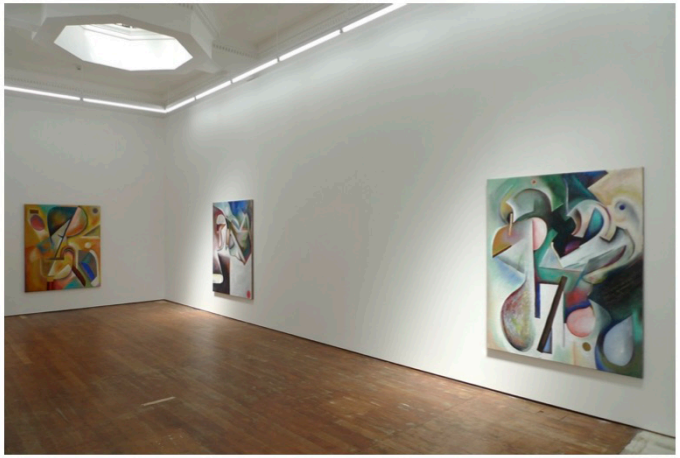
"It's just encouraging women to be themselves and be comfortable, and if you want to network with someone it doesn't make you a slut. You're equal." ●



Opposite page Taylor in the studio. **Above** Some of Taylor's new works created during her residency.

Julie Hill, "You're Equal", Paperboy, September 2017

THE PANTOGRAPH PUNCH



Art

30.06.2015

Give and Take: Imogen Taylor's "Glory Hole" and Political Camp

By Owen Connors

When I first encountered Imogen Taylor's most recent solo show, Glory Hole, at Micheal Lett Gallery late last year, the most confronting aspect wasn't the name, but the dramatic change in scale. The small canvases of Taylor's past shows have been replaced by large, low hung stretched jute works, expressing both the confidence and provocation that placing or taking a cock through a hole in a wall would suggest. This going big, as with most female artist's size decisions, gets easily rendered as a theatrical enactment of macho modernism, the Mitre 10 MEGA's "big is good" mantra to New Zealand's aesthetic sensibility taken to the point of self-parody; a playing around with the notion of becoming erect.

Yet, despite this playful gesture of identity-based critique of the art world, there is value in interpreting Taylor's developments beyond a reading that relies upon traditional notions of lack,that practitioners outside the 'White Male Artist' model are subservient to (pigeonholed, perhaps, rather than gloryholed).

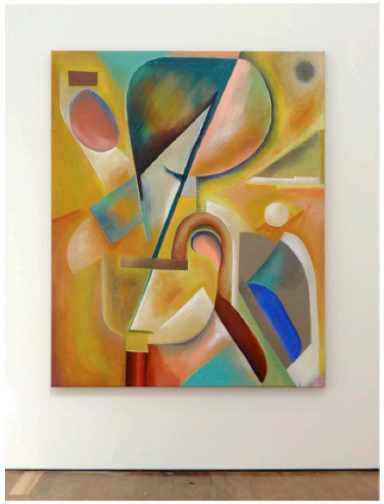
Producing big 'abstracts' as a rejection of the status quo within the art world seems such a crude interpretation of Taylor's work; yet looking to the ways in which queerness, as both a sexuality and defiance of normative ways of being in the world, functions beneath the surface gestures of these new paintings exposes a complex interaction of this body of work with

identity.

A recent article I came across questioned Taylor's legitimacy in participating in a queer conversation, deeming her "zombie formalism" irrelevant in the face of historical engagement with the HIV crisis. It is this critique that I affectively spring from, unpacking the subtleties of style across Taylor's oeuvre to defy conceptions of the apolitical that sometimes accompany an engagement with aesthetics, where the decorative is depoliticised. Moreover, Taylor is looking at the interactions between existence and expression in ways that are both provocative and practical.

When approaching these new works in relation to Taylor's past practice, one can immediately sense a consistent use of collage. Early works merge paint with the likes of string, straws and sponges, creating cheekily representative and symbolic forms out of the ephemera of the everyday. In these more recent works, the three-dimensional collage of objects has been superseded by the quotation of various styles and forms instead, simultaneously producing and disrupting Taylor's compositions. Collage persists, in the form of an assemblage of painters from New Zealand's canon.

Although the visible influence of history is customary in painting practice, Taylor's directness and discursive sourcing suggests a process more akin to copy and paste, a trawling through art history to produce an over-saturated pastiche. This is hardly a criticism, given the breadth of the source material, as this cut-and-paste processing manages to merge disparate approaches to painting, from Philip Clairmont's jarring expressionism and intentional entropy, to Rita Angus' flattened and sharp modernist figures, enriching these works through their outward and backward reach.



Imogen Taylor, Hidden Agenda. 2014, acrylic on hessian, 1600 x 1300mm

The tradition of collage Taylor's playing with here has often been rendered subordinate to the hegemony of painting. It is seen as an unassuming means of production that does not rely upon significant capital investment, instead sourcing material that plays to alternative systems of value. The introduction of collage into the medium of paint destabilises the hierarchy we prescribe to specific mediums.

It's a decision that differentiates these works from their painting influences and their taxonomy - refusing to occupy a position within a binary of high

and low, experiential and theoretical, simultaneously producing proclamations of beauty by seasoned patrons and notes in students' handbooks proclaiming "*Imogen Taylor = Ugly painting.*"

This use of collage also engages with its sources in a manner that defies traditional art historical enquiry. Each composition contains elements that suggest a nod to others, communicating across time in a manner that denies a narrative of progression. Stretched jute and curvy caricatured forms say hello to Tony Fomison, muddied modern colours and floating forms seem to acknowledge the still life of Frances Hodgkins, whilst over-worked blocks of rough acrylic, trying to merge like oils, pull in Colin McCahon's Northland Panels.

The reverence to this process of production is in some way tied to an interest in how the pastiche can operate as critique. Rather then purely working with the signifiers of the past (such as size) to establish a critical historic relationship through reactionary appropriation, Taylor's practice uses pastiche to actively deny the avant-garde, to disregard narratives of bettering and advancing as a model of artistic development.

In fine art schools, the notion of being critical is often saturated with psychoanalytical nuances; 'Daddy problems' addressed through rejecting and appropriating the forms of the past issue forth as models are taught which seek to knock the older generation off the pedestal. In Taylor's practice, pastiche denies its own path of least resistance. Past practitioners concerns such as notions of abstraction and light are pushed with an attitude of homage and the works themselves, although constituting an individual style are heavily reliant upon their influences.

This process of pastiche is often denied any critical inquiry as it is perceived to be simplified to homage and aesthetic appreciation (which is not strictly a negative experience). However, it does feed into readings of the work that reduce artistic intent in favour of the kind of accusations of "zombie formalism" that I am addressing. In fact, the notion of collage as a language and method of communication is one which is intended to recognise its destructive quality, rather than one that aggregates or curates the past.

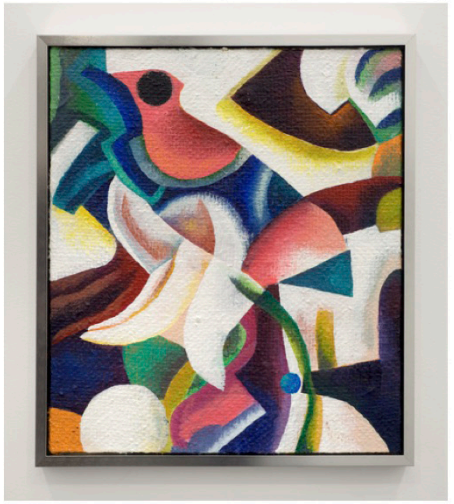
In fact, for Taylor and many of us, the past isn't just a foreign country, but an entirely alien notion. There is something distinctly yet subtly queer about Taylor's use of pastiche if we question how time may function for the queer body - denied the hegemony of reproduction, disengaged with its ancestry. Both lockstep reverence and rebellion are normative responses. The queer as a floating identity, seeking out alternative familial relations, may begin to chafe against the 'family' art model and seek a different way to engage with the past and the future.

The process of cutting and pasting starts off by destroying the original meaning of the source material, but also it produces outputs which abstract the originally representational, and Taylor's source material relies upon a balancing of abstraction and representation. Her quotations of various artists pick up on this notion of abstraction in various ways, from a fracturing of the form akin to cubism, to an altering of perspective that denies the ordinarily mimetic nature of painting.

One consequence of the collaging process contributes is a formal reading of Taylor's work as a set of strictly abstract references. But if Taylor has engaged with her influences within pastiche, we should engage with them too: we should insist on locating that representation beneath the formal destruction of collage. We should investigate what these influences speak to, and what the ramifications are of destroying the representational.

Imogen Taylor, Getting Warmer. 2013,

acrylic on hessian, 400 x 350mm



Finding representations in the work isn't all that difficult, as it still insists on presenting the figurative – and despite the destruction of collage, it does so often, and in surprising ways. The gallery's press release for the show insisted these works consist of "human forms and suggestions of bodily functions – penetration, secretion and taction – that push through her layers of abstraction."

This can be seen within *Pelvic Floors*, as suggestions of a phallic form protrude from the left of the painting as organic silhouettes overlap at eye level - a multiplicity of thighs and bums, or potentially just a scenic view of New Zealand's hilly terrain.

The release goes on to discuss the "erotics…not for their anonymity or discretion, but rather their resolute presence." However, as a result of the destructive nature of Taylor's use of collage to produce these compositions, this sensual presence is not purely reliant upon form, but also a modern palette which wilfully merges the sexy and grotesque of the colour wheel – not to mention the title to the exhibition itself, which rejoices in turning undertones into overtones.

This collage as language, despite its role in abstracting these erotic scenes, also builds them. Different styles and approaches to producing form create a polymorphous body in Taylor's work, albeit one we are denied a clear picture of. The language of collage becomes akin to a performance or articulation, describing and acknowledging a representational form whilst allowing the structure of communication to disrupt and complicate it.

Inarguably, this is a personal and political gesture. There is a pervading culture of taboo that still exists around queer female desire, and female desire in general. But Taylor's structure isn't abstracting this desire to get one over the past – in fact, it plays to a legacy of dancing around judgement and censure. There is something akin to Caravaggio in these works, as his use of religious and historical motifs to present the homoerotic lingers as a trope of queer sexual expression.

As in that case, the active abstraction of sexual subject matter allows for its acceptance in wider society: works may be discussed for their colour, their texture, their composition, their formal attributes, rather then the directly confrontational 'message' that lays beneath.

Yet as the gallery has suggested, this does not just concern "anonymity or discretion". The emphasis on Taylor's process as being akin to language situates a mode of sexual expression within structures of everyday communication.

What it recalls to me most is that most veiled of inter-personal relations, the complex, multi-sensory language structure of flirting. Its suggestive glances, the jokes and innuendo and allusions to attraction all carry particular resonance in queer relationship formation, in environments where instigation and presentation of flirting carry with them dangers beyond rejection – shame, ostracism, and violence. The "resolute presence" of the sexual in Taylor's work plays to this queer sensibility, and can appear on first blush to pull in opposite directions – a need to disguise one's sexual practice whilst constantly remembering and celebrating its role in differentiating oneself from heteronormative society.

So this reading of collage in Imogen Taylor's practice draws distinct connections to a queer way of being in the world, both in the form of pastiche in relation to time and in alternative language structures when addressing sexual desire. This can be called, tentatively, a queer sensibility, a way of feeling whose presence and influence is often hard to pinpoint.

Imogen Taylor, Pelvic Floors. 2014, acrylic on hessian, 1600 x 1300mm

There is, however, another sensibility that I have initially avoided attaching to this work - camp. The camp sensibility, as outlined by Susan Sontag's seminal 1964 essay "Notes on Camp", presents us with a virtual checklist with which to inspect Taylor's work in fulfilling this feeling. Sontag identifies camp as an aesthetic of "artifice", a "marginal" and largely "decorative" set of traits and affectations that "neutralizes moral indignation [and] sponsors playfulness."

This description of camp, however, appears to sit at odds with a sentimentally political engagement with Taylor's work – or other work that involves pastiche, frivolity, and a certain level of artifice. In Sontag's view, camp exudes an attitude of the "disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical." Emphasis is placed upon the "extravagance" of camp, the work "in terms of style". She stresses that "pure camp is always naïve" – but if we take her at her word, we seemingly deny ourselves the potential to discuss this element of Taylor's work as part of any intentional queer discourse.

This denial of queer association with camp has arisen in recent theorising and artistic practice in the camp camp. Chris Sharp's "Notes on Neo-Camp" (2013) – a group show curated at London's Studio Voltaire taking Sharp's essay "Camp + Dandyism = Neo-Camp" as a starting point - attempted to isolate this sensibility as something "post-homosexual", a formal style now "divorced from its political, predominately homosexual, subcultural origins."

Camp, within Sharp's reworking of the term, comes to be described as a "gay heritage style", which, although recognising something inherently queer within camp's historical use, disavows contemporary camp practice from personal queer experience and an ongoing political agenda.

If I stray from a formal reading of her practice, Taylor's treatment of a camp sensibility can be distinguished from Sharp's. Instead, one can recognise that the queer sensibility in Taylor's practice runs parallel to readings of a camp sensibility. The structures of language mentioned earlier that Taylor uses to abstract the sexual operate with the same sensibility as the theatrical and exaggerated nature of camp. Sontag notes that camp is the "love of the exaggerated, the "off," of things-being-what-they-are-not."

Within Taylor's practice this "things-being-what-they-are-not" manifests as both discreet involvement of queer subject matter through abstraction, and models of flirtation that talk around queerness. It is based in understanding the role one occupies in the world, and the impact of that in aesthetic outputs.

Locating this in Taylor's practice is a reminder and recognition that the theatrical structure of camp may pull upon how the queer body is forced to behave in heterosexual society. Taylor's engagement with history, and the subsequent queer sensibility attached to this, also feed into Sontag's - noting that "camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying. People who share this sensibility are not laughing at the thing they label as "a camp," they're enjoying it."

I realise that hitching a queer sensibility to a camp sensibility when looking at Taylor's practice is in many ways limiting. The scope of camp, as with the scope of so much queer subjectivity, is diverse and complex.

But in connecting the two, and arguing that there is something inherently queer about camp, I hope to continue the question of how identity politics function within the aesthetic realm. Taylor's use of the sensibility is less about any appropriation of a political or "historically gay style" – instead, it's more akin to an understanding of alternative ways of living and being in the world. Looking at aesthetics in such a way hopefully empowers reading of the complexity of experience at play in her work – it's a fine example of how art that operates within identity politics may use alternative styles and technique, not just didacticism, to undermine the status quo.

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