

pompom

The work of art in the age of digital reproduction

Chloé Wolifson

I peer at you, trying to see how you are made. Only by spending time together, leaning in close, will we discover how we are each put together. My nose accidentally bumps the surface of the screen and a love heart momentarily appears, before rapidly fading away.

To follow your nose into one of Kate Tucker's paintings is to have layers and textures reveal themselves, to find yourself focussing on seemingly innocuous details, clues left by Tucker on her investigations to allow us to unravel the truth behind their construction.

In the digital space, images embody a simultaneous newness and finality. Pixels appear before us, born into completeness, history and temporality erased. The process of their construction is invisible to the naked eye however it is a process open to infinite choice. Image data can be transferred between dimensions and subject to endless visual manipulation. If an incorrect choice is made, it can subsequently be undone: Ctrl-Z. Digital images often consist of carefully composed layers, elements merged so all appears seamless. However with this levelling of layers comes an erasure of history and memory, as well as truth. Digital imagery is, in this sense, the contemporary presentation of identity: perfectly crafted and complete, smooth and flat.

Painting, therefore, is a reflection of a more truthful construction of identity. Paint applied to canvas can conceal the layers beneath but cannot erase them altogether. The painting becomes a product of its physical and temporal history, and the way it occupies space changes as further layers are applied.

Collage further parallels this formation of self. There is nothing new under the sun; we copy and paste elements at will and against our will; Ctrl-C, Ctrl-V. Just as our character and behaviour betrays us, within a painting frayed edges or abrupt slices inevitably reveal themselves as part of a textured surface.

Kate Tucker employs all these techniques to push painting's analogue processes to have the same open-endedness as their digital counterparts. Her paintings are constructed using a variety of paints and mediums, along with collaged elements of paper, canvas or textile that often cryptically turn out to be digital prints of other works – further teasing us in our attempts to uncover the truth.

Tucker's palette is an emotional colourscape. Flesh tones and pastels harmonise with stormy blues and greys, rough-edged canvas pieces harbour indecisive stains, while opaque, hard-edged forms float above transparent fields of waxy varnish. Graphic elements such as checks, stripes, steps, frames and circles boogie with the less defined borders of blobs and brushstrokes. This is intentionally confounding terrain which crosses from canvas to canvas, as Tucker variously spares the canvas or builds up surfaces across a body of work - series of paintings themselves forming temporal landscapes.

Tucker's paintings make us acutely aware of the way we view the work of art in the age of digital reproduction. As artists continue to employ digital media and art is increasingly consumed and shared via online means, Tucker reminds us of why we walk through the doors of a gallery, or choose to live with a painting on our wall. And why, in 2016, artists still choose to pick up a brush and push paint around a canvas.

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