



Sporting Chance

Adrian Jackman's *Fields*

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If you think the housing crisis is a myth, let me introduce you to Adrian Jackman. In the height of summer this year, the artist moved with his family from Auckland to one of those small towns in the Wairarapa, where they could afford to buy a house. They leapfrogged the increasingly unobtainable housing stock of the Waikato and Bay of Plenty, and headed for wine country; not only are they paying a mortgage rather than rent, but they are close to friends

and family and within easy access of Wellington. They are adapting quite happily to life in a small town, and enjoying a climate that is positively continental compared to the year-round swamp that calls itself Auckland.

Some of the gumption required to move house so radically is evident in Jackman's June show *Fields* at Auckland's nkb Gallery. It marks a remarkable combination of the artist's engagement with both the real and the imagined worlds, filtered through a process that explores the impact of technology on

(opposite) ADRIAN JACKMAN *Imaginary Landscape No 16* 2016
Acrylic on linen, 1524 x 1220 mm.

(right) ADRIAN JACKMAN *Imaginary Landscape No 14* 2016
Acrylic on linen, 450 x 450 mm.
(Private collection)

(below) ADRIAN JACKMAN *Imaginary Landscape No 6* 2015
Acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 936 mm.

modern life, and influenced by the ideas and work of the twentieth-century American conceptualist John Cage.

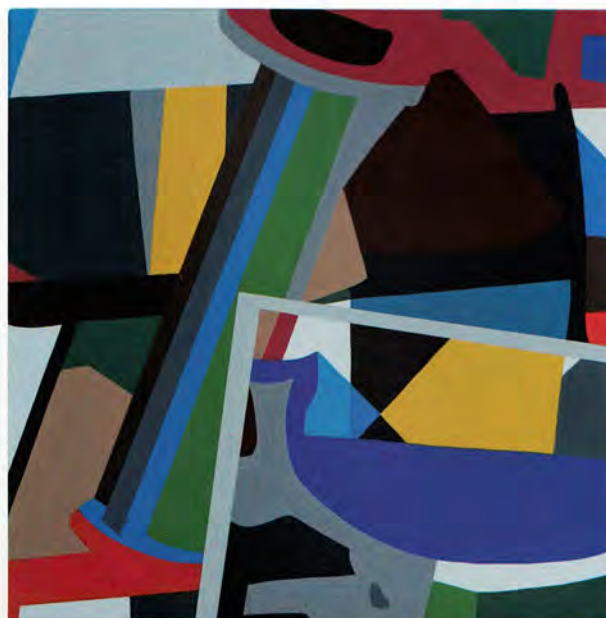
Fields presents ten canvases, each named *Imaginary Landscape*. This repeated title is an homage to John Cage, who composed five musical scores with the same name from 1939–52. An essential part of Cage's *Imaginary Landscapes* is their embracing of indeterminacy, or the inclusion of chance elements as part of their composition and/or performance. *Imaginary Landscape No 1*, for example, is scored for piano, cymbal, and two variable-speed turntables. *Landscape No 4* is scored for 24 performers at 12 radios and *Landscape No 5* calls for the recording of any 42 phonograph records.

Jackman's canvases are numbered sequentially and begin at number 6, picking up from the last of Cage's *Landscapes*. Not just an homage then, this show sees Jackman recasting himself as Cage, using the concept of indeterminacy to prepare and present landscapes in paint that are a progression from Cage's sonic works. Were the American alive, I think he might have been pleased with the liberties taken.

For his *Landscapes* Jackman's starting point is the clutter that inhabits and makes up the visual topography of current life: advertising flyers, catalogues, computer screen dumps, photographs—visual equivalents of the radio hiss and fuzz that inspired Cage. From such ephemera he digitises his selected images into black-and-white drawings, which he then applies to the canvas, layering and compositing, combining and compressing. There may be one or more principal images, around which he builds layers of lines, so that the whole becomes an array of geometric spaces. Some of these spaces are then filled in with paint applied evenly, as a solid block of colour; some are left blank, usually including those that make up the outline of the principal image.

Some rules are followed as paint is applied: the colours used are limited to a palette that Jackman has developed, a palette that will be discarded once the current series is complete; he maintains a more or less equal number of white spaces; no colour is adjacent to itself; the colours are selected and applied intuitively, and they are counted along the way to ensure overall distribution. This self-applied indeterminacy gives the painting shape, although its final appearance is not apparent until finished. Jackman is as surprised and delighted as any viewer might be.

The net effect is a canvas of dynamism and dazzle, with a rhythm that works in all directions across the picture's plane. Despite the chance involved in the process of painting, Jackman proves himself to be a colourist of some skill, his palette a mix of greys, muted hues and hot red and yellow. The



principal image may or may not be clear; the painting shifts from pure abstraction to a barely discernible figuration, and then to an image that leaps from the canvas. What can be seen now might well be invisible in ten minutes' time. The indeterminacy that contributed to the process of making has been transferred to the viewer's perception, mirroring the concept's role for Cage in both composition and performance.

The principal item pictured in *Imaginary Landscape No 16*, for example, is a toy robot cat, which has wheels instead of legs. Jackman and his wife, Lisa, gave such a toy to their young daughter for her birthday, to stand in for the real cat they were unable to adopt until they moved to their new home. (The live cat is now part of the family, and does not relate





well to its robotic predecessor.) The robot came with a manual, the line drawing of which was ideal to digitise and form the basis for this painting.

Arranged around the cat are images of furniture, interiors, architecture, trees; as with the other large works in the show, the idea of a landscape is broadened to be the world as it is perceived, be that the countryside viewed from the studio window, the bumpf that arrives in the mailbox, or the pictures taken or remembered from computer screens and magazines. It is dealt up as a selection of objects on a conveyor belt of the subconscious, the focus narrowed by subjectivity, and slowed down so that it can be investigated and rendered in paint. Each canvas is a collection of items, camouflaged by geometry, given shape by colour.

The first landscape in this series, *No 6*, is a turnkey work. It was a finalist in the 2015 Wallace Art Awards and does not feature a main object, but is an array of large and small items, resized and spatially balanced. Bolts, vehicles, buildings hover amongst tables, chairs and children; perspective here is not just a visual exercise, but an intellectual one.

Fields is a direct relative of *Minimal Wave*, the 2013 exhibition at Whanganui's Sarjeant Gallery that

resulted from Jackman's 2012 residence at the Tylee Cottage. Time spent in Whanganui inspired Jackman to invent a palette for the series he would create there; he took photographs of the buildings and architecture of the river town and, after a process of digital and physical resampling, mixed them to a range of hues—he even named them according to their source: savage pink (after the Savage Club), river gold, Durie Hill green (copied from the inside of the elevator that connects the top of Durie Hill with Anzac Parade).

Jackman engaged closely with his Whanganui world and selected his images in his usual eclectic manner; *Sequential Circuits* is the combination of the garage at the Tylee Cottage, the outline of Mr Potatohead, a toy lent to his daughter while in the town, the blockwork on the façade of the Whanganui War Memorial Hall and a pinhole camera. The images are laid on top of each other and the grid created by their intersecting outlines is rendered in the Whanganui palette.

Included in *Minimal Wave* is *Oberheim Matrix*, a painting that focused on just a part of *Sequential Circuits*—the gable of the Tylee Cottage garage. The smaller work operates as a subset of the larger, a physical manifestation perhaps of the zoom function

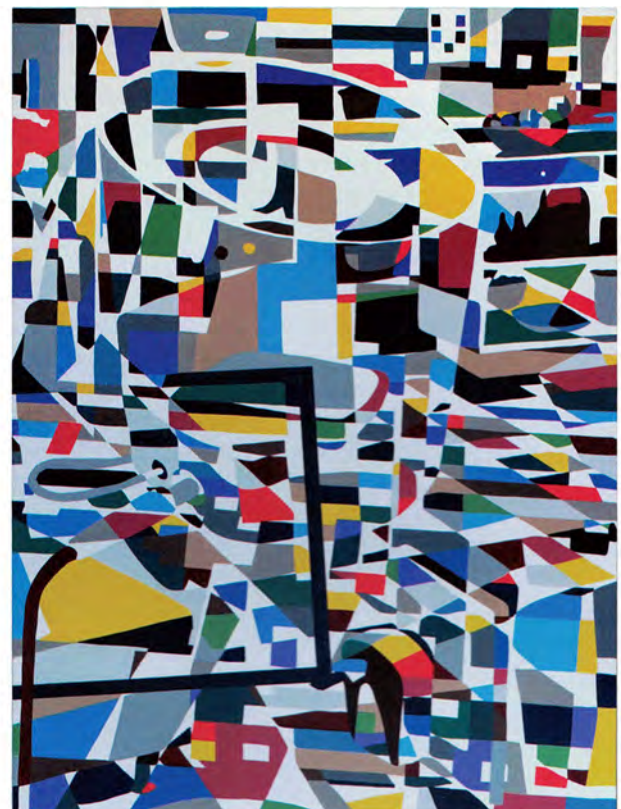


of a computer program or digital camera. Seen together the two works demonstrate an enjoyable and witty visual play; separately, however, the smaller work emphasises the essentially abstract nature of Jackman's painting. He repeated this technique for *Fields*, with similar success—*Imaginary Landscape No 14* is a subset of *Imaginary Landscape No 6*.

Music is important in the work of Jackman. There is the John Cage connection of course, and the smaller subset paintings discussed above operate like a refrain or chorus of the larger piece. *Minimal Wave* takes its name from the underground music movement of the same name from the early 1980s, a loose grouping of bands that made minimal, beat-orientated music using first-generation synthesisers, and whose members were influenced by science fiction, futurism and constructivism. Jackman empathises with these interests, and likens the repetitive beats of their music to the arrangement of patterns on the canvas. When relating it to the act of painting, he sees it as liberating, freeing up the process of plotting the elements on the picture plane. Music and technology are more directly part of *Imaginary Landscape No 9*—the main conical shape comes from the digitised drawing of the kind of portable speaker that connects to a computer.

The interplay of positive and negative space in Adrian Jackman's paintings draws heed to our real-world reliance on the black-and-white binary we expect with line-based drawing, yet also our innate

urge to make sense of apparent chaos. His found images recede and then dominate, their visibility or concealment resting on the viewer's perception. In a recent review in the *New Zealand Herald* T.J. McNamara commented that a fine landscape painter 'grappled with abstraction'. While others may grapple with abstraction, Jackman plays with it, toying with its possibilities, like a (non-robotic) cat that has caught a mouse and paws it, to see if it will flee or freeze. He delights in placing the viewer in the same predicament.



(opposite) ADRIAN JACKMAN *Sequential Circuits* 2013
Acrylic on 12 sheets of Canson Montval paper, 2240 x 2280 mm.
(Photograph: Richard Wotton)

(above) ADRIAN JACKMAN *Oberheim Matrix* 2013
Acrylic on linen, 1676 x 2744 mm.
(Photograph: Richard Wotton)

(right) ADRIAN JACKMAN *Imaginary Landscape No 9* 2015–16
Acrylic on linen, 1000 x 750 mm.