

ADRIAN JACKMAN

MIND THE GAP

18 APRIL – 24 MAY 2009

Lopdell House Gallery

There is no reason to deny the reality of progress, but there is to correct the notion that believes this progress secure. It is more in accordance with facts to hold that there is no certain progress, no evolution, without the threat of "involution," of retrogression. Everything is possible in history; triumphant, indefinite progress equally with periodic retrogression.¹

- Ortega y Gasset

Observed from a distance the earth's landscape and our interventions upon it are at once mysterious and obvious. Modern technologies such as GPS devices combined with satellite imagery allow us to navigate land and ocean in unprecedented detail. Whether it be obtaining navigational directions to the supermarket or 'geotagging' hiking adventures over distant mountains, we now more than ever before perceive the landscape topographically. From this unique perspective areas of mystery from past eras are exposed to us conclusively, in photographic detail. Unresolved details of the land have become more or less reduced to heavily vegetated areas, along with vertical terrain and the underground.

The quality of topographical imagery available varies considerably within popular web applications, most notably Google Earth. Enticing our imagination to complete unseen spaces, the flaws and imperfections in these images highlight the limits of photography (at least the limits of imagery we are allowed access to in the public domain). In a sense, working from these images offers a 'plein air' painterly pretense for the painter, who is engaging with the outside world but at one remove from the traditional model of an artist towing his or her easel through a field.

Gaps have at one time or another invoked imaginative responses in us all. Whether it be cracks in the pavement or the narrow spaces between domestic decking floorboards. In this new series of paintings, Adrian Jackman is considering gaps in the landscape. Investigating the agricultural technique known as circular irrigation, two of the three paintings in this exhibition, entitled *Detail*, and *The Fall*, refer to an ongoing discussion for Jackman whose earlier works occasionally explored the landscape from a similar point of view. Relating to his works which were based on the manicured landscape of golf course fairways, these new paintings observe the land similarly, but this time tended on a massive scale for agriculture.

Describe circular irrigation to most people and they will no doubt recall the crop circles depicted in Hollywood extraterrestrial films and conspiracy theories. Circular irrigation is easy enough to explain as the pattern created by massive irrigation sprinklers. Jackman's physical brushstrokes suggest a Courbet-like approach² echoing against the impermanence that we see in satellite photographs of these assembled landscapes.

Rough painterly gestures in certain areas are contrasted with carefully measured lines and sections of sfumato³ indicating where the photographic image fails to capture the details. In these fields seen from directly above there is no

grandiloquence of nature, as in old paintings; the sublime is replaced by a matter of fact, topographical view of our invasion upon the land. Looking closer, the arrangement of forms appears hastily constructed. Roughly slotted in between arterial roads, circular crops take in as large a space as they are able. In most fields the irrigation circle is only partial and missing sections of the pie shape are taken up by conventional rectangular paddocks and buildings. These abstract and slightly haphazardly arranged shapes are perhaps epithets, for Jackman, of our engagement with nature.

The titles of the two larger scale works (*Detail* and *Inset*) in Jackman's exhibition deliberately borrow straightforward photographic terminology. These titles, lowly technical definitions in the realm of photography, imply a conditional status upon the works, in effect freeing painting from historical jargon inasmuch as they suggest the potential importance inherent in any image, photographic or otherwise.

With the largest work, *Inset*, the topographical idea that initiated to have been exorcised and provides Jackman licence for a new investigation in the same theme: tractor tyres. While *Detail* and *The Fall* depict and also abstract the images of our interaction with land, *Inset* goes one step further in arranging a pile of future archaeological objects.

Taking in the visually jarring effect of a pile of tyres forming the monochromatic composition of *Inset* – a large map-like painting spanning numerous linked-up sheets of paper – brings to mind the work of 1960s optical artists. While that is partly a historical reference by Jackman, this work belongs to his on-going drawing practice, which operates alongside and occasionally conjuncts into his painting practice. Possibly inspiring or challenging a new direction for Jackman's current investigation, *Inset* is in effect a counterbalance to the two topographical paintings; the detritus of agricultural machinery forming an emblem for this project.

Matt Blomeley

Tuesday, 17 March 2009

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FOOTNOTES:

1. Ortega y Gasset, José, *The Revolt of the Masses*, W.W. Norton and Co, New York, 1930 (1993), (pp79)
2. Harrison, Charles, *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2001 (pp85,86). Harrison discusses Fried's study of Gustave Courbet, interpreting the physical nature of Courbet's painting: "Foremost among the defining preoccupations of Courbet's work, Fried diagnoses an urge – necessarily and significantly doomed to frustration – to transport himself bodily into the painting taking shape, and thus to close the gap between painting and beholder ... Courbet's attempt to eliminate the distinction between painting and painter beholder is seen by Fried as a means to defeat theatricalization, and thus preserve the integrity of modern painting."
3. A painting technique of merging multiple colours without a hard edge, sfumato is derived from the 19th century Italian definition which literally translates as 'shaded off'.

Adrian Jackman

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Lopdell House Gallery

Waitakere's Regional Art Gallery

Open daily: 10am – 4.30pm

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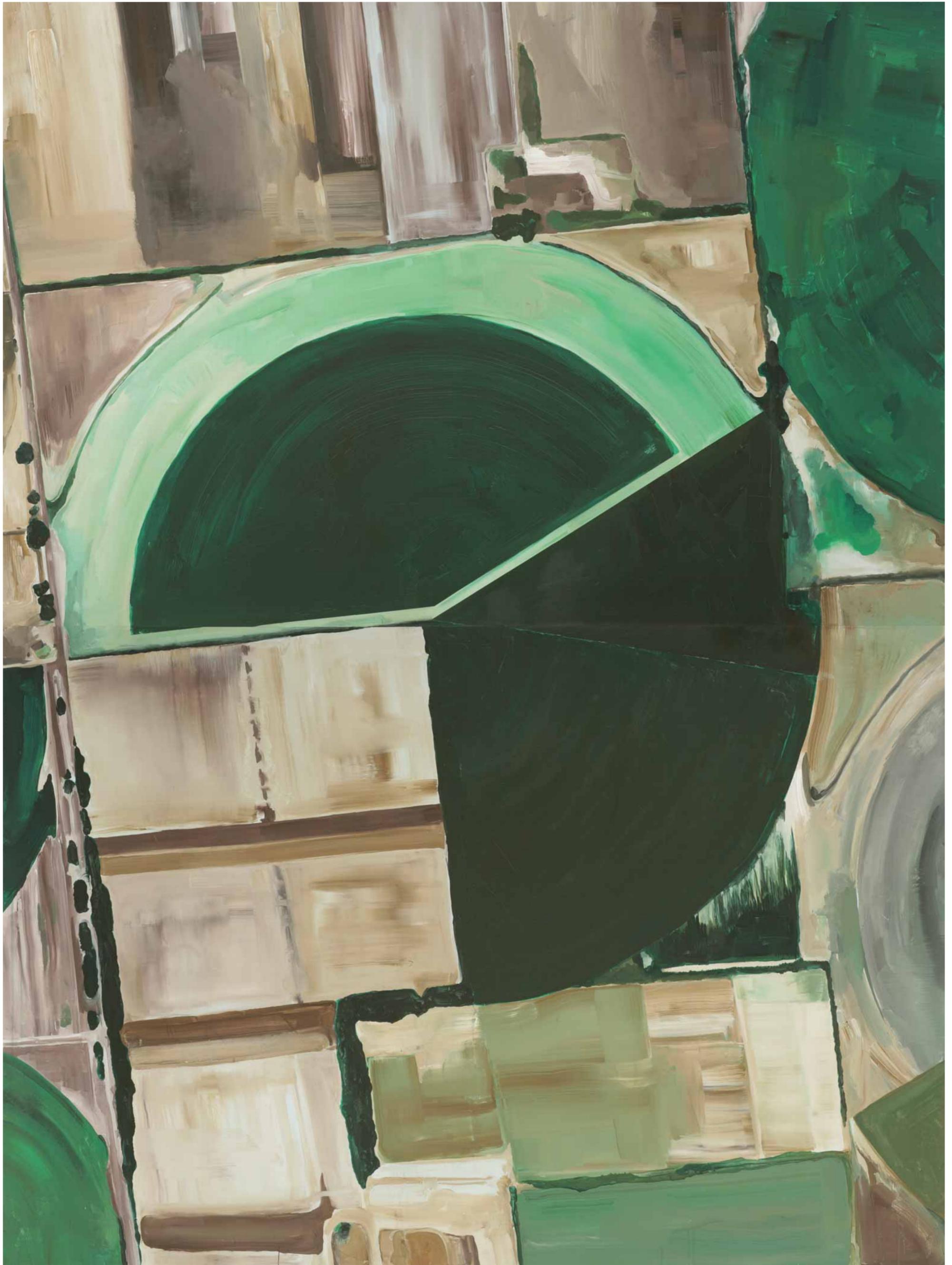


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Te Taitao o Waitakere



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Adrian Jackman

Detail

2008,
Acrylic on canvas
2440 x 1820mm