Gavin Hipkins completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in photography at the University of Auckland in 1992. In 1996 he was awarded a research grant from Creative New Zealand to photograph neo-classical and fascist architecture in Germany. In 1998 he received the inaugural Creative New Zealand artist residency at Artspace, Sydney. He has also completed residencies at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery (1999) and at the Waikato Museum of Art and History in Hamilton (2000). He was awarded the Supreme Award for contemporary art in the Art Waikato National Art Competition 2000 and was a finalist in this year’s inaugural Walters Prize at the Auckland Art Gallery. Hipkins was included in the 11th Biennale of Sydney (1998) and in the 25th Sao Paulo Bienal 2002. His work also featured in *Bright Paradise: The 1st Auckland Triennial* at the Auckland Art Gallery (2001), *Flight Patterns* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (2000), and *Guarene Arte 2000* at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Per L’Arte in Turin (2000). Recent one-person exhibitions include *The Homely* at the City Gallery, Wellington (2001), *The Stall* at the Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton (2001), and *The Habitat* at Artspace, Auckland (2000). Hipkins has written for *Art Journal, Art & Text and Art New Zealand*, and curated two photographic exhibitions which toured New Zealand. In 2000 he engaged in graduate studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. In July 2002 he returned to his position of lecturer in the College of Design, Fine Arts and Music, at Massey University in Wellington.
LIST OF WORKS

The Colony, 2000-2
100 C-type prints, each 340 x 510mm, installed dimensions variable

The Sanctuary (Fish), 2001
20 C-type prints, each 2800 approx. x 125mm

The Sanctuary (Bird), 2001
20 C-type prints, each 2800 approx. x 125mm

New Age: Auckland (Monument), 1992-2002
unique silver gelatin print, 610 x 508mm

New Age: Huia (Fence), 1992-2002
unique silver gelatin print, 610 x 508mm

New Age: Waimamaku (Tent), 1992-2002
unique silver gelatin print, 610 x 508mm

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THE COLONY
7 September - 18 October 2002

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Photographer Gavin Hipkins is fascinated by botched utopias. He is known for creating massive works from dozens upon dozens of similar images. The subject matter is typically banal, pointedly inconsequential – strips of plasticine, lengths of liquorice, polystyrene balls – but, repeated, massed and marshalled, the cumulative effect is monumental and pulsing. Mimicking the heroic rhetoric of state engineering projects, Hipkins gives these works suggestive portentous titles: *The Tunnel*, *The Field*, *The Circuit*, *The Coil*, *The Track*, *The Mill*.

Hipkins’ retro-modernist arrangements hark back to a time when photography's new ways-of-seeing were optimistically linked to a new vision of the modern world aligned with both progressive social programmes (Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy) and fascist ones (Riefenstahl). Equally they look to the present, to our current vogue for a modernist style evacuated of social concern and specificity – the style of *Wallpaper* magazine. Hipkins takes us to the heart of photography's complicity, its ability to spectacularise and obscure the world in the name of delivering it. He works the space between the medium's evidential force and its potential for abstraction, its ability to beautify – its propaganda power.

Hipkins files his new work *The Colony* under science-fiction, the genre that looks back and forth, framing retro-politics as brave new worlds. He shot 100 photographs of hemispherical polystyrene blobs. The individual images are crude, slipping in and out of focus. Geometric yet organic, the blobs resemble at once alien pods, igloos, pup tents, breasts, and the curvaceous hills and mud pools of his native New Zealand. The psychedelic colour scheme is both candied and toxic; we could be staring into a lava lamp, perhaps furthering a *boudoir* subtext. There's no reference for scale. The work could imply a macroscopic view – an imperialist invasion, a commune of hippie drop-outs in their geodesic domes, or a high-tech off-world encampment on a weirdly hued planet – or a microscopic one. The photos are stacked at random like a bar graph or a high-rise city skyline, as if anticipating the colony's future order. Hipkins runs all possibilities at once. Nothing much is specified, but all possibilities are keyed to a sense of ecstatic viral replication.

*The Colony* goes to work on the viewer, dazzling the eye with its rhythmic prospects rather than addressing the privations and violence we know to be inherent in the colonial adventure. If at first glance it looks like an advertisement, recalling the idyllic scenes that enticed New Zealand's first European settlers, in no time it comes to seem unstable, tinged with menace, a little creepy. If Hipkins offers us something formal-looking and alluring – eye candy – he does so to evoke precisely what's missing, what's latent. Revving up the rhetoric of modernist photography, *The Colony* is haunted by what it elides. Hygienic modernity crosses over into disease; science-fiction into horror.
One of my favourite architectural books is Charles Jencks’ Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods. Published in 1971, it valiantly forecasts roles for nascent traditions of architecture and city planning at the start of the 21st century. Science-fiction is marvellous because the styles date so quickly and become classic in that same fashionable moment. Jencks’ book is no different to a classic sci-fi film. Nostalgic in its utopian predictions, relying not only the future but also calling on a failed (we can make it better) past, this little but dangerous book carries all the fervour of the riots of 1968 (the year I was born) and calls for revolutionary change.

The individual photographs that make up The Colony show hand-painted polystyrene models that I have crudely glued together and documented on makeshift paper backdrops. These models resemble alien pods, cosmetic make-up samples or curvaceous hills from a lush exotic landscape. My friends have conferred they look like breasts. The Colony is a montage of these slight references. There are also strong architectural citations at play. Most explicit is the models’ resemblance to geodesic domes, alternative housing from the 1960s. One of Jencks’ captions from Architecture 2000 expounds on a photograph of a rather special colony: “Drop City: geodesic domes made from automobile bodies are built by the local drop-out community in Arizona. Many forecasters predict the drop-out community as a major social alternative for the next thirty years.”

The next 30 years have come and gone. Our old colonies are still intact, primarily unaltered by the activist tradition Jencks vicariously promotes. It is easy to parody brave assertions made by young academics, but this is not so interesting. Rather, I choose to celebrate this failed moment by revisiting that optimism by colonising a period – la mode rétro. In the optimistic spirit of this period, the photographs comprising The Colony can be hung in any order (reordered), as long as the total work resembles a city skyline.

But which particular period to colonise? New Zealand has a long tradition of landscape representation – as old as European colonialism in this region. Illustrations of idealised landscape helped entice my migrating forebears to make the long sail from Europe in the 19th century to a new colony called New Zealand. At this time, hand-painted hybrid landscape scenes of gentle rolling hills and still bays were infinitely more alluring than a gritty authenticity read in black and white photographs of the land and peoples to be "broken in".

In their shapeliness, these photographs of small models aspire to slot into a category of generic mounds, hybrid forms and nowhere colonies that are found under the scientist’s microscope, the astronomer’s telescope, or the captain’s periscope. Anywhere, but always, like history, at the end of a lens.