

From the collection



Andrew McLeod is renowned for his magpie eye with complex compositions combining eclectic images into detailed arrangements. It is the sort of eye that can be richly nourished in the digital era of Wikipedia and Google image search, where anyone can be an instant expert and new obsessions can be quickly sated with a wealth of visual material, although all this is little use without the finely honed sensibilities of a mature artist. Combined with this ease of information accessibility is the ability to cut-and-paste or manipulate a variety of sources using computer-aided design programmes. All this may make it easier to be an artist with an eclectic set of influences, from children's book illustrations to the gothic visual culture of black metal music, although an ever-

expanding set of options does not necessarily make work any easier.

Soon after McLeod completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts at Elam School of Fine Arts in 1998, he was included in the group exhibition *After Killeen: Social Observation in Recent Art*, acknowledging his close affinity with the early work of senior artist Richard Killeen. Killeen's cut-out compositions mix the high ideals of modernist abstraction with the bustling everyday world of urban life, suggesting that paintings can be a container for collections of images and ideas. Killeen's early

abstractions, often based on Pacific motifs, were sometimes disrupted by the appearance of an insect, much in the way McLeod's carefully gridded composition here is given tension by the surprise appearance of a dragon flying through the upper region and a palm sprouting between the lower bars.

Other important influences for McLeod are early New Zealand abstractionists Theo Schoon and Gordon Walters, especially the latter, who are also important to Killeen with their interest in Maori and Pacific motifs, most famously with Walters' use of the koru. Here McLeod picks up on Walters' distinctive optical push-and-pull of alternating bars, introducing his own electric colour palette and replacing the ball ends with blocks that recall the architectural motifs of his early work and also suggest the simple block

graphics of the early arcade games McLeod would have grown up with, as if the dragon is in fact a renaissance era space invader. It should also be noted that the early development of abstraction by Dutch painter Mondrian was inspired by the rhythms and patterns of nature, so McLeod's plant is not the unlikely juxtaposition it seems.

Modernist ideals of visual harmony and unity also underpin McLeod's work through his use of architectural forms, including 3D renderings of the distinctive gallery spaces he exhibits in (Ivan Anthony in Auckland, Peter McLeavey in Wellington, Brooke-Gifford in Christchurch), and digital prints based on architectural drawings, which can be accessorised with clip-art to denote the presence of shrubs, furniture or occupants. It is exactly this kind of ergonomic modular design, overlaid with schematised accoutrements that is at the heart of much of McLeod's work, emphasising a tension between plans and reality. It also questions the relationship between nature and the austerity of machine-production, an important issue for the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century, who advocated for simple natural design in which there is little division between art, craft, textiles and architecture. It should be remembered, for all the electronic origins of McLeod's production, much of it is still hand-produced with the age-old application of paint with brushes, working from drawings or composing on the canvas.

Andrew McLeod (b.1976), Pink and Green Abstraction with Dragon, 2010, oil on linen, 1800 x 1800mm, The University of Auckland Art Collection

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