



By the time Gavin Hipkins staged his exhibition *The Colony* at The Gus Fisher Gallery in 2002, he had become well-known for his distinctive technique of printing entire rolls of film uncut in continuous strips, known as falls, hung together to provide a dense grid of images.

By exhibiting the entire film, the artist's process becomes more apparent, revealing the successive attempts from one frame to the next, rather than selecting a single definitive image. The result is cinematic, suggesting an animated narrative of successive cells, requiring a sustained performance throughout the shooting of the film to create a successful larger work. Hipkins' falls often have the appearance of formal abstraction with brightly

coloured shapes moving around from frame to frame in a playful exploration of composition. A closer look would reveal objects such as buttons, bolts washers or plasticine blobs moving from frame to frame in various configurations.

With *The Colony*, which was first exhibited as New Zealand's contribution to the 2002 25th Sao Paulo Biennial, he enlarges this format to 100 individual 340 x 510mm photographs of coloured, hemispherical polystyrene balls against coloured paper backgrounds. Curator Robert Leonard describes them as replicating like a virus and suggesting micro or macro scales, either cellular or architectural, propaganda or sci fi fantasy. Although the images appear banal, they recall the

progressive programme of early European abstraction or the colour schemes of fashionably retro modernist décor, made more dramatic by the suggestive title. In the exhibition catalogue Hipkins notes the optimistic spirit of colonial travel, which brought his European forebears to New Zealand. He says: "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."

Also in this exhibition were three individual works titled *New Age* and two earlier fall pieces; *The Sanctuary (Fish)* and *The Sanctuary (Bird)*. The latter was purchased for The University of Auckland Art Collection and features close-up shots of exotic birds interspersed between matching colour fabrics and vintage domestic interiors, perhaps re-photographed from architectural books or magazines. These exotic images are equally utopian and dated. Combined with the exhibition's titles and other works, they suggest cult communities or communes, geodesic domes and alternative lifestyles.

Hipkins completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Elam in 1992, going on to study neo-classical and fascist architecture in Germany with a research grant from Creative New Zealand. In 2002 he also completed a Master of Fine Arts at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and was one of the inaugural four finalists in that year's Walters Prize. He is now a senior lecturer at Elam and his Walters Prize work *The Homely*, a continuous suite of 80 photographs taken over four years in New Zealand and Australia, has just been on show at Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art as part of its Unnerved exhibition of New Zealand art. He has just had a solo exhibition at Starkwhite, which continues his tradition of creating strange juxtapositions and compositions with buttons, beads and other objects, this time combining what appears to be biker patches with vintage children's Bible illustrations.

Andrew Clifford

Gavin Hipkins (b.1968), *The Sanctuary (Bird)*, 2001
20 C-type prints, each 2800 approx x 125mm
The University of Auckland Art Collection