

From the collection



Constituting a system that became a style, Ian Scott's lattices remain his signature works. His "basic over-and-under pattern" paintings went into production in 1976, after a decade of Girlie paintings. Like an industrial product, each lattice suggests a limitless number of colour ways, but Scott drew the line on the series in 1982 after making over 200 sequentially numbered variations on the idea. Now that he is again investigating the pictorial possibilities of scantily-clad girls, Scott rarely makes a lattice painting. When he does, the resulting interlace is like a puzzle solved: a two-dimensional Rubik's cube. The compositions are tricky but seem deceptively simple: a few bands of pure acrylic colour laid down over a

square white canvas ground. Optical effects generated by complementary colours cause these reduced elements to magically weave together and bounce into three dimensions like a kete.

Scott is aiming for the same effect as the American painter Kenneth Noland whose Plaid series deployed colour bands interweaving and crossing each other, lacing the whole surface together. Everything is subordinate to the compositional grid in Scott's work, so that even dangerously similar colours like the blues in this painting, can't dominate. Brush strokes are hidden and masking tape eliminates human

messiness around the edges. Without figures or other imagery, attention focuses on the formal elements: colour relationships and how they work.

Produced in a suburban New Zealand context, the colours and patterns in the lattices reflect their origin without illustrating it. As Kenneth Noland wrote: "Colour can convey a total range of mood and expression, of one's experiences in life, without having to give it descriptive or literary qualities." So not literally a depiction of trellis work, deck chair webbing or a Maori kete, but still carrying those kiwiana associations, and fitting in with the surroundings – like a logo on a van, on a hoarding outside a dairy or a T-shirt emblem. Hamilton City Council even used one

of Ian Scott's lattice designs for the paving of Garden Place in the city centre.

Just as contradictory is the sense of space in the lattices. Each one seems part of a continuous all-over pattern, yet the compositional system is not symmetrical, so not extendable. Colours are orchestrated to play complements like red and green off against each other, and create an optical illusion. Pictorial space is similarly homegrown and experimental: Scott introduced black to his Lattices for the first time in 1978. Bright and hot colours like red push forward and the cool blues and greens pull back, contained by bands of black like military ribbons. Black and white complicate the effect, punctuating the surface and introducing a sense of a void beyond the bands. Integral to the surface itself, and completely flat, the colours end up performing the work.

Oscillating between abstract and representational art throughout his career, Ian Scott wants his viewers to recognise the similarity between the constituents of abstraction and representation. Continuously using diagonals within a square format, he picks his way between American all-over abstraction and the New Zealand optical alternative epitomised by Gordon Walters. The content of Scott's lattices is the way they solve their formal problems – everything tied together artificially and complicated but disguised as easy and natural.

Linda Tyler

*Ian Scott (b.1945), Lattice No. 63, 1979
Acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1525mm*