

Peter Atkins: World Around Me

Sherman Galleries, Sydney

6 May – 29 May 2004.

Peter Atkins collects "forms". His studio in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick is full of items he's collected on walks around the local streets, everything from condom wrappers and plastic bags that once contained marijuana, pills and heroin to paper cup handles he picked up in an airport lounge and carpet samples given to him as a birthday present. Collecting obsessively for over a decade and filling journals with detritus from Sydney, Melbourne, Mexico City, New Delhi and Barcelona, Atkins takes his precious finds and turns them into paintings.

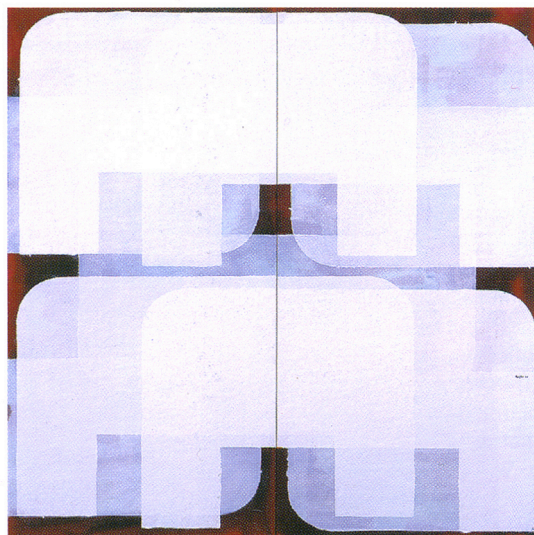
Although Atkins's paintings often appear to be geometric abstractions, the artist considers his pieces to be figurative. "I don't consider my work to be abstract," Atkins says. "They come directly from the (found) form and I want people to know that." Cueing in his audience via titles such as *Toe Separator* and *Arrow Notch* that accurately describe the found form's original function, Atkins goes an extra step and exhibits his collection of found materials with his paintings. Typically each show is built around a limited collection of material.

But with so many items collected it comes as a surprise to discover that Atkins hasn't decided on which forms he'll use for his upcoming show at Sydney's Sherman Galleries. "Well," he muses, "The new show at Sherman's follows on from the work in the *Paper Forms* show at Tolarno Galleries in Melbourne. There will be four or five final forms that I'll use for the paintings but I've only got two at the moment." And what has he got so far? "There's one that I call the 'footprint form' that comes from a box of shoes I bought my son that's a beautiful organic shape and the other is something I'm calling 'tag' which comes from a tag on a roll of carpet."

Painting since the 1980s, Atkins's canvases have become less gestural and more layered. Using enamels (which he describes as "an unforgiving media") and limiting the works in his new show to canvases 1.2 meters square, Atkins has discovered a phantom realm behind the layers of paint. He calls these elusive spaces "secondary shapes" and they emerge when forms are layered together. "My work has become more lyrical and I've become very excited by the secondary shapes," he says. "It's as though these smaller canvases are sections of larger paintings, as though the forms are breaking off the edges and coming back on the other side."

Atkins's work is an ongoing process of discovery – finding new forms, examining them for their potential as material for new works and then a recycling process back to the start, and then on again once more. With a warehouse space to fill, Atkins is more than aware that his process of making work could be psychologically obsessive. "It's taxing," he half-jokes. "And it's almost unhealthy and I'm not hindered by space ... but it's also part of the process – my work is part finding, part documenting, part painting and part archiving."

- Andrew Frost



Peter Atkins, *Paperform*, 2003. Oil on canvas on wood panels (diptych) 204 x 204cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND SHERMAN GALLERIES.

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