



ARTS PROJECT AUSTRALIA

GALLERY HOURS
Mon to Fri 9am–5pm
Sat 10am–5pm



LIST OF WORKS

1. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Colorpack 82, 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 16.5 x 14.5 x 20 cm

2. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Square Shooter 2 (with flash) 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 17 x 14 x 18 cm

3. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Colour Swinger 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 17.5 x 17 x 21 cm

4. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Colorpack 100 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 19.8 cm
Camera: 17 x 14.5 x 20 cm

5. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Colorpack 80 2014
ceramic camera &
auto acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 17.5 x 17 x 17.5 cm

6. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Super Swinger 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 15.5 x 15.5 x 19 cm

7. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Square Shooter 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 19.8 cm
Camera: 15 x 21 x 19 cm

8. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Super Shooter 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 19.8 cm
Camera: 16 x 17.5 x 18 cm

9. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Super Colour Swinger 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 17 x 15 x 15 cm

10. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
The Clincher 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 17.5 x 18 x 18 cm

11. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Colorpack II 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 19.8 cm
Camera: 15.5 x 16 x 20 cm

12. Peter Atkins &
Alan Constable
Square Shooter 2 #2 2014
ceramic camera & auto
acrylic on MDF
Box: 16.7 x 16.7 x 18.4 cm
Camera: 16 x 14 x 16 cm

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LEONARD JOEL
est. 1919

WORKS BY

Peter Atkins
(Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne)

Alan Constable
(Arts Project Australia, Melbourne)

ARTS PROJECT AUSTRALIA

POLAROID PROJECT





TWO TAKES ON THE POP OBJECT

Polaroid Project, which brings together Peter Atkins' re-creations of Polaroid camera packaging and Alan Constable's versions of the cameras found within those boxes, demonstrates the continued relevance of how artists engage with the objects of consumer culture fifty years after the advent of Pop Art. At first glance, Peter Atkins and Alan Constable seem like unlikely collaborators. Atkins is a painter and Constable is best known as a sculptor, a maker of ceramic cameras. Atkins is invested in reproducing the clean lines and abstract, colourful design of the advertising industry in exacting detail. The lines of Constable's cameras are never clean. His forms are inherently exaggerated, and the cameras themselves showcase the thumbing, handling, and kneading of the clay medium. If Atkins goes out of his way to convince us that his Polaroid box paintings-cum-sculptures share the near-seamlessness of the real thing, Constable seems to do just the opposite with his cameras. The latter are obviously NOT real cameras: their comic-book personalities, decidedly handmade disposition, their larger-than-life scale, and the fact that they wear their ceramic qualities so proudly (glazed in any number of colours) collectively proclaim their fiction. Despite the apparent disparity of the two artists, both rely exclusively on their own hands to create their work, even when that labour replicates the aesthetic of mechanical reproduction, in the case of Atkins. If we dig deep, we can ascertain a pronounced kinship shared by the two artists that dates back to early Pop in the United

States – before the advent of Warhol's screenprinting techniques that relied on the photograph. Both Atkins and Constable inhabit the handmade rather than the machine-produced realm of Pop, and signal to us that such strategies are still surprisingly timely today despite the digital and highly mediated culture we inhabit.

For nearly 20 years, Peter Atkins has been painting design forms on tarpaulin canvases (occasionally using other supports as well) appropriated from a range of sources including outdoor advertising, record albums, matchbooks, paperback books, product packaging, and street signage. Atkins reduces the essential forms of selected designs by deleting accompanying text and focusing completely on the graphic qualities of the image itself. Atkins has labelled his engagement with the graphic design of packaging and signage 'readymade abstraction' – utilising imagery that already exists in the world to transpose and distil into pared-down paintings. Steeped in the gesture of appropriation that has concerned artists for a century now (the readymade made its debut at the 1913 Armory Show when Marcel Duchamp displayed a porcelain urinal as a sculpture), Atkins has worked exclusively as a painter until recently.

Atkins has long been a collector of the objects on which he bases his paintings and the genesis of *Polaroid Project* firmly demonstrates this. Struck by the iconic graphic design of bright rainbow colour patterns on the original containers for Polaroid instant cameras, Atkins began collecting the camera boxes in earnest about three years ago (the original cameras were still inside the packaging). All of the packages and cameras date between 1969 and 1978; the colour spectrum/rainbow motif evident on the packages is not only indicative of

graphic design of the period, but also alludes to the purported chromatic vibrancy of Polaroid film. Atkins knew he wanted to make a body of work using the boxes and was aware that he would be breaking new ground within the evolution of his practice by painting three-dimensionally. Atkins acknowledges that he first ignored what was inside the boxes he was collecting – the cameras themselves. Fetishising the veneer surrounding the product rather than the thing itself, Atkins almost forgot that the purpose of the packaging was to sell cameras. Halfway through the development of the project, Atkins began to marvel at the engineering elegance of the cameras and a light bulb went off in his head – the Arts Project Australia studio artist Alan Constable, recognised for his ceramic sculptures of cameras, would be an inspired collaborator for the project. If Atkins explores the visual language of how we are drawn to things, thereby making images designed for the masses his own, Constable's skill lies in personalising what is inside the box, transforming a mass-produced consumer product into an idiosyncratic object.

Polaroid Project marks the first time Atkins has focused on replicating consumer packaging in 3D, creating what Donald Judd might have termed 'specific objects,' art objects that incorporate aspects of painting and sculpture, but do not fit neatly into either category. As Atkins admits himself, his transformed Polaroid camera containers are difficult to categorise: Are they 3D paintings or sculptures? Similarly, they exist in the interstices of Pop and Minimalism, referencing images taken from advertisements, but eliminating descriptive text, distilling ads to abstraction. If it were not for Alan Constable's cameras exhibited nearby, the viewer would

most likely be unable to make the associative leap that these brightly coloured objects are in fact based on commercial packaging that housed and marketed cameras. In order to create boxes that appear as realistic as possible while still retaining proper rigidity as a support for a painting, Atkins used 6mm thick MDF board that he painstakingly sanded, infilling any gaps or surface blemishes with epoxy in order to simulate paper packing material as closely as possible. He then masked out the designs with tape and finally painted the Polaroid signature designs using carefully matched automobile spray paint. What looks machine-printed and fabricated is actually the product of artistic labour. Atkins' boxes are the same size as the original packaging and are seemingly authentic in every way except for his decision not to reproduce text or photographic imagery, concentrating only on the colourful designs and the cubic format of the container.

Alan Constable's glazed ceramic cameras lack precise lines and angles; their handmade wonkiness imbues them with a sentience, as if each sculpture is a character, a refugee from a cartoon narrative. If Philip Guston was a ceramicist, these are the kind of objects he would make. Constable has had a near life-long fascination with cameras. He made his first cameras from cardboard at the age of eight. The ceramic cameras have ranged from accordion-style devices to digital cameras to Polaroids, and all share the noticeable imprint of the artist's hands and fingers, and quite often, an enlargement of scale compared to their real-world counterparts. Constable is legally blind and has pinhole vision so must work close-up during the creative process. For objects whose very existence

are predicated on recording the visible, Constable's cameras are created far more out of a sense of touch than sight. In Constable's hands, cameras, which we usually associate with the optical, are transformed into the tactile.

Constable's cameras are made by adding, subtracting, forming, and inscribing clay. A viewfinder or dial might be modelled separately from the camera body and then grafted on later and finally secured in the firing process. Viewfinders and lenses may be actual apertures or voids, but sometimes (as in the case of Constable's copies of digital cameras) the display might feature an incised drawing of an imagined landscape, Constable's take on trompe l'oeil realism. Constable also incises line work onto the camera's surface to suggest dimension and detail. Constable's cameras are structurally engineered from the inside out, containing internal chambers and walls to provide inherent stability, but also, perhaps, as a nod to speculative authenticity. Constable usually makes his cameras based on magazine advertisements; for *Polaroid Project* he had the rare opportunity of using real cameras as models for his sculptures.

Atkins is firmly situated within the handmade domain of the pop object/painting, as his renditions of Polaroid boxes are fabricated and painted only by him not by mechanical means, although the precise and seamless nature of his paint application replicates the look of commercial printing nearly exactly. While Alan Constable also relies on his hands in an endeavour to create a rendering of a commercial product, he does not in any way attempt to copy the Polaroid camera perfectly, or at least the results of his labour do not

suggest a desire for verisimilitude. In a certain sense, Atkins plays Roy Lichtenstein to Constable's Claes Oldenburg – two masters of early 1960s Pop. Lichtenstein made paintings of mass-produced printed imagery – notably comics – enlarging the image to reveal the building block of newsprint, the Ben Day dot. While Atkins does not necessarily play with scale the way Lichtenstein did, he shares with Lichtenstein a keen interest in exploring the imagery of popular culture, transposing it in paint to mimic commercial printing. In his installation *The Store* (1961), Claes Oldenburg riffed on the consumer products of the day creating handmade, cartoonish objects of exaggerated scale. While Constable forms his cameras out of clay, Oldenburg made his renditions of consumer goods from plaster-soaked muslin formed over wire frames, then painted in enamel – making no attempt to ape the real. Oldenburg's objects have more in common with paintings than Constable's cameras, but both amplify scale and instil an animated sensibility in the work, anthropomorphising objects. Lichtenstein and *The Store*-era Oldenburg represent the extremes of how Pop artists engaged with representation – mimicking commercial printing technology through exacting paintings, on the one hand, versus reproducing commercial goods through awkward handcraft on the other. The pairing of Atkins and Constable shows that the Lichtenstein/Oldenburg diatremic is alive and well today and that artists continue to explore different registers of the real in depicting the pop object, relying solely on their own hands.

ALEX BAKER 2014
Director Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia USA