

Miranda Parkes

b.1977

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An avalanche of day-glo colours is fighting through the wall to give you a hug. Is it a painting or sculpture? Perhaps it is a sculpture about painting. The paint, canvas and stretcher are all there, but rather than sitting politely on the wall as a flat decorated surface, or pretending to be a window into an imaginary space beyond, Miranda Parkes' work flops and billows into the viewer's space. It is not going to let you walk by and ignore it after a quick glance. It is going to grab you and smother you between its undulating folds.

Whereas in traditional painting the canvas is stretched tight over the stretcher, here it seems as though the artwork is wearing clothes several sizes too big for it, tumbling out of two-dimensional space as if it had far too much fun at a party and is stumbling over, sprawling out of its corsets.

In the late 1960s some artists began to react against the strict boundaries between sculpture and painting, preferring instead to blur the categories to see what new forms might emerge. Sculptors, particularly feminists like Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and Judy Chicago, were also turned off by what they saw as the heroic pretensions of male-dominated abstract painting and the hard, industrial forms of minimalist sculpture. They brought a softer and more human element back into art and began to explore installation. Installation art often uses sculptural and other media to modify the way the viewer experiences a particular space.

Parkes brings some of this attitude to abstract painting. Her work also uses pattern, texture and colour that come directly from the abstract painting practised in the United States in the two or three decades following World War II. In particular, the Colour Field painters such as Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis are quoted. But Parkes is not mimicking their style. In fact she turns it on its head, because the defining characteristic of Colour Field painting was its insistence on the material and visual 'flatness' of the picture.

As well as exploding the flatness of the picture, Parkes amplifies the colour. Pyjama stripes and blobs in happy candy colours: turquoise, peppermint, strawberry, bubblegum pink, acid apple green and sunny yellow. Where do you see colours like these? Posters, music videos, advertising, fashion magazines, Japanese cartoons, websites, supermarket packaging... Her eye-searing colours connect with the ZAP! BANG! KAPOW! psychedelic aspect of Pop art and artists like Roy Lichtenstein, Yayoi Kusama, Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol.

Pop art was an art movement that emerged in England and the United States in the mid-1950s and became very influential, particularly in the 1960s. It drew on themes, products and techniques of popular culture and mass media, such as comic books and advertising. As with Pop music of the period, there was an element of generational revolt in Pop art and in particular, a rejection of the cultural elitism of 'high art'.

Parkes's work celebrates and renews this sense of liberation. Her bright colours and floppy forms declare that painting can be serious fun, and that in art, rules are made to be broken.

Andrew Paul Wood

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