

# Shifting ground

The immediate visual appeal of Kate Tucker's paintings belie their complexity. As **Phip Murray** discovers, they are built on chaos and turbulence.

PORTRAIT BY JANELLE LOW

**K**ate Tucker's upcoming exhibition at Helen Gory Galerie features differently sized and shaped canvases that offer up complex fields of pictorial elements. Each canvas is completely covered with multicoloured shapes that swarm and wriggle together in marvelously complex compositions. They are certainly visually arresting images, offering satisfying pops of colour and emitting a buzz of highly animated optical energy. They are also, however, demanding, requiring the viewer to reckon with ideas of contradiction and complexity.

Tucker has titled her upcoming exhibition *Unstable Elements* and exploring the tension between resolution and turbulence was a key idea driving the series. She states: "With these works, I was exploring the idea of not completing or finishing or resolving things quite as much. I tried to really push – to push everything – and to resist balancing things out. I resisted resolution and balance where I could."

This desire to stay in the midst of forces and to keep compositions restlessly unbalanced pervades the series. There are paintings filled with contradiction: they are pictorially busy yet also calm; their colours are

discordant but also harmonious; their compositions are both balanced and unstable. These paradoxes are absolutely central to Tucker's work. She strives to operate from a space of complexity and absolutely refuses easy simplification in her work or her life.

"Something that goes across everything I do is exploring the way we look at things," she states. "I am interested in ideas around perspectives. Rather than only getting the surface, I want viewers to look for what is actually there and, furthermore, for abstract relations between what is actually there. I am interested in looking at any group of things – colours, forms, objects, even narratives – and thinking about how I can shuffle them and make something new. An image might be quite fleshy or mountainous, for instance, but at the same time it will also be something else too. I am intrigued by how something can feel believable but still be unexpected. My paintings are a way of trying to open up new perspectives."

Tucker follows a very deliberate process in the construction of her works. While a sensibility connects them, each has its own idiosyncratic and distinctive internal logic. There is a pictorial turbulence within each composition, a restlessness that comes from



1.



2.

Tucker's aim to thwart or redirect a compositional schema as soon as it starts to manifest. "As I make them, the paintings start to have a particular feel or to do a particular thing. As soon as that happens I intervene and make them do something else. I want to see what happens in that interaction. However, at the same time, I've been conscious of not making things different for the sake of it. Everything has to be motivated by a genuine inquiry. The process is different for each one. I am not at all precious at the beginning of making a painting and I certainly don't know what it will look like at the end, but I know what I want to investigate. I know that I want to do something interesting that I have not done before and I look for opportunities to find something new or learn something."

After studying and working in graphic design, Tucker found her way to art school. Since her graduation from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2009, her career has moved quickly and she has found advocates for her work in both commercial and public art contexts. "I always wanted to be an artist. I was obsessed with it, right from the start. However, at university I did multimedia design because I got a bit spooked about going straight to art school. I thought I needed to be able to earn a living and I worried that art wasn't going to work, which is a message that a lot of young women I knew got in the late 1990s. The fashions in the art world at the time felt pretty distant from my own interests. It also seemed very male dominated, and I didn't have the confidence yet at 18 years old to decide I could do it my way."

Tucker is happiest spending days in the studio, with the freedom to continually work on her paintings. One benefit of the healthy demand for her work from buyers is that it supports her to focus on painting, and to pursue continual experimentation. "I think of my practice as being forever and it's about me being able to follow my curiosity and developing forever. The great joy as an artist is to be given an opportunity to do something that excites you. My ambition is to have opportunities that enable me to do continue to do that."

Kate Tucker's exhibition *Unstable Elements* is at Helen Gory Galerie in Melbourne until 26 July 2014.

**“With these works, I was exploring the idea of not completing or finishing or resolving things quite as much. I tried to really push – to push everything – and to resist balancing things out.”**

1.  
Kate Tucker, *Self similar #1*, 2014.  
Oil on board, 75 x 70 x 5cm

2.  
Kate Tucker, *Self similar #4*, 2014.  
Oil on board, 80 x 80 x 9cm.

PHOTO: JEREMY DILLON. COURTESY: THE ARTIST; RUBICON, MELBOURNE; AND HELEN GORY GALERIE, MELBOURNE





## Nicola Stein

DIRECTOR, HELEN GORY GALERIE

"We are constantly impressed by **Kate Tucker's** refusal to simplify and reduce concerns, either thematically or aesthetically – she is an artist who embraces complexity," says her dealer **Nicola Stein**, director of Helen Gory Galerie. "There's a combination of intuitiveness and conceptual rigor in Kate's practice. Strong theoretical considerations underpin her works, and Kate addresses these ideas in a very responsive and personal way.

"Aesthetically, Kate's layered abstract paintings are both beautiful and demanding. Her works occur at the tipping point between balance and commotion. I think people can relate to the push and pull in her work and her efforts to make sense of competing, often contradictory, forces to achieve some sort of resolution. It's something we all do on a daily basis.

"Since graduating from Victorian College of the Arts in 2009, Kate has had three sell-out exhibitions. In 2013 we also presented a solo exhibition of Kate's work at Art Stage Singapore 2013, which received a phenomenal response. She has gained an avid following and there is a growing waiting list for her work. Kate works in a variety of sizes and mediums, including painting, collage and sculpture, so there is a fairly wide price range for her work.

"Kate has also exhibited twice at Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, has been a finalist in the Archibald Prize, and is currently a finalist, for the second time, in the Churchie Emerging Art Prize. This critical exposure strengthens the interest in her practice both in Australia and overseas.

"We have known Kate for almost 10 years now and have been exhibiting her work since 2012. She is an intelligent and considered artist with integrity and warmth, and these qualities shine through in her work."

*Phip Murray*





3.  
Installation view of Kate  
Tucker's work at Art Stage  
Singapore 2013.

PHOTO: KEN CHEONG. COURTESY:  
THE ARTIST AND HELEN GORY GALERIE,  
MELBOURNE

4.  
Kate Tucker, *Category of Sets*,  
2012. Acrylic on linen,  
102 x 87cm

PHOTO: JEREMY DILLON. COURTESY:  
THE ARTIST AND HELEN GORY GALERIE,  
MELBOURNE

5.

Kate Tucker, *Unstudied Immensity*, 2012. Oil, acrylic and crayon on linen, 202 x 143cm.

PHOTO: JEREMY DILLON. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND HELEN GORY GALERIE, MELBOURNE



## Jon Butt

DIRECTOR, C3 CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

**Kate Tucker** has a long history of association with c3 Contemporary Art Space in Melbourne. Director **Jon Butt** explains "she first exhibited collaboratively with **Carmel Seymour** in 2010, and then with a beautiful sequence of work for her impressive solo show in 2011, which preceded her representation with Helen Gory Galerie. She is also appearing as a guest curator at c3 later this year."

He adds: "Kate's sensibilities revolve around transformation and exchange. This can be seen in action in her work as a collaborative artist and, in form, through her own distinct art practice. I find Kate's work compelling in that it negotiates a connection between strong graphic sensibilities and a personal narrative guided by form and colour. Her works are hugely desirable objects, quite bold. Yet so much of Kate's persona becomes wrapped up within them that they transcend the commodity to provoke a more intimate connection."

"I'm excited by her new work shown recently at Rubicon [an artist run space in Melbourne] which plays with a sculptural intervention using the painting format. I'm always interested in how artists generate progression within the flow of a practice and these works show a real purpose. Robust and alive, they constantly shift between the notion of surface and objecthood, precariously unbalanced, but also grounded and calm - a curious combination. More proposition than departure, this series signals an upward shift and is the sign of an artist who takes growth seriously. Kate's willingness to roust up new motives for making is definitely paying off."

*Phip Murray*

