



digital installation man



Lee Suckling discusses a blend of digital art and painting with installation artist (and new Sydneysider) Andre Hemer



year ago, Queenstown-born installation artist Andre Hemer moved to Sydney to embark on a new leg of his career after seeing success back home in New Zealand and across several other countries.

Describing himself as an artist that “interplays digital interfaces and artifacts, painting and site-specific installation”, Hemer’s work deals with how digital interfaces and culture can be interwoven into slightly old-fashioned and ‘slow’ processes like painting.

“I’m interested in using aesthetics that can be filtered through a multitude of mediums and situations - in much of my projects there is a blurry line between what people might consider to be art, design, interior design, or elements of architecture.

“The common point is a shared allusion to painting either by a visual component or the material of production.”

Hemer’s academic background is strong and much of the last five years has been spent in Asia and Europe. Hemer began with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and then a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Canterbury (he graduated with the MFA in 2006) he then received a scholarship to undertake a six-month residency/research stay in the painting department at the Royal College of Art, London. “Since then I have exhibited widely in New Zealand, as well as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, Germany and the UK.

“Until my move to Sydney, I have mainly been based between New Zealand, Korea and Germany - having been awarded several artist-in-residence programmes that have facilitated work and exhibitions overseas.”

Important public projects and residencies have included Royal College of Art Postgraduate Residency, London (2006), Kunstlerdorf Schoeppingen, Germany (2008), IASK Residency, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul (2008), Residency and commission at Seoul Artspace, Seoul (2009), Sofitel/Global Art Projects Residency, Melbourne (2009), Kunstlerhaus GlogauAIR, Berlin (2009), Outer Spaces Installation, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch (2010) and the Rita Angus Residency, Wellington (2011).

In 2011, Hemer began his PhD in painting at University of Sydney, the location of which, he believes, provides for brilliantly authentic inspiration for site-specific artworks. “The Sydney art scene reflects its broader societal make-up in a lot of ways,” Hemer explains. “Rather than being one clear distinctive voice, it’s more like a choir of different personalities all competing for centre stage. The resulting mix and confusion is what makes it interesting.”

It is the people on the streets of Sydney, largely, that have formed Hemer’s artistic muses.

“Of all the cities in Australasia, Sydney is the one with the most diversity,” he says. “My work tends to reflect contemporary culture and therefore Sydney is a pretty ideal place to sample from a whole lot of different sources.

“One of the points of Sydney that I like to draw on is the slightly exaggerated sense of aesthetic

“In a broader sense I would like to have an influence on where contemporary painting might be heading both in Sydney and Australia.”

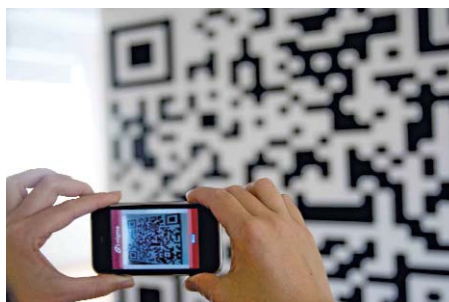
beauty - fashion, art, architecture and people – as each can be unashamedly brash, loud and unique. These senses of beauty, along with the mix of visual contradictions that happen in a large city, are things that inspire a lot of my peers here.”

Hemer is currently showing in group exhibition at Yuill Crowley Gallery in Sydney, and later in the year will show at the Melbourne Art Fair 2012.

His previous exhibitions in Australia include a solo exhibition at Peloton Gallery in Sydney in 2009 and an artist residency and installation in conjunction with Global Art Projects and Sofitel in Melbourne in 2008. Also, last year Hemer completed a wall commission at an apartment complex in Rushcutters Bay.

When asked about the reception of his works in Australia, Hemer says, “A particular artist will obviously not appeal to everyone - and my work is certainly not aesthetically shy!

“Having said that, I think that Australia has a pretty broad set of aesthetic tastes and people are more accepting of bright colour and confronting imagery than a lot of places where I have worked. It will be interesting to see what the critical and popular reception will be as I exhibit more here - so far in the projects that I’ve completed, it has been really positive; particularly with the larger, more visually ambitious wall paintings.”



A great artist will not go without criticism, however. “Occasionally, I think that some of my projects can overlap too much for some people within a particular field. In ‘The Real Bad Painter and the Story of Everything in Real-time’ at Antoinette Godkin Gallery in 2009 (Auckland, NZ), I had a few negative responses from those art world people who thought that it crossed too far into the realm of design and advertising, owing to the overloaded mix of paintings against a large wall work.

“However for me, that idea of the work being uncomfortable in terms of a kind of commercial allusion is the very reason I made the work. Painting tends to have artificial boundaries in terms of how it should be seen and used - and as with all of my projects, I am ultimately dealing with using painting as a catalyst for intervention.”

Similarly, in the Sofitel installation in Melbourne in 2009, the translucent pink drips that ran down the large windows of the Sofitel/Collins Place complex were “a fairly strong and out of place intervention into a site that was both five-star hotel and a building for luxury brands and business”.

“I’m sure in terms of that audience, the work was an uncomfortable aesthetic. Of course, on the flipside to all of these projects, there are always people who unexpectedly embrace the results – so hopefully my work can be different things to different people.”

Hemer describes his PhD in relation to the context of the city in which he has selected to complete it. “The general topic relates to digital technology within contemporary painting. I chose Sydney as it marks a nice central base in terms of discussing the Asia-Pacific region - something which my PhD will have a certain focus on,” he says.

Alongside Australasian showings throughout 2012, Hemer will also continue to work with ‘Public Delivery’ - an international initiative run by a German curator which will be publishing a book and organising an exhibition in Germany.

Noted earlier were Hemer’s peers and their shared inspiration of the sometimes visually-jarring aesthetics of Sydney. Not many Australian artists are producing similar-scale work akin to Hemer’s though. “There are some well-known artists, such as Brook Andrew, who work on a large scale with painting and installation,” he says.

“In general, however, there are not so many Australian artists making painting on both small and large scales - artists seem to do one or the other, so it’s my job to try to challenge that approach.

“My aim is to have a long-term working relationship with people and galleries in Sydney. I see the city as a vitally important place in terms of the way in which the Asia-Pacific is growing in standing in the art world.”

Hemer would like to be involved in increasingly larger projects that can challenge the way in which he works.

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