



Andrzej Zielinski: pulp digital fictions

MARK PENNING

Painter Andrzej Zielinski hails from Missouri, has done time in New York, Yale and Berlin, and recently held the visiting artist's post at the Canberra School of Art. This show at Sydney's Gallery 9 contained a series of works produced while in Australia. Zielinski's style could be described as a kind of Action Painting in the great US tradition as he applies paint with a great deal of verve, but he also builds up the surfaces of his paintings with generous masses of acrylic paste, which generates impressive relief effects. Zielinski's inventive and audacious use of colour is exhilarating at times, and he uses a saturated chromatic range with plenty of luminescent and fluorescent hues. This spectrum resembles the hyper-saturated colours that characterise the digital-era aesthetic, and it is therefore not surprising that his subject matter includes PCs, ATMs, shredders and other digi-devices.

His paintings were displayed in two rooms at Gallery 9. The larger room contained brighter-hued works, while the smaller room contained night pictures. At first glance these intense works looked like post-avant-garde versions of Peter Halley's oeuvre and they share a superficial resemblance with contemporary abstractionists like Richard Aldrich and Jon Pestoni. The larger room contained the stronger works, such as *Blue Shredded* (2011) and *Magenta Shredded* (2011). In *Blue Shredded* a pink-and-blue shredding machine dominates the pictorial space as it emerges from an indigo and luminous lime-green background. The sides of the shredder are coloured in candy, musk and incarnadine pinks, while the central chartreuse panel consists of descending blue and green lines that slowly creep towards the bottom edge of the frame. The top of the machine is peach-pink and contains on/off buttons, a paper entry slit, and a slender gold lip along its frontal edge. The paint used to depict the paper slit is laid on so thickly that the ensuing encrustations seem to break free from their illustrative function,

metamorphosing into an autonomous sculptural form.

The artist's bold handling of paint and audacious colour sense were clearly on display in *Green Shredded* (2011). This iridescent image of a yellow shredder emasculating a green piece of paper is set against a crimson and teal background. A crenulated green strip – representing the sheet of paper – runs down the centre-right side of the work, and as the paper intersects with the purple shredding slit, it forms a seductive chromatic complementarity. Purple is reprised as an air vent on the right side of the machine and forms additional complementarities with the citrus yellow/orange shades of the shredder. The crystalline interior of the machine is conveyed by a tantalising wash of blues and deep-purples, and these are overlaid by green shards of shredded paper that resemble spaghetti and flow towards the left side of the frame. The quivering teal background is constituted by finely combed pink and turquoise striations, which give the work a fluid and sweeping rhythm.

Zielinski's paintings are emphatically expressive, and gestural, but there are other conceptual and formal aspects that come into play. The paintings in the exhibition were mimetic and denotative in the sense they were figurative and depicted actual and otherwise banal objects. The connotations however are decidedly abstract for he uses acrylic modelling paste to create architectonic layers and thickly textured surfaces that revel in a realm of self-referential plasticity. Indeed, the works appeared to be in continual dispute between delivering on the denotative and illusory aspects of painting while simultaneously offering a counter-aesthetic that is absorbed in the arcuated and abstract autonomy of sculptural, even architectural-style forms. By messing with old verities such as painterly and expressive content, medium and ground, canvas and three-dimensional acrylic form, he ends up producing both painterly sculpture and sculptural painting. This outcome flows



from the artist's intensely focused desire to push expressive painting to its limits, and in pursuit of this goal he has become an innovative and finely skilled technician.

The artist's technical proficiency is very much in evidence in *ATM at Night* (2011). The loose handling of paint in this work functions as an analogy of the gloomy and crepuscular night, which cradles a green ATM machine. This machine sparkles like a solitary green lantern amidst a swirling melange of amorphous purplish plumes, while further distinctive highlights appear in the illuminated pink and purple buttons that ride along the encrusted surface of the machine. Once again, Zielinski plasters on plastic acrylic to build three-dimensional and sculptural accretions that toy with illusion by threatening to transcend the denotative purpose of the image. Adscititious moments of transcendence arise in the painting's saturated hues and other chromatic intensities. These produce engaging optical sensations that elicit moments of meditative self-absorption, reminiscent of the Zen-like obsessions of the American transcendentalists.

The more restrained and schematic *Magenta Shredded* (2011) provides another instance when painting's depictive and figurative function barely holds sway over the impulse towards materialist autonomy. The blue/green and pink marble shredder floats over an expressive pale yellow ground that is sporadically decorated with globs of gestural paint. The shredder spews out candy-coloured lines of shredded paper that resemble red liquorice strands, and consists of softly gouged layers of thickly encrusted paint and plasticine ridges. Accordingly, the painterly encrustations and high-relief surfaces suggest a three-dimensional object. This transformation exceeds the work's illusory dimensions by actualising the object as a discrete sculptural form, which is a very striking elaboration. It is also obvious why Zielinski likes shredders, for they represent a rigorous, inexorable, and remorseless transformation of



materials, akin to the artist's treatment of the painterly support and paint itself, with which he plays, moulds, melds and bends to his will. The titles of the works say it all, for like the machines, he shreds greens, purples and magentas and any other colour that gets in his way. Zielinski however is not a natural iconoclast, rather his punishing use of media seems motivated by an insatiable and highly accelerated curiosity.

David Joselit has written about the transitive nature of contemporary painting, and has argued that this operation reveals an awareness of art's place within dynamic cultural and technological networks of signification. Zielinski's depiction of devices like ATMs and computers follows this pattern to some extent, but he also treats these objects as surrogates for a larger interest. This interest can be described as more formal in that he engages with the transitive and dynamic networks that exist between the canvas as physical support and the dictates of mimesis, between diagrammatic conception and abstract form, as well as interactions between the mediums of painting, sculpture and architecture. Ultimately, it seems that the robust Zielinski seems willing to take whatever risks are necessary to make painting deliver on these interactions, and presently these risks are paying off handsomely.

The solo exhibition *Andrzej Zielinski: Devices* was shown at Gallery 9, Sydney, 15 June to 9 July 2011. www.gallery9.com.au

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P42: 1/ *Green Shredded*, 2011, acrylic on linen, 102 x 102cm.

2/ *Blue Shredded*, 2011, acrylic on linen, 116 x 116cm.

P43: 1/ *ATM at Night*, 2011, acrylic on linen, 165 x 165cm.

2/ *Magenta Shredded*, 2011, acrylic on linen, 165 x 165cm.

All images of work by Andrzej Zielinski; images courtesy the artist and Gallery 9, Sydney.


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