

I4I 50FA

Ilam Campus Gallery
School of Fine Arts
University of Canterbury

DOUBLE
DRIBBLE
TYNE
GORDON

22 February – 22 March 2019

Double Dribble 2 will be running at
The National 3 – 27 April



One foot in the world

The earth has slit open but the sky is still blue. That's how we know we're still on earth, probably. But I once read a book about blue and learned that the colour of any planetary atmosphere viewed against the black of space and illuminated by a sun-like star will also be blue. This could be a landscape on any planet sitting between a hot star and a void.

To call Tyne Gordon's paintings 'landscapes' is something of a misnomer. Have you ever gazed upon a vista like the ones shown in *Alley-oop 1, 2 and 3*? A fleshy mound, never a mountain, standing alone upon a flat plain devoid of all life. The mound is ashy purple, it looks bruised and mineral rich, it could be Iceland or Mars or nowhere we have a name for. The world these paintings depict feels arid and alien, as though the atmosphere held no moisture, although really it is because they are painted on board, where paint dries quickly on the surface rather than soaking in and softening. They are brutally flat works, giving just enough texture to pull you into the horizon line, always keeping you at arm's length, keeping relations alien. There are no figures in the foreground, no bodies to give a sense of scale, to prove we are even looking at a landscape.

It could be that the desire to call these paintings 'landscapes' is borne not from their form so much as their immense stillness. They remind me of that saying – if it were not for darkness, how would we know when we stand in the light? – except here it is a stillness that seeks to remind us of its opposite, almost to conjure it. For there is tension within these images, something coiled beneath the crust, magma, water, milk, blood. These are landscapes clenched, preparing for a breach of stillness that would also see an end to the dryness, a rupturing of all that is solid and serene. Perhaps liquid will never crack through the surface, or perhaps we are seeing this place before

it is irreparably altered, drowned in water, turned to stone, wreathed in green, pearly with maggots, swollen and aching. Perhaps the stillness we are faced with is the calm before the storm, before an eruption that could end life, or begin it.

Shown alongside these clenched landscapes, paintings such as *Enter the swamp* (2017) and *1-3-1 Zone* (2018) seem to suggest this kind of endgame. More texture than image, these works are built from viscous swells of paint. They are fluid and fecund, closer to chaos and nature, are a primordial soup or bubbling mud, a river of mercury, a galaxy of toothpaste foam spat out and swirling down a drain. They seem to show a liquid world, the kind that you could leave for 13.8 billion years and return to find something like the one we live in.

In describing Gordon's work, I find myself slipping unthinkingly between language pertaining to the natural world, and language that would describe the body. Both are liable to ooze and crack, to overreach their edges, to transform – and so too are Gordon's paintings and sculptures. Works such as the *Alley-oop* series can just as easily be read as volcanoes as they can vulva, both sites of creation and eruption. In their ambiguity, and with their inability to "respect borders, positions, rules," these paintings draw us towards the place where meaning collapses, to the place of the abject. Abstracted, they shimmer between the abject and the sublime, both affects that disturb the fragile boundary between subject and object, self and other. At their most abject, they evoke the horror of an open wound, of our body opening itself to the world, leaking, turning the inside out, the (m) other giving birth to the self. At their most sublime, their formlessness feels like boundlessness and affirms the limitations of the self.

We find the abject in the body-horror films of David Cronenberg, where flesh meshes with technology and characters find themselves

self-inserting Betamax tapes that come back out looking like bricks of raw flesh. Works like *Alley-oop 2* and *Clinger* (2018) bring Cronenberg's oeuvre to mind, encased as they are in fleshy, chewy frames made of soap and silicon (with other works such as *3-4-1 Zone* (2018) framed in melted black plastic strings, recalling a tangled cassette tape). These frames are like bodies themselves, rectangles that have grown up around the paintings like fungi, hardening so the image becomes trapped, inseparable from the object.

Weighty and brick-like, these fleshy frames pull Gordon's paintings into three-dimensional space. They become hybrids, image entangled with object, speaking to her belief that the image is as important as what it is made of. It is this overriding interest in materiality that has driven her to work across both painting and sculpture, crafting her own frames and creating sculptures using found objects that are then transformed through various alchemical processes such as paint, mosaic and composition.

The resulting works take the form of fountains that do not flow – or more precisely, that no longer flow, for they bear the evidence of having at one point secreted thick, nuclear, blood-like liquid. What once cycled through these fountains, animating them, mimicking the cycles of life, now lies stagnant – both *Heavy Breather 1* and *2* (2018) have ceased to breathe at all. But before the water stopped flowing, what were these fountains, where did they belong? They are decorative, domestic objects, best suited to a small garden or foyer. I can imagine one playing on the lawn of a house down a cul-de-sac, the only thing distinguishing that garden from the other identical squares of fenced-off lawn surrounding it. But these have been embellished, carefully mosaicked to become somehow both flamboyantly kitsch and yet eerily organic, with grout like lumpy flesh covered in strange growths. They are domestic objects gone horribly wrong, choked with murky, poisonous-looking liquid.

Shown alongside Gordon's bodily paintings, these fountains take on alternative meanings. They too can be read as bodies, with water pumping through them like blood circulating through veins.

But the water has stopped flowing, rendering the fountains still as corpses. Kristeva takes the corpse as the primary example of the abject for the way it traumatically reminds us of our own materiality. She writes,

...corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.

Not taking the form of human bodies, when we stand before these dead fountains, we are not faced with the full horror of our bodies as empty casings, as shells from which our subjectivities have been expelled. We are faced not with a cadaver, but with a signifier of death, something we can understand, react to or accept precisely because it is not the abject – it is an object.

The fountain has stopped flowing but the sky is still blue. Rather than signalling a world-ending event, *Heavy Breather 1* and *2* read as relics from an ended world, a dystopian future where water has become thickened and toxic, clogging fountains and pipes. These small fountains speak not to a world that has ended in fire and brimstone, but in the poisoning of our environment, presumably at our own hands.

Lucinda Bennett

1 Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*, (USA: Wave Books, 2009), 62.

2 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

3 Cronenberg, *Videodrome*. It should be noted that Cronenberg's films have a long history of criticism that hangs on their depictions of women as abject, and their abjection turning them monstrous (see Barbara Creed, *The monstrous-feminine: film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993)).

4 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

5 *Ibid.*