

FRIEZE

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PETER HALLEY

by Russell Haswell

For Peter Halley's first solo show in the United Kingdom for over ten years, and his first installation, six post-neo-geo paintings were hung on-top of repeated wallpaper formatted prints and wall drawings of exploded conduits. It seems important to note that the ceiling and floor were untouched. Ripples and bubbles between the gallery wall and the prints recalled the role of Halley's troupe of assistants in the making of the work. This is the artist's deliberate removal of his own gestural mark making, an attempt to reference the mass-produced, disposable product saturated society that his works are apparently a focused bi-product of. Lets call it auto-constructionism.

Halley has said that his works are intended to be viewed quickly, look 'hot' or even 'turbo charged'. His slick ambition reveals the glorification of his subjects (prisons cells for example) - like fictionalising the insanity of a high-speed car chase as a hedonistic pre-prison exercise.

Halley forces the philosophical issues of the contained signifier's in the paintings via the repetition of his subject matter. Their obvious production processes - the textural qualities of the stucco effect of the roll-a-tex used on the cell and prison areas - are commercial Post-industrial materials. The surface of the paintings, which deny photo-mechanical reproduction, draw the viewer in, creating 'a must see' situation.

Halley's 1999 paintings consist of small changes in a system that has lasted over a decade. The original elements of his imaginary and/or theoretical world are still in use - prisons, cells, conduits and smokestacks - but now they are burnt out, glowing, circulating, underground and/or multiplied. The self-restraint of these radically small changes - one colour, one element - in Halley's work, is a nod to heavy minimalism (Ryman and Serra spring to mind). Still consisting of more than one panel, the work has retained the lower horizontal panels which display the underground conduits (often thought of as escape tunnels), defining the apocalyptic landscape setting of the subjects which lend the subjects their building or cell status.

The conduits still carry the source of the illumination to the cells, their varying size of signifying the possibility of transportation of matter other than human (the city as a functioning machine). Underground and overground conduits seem to ignore cellular technology: a social rather than individual issue. Seemingly irrational, the changes seem to be euphoric: traditional colours have been replaced with contemporary metallics and colour combinations. The paintings are not abstract, but diagrammatic images of storage and information transportation. The cells are Pop-Minimalist squares which act as confining structures, whereas

the prisons are a critical element. In these glamorous works, synthetic colour is used to liven up the stagnant state of the arts, but also to compete with and assault the current wave of day-glo copyists. Halley utilises his powerful and personal arsenal of retinal assaulting washing powder/detergent box colours without just being 'Op'.

Halley's use of consistently hard edges has ignored the changes and developments in geometry, which is just as much about curves and ellipses as it is ninety degree angles. He might employ geometry as a metaphor for society, but in the event of an earthquake his images would shatter. Although networks of viral and electronic data flow are considered to be contemporary information carriers, flexible conduits and cabling are required. This might explain the curved and blurred contents of the posters, where the more playful, initially digitally rendered prints are filled with the distortions of the 'traced edges' command used in computer illustration packages. They provide the viewer with the deployment of true symmetry and satisfaction in the illusion upgrade (unique iris prints of the Smoking Cell, 1999), or Static Wallpaper and Mutated Cell (both works 1999).

These post-recession neo-geo paintings are the retrogressive nostalgic mirroring of pop culture of the late 70s and 80s. But they re-establish them in a similar way to fashion while still managing to reflect contemporary interests - like remembering the 80s and observing the resurgence of pop icons such as Debbie Harry. Looking at Halley's paintings, I cant stop thinking that he must have been heavily influenced by art rock/pop/modernists/designer record sleeves of the early 80s - arguably his formative years.

The contemporary world has changed radically since the mid-80s and Halley reflects the wider social implications of the eroticisation of technology. His titles are often more than descriptions of their compositional contents (Smoking Cell, 1999) but plundered from Computer Games (Time Crisis, 1999) or Independent Music Fanzines (Forced Exposure, 1999). Yet why the Exploded Conduit wall paintings aren't titled or listed as works in the same way as the prints gives me the feeling that they are almost an afterthought. The attempt to battle the current day-glo copyists and perpetuate the legacy that the neo-geo lives on is still Halley's playful production line.