



Colouring outside the lines

Chloé Wolifson

Printmaking is an artistic discipline that is seen by its disciples as just that, with the centuries-old technical skills of the medium universally revered by print practitioners. For Christopher Dolman, however, the deliberate misuse of these learned techniques is a vital part of his process. Dolman's cross disciplinary practice has printmaking at its core, with disparate imagery and objects layered using ad hoc and experimental tactics in a remix of the medium.

Dolman's works reveal a respect for the modernist movements of Geometric Abstraction and Pop, while consciously interrogating and reshaping their relevance to the practice of an artist working now. Dolman blows the dust from the surface of these key 20th century moments and peers into them, seeking connections with the aesthetics of his own personal experience.

"I was in an internet cafe, opening Google Maps with a really slow internet connection and only getting geometric shapes of colour on the computer screen. The glitch made me look at accident, or mistake as process which I started to exploit through print processes both digital and hand made. To me it contemporized Geometric Abstraction, borrowing the hard-edged shapes from 1960s painting, but without its striving for purity or integrity."¹

The geometric forms in large-scale two-dimensional works such as *Days of Thunder* (2012) are informed by this approach. To create them, Dolman layers ink onto paper like rock strata slowly building up in the earth. This process highlights and builds upon surface imperfections until they are vital to the work's DNA. The lines between accident and intent are blurred, raising questions about the relative value of success and failure.

The 2013 video work *Jumprint* takes this further, using corporeal action as a signifier for process. In attempting to high-jump over one of his large prints, Dolman highlights the incongruity between the measured achievements of athletics versus the arbitrary nature of artistic success, the latter hinging on allowing space for failure to happen and be embraced.

Bright saturated colours and hard-edged shapes are also recontextualised via the graphic traditions of the artist's formative years of the 1980s and 1990s. In the sculptural work *When we were kings* (2012), a pile of colourful VHS covers forms the torso of a makeshift figure crowned with Groucho Marx-esque glasses and nose and a clownish pompom hat. This work is rooted in notions of teenaged self-identity.

Dolman also memorialises the quotidian in *Travel Log Vanitas* (2013), carefully rendering mundane objects such as a beanie, toilet paper and kitchen sponge to scale in painted, glazed ceramic. Presenting on a trestle table in the 2013 exhibition *Trompe l'ol*, these works resisted a museological reading, maintaining a connection to the craft origins of their medium whilst simultaneously highlighting their frustrated functionality.

In a series of collaged works in the same exhibition, Dolman presented a fragmented account of his own European 'grand tour', where clichéd postcard-worthy images are interspersed with iPhone images of incidental holiday moments. ATMs, train stations, and wheelie bins are all set to a backdrop of Geometric Abstraction done the 21st century way – that is, with blocks of colour in Photoshop.

The work *Sponsor's Flag* (2013) is a collection of brand icons representing the artist's influences, from comic book superheroes to energy drinks, from fashion to junk food. In the centre of the work, Bart Simpson moons the viewer, a smile on his face. This global ambassador for subversiveness serves as a cheeky mascot for Dolman's practice, a reminder of the excitement borne from breaking the rules.

¹ Christopher Dolman in email conversation with the author, July 2014