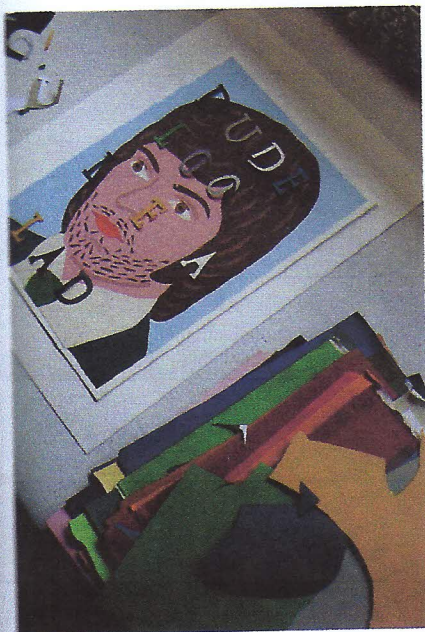




## CUT AND PASTE

Artist Gavin Hurley's whimsical pieces often portray historical figures and exude nostalgia, so it's only appropriate that he works from a space that reflects the style of another generation.

TEXT JULIE HILL PHOTOGRAPHY PATRICK REYNOLDS



**G**avin Hurley is in his kitchen, making me a coffee worthy of a barista. He even decorates the froth. He has lived in this apartment block in the Auckland suburb of Freemans Bay for seven years, and calls it an "artist's ghetto". His friend and collaborator Sam Mitchell lives nearby, as does the photographer Jennifer French, the Walters prize-winning Dan Arps, gallery owner Anna Miles and, up until recently, the sculptor Jim Speers.

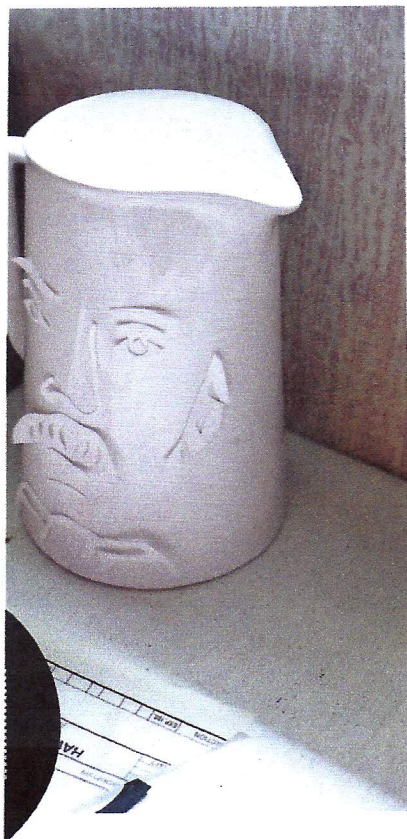
The flats, which are around four decades old, seem to cry out for equally retro décor, so it's fortunate that Gavin's boyfriend

Cameron owns the antique store Flotsam & Jetsam on Richmond Road in nearby Grey Lynn. In the living room are schools of tiered cake stands, Wedgwood bunny rabbits and glass domes. Frequently Gavin intercepts Cameron's treasures and turns them into art, like the white milk jugs he has tagged with slogans in black paint. "They have a matte surface, kind of bisque, so they're nice to doodle on," he says.

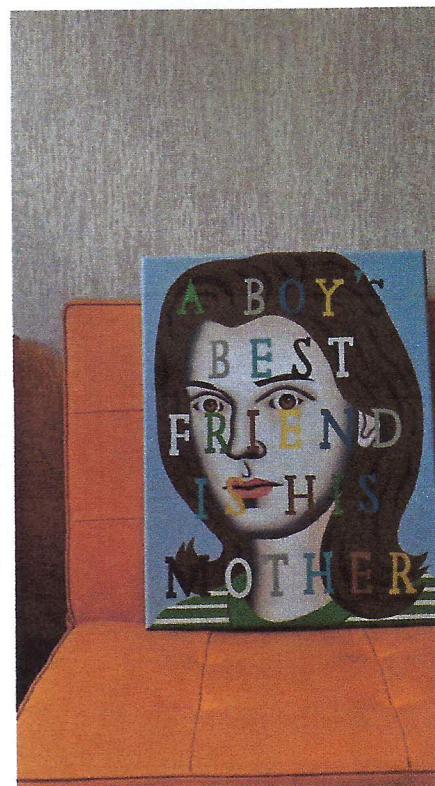
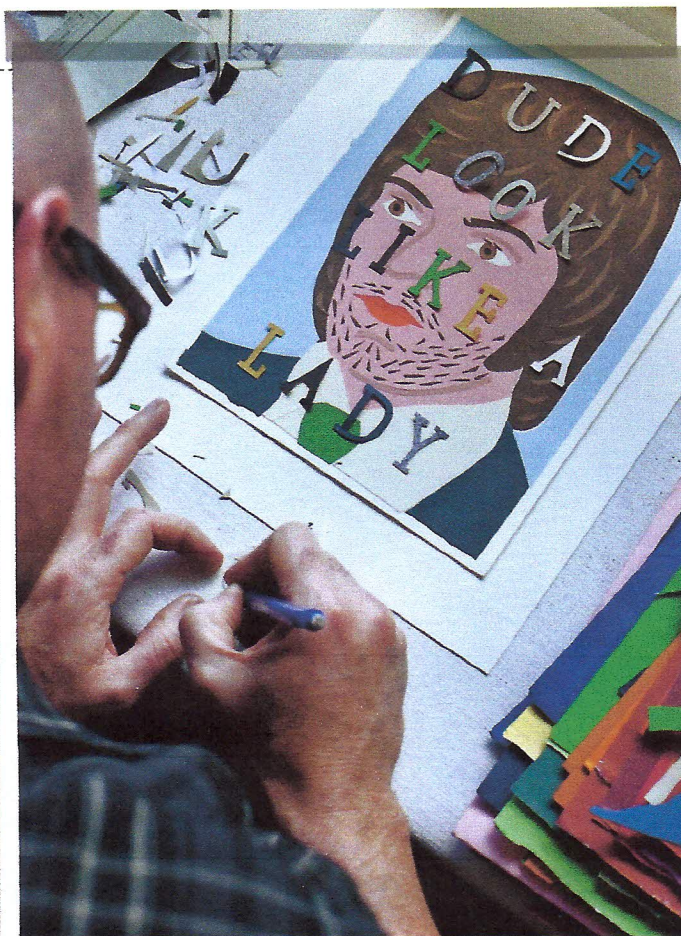
When it comes to his workspace, Gavin is a man of few demands. He says he can work anywhere. His studio is modest: there is no easel, just a little stool. Coloured paper is

Gavin's signature style is his collage technique which can still be seen even when he paints. The picture of the man in a tuxedo (above) is based on a collage postcard designed for Crane Brothers menswear a years ago.





Gavin admits he's been "sticking moustaches on everything" recently, including plain white milk jugs (above). One of his earlier works of a faceless Beatles fan (opposite page, bottom left) echoes a Rita Angus painting that he found hugely inspirational.



neatly stacked; reams of patterned vinyls, tracing paper and linen stand in a corner. One of Cameron's boxes is marked "monogrammed cups, demitasse, Santa mug". Unfinished portraits are stacked upside down because Gavin can't stand to look at them. The blinds are drawn against the strong Aotearoan sun – though it's tougher to dissuade the cat from spraying on his blank canvases.

Gavin enjoys this time of year, when his shows are finished and the summer awaits, "then you make a few pieces that summarise what you were trying to do".

One such piece, a painting he is working on "just for fun", is based on a collage postcard he designed for the changing rooms in menswear store Crane Brothers a few years back. A man in a tuxedo stares into the mirror; a wolf in a tuxedo stares back.

Gavin spends much of his working day scouring second-

hand bookstores for the historical characters who will populate his canvases. Among the upside-down faces are the merchant, bibliophile and dandy Alexander Turnbull, and the surprisingly attractive first mayor of Wellington, George Hunter. "I'm often drawn to early colonial figures who were in politics and were artists and land surveyors and explorers. I sort of have a thing for that."

He also has a thing for shape, which might explain why his faces are often blank. "I think that's because I'm short-sighted. Like you get your first glasses and you realise trees have separate leaves. But even now I'm always attracted by form." One of his favourite shapes is a moustache. "In the past couple of years I've been sticking moustaches on everything," he says. "You can make a painting and if you think it's missing something you can doodle one on."

Gavin has just received a commission to make a portrait of a real person: the client's early settler relative, a man with a kindly smile and an Amish beard of fantastically shiny tight grey curls. "The guy had five wives and 20 children," Gavin says. "It makes me more nervous when it's a real person but I love the whole thing that people are interested in their own personal history because it's such a young country in a sense."

He traces his love for male head-and-shoulders portraits to Rita Angus and her 'Head of a Maori Boy'. One of Gavin's earliest portraits, of a Beatles fanatic named Edward, with a moptop hairdo and blank face, even echoes the shape of the Maori boy's head. "It was at the Auckland Art Gallery and I would visit it often. It was just a head and shoulders portrait and I think I've never really moved passed it." •





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