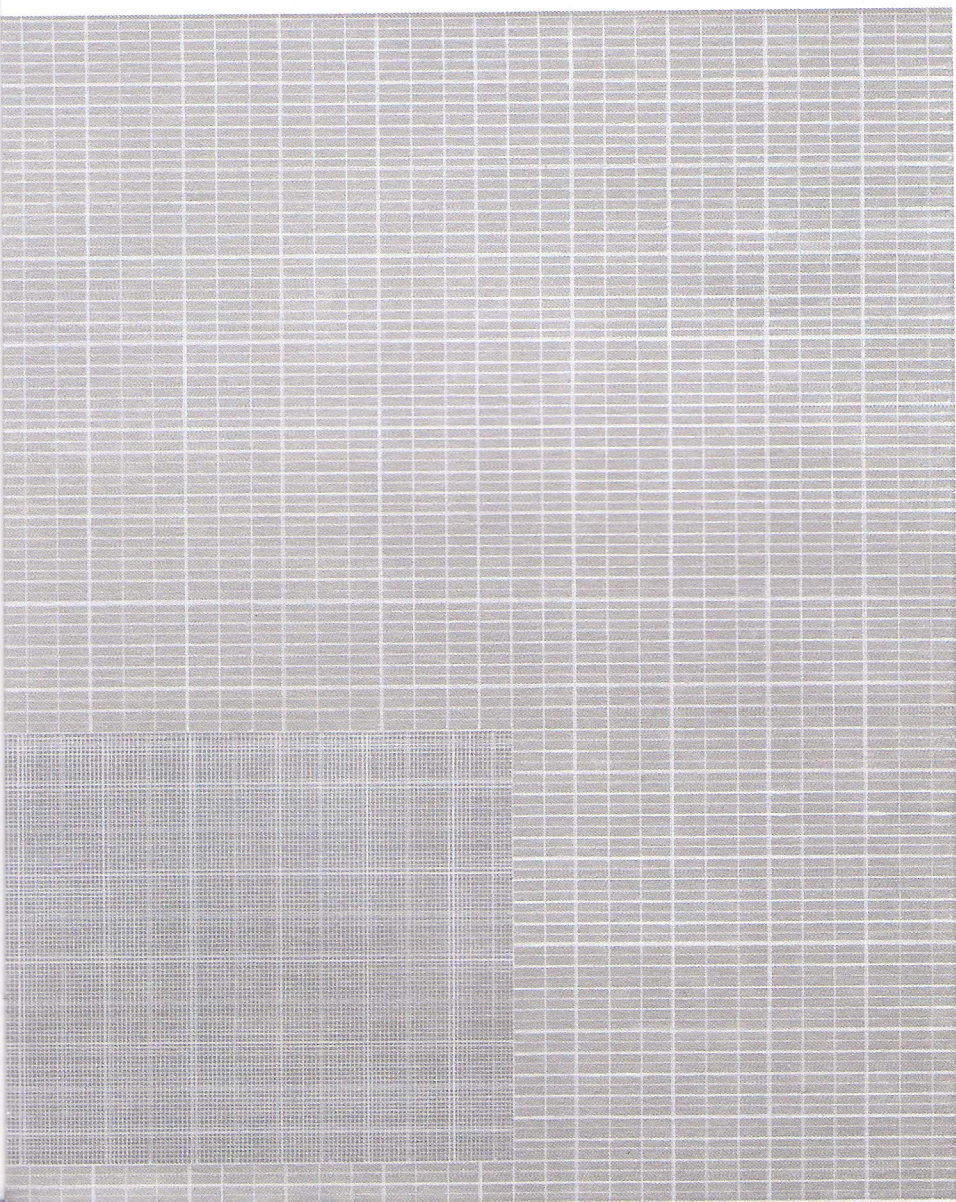


17 June — 9 August 2013

Inland Empire

Ruth Cleland and Gary McMillan





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ISBN 978-0-473-24923-6
Published on the occasion of
the exhibition **Inland Empire:**
Ruth Cleland and Gary McMillan
17 June—9 August 2013

Uninhabited spaces, ordinary scenes, overlooked views. Ruth Cleland and Gary McMillan make drawings and paintings of the places we fail to notice, as we are preoccupied with the busyness and activities of daily life.

It's not uncommon for new viewers to confuse the works of these two artists. Ruth and Gary share a consistent attention to detail, a similar 'everyday' subject matter, and both use photographs as the starting point for their drawings and paintings. But it's a mistake to assume that the intent of their work is the same.

Gary describes his work as being "closer to fiction." He thinks of his paintings as frames from an imaginary film, where each scene has a sense of impending action. With a slight tilt or blur to the image, a movement is caught and there is a feeling that the view itself is about to shift. Like an in-between shot that segues to the next moment of action, his paintings deliberately evoke a feeling of unease. *Untitled #11* and *Untitled #12* are glimpses where such movement is implied by the cropping of the view.



Gary McMillan *Untitled #11*, 2013



Gary McMillan *Untitled #12*, 2013

Gary has a finely tuned way of seeing the world that comes from an awareness of his own discomfort around others. He openly acknowledges that his disquiet leads him to be an observer, able to notice things that most other people overlook.

The light that streams through the lounge studio in the late afternoon provides inspiration: "I'm obsessed with light. I'm trying to achieve the effect of blasted-out light that film and photography can capture but the eye alone can't perceive." *Untitled #10* is a key example in which this 'blasted-out' light is depicted. Light becomes the subject of the painting, even more so than the character shown taking a photograph at the french doors. Another painting attentive to the nature of light is *Untitled #8*, where low sunlight radiates a warm glow off the house in the scene.



Gary McMillan *Untitled #10*, 2013



Gary McMillan *Untitled #8*, 2013

Several of Gary's *Inland Empire* works move inside – he calls them 'more insular' despite the fact that they are looking outwards. There is containment at the same time as exploration, in a style akin to German artist Uta Barth (b.1958) who has spent the last 14 years taking photographs exclusively inside her own home. Barth's work is also contemplative of light and explores the emptiness of human space un-peopled. Like Barth, Gary intentionally depicts the mundane or the incidental in order to focus attention on the fundamental act of looking and the process of perception.¹

Gary is very taken with the grace of the photographic image as it corrupts into grain. He is known for examining the dots that form printed images, and for wanting to sit right up the front at the cinema in order to see the particles that make up the projected image. He paints with the same attention to each spot of paint.

Ruth's works are "closer to non-fiction." Ruth is hesitant to describe her work as 'anthropological' but there is some sense of social documentary in her scenes of suburbia, empty shopping malls and parking buildings. Not wanting her work to be a direct statement on suburban sprawl, but rather a snapshot in time without overt judgement or commentary, Ruth's work raises questions of what do we value, where do we spend our time, and what will these places be like in the future?

Like a Vija Celmins drawing of a section of the ocean, Ruth's pencil drawing titled *Parking Building (detail #2)* focuses on a small area of concrete – we don't know if it's the wall or the floor, which level, or which parking building – but the implication is that this rectangle is but a drop in a growing ocean of concrete.

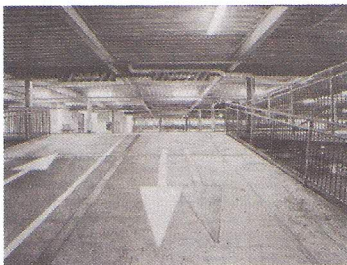
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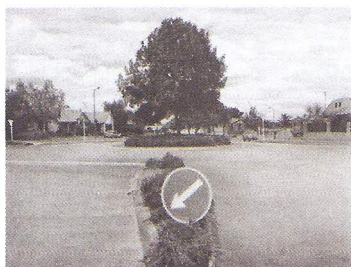


Ruth Cleland *Parking Building (detail #2)*, 2012



Ruth Cleland *Parking Building #2*, 2012

In her *Island Series*, nature is contained within a circle of concrete kerbing, and street signs direct absent people where to go and what to do. The absence of people in the work is deliberate, as the presence of any figure would detract from the intent of the work by implying some kind of narrative. Centrality is important in these works too. The use of one-point perspective brings a tension to the composition and directs our focus upon the island, as if it's a kind of monument.



Ruth Cleland *Island #6*, 2012



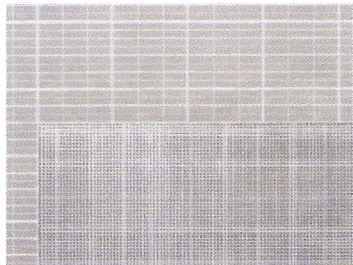
Ruth Cleland *Island #7*, 2013

The use of the grid has become an integral feature in Ruth's recent work – bringing the method of image transfer to our attention – a further acknowledgment of the source photograph and a nod to historical art practice. The meticulous enlargement, square by square, from the original photograph is a process both Ruth and Gary employ.

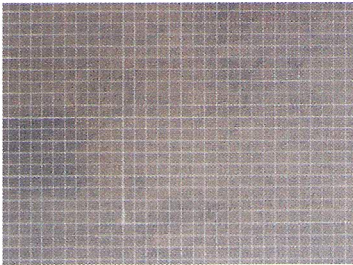
Initially, Ruth began leaving traces of grid lines, unashamedly proclaiming the practice of image transfer. Gradually the grid has become more significant in her work as she has embraced it as a visual metaphor, suggesting suburbia can be a grid, physically and metaphorically. The idea of being 'on the grid' or 'off the grid' provides layers of meaning and alludes to an omnipresent order beyond personal control.

Ruth's *Grid Series* works are full-blown explorations of the grid as a mode

of abstraction, and like the grid works of Canadian-American artist Agnes Martin (b.1912), it's the flaws and nuances of each intersecting line that become the detail.



Ruth Cleland Detail from *Grid #12*, 2013



Ruth Cleland Detail from *Grid #13*, 2013

While a photographic image may be a starting point for both artists – and while both acknowledge this in their process of photorealistic painting – it is clear that the ideas that develop and accumulate behind the work are separate and distinct.

Their work and practices are symbiotically interlaced; through each influencing, encouraging, and acting as each other's sounding-board. With the amount of time devoted to creating their artworks, it's advantageous for them each to have a partner that understands the drive and intent behind the making.

Steph Chalmers – Art Collection Curator, University of Waikato

Ruth Cleland and Gary McMillan are originally from the Waikato. They each hold a Master of Fine Arts (with distinction) from Otago School of Art in Dunedin. Among many other successes, both artists have been awarded the 1st prize at the *National Painting and Printmaking Award* organised by the Waikato Society of Arts in Hamilton (Ruth in 2003 and Gary in 2012). In 2009, Ruth and Gary completed artist residencies at the Vermont Studio Centre, USA.

Ruth and Gary are represented in the collections of The James Wallace Arts Trust, The Hocken Library, Otago Polytechnic and Eastern Southland Gallery.

Ruth is also represented in the Chartwell Collection held at the Auckland Art Gallery and the Trust Waikato Collection held at the Waikato Museum.

For more information visit:
www.ruthcleland.com
www.garydavidmcmillan.com

Ruth Cleland's work is shown courtesy of the artist and Melanie Roger Gallery
www.melanierogergallery.com

Gary McMillan's work is shown courtesy of the artist and FHE Galleries
www.fhegalleries.com