

G. Hurley

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gavin hurley

Born Auckland 1973

BFA Elam 1998

Lives in Auckland

There are not many portrait painters to be found on the contemporary art scene. Depictive realism is not high on the agendas of artists who want to be recognised for their ideas, rather than their technical ability. Gavin Hurley bucks this trend. For a decade he has been painting portrait heads, but not quite in the classical manner. His predecessors are Ferdinand Leger, Andy Warhol, Alex Katz and American naïve painters, rather than Rembrandt and Rubens. His aim is Post-Modern irony rather than immortalisation.

Hurley's technique is to prepare coarse-weave canvas by painting it black and rubbing over it in white. The result is a frottage effect, with the white weave pattern raised on the black. He then proceeds with the painting. In some places the underpainting comes through as a faint inflexion on the surface colour. In other places he obliterates the underpainting, but achieves a two-tone effect on the surface, still using the weave to achieve this. In other places he will flood out the surface in one colour only, with no tonal effects (this is always in a limited area, such as hair, where cross-hatching would not look right). The artist always leaves a little bit of the ground painting visible, often just in the corners of the eyes, so the discerning viewer knows it is there.

Hurley's colour is always muted — dull greens, pinks and aquas, greys, black, and off-whites. Backgrounds are plain. Visages are pale and impassive. Edges around eyes, eyebrows, lips, beards and the heads themselves are sharp. Freckles and lines are omitted, the only minor facial features being the furrow in the middle of the upper lip and the rise of the chin. The paintings have a slightly fifties, dated air.





