



Collision Drive 1



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15 April – 21 May 2019

Paintings by Steven Rendall and Benet Spencer

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Foreword

by Geraint Evans

The sliding doors at the centre of Benet Spencer's *Modern Interior* series create an interface between inside and outside. The near proximity of the garden to the domestic interior and the open plan composition of the space reminds us of the influence of Japanese *sukiya-zukuri* design on Modernist architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Gropius. In *Modern Interior II* (2019) the door seems to float and glow like a computer screen or tablet, suggestive of a virtual interface.

Spencer works on unprimed canvas, using thin veils of paint, which has the effect of suppressing the narratives suggested by the painting's imagery, calling the viewer's attention instead to the process of painting itself. And the interior/exterior dynamic in Spencer's paintings extends beyond the edge of the canvas as the multiple geometric patterns and structures depicted within the paintings find echoes in flat areas of colour applied to the walls of the gallery within Wimbledon College of Arts' original 1930's entrance hall.

Collision Drive 1 is the first in a series of exhibitions in which Benet Spencer and Steven Rendall contemplate the relationship between collage and painting, the painting process as an active tool for investigation and painting in its expanded forms.

Steven Rendall presents montages of accumulated visual information – images from auction catalogues – artworks and artefacts, spliced and repurposed through preparatory collages and subsequently, through large painterly works on unstretched canvas.

The work recalls Robert Rauschenberg's Silkscreen Paintings, described by Archim Hochdörfer as "a programmatic confrontation between traditional, expressive painting and the surge of media imagery"¹. In his essay, *Surface, Image, Reception: Painting in a Digital Age*, Alex Bacon cites Leo Steinberg's thesis on the emergence of the flatbed picture plane in the work of artists such as Rauschenberg, which he says makes a "symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as table tops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards – any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed...the painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of operational processes"².

Rendall's paintings assert their object materiality through the canvasses' purposefully uneven edges and integrated fixings and, at times, through their mode of display – placed, for example, at 90-degree angles to one another in the corners of the gallery space or hung loosely on the walls.

A further iteration of *Collision Drive* at the RMIT Project Space, Melbourne, Australia later this year, will see the exhibition expand to include the work of a number of other artists with similar concerns from both the UK and Australia, including Stephania Leigh, Andrea Medjesi-Jones, Laurence Noga, Bronte Webster and Hiroe Komai.

1. Hochdörfer, A (2015) *How the World Came In in Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Prestel

2. Steinberg, L in Bacon, A (2016) *Surface, Image, Reception: Painting in a Digital Age*, rhizome.org 24.05.16



Rendell and Spencer's Collision Drive

by Phil King

There is an esoteric word: *detritorialization*. Coined in France in the early 1970s* it means a kind of inevitable outlandishness. Inevitable because it also has a fatalistic soupçon of everything getting worse. It indicated the trajectory of the endless loss of quality of life implicit in economies organised around accumulating vast quantities of money. Capturing the nature of such abstraction, a kind of anti-nature, the word concept had an opposite – *reterritorialization* – a countermovement whose force is to try and create artificial qualities and natures – often of a nostalgic kind – on the basis of the abstracted ungrounded life of money and its circulation. Investing in property might be a clear example of trying to ground currency quicksilver. Planting a flag to claim, or rather invent, artificial territory in the midst of a generalised, catastrophic drift away from liveable lives – and yet turning homes themselves into a moveable feast.

On a global scale, and the show *Collision Drive* is nothing if not global in intent, we can perceive the history of Great Britain and its former colonies within this necessarily abstract dynamic and I would suggest that the paintings of Benet Spencer, with his 'architectures' and of Steven Rendall, with his 'populations' and screens, give us a shared, disjunctive, ungrounded vista that spans 'old' and 'new' continents. Both territorial inventions giving birth to artificial Imperial Nostalgia in the one case and fantasies of a fresh New World and life on the other, one that strip mines anything that went before – with both situations becoming gnarled up in each other free of actual concrete reality and life. (After all Australia was there, and populated, long before any flags were planted on it).

Looking at the paintings of these artists together, one from Melbourne the other from 'the old country', is an opportunity to witness the creation of a particular form, one they title *Collision Drive* – the nature of this form is a kind of abstract internationalism of a new kind, connected perhaps to the artist Nick Fudge's onscreen *Reality Drive*, or the circuit paintings of Peter Halley, a shared general momentum free of nostalgic reclamation of lost territories while caught up in the 'starting from zero' programming that is the overarching paradigm of the world that we all try and live on.

As working painters however, they, to a large extent, display the results of their own habits for us; paintings after all can be seen as evidence of particular habitats, evidence of the creation of particular horizons through forces of habit and repetition. Put the identities, or bodies of work, manifest by these habits together and what we have is indeed a kind of collision, a crashing synthesis of different worlds, in this case the nature of a mass population as faced by Rendall is jammed with the sense of a continually developing architectural sensibility as constructed by Spencer – both worlds cut off from the old territories they were actually painted in in order to join, potentially inhabit, and provide some kind of roof for, a new place. But this new place actually has no place – at best it is a strange kind of high level abstraction between, and outlined by, our artists' far away, and different, horizons. The sun sets within utterly different time zones in this abstract unity. But my sense is that impossible embodiment can and will happen. I feel, as with all good art, part of the experiment.



Looking at Rendall's paintings it is the sense of homeless population that strikes me first. *Psychomachy* (2017), for example, is a peopled painting, the people painted caught up in diagrams of various kinds, different kinds of heads tumbling about in a kind of implicit 'capitalism', bodiless heads, often seeming like mere masks. Different cultural horizons feel jumbled up in abstraction without any clear land or sense of actual place, in a form of cut-off media landscape of the kind he manifests onscreen in earlier paintings. This jumbled sense of a populated 'mediascape', linked to a powerfully achieved sense of painting's fundamental abstract nature and organisation, invents a colourful medley of voices and faces and talking heads. Masks act across cultural and geographic boundaries to define a sort of detached cloud cuckoo land between different 'everywheres'... there is a sense that any putatively dominant 'European Culture' is but part of the medley, sucked into a radical confusion, something old and new seen and collaged together from an alien point of view. Acting in counterpoint to this affect is the concrete and matter of fact way that he combines his work as installation within architecture, he gives it a real home of a newly created kind, installing it somewhere in the stratosphere of our warming globe, and now in actual art galleries.

I'm reminded of David Bowie's alien in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) passively watching a multitude of screens, monitoring alienated and over-populated complexity in continual hubbub. It is within such other-worldliness that these two artists connect and contextualise each other, within some-no-place which is created by their work as a common ground, a common sense that is not common and doesn't really make sense... we see, even if we can't necessarily come to terms with, the velocity of a kind of unlikely deterritorialized realism.

Spencer clearly creates and provides an architecture for this deterritorialized catch all abstracted realm, while

equally clearly being caught up in its sweep himself, his 'architecture' is itself a motley invention, building on the same groundlessness that it seems intended to house and contain. In *Diagram of a City* (2016) the 'off-world' nature of this non-site, this unreal city reduced, or rather stretched thin, to a schematic, is able to contain the Death Star from *Star Wars*. It was the blueprints of that artificial planet that created the thrust of that first *Star Wars* franchise (nostalgic) storyline... diagrams that showed its weak spot downloaded and smuggled in the hard drive of a cute little robot. Realism, in a space where whole worlds can be destroyed, is 'out there' and that is where these artists meet and collaborate, perhaps even scheme a little ahead of the game.

Let us ourselves step into this 'ahead of the game' meeting place, this groundless attempt at common ground in which sheer quantity of ragged material finds diagrammed assembly. Let's look for what it is and how its arrangements might work. First of all, as the artists themselves claim, it has an experimental nature. To me this means an ambition to escape the known rather than something scientifically grounded. Constructing a pragmatic conspiracy together out of their paintings, proposing their work as part of and defined by particular places on opposite sides of our world the artists create new populated nowhere habitats together, fictional scaffoldings that can really be experienced but that grow out of virtual necessities beyond measure and out of regressive national and cultural identities. Interiors suddenly contain fauna and decor that can be counted on out of thin air. Spencer creates a world of interiors for us to participate in, for us to experimentally inhabit. In economies where property rules as a means to shore up against the catastrophic drive to leave everything behind, the nostalgia of interior decorating has become king. This is an experimental art that works by putting us in a place of creating things and I can only suggest the need to really experience its placing, its arrival in the



(p 10)

Steven Rendall
Psychomachy
2017
Oil and acrylic on linen
275 × 183 cm

(this page)

Benet Spencer
Diagram of a City
2015
Oil and acrylic on canvas
160 × 200 cm

(overleaf)

Steven Rendall
*Study for Merely to breathe
was enjoyment (right)*
2019
Paper collage, ink, pencil,
paint
30 × 21 cm



real. Putting these painters together is an act that lets their ambitions create somewhere unknown that works, that colours life in somewhere beyond our grasp. They lay out somewhere new to move into and include the neighbours that might come with. Maybe the plan is to create abstract installations where everyday chronic homesickness can be really potentially cured without looking back.

Place and people become another as yet unknown experience, diagrams indicate but painting, and its installation, are actually materially manifest – all this speculation happens in between diagram and painting, proposal and event. It's a lot to put together.

And so, together, and yet clearly an actual world, and actual time, apart, these painters let their ambitions create somewhere that works... it is up to us to go there, to join in its assembly. It is tempting to name this movement, try and fix this disjunctive synthesis that our painters have decided to work to create together. Perhaps 'Virtual Realism' might evoke the general journey Rendall and Spencer begin to take us on. The interiors that we enter along with Rendall's disassociated heads, masks, and busy screens become ever more actual, ever more liveable even if fundamentally out of time and space. He builds walls out of his paintings as travel-sickness threatens. Home is where the art is. What happens can perhaps be named a disjunctive overreaching form of science-fiction where each artist's work collides, but this categorisation would perhaps capture and limit what's going on to yet another form of, in this case, 1950s nostalgia – that paradigmatic era of classic science-fiction and abstract 'international' painting, a formica civilisation whose limits and categorisations both painters intelligently push beyond as they pragmatically plan something real between time zones.

*In memory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Steven Rendall
Merely to breathe was enjoyment (right and left)
2019
Acrylic on canvas
307 × 243 cm

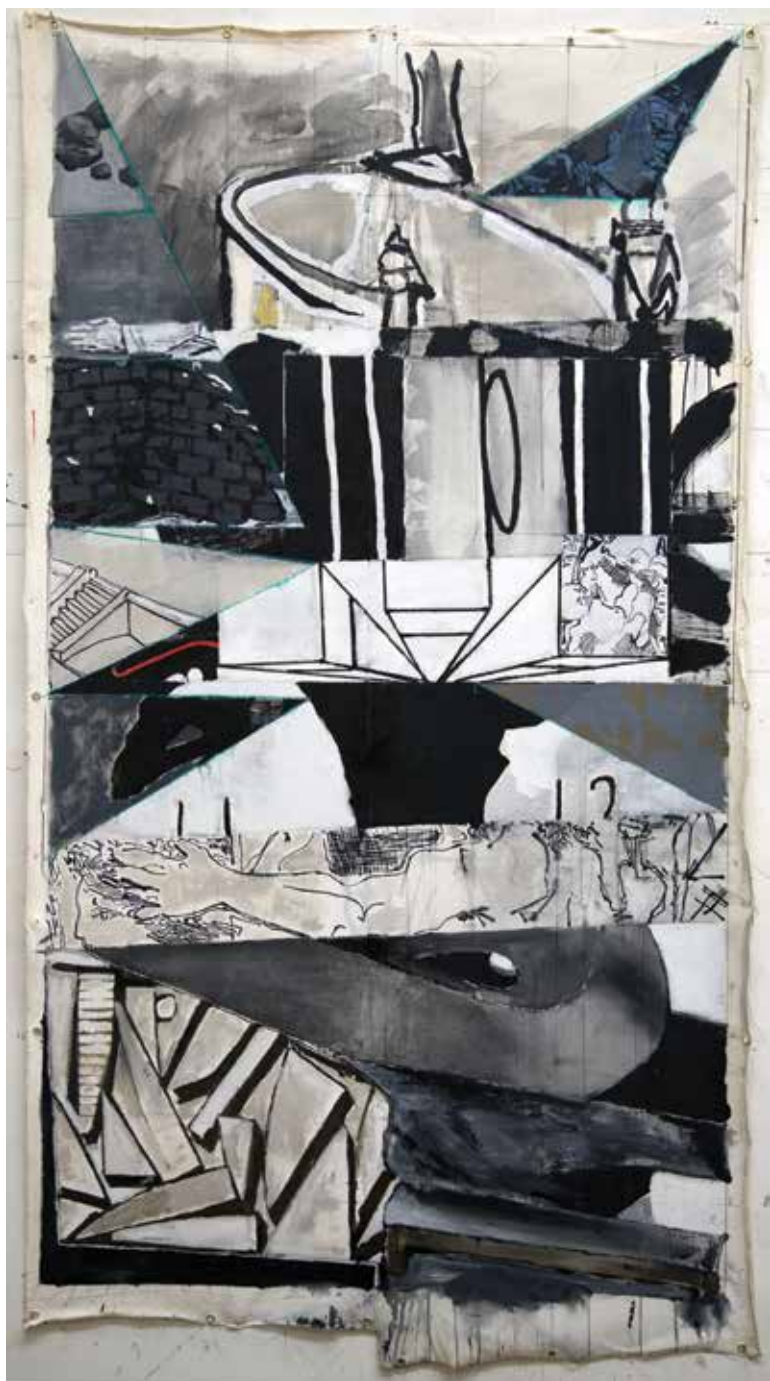




Steven Rendall
Study for ... when the film from the mental vision departs
 2019
 Paper collage, ink, pencil, paint
 30 × 21 cm

(opposite)
 Steven Rendall
... when the film from the mental vision departs
 2019
 Acrylic on canvas
 307 × 107 cm





Steven Rendall
Tiriel
2018
Oil, acrylic and pencil on linen
153 × 102 cm

(opposite)
Steven Rendall
The stranger grew pale
2019
Acrylic on canvas
174 × 96 cm



Benet Spencer
Modern House 7
2014

Digital Inkjet print, photocopy,
cardboard and pealed acrylic paint
28 × 36 cm

(opposite)
Benet Spencer
Museum Interior I
2019

Oil and acrylic on canvas and
emulsion on wall
305 × 280 cm
(canvas 90 × 125 cm)

(opposite)
Benet Spencer
Modern Interior I
2017
Oil and acrylic on canvas
120 × 170 cm

(p 26)
Benet Spencer
Modern Interior II
2019
Oil and acrylic on canvas
120 × 170 cm

(p 27)
Benet Spencer
Modern Interior III
2019
Oil and acrylic on canvas
120 × 170 cm







The University of the Pacific
The Pacific University Foundation

Colophon

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RMIT Project Space, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia 11 Oct - 9 Nov 2019

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