

## **Tim Maguire Catalogue, Galerie Andreas Binder, Munich 2003**

### **TIM MAGUIRE**

In choosing to create this new series of monochrome paintings, Tim Maguire has taken what might be seen as a risk in depriving himself – and his audience – of what has been one of his great strengths in recent years: the riot of colour, the hot reds and greens and pinks and yellows that have animated his work. This new departure may even strike some viewers as a perverse reversal of direction.

In fact, the move represents a further stage in the long exploration of the balance between process and image – between the artist controlling what we see on one hand and a deliberate distancing of the artist on the other – which has characterized Maguire's work from such early experiments as drawing with his feet instead of his hand; or more recently the unpredictable application of corrosive solvents into his meticulously painted surfaces.

Some departures generate instant and deliberate results; others throw up problems that may only be solved some time later. The colour separation paintings are a case in point: Maguire has reached an impasse in his attempts to find an analogy for the process in which colour photographs are printed using tiny dots of just four colours – cyan, magenta, yellow and black – which the eye then mixes into the full range of colours. When a painter mixes them on the palette, however, the result is a brown sludge. Several years later, working on a series of abstract paintings in which chance played a leading role, Maguire realized that applications of solvent could provide his analogy; that he could build up an image by applying the four colours one by one and, by flicking solvent and dragging it across the surface of the drying canvas with a stiff brush, he could reveal the successive layers of colour underneath.

The monochrome series – 'monochrome' used loosely, since there is a trace of colour in each black – grew directly out of the colour separation process. The tonal range of each colour is digitally generated and printed photographically in black and white as the artist's reference, and it was studying these black-and-white images closely, day after day in the studio, that prompted Maguire's interest in exploring monochrome. The new paintings are worked up from a single colour layer: from the magenta alone, for instance. With just one layer of paint, there is less room for intervention by flicking or dragging, and much more evidence than we are accustomed to in Maguire's work of the artist's own hand. The shape of each painting is the result of a single session in the studio, for once the paint is dry the image is

fixed. The white, so strong here, is the white of the canvas itself, either left untouched or revealed by solvent.

The balance between process and image is profoundly different in this series, the form of each petal or fruit or flower head emerging with a quite unexpected power. Perhaps as the result of an evolutionary need to see by moonlight or at dusk, the human eye is able to read more into monochrome images, to see more, as it were. So, here, we register a palpable weight in the imagery, a physical presence not seen in the colour separations.

We are reminded of early photography, of course, but also of Man Ray's surrealist images from the 1920s; and there is a strange feeling of three-dimensionality and solidity to the forms, as if they had been modeled in clay on stone. Seen together, Maguire's new paintings display a remarkable range of tone and effect.

Text by **Bruce Millar**

Tim Maguire is one of Australia's most internationally recognized contemporary artists and one of the very few who has managed, for nearly twenty years, to build an extensive body of work whilst maintaining an active and prolific exhibition history both within Australia and throughout Europe and New York. Maguire is perhaps best known for his large flower paintings derived from details of colour-plate reproductions of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century still lives, however, his oeuvre encompasses numerous other explorations into form, content and process. As many commentators have noted, these works are not so much transcriptions as transformations, often rapidly improvised and if their historical lineage provides a kind of artistic respectability, this is offset against the rather more ambivalent relationship that the artist takes to his source material. As Adrian Searle writes, "Never does it seem that he is engaging in the trite postmodernist game of re quotation and appropriation .... instead he treats the art of the past (whether it is the recent past of post-war modernism or the activities of Dutch genre painters of the 1700s) as something to be recaptured, not from the linear flow of history but from a field of possibilities .... Maguire approaches the models he uses, not with the cool eye of the theorist or the academic but as a painter, one for whom the endpoint of history must serve as a beginning".

His work has been seen recently in solo exhibitions at the John Curtin Art Gallery, Perth WA (2001) and the Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery, NSW (2002) as well as the group exhibition *It's a Beautiful Day*, at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne. In 2003 the Bendigo Art Gallery will present a ten year survey of paintings.

Of particular relevance to these new paintings, however, is the earlier site-specific exhibition, *Canal*, commissioned by Jonathan Watkins for Chisenhale Gallery, London in 1992. This exhibition exemplifies Maguire's meticulous approach to the physical demands of particular exhibition venues, in this case, an enormous, black, windowless space typically associated with installation practice. Maguire was the first artist to be commissioned to make paintings for this space. The luminosity of the exhibited suite of paintings emerging out of the blackness almost as squares of light, created an extraordinary sense of illusionistic space – as if there were apertures - within the gallery walls – blind windows onto the canal. As visitors moved from daylight into darkness, these 'abstract' works (recast after the style of Barnett Newman) evoked the physical sensation of an invisible canal just beyond the gallery walls. It is this conceptual as well as technical virtuosity that makes Tim Maguire such an exemplary artist.

**Sarah Miller**

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