

The background of the image is an abstract, painterly composition of wavy, horizontal stripes. The primary colors are a vibrant yellow, a bright orange, and a dark forest green. The stripes vary in thickness and flow across the frame, creating a sense of movement and depth. In the upper-left corner, there is a dark, textured area that appears to be a shadow or a different layer of paint. The overall effect is reminiscent of a tiger's stripes or a close-up of a zebra's coat.

sick

# sick

Amanda Davies

Feb 4th - March 6th, 2005

Amanda Davies literally paints pictures back to front. This is very disconcerting when you consider that the history of painting has been primarily based on images produced by the artists' optical skill and sensitivity, played out directly on the surface of the picture: the side most visible to artist and viewer alike. Isn't optical directness and spontaneity essential to the discipline of painting?

Davies' work though, doesn't really look like anything other than painting and, in fact, the images that result from her eccentric process refer directly to images in the history of painting most admired for their painterly qualities: Manet, Goya, Hopper and Fischl, just to name a few. If it were possible though, for history to not merely end, but go backwards, Davies' process might well become the norm. A painting would be finished *before* it began, the painter working

from highlight to ground; and you, reading this essay, would do so before it was written, (sound familiar?).

Looking at these works you get the impression that there isn't a *ground*, as they are painted with enamel paints on a plastic that has the same gloss finish as the paint itself. As if to confuse the front and the back even more, this allows them to appear to be held together merely by the paint. Like a slide prepared for forensic examination, the *ground* is the transparent *surface* through which an image is seen, but the layering processes and the artist's brush strokes become, ironically, obfuscated and thereby visually insignificant. Although referring to renowned paintings (and obviously hand painted), it's the strategic mechanical process that comes to the fore.

The use of x-rays to determine the authenticity or provenance of paintings conjures up images buried under the layers of paint that form an entirely different image. These *pentimenti* are of considerable interest to Davies as they're not only a fascinating

anthropological trace but, more importantly, they further undermine the possibility of making an authentic contribution to a medium almost buried under the weight of its own history. Davies' paintings are imbued with the mystery at the core of such detection techniques and consequently sidestep an intrinsic perspective of painting. They are paintings from the outside looking in, as if from an anthropological perspective, prepared for, and in fact already being transformed into, infinite reproductions onto screen.

The domestic scenes that are their *subject*, despite suggesting intimacy, take on the anonymous, nostalgic poignancy of personal photographs from an era long past. Davies' images though, are without the patina of age and the reassuring narrative that looking at the past allows for. Instead, Davies paints images *blind*, images already lost to an uncertain history.

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## Amanda Davies

Amanda Davies is an active member of the artist run gallery INFLIGHT and currently works from Tower Road Studios, New Town.

In 2004 Davies was a member of Letitia Street Studios and completed a Cultural Residency at Low Head Lighthouse, through Arts Tasmania. In 2003 she completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours, at the University of Tasmania. Group exhibitions include, *found*, INFLIGHT(2004), *To Begin with...* Bett Gallery, Hobart 2003, *Queue Here*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space (2002).

The artist wishes to thank Paul Zika, Colin Langridge, Emidio Puglielli, and Neil Haddon for their assistance and support.

### Images:

(cover) sick 2005, detail

(insert) sick 2005, enamel on plastic, 240 x 350 cm

(back) *feeling at home* 2005, enamel on plastic, 240 x 350 cm

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