

# SLANG

Recently, when I had that moment where I decided it was time to take these paintings out of the studio and into the real world I, perhaps naively, thought it wise to show a particular friend. He asked me this:

*'Is it possible that the first rule is inversely analogous to the Reject/Rothko double?' I mean, what if vulgar Reject Shop paintings don't lower the dignity of the Rothko object but, rather, ensure that dignity? In the linguistic example, I can see how the slang diminishes the authority of 'proper' speech. I'm wondering if art-commodity capitalism doesn't operate on different forms of power, ones that don't diminish simply by being mocked? And, then, also, to come back properly to those paintings that started you off in the first place, is it the case that those paintings demonstrate a glaring misuse of the frame-works? Or do they usually just pass unremarked upon?*

In that famous paper that Joselit wrote about that famous quote that Kippenburger said, he asks us: *How does painting belong to a network?*<sup>2</sup> I was instantly reminded of this paper when I read my friend's question and in an attempt to tie everything together I reread it. Thinking about it for a while, I realised that I was being left with more questions of myself than answers to a wider problem. A problem that it might help to spell out a little more:

Joselit says that 'painting has always belonged to networks of distribution and exhibition, but [that] Kippenburger claims something more: that, by the early 1990s, an individual painting should explicitly *visualise* such networks.' Joselit via Kippenburger via my friend left me wondering whether these frameworks had shifted away from those concerned with aesthetic enquiry, however momentarily, and toward a more sociological question of what these 'fake paintings' might actually mean from the point of view of the 'real' ones?

Through my research I thought quite regularly of that image of Hockey sitting proudly in his office in front of that indigenous painting, and doing so as he cut funding from both the community that produced the artwork and the discipline to which part of its history belongs. It would seem that these product paintings which first sparked my interest in terms of an archetypical kind of abstraction, had, through the unforeseen events of national politics, opened up my thinking about not the network to which painting belongs, but to a larger one involving art and the *visualisation* of it within the wider social network.

When Whitlam died I came across this newspaper clipping from 1973.<sup>3</sup> It had a front page-sized reproduction of Pollock's now notorious *Blue Poles* and above it a heading in bold which read: *Would you pay 1.3m. for this?* To me, the implications of the heading (and the words that accompany it) represented a kind of attitude toward cultural capital within Australia that would deem the futures of artists and their disciplinary companions rather dim.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the obvious manipulation of asking the average reader if they would pay 1.3 million for something that would have abstract benefits (and I don't mean visually) – equating such a purchase to a system of income and expenditure that already exalts the idea of the disposable income within its own home – the clipping also included something similarly diminishing.<sup>5</sup> Under the heading it read: *Here it is for your wall! Your Herald souvenir of Australia's controversial painting 'Blue Poles'!*

Reading this sentence and thinking about the act of removing *Blue Poles* from its array of then progressive contexts and affixing it to the back of the toilet door, made me again rethink the problem. These Reject Shop paintings, despite my awareness of their *unremarkableness*, managed to self-consciously intimidate my veracity as an artist.<sup>6</sup> They also, perhaps unknowingly, hold the opinion that a painting's role is to better the room that it hangs in, rather than to be a mode for betterment in its own right. It is these kinds of assumptions that possibly lead me to conclude that my main question is not one regarding the liberation of the artist figure, but more so what the link is between art that is decoration (and therefore not necessarily art) and art that is used as decoration, as in the case of Hockey.<sup>7</sup> There is something in this that I can't seem to understand: is it that more people engage with aesthetics on this decorative level because systemically that is how our day-to-day reception of the arts has been regulated to be? Or in another sense, what are the politics of the decorative image, and of using an image that isn't primarily decorative *decoratively*?

The act of replicating a number of these product paintings is not necessarily an attempt to return their language back to that of painting and its networks, but more so one to bring the primacy of their existence to the forefront of the relationship between the artist and life. Seeing them hanging next to each other in a room seems more relevant than only talking about how they looked.

1 What came before this question was an attempted discussion on my part surrounding the link between the defining formula of language that categorises as slang, and artworks produced on mass by leading retailers. These including (but not limited to): Freedom Furniture, IKEA, Captain Snooze, Fantastic Furniture, imported reproductions from the outskirts of Ubud, derivative abstraction found on café walls (alongside its price tag), endless stretched prints found in every shape and colour at [www.thecanvasworkshop.com](http://www.thecanvasworkshop.com) and The Reject Shop. The particular rule in question came from a general Wikipedia definition, which despite its inherent tokenism, went something like this: '[Slang] lowers, if temporarily, 'the dignity of formal or serious speech writing'; in other words, it is likely to be considered in those contexts as a glaring misuse of the register'. For whatever reason, Rothko objectively took the place of the 'proper' artwork.

2 The quote was this: 'Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful. The whole network is important! Even spaghetti... When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it.' Joselit, David, *Painting Beside Itself*, October, Fall 2009, MIT Press.

3 I was unfortunate enough (so I was continuously told) to be apart of the generation who will 'never know a true politician like Whitlam'. The GenY-er in me, someone naturally built to resent any discussion pertaining to or starting with 'your generation...', silently did my research. As it goes, when it comes to arts policy in Australia, perhaps the misfortune proves to be true.

4 In 1986 a painter called Jutta Koether wrote: 'When I read somewhere, fascinated, that 'An American scientist has discovered that...', I always ask myself what kind of person that might be, this unknown scientist, who has dedicated his entire life to a single question or problem whose solution is disseminated in a few lines to the entire world through a tabloid.' Having just read that in her recently reprinted book *f.*, considering its interpretations alongside the clipping seems pretty fitting.

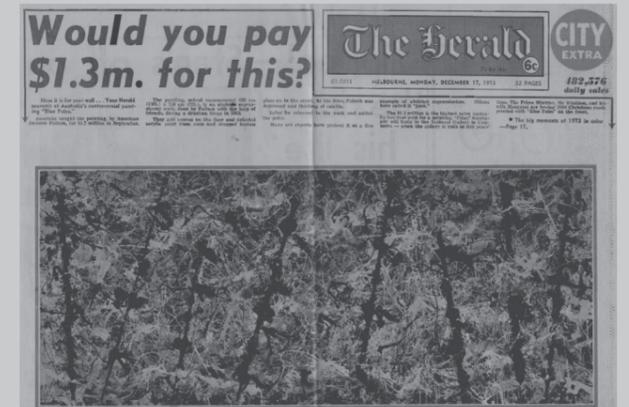
5 One of the dichotomies of this project is that art is usually purchased by an individual with a disposable income, an irony exacerbated by the fact that artists very rarely seem to have one of their own. In the case of the Whitlam clipping, something that also seems especially interesting about it is the implication that a government investing in cultural capital is a disposability of a similar kind.

6 My favourite quote that came out of the events of the last couple of months and in regard to the funding cuts was probably this: 'It's indicative of a conservative attitude to arts and culture, relegating it to a realm of entertainment rather than seeing it as a social enterprise which has the capacity to challenge orthodoxies'.

7 My friend also said that one of the most important lessons Bauhaus had and still has to teach us is that art is never decoration and decoration is never art. I tend to agree.



Photo: Alex Ellinghausen



Front cover of *The Herald*, Monday, December 17, 1973.

SLANG - Isabelle Sully  
TCB art inc  
9/07 - 25/07 2015

*Inflection 2*, 2015  
acrylic, enamel on canvas, shrink wrap,  
90 x 50cm

*Splashes of Maroon*, 2015  
acrylic, enamel on canvas, shrink wrap,  
120 x 80cm

*Ethereal Glow*, 2015  
acrylic, enamel, PVA, silicone adhesive  
on canvas, shrink wrap, 60 x 40cm

*Autumn Breeze*, 2015  
acrylic, enamel on canvas, shrink wrap,  
80 x 80cm

*Untitled (display wall)*, 2015  
steel, enamel, 2930 x 3550 cm

*Here it is for your wall!*, 2015  
A3 poster

