

The image shows a person lying in a bed in a waiting room. The room has a desk with a telephone and some papers. The entire scene is overlaid with a complex, colorful geometric pattern of triangles and polygons in shades of purple, blue, yellow, and orange. The text 'WAITING ROOM' is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the top right of the image.

WAITING ROOM

BEVAN SHAW



Published by Satellite Gallery on the
occasion of Bevan Shaw's solo exhibition
Waiting Room, October 2-20, 2012

Curated by Justin Jade Morgan

Graphic Design by Selene Simcox



WAITING ROOM

Bevan Shaw

“Symptoms can create a barrier in living the life one used to lead. Medications also have their side effects or perhaps keep one in a holding pattern instead of helping the individual regain full health. These paintings explore what it might be like to live with chronic illness, the patterns that surround it and the disconnection that can be felt.”

Bevan gained a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Ilam, University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 2005. He currently lives and works in Wellington where his practice involves painting and drawing. With interests in colour theory, op art, and psychology of perception; his paintings explore the interaction between colour, pattern and subject matter from everyday surroundings. He has been a finalist in major New Zealand art awards multiple times. Most recently his painting *Leaving For Work* is part of the travelling exhibition for the Wallace Art Awards 2012. Bevan's works are held in the Wallace Collection and private collections in New Zealand and Australia. More about his work can be found at his website, www.bevanshaw.co.nz.



Candy Coloured Pain: A review of 'Waiting Room' by Bevan Shaw

Christine Nieuwoudt

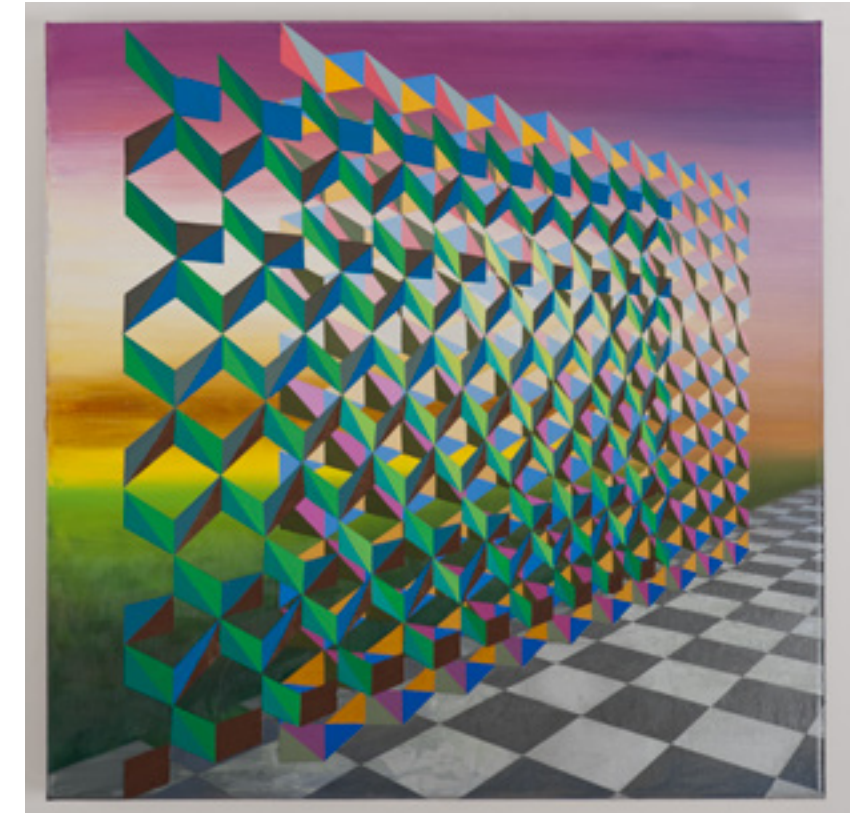
As with much of his previous practice Bevan Shaw's exhibition 'Waiting Room' at Satellite Gallery is a visually rich and colourful experimentation with op art like pattern and a play with representation of space. However the subject matter Shaw now explores concerns the experience of chronic illness, as well as the experience of the isolation, medication and routine which accompany it. When viewing the series the most distinctive feature is the juxtaposition of representational painting and pattern; the majority of the paintings show images of medication or domestic interiors in soft painterly brush strokes of oil colour. Through these images run repeating patterns of geometric abstraction in bright, smooth, glossy vinyl tempera. The kaleidoscopic lustre of these designs disguises a certain element of meticulousness; the works are carefully considered and cunningly executed.

There is a distinctive play with texture which informs the shift between pattern and image. The use of layering and masking the patterns literally cut into the more painterly representations, their edges are raised and their smooth surface contrasts to the softer treatment of the oil. In choosing to vary the types of paint, Shaw consciously distinguishes the pattern from the image with colour and the surface application. They are separate entities and yet carefully subsumed into a whole. The patterns appear to interrupt or screen the image, forming a dividing lattice which distances the viewer from the image. However at the same time it is not clear which has been painted first and where the nature of the dynamic between the two stands. They are not obviously opposed and yet the harmony of their interaction seems apprehensive.

The interplay of psychedelic repetition informs and heightens the static and almost claustrophobic interiors. The colours

chosen to form the unrelenting lines of shapes both contrast and offset the more subtle colour variations in oil. This systematic repetition lends a metaphorical aspect to their presence; their role lends more to the show than just a visual interplay of shape and colour. It seems to reference the act of perception as different to the act of seeing, to alert us to the psychological dimension of our experience of reality. In our everyday experience there is always present a constructed latticed pattern of personal psychology through which we see the world, whether we are aware of it or not. This concept of individualised perception seems to inform the function of the layered pattern across the works, and references the psychological state within the experience of chronic illness referenced in the show.

The paint application is layered and there are variations in the thickness and texture of the surface. In several places the paint is transparent



Half Measures, 2012
oil and vinyl tempera on canvas,
46 x 61 cm

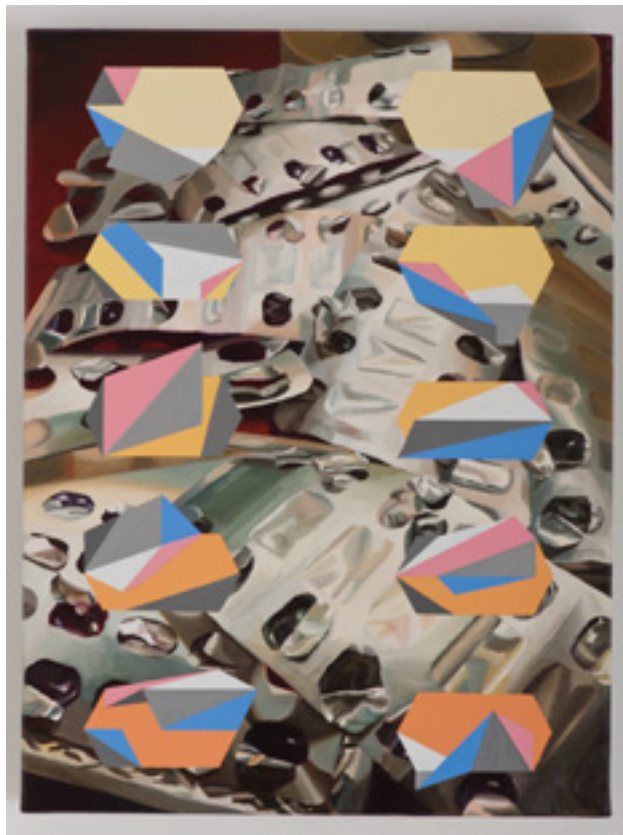
Previous page:
Hedge, 2011
oil and vinyl tempera on canvas,
50 x 50 cm



enough to see pencil marks on the canvas, in others it is thickly pasted with a palette knife. The edges of the canvases intriguingly negotiated, rather than a continuation of the painting they are sectioned off into swathes of white or grey, completely separate to the main image. Is this to consciously detach the paintings from the space they inhabit, to disconnect the images from real or exterior space and experience?

The first painting *Hedge*, is the only in the group in which the geometric abstraction is visually contained within the parameters of the painting. There are two distinct layers of pattern forming a floating wall between horizontal washes of colour in the background and a silver and metallic grey chequered path in the foreground. The overlapped grids of colour hang in an undefined swathe of space, with no visible beginning or end. This abstract landscape introduces the idea of an interior landscape and forms an entrance to the landscape of experience which Shaw examines in the succeeding works.

Half Measures and *Pills* are both close-up representations of multiple half-empty or used containers of medication. In comparison to the rest of the series the colour scheme of the oil is less saturated and almost clinical. Both paintings examine the experience of measured and scheduled imbibing of pharmaceutical drugs. The sheer multitude of containers and their close proximity to the viewer gives them a confrontational air. Just like illness, medication is not something commonly flashed around. It is something hidden, kept out of sight and relegated to the bathroom cabinet or the dark interior of a hand bag. Here Shaw enlarges it, arranges it and makes it the subject of public viewing. The shiny foil packages and tinted bottles blur into one another, an effect compounded by the geometric vinyl design and create a foreboding manufactured mass. There is a certain irony to the impersonal nature of pharmaceuticals when the substance is imbibed and ultimately becomes personal, part of one's body and everyday life.



Running Low depicts a seascape overlaid with geometric patterns similar to the patterns overlaying *Pills*, in that it mimics the broken foil of used pill packs. It shows a pronounced shift in terms of subject matter and yet links the subject to the global. It documents the tense waiting of medication to arrive from overseas¹ and communicates a certain composed frustration. The sea is endless, littered with rocks and clouds float on the horizon, yet the colours are striking and the sky is a sublime blue. The presence of the blister pack pattern hangs in front of the landscape and smaller in front of a large cloud, as if it would appear anywhere one looked interrupting any and every landscape. The spectral shapes of medication illustrate the mental state of the artist; that the arrival of the medication was at the forefront of his mind.

Waiting Room is the most similar work in the show to Shaw's recent prior paintings in the treatment of juxtaposed bands of colour; these form patterns which create and bind the illusion of space. Swathes of pattern form the walls, furniture and floors of a living room. The two figures within are only partly visible, obscured by furniture and truncated into faceless body parts.

¹Information received through personal communication with Bevan Shaw



Running Low, 2012,
oil and vinyl tempera on canvas,
90 x 120 cm

Opposite:
Pills, 2012
oil and vinyl tempera on canvas,
40 x 30 cm

Waiting Room, 2011,
oil and vinyl tempera on canvas,
50 x 80 cm



They seem as isolated from one another as they are from the viewer. The room is dark and shadowy, the landscape outside beautiful but melancholic. There is a poignant and morbid atmosphere, one of waiting. The tension and restless movement created by the vibrant pattern contrast with the scene rendered inside the room which is one of stasis. The structures in the living room seem alive and independent of the exterior landscape, the patterns destabilise and the shifting light sources produce as much a psychological bounding of space as a visual one.

Up and Down and *Blocked* show images of the same bedroom with similar subject matter and viewing points. It is unclear where the

geometric pattern ends and the image begins, the psychedelic effect of spatial abstraction is more marked. The presence of objects within the room such as pill bottles and blister packs mirror the images in *Half Measures* and *Pills*, but the emphasis has shifted to the figure of a woman. The same woman is portrayed in different positions in her bed, her back either turned or eyes closed, and presumably at different times. She appears to be completely unaware of a viewer in both paintings. The way she is portrayed with the increasingly interfering patterns gives a sense of isolation from the viewer, a sense of confinement and marginalisation. In each painting, the low light from the lamp creates the sense of undefined time, a sense of constancy. The

Up And Down, 2012,
oil and vinyl tempera on canvas,
50 x 80 cm



Blocked, 2012,
oil and vinyl tempera on canvas,
50 x 80 cm



space of a sickroom is an intensely private one where the individual is vulnerable and without glamour, it is not a public space. Making this space public gives the viewer a sense of intrusion into a separate realm.

There is a cyclical feel to the procession of paintings with no concrete end or beginning, the cycle could repeat several times or start anywhere. A subtle change in the colour range complements the movement of subject matter through the order the works are arranged in. The palette moves from cooler to warm, from still life and landscape to human figures in domestic spaces. This maintains a sense of narrative, a story of progression from the

impersonal to the personal. The time and space of the series is undefined, there is no clear beginning or end. The undefined time introduces a sense of continuation or eternalness. The unrelenting and precise repetition of pattern gives an overall mood of claustrophobia and restless stasis. It forms a sense of psychosis or obsession, spiralling deeper into the isolation and frustration of confinement. The exploration of pattern both forms and warps space. This instability gives a very surreal sense of restless immobility, of turbulent motion in the vinyl geometric abstraction.

The title suggests the experience of illness is one of uncertainty and waiting, a sense of limbo. It is not stated what lies beyond the waiting or whether there is an end to it at all, the question is left open. We are let into the very personal and private space of illness, but through visual technique separated and distanced from it at the same time. The limbo experienced is one of time being undefined and yet organised into neat chunks by the routine surrounding medication. The day is separated, regulated by the times and doses of various capsules and tablets. The control of the body is forfeited to various specialists and doctors, and is no longer reliable or predictable. State of health rests precariously on waiting, the trialling of different medications with the outcome never certain.

Space is the central exploration of the exhibition 'Waiting Room'; space between people, objects, perceptions and experiences. Illness, like death is an experience which is hidden from society. It is an uncomfortable reminder of human mortality and fragility and mostly rejected in everyday life experience. Today's society is predominantly interested in beauty, prestige and perfection. Often it pays very little attention to the parts of life which are not concerned with their attainment. Not only does this exhibition serve as an insight into a hidden experience it serves as a kind of *memento mori*, an open ended and delicate exploration of how we choose to experience our reality.

For more information and images of Bevan Shaw's work visit his website at www.bevanshaw.com



www.satellitegallery.co.nz | Email: gallery@satellitegallery.co.nz
Cnr St Benedicts St + Newton Rd, Newton, Auckland 1010, New Zealand