

TIM MAGUIRE

Dice Abstracts

4 May – 1 June 2019

Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

For his new series of digital prints, Tim Maguire incorporates elements of chance into the creative process. They hit you right in the retina, a field of phosphorescent hues blending one into another in textured gradations, from turquoise to canary yellow, violet to midnight blue, scarlet to tree-frog green. The effect is both disorientating and strangely clarifying: gazing at these gridded squares of colour, one feels perceptually sunburnt yet at the same time exceptionally alert.

Dice Abstracts is the latest instalment in Tim Maguire's wide-ranging, 35-year career, which has seen the British-born, Australian-raised artist explore the overlap between painting, printmaking, photography and the moving image in works defined by their fascination with colour and foregrounding of process. This audacious series of archival pigment prints epitomises Maguire's restless curiosity and desire to break new visual ground in its mapping of the harmonies and dissonances that exist between analogue and digital techniques.

Why audacious? Because the artist has partially outsourced the creative act to chance – to 'virtual' dice rolls, no less – by inventing a process that randomly determines the chromatic and formal composition of each image. In so doing he situates himself within a rich tradition of artists and collectives, from Duchamp and Dada to Fluxus and Fischli/Weiss, that have harnessed aleatory impulses to push their art-making into uncharted territory.

In spite of its otherworldly intensity, not everything about this series is digital. In fact, the mark of the artist's hand is present in the source imagery, six charcoal drawings on textured paper depicting simple, light-on-dark motifs. Scanned into Photoshop, these monochrome building blocks provide the foundations for the variety that follows, activated by the layering of the three primary colours.

Cue three rolls of a desktop dice for each layer: yellow, magenta, cyan. The first roll determines which of the six charcoals will be used. The second dictates whether the motif will be orientated vertically or horizontally. The third roll decides whether the motif will be light on dark or dark on light.

Maguire's exhibition at Tolarno Galleries is built around two sets of prints. The largest is a grouping of 10 works (each 100 x 100 cm) selected from the first 50 dice combinations thrown. Produced in Paris by master printer Franck Bordas, with whom Maguire has worked for almost two decades, they were first shown in the survey exhibition *Tim Maguire | Mixing Numbers: A Survey of Prints and Video 2003–2018* at Maitland Regional Art Gallery in November 2018.

The second, *24 Consecutive Dice Abstracts*, 2019 is a set of 50 x 50 cm prints, which, as the title suggests, were created consecutively, "with no curatorial intervention," as Maguire puts it. "The texture is less overt in this set than in the large-scale prints, so they'll be hung on the walls in a grid. Rather than reading them as individual works, it's more about the relationships and variations between them."

A lysergic tapestry of interweaving hues, *Dice Abstracts* exploits 19th-century French chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul's law of simultaneous contrast to concoct combinations that seem perceptually counterintuitive – how could green ever be so 'hot', or red so dark-star 'cool'? Thrillingly alive in their emissive, soft-edge

abstraction, the prints call to mind Josef Albers' nested squares, Barnett Newman's 'zip' and vertical-band paintings and Victor Vasarely's psychedelic geometry, all practitioners whose bodies of work have informed Maguire's own progression.

Inviting chance into the studio to play a part in the creation of *Dice Abstracts* speaks to competing impulses in Maguire's artistic temperament. "Part of me wants to have total control – to create perfection – and the other part wants to blow it all up," he laughs. "Introducing randomness minimises choice, and that gives me more freedom to focus on process. I mean, it's not all completely random – I made the charcoal drawings, which is why it still feels like me – but I really found the images through the process."

As a process, it raises interesting questions about authorship and intentionality. "In a metaphysical sense, all of the prints exist already," says Maguire. "They're out there somewhere – in the future or the ether – but I don't know what they look like. And of course, if I threw the dice for long enough and made all 13,824 prints, the element of chance would be eliminated altogether."

Accompanying the prints are two moving image works, one of which recreates the *Dice Abstracts* concept in digital video, slow-fading between hundreds of iterations over 105 minutes.

Reaching deep into the digital abyss, Maguire identifies the (neon-bright) ghost in the machine, the sensory and affective potential of so many zeros and ones. Like a ringmaster of colour, he sets the parameters – the rules of the game – then watches the spectacle unfold. "The fact that the prints are generating themselves is quite exciting," he says. "I'm constantly being reassured and surprised – I can see how they might come together but I can't predict what they are going to look like."

Tony Magnusson
April 2019

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Tolarno Galleries
Level 4, 104 Exhibition Street, Melbourne VIC 3000
Open 10am – 5pm Tue–Fri, 1pm – 5pm Sat
tolarnogalleries.com