

TIGHT FIVE – PAUL DAVIES

Interview with Kelly Carmichael

Paul Davies creates elegant and airy paintings that draw from some of the biggest names in Mid-Century architecture. There is a post-war optimism to Davies' work, but, alongside the glamour of his pool scenes and iconic architecture a slight eeriness sneaks in. Across a practice that explores concepts like reproducibility and uniqueness, utopian imagination, and immigration, a rich and alluring body of work reveals itself to have hidden depths.



When did it click?

The magic of seeing a blank piece of paper appear with an image in a photographic developing bath has never left me since I first saw it as a kid. That fleeting moment of the process remains integral to the concepts behind my practice today. My dad was an amateur photographer and he'd build makeshift darkrooms in the various houses we lived in. He still has the black and white prints of Central Otago landscapes taken when we lived for a time in Oamaru.

Your practice has a distinct Mid-Century feel, where does your love of this aesthetic come from?

Although I preferred painting throughout school, I majored in sculpture at University. Our class studied site-specific artwork that incorporated the built and natural environment and this led me to look at the utilitarian qualities of Mid-Century architecture. For example, architect R.M. Schindler and his furniture pieces that could be placed in different orientations to serve different functions. My work explores the way these designs, and others like it, were made for mass-production. In a similar way, I employ hand cut stencils for example, to repeat subjects across photography, painting, and sculpture.

Paul Davies, *Everything Loose Will Land in LA Double Golden Gully* (2017)



Paul Davies, *Limbo Pool* (2019)

Talk us through the process of making your work and why is this important to your practice?

I begin with photographing source material, either something I've stumbled on, or, during an artist residency like the ones at Cite des Art Internationale in Paris and the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture in Arizona that I've been part of. I print the images and cut out details by hand, then collage and place them atop the canvas, painting through the cutouts to build up the image layer by layer. This approach is a way to create the shape and feel of a place, rather than depict a direct likeness of an exact location.

You are Australian but lived in LA for a significant period, did the infamous Los Angeles Noir seep into your soul and your art?

Much of the work I made in Los Angeles focused on the contrast between the seemingly breezy nature of Southern California and its dark flip-side represented in movies and books such as Joan Didion's *The White Album*. I began to make work outside my studio, under direct sunlight, producing a series of camera-less photographs depicting silhouettes of Mid-Century architecture. Some of these were shown at Schindler's Fitzpatrick-Leland house in the Hollywood hills, it was crazy to see these works inside the architecture that inspired them.

What's your biggest barrier to being an artist?

I love being in the studio and working away on my own. But, for me painting is a slow-burn process and it takes time to get in the flow. A lot of planning goes into the early stages of a painting and the overall concept for a series of work. The actual painting part is methodical and more about distilling this information, so the challenge is remembering to slow down and work through the process.

Paul Davies is part of the group exhibition *Whispering Gums* showcasing Australian artists at Starkwhite Queenstown, 1–7 Earl Street, until mid-January. Paul will give an artist talk about his practice at 6pm on Friday 16 December at the gallery. www.starkwhite.co.nz