

# Stefan Dunlop: Process Painter of Fragmented Art

*Preview*  
**SARAH COX**

NOOSA HINTERLAND-BASED ARTIST STEFAN DUNLOP PLAYS TRICKSTER WITH HIS LATEST SERIES OF PAINTINGS FOR IN AN EXHIBITION LATER THIS YEAR AT GALERIE POMPOM IN SYDNEY.

Stefan Dunlop's artworks enigmatically turn the elements of visual design on their head. Compositions of collage fragment and tend toward abstraction. Illusionistic space collides with the flat surface of the canvas. Figures and objects appear to protrude out to a fourth dimension. Strong diagonal lines and pyramid shapes arrest the viewer and visually defy gravity. Poetic licence is at play as colours of the Renaissance complement rather than obey nature.

Dunlop contextualises his work in today's world of 'fake news' and post-internet art by addressing the Western art tradition with irony. He adheres to a critical approach based on an aesthetic discourse that employs abstract art as a response to digital technology. His response to the chaos confronting us today is to go back to the old-school order of paint on canvas, using collage and fragmentation to evoke the digital milieu's oversaturation of images.

Dunlop's oeuvre has evolved from creating observational-based work and still lifes to



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figures in landscape. Early on, his work comprised monumental heroic figures painted in warm colours and bold gestural strokes. His recent work, in contrast, uses less structured, looser forms.

His focus is not on the finished painting but in the process – an honest and authentic engagement with materiality.

He combines the formal elements, 'mashing them together ... extending their vocabulary,' Dunlop explains. The artist grapples with composition, colour, line, shape, tone, texture and expansive space, pushing and pulling, adding and removing, painting over, and dragging and blurring paint, until he feels the completed work 'visually reverberates or hums'.

The labor-intensive process of mixing paint, assertively applying brushstrokes, and building up layers counters the instant gratification obtained through social media or the internet. To help him resolve his abstract work as part of his process painting, Dunlop resorts to a bag of tricks. He might use a mirror to present a reverse view. He may magnify or multiply an object to achieve balance. He sometimes flips a painting that he is working on upside down to present a fresh perspective.

In the work *Peasant* (2019), Dunlop appropriates *The Peasant Dance* (1567) by Pieter Bruegel, the sixteenth century Dutch and Flemish Renaissance painter. Playing prankster, he places the peasant figure next to an everyday object of a screw nut, an incongruent juxtaposition that renders the familiar unfamiliar in a humorous contradiction. Multiple perspectives are then presented as he overlays these figures and objects. He makes broad diagonal, zigzag or crossed lines in a palette of luminous Renaissance colours – ultramarine blue contrasted with vermilion red, orpiment gold opposite verdigris green.

Inspired by a contemporary photograph sourced from the internet depicting a group of German punks preening their hair, *Splash 5* (2019) incorporates a pyramidal form to create illusionistic space. Dunlop then adds a tilting rectangular shape in the corner of the painting appropriated from the table in the photograph. This shape appears to fall out of the picture, hinting at a fourth dimension. It also references the skewed perspective first introduced by Cezanne when he painted a horizontal table tilted vertically in *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* (1895). Dunlop repeats this rectangular motif in a series of steps in the centre of

the work, creating an illusion of spatial recession that distorts the flat surface of the canvas. He presents a fragmented image that visually exhausts like pixellated computer graphics. He completes the process by adding a cheeky Jeff Koons-inspired figurative bunny head and a piece of cake on a plate.

As an old-fashioned painter, Dunlop's focus is to adhere to the theory of Clement Greenberg, who determined the irreducible purpose of Modernist painting is to address paint's formal qualities and the flatness of the canvas. As an artist who focuses on the physical, he also expands the formalist norm using the techniques of fragmentation and collage to hint at a space beyond the two-dimensionality of the canvas. Like with the work of another of his influences, Australian colourist painter Stephen Bush, time must be taken to unpack the complexity of the work.

The artist is bravely navigating a new course and charting new waters with his abstract paintings. He is grappling with the problems of art-making in reference to all that has gone before him, while responding to the digital world we live in today. And he is contemplating the future. The process painter of fragmented art hints it is an inside joke – a painting whose elements of design reveal a fourth dimension that in time will tell. ■

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## EXHIBITION

**Stefan Dunlop**  
7 August to 1 September 2019  
Galerie Pompom, Sydney



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01 *The Peasant wedding*, 2018, oil on linen, 180 x 164 cm

02 *Splash 5*, 2019, oil on linen, 153 x 133 cm

03 *Splash 2*, 2018, oil on linen, 180 x 164 cm

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Pompom, Sydney, Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne and Edwina Corlette Gallery, Brisbane