

artprogram

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Credit Suisse Private Banking
Contemporary Art Award
Alasdair McLuckie

Kelly Fliedner

ALASDAIR MCLUCKIE DRAWS RICHLY from non-western histories of folk, tribal and outsider art to create narratives depicting mythological creation stories or pseudo-human histories that are known for their meticulous design and obsessive execution. Since graduating from Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts in 2007, McLuckie has conveyed these narratives through detailed stories etched into the surface of wood with biro pens or drawn onto gridded paper. Themes of destruction and creation are also explored through his craft-based work, employing thousands of multicoloured beads sewn together into panels depicting magical creatures or adorning the exterior of objects placed within shrine-like installations for folkloric gods.

Memorably presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia for 'Primavera 2010', McLuckie's *The highest mountain peaks right before dawn*, 2009, is a commanding 12-metre-long biro drawing on wooden panels detailing a fictitious apocalyptic flood story. The fantastical skeletal figures within the drawing are seen to exclaim such things as 'the end is nigh' or 'this don't look good' as they are about to be zapped with lightning from the heavens above. These curious cartoon-like figures at first resist death only to eventually succumb to their omnipresent and vengeful god by at last accepting the next phase of their existence: 'See you'll soon.'

The ritualistic nature of McLuckie's work is emphasised by his use of folk aesthetics, signature patterning and symbolism. However, instead of beginning with such grand narratives of life and death, his work often has a more basic and formal catalyst: for instance, a straightforward interest in how biro ink appears on the surface of wood, or how simple variations of different beads materialise on varying coloured fabric. McLuckie's work draws on primitive abstraction while his formalist aesthetic tendency is strong, with a scrupulous focus on design, materials and process. This interest in process, as well as an uncanny



attention to detail, has recently led McLuckie to create bead 'prototypes' that focus purely on the materials themselves, as seen in the 2010 'Fields of Ecstasy' series, featuring zig-zagging patterns and mask-like faces at either end. Rather than designing an image that is then reproduced with the beads, McLuckie instead measures out the width and height of each intended panel, identifies how many beads are needed and then attends purely to the material, colour and dimensions of each to create a series of 'test pieces', letting go of the design and experimenting with varieties of display.

Through this diligent focus on materials, McLuckie is able to see the craft potential in other forms such as agate stone, which the artist used in his recent exhibition 'Pink Lions' at Murray White Room, Melbourne. Woven on the centre of a series of unprimed canvases were two large circular slices of pink agate stone, each to strikingly different effect. Next to these raw canvases hung several large, square, uncovered wooden frames imprinted with meticulously repeated geometric biro-drawn patterns. The simplicity of these frame and canvas works beautifully belied the labour that led McLuckie to them. Similar to his previous work, they featured an ancient abstraction or tribal aesthetic and were rigorously worked through McLuckie's obsessive detail. However, the removal of narrative lent them an added purity and intuitiveness. There was a sense of effortless creation that gave them an authoritative presence within the gallery. With 'Pink Lions' McLuckie revealed the usually unseen skeletal elements involved in the artmaking process (the canvas and frame), offering them as sacred.

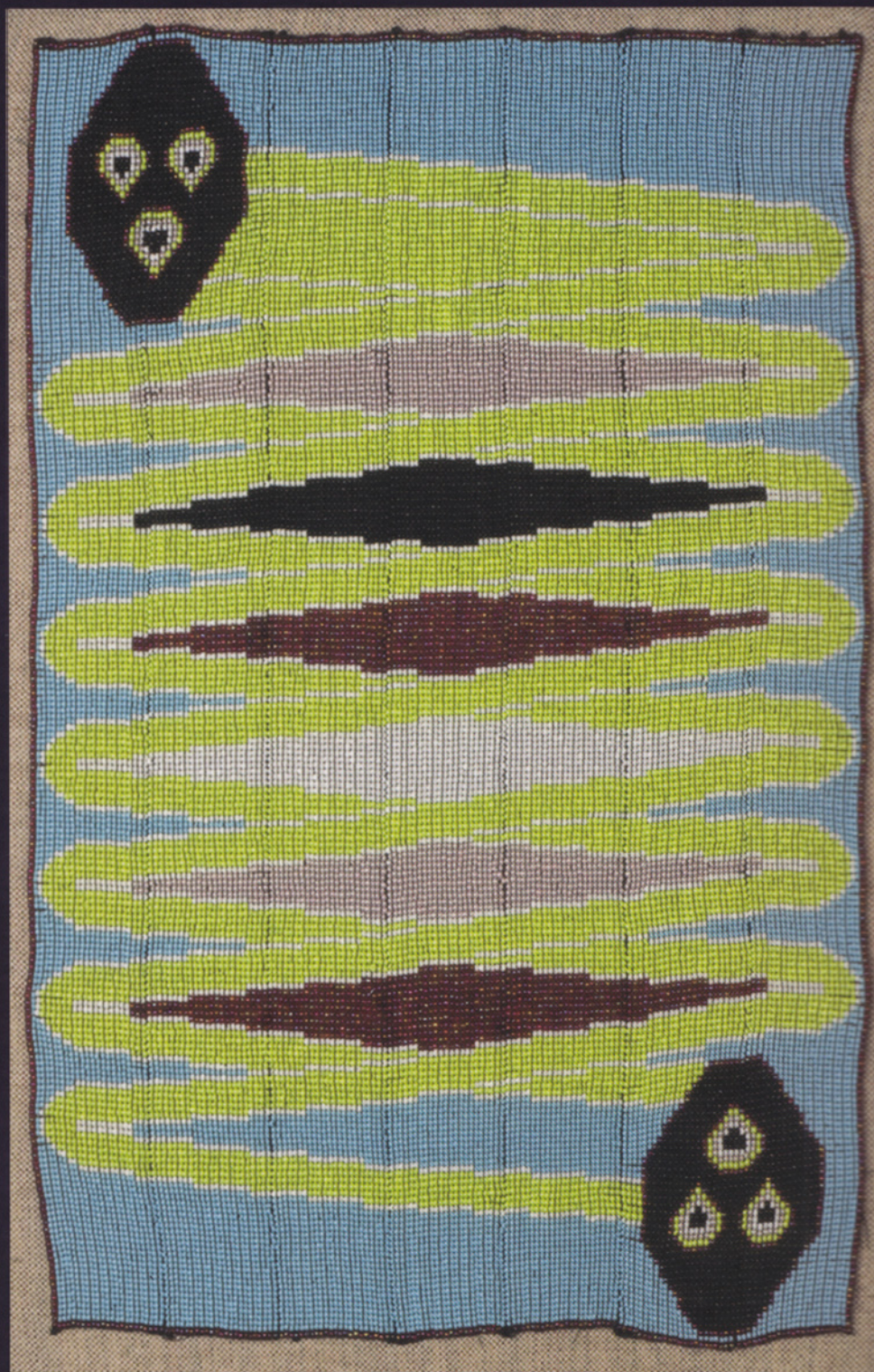
These pared-back works signal an interesting shift for McLuckie: whereas before, his process was superseded by broad apocalyptic themes, his work is now governed by a focus on the process of creation itself – the act of making art.

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Alasdair McLuckie
January, 2010

Woven seed beads on chenille, 60 x 38 cm
Museum of Old and New Art Collection, Hobart
Courtesy the artist and Murray White Room, Melbourne
Photograph John Brash



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