

FEATURES

# ALASDAIR MCLUCKIE FEEDBACK LOOPS...

Alasdair McLuckie's art may retain traces of distant histories and cultural practices, but its roots are closer to home.

By Dan Rule



LOOPS

ALASDAIR MCLUCKIE  
Re-upholstered vintage  
cotton lamp with woven  
glass seed beads, 2013  
45 x 22 x 22 cm

Private Collection, Melbourne  
Cortesy the artist and Murray  
White Room, Melbourne



# LOOPS



ALASDAIR MCLUCKIE  
*Untitled*, 2013  
woven glass seed beads  
on linen  
51 x 58 cm

Private Collection, Sydney  
Courtesy the artist and Murray  
White Room, Melbourne

The various strands underpinning Melbourne artist Alasdair McLuckie's practice might seem disparate at a glance. On the one hand, the 30-year-old's boldly designed and intricately embroidered beadworks can be traced back to Native North American weaving techniques; methodologies that McLuckie learnt from his father, an avid collector of tribal arts and artefacts. On the other, his Picasso-esque drawings and sculptures - rendered in biro pen on recycled bookbinder's board and cobbled together with electrical tape - are at once fastidious in their detail and considerably lo-fi in their materiality. His strikingly economical collages, meanwhile, read like exercises in spontaneity and at times humorous anthropomorphic form. But the references and formal threads that define McLuckie's work - which, in the last six months, has shown as part of both *Melbourne Now* at the National Gallery of Victoria and *Future Primitive* at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, and seen him win the QANTAS Spirit of Youth Award - aren't without a compass. And they all tend to lead back to the same place.

**MUCH HAS BEEN MADE OF YOUR BEADWORK'S CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BEARINGS. HOW DID IT COME TO PERMEATE YOUR PRACTICE?**

I got into that after seeing my dad engaging with it himself. In my second year of art school, I eventually just asked him if he would teach me how to do it. He had made himself this tiny little loom, which was really beautiful. So he taught me and the first pieces were made on my dad's little loom. The more I engaged with art history in university, the more I was uninterested in Western art history and classical Western art

- it really bored me. I just became more and more interested in tribal and primitive art on the one hand and contemporary art on the other. To my eye, there just seemed to be a particular directness to so-called 'primitive' and tribal art. The process of the beadwork was also a bit of a drawcard, as I'd never seen it being used in a contemporary art context.

**WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER'S INTEREST?**

He was interested in tribal arts from all over the world. He had things from Africa and all manner of places, but his primary interest was in Native North American art. And so he taught himself these Native North American techniques purely out of interest. To make things and understand through making is a really fascinating way to engage with an interest. It wasn't weird or different for me - it was just the stuff that was around the house. I think because of that, I don't think about it in a hugely conceptual way in relation to my practice.

**NONETHELESS, HOW DO YOU NEGOTIATE THE IMPLICATIONS OF USING PRACTICES THAT RELATE IN SOME WAY TO OTHER CULTURES?**

It can be problematic having a contemporary practice and referencing this kind of material, and navigating it can be quite interesting and quite tricky. There are elements of attraction and desire, which is again tied into modernism's relationship with this kind of thing too. It is very personal for me in the sense that it comes from my father. It was more than just an appreciation for me - it was something that I grew up with. I can always remember having these objects and artworks around.

# FEEDBACK





Left:  
Installation view  
ALASDAIR MCLUCKIE  
*Future Primitive* at Heidi  
Museum of Modern Art,  
Melbourne, 2013

Opposite:  
ALASDAIR MCLUCKIE  
*Unbird* (from the series  
*Scultwre People*), 2013  
Biro pin on binder's board  
42 x 13 x 26 cm

Courtesy the artist and  
Murray White Room,  
Melbourne

**YOUR EARLIER BEADWORKS MADE QUITE SPECIFIC REFERENCES. THE *FIELDS OF ECSTASY* SHOW IN 2010 DREW INFLUENCE FROM RITUALS AND DIETIES ASSOCIATED WITH ANCIENT HARVEST FESTIVALS. THERE SEEMS A MORE FORMAL ENGAGEMENT AT PLAY IN YOUR MORE RECENT WORKS.** When I started, I was very steadfast in my references and what I was doing, but I feel like the more my practice has developed, the more it has become a reaction to the materials and the process and has become more of a deeper investigation of those elements. As a result, the beadworks are becoming more and more abstract – almost becoming completely self-referential – and being open to the potential of displaying them with other images as well, which are a separate kind of entity.

**TELL ME ABOUT YOUR NEW CIRCULAR WORKS. THEY'RE FAR LOOSER, ALMOST AS IF YOU COULD CHANGE THEIR ORIENTATION ON A WHIM.**

I was working on the first one for about two weeks, thinking about the way it would sit on the wall. Then one day, I walked into the studio and realised I could shift the entire field of the work just by orientating it differently. That's what I found fascinating about working with a circle – it kind of changed everything. I'm interested in the idea of almost injecting the opposite of what the materials call for and seeing what comes out of that. It has made it far easier to have these flowing, almost art nouveau motifs.

They're spontaneous and immediate in a sense, but there's also that element of collecting. I think every process in my practice has an element of collecting and order about it. So with the collages, I become obsessed with collecting certain magazines like *National Geographic* from

op shops and so on. Before I make a collage, which is quite spontaneous and quick, I spend months collecting and ordering images into particular categories. With the images of Matisse and Picasso and Dali, there's that anthropomorphic idea at play where you have this sense of suspended reality. I'm really interested in the psychology of the images and exposing the process and the materials again.

**WHAT ABOUT YOUR NEW DRAWINGS, WHICH ARE ALSO SCULPTURES SIMULTANEOUSLY?**

I would usually just draw in a sketchbook, but I was getting really anxious to make some more work and found this binder's board. You're not even meant to see this stuff – it's usually hidden beneath the cloth of a book's cover – but I was just really attracted to the surface. And because the card was so solid, I straight away saw that there were three-dimensional possibilities with this material. They're the most un-archival works ever made (laughs). They're biro pen on bookbinder's board and the structure is affixed with electrical tape.

But drawing is really the first port of call for me – I wanted to draw comic books as a child. I'll always go back to it and enjoy it the most as a way to express or communicate in that really immediate way. Every time I've completed a series of bead works, which take up such a long period of your life, I'm always pulled back towards drawing.

**ALMOST LIKE A FEEDBACK LOOP...**

Yes, and there's something comforting about that as well. Before I had my current studio at Gertrude, I'd always worked in a really confined space. So if I was working on the beads, I couldn't be working on anything else because I didn't

have the room. So before being in here, I've never had the luxury of having these sculptures out and being able to consider them in relation to the beadwork or the collages. I can kind of see it all coming together now. ▽

Alasdair McLuckie shows as part of a group exhibition *In Free Circulation* at Mother's Tankstation, Dublin from April 23 to May 31 and as part of a group presentation by Murray White Room at Art Basel Hong Kong from May 15 to 18.

His forthcoming solo exhibition shows at Murray White Room, Melbourne from July 11 to August 9.

alasdairmcluckie.com  
murraywhiteroom.com

**'THEN ONE DAY, I WALKED INTO THE STUDIO AND REALISED I COULD SHIFT THE ENTIRE FIELD OF THE WORK JUST BY ORIENTATING IT DIFFERENTLY'**



