

In conversation with the molecular: a response to Sean McDowell's *Infusion; Diffuse* by Lily Beamish

The kaleidoscope comes into focus in Sean McDowell's practice: a balance of the frictitious and the fluid. Introducing *Infusion; Diffuse*, Melbourne-based artist Sean McDowell's return to solo exhibiting after a two-year hiatus.

Consisting of four large-scale oil paintings, the work speaks to an ongoing state of flux, a crystalline metamorphosis between seasons, the landscape, the body, and the cells. It's a type of wall-to-wall, cell-to-cell, dusk-to-dusk introspection that only comes from sitting with yourself after illness, something that the artist is familiar with.

Equal parts autobiographical and responsive to the current cultural epoch, these abstractions insist on being experienced rather than merely viewed. Built up through layers of semi-transparent glaze, meticulously applied by the artist, small incongruencies in the glassy finish give insight into their physicality. The layers of paint bringing depth, movement and a textural grounding to the work.

A jewelled colour palette defines the work, with burnt oranges, muddled greens, deep reds, and quartzite blues and purples spanning the vast canvases. These colours are routinely intercepted by fluid, scratchy lines or bulbous, textured circles. At the macro; they are grassy paddocks viewed from above, at the micro; cells under a microscope or the wing of an undiscovered butterfly.

The works speak to one another, each in quiet conversation and response. Where *Infusion; Diffuse #1* is matte and textured – marked by specklings of deep rouges, oranges, and burgundy against icy pastels – *Infusion; Diffuse #3* is fluid and cool: a study in sweeping movement and layered transparency. The synergy between them is palpable. They unfold in dialogue, a call and response to what has come before and what might follow – a dizzying loop of relation, a practice extending itself beyond the canvas.

If *#1* and *#3* move in opposition, then *Infusion; Diffuse #2* and *Infusion; Diffuse #4* return in echo. Cast in a haze of warm umber, turmeric yellow, and acerbic greens, the pair feel almost matrilineal in their dynamic. *#2* speaks in a sleek, graphic register, where colour settles into a sateen finish and sharp, contrasting lines articulate form and motion. By contrast, *#4* reads as a ghost print: transparent washes interrupted by graphic flashes of red and varicose threads of purple. Together, they form a kind of mirror, an inquiry into origin, identity, and consumption.

Much of the beauty of the work lies in what you bring to the experience. McDowell is deeply inspired by the cycles of the natural world - from the molecular to the interstellar and his work reflects this broad pool of interest. Though largely autonomous, the paintings speak to one another like chapters or seasons, building off the language of the previous to create an informed conversation.