

Michael Cubey

b.1965

Bachelor of Fine Arts: Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

Michael Cubey's recent paintings revolve around the adventures of 'The Paintman'. This name may refer to the figures that have appeared more regularly in Cubey's art over the last few years. These are literally men made out of thick layers of multi-coloured paint. The name may refer to Cubey himself, toiling away in his studio. For over 20 years, Cubey has pushed and tested the possibilities of a painterly practice.

Cubey has continually sought ways of energising an essentially expressionist mode of painting with new forms, associations and meanings. This underpins the restlessness and energy that animates his work. *Green River* characteristically hovers between established formats and boundaries. It sways between the abstract and the figurative, the beautiful and the ugly, the controlled and the uncontrolled.

Green River teases the viewer with a hint of figurative content. But this is submerged under a more overt concern with materiality and the painting process – what the work is made from and how it is constructed. Attention is drawn to thickly applied layers of paint and glazing that build up a lustrous surface, pulsating with energy and life. Its strong tactile qualities appeal as much to the sense of touch as to the eyes.

Cubey sometimes extends this interest in materiality by painting on found objects. Pieces of wood, glass, and even paint tubes and brushes have all featured in his art. These paint-drenched objects open up a whole new set of textural and formal variations, while providing the opportunity to break away from the limitations imposed by a flat surface.

The use of high-keyed colour is at the core of Cubey's art. A lurid day-glo green dominates this painting, supported by other vibrant colours – bright oranges to deep mauves – from the 'toxic' end of the spectrum. Colour is freed from the demands of naturalistic representation; it's not there to describe what and how we see. Cubey also avoids conventionally tasteful colour combinations. Freed from these demands and conventions, colour takes on a life of its own. It provides both a physical presence and even a narrative impulse.

This exuberant use of colour connects Cubey's painting to that of Rob McLeod, his art teacher at Wellington High School in the mid-1980s. Both painters have taken a similar winding path through and around expressive painterly approaches and formats. Cubey and McLeod both wield bright colour in opposition to what they see as an often timid and anaemic tradition of painting in New Zealand.

This painting was exhibited in 2006 at Bowen Galleries, Wellington. The exhibition's title *Stop Thinking About It* stresses the importance of a physical response to art, rather than a purely intellectual one.

The art of 'The Paintman' aspires to a state of sensuous confusion, refusing to offer any secrets or answers. The artist and the viewer are meant to lose themselves in the colours, forms and textures. *Green River* suggests that an over-intellectualised approach to making or viewing art, represented in the painting by the hovering question marks, can easily become a hook on which to catch or hang yourself.

Aaron Lister

Artist website:

www.cubey.org

Galleries and museums:

www.bowengalleries.co.nz

Web search:

Rob McLeod

