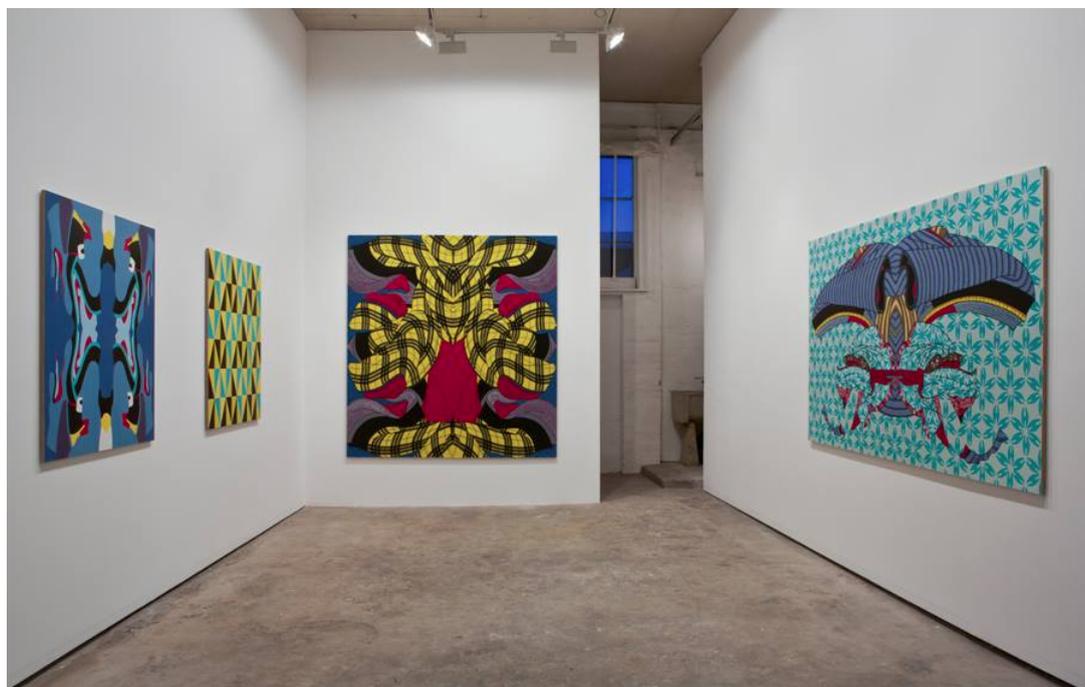


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Independent Arts Writer and Curator

Natalya Hughes – Looking Twice, at The Commercial, Redfern



Natalya Hughes, Looking Twice – Installation View, The Commercial

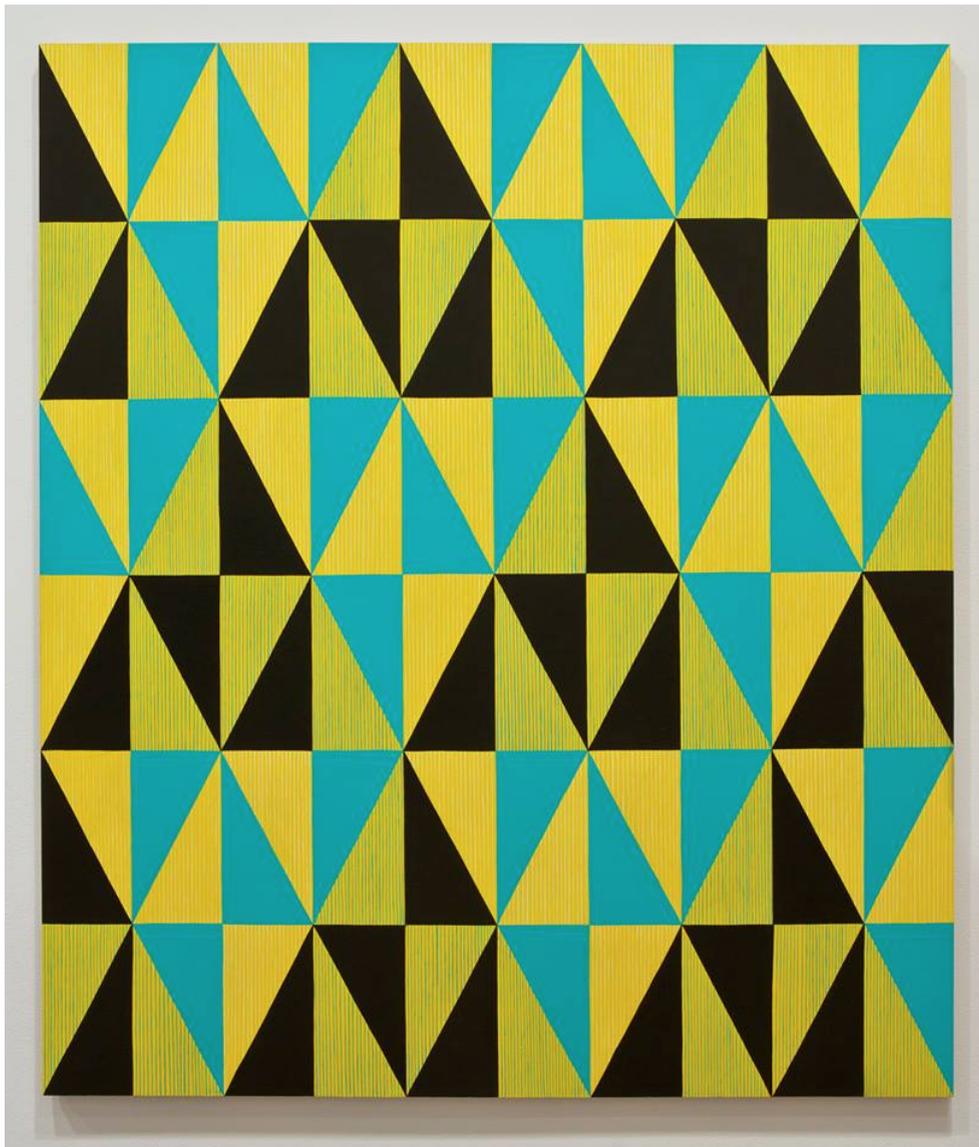
At their essence Natalya Hughes' paintings in *Looking Twice* are Japanese – simultaneously traditionally and contemporaneously so. However they effortlessly reach beyond this, into abstraction, psychedelia, psychoanalysis. Their Rorschach-like morphing surfaces are reinterpretations of the portraiture of 19th century Japanese artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. The luxurious and sometimes clashing combinations of colours and patterns found on the clothing and furnishings in Yoshitoshi's images (bringing to mind the designs of fashion house Kenzo) are as important to his works as the subjects themselves. Hughes adopts and adapts these visual motifs, using digital design programs to create symmetrical compositions in which the subjects of Yoshitoshi's portraits are each subsumed into a vortex of colour and shape. These images are rendered boldly and flatly in acrylic on plywood, in contrast to Yoshitoshi's

delicate woodblocks. Resulting works such as *Looking cute* 2013 draw the viewer in with suggestions of imagined figures – not necessarily human, but perhaps arthropod or even alien.



Natalya Hughes, Looking Cute, 2013, acrylic on plywood, 140 x 240 cm

The graphic quality of Hughes' work also speaks to the contemporary Jap-anime aesthetic, not only through intense colour and hard-edged shapes, but also in the undertones of eroticism inherent in the morphing symmetrical forms. The artist has turned her hand to animation recently and it is not difficult to see how the development of these striking paintings could work in tandem with such a practice. Hughes' practice also incorporates wallpaper, carpet and fabric designs which she has used to create trippy total environments in which her paintings pulse.



Natalya Hughes, Abstract, 2013, acrylic on plywood, 120 x 104cm

Abstract 2013 contains a percussive repetition of triangles, the geometry of which deliberately resists the narrative-charged readings of the other three paintings in the show. However the acid yellows and greens of this work harmonise with the other paintings in the exhibition while resonating with Western modernist traditions, and ultimately this small but rigorous exhibition is all the better for its inclusion.

Natalya Hughes – Looking Twice can be viewed at The Commercial, Redfern until 9 November 2013. - <http://www.thecommercialgallery.com/>