

# DIENA GEORGETTI

## ART AND ARTIFICE

By flattening and re-assembling the hierarchies of visual culture, Diena Georgetti creates an aesthetic universe that's humane, democratic and in thrall to a vision entirely her own.

By Sara Savage



Inside Diena Georgetti's apartment in Melbourne's inner east, a laptop is open on the kitchen table. Flicking through folder upon folder of images saved from various corners of the web – from obscure online archives to open-access platforms like Pinterest – Georgetti sheds light on some of the sources that form the basis of her current painting practice, rooted in the act of borrowing, remixing and straight-up reproducing the work of others.

"Pre-internet, my sources came from magazines, catalogues and even films," says the Alice Springs-born artist, with one click of the mouse revealing a folder containing images of Brazilian Neo-Concretism and 1970s Geometric Abstraction; with another, a coffee table she plans to buy for her living room. "Post-internet, I've been able to find all kinds of amazing work that's happened on our planet, but has never really been seen in full. Only a handful out of thousands of artists ever makes the history books."

In her use of the term, it's unclear whether Georgetti – self-described as "uninterested in theory", though explicitly influenced by Modernism – is acquainted with the discursive shitstorm surrounding the contested realm of 'post-internet' art, typified by the new-media aesthetics of Cory Arcangel, Amalia Ulman and countless others who self-reflexively employ the internet to both celebrate and critique it. In any case, it doesn't matter: Georgetti means 'post-internet' in the purest sense, referring simply to her practice after she became privy to the world wide web. It's this very abstinence from discourse – as naïve as it is a skill in itself – that epitomises her charm.

Georgetti's 'pre-internet' practice began in late-1980s Brisbane, after graduating from the Queensland College of Art in 1986. Only three years later, she exhibited a series of blackboard paintings at Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art, recalling the experimentation of German postwar artist Joseph Beuys ("As a student, a girlfriend and I played a game that posited the question, if you could marry Joseph Beuys, would you continue to make art? She said yes and I said no"), albeit more frantic and obscured than Beuys' assured acts of pedagogy. A collection of Georgetti's blackboards was also included in the 1992 Biennale of Sydney, not long after she had moved to Melbourne and became involved with the short-lived artist-run space Store 5 (founded in 1989 by Gary Wilson and Kerrie Poliness, and shrouded in mythology even after its 1993 closure). With a brief foray into Chinese ink painting in the mid-1990s, Georgetti's more recent style of painting began to emerge, in which she samples, juxtaposes and reimagines a history of abstraction in a way that values aesthetics above all else. In 2008, Monash University Museum of Art and Brisbane's IMA jointly presented a 20-year survey of Georgetti's work; more recently, she was one of 14 artists featured in-depth in ACCA's major 2016 exhibition *Painting, More Painting*.



"It was strange to see my work like that," says Georgetti, reflecting on the 2008 retrospective. "It was the curators' [Max Delany and Robert Leonard's] view of the work, not my own. I wouldn't have presented my work chronologically. I would have had a blackboard next to a painting, and so on. In the end, though, I did think it was the right way to present it."

It seems odd that Georgetti – who frequently re-contextualises the work of others to form new meanings – could be so precious about the presentation of her own work. Yet at the same time, it makes perfect sense: Georgetti's main concern, after all, is aesthetics. Images derived from art, fashion, architecture and design are treated as equal, with more importance placed on how each element complements or converses with its neighbour, or how a finished painting sits amid its interior environment, than the disparate historic contexts from which each element has been plucked (about which Georgetti is purposefully vague). In an early artist statement, she speaks of the ways she tests a painting in her domestic surroundings before revealing it to the world: "I set it in the bathroom while I bathe. I arrange it amongst my interior furnishings, and invite social events for it to be present at. I look for it in the glow of the TV." For Georgetti, objects are spiritual beings, and a painting an everyday object in itself – no different than a sofa or a fruit bowl. In 2017, she tells me, this is truer than ever: "It's the aesthetic lineage that connects these things that's continually fascinating to me."

March 2017 saw Georgetti's *The Humanity of Construction Painting* (2017) take home the prestigious Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize, alongside Melbourne-based emerging artist Kenny Pittock. Now in its 21st iteration, each year the Prize sees a guest curator (in this case, Callum Morton) nominate established artists to create a work for the exhibition, who in turn select one emerging artist to do the same. When Morton first approached Georgetti, she had only just moved back to Melbourne after 15 years spent living in rural Kooralbyn, about an hour south of Brisbane. "I was a recluse. I was honestly so out of touch with any sort of emerging artists that I did what everyone does, and turned to Instagram," admits Georgetti, who stumbled upon Brisbane artist Spencer Harvie and invited him to participate.

Though aesthetically dissimilar, Georgetti and Harvie share a desire to uncover hidden meanings in human histories through visual cultures. While Georgetti rejects the term collage ("it describes a technique, yes, but not the formula of how my paintings are made, which relies more on the senses"), she and Harvie can be aligned in their mutual research through juxtaposition, and in their development of new visual languages designed to better understand the past (and, importantly for both artists, to look toward the future).

Left to right  
DIENA GEORGETTI  
*CABLE*, 2016  
acrylic on canvas,  
custom frame  
138 x 69.5 x 5.5 cm  
Collection: Art Gallery  
of Western Australia,  
Perth

DIENA GEORGETTI  
*COMPOUND*, 2016  
acrylic on canvas,  
custom frame  
88 x 48.5 x 3 cm  
Private collection

Opposite  
DIENA GEORGETTI  
*SUPERSTUDIO*, 2015-17  
acrylic on canvas,  
mounted and framed  
334.5 x 302 x 6.5 cm  
(four parts)

Photos: Sofia Freeman/  
The Commercial Gallery  
Courtesy the artist  
and The Commercial  
Gallery, Sydney



DIENA GEORGETTI  
*RAIDER*, 2016  
acrylic on canvas,  
custom frame  
137 x 59.5 cm  
Private collection

Opposite  
Top to bottom  
DIENA GEORGETTI  
*MOHICAN*, 2016  
acrylic on canvas,  
custom frame  
82.4 x 65 x 2 cm  
Private collection

DIENA GEORGETTI  
*GRAVITY*, 2017  
acrylic on canvas,  
custom frame  
74 x 55 x 6.5 cm

Photos: Sofia Freeman/  
The Commercial Gallery

Courtesy the artist  
and The Commercial  
Gallery, Sydney



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Though there's a clear respect for the artists from whom Georgetti borrows, there's also a subtle - yet crucial - dissociation from the constraints of their original contexts. The impulse to locate Georgetti's practice within the historical narrative she's so careful to reject makes her a difficult artist to write about. "My work is made of communities past, and my paintings [are] a schism in time," Georgetti writes to me in an email following our meeting. "I want to make paintings without conditioned standards, that can be of any time, place, gender or age." For Georgetti, the difference between original and copy, invention and plagiarism, seems to hinge on the emotional qualities she breathes into each work. From a humble process conducted on a laptop, a grand objective is brought into being: more than an archive or a collection of styles, Georgetti's paintings seek to uncover a universal human condition. **V**

Diena Georgetti shows new work as part of *Call of the Avant-Garde: Constructivism and Australian Art* at Heide Museum of Modern Art from July 5 to October 8 and at The Commercial from September 1 to 29, 2017.

Diena Georgetti is represented by The Commercial, Sydney. [thecommercialgallery.com](http://thecommercialgallery.com)

