

Paintings refocus Maciver's energy

Stephen Bevis

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Alex

Maciver at Buratti Fine Art.

Alex Maciver has made a few waves since moving to Perth from Scotland five years ago.

Not least of which was his winning of the \$15,000 Fremantle Art Centre Print Award in 2013 with his muddied, mirrored diptych made by imprinting one wet painting on to another before working them over with a brush and spray.

Maciver, who trained and worked as a portrait artist in Scotland before expanding into print, sculpture, installation and performance, has swum against the tide of artists leaving Perth with dreams of elsewhere.

Ironically enough, his last solo exhibition PERF in 2014 also was the closing-down event at Melody Smith's short-lived gallery before she upped stumps to Sydney.

PERF took its name from a jokey mispronunciation of his new home town's name. But it also referenced the words perfect, perforate and performance, three concepts at play in Maciver's tongue-in-cheek opening night aerosol assault on models dressed as canvases that drew the audience into the action.

In his latest show Maciver returns to basics, of sorts, with 16 paintings that enmesh ideas of portraiture and landscape, representation and abstraction within the discipline of a restricted colour palette and consistent canvas size.

The shift from the artist-run space to Buratti Fine Art will expose him to a new commercial gallery audience but he won't be aiming for comfort or stylistic recognition to secure sales.

"I'm not going to be pigeon-holed into just one medium or one style or one artistic practice," he says. "I want to break free of any perceptions.

"I don't think it is relevant for an artist to be comfortable. I don't think it is healthy to find that level of comfort or repetition. It's also not good for the art market if an artist is continually flooding the market with the same work."

Maciver, 31, was born in Sydney but grew up in Scotland, where he went to art school in Dundee before heading to Queensland in 2008 to reconnect with the Australian father he had not seen since he was four.

His father was an art-school dropout turned carpenter and psychiatric nurse living outside Cairns. A curator at the Tanks Art Centre in Cairns heard about their reunion and suggested a father-and-son residency and exhibition.

"I didn't really know him but we worked together for a short while for an exhibition called *Mein Doppelgänger*," Maciver says. "It was interesting. It was really difficult and awkward meeting and working with someone that you had no real links to but felt a connection with."

After further studies in Cairns, Maciver returned to Scotland for a year or so before the bleak prospects there and the opportunity of a job here brought him to Perth. He balances his artistic practice with work as a local government arts officer.

"I couldn't live in Perth as an artist only," he says. "It's practically impossible unless I was willing to change my practice to be more suitable to public artworks. I'm reluctant to do that.

"There is still a drive to get out and about but I think you can comfortably do that based in Perth, which has been good to me. I think there are enough artists here challenging relevant themes that I don't need to go elsewhere to get that inspiration."

Alex Maciver: *New Works* at Buratti is his third solo exhibition, all of them in Perth. In the UK and Queensland, he has participated in a dozen group shows and undertaken commissions as a portrait artist.

"I was paid to make rich people look pretty," he says. "That was my job. I moved away from that for a number of reasons. I think I lost touch with my practice and I was providing a service. It was less about art and more about representation, using my skills as a trained painter without any conceptual input at all. It was all about aesthetics, which wasn't enough for me."

Alex Maciver: New Works is at Buratti Fine Art, Subiaco, from Friday (opening at 6pm) until August 6. Details: buratti.com.au