

Simon Attwooll  
*Sticky Plaster In The  
Gene Pool*

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Dull afternoon light falls on a series of monochromatic prints suspended by the far window; their painterly detail, like curious bodily secretions, reflected in the assemblage installed on the gallery floor. Gazing at the prints, there are flickers of a recognisable subject, but their true nature remains inscrutable. *Are they landscapes? - If they are, they are certainly not terrestrial. Am I looking at glass from which something has been rubbed away?* The prints in *Sticky Plaster in the Gene Pool* contain layers so intricately entwined, one feels that if they could prize them all apart, the whole print would surely shatter. Angular shapes slice in to the peripheries, as though, at some stage, the prints had been stored as a stack, each print leaving the echo of the one that came before. These works are like an Escher print, the moment you think you've figured out how they're made, your eyes blur, forms float in front of your eyes and once again you can't grasp it, and need to start back at the beginning.



Initially, one might find Attwooll's new body of work a departure from the rest of his oeuvre, which is known for its use of lurid colour and its exploration of the absurd. Yet on further inspection, synchronicities arise, specifically with his *Car Crash Compilation* series. In these works, Attwooll combines screen print and collage, to create evocative and cinematic images of road accidents. *Car Crash Compilation* was inspired by J. G. Ballard's disturbing dystopian novel *Crash*, in which the central characters become obsessed with the violent psychosexuality of car accidents, resulting in tragic consequences. It was during this investigation that Attwooll first became aware of possible links between his car crash works and a collection of microbiological slides that he had acquired earlier. Drawn to the way in which Ballard fuses the collision of cars with bodily destruction, *Sticky Plaster in the Gene Pool* was born.

Attwooll's practice as a whole is self-reflexive: his love affair with the methods and history of artmaking reaching a culmination in this exhibition. Slipping between mediums: not quite painting, or printmaking, nor object-based practice, this is an exhibition that defies straightforward categorisation. Working from photographic source material throughout his practice, Attwooll has begun to think of the photograph as a readymade. Whilst conceptually grounded, Attwooll's practice is process-based at its core, a celebration of accidents: whether it's a collage with an unexpected composition or an aggressive smear of white paint. Interested in failure and glitches, Attwooll playfully explores materiality: the work's painterly surfaces contrasting with the ready-made structure of the half-tone dots.

For *Sticky Plaster in the Gene Pool*, Attwooll questions the status of printmaking in contemporary practice- thinking of the half-tone dot as an 'optical artefact.' Used to deconstruct an



image in order to make multiples prior to the digital age, the half-tone dot is becoming more and more obsolete. The relationship between Attwooll's subject matter and the half-tone dot becomes particularly interesting when one realises the resonances between the reproduction of images and that of cells- even more so when one thinks that the printed slide as a form of medical imaging, is now defunct.

Attwooll's prints known for merging with the frames in which they are exhibited; printing directly onto the mattboard and painting the exterior, he renders the prints into palimpsestual art objects. Attwooll's new prints are exhibited sans frames. Yet their thickly printed half-tone dot is braille-like and in combination with the heavily painted geometric shapes that bedeck their surfaces, there is a seductive tactility to the prints that causes them to retain an object-like quality.

Attwooll's prints have a distinctly temporal quality. Within his work, Attwooll deconstructs and examines the narrative of events: the awkward halting time of children's school portraits, the meteoric speed of the car collision, the protracted, creeping multiplication of cells that goes unnoticed right until an abrupt phenomenological change occurs. From the use of tyre mark rubbings in his images of automobile wreckage, his preoccupation with compiling archives, to the current exhibition's evocation of the laboratory, Attwooll takes on the role of detective.

Attwooll's repeated use of photography resonates with Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*- whether it is a scene of mechanical obliteration or what could be a sample of a cancerous tumour, these images stand as painful reminders that our world's very existence hangs in a fine balance. But the works in *Sticky Plaster in the Gene Pool* are not memento mori- Attwooll's abstraction of these slides opens up possible futures





for the subjects from which the specimens have been extracted. Science reduces the complex reality of existence to empirical fact- the slides' subject's future is unequivocally determined. Attwooll renders the subject matter of the slides barely discernable. We do not know whether what we look at are images of photosynthesis, or the damning cell multiplication of disease, or whether in fact these works depict a marble wall or strange celestial body. By obscuring the evidence, he creates a fictional reality, in which their future is perhaps not quite so undeniable. Another version of events is offered, introducing a myriad of new realities, providing the chance for each 'event' to live on in an abstract fiction.

Katie Paine





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