



**SIMON DEGROOT**

**TITANIUM ANVIL**

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ARTSPACE

**17-25 MAY 2013**

This exhibition catalogue documents *Titanium Anvil*, a solo exhibition by Simon Degroot.

The exhibition opened on 17 May 2013 and continued until 25 May 2013.

**Front page**

*Flower's Flowers Greyscale* 2013

**Over page**

*Study of Fragments* 2013



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# MALLEABLE HISTORIES

By Kylie Spear

*Memory is a dangerous function, it retrospectively gives meaning to that which did not have any. . . Fragments . . . alone will survive the catastrophe, the destruction of meaning and language, like the flies in the plane crash which are the only survivors because they are ultra-light. Like the flotsam in Poe's maelstrom: the lightest items sink the most slowly into the abyss.*

- Jean Baudrillard

The namesake of Simon Degroot's solo exhibition, while perhaps initially evoking a sense of solidarity and masculinity, reveals much of the underlying narratives present in the show. Titanium, a lustrous metallic element, is strong yet highly malleable material; easily manipulated with the correct force. The ancient anvil is a large and heavy tool traditionally used to forge metals. Like the objects the exhibition's title refers to, one's memory is similarly susceptible to change with the right circumstances. Upon close examination, the constituents of a memory prove unreliable; various fragments of sounds, objects, aromas and emotions combine to form scenes that may never have objectively taken place. In Titanium Anvil, Degroot deconstructs and abstracts familiar imagery in order to question the formation of meaning, especially in regards to childhood memories and the everyday.





Like the works in Titanium Anvil, Degroot's previous bodies of work appropriate popular imagery, most memorably digital pixels, wrapping paper and children's cartoon characters such as Big Bird. These symbols were combined with established painting practices, such as the still life, as well as historical images. Bold, colourful and playful, Degroot juxtaposes machine-like reproductions with abstract, expressive brushstrokes. Their sometimes child-like rendering, combined with Degroot's prolific production and consistent aesthetic evolution alludes to an almost innocent questioning; a genuine curiosity about contemporary imagery, its constituents, and how they are combined to form meaning.

The first room in the exhibition was also the most minimally installed; sombre lighting isolated and alienated three small works. Hung slightly higher than the standard mid line, the works took on an untouchable aura. Coloured acrylic placed over the paintings allowed the fluorescent lighting to add a hot pink halo to the edges of the works. Images of flowers were borrowed from three popular cartoons, namely Bambi, Family Guy and Daffy Duck. The different renderings of the same subject matter- close up clusters of flowers- were preserved behind rose-coloured surfaces, exposing a perceived tendency to over-romanticise childhood memories.

**Left - Right**  
*Memory of Daffy, Memory of Stewie and*  
*Memory of Bambi 2013*



*Flower's Flowers Colour 2013*



*Flower's Flowers Greyscale 2013*

Images of flowers reappeared in the second room of the exhibition, this time exclusively from the animation Bambi. The two large works were hung on opposite ends of the rectangular room, creating a sense of tension that was heightened by contrasting use of colour. A desaturated work was hung against a mid-tone grey wall, while at the other end of the room the same composition was shown bursting with colour against a rose-pink wall. The painting's rounded corners added a touch of sentimentality to what was otherwise a rigid room. When standing between the works, the optical effects experienced by switching one's gaze from the colour composition to the monochrome and back again alluded to the futility of memory. Even slight changes to our recollection of specific details compromises our perception of events.

The final works in the exhibition contained works bombarded with contrasting colours and abstracted shapes. Different to the other rooms the forms in these works, such as stairs, boxes, rainbows etc., were reduced to basic lines, shapes and gradients collaged onto flat surfaces. Many of the individual forms appeared almost mechanical, drawing on commercial colour separation techniques in their composition. Employing poststructural methods of dissecting texts, these abstracted fragments were recombined and recontextualised to forge new associations. This process threw Degroot's compositions into uneasy states, where perceptions of meaning were continuously deferred from signifier to signifier. These works acquired provisional readings, where the proximity of paintings effected the reception of each individual work. The same works arranged differently would alter their collective and individual meanings again. Like the formation of a memory or individual words in a sentence, each fragment gained significance only through its affiliation with others.



*Untitled 2013*



Then there was the lone sculpture of the exhibition. Surrounded by wall-based paintings, this work sat atop a narrow plinth. The prism-like object consisted of opposing walls of mirrored paintings, lit primarily by a LED embedded in the plinth. This small monument encased fragmented shapes and colours that were never entirely accessible to the eyes from outside.

The works in Titanium Anvil contain a collective familiarity perhaps related to common childhood experiences of watching cartoons or our shared literacy of contemporary imagery. These familiar fragments act as elements in a larger vocabulary, which Degroot uses to alchemise new associations and meanings. The results are both communally familiar and subjectively experienced; a push and pull between public and private, commercial and intimate. They helped to question the processes of value formation, suggesting that memory is something that is not located in the past, but forged in the present.



Baudrillard, J 1997, *Fragments: cool memories III 1991-95*, Verso Publishing, London.

Gitlin, T 1989, *Postmodernism: roots and politics*, Dissent Publications, Canberra.

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**Left - Right**  
*Conjuring, Building Upon Solid Forms and  
Monument Segment 2013*

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