

The Little Machine



***Paint Thing...
You Make My Heart Sing***

***Paul Hoban
Christian Lock
Loren Orsillo
Jazmine Deng***

25 February – 1 April 2023

The Little Machine
Space for Contemporary and Experimental Art

Paint Thing...
You Make My Heart Sing

25 February – 1 April 2023
Exhibition opening: 7–9pm, Friday 24 February 2023

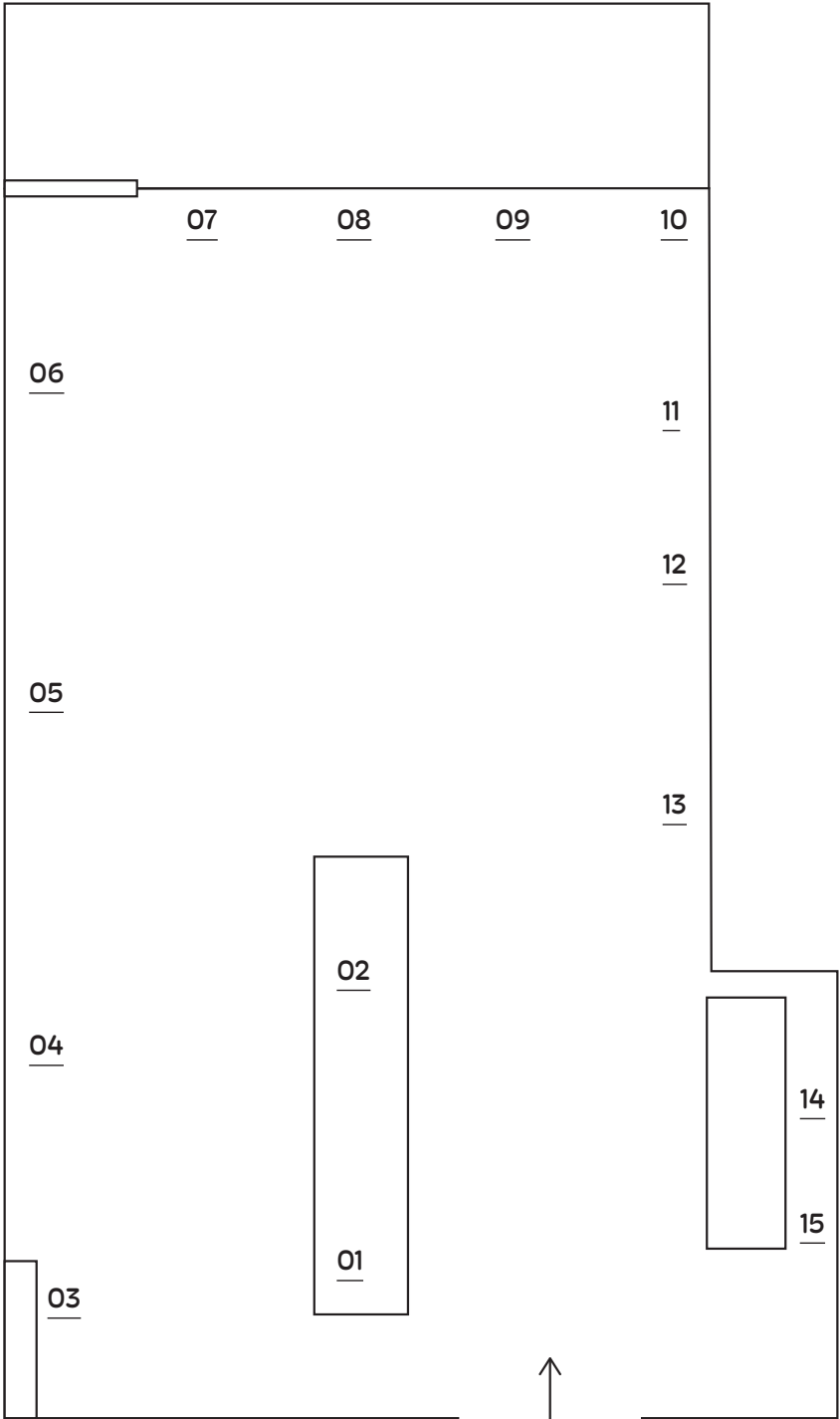
Shop 12, Regent Arcade Adelaide
www.thelittlemachine.com
[@The_Little_Machine](https://www.instagram.com/The_Little_Machine)
info@thelittlemachine.com

Sun–Tue: closed
Wed: 1–5pm
Thu: 1–5pm
Fri: 1–7pm
Sat: 1–5pm
Or by appointment

The Little Machine acknowledges that we are working on the lands of the Kurna People, the traditional custodians of the Adelaide Plains. We respectfully acknowledge the Aboriginal and Stories Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and pay our respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging.

The Little Machine Co-Directors are Eleen M. Deprez and Michael Newall. We wish to thank Paul Greenaway, Suzanne Close, Loren Orsillo, Shirley Wu, and the good folks at Renew Adelaide for their generous support of this exhibition.

Paul Hoban and Christian Lock are represented by
GAGPROJECTS, Adelaide.



01 Jazmine Deng

Beige (2023)

Oil paint and graphite on canvas, found book (Chinese vintage cooking book)
\$175 (painting only)

02 Jazmine Deng

Microsoft (2023)

Oil paint and beads on canvas, found PC system, broken hair clip, beads, found scrap of red packaging paper
\$215 (painting only)

03 Jazmine Deng

How Are You? Tired, it was a moment that she realised how much this all really meant, she held onto it for a moment longer, breathed it in, and let it all go (2023)

Ballpoint pens, pencils, coins and miscellaneous items in tinted glass jar, pages from English to Chinese dictionary showing words starting with the letter 'P'
Not for sale

04 Jazmine Deng

Psychedelic, 靛線 (cǐ lǎn), Account Statement, Failure (2023)

Crumpled Chinese New Year banner on found screen door, oil paint and graphite on canvas
\$240 (painting only)

05 Christian Lock

Oceanic Anton (2014)

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
\$13,500

06 Loren Orsillo

S\GHOST 2.0 (2022)

Holographic faux snakeskin fabric, expandafoam
\$875

07 Loren Orsillo

Abysmal Fucking Birthday (2022)

Concrete, wire, house paint, metallic paint powder, synthetic crystals, candles, plastic
\$750

08 Loren Orsillo

LETSGOCAMPINGIPROMISENOTTO-FIGHTANYONE (2022)

Block-out fabric, acrylic paint, packing tape
\$625

09 Paul Hoban

Number Four, from After Image Series (2013)

Oil on canvas
\$1500

10 Paul Hoban

Flight Machines (2019)

Five fluorescent tubes, and mixed media
Dimensions variable
\$5000

11 Paul Hoban

Thirteen (1993)

Roplex and plant material on linen
\$8000

12 Paul Hoban

Trans Verse (2019)

Synthetic polymer and spray enamel on canvas
\$1800

13 Loren Orsillo

#2 Midnight Sludge-City Sample from Upper Level (Warm Climate) (2023)

Concrete, wire and lights
\$690

14 Paul Hoban
*Basque x Cantonese (abridged),
from Colour by Word series* (2008)
Oil on canvas
\$1500

15 Paul Hoban
Halo (2021)
Glass tube and mixed media
\$1200

Paint Thing... You Make My Heart Sing draws attention to influences and affinities that have shaped abstract painting in Adelaide over three generations.

Paul Hoban is an eminent Australian painter who, since the 1980s, has experimented with techniques and materials, explored paint as substance, object and representational vehicle, investigated the links between image and language, and developed a practice responding to philosophy, psychology and outsider art. The paintings and objects he creates are surprising, original and powerful.

Christian Lock studied painting under Hoban at the University of SA, and makes paintings characterised by vast, sensuous, virtuoso brushwork. Lock's work in *Paint Thing...* is a huge canvas titled *Oceanic Anton*, a tribute to the late Adelaide painter and sculptor Anton Hart, which

extends and develops Hoban's "paint skin" technique into a visionary maelstrom of pigment.

Loren Orsillo, in turn, studied painting under Lock at the University of SA, developing a practice that interrogates paint, material, picture surface and wall, and integrates concrete, candles and plastic kitsch. She brings to play a serious attention to materials alongside a critical and sometimes sarcastic attitude to contemporary culture.

Jazmine Deng, a recent graduate of Adelaide Central School of Art, developed her practice independently of the other artists in this show. But Deng's work shows a striking affinity to theirs in terms of her fascination with paint, matter and materials, and her integration of painting into an "expanded field" of practice. She uses these means to develop elegant, disarming installations incorporating found objects, and imbued with frank, vivid elements of autobiography.

Paul Hoban and Christian Lock are represented by GAGPROJECTS, Adelaide.

Paint thing... I think I love you... But I want to know for sure

A new history of abstract painting is needed. There is no great mystery about this. In Melbourne, the Victorian Spiritualists' Union holds most of the paintings of the British painter Georgiana Houghton (1814–1884), who made abstract paintings from the 1860s, guided, she said, by spirits. She exhibited them to a largely unappreciative London public in 1871. Houghton is now reasonably well-known, having had an exhibition dedicated to her at the Courtauld Gallery in London in 2016. Other spiritualist painters, such as Hilma af Klint and Annie Besant, also experimented with abstraction in the decades before Wassily Kandinsky and Kasimir Malevich, who are usually credited with the invention of abstract painting in the Western tradition. Why have these women not been incorporated into histories of abstract art? Partly, I think,

that's due to their gender, and partly because their work can be seen as outgrowths of their spiritualist practices rather than art. The sexism, of course, is unfair, but so too are complaints about their spiritualism, since Kandinsky also saw his work and practice as essentially spiritual in nature (as he describes at enormous length in his book, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911)). So, what would a history of abstract painting that started with these earlier spiritualist painters look like?

Here is one possibility. Many of the patterns and visual effects that are found in spiritual art share qualities with psychedelic experiences. Psychedelic experience, though most often associated with drugs in our culture, can be produced in a variety of other ways. For example, lucid dreaming, sensory deprivation, stroboscopic lights, migraines, hypoglycaemia, or simply applying pressure to the eyeballs, can all produce the patterning and other visual effects associated with psychedelia. The word “psychedelic” is from the Greek, meaning “mind revealing”, and here it is apparent that all these very different sensory and physical circumstances do reveal some common features



1. Mayo Clinic, Migraine Visual Aura, 2011

of the mind – or at least they engage common mechanisms in the brain devoted to processing information. Above is an image from a video, published by the Mayo Clinic, simulating a migraine aura. It shows an iridescent arc of colour flickering and undulating. On the next page is a painting by Annie Besant, from the book *Thought-Forms*, which she published with C. W. Leadbeater in 1905. Last image is a painting by Kandinsky of 1925, which shows an undulating line that echoes those of Besant, which in turn have a suggestive affinity with the arc of the migraine aura.

Kandinsky, as a fellow Theosophist, likely knew Besant's book. He said that as a synaesthete he experienced colours and shapes in response to music (his more ambitious works are accordingly titled "Compositions"). Besant too seemed to have a similar form of synaesthesia – she says that her image documents a vast "thought form" that she saw rising above a cathedral in which the music of Gounod was being played. Synaesthesia and migraine are rather different conditions, but it may be that there are overlaps in the way they stimulate the brain. Migraine auras seem to be the product



2. Annie Besant, Detail from Plate G "Music of Gounod", 1901

of electrical activity that moves in expanding arcs across the visual part of the brain, and one may speculate that Besant's and Kandinsky's synaesthesia affected their brains in a similar way.

So, perhaps there is a secret history of abstract painting yet to be told that joins spiritualism and psychedelia. The painter Paul Hoban has thought in similar directions, observing in his 2012 PhD thesis that some patterning in prehistoric art could

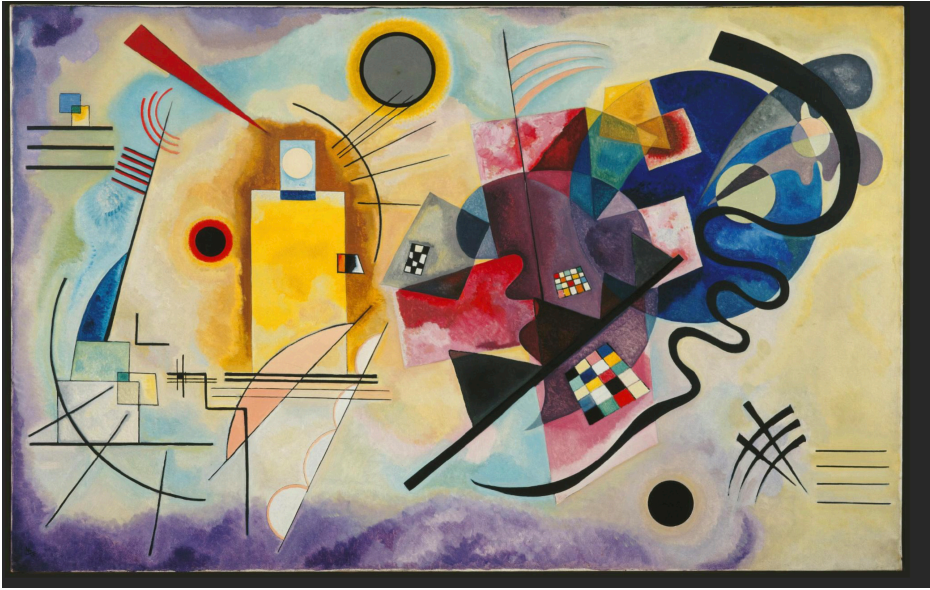
have similar psychedelic origins. I should add that there is a tension between spiritualism and the neurological explanations that I have just sketched. Besant and Kandinsky would have been dismayed by the idea that their psychedelic experiences reveal merely the mechanisms of the brain, vibrating and sparking, so to speak. By their lights, what is revealed in these shapes and colours is a genuine revelation: for them, they limn an immaterial, spiritual world. But for Hoban,

the idea that this kind of experience may merely record patterns or pulses of neural activity is not something to be avoided, rather, it should be embraced.

One of Jazmine Deng's works here is *Psychedelic*, 繚線(*cil sin3*), *Account Statement, Failure* (2023). A component of this installation, a small painting, suggests psychedelic experience. It shows a delicate patterning of colour tearing apart to reveal a full hallucination of clouds and vast sky beyond. Christian Lock's work, *Oceanic Anton* (2014) – which appears here as a tribute to the late, great, Adelaide painter Anton Hart – also suggests psychedelia. It is a great, surging maelstrom of paint that surely gives Edgar Allan Poe's maelstrom a run for its money. Its undulating, roiling rhythms, are also worthy successors those of Besant and Kandinsky. On which side do Deng and Lock fall – are they materialists like Hoban, or spiritually-oriented, like Besant and Kandinsky? I don't know. It feels inappropriate to push artists on these matters – our views on those questions are, after all, a work in progress for most of us. Hoban is an exception in volunteering his positions, and in a more subtle way, Loren Orsillo is

too. Her *Abysmal Fucking Birthday* (2022), a wall-mounted blob of concrete studded with purple candles, also includes purple crystals. More precisely these are plastic, faux crystals. She was hesitant about showing this work at first, as she worried the crystals – a mainstay of contemporary new age spiritualism – might be misinterpreted. They are, as she told me “sarcastic”. I said I would mention this in the catalogue essay, so viewers would not be misled. Later, Paul Hoban, who did not know Orsillo, dropped in as the exhibition was being hung. He stood in front of *Abysmal Fucking Birthday*, eyes narrowed. “Are the crystals,” he asked me, “sarcastic?” Fortunately, I was in a position to assure him that they were. He looked pleased and nodded.

Hoban is not an ordinary, straightforwardly scientifically-oriented kind of materialist (though he is a respecter of science). His position is closer, I think, to the “base materialism” of the philosopher and writer Georges Bataille. For Bataille, matter – the stuff of which the universe is made – is always in flux, destabilizing or breaking down what he calls “form” – every sense of structure, order and permanence in the world,



3. Vassily Kandinsky, "Gelb-Rot-Blau" [Yellow-Red-Blue], 1925

whether physical, social or psychological. It is in that process of destabilizing that humans can find a "revelation of being". But it is a revelation with no transcendental character. Rather, it seems to be aligned with the intimation of freedom that one has in defying boundaries, coupled, perhaps paradoxically, with the willing self-abnegation of one's person that the breaking down of all boundaries must eventually entail. Accordingly, certain of Hoban's works in this exhibition seem to me like the displayed leftovers of a life. *Thirteen* (1993) is like a flayed skin of paint, *Flight Machines*

(2019) is like a pile of bones, and *Trans Verse* (2019) is like scoured flesh. Yet, at the same time they teem with life – pullulating textures, babbling script and congealing paint. Orsillo's work also makes its materiality obtrusive, and it too teems with life: the textures of concrete, the detritus of a paint-spattered drop-sheet in *LETSGOCAMPIN-GIPROMISENOTTOFIGHTANYONE* (2022), the expanding dripping foam of *S\GHOST 2.0* (2022). Sarcasm, which is also aimed at pulling things down, yet has an undeniable vitality, is rife in her titles.

This is an exhibition of “paint things”. There is paint that obtrudes as an object in the viewer’s attention, and there are also things, objects that demand to be read in painterly terms, as deliquescing, flowing, splattering substance. There is something in these that I think makes the heart sing. Besant and Kandinsky have their music – maybe there’s not so much of that here. But there’s also the revelation of being that Bataille talks about. It’s a rather rougher revelation – perhaps more like the screeching, pulsation of punk than the Gounod that Besant loved – but it’s something that one can sing too, nevertheless.

Michael Newall

Image credits

1. Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1901.
2. Mayo Clinic, “Migraine Visual Aura” Youtube, 1 Mar 2011.
3. © Adam Rzepka – Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI /Dist. RMN-GP



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www.thelittlemachine.com

@The_Little_Machine

info@thelittlemachine.com

Shop 12, Regent Arcade - Adelaide