

# Jennings Kerr

## Tristan Chant *Gardens*

Tristan Chant's studio is like a garden. A place of many ideas, a wonderland of creation and a melding of evolving systems. The works come together in many different ways, with varying ideas, and like a garden there seems to be so many variables. There is a wild spirit in his studio, collections of images from different decades, at varying stages of decay and rebirth, an alchemy of collage and its sources, like a good compost pile ready to feed the earth for new growth. The pre-show, before the spring of new works like a rambling cottage garden. The transfer of energy from insects, bees, water and sun, the hands at work and the creation of life. The grafted rose dug into the soil, blood and bone and watered in. We have seen so many wonderful garden scenes depicted in woven tapestries, such rich history of storytelling and nature fixed in fibres. Here we have a subversive use of woven tapestry, a repositioning of the loom using damaged, blurred and out of date polaroids as its fertiliser. Chant documents his own garden flowers, night scenes through the camera, damaged gel transferred out and onto digital screen, and back out as woven painting. This bending of mediums and manipulation of image can also be seen here on paper in the form digital collage. These pieces of paper carrying so much weight and history, loaded with the provenance of the great Dutch still life works of the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam. These vivid photographic archives are fed into digital software and algorithms like seeds to soil, the echoes and distortion, the mashing of painting, is then output to paper like a flower bed planted with an array of random bulbs. What makes this show so interesting is how order is brought to chaos, how Chant controls his room, how he is able to bring out tension in images and mediums, and how the works despite all of the technicalities of process and material are able to be enjoyed in their contemporary beauty.

At their core, these works are about examining our relationship to images and consumption, the way we interact to various forms of media, and the power of the image in contemporary society. I have always loved the symbolism assigned to flowers and the power of those images. In this body of work Chant plays not only with this symbolism but with the history of image and significance of medium. Traditionally tapestries were a signifier of grandeur and affluence and outweighed painting until end of the 16th century. This was mainly based around the complexity of the process as well as the materials used. The handwoven tapestries were often very large in scale and depicted figurative and landscape scenes as a series of pieces to hang across entire rooms, frequently used ceremonially in palaces. The medium was used as a stately symbol with depictions of coats of arms or family crests as a symbol of status or sign of power and wealth. Chant uses a technique known as Jacquard tapestry that operates with a computer guided loom that can accurately replicate colour and image in woven surface. This is a fascinating binding of the photographic with the contemporary fixation on textile within expanded painting. Chant throws all these things together, blending his materials, processes and images like a good soil restoration. These woven paintings are born out of a very different medium. The instant camera and polaroid film, once very popular for its immediacy of developing, has been used here as a kind of analogue glitch through out of date and damaged film. Scenes captured at night, flowers distorted like glowing bacteria or heat signatures. Chant has paused his flowers in gel film and then digitised them for further rinsing, fed into a computer guided loom. The images are soft and blurred but still give a romance of bloom created by pushing and pulling the materials through the digital and analogue.

In 1798 the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam was founded as a centre of Dutch art and culture. The museum collection contains great masterpieces and it is these Dutch Still life works that Chant has used to subvert painting through digital manipulations and algorithmic collage. These pieces are clever in the way they drag history through a gamut of distortions. The pigment on paper in the smaller works is saturated with colour, echo and blending of image. Elements of the original paintings spread out across the surfaces in hypnotic dance, digital brush strokes that sit in harmony with the masterful rendering of the original works. In the theatricality of these works we still see all the things that bring us back to the garden, but here as in the original still life paintings there is a different kind of randomness. In these new works we find a blending of image, a stacking of painting. Abstraction through repeat pattern and in a way a very sophisticated acknowledgment of how these still life works often incorporated flowers in bloom that are together despite varying in season. There is trickery mimicked, illusion and deception once again here in the printed collage. There is a complex floristry in this collage, paintings of flowers as flowers, arranged by software into somehow even more opulent celebrations. For me these are another example of how Chant is able to reposition the image, to contort genre and medium but most importantly to bring new life and meaning to images and how we interpret them.

Perhaps the forgotten medium is the planting of the flowers, the garden enjoyed over time. It will continue to evolve and grow. Backs will be strained and fingers muddied, the garden will continue to bring joys and challenges. I am not green thumbed but I see the reward in being able to create in this setting and the complexity of this creativity with its constant variables, the climate, the care taken, the plant tolerance, type of soil and so on. I have seen Chant progress and grow as an artist. These works are very sophisticated and continue to show his ability to subvert medium, material and image, and our understanding of them. I love this room as a garden and his studio in relation to the splendours of planting. I love how you can get lost in this work the way you can wandering a hedge maze or overgrown grassland. These works may not be what some people think of as paintings but they are very much painting in the contemporary world. The power, mystery and romance of the flower continues to amaze in all its beauty.

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