Chris Pole

Repeat Pattern

August 1 – October 31, 2013

Chris Pole's painted landscapes present curious alternate realities. Photorealistic representation is undermined by one-dimensional shading to create mesmeric geometry. His work has been described as "visually arresting but essentially enigmatic - like a frame snipped from an Italian neo-realist film" by Lara Strongman, Former Senior Curator and Deputy Director of City Gallery in Wellington.

Fences, bridges, and fallen trees often feature in the foreground of Pole's paintings, which seem to prevent too great a human intrusion into these unoccupied territories. Pole uses partial phrases superimposed onto the painted scene – words that could be equally seen as invitations, barriers, or simply statements – offering a hint of a personal perspective, but leaving fuller interpretation and experience to the viewer.

Adept at creating evocative architectural spaces, he draws on aspects of style reminiscent of David Hockney, Edward Hopper, and Ed Ruscha to craft potent landscapes of heightened realism and flattened perspectives.

Repeat Pattern features new works completed during Pole's residency at Shalini Ganendra Fine Art.

Chris Pole (b.1977 New Zealand)

Education

MFA	University of Canterbury

Recent Awards

2011	Finalist, 20th Annual Wallace Art Awards
2010	Merit Award, Anthony Harper CoCA Art Awards
2006	Finalist, Parklane Art Awards, Auckland
2003	Merit Award, Lake Taupo Open Art Awards, Lake Taupo, Museum of Art and History
2002	Margaret Stoddart Prize, Centre of Contemporary Art
2001	Ethel Rose Overton Scholarship, University of Canterbury

dissolve, 2013
Oil on canvas, 76 cm x 244 cm

submerge, 2013
Oil on canvas, 122 cm x 92 cm

navigation, 2013
Oil on canvas, 92 cm x 122 cm

translation, 2013
Oil on canvas, 92 cm x 122 cm

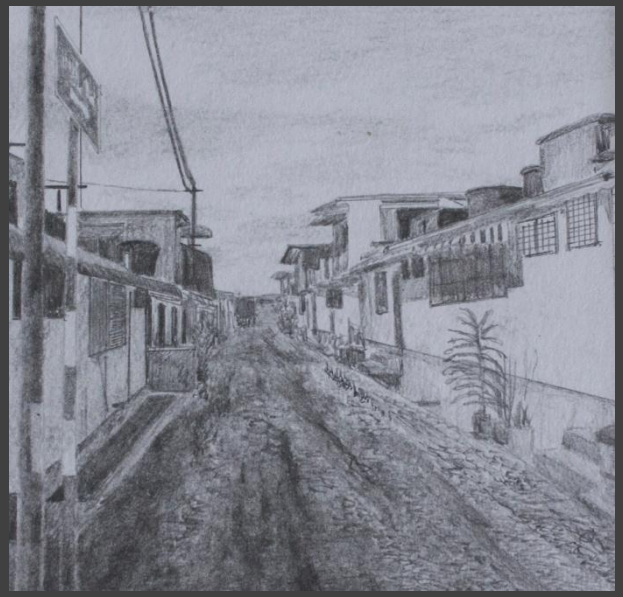
repeat pattern, 2013
Oil on canvas, 92 cm x 122 cm

aside, 2013
Oil on canvas, 30 cm x 30 cm

monologue, 2013
Oil on canvas, 30 cm x 30 cm

1

3



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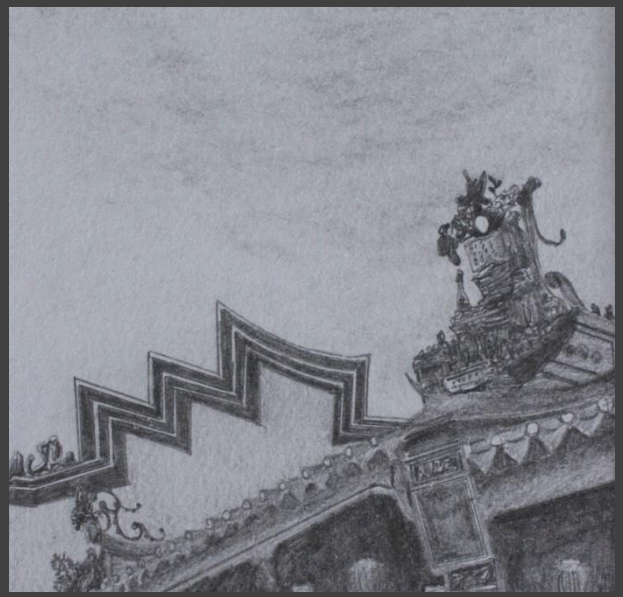

1. *untitled I (penang), 2013*
Pencil on paper, 25 cm x 25 cm (framed)

2. *untitled II (penang), 2013*
Pencil on paper, 25 cm x 25 cm (framed)

3. *untitled (kepong), 2013*
Pencil on paper, 25 cm x 25 cm (framed)

4. *untitled III (penang), 2013*
Pencil on paper, 25 cm x 25 cm (framed)

Chris Pole is an accomplished painter and exhibit designer based in Christchurch, New Zealand. His first works were abstract and utilized natural components, such as New Zealand soil, in their composition, but, after extensive travel across the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, Pole began to render some of his photos into painted depictions of strongly composed tourist scenes. His inclusion of text, often enigmatic, on the works is often tied to literary and musical references and sometimes simply random. He is the current artist in residence at Shalini Ganendra Fine Art (SGFA).

Repeat Pattern is the manifestation of Pole's gradual acclimatization to Kuala Lumpur over the course of his six week residency at SGFA. A comparison of Pole's first and last works painted here, 'dissolve' and the show's title piece, 'repeat pattern,' demonstrate a transition from a distant and survey-like scope of KL to a focused, more realistic depiction of a scene in Penang. 'Dissolve,' the work that anchors *Repeat Pattern*, spans the width of a gallery wall and contains stunning detail of the KL cityscape. The countless buildings, landmarks, and greenery are rendered meticulously by Pole, yet the variety of primary colors and block-like shapes lend to the work the feeling of a child's play set—at times the city seems haphazardly arranged, while at others it seems ingeniously constructed. This work, the most detailed of the *Repeat Pattern* exhibition is the one in which Pole is the most unfamiliar with KL and its personality.

Poles smaller works, 'aside' and 'monologue,' begun soon after 'dissolve,' also convey Pole's recent arrival to KL. They appear like snapshots taken on Pole's first walks through the city. In 'aside,' Pole's use of a small canvas to depict a bustling area of KL, bursting with vibrant reds and oranges while homes and storefronts appear stacked on top of each other, demonstrates Chinatown's chaos. The partner of 'aside,' 'monologue' seems to be the quintessential snapshot of a newcomer's fascination with the intricate and delicate beauty of Islamic architecture. In this work, Pole's strong sense of composition and form, which in the end elevate these works from mere snapshots, is clear. While the Sultan Abdul Samad Building takes the center and focus of the work, in the upper left hand corner is a glimpse of a Chinese style pagoda, its angular shapes at odds with the rotund curvature of the mosque just behind it. This work almost unconsciously demonstrates another fact about KL--its incredible religious, ethnic, and racial diversity.

Of all Pole's works in this series, 'submerge' is the most enigmatic. The painting is an idyllic depiction on Lake Titiwangsa, with most of the canvas taken up by tranquil water and sky. Yet the absence of humans in the work lends a tranquil and isolated tone to an otherwise popular area. The work is transformed by the word 'submerge', because a sense of mystery overtakes it. One has to wonder what is meant to be submerged and what so needs to be hidden that it must be drowned. 'Submerge' marks an important step in Pole's acclimatization process because it refers to when he becomes more than a tourist, no longer consuming as many sights and sounds as he can, and begins to take pause within the city. Pole seems to realize that he actually has time to really *see* KL. There is a sense of a slower pace in this work, as if perhaps, this is the first opportunity Pole has taken to simply sit and observe the city.

Pole's fascination with architecture is clearest in 'navigation' a work depicting the National Mosque. He captures the dizzying juxtaposition of a checkered ground with a lanky spire abutted by a wide roof shaped into half pyramids—all of this backgrounded by a teal carnival-like roof. Along with 'submerge,' this work takes on a slightly slower pace, a luxury afforded by the beginnings of comfort with a city.

'Translation' may be the least idealistic of Pole's works. It is an unsettling piece, seemingly from a garish post-colonial themed nightmare. The perspectives are nonsensical and one gets a slight sense of vertigo after a glance. What strikes first is the clash of pinks, reds, and yellows that give the work a slightly candied feel. This work, unlike the others does not sit back on the canvas quietly; it leaps out demanding undivided attention. In a room, it is likely the first work to catch the eye, portraying well the strange mixing that happens in KL as the city becomes more industrialized.

Unlike the other works, ‘repeat pattern’ depicts the Malaysian sky as it usually is, cloudy and a whitish-gray. The other works have a slight idealistic rendering, with blue skies and suggested sunshine. However, after the adrenaline of a new city subsides, reality descends as what happens in ‘repeat pattern’. This work demonstrates Pole’s ultimate comfort with the city. It is focused on a particular scene, unlike ‘dissolve,’ and it is not even of KL, but Penang. A city Pole travelled to after he got his bearings in KL.

Repeat Pattern captures Kuala Lumpur's chaotic sprawl as a young metropolis, ever too big for its trousers. Not many places on earth can boast diversity of race, religion, class, and food like Kuala Lumpur can. Even the colors here are different, they are brighter, more saturated. The sky is blue and the greens of a lush rainforest still dot the cityscape. Pole, over the course of six weeks has managed to capture essential aspects of the city, particularly its architectural personality and its sometimes paradoxical mix of shape, form, and purpose among the cityscape. More importantly, he has put his cerebral work and thought process on canvas for all to see. While connecting each work with part of Chris's gradual mastery of KL, audiences have a special chance to see inside the personal thought process of the artist. Shalini Ganendra Fine Art is fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve as a part of Pole's process and to be able to exhibit the many manifestations of his process.

Naimonu James, *Harvard University*

August 1, 2013

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