

A Great Quietness

Arthur Parker may not be a household name — yet — but one is sure to have seen his paintings which adorn Sydney's inner-city streets and beyond. *Quiet Subversions: Paintings by Arthur Parker* is Parker's first retrospective, and covers all three phases of his mighty half-decade art career: the Site-Specific Paintings, (2011-2013), the Drop Sheet Period (2012-2013) and the Still Life Period (2013-2015).

The Site-Specific Paintings (2011-2013)

Parker's early minimalist series, *Illicit Abstracts* (2011-2013), made painted explorations into the possibilities of layering and juxtaposition on the walls of Sydney buildings. These expressions, lively in their combination of intuitive shapes and predetermined colours, are sometimes painterly, sometimes hard-edge, often opaque and on occasion, transparent. Parker follows in the footsteps of other important colour patch artists from the history of painting: Mark Rothko and his colour fields; Piet Mondrian and his primary-coloured defacement of black and white grids; and in figurative painting even, in the felt, patchy-colouration of Giorgio Morandi's bottle



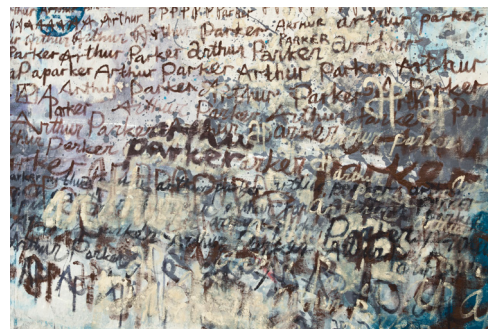
Illicit Abstract #153 (Alexandria)

compositions, and smeary shadow patches applied to the cheek of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. But no other painter of colour patches has been more prolific than Parker. His output matches that of Arthur 'Eternity Man' Stace and Banksy — put together.

The Drop Sheet Period (2012-2013)

While the focus of Parker's *Illicit Abstracts* was colour, shape and site, The Drop Sheet Period marked important developments of style and self-awareness.

By this time, Parker had taken to exclusively using brushes in favour of paint rollers ('They're buggers to clean'),* and as a result, self-conscious experimentations into mark-making and colour-mixing began to occur in Parker's oeuvre. The authority of the picture-plane began to be interrogated, in works such as *Untitled (Reverse Buffing)* (2012) and *Untitled (Practising My Signature II)* (2013), where Parker developed the layering technique begun in his *Illicit Abstracts*. Through considered mark-making, outlining and highlighting found accidental drips on his drop



Untitled (Practising My Signature II), 2013 (detail)

sheet, Parker created a dynamic push-pull relationship between the two orders of marks. In doing so, ambiguities between accident and intention are echoed in the visual tensions between foreground and background, positive and negative.

Parker's layering of text in the *Untitled (Practising My Signature)* series (2013) serves as both (artistic) expressive mark-making and (incidental) visual evidence of his thought processes. Here we see the remains of Arthur's efforts as he learns, corrects, practises and never quite perfects his signature. Thinking and learning are materialised in Parker's individual works as well as across the full breadth of his oeuvre.

The Still Life Period (2013-2015)

Like the way in which works from Parker's Drop Sheet Period acted as spaces of rehearsal, Parker's paintings in the Still Life genre continue with a quality of 'figuring it out' through brave interpretations of perspective and local colour, which highlight the instability of (Parker's own) perception. Subjects take inspiration from Parker's personal history, as in the traffic cones of *Untitled (Trip Hazards)* (2013-2015) and the humble objects featured in the free-floating polyptych *Untitled (Grills, Vents and Plugholes)* (2014).

Consistently throughout this period — and over the course of his entire career — Parker has indeed drawn our attention to the simple beauty of the near-invisible and unacknowledged. He highlights for us the intricacies and eternal variations of ventilation grates; the fragile strength of a weed; a pastel-coloured feeling; the subtle dialogue between hues of his *Illicit Abstracts* and their surrounds; and his own existence even, as in his signature-practising works. In their alluringly honest style, Arthur Parker's paintings quietly celebrate the beauty of the average and the imperfect and remind us of all that we are: fascinatingly human.



Untitled (Grills, Vents and Plugholes), 2014

* Arthur Parker, interview with the author, 31 March 2015.