

# The approach

Summer 2001

£5.95 \$10.95 US

# Modern Painters

**Polly Teynisse** Censorship  
**Julian Mitchell** Howard Hodgkin  
**Harland Miller** Pop Art  
**Philip Hensher** Michael Andrews  
**Martin Gayford** with David Sylvester  
**Trevor Winkfield** Stieglitz  
**Matthew Collings** Bill Viola  
**Tim Trevis** Masks  
**Charles Pickstone** Arte Povera



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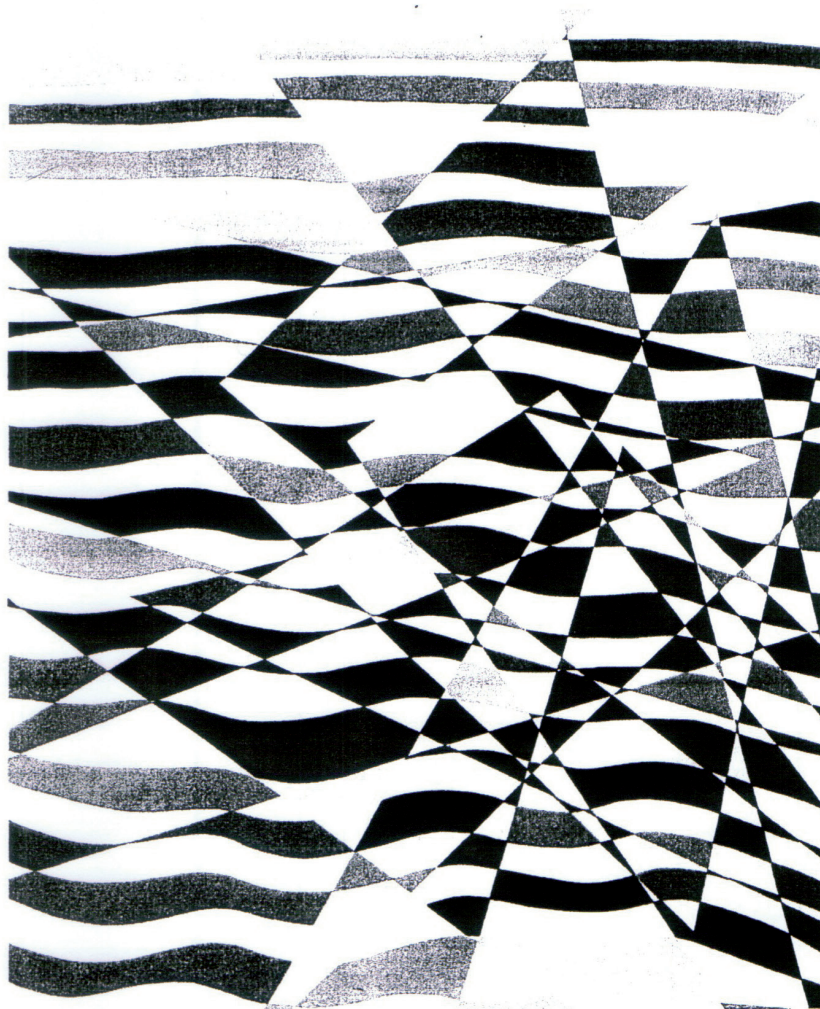
Jason Oddy

# Modern Painters Originals

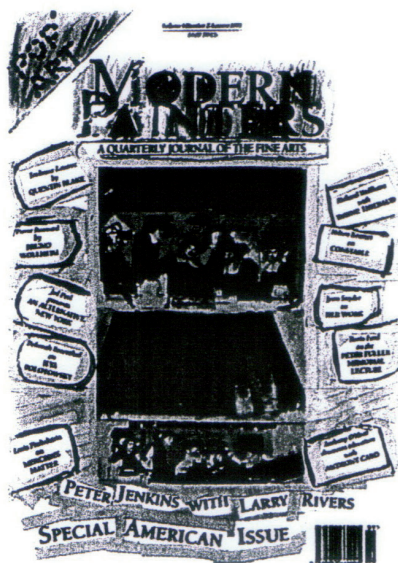
**Peter Davies is the latest artist to make a work especially for Modern Painters' cover**

It won't have escaped your notice – indeed if you've got this far it can't have escaped your notice – that this quarter *Modern Painters* has for its cover a work by Peter Davies, one of the fastest rising young stars on the contemporary art scene. *Chopped-up Stripes Painting* is a picture commissioned especially for the Summer 2001 issue as one of an ongoing series of original works produced by artists at the editor's behest. This innovative enterprise on the part of the magazine has generated enthusiasm and controversy in equal measure, as witness readers' letters ('Why do you afflict the vision of your hoped for readers...?' begged one, after an eyeful of Tom Friedman's bug-eyed monster, autumn 2000).

There have been other, single, commissions over the years, such as Larry Rivers's flamboyant collage for the Pop art issue way back in autumn 1991. But the first in the current, ongoing series is notable in that it was by a photographer. John Riddy, for the winter issue of '99, depicted that outsize Duchamp readymade, the London Eye, under an ultramarine South Bank sky. Since then works created by figures as diverse as Julian Opie, Tony Oursler, Trevor Winkfield and Bank have graced the cover. As fluctuating sales testify, some have been more successful than others in tempting potential punters to part with a few bob. Bright, graphic numbers



Peter Davies, *Chopped-up Stripes Painting*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 55.9 x 45.7 cm. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery, London



Larry Rivers's cover for *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1992

have been succeeded by darker, more brooding affairs, while this time round we have been treated to a bedazzling, multi-coloured composition appropriate to the season in which it appears.

If *Chopped-up Stripes Painting* looks like a Bridget Riley that has been assaulted by a slasher cubist, then this hybrid effect is typical of Davies's work. At his recent one-man show at London's Gagosian Gallery he exhibited a series of pictures, each of which contained within them references to a multiplicity of different artists. In some cases the

sources of his inspiration were writ large across the canvas. *The Fun One Hundred*, like *The Hot One Hundred* that in 1997 was this only 30-years-old painter's contribution to Saatchi's 'Sensation', lists, in descending order, Davies's personally selected century of artists. Chosen because they lie within what he describes as his 'field of vision', each name is drawn in wonky, hand-painted writing and is annotated with a pithy epithet. These text paintings are full of knowing art-world jokes told with the aid of an unabashedly vivid palette that allows the pictures to be enjoyed

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THE FUN ONE HUNDRED				
1	PABLO PICASSO	he had a lot of the above	51 DONALD JUPP	boxing clever
2	ANDRE DUCHAMP	what a pisser	52 JOHN CURRIN	Renaissance man
3	SALVADOR DALI	liked lots of cheeks (+gold)	53 CECILY BROWN	orgy - tastic
4	M. KIPPENBERGER	good mood NAZI gas station	54 SUE WILLIAMS	fucked up
5	RICHARD PRINCE	you must be joking	55 GARY HUME	stadium rock
6	RENE MAGRITTE	Ceci nest pas une blague	56 LOUISE BOURGEOIS	kilnious interview style
7	JEFF KOONS	shagging	57 BARRY LE JA	making a mess
8	PAUL H. CARTHY	Shower Chocolate Schlop	58 JENNY SAVILLE	zombie flesh eaters
9	PHILIP GUSTON	very studio(us)	59 GEORGE CONDO	see number one
10	CY TWOMBLY	scribble	60 CHRIS OFILI	shit head
11	SIGMAR POLKE	magic mushrooms	61	American graffiti
12	ED RUSCHA	burn Holly wood burn	62 FRANCISCO Goya	flamibal the cannibal
13	G. MATA CLARK	prime cuts	63 JESSICA STOCKHOLDEN	assembly line
14	CHRIS BURDEN	shoot to kill	64 GUSTAV KLIMT	oran-MENTAL-is anything
15	BRUCE NAUMAN	fun from rear	65 ANTHONY CARO	not really funny!
16	DAVID SALLE	cavalier of the canvas	66 GILBERT + GEORGE	smashed
17	HENRI MATISSE	original formalist	67 CARL ANDRE	nice brickwork
18	T. POLLOCK	paint spill	68 CHUCK CLOSE	up close + personal
19	RICHARD SERRA	weight watcher	69 DIETER ROTH	trash the gaff
20	JOHN BALDESSARI	he's making no more boring art	70 KEN NOLAND	Oin Oin Oin Oin Oin Oin Oin
21	MIKE KELLEY	paint skitter and proud	71 MARINO MARCI	temple of doom
22	ANDY WARHOL	Ass in hole(s)	72 WGO RANDOLPHE	supermodel wannabes
23	W. DE KOONING	dutch courage	73 PIET MONDRIAN	celebrity squares
24	ROBERT SMITHSON	a quake in a lake	74 LAURA OWENS	feel good art
25	DUANE HANSON	white trash	75 DAN FLAVIN	how many artists does it take to change a light bulb?
26	J-M BASQUIAT	"The FUN'S over"	76 TERRY WINTERS	space invader
27	CHARLES RAY	road kill	77 ROBERT GOBER	walk paper
28	GEORG BASELITZ	thats one way of doing it....	78 ERIC FISCHL	bad boy
29	V. VAN GOGH	ouch! * @?	79 IVES KLEIN	blue movie style
30	RAYMOND PATTISON	goth cartoons	80 JORG IMMENDORF	bar brawls
31	JASON RHODES	total organised chaos	81 ALLEN SCOTER	chucks custard
32	CINDY SHERMAN	dressing up	82 PIPILOTTI RIST	road rage
33	JULIAN SCHNABEL	plate rage	83 JAMES ROSENQUIST	stealthy bomber
34	FRANK STELLA	very attracted	84 JASPER JOHNS	star spangled banner
35	HAN GOLDIN	fancy tennies	85 ANDREAS GURESKY	Nike Town
36	CAROL DUNHAM	foam filled tank	86 DAVID HOLKNEY	pool attendant
37	PHILIP TAAFFE	snakes and ladders	87 ELLEN GALLAGHER	funny faces
38	ROY LICHTENSTEIN	wham	88 RITA ANGERMANN	get a job
39	STUART DAVIS	jazz bop	89 RICHARD HAMILTON	The Beatles: The Beatles
40	SOL LE WITT	interior decorator	90 ASHLEY BICKERTON	beach bum
41	VITO ACCONCI	what a tosser	91 JULIAN OPIE	virtual reality
42	SEAN LANDERS	'you cannot be serious'	92 ANDRES SERRANO	pissed christ
43	FRANCIS BACON	pissed and proud	93 PETER HALLEY	cell by date
44	ALEX KATZ	party time	94 TOM OUSLER	ventri loquist dummy
45	FLORENCE TORRES	curandy man	95 ALBERT Oehlen	portrait of A. Hitler
46	MATTHEW BARNEY	the man who jill to carth	96 DOUG AITKEN	Electric Carth
47	JOSEPH BEUYS	was he for real	97 MARTIN HONERT	tourist trap
48	PIERO MANZONI	shit happens	98 SARAH LUCAS	toilet humor
49	DAMIEN HIRST	silence of the lambs	99 JACK PIERSON	will at +HF jllk
50	KAREN KILIMNIK	Mrs Peel.... were needed	100 VANESSA BEECROFT	hanging out

Peter Davies, *The Fun One Hundred (The Pink Top Version)*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 182.8 x 121.9 cm

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as an upbeat spectacle without completely overwhelming their verbal message.

The other strand of his work is to be found in his abstract canvases, which, he says, are inspired by the same manifold references as appear – quite literally – in the pictures with words. Taken as a whole, Davies's output might easily stand accused of being exclusively interested in art-world navel-gazing, a sort of latter-day, postmodern version of *l'art pour l'art*. Yet it does resonate, too, with the broader concerns of our information-rich age, and you get the impression that his response to art is akin to the feeling we all occasionally experience in, say, a bookshop when we find ourselves overwhelmed by the sheer weight and extent of the knowledge that surrounds us. Faced with such an overload, we might fend off our panic with a token purchase or two; but Davies takes the raw material of confusion, mixes it with a good deal of judicious enthusiasm, and then sets about creating his own art-historical cosmology in pictures. If this has the effect of helping this Goldsmiths' graduate make sense of the multitudinous world around him, it also – at least to begin with – served him as a way of gaining a toehold in the art world.

'The main reason I started making the lists', he explains, 'was because I felt that I was powerless and that I had no voice in terms of art that already existed. It was a way of saying, "I don't care that my opinion doesn't count, I'm going to put it up there in big letters and force people to pay attention to it anyway". I suppose I was always quite opinionated about art, and at the time I started making this work I was also doing some abstract paintings that weren't very satisfactory. I was looking at all this art and art history and was becoming aware, quite quickly, of a lot of things I hadn't known about before. I realised I needed to put some of this information into the work I was making, but I couldn't figure out how. I was thinking that if I wanted to make a clever painting it needed to have references to things that pre-existed, and doing these lists just seemed a way of putting all that stuff into one of my paintings in a really simple way.'

In spite of the potentially hubristic nature of such an enterprise, his pictures, insofar as they describe an exhaustive source of influences, are also the expression of a self-effacing humility that calls to mind Rimbaud's celebrated declaration '*Je est un autre*'. Indeed, they take this formula one step further. 'I are many others', they seem to be saying, for within every canvas a whole host of voices vie to make themselves heard.

Even though Davies's style is as distinct as his opinions are strong, his work confounds the idea that an artist nowadays might be univocal or autonomous. Instead, he presents us with compositions that, to differing degrees, synthesise the various influences that are his inspiration. In some, such as the large-scale *Brown With Overlapping Rectangles Painting*, he allows the underlying conceptual tensions to remain largely unresolved. Whilst in others the concepts that are the motive force of the work itself find themselves being marshalled under the banner of a more overtly unifying formalism.

Such is the case with his epic canvas *Small Touching Squares*. So huge that it had to



Peter Davies, *Small Touching Squares in a Pattern Painting* (detail), 1998–9, acrylic on canvas, 609.6 x 304.8 cm

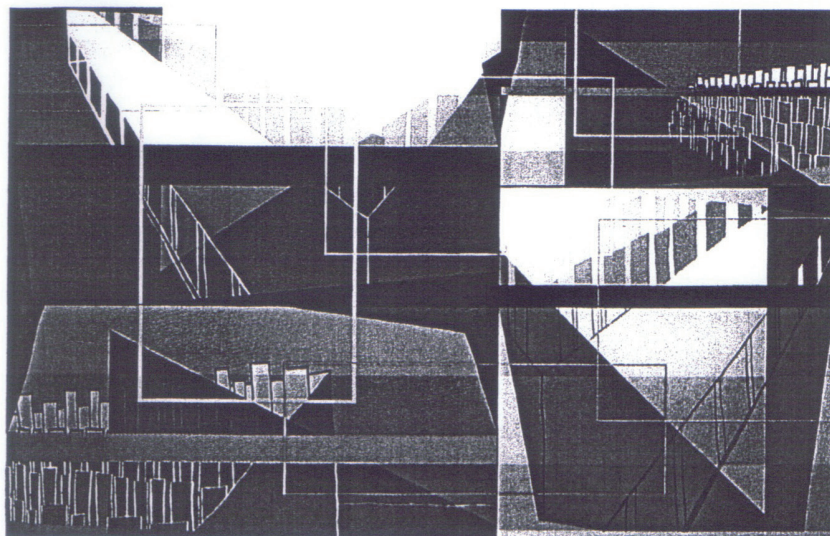
be a triptych, this work is composed of a seemingly infinite number of tiny hand-coloured squares each measuring no more than a few millimetres across. Yet in spite of his use of this most basic of geometric units, the effect is anything but regular. Instead, viewed from a distance, the picture resolves itself into shimmering, undulating patterns that arise from the irregularities and errors that must inevitably occur during a task as deadly repetitive as creating a work like this by hand.

Although such apparently studied cack-handedness is extremely effective, it is a process over which this young British artist claims to have only partial control. This is because unlike conventional op-artists, he does not rely on any pre-determined formula to achieve his eye-catching results. Similarly, he maintains that even during the course of producing one of his abstract canvases he does not make a deliberate attempt to refer to any particular work. Rather, as he explains it, what tends to occur is that he'll be looking at a whole range of different things, say from paintings and sculpture to video and

performance art. And this means that he can be half way through a picture before realising just what unconscious influences have gone into its making. 'What always happens with work that I'm doing is that, as I'm making it, it suddenly occurs to me that "Hey, there's this, that and the next thing going on in there". With this commission, I realised at a certain point that it tied in with the Robert Delauney painting *La Ville de Paris* that I'd seen at "Century City". And even though I wasn't really feeling directly inspired by the Delauney picture, it somehow inspired this painting that I've made.' Hence *Chopped-up Stripes Painting's* cubist treatment of line and space.

But if such an approach seems somewhat organic, then Davies went through a conscientious process of understanding just what it would take to make a picture that could also work as a magazine cover. 'When I was asked to do this for *Modern Painters*, I first of all thought, "Wow! That's great". But normally when I have an idea for a painting I think, "Let's do something on a massive scale". I've always found working on a small scale slightly unsatisfactory as it lacks physical impact. But for *this I realised I had to think quite differently. I started looking at carrier bags and adverts that had stripes on them, because I'd noticed they were very eye-catching on a small scale. I've always thought of stripes as being a minimal, '60s type of thing, which I really admire. But although I wanted to do a painting of stripes, they often just look really boring. So I figured that it needed as many colours as possible, and since one of my signature things is this multi-coloured effect, that's what started me off.*' The end result of his endeavour is the alluring geometries and candy hues that now grace the front cover of this magazine. And for my money – yes, all £5.95 of it – Peter Davies has, with *Chopped-up Stripes Painting*, produced what must rank amongst the most successful of *Modern Painters* covers to date.

Peter Davies's paintings will be exhibited at 'Patterns: Between Object and Arabesque', 21 September – 17 December, Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense, Denmark.



Peter Davies, *Brown with Overlapping Rectangles Painting*, 2000–1, acrylic on canvas, 274.3 x 426.7 cm