

*Core Sample* showcases abstract painters in the Two Rooms stable selecting a single artwork as a sign of things to come – each will have had a solo presentation at the gallery within the year. The exhibition features new and recent paintings by Gretchen Albrecht, Matt Arbuckle, Andrew Barber and Tira Walsh – artworks making their first appearance at Two Rooms – alongside newcomer Robbie Fraser.

*Core Sample* borrows its name from the title of a painting in the exhibition by Matt Arbuckle, whose loosely layered bands of colour suggest strata and other associations. Viewers might reflect on archaeological and other scientific methods employed to obtain a core sample from a given research terrain, drilling down to reveal new insights excavated from beneath the surface. They might draw parallels with these painters' investigations of surface and depth, form and content, material and meaning. This eclectic exhibition presents a cross-section of their practices which balance the gestural and geometric, and celebrate the diverse aesthetic, cultural and conceptual potential of contemporary abstract painting.

A core sample may suggest research insights gained from excavating historical material in the present. Here, the strata of painting – conversations between and across artists and artworks over time – are further revealed. The practice of sampling in music may also act as a useful comparison here, as artists reinterpret and remix their references and sources in new compositions. This idea can also extend to a common process in painting – the accumulation of layers which at times breathe through from beneath – as a metaphor for contemporary practices considered in relation to painting's long and layered histories.

In this context, we might also think of the painting conservator in a museum or gallery, analysing, reconstructing and preserving historical works. Their specialised Infrared Reflectogram cameras were first made for the military for missile targeting systems and for night vision used by the security surveillance industry. In the service of painting, sometimes they reveal hidden drawings and other paintings beneath the upper layers of paint invisible to the human eye. What connections lay beneath or beyond the surface of these works?

As a noun, the Māori word *tīpako* refers to a sample or selection, while as a verb can mean variously to pick out, take one at a time, take a little here and there, highlight, single out, cull, or select (using a computer). The verb *tīpao* can also mean to single out, pick off or cull; and in contrast, can also mean to come and go irregularly, to wander. In this exhibition, we might extend this constellation of ideas – oriented around selection, singling out, wandering, coming and going – to guide our navigation of these artists' diverse approaches.

In *Core Sample* we encounter consonances, contrasts and unlikely connections across these artists' various approaches to visual communication, aesthetic experience and story telling – individually and collectively. Brought together, the exhibition is a unique sample of contemporary abstract painting which acknowledges its inherent subjectivities, speaks for itself in the here and now, and signals new research on the horizon. Much like the studio, here the gallery also becomes a laboratory.

Emil McAvoy, May 2023