

Tess E. McKenzie searches for personal meaning within domestic decisions. As part of these nuanced observations and efforts she has framed a green-hued swatch of house paint christened 'Get Together'. The title 'Get Together' also articulates the action of two projectors side by side in her solo exhibition; each running through a carousel of slides of paint swatches sporting names like 'Loving Arms' and 'My Favourite'. As these slides illuminate Screen Space, the paint names form romantic phrases that verge on clichés, imposing profound meanings upon a simple square of colour.

Modest and overtly sentimental in their offering, the titles assigned to paint swatches turn the most banal of everyday objects into something poetic. However, when selecting a colour to paint our living rooms, do we really expect to achieve the kinds of sensations that describe the paint inside the tin? Most likely not.

No matter how overwrought the names are, the pairings of the paint swatches seem to demand comparison and association. One is called 'Pick Me Up', another 'Road Ahead'. What is the difference between these two slight variations for the person deciding upon their home's colour scheme? Joseph Kosuth states 'Our experience, and the meaning of that experience is framed by language, by information. Seeing is not simply looking.'¹ McKenzie tests this idea in a cheeky manner; interrogating the relationship between language and colour as both a description of a visual quality but also a product of contemporary marketing.

McKenzie presents the paint swatch as a readymade abstraction - echoing Malevich's *Black Square* 1915 and the Modernist grid. This Duchampian use of the prosaic paint swatch - manufactured, incidentally, by British Paints - hints at McKenzie's merging of utilitarian and art historical language. This double association in her work can also be seen in Peter Atkins's *Disney Color Project/ Readymade Abstraction* 2009, in which Atkins based a series of paintings on a set of *Disney Color* house paint sample cards², or Darren Sylvester's modernist grid, *I Care For You* 2007, in which the artist used a colour palette straight from the make-up range of cosmetic company Clinique. Atkins observes abstraction within commercial packaging with a keen aesthetic eye, while Sylvester critically fuses the palette of the beauty industry with that of the modernist grid. McKenzie, however, appears to be more interested in observing and highlighting the simple and absurd qualities that exist in these commercial objects. Her own gestures are minimal as she literally frames the voice and decisions made by the employees of British Paints who named 'Get Together' and other colours. She attempts no transformation of the material, instead allowing the dynamics of the objects to simply speak for themselves.

As the slides slowly alternate and synchronise, McKenzie's nuanced observations are reminiscent of Martin Creed's *Work No. 494: Ships coming in* 2005, a video work in which two monitors are stacked one on top of the other. One screen shows a jetty on a bright clear day, while on the other the sky is cloudier. A ferry appears on the screen and pulls into the jetty. Moments later, the same events occur on the second screen. It quickly becomes apparent that this is the same arrival on two separate days. People appear and the ropes are thrown out and tied, both exactly synchronised. With a clang, the rear door is dropped onto the quay – this noise rings out as it occurs simultaneously on both screens. Here Creed observes the practiced schedule of events that occur every day with deadpan humour³. At the same time, Creed leaves the viewer with the undeniable sense of satisfaction for a job well done.

Creed and McKenzie share an interest in the use of day-to-day moments: whether watching ships come in every day or collecting paint swatches from the local hardware store, they do not attempt to create something new for the world. Instead, their small discoveries look afresh at what is already there.

- Liang Luscombe 2011

¹ Interview with Jeanne Siegel, *Joseph Kosuth: Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings: 1966-1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge: MIT P, 1991) 53.

² Ashley Crawford, 'Readymade Abstraction,' *Australian Art Collector* Oct.-Nov. 2009: 172.

³ Jonathan Watkins, *Martin Creed* (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2008) 36.

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SCREEN SPACE

Get Together

Tess E. McKenzie

“In this book there are two texts which simply alternate; you might almost believe they had nothing in common, but they are in fact inextricably bound up with each other, as though neither could exist on its own, as though it was only their coming together, the distant light they cast on each other, that could make apparent what is never quite said in one, never quite said in the other, but said only in their fragile overlapping.”

- excerpt from the foreword to *W, or The Memory of Childhood* by Georges Perec

