



SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF



On the outside, number 251 Parramatta Road, Annandale, is an unassuming print warehouse. But two floors above street level an eclectic community of artists is honing its skills. The converted loft space that is Higher Ground Studio is home to street art heavyweights Ears, Phibs, Beastman, Birdhat and Numskull, as well as cutting-edge painters Mark Alsweller, Max Berry, Tom Ferson and BENNETT. Their combined creative output produces everything from screen-printed skateboard decks and alfresco art installations to commissioned murals, fine art paintings and sound engineering.

The studio is an assault of colour and contrasting art styles. Canvases lean against walls covered with pop art, used stencils, and news articles. The large windows at the far end throw light across the paint tins and power tools, magazines, milk crates and aerosols. The long communal area breaks out into individual workspaces, each offering an insight into the idiosyncratic creative brain it houses.

Emerging painter BENNETT's studio has a lived-in feel. A strident yellow heat lamp stands in one corner, whilst a collection of abandoned glue sticks, cutting blades and Rorschach-like paint blots impart the narrative of his creative process across the bench tops and makeshift walls. Bent over a cutting board, BENNETT wears an old t-shirt, baseball cap and jeans textured with paint. The surfaces around him are papered with loose clippings and old receipts, sketches, scraps of paper and



cardboard. Strangely, there is a sense of congruity to the chaos. The quietly spoken 25-year-old has been a practising artist for going on five years now and the strength and maturity of his work is gaining recognition in widening circles.

BENNETT was born in Watford, England, perhaps best known for its football team and the unlikely threesome: Spice Girl Gerri Halliwell, Duran Duran's Simon Le Bon and Snatch stand-over man, actor Vinnie Jones. Migrating to Australia with his family at the age of ten, BENNETT settled in Sydney, the urban environment that was to become a source of inspiration for him. Creative from an early age, the tech-savvy teenager was encouraged to study Graphic Design. After a stint at the College of Fine Arts (COFA), he completed his degree at TAFE, before trading design briefs for a more personal art practice.

BENNETT cut his teeth at Worlds End and Stupidkrap studios in Hibernian House, Surry Hills, in the mid to late 2000s. Throughout his time there, his distinctive style using collaging and stencil work in mash-up paintings gained a lot of attention. Inspired by the violence behind fairy tale, BENNETT explored the duality of the

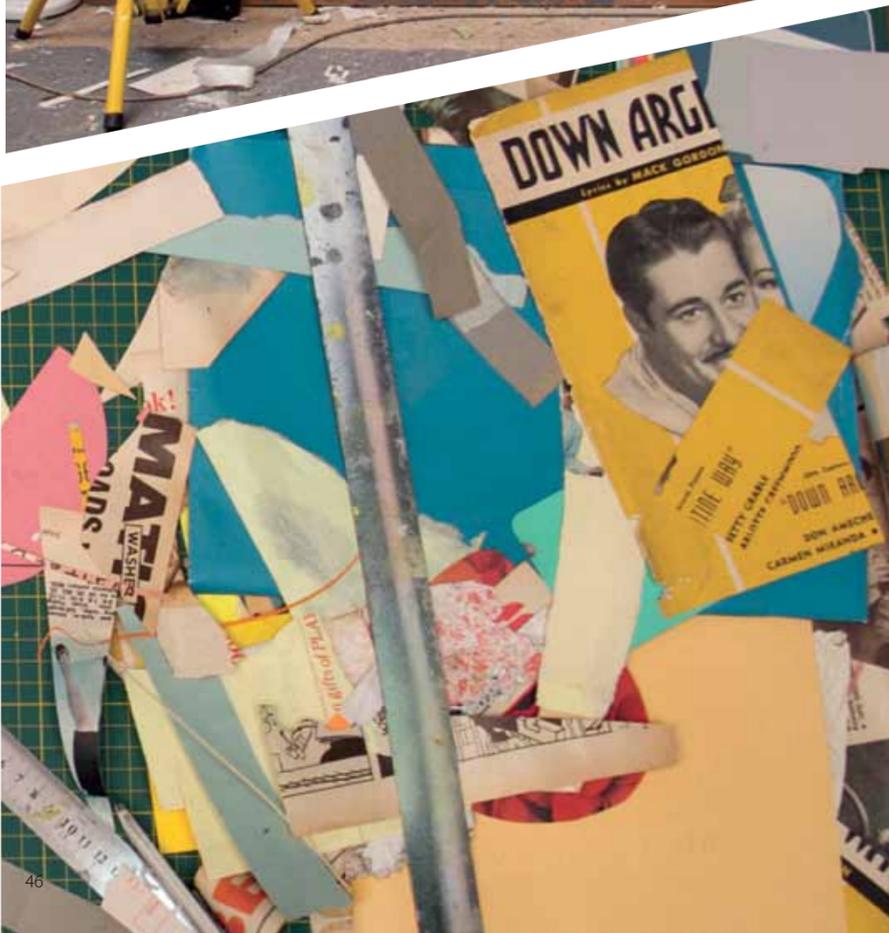
banal. But there was a sense of frustration on the artist's part. He felt unfulfilled.

Over the past eighteen months his technique has graduated toward acrylic-based paintings on board, whilst still retaining something of his mixed-media approach. Searching for a greater sense of honesty within his work, BENNETT began to pare things back. 'I really found myself when I broke down my work into form a bit more,' he explains. 'I'm really into shape and composition. I'm drawn to the accidental alignment of objects in space.'



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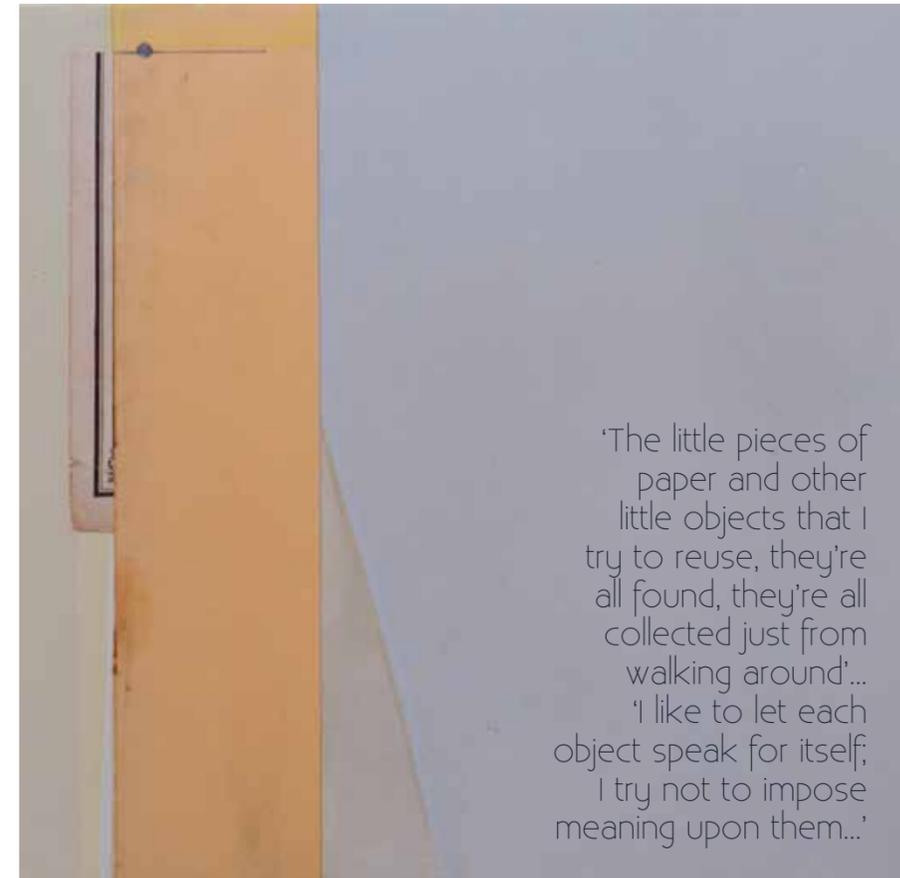


Inspired by neglected objects and everyday environments, BENNETT's work exudes nostalgia for life's minutiae. The self-taught painter is something of a hoarder, drawn to the things that people have discarded. His expansive artworks incorporate cuttings or found-items. 'The little pieces of paper and other little objects that I try to reuse, they're all found, they're all collected just from walking around,' he says. He cites Duchamp and the Dada movement as major influences; their experimentation with context and meaning resonates. Through his own juxtapositions, BENNETT is intent on maintaining the integrity of each found-item. 'I like to let each object

speak for itself; I try not to impose meaning upon them. Each object has a history of its own that we can't replicate and there's something about that that is worth considering.'

For BENNETT, the commonplace is rife with stimuli: the shape of buildings against sky, a receipt in a language you can't understand, a series of rooftops exhibiting harmony in colour. 'I'm constantly just trying to take it all in, take it all in and store it, and it will come out somewhere.' Music also plays a part. BENNETT walks to the studio most days, plugged into instrumental beats and soundscapes. 'I really want to get into a different headspace when I create art. I tend to rely on music and being outdoors. My vision doesn't necessarily correlate with what I'm hearing and that's kind of like two worlds at once. That's really stimulating.'

Each work presents a series of milestones. Although his sketches provide a platform for exploration, BENNETT doesn't have a clear picture of what he's going to paint before he picks up the brush. He's wary of placing too much emphasis on the purity of the initial concept. 'I think we're biased towards our ideas, their perfection.



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The process of their physical realisation results in a more instinctive response.' Then it's a process of washing and rubbing back. 'Less is more – that's definitely true. When you pare things back, that's when you discover subtle accidents.'

It is easy to imagine BENNETT's expansive abstractions of colour and form mounted on exposed brick in on-trend urban-industrial restaurants and pubs, or equally within the foyers of major corporate players, casinos and exclusive hotels. Their simplicity is breathtaking. His work has been commissioned for private homes and his exhibition history is extensive. In the last two years alone, he has contributed to over twenty exhibitions across Australia, including the acclaimed Cockatoo Island "OutPost Project." New Lines, his most recent exhibition at the Rex-Livingston Gallery, saw his work gain the interest of a more commercial audience.

Last year he mounted his second exhibition in Tokyo and with a trip to Berlin planned in August, there is much to celebrate. He has a three-man show at Rex Livingstone and another solo-exhibition in the pipeline toward the close of the year. But for



now, there's no rush. BENNETT is happy to be producing art within the local scene, taking the time to fully realise the narrative of each painting. 'The Sydney scene is pretty dynamic and talented – it's a good time to be painting.'

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