

How the rich recycle their pleasures

I was a mind-wandering art installer working at Heide in 2007 when I discovered Mike Brown. His work made me wonder if he was exhausted all the time, exhausted from the hyper nature of his art-making, from the unhinged wrist spasms of his gestural painting, and the complex assemblages. His work gave off a warm afterglow of radiant energy from the hot act of making, remaining potent and ready to engage the viewer forty years on. Brown's style is steeped in that 1960s through to 1990s pop-hippie-Oz-magazine thing. But Mike Brown's work also transcends that time bracket and shares similarities with the art-making of today: the cool attitude, the material nature, the 'hyper' aesthetic, and the irreverence.

I remember installing Brown's *Kite*. Once it was up on the wall everyone took a step back, the curators came in to see it. It was still controversial, still a big deal. *Kite*, consisting of an octagonal frame covered with collage and brush-and-ink writing, presents a charged yet eloquent dressing down of the mid-'60s Sydney art establishment and its stars. Mike went knives-out for everyone: Hughes, Klippel, Olsen, you name them. Brown declared the critics lame and the artists stagnant, and called on his peers to make progressive art.

How could you do that and survive in the Australian art world? As small as it is now and was back then? Those artists, critics and galleries he ran down in response to the Hungry Horse calendar of '63 would surely have seen red and returned fire in career-stymieing ways. LOL.

Mike Brown the dude lived hard. He made beautiful work but was always poor. He fell in love, fell out of it; and celebrated the positive aspects of life, bringing to the fore slogans like 'Power to the People' and 'the Miracle of Love'.

Mike Brown lived the artist's life at the lofty heights that some freak out about. But his life seemed charmed if his work is anything to go by.

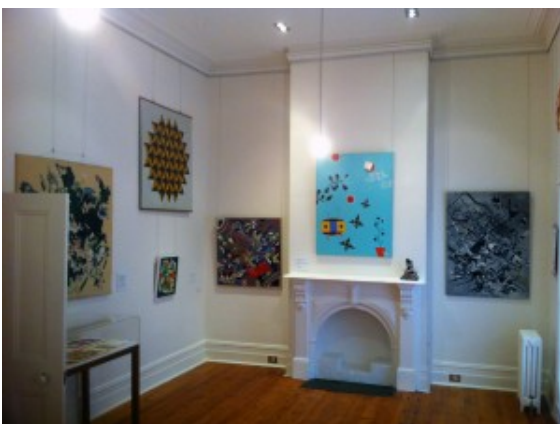
[*The sometimes chaotic world of Mike Brown*](#), Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 4 May - 13 October 2013.



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