

Kate Smith's empire

Sutton is one of the few galleries in Melbourne still willing to underwhelm.

The space was so sparse, I didn't have a clue until I was up close to the six or seven works on canvas board propped vaguely around the walls. What were canvas boards ever supposed to be about: amateur utopia, the art proletariat, easy travel (always better stacked)? Of course now though they're about the contemporary precedents.

Modern painting is one of the few sports in the art scene that can modulate a negative, or speak of decline, provoking value judgements about production and posing questions like: do we need it in the first place? Good questions for 2012. And slacker abjection for Kate Smith also clears the path of all that masculine indebtedness.

Maybe early on all you can do as an artist is get the main propositions in place. It's enough to do that.

What's on the painted surface matters less. A friend said 'palette paintings'—anything so long as the results are sufficiently empty to represent not much at all, or at least come across as incidental. Although these works manage still to be laced with the after-effects of that new 'empire of painting' at the ANU Canberra.

Having a show in a senior gallery can be more important in an artist's career than the show itself. This is something the artists Kate Smith unavoidably recalls—Imants Tillers, John Nixon, Store 5 et. al.—most likely also understood very early on. It gratifies the gallery but is understood in an entirely different way compared to where a show as scant and minimal is held in an artist's space or less secure gallery.

Kate Smith, [*Deep privacy/convex*](#), Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 12 October - 10 November 2012.



Kate Smith



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Kate Smith, 'Mechanic holds to reams of white paper', 2012, oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 20.3 x 40.6 cm



Kate Smith, 'Orange reserve', 2011-12, oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas board, 20.3 x 40.6 cm



Kate Smith, 'No meaning tattoo', 2012, oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 25.4 x 20.3 cm