

Vegas Can Be

Jonny Niesche

Minerva, Sydney, 19th March – 3 May 2014

Elizabeth Pulie

I'm a fan of Jonny's work, having seen it first in *The Glitter Stick* at MOP Projects in Sydney in 2010. I loved the poured glitter and the shiny surfaces; mountains, blobs, sticks and other recognisable objects could be found within the work, but the paintings as objects had an appealing superficiality. The exhibition was accompanied by a fill-the-blanks 'essay' contributed by Sean Lowry; the prize for best blank-filling was a work from the show. The combination of the dazzling surface of the art objects and the tongue-in-cheek essay competition seemed to deflect the normally sombre contextualisation of contemporary art.

Niesche's 2014 exhibition, *Vegas Can Be*, was installed over both gallery spaces at Minerva – I'll call the spaces room 1 and room 2 – and despite some shared materials, motifs and techniques, the work within the two rooms appeared to hold entirely different sets of concerns.

Room 1 is the room first encountered by visitors to the gallery; it contained an installation of three works in a row, of the same dimensions and executed on voile – a soft, sheer fabric, the transparency of which allowed a view of the wooden stretcher frames behind. *Dividing her eyes on lines*, the hot pink first of these three works, revealed a stretcher constructed in a decorative fashion: thick and thin wooden bars criss-crossed the space behind the stretched voile, lending the effect of an asymmetrical 1950s fabric design. The third work of the trio, (*Let's fuck (desert meadow)*) had no such fancy bar-work; a set of concentric and blended blob forms echoed the dimensions of the rectangular frame, shades of yellow disappearing gradually to a dark blue-grey, formless centre.

The middle work of these three, *Blank magic parralactic*, contained the only imagery within Niesche's show – the figure of a man in an old fashioned hat, rendered in slim concentric circles reminiscent of a target. 'Blank' magic? 'Parralactic'? The slightly off wording of the title revealed nothing to me about the depicted man or the work; it seemed intentionally opaque. A further layer to this middle work was a subtle overall geometric design based around two diamond shapes, their forms echoing to infinity beyond the frame.

This geometric design provided the only obvious link to the series of paintings Niesche installed in room 2, forming as it did the core of each of three large, shaped canvases. Mesmerizing lines, bedazzling glitter, seductive tonal gradations and lurid colours contrasted seductively both with each other and with the natural linen support cleanly delineating the edge of the works. In this second room the paintings were both heavy and light; their finite, well-crafted bodies contrasted with the constant outward movement of their concentric design, and the flat natural linen exposed at their edges grounded the otherworldly glitter of their surfaces.

Flawless surfaces, clean lines, seductive colours, repeated patterns and glitter – in art, I am naturally inclined towards the surface and the superficial. I like art that declares a void, not indicating a world beyond or behind itself – perhaps containing the world *within* itself. Niesche's airy, translucent works in room 1 were ironically opaque to me; the lightness of their surfaces and their tendency toward image did not hold my attention, while the heavy objects embodying the move to infinity in room 2 made more sense; a balance was struck there.

Baudrillard wrote in 1996, 'the best scenario would be for the idea to disappear as an idea to become a thing among things'¹. With *Vegas Can Be*, it seemed the move from room 1 to room 2 – from the transparent, individual works on voile to the series of heavy but glittery shaped canvases - was a move from art about *something* to art about *nothing*, accompanied by an opposing move from lightness to substantiality; here, ideas disappeared and became things.

¹ *Radical Thought*, 1996 *The Conspiracy of Art*, Sylvere Lotringer ed., Semiotexte 2005

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installation views



Dividing her eyes on lines 2014
voile, wood,
118 × 133 cm



Dividing her eyes on lines 2014 (Detail)
voile, wood,
118 × 133 cm



Blank magic parralactic 2014

glitter, linen, acrylic, voile, euromir,

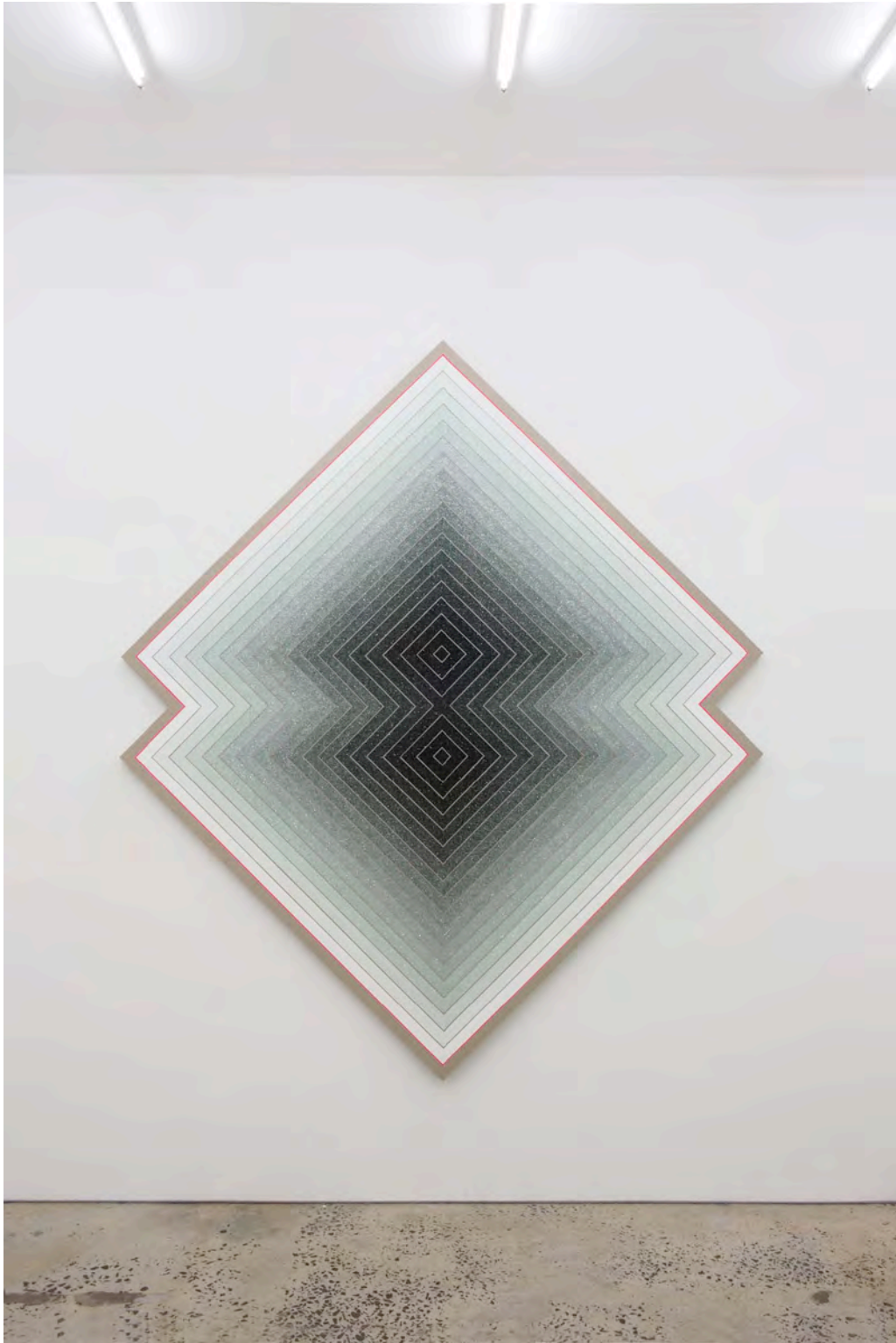
119 × 134 cm



Let's fuck (desert meadow) 2014
voile, wood, 118 × 133 cm



installation view



Moon to a flea is a diamond to a pea 2014

glitter, acrylic on Belgian linen,

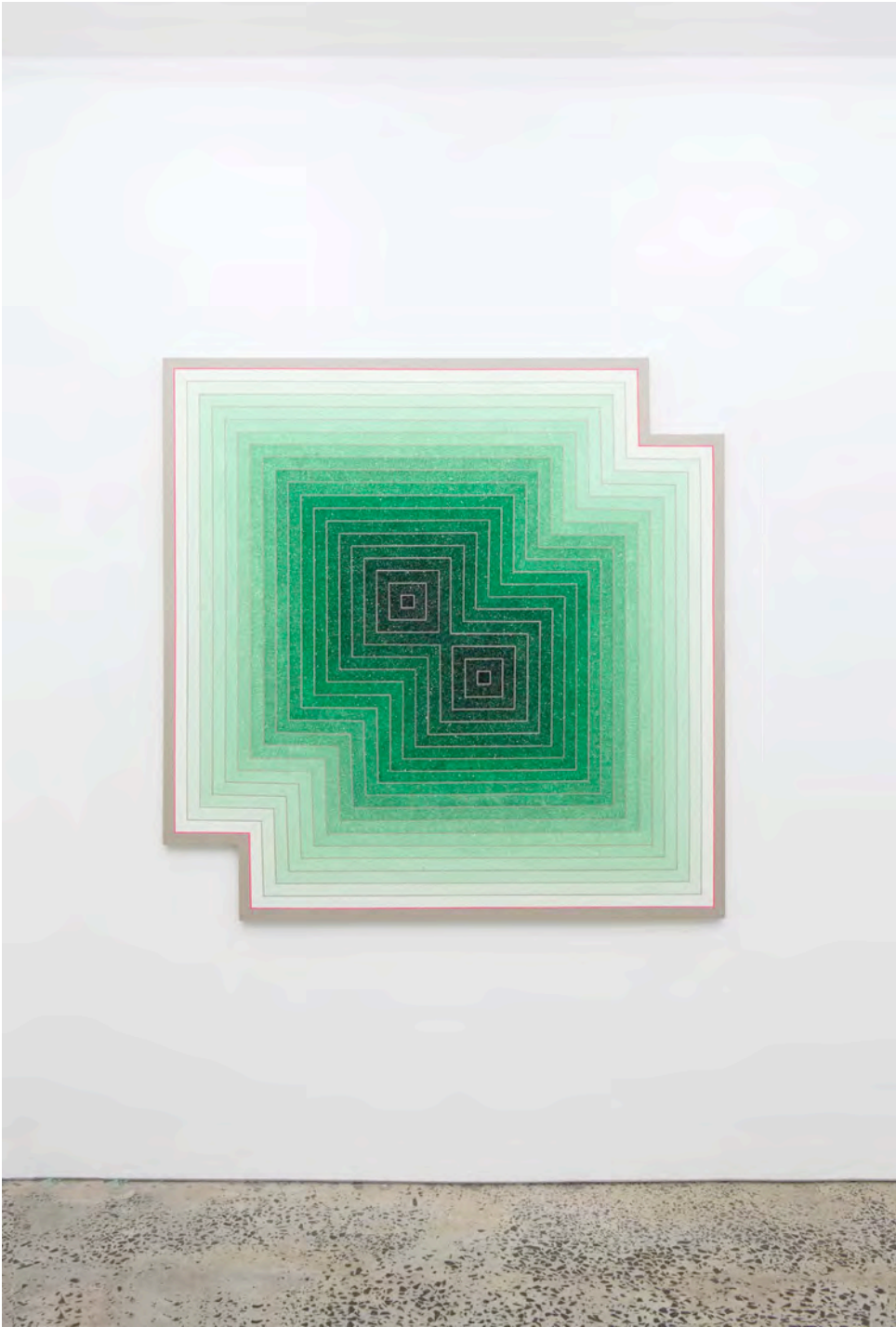
196 × 226 cm



Moon to a flea is a diamond to a pea 2014 (detail)

glitter, acrylic on Belgian linen,

196 × 226 cm



Cosmic transmystic 2014

glitter, acrylic on Belgian linen

160 × 226 cm



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