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Derek Hill: Flaw

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Myles Meehan Gallery, Darlington Arts Centre, Darlington, U.K.

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In his current exhibition, "Flaw," at Darlington Arts Centre, Derek Hill presents a series of ten large abstract paintings that are produced through a wide range of methods and media. Hill uses the combination of industrial chemicals and oil paints to create monstrous compositions that suggest organic processes and biological forms.



Flaw, installation view at Myles Meehan Gallery, 2009;

Derek Hill, *Untitled II* (from "Flaw" series), 2007-2009. Industrial solvent based mixed media, oil color on canvas on board, 244 x 305 cm. Courtesy the artist.

There is a strong industrial grounding to the work, which glistens throughout, but the displacement of the oils in the pigment at times imbues the work with darker connotations, reminiscent of oil spills or discarded footprints of a post-industrial world. The multiple layers are produced with uncompromising patience, creating a luminosity and translucency. In other paintings, such as *Untitled V*, Hill displays a more painterly approach, staining the canvas to produce hues with great depth, taking on the qualities of aerial photographs.

The autobiographical nature of the series is expressed strongly by Hill, the inspiration being rooted in a near fatal tropical illness, streptococcus septicaemia, which he contracted whilst traveling extensively. As Hill states: "The infection I picked up was rare and one which almost claimed my life and has been a key source for my artistic practice ever since." Indeed, the displacement of the oil on the paintings' surfaces form tessellations that could have originated in biological Petri dishes. This also reminds us of the biological nature of paint and oil, which sit together with unease on the canvas, separated into their own colonies, sharing space, but never intruding into each other's domain.



Derek Hill, *Untitled V*, (from “Flaw” series), 2007-2009. Industrial solvent based mixed media, oil color on canvas on board, 183 x 183 cm. Courtesy the artist;

Derek Hill, *Untitled VI*, (from “Flaw” series), 2007-2009. Industrial solvent based mixed media, oil color on canvas on board, 183 x 183 cm. Courtesy the artist.

However, the work also manages to express joyfulness throughout. It certainly glimpses strongly towards abstract expressionism and post-painterly abstraction; the processes used produce paintings that evoke feelings reminiscent of an industrial Morris Louis or Willem De Kooning.



Derek Hill, *Untitled VIII*, (from “Flaw” series), 2007-2009. Industrial solvent based mixed media, oil color on canvas on board, 183 x 214 cm. Courtesy the artist;

Derek Hill, *Untitled III* (from "Flaw" series), 2007-2009. Industrial solvent based mixed media, oil color on canvas on board, 244 x 305 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Some of the paintings are worked over with abstract shapes and lines produced with a glue gun, providing a playful, surrealistic movement to the top layers. The effect is startling, with Miró-esque configurations dissecting the multiple coats of oil, paint and solvent. The exhibition is a pleasure to encounter, with Hill expressing competence and knowledge of his chosen medium that can only have been gathered from a sustained and laborious process of experimentation.

The exhibition space, split into two connecting rooms, houses Hill's large-scale paintings with ease. Viewed in this way, the work takes on a different character, radiating a joyful, warm sensation, but never stepping too far away from a more somber restlessness. However, time must be spent viewing each work individually, no doubt due to the laborious nature of their production, requiring the spectator to consider layers upon layers that unite to create paintings fused together without conflict; an *uncanny* pleasure to view.

