

## BIOGRAPHY

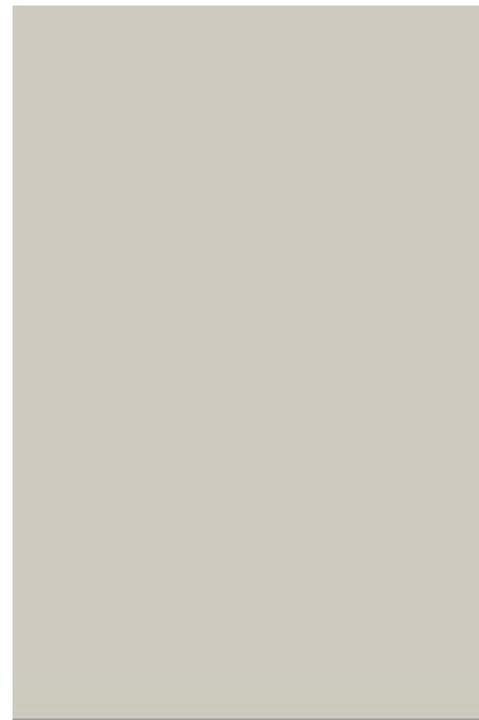
Gavin Hipkins was born in Auckland, New Zealand in 1968. He completed a BFA at the University of Auckland in 1992, and an MFA at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada in 2002. He lives and works in Wellington, New Zealand where he teaches in the School of Fine Arts at Massey University.

Group exhibitions include: *Picturing Eden* International Museum of Photography and Film, George Eastman House, Rochester, USA, 2006; *Vision Express International* Ming Yuan Arts Center, Shanghai, China, 2005; *A Molecular History of Everything* Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia, 2004; *Metropolitan Iconographies: 25<sup>th</sup> Sao Paulo Biennale* Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2002; *How Extraordinary that the World Exists!* CCAC Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, Oakland, USA, 2002; *Flight Patterns* Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA, 2000; *Arte 2000* Palazzo Re Rebaudengo, Guarene d' Alba, Italy, 2000; *Every Day: 11<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia, 1998.

Gavin Hipkins is represented by Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington, and Starkwhite, Auckland, New Zealand.

[www.hamishmckaygallery.com](http://www.hamishmckaygallery.com)  
[www.starkwhite.co.nz](http://www.starkwhite.co.nz)

*The Village* 2002-06  
set of 20 inkjet vinyl prints 300x105cm (120x42")  
archival inkjet prints 150x50cm (60x20")



GAVIN HIPKINS  
THE VILLAGE

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## GAVIN HIPKINS THE VILLAGE

Walking into *The Village*, one is dwarfed by Gavin Hipkins' monumental three-metre banners cascading from ceiling to floor. Uniformly spaced around the gallery, exaggerated details are juxtaposed with giant swatches of colour, forming a grid. The disparate fragments coalesce intriguingly, albeit with an oblique logic. Despite the richly appealing array of colour and form, a dark and unsettling undertone lurks omnipresent. The details look forensic.

Closely scrutinised everyday objects are rendered strange, something sinister implied in their deserted stillness. A house on fire with smoke billowing out pollutes the clear blue sky. Rows of hair-swatches are mysteriously strung up along a wall. Nearby—motionless and always photographed from behind—the immaculate hairstyles of anonymous women, who have turned away, become fetishised. Each image represents both presence and absence. An elaborate knocker of a closed door, a bridle without a horse, Hipkins portrays a ghost-town, void of life. A rope, harness, fishing nets, anchor and antiquated deep-sea diving suit, all seem permeated with a similar weight. Are these merely anodyne depictions of traditional utilities, or deeper cultural metaphors of restraint, capture and containment?

Clothing incorporating headwear in which the physical body is never visible is a reoccurring motif throughout his work. Always alluding to the corporeal whilst concealing the implied details, Hipkins' signature hood appears in the form of an army-green jacket. Slumped over and hood downcast, the face is obscured in darkness. Referencing both the history and nature of photography, the images reveal the camera's accepted ability to record reality and its equal capacity for concealing truth, allowing plenty of room for slippage in the 'evidence' of representation. Never telling the entire story, photographs depict a fragment of time, refusing to reveal what is outside the moment, and outside the frame.

A combination of snap-shots, documentation, surrealism and modernist ideals, his isolated details unfurl as prototypes. A prize-winning rose on display outside a quaint cottage, a picturesque waterfall and the surfer's ideal wave are interspersed with nostalgic, vernacular artefacts gleaned from museums; remnants that evoke New Zealand's colonial past. Hipkins traces the bits and pieces we have left behind; symbols used to define a nation, implying a fixed notion of a complex history, merge to tell its 'story'. The opacity of photography and the selective nature

of memory lends credence to the chronicle. Their story is of European colonisation and neglects to include the longer history of the indigenous Maori. In this way, the haunting, ghostly presence depicted in Hipkins' featureless portraits also indicates the shift in the occupation of land. Continuing his exploration of the fraught nature of nationhood, his carefully selected images conflate fact and fiction, inviting viewers to contemplate the 'idea' of New Zealand; a paradise with spectacular landscapes that have remained relatively unspoiled; a perfect tourist destination.

Each image rests against a vibrant block of colour, sampled from the picture. Referencing both art history and commercial advertising, the colour fields do more than thread the series together. Presented like swatches of a Pantone Guide, we are instantly familiar with this colour matching system. Due to scale and materiality, we associate the banners with exterior advertising billboards, consumerism, and life-style promotion, they stand uneasily and appear out-of-place inside. The blank blocks of colour seem to necessitate a slogan or at least a logo. We anticipate "FOR SALE" and a phone number above the perfect house with a blooming garden. But if it's going to sell, the colour should be bright red not muted dark-blue.

As the images rely on each other to suggest a narrative, so too, the colour blocks feed from their figurative complements, while the installation interprets their context. Hipkins describes his vertical banners as hanging "like memorabilia from a folklorist fascist parade", but they are reminiscent also of ancient scrolls, religious scriptures and memorials in general, while contemporary use of this format is ubiquitous as display signage and advertising. Hipkins' recontextualising of the familiar elicits new and nuanced interpretations.

We look to images for understanding and to impart a truth, but they never give us a complete picture. Hipkins' series illustrates the limits of representation. While the contextualised, figurative elements communicate a 'fact', the corresponding blank colour fields—referencing abstract, monochrome painting—allow the viewer a space for contemplation; to project and reflect. Hipkins sets up a dialogue between these two counterparts, creating, as it were, a third space where depiction and interpretation allow expansive and inclusive new realities.

**Karra Rees**

**Curator** Centre for Contemporary Photography

1. In conversation with Gavin Hipkins 2005



above  
*The Village* installation view (detail)  
Starkwhite, Auckland, July 2006

l-r  
*The Village (Bird)*  
*The Village (Falls)*  
*The Village (Angel)*  
*The Village (Anchor)*  
overleaf l-r  
*The Village (Blonde)*  
*The Village (Horse)*  
*The Village (Hood)*  
*The Village (House)*

