

# **Neither Spectacularly Successful, Nor a Spectacular Failure**

**Ida Lawrence**

**Curated by Jane Gillespie, Sebastian Henry-Jones, Harriet Reid & An Sheng**

**19–24 October 2016**

**Sydney College of the Arts, Rozelle**

## **Artist Biography**

Ida Lawrence is a visual artist from Sydney. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting at the Sydney art school situated in an old gaol, and received First Class Honours in Sculpture at the one in a former mental asylum. During 2010–2013 she was based in Indonesia while also studying at the Indonesian Arts Institute, Yogyakarta.

Ida has held solo exhibitions in Japan, Indonesia and Australia and her work has been included in group exhibitions such as The 15th Asian Art Biennale, Dhaka, Bangladesh (2012) and Sculpture By The Sea, Bondi (2013). She has been an artist in residence in Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and exotic Leichhardt, Sydney and her practice has included working collaboratively with visual artists, writers, musicians, actors, film makers and dancers. Her practice spans painting, installation, drawing, performance, and she delights in writing fictional biographies.

## **Works**

**Clockwise from door**

**Pale Imitation (Blue and White Zigzags I)**  
acrylic on canvas, 33 x 26 cm; Black & Gold Regular Household Wipe

**Pale Imitation (White and Blue Zigzags)**  
acrylic on canvas, 122 x 102 cm

**Plastic mesh (oranges bags)**

**Plastic mesh (onion bags)**

## **Table**

**Pale Imitation (Cadmium Red Diagonals)**  
acrylic on canvas, 90 x 45 cm;

**Pale Imitation (Cadmium Red Spirals)**  
acrylic on canvas, 48 x 44 cm;

## Essay

Why do we privilege certain things over others? Why is it that a painting of a stained-handkerchief is given more consideration and is thought of as being more superior to a real stained-handkerchief? Why is it that a few hurried and patchy painted shapes applied to a kitschy bed sheet transform the bed sheet into something that is not of this world, but something better than it? Why do we always consider the work of art to be more magnificent than the thing it represents, especially if the art itself is not particularly considered but rather scanty or meager? Can the work of art really be better than the original thing itself?

These are just a few of the questions raised when considering the work of Sydney artist Ida Lawrence, who's practice is grounded in the avant-garde desire to be universal. Lawrence's work is concerned with the ordinary, reimagining and reinterpreting of domestic objects to create paintings which expose both the beauty and imperfection of everyday life. Lawrence's paintings recreate the patterns found in mass produced throw-away items such as Chux wipes and mesh fruit bags. In order to make her work share the common fate of things Lawrence deliberately avoids conveying any artistic ambitions through signs of intense labor, daunting complexity, immaculate execution or serious themes. Instead she creates paintings that purposefully fail, that are not strong works of art, that are neither spectacularly successful, nor spectacular failures. This representation allows the viewer to stop and contemplate the objects that we use every day, in order for us to consider, what art critic and philosopher Boris Groys calls, the 'thingness' of things. Groys argues that this kind of representational painting which Lawrence employs reveals things which would stay unnoticed if it not represented by artistic practice, stating that "It is art that shows us our way of existing in the world."<sup>1</sup> By privileging the 'thingness' of a Chux wipe or mesh bag, Lawrence questions both the value of art and ordinary objects, with the result being works which have disbanded with the ambition to create 'strong' paintings but instead bridge the gap between the everyday and the ideal.

Lawrence's ability to create such eloquent but casual paintings of such mundane objects allows audiences to discover the beauty in such unassuming materials. Her compositions reward those who observe closely and carefully, as those are the people who will ask the question; which one is the true masterpiece? The intention of this exhibition is not to deconstruct the medium of painting in order to be able to answer this question, but rather to abandon the conventional considerations of painting such as composition, colour scheme and content, instead leaving painting open and provisional. This technique as Roland Barthes once stated, "outplay[s] the paradigm of [the] medium, and continually baffle[s] it".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys, *In the Flow*, (London: Verso), 2016, 115–116

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes cited in Raphael Rubinstein, "Provisional Painting at Modern Art," *Contemporary Art Daily*, last modified May 4, 2011, <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2011/05/provisional-painting-at-modern-art/>