

MASON KIMBER

A CARESSING GAZE

Fragments

It seems straightforward to say that Kimber works with fragments, and the works he produces are themselves fragmentary. In each of them, there is some larger whole that is absent; each work is an attempt to indicate that absence while also creating something original.

Fragments describe a relationship between the studio and the world outside of it. While out and about, Kimber might take a cast of an object or texture and then bring that back to the studio. It might lie around in the studio until he decides to use it in a work.

Kimber uses fragments in two modes: either a selection of them is brought together to form a surface, or fragments, which might be pieces of material or partial images, are placed within frames. In the first mode, the fragment doesn't simply sit on the surface; it becomes part of it. The fragment constitutes the surface, together with other fragments. These fragments are bound together by a layer of material, which unifies them as a surface. A colour or tone might be used to emphasise this unity. In the second mode, a frame contains a fragment. The fragment, often coloured, sits within a shallow niche that appears to have been carved into the frame. In some works, there may be several of these niches in one frame, and they may contain fragments or be left empty. These two modes can also be described as part of a continuum; sometimes, the frame becomes an extensive surface, coincident with the work itself. At other times, works seem to have lost their frames, being fragments in the sense of not being framed.

Frames

Kimber's frames are thick and object-like and are generally not orthogonal. They appear to have been made by subtraction, as if material has been carved away from a larger whole. Though they often appear like fragments themselves, the frames exist to carry fragments within them. In many works, it is unclear if a fragment has been selected for a frame because it can be fitted to the contours of a niche, or if the niche and the frame itself have been made for the fragment. Frame and fragment share a relationship that challenges the conventional division between the frame and what is framed. Lines often move between fragment and frame, or impressions or carvings into the frame highlight similar shapes or contours in the fragment. Frame and fragment are thus symbiotic and specific to one another regardless of the found or imported nature of the fragment.

Walls

Works that are formed of surfaces have a relationship to the wall. Kimber often employs fresco painting techniques whereby a wall-like surface is prepared to receive pigment that then becomes part of the surface. Pencil outlines transfer shapes and images from preparatory drawings, providing a scaffolding for the painting. The prepared wall surface often contains fragments. The whole surface will then be painted over—or, rather, painted into. The painted images are architectural, though not in the sense of representing buildings. Rather, coloured shapes and planes overlap and interpenetrate to articulate depth and surface. Different levels of transparency and opacity modulate these effects. Projection from the surface and regression into it are both physical (an effect of the prepared surface, with its fragments) and illusory (an effect of the painting). Through being layered into the surface, the painted elements become part of the physical surface. The painted and the material surface continually exchange qualities. While the fragment–frame relationship is one of juxtaposition, the surface–image relationship is one of superimposition; surface and image spread across each other and constitute each other. Again, however, these frescoes are fragments. It appears as if Kimber might have removed them from a real wall, just as he takes casts of real objects and surfaces. The preparatory sketches appear more finished than the final painted images, which are more like studies.

Sets

Kimber uses set-construction techniques to make works. Frames are made from pieces of extruded polystyrene, with expanding foam binding them together and providing literal and formal cohesion. Mismatched pieces give the surface an unevenness, with lines, grooves and niches appearing. The resultant form is coated in render to unify the surface and to give the impression of solidity. Surfaces constructed from fragments involve the transfer of silicone moulds of objects to a material such as plaster. Hessian and paper pulp enable wall-like surfaces to be built up for the purposes of painting.

Set construction makes something 'fake' look real or convincing under certain conditions. Ordinary materials are made to look or perform like something more solid or significant. The work's relationship to an outside is staged in this way. Fragments and images are transferred through ordinary materials to take their place on a set. Sets are stages for play, for combination and recombination, make-believe, and reinterpretation.

Rubrics:

Fragments, Frames, Walls, Sets, Interiors

Mason Kimber's oeuvre raises what might initially seem to be a banal question: when are artworks finished? There might be a relatively simple answer: they are finished when they are encountered in a gallery and seen as a body of work. And yet, something about Kimber's work refuses this answer, even though in a gallery it certainly appears as a unified body. To understand this refusal, I want to try to get *behind* the work, though not in the sense of getting closer to some sort of truth or meaning. Rather, this sense of 'behind' is spatial and temporal. What is on the other side of these works? What preceded them? What do they suggest is ahead?

Interiors

In all its modes and variations, Kimber’s work interacts with two kinds of interiors: the interior of the studio and that of the gallery. In the studio, quite obviously, works are in the making. Fragments are arranged loosely in groups on the floor, on tables, or stacked against walls. Surfaces are in the process of being constructed and painted. Casts of objects are made and juxtaposed. Preparatory sketches are pinned up. The studio holds together relationships between materials, surfaces and ideas. It is a spatial substrate, an enveloping surface from which individual works emerge.

Work in progress is drawn out of this enveloping context to be mounted on the studio walls at eye level. Fragments and surfaces are arranged around the studio and elevated to the status of a work through the act of display, rather than through the completion of a process of fabrication. This act is theatrical; the work is being staged. The fragment’s initial ‘staginess’ will be disavowed through the processes of set construction that render it materially complete and believable. It will be freed from the studio to represent itself.

In the gallery, completed works are arranged to keep their distance from each other. They are self-contained, asserting their own wholeness and completeness, no matter how fragmentary their nature. As an interior, the studio appears to be more whole and integrated, the gallery more fragmented. And yet, the gallery presents what the studio stages. A curtain has been drawn back and a body of work revealed.

Rubrics

In writing a text such as this, one always needs to think in two directions: towards the work and towards writing about the work. The writing is not simply the outcome of the thinking, nor does it (nor should it be taken to) explain the work or its meaning in a general sense. Rather, it sets out a relationship to the work—in this case, my relationship. To make this happen, one needs to find a device to order fragments of thinking, to see how they might go together, heading towards a whole, just as Kimber does. In the foreword to his analysis of Francis Bacon’s oeuvre, Gilles Deleuze plainly describes the structure (and method) of his book as a series of rubrics.¹ Each of these delimits a particular facet visible in Bacon’s paintings. These rubrics overlap, but there is a logic to their sequence—the ‘logic of sensation’ that is the subtitle of the book and the horizon of Deleuze’s analysis. I admire the structure of that book as much as I do Deleuze’s analysis of the paintings.

However, I have never been completely sure about how to use a rubric. I know it functions as a title, and it can also be a kind of framework. It’s a shorthand, or at least a shortened form of something longer that would unfold from it, and which it would structure. There is also the sense that a rubric is handed along; it has a degree of authority, but it must be actioned or put into practice. I realise now that the rubrics I have used are inherited or at least preexisting. Perhaps Deleuze would say they are immanent (as, indeed, is his thinking in the kind of formal analysis I have attempted). They structure my thinking in a way that might become visible only in the act of writing, which is an act of sequencing and ordering, two concepts that Deleuze also uses in prefacing his work. Rubrics come to the fore when I encounter things in the world and try to make sense of them. Becoming conscious of them was generative for me. It enabled me to get behind Kimber’s work, and it was a way of delimiting my interest in it. ‘Fragments’ was given by the work, but ‘frames’, ‘walls’, ‘sets’ and ‘interiors’ are the rubrics I think with daily. With them in hand, I walk around Kimber’s exhibition more aware of what it means for the work to be finished, and what constitutes the ordering of my own thinking.

By Charles Rice

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation*, trans. Daniel W Smith, Continuum, London, 2003, p ix.

Strata (Blue) 2021

Synthetic polymer paint, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
60 x 46 x 5 cm
Private collection

Strata (Dwelling) 2021

Synthetic polymer paint, gypsum, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
69 x 55 x 5 cm

Strata (Keystone) 2021

Synthetic polymer paint, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
65 x 90 x 5 cm
Private collection

Strata (Patina) 2021

Synthetic polymer paint, composite render, resin, extruded polystyrene, wood
54 x 43 x 5 cm
Private collection

Strata (Step) 2021

Synthetic polymer paint, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
83 x 60 x 5 cm
Private collection

Tablet/Afterglow 2023

Synthetic polymer paint, gouache, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
84 x 60 x 6 cm
Private collection

Tablet/Flare 2023

Synthetic polymer paint, gouache, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
82 x 60 x 6 cm
Private collection

Tablet/Passage 2023

Synthetic polymer paint, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
85 x 60 x 6 cm
Private collection

Club Bay View 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, pencil, gouache on modelling compound, hessian, wood
88 x 64 x 4 cm

Cracked Steps 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, pencil, modelling compound, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
57 x 79 x 9 cm

Elevation 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, pencil, modelling compound, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
58 x 50 x 7 cm

Fragments 2025

Gypsum
Dimensions variable

Keystone 2 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, pencil, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
125 x 90 x 3.5 cm

Morning Window 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, modelling compound, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
55 x 83 x 6 cm

Perimeters of Light 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, pencil, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
125 x 90 x 3.5 cm

Pockets 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, modelling compound, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
90 x 113 x 7 cm

Skyfade 2025

Synthetic polymer paint, paper pulp, hessian, composite render, extruded polystyrene, wood
92 x 80 x 7 cm

All works courtesy of the artist, unless otherwise noted.