

Digital dreams

DOUGLAS COUPLAND PAINTS THE PRESENT

BY DAVID JAGER

Douglas Coupland has spent two decades revealing the unsettling implications lurking under the shiny digital surfaces of late capitalism. Now he sets his mind on this century.

Welcome To The Twenty-First Century's is vintage Coupland, shiny, Lego clean and depersonalized in a friendly way, with the digital referenced in every reprocessed image.

A Tom Thomson pine is redone in geometric pixel shapes and soothing autumnal shades. A Lawren Harris landscape is abstracted until it appears to be the clean laser copy of a corporate logo.

In the back room, Coupland's grey abstractions of the IBM clean room are reminiscent of early cubism and suprematism, proving that the old can recycle itself in unexpected ways.

Large QR code paintings recall Mondrian; one is entitled QR Boogie-Woogie No. 5. Scan them with your iPhone and a philosophically wistful statement appears. A series of sculptural towers, shiny spikes of stacked pastel-coloured rings, betray Coupland's new fascination with bold colours.

Text paintings the size of small band posters deliver random bits of Coupland's state-of-the-21st-century address: "In the future everyone will shop from jail" and "All governments seem to be winging it except for China." Such soft lobs of irony and whateverness are Coupland's shoulder-shrugging specialty, hitting our over-saturated neurons like online banners.

Not that there's any arguing with his vision. Can any of us remember what our minds were like before the internet, or tell us what we are turning into? If we think we know, Coupland seems to be saying, we're lying to ourselves.