









DEVONPORT  
REGIONAL  
GALLERY





*Portrait of an Art Student, 1976*  
Oil on Linen, 130 x 121 cm. Collection: The artist

When Jean Thomas established The Little Gallery in 1966, it was the first art gallery on the North West Coast. The launch took place on 29 November 1966 with a solo exhibition of Christopher Pyett's paintings and drawings. Jean Thomas' vision for the Gallery was to create a centre for community arts and activities. Her aim was to promote Tasmanian artists and to provide an impartial program of appreciation with the inclusion of national and international exhibitions.

Jean Thomas purchased a variety of art works, including works by Christopher Pyett which are now included in the Devonport Regional Gallery's Permanent Collection. On her retirement, she encouraged the local Devonport Council to purchase The Little Gallery, marking its evolution from a semi-commercial community gallery into a regional art gallery. Inspired by Jean Thomas's vision and work, the Devonport Regional Gallery continues to collect contemporary Tasmanian art, craft and design and similarly encourages community participation, artistic excellence and inspirational art-related conversations.

When Georgia Rouette first approached the Gallery in late 2008 to discuss a potential survey exhibition of Christopher Pyett's paintings and tapestry designs, it was a welcome opportunity to showcase the artist's work since that first involvement in 1966. The exhibition *Christopher Pyett: symphony in colour* not only celebrates the artist's career, it acknowledges the development of a Tasmanian artist, now living in Victoria.

Christopher Pyett is not only recognised as an exceptional colourist, but has also gained a reputation for his designs in tapestry. Pyett's most recent accolade was the design for a portrait of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra which featured as the centrepiece for the launch of the newly built gallery in December 2008. Pyett's colourful, mainly abstract paintings and tapestry designs open vistas for a variety of interpretive possibilities.

Dr Ellie Ray  
Director, Devonport Regional Gallery



Christopher Pyett: symphony in colour

*Ruminations from the curator*

*Christopher Pyett, symphony in colour* spans the notable 44-year career of a Tasmanian artist who is well known for his vibrant, evocative gouaches and designs for tapestries. The Little Gallery, run by Jean Thomas and situated behind the (now) Devonport Regional Gallery, opened its doors to the public in 1966 with a solo exhibition by Pyett and again celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an exhibition of his works. Inspired by colour and classical music, Pyett's abstract works are highly suggestive, liquid and resonating with movement.

This exhibition includes works, paintings and tapestries, taken from both private and public collections and spanning the career of this highly talented artist. *Christopher Pyett, symphony in colour* interprets the work of an artist who has travelled extensively and manifests a unique approach to the gouache medium and exuberance in tapestry design.

Georges Braque once said: *There is only one thing valuable in art; the thing you cannot explain.*

And in the danger of fortuitously engendering indulgence or artifice through words, the curator will remain silent and surrender the platform to the artist and his art.

Georgia Rouette, 2010

*Surf Beach Flinders Island, after Peter Grimes, 2006*  
Gouache, 100 x 136 cm. Collection: The artist



*Ploughed Patterns, Forth, 2006*  
Gouache, 36 x 40 cm. Collection: The artist

Christopher Pyett

I began painting around the age of 5 or 6, with a box of Cole's watercolours that came with a little yellow-handled brush. At that time I painted rows of green cabbages on the red soil of our garden.

I studied painting from 1961 to 1964 at the Hobart Technical College. They were years of immense happiness and to this day I remember them with much fondness. I feel fortunate to have studied painting before Australia became smothered by international art magazines. We received a solid grounding in painting and drawing and were not influenced in this task by the latest fashions from New York or London.

At art school I came into contact with staff for which I felt an ever growing respect. I should like to pay tribute to three in particular: Dorothy Stoner, Jack Carrington Smith and George Davis. All three possessed a strong personal philosophy about painting, and each influenced my creative development and provided a foundation on which I could build a career. I have been, and remain, very grateful for all they taught me 50 years ago.

Tasmania has a strong tradition of landscape painting and I grew up surrounded by this influence. Towards the end of my time at Art School I became increasingly influenced by classical music and particularly the inventiveness necessary to successfully compose for a symphony orchestra.

Apart from a few fleeting love affairs, my creative influences have been analytical rather than expressionist. I have always been drawn to painters whose work demonstrated sound painting, good drawing and inventive colour.

I admire the drawings and paintings of Godfrey Miller, particularly the structure of his paintings combined with his mystical palette. I consider Miller's drawings, along

with the drawings of Georges Braque and Pierre Bonnard, to be the essence of what drawing should be. The paintings Braque completed in the latter years of his life are among his greatest. They display brilliance in colour, pattern and composition. I enjoy Bonnard for his decorative beauty and exquisite use of colour. He was, I think, the greatest analytical colourist I have seen.

Among my very favourite painters is the English artist Sir Stanley Spencer RA. Spencer was a Slade student and a brilliant draughtsman. His highly inventive use of pattern has always attracted me.

Edouard Vuillard was another of my influences. As my interest in colour developed I looked for media that produced colour in both a flat and intense way. I experimented with a method of painting used by Vuillard known as distemper; a medium that allows both flatness and the transparency of colour. My use of distemper lasted for only a short time, but it did lead me to painting in gouache, a medium I have used exclusively since the late 1980s.

In 1985 I received my first commission to design a large tapestry for BHP. This was my first experience working with the Victorian Tapestry Workshop and the discovery of tapestry as a medium was magical. The BHP tapestry was the first of 33 commissions, both private and public, that I have completed.

While it is impossible here to describe what tapestry offered me, I can say that my knowledge and understanding of colour grew considerably. The weaving techniques used in good tapestry result in a great richness of colour. As Georges Seurat found, the medium of tapestry allows colour to mix on the way to the eye, a realisation that influenced his method of painting.

I am interested in the character of the weather and in the early 1990s I devoted a year to painting the sky. I completed 365 small paintings, each undertaken at 6.30 in the morning and all from the same position. I was satisfied with this extensive series and felt the concentration on pattern and decoration I found in the sky important.

As I searched for ways to better display colour, I found I was drawn to expressing my thoughts with abstract forms. My paintings to this point were usually inspired by a series of colours, a quote, a friend, a memory, a place or music.

In his studies of colour, Josef Albers suggests using collage assembled from hand-painted paper as a consistent way of working. It is a technique that allows some initial planning in the placement of colour. I researched colour using this method over several years, which in turn led to the 'Arch and Slab' series. My 'Arch and Slab' paintings are built only on colour, its rhythm and character. They strive, by the use of repeated themes and subtle variations, to orchestrate colour. These paintings, some of which are in this exhibition, started in late 2008 and represent what I feel is a major development in my work.

Christopher Pyett, 2010

#### SELECTED REFERENCE

*Tasmanian artists of the twentieth century: painters, sculptors, printmakers and photographers 1900-1985*, Sue Backhouse, Pandani Press, Tasmania, 1988

*Artists and galleries of Australia*, Max Germaine, Boolarong, Brisbane, 1984

*The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, Alan McCulloch, Susan McCulloch and Emily McCulloch Childs, AUS ART EDITIONS in association with THE MIEGUNYAH PRESS, 2006

*Artists' tapestries from Australia 1976-2005*, Sue Walker, The Beagle Press, Roseville. NSW, 2007





*Morning Skies No 1 (from the series of 365), 1997-1998*

Gouache, 80 x 70 cm. Collection: The artist

*Beethoven Symphony No 2* 1966

Oil on canvas, 60 x 47 cm. Collection: Devonport Regional Gallery

*Leonore, No 3 Opus 72*, 1966

Oil on canvas, 60 x 47 cm. Collection: Devonport Regional Gallery



*Portrait of Barbara*, 2007

Gouache, 57 x 38 cm. Collection: The artist



*Tasmanian Pastoral No 2*, 2005  
Gouache, 40 x 34 cm. Collection: The artist

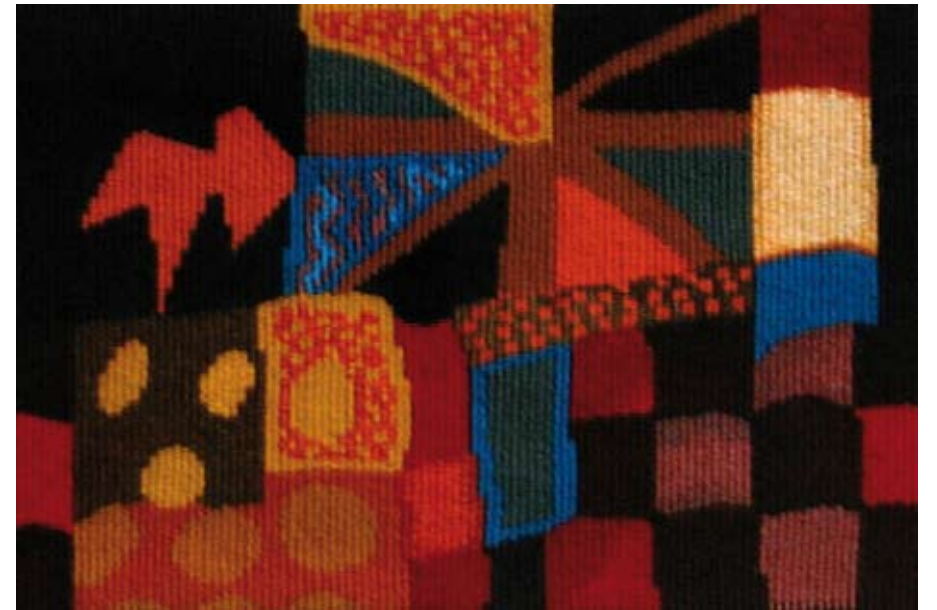


*Orange Soil, Forth*, 2006  
Gouache, 36 x 30 cm. Collection: The artist





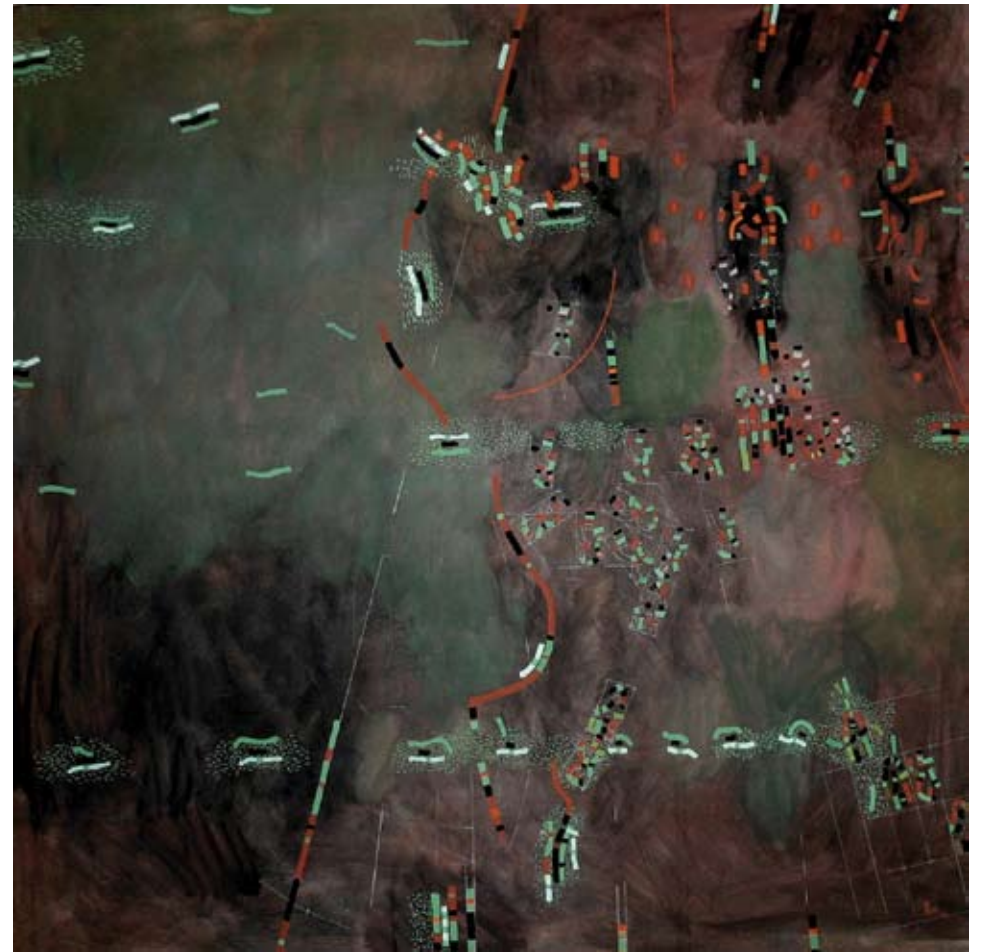
*Le Roi Lear after Hector Berlioz, 2006*  
Tapestry, Woven by Barbara Mauro, Melbourne, 40 x 48 cm. Collection: The artist



*Cat The Pageant Tapestry (detail) 2006*  
45 x 76 cm. Collection: The artist



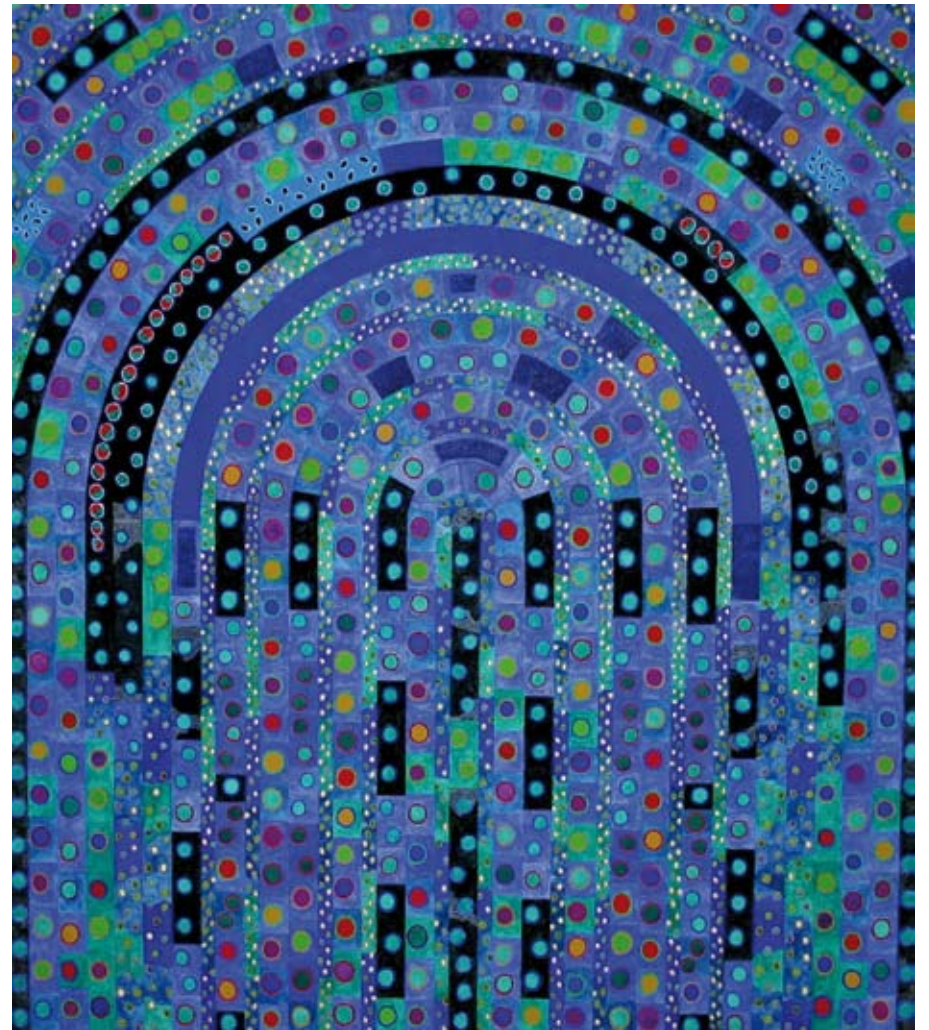
*Don Heads Tasmania, 2007*  
Gouache, 106 x 120 cm. Collection: The artist  
*The Potato Fields, 2008*  
Gouache, 91 x 91 cm. Collection: The artist







*Arch & Slab No 1 Beyond Blue, 2009*  
Gouache, 100.6 x 184 cm. Collection: The artist  
*Arch & Slab No 2, 2009*  
Gouache, 100.6 x 94 cm. Collection: The artist







*Arch & Slab No 5 'Ambrose'*, 2010  
Gouache, 104 x 101 cm. Collection: The artist



*Arch & Slab No 7 'Miss Benjafield'*, 2010  
Gouache, 102.4 x 94.8 cm. Collection: The Artist



*Arch & Slab No 3, 2009*  
Gouache, 200.4 x 94 cm. Collection: The artist

LIST OF WORKS:

*Dead Bird, 1965*

Oil on canvas

150 x 200 cm

Collection: The artist

*Beethoven Symphony No.2, 1965*

Oil on canvas

75.7 x 60.7 cm

Collection: Devonport Regional Gallery

*Leonore No 1, Opus 138, 1966*

Oil on Canvas

75.7 x 60.7 cm

Collection: Devonport Regional Gallery

*Leonore No 2, Opus 72, 1966*

Oil on Canvas

76 x 60.8 cm

Collection: Devonport Regional Gallery

*Portrait of an Art Student, 1976*

Oil on Linen

13 x 121 cm

Collection: Devonport Regional Gallery

*Forth River, 1966*

Oil on board

40.3 x 45.2 cm

Collection: The artist

*Abu Hassan, 1974*

Acrylic on Canvas

173 x 124.6 cm

Collection: Tasmanian Museum & Art  
Gallery

*Winter Dreams, 1976*

Oil on Canvas

130 x 90 cm

Private collection, Melbourne

*Morning Skies No 1 (from the series of  
365), 1997-1998*

Gouache

80 x 70 cm

Collection The artist

*Morning Skies No 2 (from the series of  
365), 1997-1998*

Gouache

80 x 70 cm

Collection of the artist)

*Morning Skies No 3 (from the series of  
365), 1997-1998*

Gouache

80 x 70 cm

Collection: The artist

*Morning Skies No 4* (from the series of 365), 1997-1998  
Gouache  
80 x 70 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Morning Skies No.5* (from the series of 365), 1997-1998  
Gouache  
80 x 70 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Dr Sue Walker's Presentation Tapestry Painting* 2005  
Gouache  
58.2 x 106 cm  
Private collection, Melbourne

*Dr Sue Walker's Presentation Tapestry*, 2005  
Tapestry  
150 x 100 cm  
Woven by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop  
Private collection, Melbourne

*Le Roi Lear after Hector Berlioz*, 2004  
Gouache  
44 x 33 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Le Roi Lear after Hector Berlioz*, 2006  
Tapestry, Woven by Barbara Mauro,  
Melbourne  
40 x 48 cm  
Collection The artist

*The Pageant Tapestry*, 2006  
Tapestry, Woven by Barbara Mauro,  
Melbourne.  
45 x 76 cm  
Collection: The Artist

*Tasmanian Pastoral No 2*, 2005  
Gouache  
40 x 34 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Ploughed Patterns, Forth*, 2006  
Gouache  
36 x 40 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Orange Soil, Forth*, 2006  
Gouache  
36 x 30 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Ploughed Fields Meet the Bush, Forth*, 2006  
Gouache  
42 x 35 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Surf Beach Flinders Island, after Peter Grimes*, 2006  
Gouache  
100 x 136 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Portrait of Barbara*, 2007  
Gouache  
57 x 38 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Don Heads Tasmania*, 2007  
Gouache  
106 x 120 cm  
Collection: The artist

*The Potato Fields*, 2008  
Gouache  
91 x 91 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Arch & Slab No 1 Beyond Blue*, 2009  
Gouache  
100.6 x 184 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Arch & Slab No 2*, 2009  
Gouache  
100.6 x 94 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Arch & Slab No 3*, 2009  
Gouache  
200.4 x 94 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Arch & Slab No 4 'All art aspires to the condition of music'*, 2009  
Gouache  
224.5 x 115.4 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Arch & Slab No 5 'Ambrose'*, 2010  
Gouache  
104 x 101 cm  
Collection: The artist

*Arch & Slab No 6 'The Miss Lades'*, 2010  
Gouache  
100.5 x 100.5 cm  
Collection: The Artist

*Arch & Slab No 7 'Miss Benjafield'*, 2010  
Gouache  
102.4 x 94.8 cm  
Collection: The Artist





*Arch & Slab No 6 'The Miss Lades'*; 2010  
Gouache, 100.5 x 100.5 cm. Collection: The artist

#### BIOGRAPHY:

**18 Solo Exhibitions from 1966 including**  
The Little Gallery, Devonport  
Stuart Gerstman Galleries, Melbourne  
Solander Gallery, Canberra  
John Buckley Fine Art, Melbourne  
Freeman Galleries, Hobart  
Australian Galleries, Melbourne  
Antipodes Gallery, Sorrento

**22 Group Exhibitions from 1974 including**  
Victoria & Albert Museum, London  
Institute of Applied Art, St Petersburg  
Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

**5 Awards including**  
Tasmanian Art Gallery Purchase Prize,  
Hobart  
Georges Prize, Tasmania

**10 Invitation Prizes**

**31 Public and Private Collections**  
including  
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery,  
Hobart  
National Portrait Gallery, Canberra  
BHP Research Laboratories, Canberra

**34 Commissions including**  
Victorian Institute of Forensic  
Pathology, Victoria  
CSIRO Plant Research, Canberra  
Mr & Mrs Frank Lowy, Sydney  
Mr & Mrs Alan Myers, Melbourne

**Artist in Residence**  
Herald and Weekly Times Ltd 1992 &  
1993 Victoria

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The curator would like to thank Christopher Pyett who, over the last 12 years, has kindly given me access to his studio, his home, his thoughts and his direction. He is a great artist and a cherished friend. And thanks also to Barbara Pyett whose presence is so warm, welcoming and supportive.

I'd like to greatly thank Ellie Ray and her fabulous team at Devonport Regional Gallery for accepting to present this exhibition and for producing the exhibition catalogue.

The artist would like to thank Georgia Rouette, the curator and organiser of this exhibition. Georgia has been a friend for many years and I was pleased when she discussed the possibility of this exhibition. Georgia is not only a talented curator: she has also written two books on exhibition design and a guide for small museums. I am delighted she was able to curate this exhibition.

The Devonport Regional Gallery extend their gratitude to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery for kindly lending the work 'Abu Hassan'.

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