

List of Works

Vivienne BECK, *Tulle Garden*, 1976, etching, aquatint on paper, 28.2 x 17.9cm, acc. 1976.011

Paul BOAM, *Untitled*, 1971, oil on canvas, 71.5 x 62.4cm, acc. 1978.007

Mary BOWER, *Untitled*, n.d., colour screen print on paper, 64.5 x 84.0cm, acc. 1979.007

Vivienne BREHENEY, *Urban Series I*, 1984, colour etching, hand colouring, 59.0 x 50.0cm, acc. 1984.082

Vivienne BREHENEY, *Wharf Series*, 1982, colour etching, relief print, 40.7 x 33.6cm, acc. 1990.063

Timothy BURNS, *The long night, the sound of the water.*, 1994, 160.0 x 120.0cm (a), 160.0 x 120.0cm (b), acc. 2004.002

Denise CAMPBELL, *Untitled*, 1992, print media and gouache on paper, 76.0 x 160.0cm, acc. 1993.201

Karen CASEY, *God is on our Side*, 1991, oil on paper, 116.5 x 86.5cm, acc. 1992.048

Robert CLARKE, *Lost*, 1976, etching, 34.2 x 29.5cm, acc. 1976.005

John COBURN, *Fire Dance*, n.d., silkscreen print, 82.5 x 102.0cm, acc. 1991.061

Simon CUTHBERT, *The Problem with Concrete*, 2002, 78.0 x 90.0cm, acc. 2007.007

David HAWLEY, *Untitled*, 2009, mixed media on plywood, 68.5 x 237.0cm, acc. 2010.009

David MARTIN, *Sunpicture*, 2002-03, C type photograph, 110.0 x 76.0cm, acc. 2004.001.b

Anne MORRISON, *The Sentient Body*, 1997, oil on canvas, 203.0 x 160.0cm, acc. 2003.001

Michael MURUSTE, *Sea of Solitude*, 2002, oil on canvas, 183.0 x 122.0cm, acc. 2004.003

Susan PICKERING, *Fluent 3*, 1999, etching, 55.5 x 56.2cm, acc. 2001.011

Jon PLAPP, *Singular Kingdom*, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 75.0 x 82.3cm, acc. 1998.011

George RICHARDSON, *Golconda bush, autumn rain*, 1983, acrylic on canvas, 175.0 x 179.0cm, acc. 1983.084

Denise Ava ROBINSON, *Part and particle*, 2006, Coralline algae on paint on handmade paper, 40.0 x 110.0cm (each), acc. 2008.225.a-c

Paul SNELL, *Elliptic #201201*, 2012, lambda metallic print, 85.0 x 200.0cm, acc. 2012.004

Peter STEPHENSON, *30M Plan*, 1979, collage and acrylic on canvas, 150.4 x 175.6cm, acc. 1990.065

Jens WALDENMAIER, *Habitat – In Australia I*, 2009, archival pigment ink on Hahnemuhle pearl fibre paper, 110.0 x 110.0cm (sheet), acc. 2014.004

Jens WALDENMAIER, *In Shanghai V*, 2009, archival pigment ink on Hahnemuhle pearl fibre paper, 110.0 x 110.0cm (sheet), acc. 2014.001

Cover Image:

Jon PLAPP, *Singular Kingdom*, 1996, acrylic on canvas. DCC Permanent Collection. © Estate of Jon Plapp, courtesy Charles Nodrum Gallery.

Inside Images:

Paul Boam, *Untitled*, 1971, oil on canvas. DCC Permanent Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Vivienne BREHENEY, *Wharf Series*, 1982, colour etching, relief print. DCC Permanent Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Paul SNELL, *Elliptic #201201*, 2012, lambda metallic print. DCC Permanent Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Michael MURUSTE, *Sea of Solitude*, 2002, oil on canvas. DCC Permanent Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Exhibition: 13 January–18 February 2018

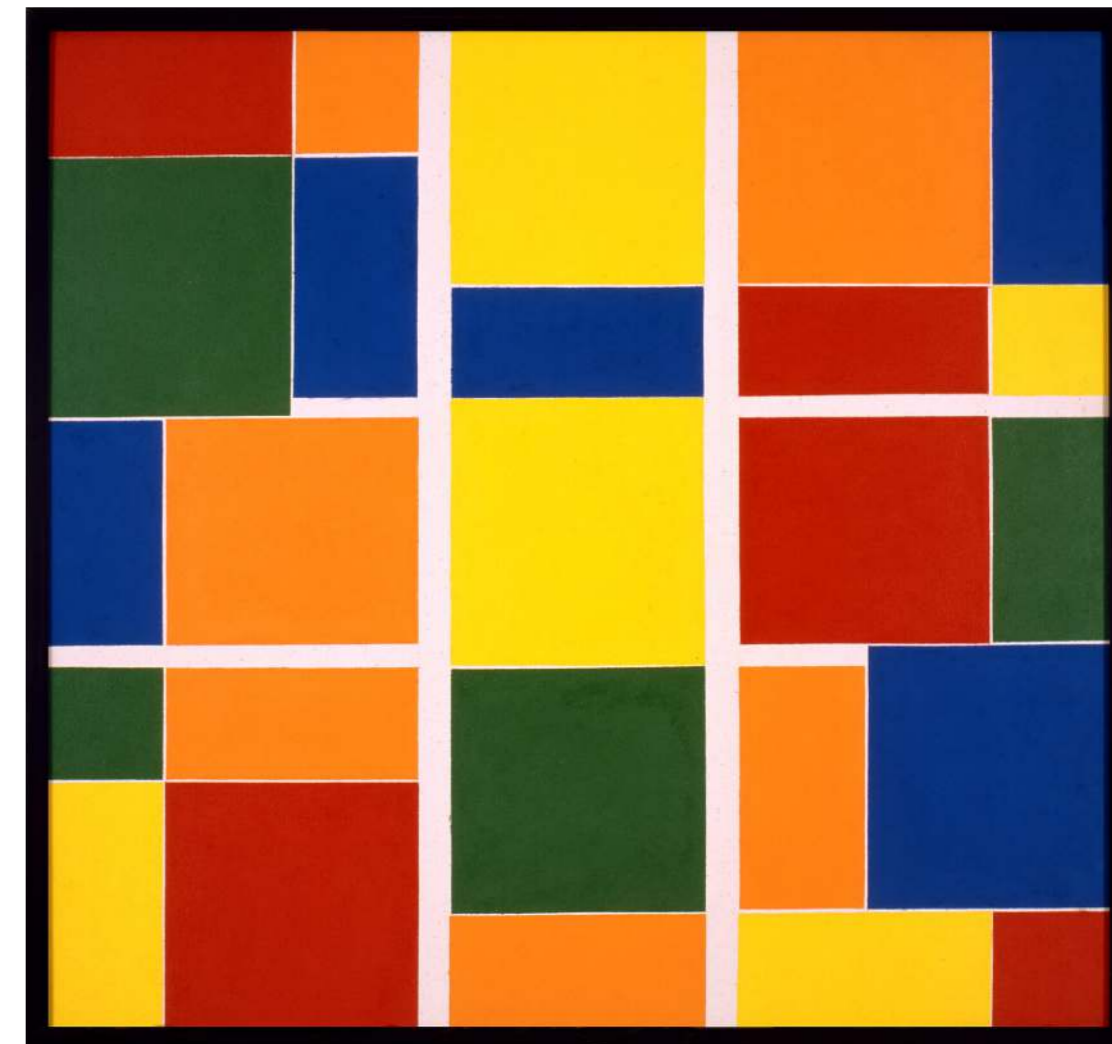
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‘There is no abstract art...’

There is no abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterwards you can remove all traces of reality. There's no danger then, anyway, because the idea of the object will have left an indelible mark.¹ – Pablo Picasso

Abstract art is often a source of confusion, seeming to pose more questions than answers. It can lead us to consider the nature, purpose or value of art, and how we think we should be able to respond to it. Much of this confusion about what to make of abstract art stems from our perception that it does not directly link to the world as we experience it. More often, it is self-referential, refers to the history of art, or it reflects the internal, highly personal world of the artist in seemingly obscure ways. The first end of the spectrum is arguably objective, concerned with the formal qualities of composition and colour, while the other is highly subjective, exploring the intuitive or emotional.

Emerging after the invention of photography, when it was no longer necessary to paint recognisable depictions of the world, many artists began to explore more subjective concepts, thoughts and emotions through their work. Different types of abstraction emerged; the energetic and romanticised abstract expressionism; the highly conceptual minimalism; the hard-edged geometric abstraction; and the optical illusions of op-art, designed to trick or overwhelm the eye. Though diverse, each of these styles can evoke an intense viewing experience. Part of this experience is seeking to find a point of entry into understanding the work, which we find easier in the case of the figurative – the recognisable. However, as stated by Picasso in the quote from which this exhibition title was taken, even abstract artists ‘...*must always start with something*’ – whether this ‘something’ be an influence, an idea, or an intention.

Many of the artists in this exhibition, the majority of whom are Tasmanian, find their starting point in nature. Timothy Burns cites 19th century Scandinavian painting, Japanese art and abstraction as influences. He uses blocks of solid colour to reference water, sand and sky, and often uses textured surfaces to create a sense of light reflecting along the surface of water, or wind moving through trees. Through her paintings, Anne Morrison has considered both the body and nature from micro and macro perspectives, resulting in works where organic forms appear as seemingly porous

patterns. Many of Susan Pickering’s works were inspired by pieces of music, however the landscape was also a prominent influence in her later works. After completing a residency at Lake St Clair, Pickering said ‘while remaining largely abstract, the landscape has insinuated its way into my art-making’ⁱⁱ.

John Coburn used vibrant colours and simple, suspended shapes to convey the Australian landscape, once stating simply ‘I want to express my feelings about nature and the world’ⁱⁱⁱ. Paul Boam has said that the landscape is almost always an influence on his work ‘but as a feeling, a sense of place, rather than a depiction’^{iv}. In some works, Boam’s geometric designs are overlaid with gestural brush strokes, walking the line between geometric abstraction and a more expressive painting style. Similarly, Michael Muruste’s works delve into experiences, rather than representations, of his surroundings. His focus lies in the process of creating a work, instead of the outcome. Process is also important for



David Hawley, whose practice centres on experimentation with methods, technologies and painting conventions, while questioning our assumptions about abstract art.

Though all working in abstraction, Jon Plapp, Vivienne Breheney and Paul Snell provide three examples of artists using different mediums and techniques, across different periods, with varied intentions; from experimentation with formal traditions of abstraction, to the expression of personal responses to place, or focusing on the viewer’s experience of their work. Having a greater understanding of these starting points, whether they be the influences, intentions or thoughts of the artist, opens up new meaning in these abstract works.

For example, Jon Plapp’s work *Singular Kingdom* is an example of geometric abstraction, and has been described as a distinctly sensitive example of the genre. Plapp began painting in this style in the 1980s, and while his works appear systematic and structured, his process was hands-on and instinctive. Plapp would tear his canvas to size, then use loose threads to measure and lay out a grid structure, holding the threads in place with tacks before drawing the grid lines free-hand. The grid motif is found throughout Plapp’s body of work. He would often work in series, and was said to have a clear vision for each work from the outset. He would experiment with a particular idea or theme which would evolve throughout his practice, such as the grid, which was softer and less defined in earlier works, while having a stronger, more defined border in later works. Though Plapp’s works seem concerned with formal elements, many of the artist’s titles are taken from the poetry of E.E. Cummings, with *Singular Kingdom* taken from the poem *If you and i awakening*. Cummings’ poems are deliberately disjointed with obscure uses of grammar, making the reading experience highly visual in a way that may be aligned with a viewing of Plapp’s paintings.

For Vivienne Breheney, the landscape has provided an ongoing source of inspiration for her works, particularly the North West coast of Tasmania where the artist grew up, and continues to live and work. Breheney’s painting and printmaking practice often takes abstract forms, however many of these works are representations of specific locations, often alluded to or directly named through a work’s



title. While earlier in her practice Breheney depicted the landscape in realistic, recognisable ways, she progressively began to adopt a more emotional perspective, which led to a new way of representing her surrounding environment, and a gradual reduction of recognisable elements in her work. Many of her abstract works contain distinct blocks or segments, while others such as *Wharf Series* are more gestural in their approach. For Breheney, as her work has shifted from representational to increasingly abstract, the subject matter of the Tasmanian landscape has not changed. Rather, the move to abstraction has allowed for a more emotional and subjective experience and interpretation of the landscape.

Like Breheney, Paul Snell has also found the natural environment to be an influence on his practice, with many

of the processes and considerations underlying his work reflecting systems and rhythms found in nature. Snell’s work provides viewers the opportunity to engage in a meditative experience, which may echo contemplative and tranquil experiences of the vast Tasmanian landscape. As is evident in *Elliptic # 201201*, Snell’s use of colour is vibrant and seductive, while lines of varying width create a sense of movement; a pulsating rhythm. The work is not an optical illusion, but the act of looking at it arouses a sensory experience. Snell cites geometric and hard-edged abstraction as influences on his work, and though he engages the use of technology, through digital and photographic processes, the experience of viewing works such as *Elliptic # 201201* more closely aligns with the feelings of awe and transcendence that have been associated with viewing abstract paintings.

These are just three examples of the ‘something’ that artists start with when working in abstraction. In 1990, arts writer Anna Moszynska suggested that both abstraction and representational art will continue to be made into the future, but that our preoccupation with the classification of artworks into traditional categories will likely continue to lessen’. Some of the artists in this exhibition identify as ‘abstract artists’ while others may find this label limiting or inaccurate.

Many work directly and consciously within the tradition of abstraction, while for others this genre is a subconscious mechanism for expressing their thoughts, experiences and emotional responses to the world. This move away from the classification of their art as figurative, abstract or otherwise could be considered in relation to the latter part of Picasso’s statement ‘*There’s no danger then, anyway, because the idea of the object will have left an indelible mark*’.

Erin Wilson
Curator

ⁱ Walthers, I.F. 2000. *Picasso*. Taschen, Los Angeles, p.60

ⁱⁱ Pickering, S. 2015. *Visual Artists – Sue Pickering - Tasmanian Arts Guide online*. (www.tasmanianartsguide.com.au/artists/visual-artists/sue-pickering/)

ⁱⁱⁱ John Coburn in Mitchell, A. 2000. *John Coburn: Spirit of Abstraction*. Australian Art Collector, Issue 14, October – December 2000, p.97.

^{iv} Email from the artist, 22 November 2017

^v Moszynska, A. 1990. *Abstract Art*. Thames and Hudson, London, p.229

