

# **EDUCATION KIT**

Ralph Balson

Janet Dawson

Lesley Dumbrell

Rosalie Gascoigne

Frank Hinder

Michael Johnson

Peter Kennedy

Robert Klippel

Bea Maddock

Clement Meadmore

Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri

Vernon Treweeke

### **GALLERY A: THE EXHIBITION**

Gallery A Sydney 1964–1983 has been produced to explore an important aspect of Australia's art history, with a specific focus on abstraction. This exhibition quite literally illustrates the art, artists and social context of Sydney from the 1960s to the 1980s through the history of Gallery A Sydney.

Gallery A originated in Melbourne in 1959 when furniture designer Max Hutchinson turned his showroom into a gallery for contemporary art. The success of this transformation led Hutchinson to relocate to a larger Melbourne premises and then to open a Sydney branch in 1964. This second Gallery A, in Paddington, quickly established a reputation as one of the city's leading galleries, 'a home of the purest, most painterly painting'.

Ann Lewis took over the official management of the gallery in 1970. Eventually Gallery A developed a more international focus with the Paddington gallery playing host to a number of abstract artists from New York, where another Gallery A branch had been established. Some of Australia's most innovative young artists received international attention as Gallery A sought to give our country a solid artistic identity on the world stage.

Gallery A was responsible for developing and advancing an important area of Sydney's contemporary art scene, providing a platform for emerging abstract artists to exhibit and experiment with new techniques and art-making styles. As well as being a key player in establishing Australia's growing artistic reputation, Gallery A played an important role in promoting Aboriginal paintings within the milieu of contemporary art. By exhibiting Indigenous works outside the context of historical or anthropological collections, Gallery A gave Aboriginal art an exciting and commercial new profile.

From 1964 to 1983, Gallery A Sydney embraced a new direction in art-making and was responsible for the launch of some of Australia's most respected artists. Names such as Rosalie Gascoigne, Robert Klippel, Ralph Balson and John Olsen all were connected to Gallery A in the early stages of their careers and benefited from the gallery's bold vision.

# GALLERY A: THE EDUCATION KIT

i. Daniel Thomas, The Sydney Morning Herald, 22 November 1973

This kit is designed to be a practical classroom aid for teachers of senior secondary Visual Arts students in New South Wales. The content is suitable for both the preliminary and HSC courses. It includes activities, critical writing tasks and research plans that have been designed to extend students' thinking and to address many of the course outcomes.

The kit contains twelve images from a selected group of Gallery A artists that represent a diverse cross-section of art-making styles within the field of abstraction. While some names may be familiar to senior students, this kit also offers the opportunity to explore the practices of a number of lesser-known artists whose contribution to Australian Art history has been equally important.

The kit is most effective when used in tandem with the exhibition presented at Campbelltown Arts Centre from 21 March to 3 May 2009; however, the kit also operates as a stand-alone resource that will remain useful long after the exhibition has finished. There is also a substantial publication accompanying the exhibition that will give further insight into the artists' work and the history of Gallery A.

Each of the twelve focus sheets features a single artist, and includes:

- biographical information on the selected artist
- statements made by that artist
- quotes from art journals, newspapers and art commentators
- critical commentary
- historical context

Also provided are guiding questions and research tasks in relation to the artist's practice, the 'Frames' and the 'Conceptual Framework'. Similarly, the focus sheets act as a starting point for classroom discussion and promote further research into each artist's practice.

In addition to the artist information there is also a glossary focussing on terms related to the subject, a comprehensive bibliography, and a list of further reading.

Drew Bickford, February 2009

# GALLERY A: CURRICULUM LINKS

Suggested starting points for discussion of the exhibition might include:

- Reflection on how lack of figurative representation in abstract art can
  offer new readings that challenge the dominant historical tradition of
  the human form in art.
- Ways in which artists use symbolism, shape, colour and line to communicate ideas and meanings.
- Visual analysis of abstract artworks using interpretative frameworks, appropriate terms and vocabulary.
- How subjective interpretations of abstraction intersect with structural analysis; i.e., how the work appears compared with how the work makes you feel.
- Exploration of how the simplicity of abstract forms and motifs can communicate a complex raft of ideas, observations, experiences and emotions.
- Ways in which the viewer is able to decipher and translate the artist's visual language of creative ideas and inspiration.
- The idea of abstraction across various media, from painting to sculpture and dance.
- How Australia's cultural identity burgeoned in the 1960s via the success of local abstract artists.
- The position of Indigenous art within the milieu of contemporary Australian abstraction
- How people engage with public art.
- How changing world events might have informed the shift in art-making styles and techniques that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s.

## IN FOCUS: ABSTRACTION

In the fine arts, the term 'abstraction' refers to art which lacks obvious representational qualities, which does not depict recognisable scenes or objects, and instead works expressively with forms, line, and colour for their own sake.

The term abstraction does not describe one specific style of art making but is a broader term referring to a number of art movements that pioneered new directions in representation.

These bold and daring movements dismissed the pictorial traditions of previous American painting to capture a fresher, more dynamic and improvised style of working. It is not a common style or technique that abstract artists share but rather, an artistic perspective or view of the world.

Abstract works were often large, emotional compositions that drew attention to the use of paint, colour, line and shape. Abstraction was the beginning of the American artistic revolution. Iconic art styles such as Pop Art, Minimalism, and Op Art stemmed from this new imagemaking process.

# IN FOCUS: COLOUR FIELD PAINTING

Colour Field painting is a type of abstraction whereby recognisable painterly imagery or symbolism is reduced to blocks or shapes of bold colour. This treatment of colour and form dared to challenge notions of representation in painting and was popularised in the 1940s by American artists such as Mark Rothko and Clifford Styll.

The hallmark of Colour Field painting is large, flat areas of colour that lack any specific, identifiable shape or form. These shapes are sometimes organic and sometimes geometric; however, they generally lack the characteristics of more conventional painting styles. Specifically, Colour Field paintings are devoid of subject matter and avoid figurative representation.

### IN FOCUS: HARD-EDGE PAINTING

In the most basic sense, the term Hard-edge painting is a purely descriptive mechanism for explaining this conceptual and often misunderstood area of contemporary painting. Lacking the expressive and gestural qualities of some abstract painting styles, Hard-edge painting is typified by strong, straight lines of colour that form a stylised geometric composition.

These hard edges form stark and rigid separations of colour that deliberately draw attention to the action of mark-making. This style is characterised by the display of clean, sharp lines and a distinct clarity to the perimeters of notably flattened painted forms.

### **GLOSSARY**

Abstract An idea or notion that is conceived outside of reality.

Often difficult to understand or qualify.

Allusion A passing or casual reference to something.

The lack of clarity due to the presence of more than **Ambiguity** 

one meaning.

Assemblage A sculptural technique of organising or composing a group of unrelated and often discarded objects into

a unified whole.

The leaders of progress in a particular field, Avant-garde

usually the arts, who are often referred to as

modern or experimental.

The science of arranging time in periods and Chronology

ascertaining the dates and historical order of

past events.

Collage A technique for composing a work of art by pasting on a single surface various materials not normally

associated with one another, for example, newspaper clippings, parts of photographs, theatre tickets and

fragments of an envelope.

Conceptual Pertaining to concepts or to the forming of concepts.

Conspicuous Attracting special attention via outstanding qualities,

behaviours or eccentricities.

Constructivist A non-representational style of art developed by a

group of Russian artists principally in the early 20th century, characterised chiefly by a severely formal organisation of mass, volume, and space, and by the

employment of modern industrial materials.

Cornucopia An abundant overflowing supply.

**Eccentric** Deviating from the recognised or customary

character, practice, etc.; irregular, erratic, peculiar,

or odd.

The quality of being short-lived or transitory; lasting **Ephemeral** 

only for a brief time.

Existential Relating to existence and the actual existence

of objects.

Geometric Relating to the mathematical principles of geometry.

Idiosyncratic A characteristic, habit, mannerism, or the like, that

is peculiar to an individual.

Installation A type of sculpture that is specific to a certain space

or venue, a work that acknowledges the environment

in which it has been placed.

Kinetic The quality of being moveable, in motion, or able to

cause motion.

A, usually small, model of an intended work, such as Maquette

a sculpture or piece of architecture.

Op Art An art movement that addresses the interaction

> between the moving image and the picture plane. Geometric shapes are arranged in such a way to simulate distortion, movement or vibration.

Oeuvre The total creative output of an artist or writer. Paradigm A set pattern or model for a specific concept.

Paradox A statement or concept that contains

conflicting ideas.

Plinth A support or column used to display an artwork,

usually sculpture.

Recontextualise To change how and where objects/materials are

normally seen.

Directed to the past, a look back to that which Retrospective

has occurred.

Created for a specific location, eg, in the outdoors. Site-specific

Being in conformity with a specific style or Stylised

visual type.

Triptych An artwork consisting of three panels, often hinged.

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# Peter Kennedy



# Peter Kennedy (b. 1945)

It was the simplest of ideas; that light can be art. This notion was first introduced to Australian audiences in the early 1970s by Sydney artist Peter Kennedy. His groundbreaking use of coloured neon lights altered notions of sculpture, site-specific art and the way audiences, and even art itself, interacted with a gallery space.

Peter Kennedy's experimentation with fluorescent lights began by photographing them at a nearby factory and advanced to procuring samples for conceptual sculptures that gave life to the traditionally sterile gallery environment. Using timers and stroboscopic effects, Kennedy's lights would snake along the floor and climb the walls, turning the exhibition space into a glowing kaleidoscope colour.

Conflicting with the classic ideal of the gallery as a 'white cube', Kennedy's light installations gave people a new way to interact with art, and, in some instances, offered viewers the chance to become art themselves. In his 1970 exhibition *Luminal sequences*, Kennedy installed his trademark neon configurations inside the exhibition space at Gallery A Sydney and simultaneously projected images of visitors onto the gallery walls. This dual layering of light, colour and image examined the idea of spectatorship within the gallery context, giving patrons a different perspective on looking. Viewers were standing amongst the light sculptures, and, at the same time, viewing them as a two-dimensional image.

Some of Kennedy's works operated on timers that would provide a certain rhythm to the lights as viewers moved amongst the works. This presented a move away from the tradition of art as a static and tangible object. Kennedy's works provided a more fluid interpretation of art in that the ambient neon work's effect on the space was ephemeral and not located within the traditional context of 'art as object'.

### **QUESTIONS**

### Subjective Frame

- How has Peter Kennedy made his work an experience rather than simply an image?
- What sensory effect might Peter Kennedy's neon works have on a viewer?

### Postmodern Frame

- Why might Peter Kennedy's use of light be defined as 'postmodern'?
- People have certain expectations of how gallery spaces and the content of exhibitions should appear. How does Peter Kennedy's contradiction of these notions create a shift in the way people may think about art?

### Conceptual Framework

 Coloured light and neon is a part of our everyday world. Think of how neon features in your daily, lived experience. What associations do we make with lights of certain colours? Why do you think Peter Kennedy has transformed this simple industrial product into art?

### **ACTIVITY**

In the course of a week, attempt to record the number of neon signs or coloured lights you see in your daily activities. How are they used? Where are they featured? Which colours are predominant? How do people interact with them?

# Bea Maddock



# Bea Maddock (b. 1934)

While Bea Maddock has incorporated photography, sculpture and painting into her practice, she is principally recognised as one of Australia's leading printmakers. In her 50-year career Maddock has worked across a wide variety of specialised printing processes including etchings, linocuts, photo-etchings, screenprints, stencils and woodcuts.

Maddock's printed works of the 1970s demonstrate a distinct graphic sensibility that reflects an interest in the principles of design. Maddock's work from this time often features one very strong, singular image, such as a staring face or pair of shoes, or presents a single image repeated over and over in a formal grid-like pattern. These grid works recall the celebrity silk-screen prints of Andy Warhol, such as his iconic 1962 work *Marilyn*. 'This repetition of elements has a filmic, hypnotic quality'.

Until about 1970 Bea Maddock was practising primarily as a Hard-edge and Colour field painter before she moved on to her more graphic, photo-based works. Maddock's practice often addresses themes of loneliness and isolation, illustrated by stark, simplistic images presented singularly or iterated in multiples.

### CRITICAL WRITING

'Bea Maddock (Gallery A), a Melbourne printmaker, now looks like one of Australia's very best artists. Confining herself to black and white, the etchings and screen-prints usually start from a newspaper photograph. Quite apart from superbly ordered forms, there is a strong emotional quality, and only when it is realised that the photographic sources are concerned with death and disaster does the obscure emotion clarify as—perhaps—an awareness that any photograph, any representational drawing, is only a dead version of a living thing, and that pictorial art is therefore basically concerned with death.'<sup>ii</sup>

### **QUESTIONS**

### Subjective Frame

- Bea Maddock has worked with striking images such as people at funerals and Holocaust victim Ann Frank. How does Maddock's choice of images convey personal narratives?
- The use of black and white photography is often used to portray a sense of truth or reality in image representation. Imagine that Bea Maddock's works were reproduced in bright colours. Would this invoke a different response from the viewer or suggest a different meaning? Explain your answer.

### Structural Frame

- Bea Maddock uses very rigid compositional techniques in her printmaking. How does the act of repetition affect the viewer's reading of the image? Does the sectioning of the frame direct the viewer's attention in a specific way?
- Look at the artwork *Four times five plus four,* 1970. Where does the title come from?
- How does Bea Madock's use of grids within grids direct the viewer's eye? Why do you think she has worked in this way?

### Conceptual Framework

 How does Bea Maddock's use of found newspaper images reflect her engagement with the everyday world?
 How do the newspaper images give her work both an immediacy and sense of historicism?

## **ACTIVITY**

Search through old newspapers for a striking black and white image. Create your own linocut from this image to print a grid-like composition. Decide on how many repeated prints you will need for the most dramatic effect. Consider a slight shift in the tone/colour of your print to highlight a section of your composition.

- i. Ann Kirker and Roger Butler, *Being and Nothingness: Bea Maddock*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1992, p. 105.
- ii. Daniel Thomas, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 December 1974.

# Frank Hinder



Stephen Jones collection.

# Frank Hinder (1906-1992)

Through the looking-glass (without Alice) is the nearest I can come to what one has in mind—something one knows must lie beyond the realm of the accepted 'real', but what is it and how does one express it?

Frank Hinder diary entry.i

Frank Hinder stands alongside artists such as Grace Crowley, Rah Fizelle and Ralph Balson in significantly advancing the modernist movement in Australian art. His early paintings and drawings reflected strong Cubist and Futurist influences, using bold, angular lines and a considered architectural approach to rendering subject matter. Hinder, along with Balson and Crowley 'questioned the primacy of traditional painting and sculpture, delved into abstraction and incorporated technology into (his) art ... to render new ideas of space and time.'

However, Hinder is best known for his *Luminal kinetics*, pulsating surfaces of reflected light that moved within box frames:

(Hinder) used light more directly, primarily transmitted from lamps mounted in fixed positions or on metal beams rotated by one or more motors, and directed onto the screen in a cycle modulated by reflective surfaces and coloured filters placed in straegic positions in the box. They were straightforward electro-mechanical devices that produced an apparently ever-changing painting of light onto the interior of the patterned glass screen at the front of the case. III

Frank Hinder used art as language. His works were a meaningful exploration of what is real and what is imagined in our world, and Hinder's *Luminal kinetics* were a direct attempt to give a visual form to scientific and philosophical ideas. Hinder believed that science and philosophy were essential in developing an understanding of how everything in our daily lives is interconnected, and enforced the utopic ideal of a 'supernature'. This idea is evident in his work, which varies from sketches of native lizards and birds, to the luminous vistas of our cosmos seen in his *Luminal kinetics*.

From his early works in the 1930s through to his sculptural works from the 1960s, Hinder was determined to express a kind of living energy in his artworks. He generated the dynamic sense of rhythm often seen in works from the Futurist movement and this sense of urgency transformed his; however, 'Hinder replaced the Futurist's brutality with harmony, creating a modern style for twentieth century Australian life'.iv

His visual language expressed the interconnectedness of everything, and naturalism, semi-abstraction and abstraction were all aspects of a practice needed to reflect his inclusive world-view. Hinder believed art could get as close as science and philosophy to the unreal 'real' behind the looking glass of appearances.

### **QUESTIONS**

### Subjective Frame

- '[The] paradox of abstraction is that it is closer to "real" than realism' \( \)
  Discuss this statement by Frank Hinder with reference to the subjective interpretation of the term 'real'.
- What subjective factors affect the way people view art?
- Do you think abstract art may lend itself to more subjective interpretations than traditional art-making methods? Explain your answer.

# Structural Frame

• How do Frank Hinder's *Luminal kinetics* differ from Peter Kennedy's light installations?

#### Postmodern Frame

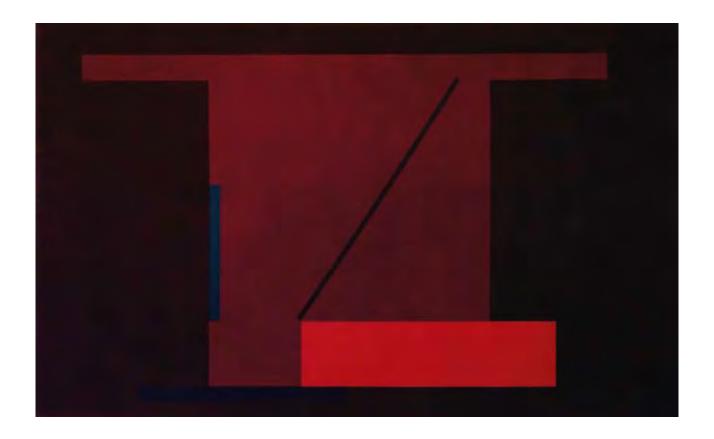
 How do Frank Hinder's works challenge traditional notions of how audience audiences view and interpret art?

### **Extension Task**

- How did Frank Hinder expand or extend upon ideas intitiated by the Futurists? How did his works differ in style and concept?
- Develop a case study based on other artists who use light and movement in their work. Consider artists such as Bruce Nauman.

- i. www.frankhinder.com.au, viewed 11 November 2009.
- ii. http://www.usyd.edu.au/museums/pdfs\_docs/newsletter\_june05.pdf, viewed 19 November 2008.
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# Michael Johnson



# Michael Johnson (b. 1938)

Painters like Michael Johnson set themselves the task of exposing the fallibility of the eye. Their art is built upon the fact that there can be a wide discrepancy between reality and our visual experience of it ... they prove that the eyes can be tricked into seeing things as they are not.

James Gleeson<sup>i</sup>

Michael Johnson is one of Australia's most influential abstract painters. His works helped break down restrictive cultural traditions in Australian painting. Like Ralph Balson, Johnson's interests were the distribution of bold colour and strong geometric compositions. Narrow columns of colour pitched against solid, square planes appear in many of his earlier works, demonstrating the influence of American abstract expressionists such as Mark Rothko.

This organised formalism of shape and composition was a kind of spatial exploration for Johnson, who uses the canvas almost as a map, charting geometric landscape. His works evoke a sense of environment or place and often suggest abstract landscapes via bands of hard-edged colour to represent land, sea and sky.

Michael Johnson's work demonstrates a careful balance of colour and shape. He uses lines to define these areas of individual colour, creating the illusion of an aerial snapshot of some impossibly colourful world. Johnson is specifically interested in how colours relate to one another when ordered in a highly organised and formal way. Later in his career, Johnson's work took on a much more textured and expressive quality while maintaining a distinctly abstract nature. This more gestural style of painting saw Johnson being more aware of the surface of the painting and the tactility of the medium.

# CRITICAL WRITING

'Johnson has compared the act of painting to the relationship between musician and the instrument—the vibrations felt are transposed onto the canvas in what he calls "chords of colour". His paintings are *about* painting in the most elemental and personal sense ... "a certain site to perform within" ... However, the abstraction is more than a non-referential imprint of the painterly process; it offers a multitude of avenues for allusion and association. ...[Johnson's early] paintings were about the flatness of the picture plane, the absence of the mark, the independence of colour ... of being true to the canvas.

Victoria Lynn, *Michael Johnson: Paintings 1968–88*, Art Gallery of New South Wales in conjunction with Beaver Press, 1989.

### **QUESTIONS**

## Subjective Frame

 '[Abstraction] offers a multitude of avenues for allusion and association'.

Michael Johnson<sup>ii</sup>

Abstraction is a style of art making that is often seen as inaccessible or difficult to penetrate. Explain how Johnson's quote above responds to this idea.

### Structural Frame

- Michael Johnson's painting style has been described as minimalist abstraction. What do you think this term means in relation to the formal qualities of Johnson's paintings? What makes his work fit this description?
- Later in his career, Michael Johnson's painting strayed from rigid geometrical patterns into much more textured and expressive images. This is true of a number of abstractionists from this period. Why do you think artists might develop their practice along these lines?

# Conceptual Framework

 Many of the Australian modernists were influenced by the abstract expressionist movement that came out of the United States in the 1940s. Look at the work of Mark Rothko and suggest how his art-making style has impacted on the practice of Michael Johnson.

- i. James Gleeson quoted in Meryvn Horton, *Australian Artists* of the 70's, Ure Smith Publishers, Dee Why West, 1975.
- ii. Glenis Israel, 'Michael Johnson (b. 1938)', in Glenis Israel, *Senior Artwise Visual Arts* 11–12, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, Milton, Qld. 2000. p. 40.

# Ralph Balson



# Ralph Balson (1890-1964)

Ralph Balson is recognised as one of the most important figures in the history of Australian abstract painting. Demonstrating a passion for line and shape, Balson's geometric abstractions made him an artistic leader of his generation with paintings that operate as beautifully simplistic planes of overlapping colour.

The construction of Balson's images articulates his interest in the themes of order and chaos. While his works show a commitment to careful composition, there is also a sense of disorder and randomness to the organisation of the painted surface. Balson's visual language is bold colour and elementary use of shape, with each work speaking to the viewer as an immediate expression of energy.

Ralph Balson spent all of his life as a self-employed house painter whose creative painting was reserved for weekends. Although he painted his whole life it was only after professional retirement that he took up painting as a full-time endeavour.

In July 1941 Balson held his first solo exhibition of abstract paintings in Sydney. This first for Balson was a significant milestone in Australian art history, being the first one-man show of non-objective paintings ever held in Australia. As highlighted by Nick Waterlow OAM, Director of Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 'It was a key moment when a new paradigm emerged, an example of a genuine, home grown, Australian Modernism.'

Later in his life, Ralph Balson's technique shifted from geometric shapes to a more organic approach of simply pouring paint onto a flat canvas and allowing the colours to navigate the surface themselves. Balson called these poured paintings 'matter paintings': 'I try to find out what the substance of paint will give me, to make a painting a Matter Painting'."

Four years after Ralph Balson's death in 1964, Patrick McCaughey, art critic for the Melbourne newspaper *The Age.* wrote:

Ralph Balson is a classic story of the artist neglected in his lifetime and hailed as a master after his death. Balson achieved what few other Australian painters have achieved: a great last period where all the themes and obsessions of an artist are brought together into a climatic unity ... nobody will ever doubt again that Balson is one of the masters of Australian painting.<sup>III</sup>

### **QUESTIONS**

### Subjective Frame

- Look at Ralph Balson's painting *Construction 3*, 1941, and discuss the way his use of colour and shape might either distance or engage the viewer.
- 'Abstract art is often found to be difficult or inaccessible to the average viewer.' Respond to this statement.

### Structural Frame

 Ralph Balson's means of creating the 'matter paintings' is vastly different from the very formal and rigid colour use of many abstract expressionist painters. Discuss the freedoms and restrictions that pouring paint can create.

### Practice

 By definition, an artist is an artist due to their mastery and control of a particular media. Yet the act of pouring paint requires the artist to relinquish command of the paint. Discuss Ralph Balson's technique of creating 'matter paintings' in relation to the issue of complete artistic control. Why do you think he might have incorporated this style into his practice?

### Research Task

 Ralph Balson is quoted as saying '[My] greatest single influence is Mondrian'. Compare and contrast Balson's Construction 3, 1941, with Piet Mondrian's work.

## **ACTIVITY**

Debate — 'That's Not Art!'

Organise a classroom debate in which the relevance of Abstract art is discussed. Consider the absence of figurative representation, personal interpretation and the dismissal of realistic imagery.

Making it Matter

Create your own 'matter paintings' using liquid paint and canvas placed on a flat surface. How does the paint move on the surface? Do you find the pouring of paint to be a liberating or a worrying creative experience?

- i. COFAUNSW Media Release, Tuesday 17 June 2008.
- ii. www.odana.com.au/art/balson.html, viewed Monday 16 June 2008.
- iii. http://www.odana.com.au/art/balson.html
- iv. http://www.odana.com.au/art/balson.html

# Rosalie Gascoigne



# Rosalie Gascoigne (1917-1999)

Gascoigne's work fits in everywhere and nowhere: it is minimal, conceptual, both landscape and genre, found object and ready-made.

Auckland-born artist Rosalie Gascoigne depicts the Australian landscape in a unique and often disarming way. Her abstract constructions defy the conventions of traditional landscape representation, and with this offer an alternative perspective on how we can view our country.

Starting her official art career much later in life, Gascoigne was well into her fifties when she exhibited her first works. Gascoigne admits that life as a 1950s housewife did not fulfill her needs and she sought desperately to escape into a more creative and challenging pursuit.

Rosalie Gascoigne's mixed media assemblages are instantly recognisable with their striking use of scrap metal, timber panels, irregular composition, text, and, sometimes, brilliant reflective surfaces. These works tell the story of her travels around the countryside, journeys on which she would collect discarded items like a bowerbird constructing its nest. Gascoigne's works celebrate the beauty of Australia's natural landscape by interpreting it through different everyday objects. 'In her instinctive feeling for the texture and colour of weather-worn discards, she evokes an image of the rural environment as valid."

Here Gascoigne discusses her innate connection between her artwork and the environment that inspires it;

'I know about an Australian landscape ... it's got to be in your bone marrow. But I still start with the same premise, I've got the materials ... fed by your emotions, it will grow and you know yourself when you've arrived at something' iii

Weathered timber, rusted metal, and faded and peeling paint are hallmarks of Gascoigne's distinct visual style. Her sculptural forms reflect a past history or remnant from times gone by; the aged and deteriorated state of her materials suggesting a life already lived.

Rosalie Gascoigne's practice varied greatly over the years that she produced work, with a range of materials and styles of construction evident throughout. While her timber works and bright yellow road-sign jigsaws are most readily identifiable as 'Gascoignes', the artist was also prolific with corrugated iron, feathers and steel. Her penchant for collecting items of the everyday saw Gascoigne develop a system of organisation that transformed the unremarkable into an object of significant beauty.

'I used to walk in the paddocks ... I would see the potential of things, rusty, ordinary fencing wire. I was making things out of dried sticks and a bit of farm iron.'

### **QUESTIONS**

### Conceptual Framework

- How do Rosalie Gascoigne's artworks challenge our understanding of the depiction of the Australian landscape?
- How do Rosalie Gascgoigne's artworks express her connection to the landscape?

## Subjective Frame

'My environment is what has conditioned me and what I respond to daily. It's what I've got. My art must come out of that.'

Rosalie Gascoigne<sup>v</sup>

- How does Rosalie Gascoigne's use of found materials create a sense of history, time and place in her works?
- The construction of Rosalie Gascoigne's works appears simultaneously deliberate and haphazard. How does her handling of materials convey this? Do you think this might reflect the manner in which the objects were collected? Explain your answer.

#### Cultural Frame

 How does Rosalie Gascoigne's choice of materials evoke a sense of national identity?

### Postmodern Frame

- How does Rosalie Gascoigne give found objects new meaning by re-contextualising them? Give examples.
- Marcel Duchamp is regarding as being the first artist to use found objects or 'ready mades' in his work.
   Investigate Duchamp's practice and compare some of his works to works by Rosalie Gascoigne.

- i. Hannah Fink, 'That Sidling Sight: wondering about the art of Rosalie Gascoigne', *Art and Australia*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Fine Art Press, Sydney, p.207, 1997.
- ii. Sandra McGrath, The Australian, 24 May 1975.
- iii. Deborah Edwards, *Rosalie Gascoigne: Material as Landscape*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1997.
- iv. ibid
- v. Rosalie Gascoigne-Colin McCahon: Sense of Place, exhibition catalogue, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1990.

# Clement Meadmore



Clement Meadmore
Hereabouts, 1971
Polyester resin, cast, pigmented black,
polished ed. 74/150
24.0 x 14.5 x 11.6 cm
Collection: National Gallery of Australia
Reproduced courtesy the artist,
licensed by VISCOPY, Australia.

# Clement Meadmore (1929-2005)

[His] work celebrates a delicate grandeur. His cubist extrusions ... share a rhythmic simplicity and fluid, dynamic balance connected to art school principles adopted from Michelangelo.<sup>1</sup>

Clement Meadmore was a Melbourne-born artist who started his creative career as an industrial designer in the early 1950s. While Meadmore maintained an interest in the functionality of his created forms, aspects of his daily work life inspired him to begin sculpting non-figurative metal objects. Within a few years Meadmore was exhibiting his abstract artworks in the galleries of Melbourne and Sydney.

Worked in welded steel, Meadmore's sculptures range in size from small maquette's to enormous structures designed for public display. His creations often resemble a twisted or tightly coiled metal bar attempting to reach in a number of different directions. From the smallest to the largest of his works, there is a sense that each sculpture rests on the most delicate axis while maintaining a sense of monolithic strength. 'He conceived of his monumental works in terms of human scale, drawing on the experience of the body, movement and gravitational pull.' The appearance of Meadmore's sculptures not only varies in scale but also in texture. Some of his sculptures display the slick, black polish of a snake, while others have a much rougher and weatherworn exterior. Meadmore has many sculptures installed in the urban environs of American cities where the taut, steel surfaces of his works mirror the shiny, reflective exteriors of the buildings around them. Others, in more tranquil garden settings, take on the rusted, earthy appearance of the land.

Meadmore's sculptures are highly expressive with their flowing, fluid forms demonstrating what he calls his 'geometry of emotion'. III While the works have a distinct geometric appeal, there is also a very loose and almost kinetic quality that brings a tremendous energy to each piece. Melbourne art and furniture consultant Bill Luke describes Meadmore's works as, '... graphic and sculptural and on such a large, confrontational scale. It's very masculine, gutsy and absolutely real.' IV

There is a robust physicality to Meadmore's sculptures that is vastly different to the work of one of his peers, Robert Klippel. While both artists' works have an undeniable presence, Meadmore's lithe and powerful sculptures adroitly command complete viewer attention.

## **QUESTIONS**

## Subjective Frame

'Sculpture should be able to roll down hills, and if small enough, cradled in one's arms.' \( \text{\tiny{\tiny{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\tiny{\text{\tiny{\text{\tiny{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\tiny{\tiny{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\tinx{\tiny{\tiny{\titileft{\text{\tinit}}\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\ti}\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\text{\texi{\text{\text{\texi}\text{\text{\text{\text{\texi{\text{\texi{\texi{\texi}\text{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi{\texi}\tit

- What does this quote from Clement Meadmore suggest about the tactile and personal nature of sculpture?
   How do these qualities of sculpture differ from the qualities of other art forms, such as painting, photography and printing?
- What do Clement Meadmore's sculptures remind you of?
   Do they resemble anything in nature?

### Structural Frame

- Clement Meadmore's works have been described as masculine. Why do you think this is? What specific structural qualities do his sculptures possess that might suggest this?
- Clement Meadmore's sculptures are revered for their aesthetic simplicity but also their complexity of form. How does Meadmore's choice of materials enforce this idea?
- Discuss the potential for different interpretations of Clement Meadmore's sculptures if they were constructed from:
  - (i) Timber (ii) glass (iii) clay (iv) paper.

#### Practice

 Clement Meadmore refers to the 'geometry of emotion' in his practice. How does he merge the two extremely divergent elements (mathematics and sensation) into his work? What evidence is there of this intention in his work?

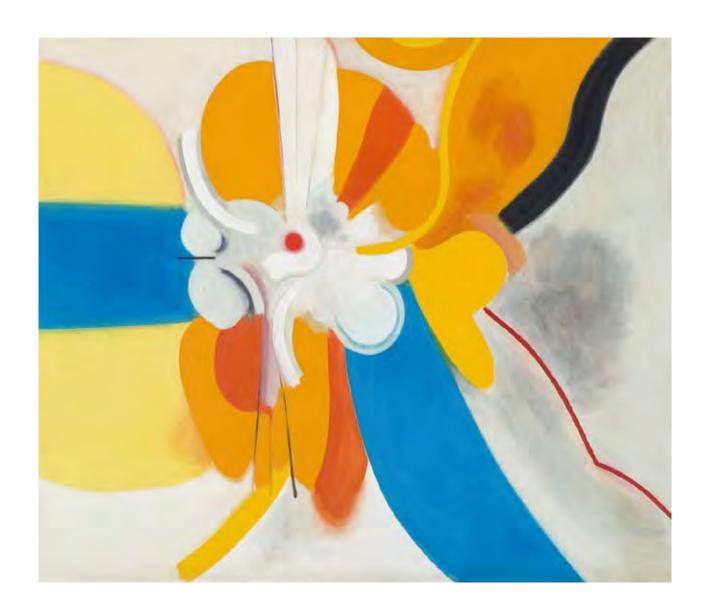
# **ACTIVITY**

Create your own sculpture in the style of Clement Meadmore.

- Take a long, rectangular column of firm clay and begin experimenting with twisting and coiling to make a subtle form.
- Use this maquette to make a series of sketches in your V.A.P.D. showing the design from several different angles, back, front and above.
- When satisfied with a design, begin creating your own Meadmore-style sculpture. Work the clay to a smooth finish, retaining the sharp square edges. Fire and glaze for a slick final work
- Imagine this work as a large-scale installation in an outdoor public environment. Where would it be best suited? How would it reflect its location? How would people interact with the work?

- i. Peter Hyatt, http://www.hyatt.net.au/essays3.htm viewed September 9 2008.
- ii. Virginia Spate, 'Clement Meadmore: 1929–2005', *Art and Australia*, Vol. 43, No. 1,Spring 2005, p. 26.
- iii. Hyatt, op. cit.
- iv. Bill Luke, http://www.hyatt.net.au/essays3.htm, viewed December 12 2008.
- v. Clement Meadmore, http://www.hyatt.net.au/essays3.htm viewed 2 November 2008.

# Janet Dawson



# Janet Dawson (b. 1935)

Janet Dawson is credited as being one of Australia's pioneering Abstract artists; her paintings of nature paved the way for the following generation of female artists. Dawson's use of diffused colours and recognisable shapes gave her works a sometimes moody and other times playful appearance, displaying always evolving strategies that anticipated the stylistic developments of many of her contemporaries.

Dawson's abstract works marked a new direction for Australian painting, heralding an opportunity for female artists to find their place in a male-dominated contemporary arts scene. Dawson's early work, produced throughout the 1960s, consisted of very dynamic paintings that used bold flat colour, strong lines, and very little tone. It was in this period that she was acknowledged as having introduced the Colour field painting movement to Australia. However, Dawson found the limitations of this practice too restrictive, and sought to experiment in more tonal abstract works. Accordingly, her work throughout the 1970s demonstrated a softer palette, with more evocative imagery.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the political and social climate of both Australia and the world at large played an important part in the development of Australian art. Shifts in mood and defiant reactions to significant world events such as the Vietnam War signalled a new era in the way many artists were shaping their art practice.

With Australia facing a recession, record unemployment and an unpopular government, the population sought to find a voice by supporting minority groups and those living alternative lifestyles.

One aspect of this social upheaval was the emergence of the women's movement. While this had already begun in earnest during the mid 1960s, Australian women embraced many of the group's ideals during the early 1970s, in an effort to add a personal dimension to a political campaign for equality. 'Demands for equal opportunity were increasingly accepted and implemented by government and institutional organisations.'

With the designation of 1975 as the International Women's Year came greater awareness towards women's issues. This sensitivity extended to the cultural sphere and assisted in dramatically changing the fundamentals of contemporary art practice. Female artists fostered a rethinking of the value and placement of women's art in an Australian context.

'The Womens Art movement played a significant role not only in opening up new subject matter but in creating new opportunities for artistic expression by breaking down many of the old art/craft distinctions, encouraging women amateurs, questioning the hierarchy of the arts and celebrating craft skills.' ii

### **QUESTIONS**

### Conceptual Framework

- Janet Dawson was in her forties in 1975 when the women's movement was at its peak. How do you think her experience of this change might differ from younger women at that time?
- At this time art in Australia was heavily dominated by men. How does Janet Dawson's practice demonstrate a reaction to this phenomenon?

# Structural Frame

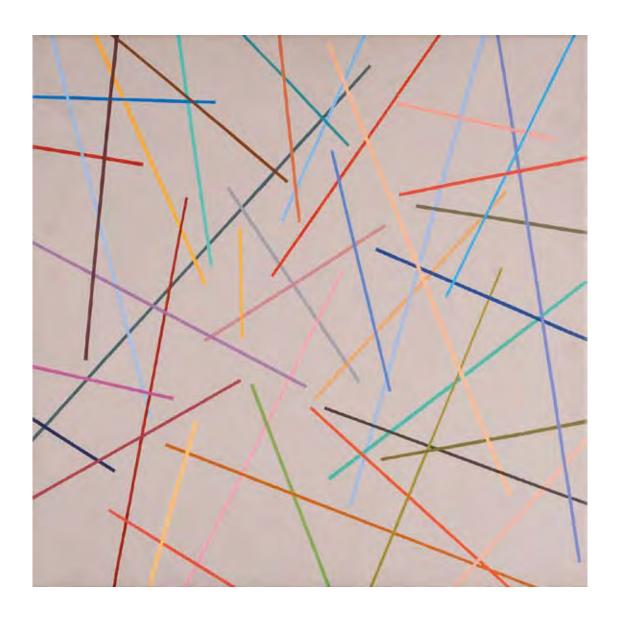
 What physical techniques does Janet Dawson employ to create her paintings? Look at *Origin of the Milky Way*, 1964, and describe Dawson's application of paint, composition, and choice of colour. How do these three factors contribute to the overall impact of the painting?

### Research Tasks

- Compare Janet Dawson's practice to the work of Rosalie Gascoigne. Discuss the similarities and variations in they way both artists represent aspects of Australia's natural environment.
  - Consider how the works challenge the way a viewer might define the term 'landscape'.
- Look at more of Janet Dawson's paintings and discuss the development of her style and practice. What changes are obvious in her manner of representation?

- i. S. Kirby, *Sight Lines*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1992, p. 25.
- ii. ibid., p. 85.

# Lesley Dumbrell



# Lesley Dumbrell (b. 1941)

I've got a pre-occupation with colour, which is always hugely important ... that is my obsession. The colour is always the first thing and it's the most important thing.

Lesley Dumbrell is a Melbourne-born painter who has developed an art practice based on light, colour and line. Her large, abstract images are rendered with spears of bright colour pitched against more subdued fields of colour. Dumbrell works in a highly organised manner, strategically avoiding any expressive or gestural motifs. As such, her images have an almost architectural appearance and Dumbrell often refers to her paintings as mathematical.

Dumbrell's fascination with this style of painting began with an interest in the work of Bridget Riley. Riley was a part of the Op Art movement of the 1960s and Dumbrell soon began adding her own personal variations to this technique. While her early works were more restrained in use of colour and shape, the 1970s and 1980s saw Dumbrell develop a much stronger and vibrant palette. With this and the use of more severe stripes and interlocking shapes Dumbrell achieved a heightened geometric abstraction.

There is a tremendous sense of rhythm in Dumbrell's paintings, with repetition featuring strongly in many of her works. An almost percussive use of line is a recurring feature of Dumbrell's practice and she has stated that she sometimes feels like a composer who uses paint instead of music.<sup>ii</sup>

Here Dumbrell discusses the idea of sensation and illusion in Op Art:

It isn't until you've got the last piece of colour into the painting that you can stand back and it's all together that you really know whether it's going to work or not. And if it does work, there's always this buzz because the thing that optical art does is ... there's a number of elements that go together ... but when they're all put together, they create another illusion of something that isn't there at all, that is impossible. But you see it and you believe it's there.

## **CRITICAL WRITING**

Dumbrell's unique abstract imagery ... employs a dazzling array of colour, creating optical effects that allude to natural forces—wind, fire, rain and earth. This highly articulated and psychological use of colour and line creates a visual friction where space seemingly pulsates—simultaneously receding and advancing. Dumbrell's compositions tangle the viewer in a complex and beautiful net proffering an electric sensory experience.<sup>iv</sup>

### **QUESTIONS**

### Subjective Frame

- Lesley Dumbrell says her works are triggered by 'sensory experiences'. Describe how memory and experience can inform the way an artist creates work and the way in which an audience may engage with it.
- Abstract art in general, and optical art in particular, relates more closely to music than it does to reality, visual reality.<sup>v</sup>

Art and music are often said to be closely linked. Outline a number of factors that might support this argument.

#### Structural Frame

 Lesley Dumbrell states that her paintings are a kind of 'visual language'. What do you think she means by this? What technical considerations support this statement?

#### Research Tasks

- Investigate the works of Australian artist Bridget Riley.
   How do her black-and-white optical images engage the viewer? How do they differ from the colour works of Lesley Dumbrell?
- Research more recent examples of Lesley Dumbrell's paintings. What similarities and differences are there between the older and newer works?

- i. www.charlesnodrumgalery.com Viewed November 24 2008.
- ii. http://www.artinfo.com.au/supporting\_galleries/details/john-buckley-gallery Viewed September 19 2008.
- iii. http://sunday.ninemsn.com.au/sunday/art\_profiles/article\_1180.asp, August 4 2008.
- iv. http://www.johnbuckley.com.au/exhibitions/dumbrell/newworks2008/index.html, Viewed August 2 2008.
- v. http://sunday.ninemsn.com.au/sunday/art\_profiles/article\_1180.asp, Viewed August 22 2008.

# Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri



# Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri (1926-1998)

PINTUPI LANGUAGE GROUP

The distance between the western desert and Gallery A is more than geographical, though looking at these paintings, one can fool oneself into believing there's no distance at all.

As one of the foremost painters to come out of the Papunya art movement, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri is acknowledged as an important contributor to Western Desert art. He is similarly highly regarded for his contribution to the bringing of Indigenous art into the rubric of contemporary art through his connection to Gallery A. Tjapaltjarri's position as an artist and senior ceremonial man enabled him to bridge the divide between traditional Indigenous art and the progressive movement of abstract painting. Tjapaltjarri's success is underpinned by an understanding of his own culture's relationship to art, coupled with an independent desire to explore new possibilities in visual storytelling.

Throughout his career Tjapaltjarri used traditional Aboriginal art-making methods, such as dots and lines, as well as other abstract motifs to communicate his dreaming stories. He stopped using natural paints from the earth and in favour of using man-made acrylics. Tjapaltjarri's paintings have been compared to works from the Op Art movement in Western Art, an illusory practice wherein the two-dimensional surface of a painting is rendered to appear as a moving or vibrating plane. This optical effect is achieved through use of repetition of colour and line. Traditional Aboriginal painting is known for these qualities, which are inherent in this manner of repetitive and highly organised mark-making.

Tjapaltjarri proved that Central and Western Desert art could reach well beyond the boundaries of its isolated origins to communicate to and engage with contemporary art-making movements. 'He was a wonderful exponent of making art based on ancient traditions respond with a contemporary edge.' ii

The national and international commercial success enjoyed by high profile, contemporary Aboriginal artists today can be largely attributed to such as Tjapaltjarri and indigenous Gallery A artists such as Johnny Warangkula Tjipurrula.

### **QUESTIONS**

### Cultural Frame

- Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri's works blend traditional and contemporary art-making practices. How do you think this might reflect aspects of Tjapaltjarri's lived experience?
- What issues associated with identity might an artist like Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri face?

# Conceptual Framework

 Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri's practice remains specific to Australian Aboriginal culture whilst also communicating a broader cross-cultural message. Discuss how Indigenous art from other cultures has been introduced into the commercial realm.

### Research Task—Structural Frame

- Explore two artists from the Op Art movement. How does Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri's work reflect aspects of this style of art?
- Contemporary Aboriginal artists Brook Andrew and Jonathan Jones both make work that have optical elements to them. Andrew uses bold patterns and stripes in his large-scale installations whilst Jones creates environments and structures out of fluorescent tubes.
   Research the works of these artists and compare their practice to that of Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri.

## Discussion Topic—Culture vs Cash

The idea of transplanting Indigenous artforms into a mainstream capitalist market has been cause for debate over time. Some argue that this devalues the cultural currency of a rich art-making tradition, whilst others see it as a progressive and liberating form of cultural and social education. What do you see as being some of the issues that may have informed or inflamed this debate?

- i. Terence Maloon, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 1982.
- ii. www.jintaart.com.au Viewed December 1 2008.

# Robert Klippel



# Robert Klippel (1920-2001)

I must be inspired by nature, and I don't mean some specific natural thing, but nature in its broadest sense, nature in all its variations and manifestations ... I hoped through this to understand my relationship with the whole universe.

Robert Klippel's eccentric sculptures and man-made environments have made him one of our nation's most valued and collectable contemporary artists. His famously idiosyncratic assemblages are instantly recognisable and bring a sense of mirth to contemporary sculpture.

Klippel's success as an artist is frequently attributed to his diversity in choice of media and his apt practical application of these materials. Working with timber, metal, wire and discarded machinery, Klippel was an extremely prolific artist, producing hundreds of sculptures based upon thousands of collages and drawings. Klippel's massive, almost factory-like creative output did not diminish the quality of his work, and over the years his work remained fresh, as he negotiated a range of styles from figurative sculpture to abstraction and surrealism.

[Klippel's forms] are primarily manifestations of sculptural thought: of weight, volume, space, rhythm, vitality, proportion, tension, balance and texture.<sup>ii</sup>

Each sculpture seems to offer a glimpse into another world, revealing the inner workings of an unknown being. There is an almost skeletal quality to his mechanical sculptures, with each work looking like a naked armature of metal springs, cogs and rods. Despite the industrial brutality of this cold metal, there is a distinct personality and often a disarming humanity to the works.

# **QUESTIONS**

## Practice

There are many other sculptors throughout the world working with junk, but whereas they largely reduce their material to sterile neutrality, Klippel moulds them into a tree of life. 

The sculptors throughout the world working with junk, but whereas they largely reduce their material to sterile neutrality, Klippel moulds them into a tree of life.

- What do you think this quote suggests about Robert Klippel's practice? Consider his materials, subject matter and approach to sculpture as a medium.
- How do Robert Klippel's art-making processes demonstrate a diversity of practice?

# Postmodern Frame

- Robert Klippel's works challenge many conventions of classical sculpture. How does his use of materials, scale and colour vary from more traditional sculptural representation?
- What reasons can you suggest for the sense of personality and humour that is evident in Robert Klippel's works?

### Structural Frame

- What technical processes does Robert Klippel employ to achieve the effective transformation of everyday items into eccentric sculptures?
- Expand upon the quote above referring to Robert Klippel's practice as a manifestation of sculptural thought. What specifically do you think the author means by this?

### Subjective Frame

- How do Robert Klippel's sculptures suggest a world of fantasy? What kind of response do his sculptures demand from a viewer?
- Consider what types of outdoor environment in which you might expect to see a Robert Klippel sculpture.
   How would your interpretation of his work differ if it were five metres tall?

### **ACTIVITY**

Research Robert Klippel's practice and select images of at least five of his sculptures. Imagine that the works are alive, and, based on the way they appear, create an individual personality for each. Suggest human names for them and create a personal history that reflects their form, colour, shape and construction materials.

Take the exercise further by integrating the devised characters of each Robert Klippel sculpture to create a short written narrative in your V.A.P.D.

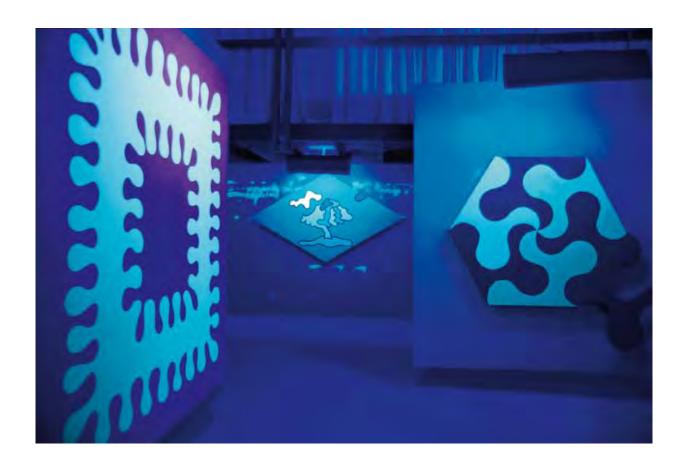
# **END NOTES**

i. Robert Klippel quoted in Deborah Edwards, *Robert Klippel*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2002, p. 18.

ii. ibid., p. 16.

iii. Nick Waterlow, *Remembering Gallery A*, in John Murphy (ed.), *Gallery A Sydney 1964–1983*, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, p. 22, 2008.

# Vernon Treweeke



# Vernon Treweeke (b. 1939)

I look at the world and think 'how can I paint that?' and then I try to  $^{\rm i}$ 

The term psychedelia refers to a 'mental state of enlarged consciousness'." This altered state is sometimes characterised by delusive visions and a state of blissful disorientation.

The different way of looking at the world brought about by the psychedelic lens is a theme that Vernon Treweeke visits with some regularity in his striking painted works. Practicing during the 1960s, Treweeke's works reflect a number of different styles such as Pop Art, Hard-edge painting, Minimalism and Conceptual art. However, Treweeke's paintings defy simple classification, as they bridge many different styles under the banner of abstraction.

The closest means of categorisation would be to acknowledge Treweeke as a practitioner of the abstract sub-genre of psychedelic art. In fact, Treweeke has been referred to as "the father of psychedelic art". Using this eccentric painting style, Treweeke is best known for his use of fluorescent paint, which glows when exhibited under ultra-violet neon light. Psychedelic art shares some similarities with the Op Art movement particularly with its hypnotic quality that can destabilise the manner in which we both see and look.

Treweeke's imagery frequently follows the familiar principles of abstraction in that it often lacks figurative representation and instead focuses on colour, shape and form. Over time, Treweeke added another dimension this by layering sections of the canvas with fluorescent paint.

Treweeke's paintings require specific environmental conditions for maximum impact, as the viewer is asked to consider the conceptual content of the image, the physical construction of the works and the environment in which they are viewing it. Much like Peter Kennedy's neon light installations, Treweeke's paintings remove people from their everyday practice of looking, engaging the viewer in a direct sensorial experience that suggests a distinct physicality.

## **QUESTIONS**

# Subjective Frame

- Vernon Treweeke uses unconventional painting techniques to create his unusual images. How does the use of fluorescent paint and black lights invite the viewer to experience the works in a way different from the experience of traditional paintings?
- The word psychedelia refers to altered states of awareness and hallucinations. How does Vernon Treweeke's practice generate this sensation?

### Structural Frame

- Discuss Vernon Treweeke's use of shape, scale and composition in relation to your understanding of the term 'psychedelia'.
- Vernon Treweeke's glowing paintings create an illusion
  of three dimensions over a two dimensional surface.
  Consider the idea that he is sculpting with paint and light.
  Suggest other artists who have given sculptural qualities
  to paintings. How has this been achieved?

### Conceptual Framework

 What was the relationship of psychedelic art to the social and political climate of the world during the 1960s?

#### Practice

 Vernon Treweeke has made specific choices about how his works must be viewed. Outline elements of Treweeke's creative decision-making that points towards ensuring a very specific experience for viewers.

- i. Peter Hill, 'Pose and Expose', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 2003.
- ii. The Macquarie Dictionary Third Edition, Macquarie University NSW 1997 p. 1721.
- iii. Stateline, *On the Railway With the 'Father' of Psychedelia*, interview with Sarah Schofield, broadcast 16 May 2003 http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/nsw/content/2003/s857743. htm, viewed on 24 November 2008.