

**LESS IS MORE**  
– More or Less





# LESS IS MORE

## – More or Less

From the M G Dingle & G B Hughes Collection

5 April to 3 May 2012

SHOALHAVEN CITY ARTS CENTRE  
MAIN GALLERY

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Front & back cover image: Margaret Dredge: *Untitled (blue & orange)* 1974 (detail)

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# LESS IS MORE – More or Less

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## THE M G DINGLE AND G B HUGHES COLLECTION

The collection has been assembled over a period of nearly fifty years, the first art works were acquired in the early 1960s though the earliest painting held in the collection is from 1959.

A passion for art, the sense of providing support for Australian art and artists and the friendships that have been formed are integral to the way the collection is perceived. While art was never seen by Gavin, while he was alive, nor I, as being only about a limited artistic style, we both love really great art of all styles, we have however tried to keep within some limits, a collection is better if there is a focus.

That focus comes under a general heading of "abstraction" probably fitting / influenced by the following non-definitive list of art movements: colour field, abstract expressionism, optical and minimalism. Mediums are in the main based around traditional materials and techniques such as painting in acrylic or oil, sculpture in metal, stone or timber as well as printing, drawing and ceramics. There are a number of thematic strands within the collection including a strong representation of art made by Australian women artists; a theme that was explored in *Personal Journeys: 40 years of Australian Women's Abstract Art* exhibited at the Shoalhaven City Arts Centre in 2009. Another theme within the collection is a leaning toward "black and white", particularly paintings where black is important in making the art "work", this was the theme for the 2010 exhibition *Black is the Colour....* There is a small component of art works made from found objects, this was explored in the 2011 exhibition *Making Do: art from found objects*.

"Less is More: more or less" is the theme in the current exhibition, and in future exhibitions it is

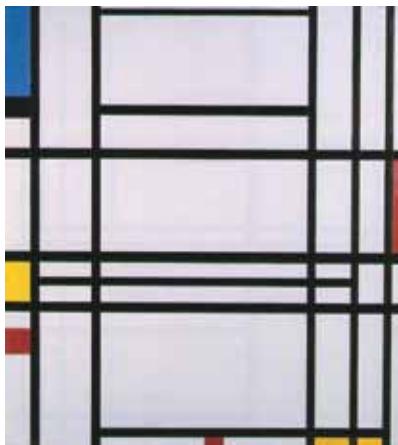
planned to explore the work of individual artists. A major survey exhibition of the work of artist Margaret Dredge, whose 1964 painting started the Collection, is planned to open in 2013.

We first met Margaret Dredge in the 1960s in Melbourne and became and remained friends for all her life. Margaret started exhibiting in group exhibitions in Melbourne and eventually was recognised as one of the leading artists in Victoria. However at the same time, in the 1970s, she also became very cynical about the world of commercial art and the politics of the exhibition circuit and withdrew and, while continuing to paint, never exhibited her work in public again. She left a legacy of over eighty major works in her studio many of which have never been exhibited. I am working with her three children to complete a survey of her artistic achievements from the early 1960s until 2001, the year she died.

One of the great benefits in building a collection is meeting and getting to know the artists, and where possible tracking development from their early career through a number of works purchased over extended periods. Along with this is a sense of providing support, through the acquisition of their works, to artists who have not, as yet, received the full recognition that their art deserves.

On 5 July 2008 the Shoalhaven City Council and Gavin and I signed a deed of agreement accepting our bequest of the Collection to the Shoalhaven. While these exhibitions are about the Shoalhaven community accessing "their" collection, they are also a tribute to my lifelong partner Gavin, who died on 24 October 2008.

**Max Dingle**



*"The more stuff in it, the busier the work of art, the worse it is. More is less. Less is more.*

*The eye is a menace to clear sight. The laying bare of oneself is obscene. Art begins with the getting rid of nature."* Ad Reinhardt 1913 – 1967.

USA Artist from the abstract expressionist generation, who prefigured minimalism with his all black paintings.

## LESS IS MORE – More or Less

It might easily be assumed that this selection of art from the M.G.Dingle and G.B.Hughes Collection falls within the category of Minimal Art. However I would argue that most do not fit within the formal framework of "minimal art" as it was defined during its brief period in the art world's limelight. There are only two works in the exhibition, both by Margaret Dredge, that were created in the late 1960s when Minimalism, a part of the post painterly or post abstract expressionist movement, was directly influencing the Australian art scene. Though there is no denying that most of the art included here has been influenced by Minimalism.

Minimal art is generally held to be a reaction to abstract expressionism, a bid to rid art of any sign of the self, a very pure form of art that does not represent anything but what it is, through order, simplicity and harmony. While Minimalism emerged in the 1950s its strongest period is over the 60s and 70s.

Though it may be argued that artists much earlier than this also explored reductionist techniques, Goethe's *Altar of Good Fortune* 1777, consisted of a stone sphere on a stone cube, while the beginnings for Minimalism may also be found in the geometric abstractions of the Bauhaus (1919 – 1933), in the works by artists associated with the

movement DeStijl (1917 – 1932), Piet Mondrian in particular, as well as in the Russian Constructivists (1914 – 1940) and in the sculpture of Constantin Brâncusi (1876 – 1957).

The Dada movement and the use of 'ready made' objects, such as Marcel Duchamp's (in)famous *Fountain* 1917, a urinal, are also thought to have had an influence on minimalism and the use of industrial materials.

In the practice of Minimal art, colour was not used to express feeling or mood, but simply to delineate space. Form (in the work) dictated the composition, such as in Frank Stella's stripe paintings, the width of the painted stripes were based on the width of the timber supporting the stretched canvas.

Because form, simple geometric shapes and industrial materials were used to remove any evidence of the artist's input many minimalist painters changed to sculpture and three dimensional objects. USA artist Donald Judd, being a case to point, in the 1960s produced a

Above from left:

Composition No 10 1939 – 42 Piet Mondrian  
*Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp 1917 Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946)  
 Frank Stella 1964 Ugo Mulas

range of art works which he called 'specific objects' and maintained they were neither paintings nor sculpture. Judd also refuted that his art was minimalist.

When looking to identify works from the collection for this exhibition I soon realised that most of the collection's "minimal" works did not totally fit the more formal definitions of "minimal art". Especially the dictum that the artist should exclude self expression, should exclude 'the pictorial, illusionistic and fictive in favor of the literal' and favour the 'geometric, forms purged of metaphor, equality of parts, repetition, neutral surfaces, and industrial materials'. Of the few works that are geometric, the most 'severe' in its fit within the minimal, is *Untitled (blue and orange)* c.1970, by Margaret Dredge, who, at this time, battled to repress the language of self-expression and assimilate post-painterly (or post-expressionist) abstraction into her practice, and in this work has achieved her aim. However in *Untitled (Black and White)* c 1969, an earlier and elegant exploration of form in black, white and greys from this period, the softness of the curved elements are anything but "hard edge".

Lyn Zelevansky curator of *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the 1990s*, (Museum of Modern Art, New York 1994) suggested that Minimalism "has a place in the second half of



Carly Snoswell *Untitled* 2010 Installation

the (20th) century akin to the one Cubism had in the first half. A high percentage of artists.... have worked with aspects of it.... deliberately violating it and creatively misunderstanding it".

Artists in the first decade of the 21st century also look to minimalism. Carly Snoswell with her use of 'ready made' industrial material has produced a delightful installation which is as delicate as lace, as bright as dew on a web in the early morning and as common as the plastic ties that hold the label to your new clothes. This work transcends the mundane nature of the material it is made from.

Jenny Herbert-Smith, whose two works *Attached Detachment* 2010 and *It will be alright on the night* 2011 are included in this exhibition, states that in the practice of her art she is "constantly drawn back to Modernism's optimism. The sense of movement, application of colour and the essence of joyful creation which are peculiar to the Modernist period are elements I like to embrace with my work." While Jenny immerses herself in imagery of the period, she remarks that the "focus is on the form, the object and not the artist's name, intention or statement. I have questioned myself as to whether I am missing something, maybe my work should have a narrative, a statement, an agenda, but to do this would not be honest, it is not my intention, therefore I make no excuses. My work is largely minimalist in form, exploring shapes in space and in particular line, but above all, my focus is on the completed work."

Melanie Howard's colour and paint work seems to come from a very subtle self expressionism which has more to do with painting as mystical or religious experience than any attempt at minimalism. Complex, intriguing, mysterious and reductionist are among the words that could be used. The blurring of colours, the markings and scratching in the paint surface, all combine into an almost zen state of meditation. The two works the artist has named, *Contemplation* and *Minds Eye*, provide a clue to the inspiration. Paintings by Howard require the viewers' complete attention as well as reflection and deliberation of and on the "other". The viewing experience can be akin to watching clouds, as Charles Nodrum has noted "Minimalist painters keep reminding us about emptiness and nothingness. They seem to say 'slow



Tim Maguire *Fin de Siecle – Study No 5* 1992

down – look very carefully’ – (and) so force us to sharpen our eyes.”\*

Tim Maguire, an artist known more for his large sensuous blown up details of roses, peony and various fruits, has explored his minimalist side in series such as White Paintings (Martin Browne Fine Art 2003) and in studies such as *Fin de siecle - Study 5* 1992, included in this exhibition. This work, on one hand, fits the elimination of self required of a minimalist work, or as suggested by Bruce James in his 2002 Sydney Morning Herald review of Tim Maguire’s work “the paintings exist in order to give lie to the existence of the painter.” Tim Maguire noted that while he wanted to get an effect of water and mid-summer light beyond the gallery wall, he also arrived at images reminiscent of minimalist artist, Barnett Newman’s “Zips” (1905 – 1970); works characterised by a monochrome field divided top to bottom by a vertical line. But Maguire also realised that “a closer look reveals elements intolerable to the aims of Newman and his colleagues – illusionistic representations of luminosity, a penumbra around the ‘zip’, the suggestion of reflection at its base that conjures up the possibility of space, mass, water and natural light.”\*

However for some viewers this study contains a strong mystical element, like a door opening to a new future, offering rewards for the contemplative viewer. *Fin de Siecle*, literally the end of the century, is a term also used in the context of the

closing of an era, passage or period as well as the opening of a new path or a way forward. The work draws the viewer through the dark red portal to a bright unknown future. To a few it might evoke the bright light at the end of a dark tunnel that some who have stood at death’s door maintain they have witnessed or for others the remembered experience of being born, from the dark warmth of the womb to light and love.

Other artists, who have created work which contains a quiet force, that I almost invariably surrender to, and can sit in contemplation no matter how many times I see them, are painters Vivienne Ferguson and Ruth Faerber and ceramicists Steve Harrison and Vic Greenaway. Vivienne Ferguson’s two paintings are from the late 1990s, and over a period prior to this she had been reducing the content of her work to the point of almost total elimination of form, colour, texture and brush marks. Paintings after this period have gradually become more intense with stronger brushwork in a limited palette. *Goings on* 1999 and *No such thing* 2000 from this brief period were reached though an artist exploring the potentialities of elimination without the loss of meaning or self expression. John McDonald, critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, had this to say in a review\*. “The term spiritual is much abused in contemporary art, but there is an absence of ego in (Ferguson’s paintings and Steve Harrison’s ceramics) that it would be vain to see the artists aspirations in any other light.”

Print and paper artist, Ruth Faerber’s *Something passes – Some things remain* 1977 contains a quiet simplicity and the slight sadness that is integral to the joys of living that remains long after leaving the work. Despite seeing many excellent examples of this artist’s work, she is represented in numerous collections, from the National Gallery of Australia to various regional galleries, it is only this one work that, for me, resonates emotionally, a reminder that the experience of art is a deeply personal one.

*But I know so little* 2001 a porcelain bowl by Steve Harrison appeals to that quiet simplicity that I love, except in this case it is combined with a sumptuous glaze that you almost want to eat. It brings to mind that an empty bowl symbolises a willingness to be filled with new knowledge. While Vic Greenaway’s



David Horton *Tapia* 1999

*Untitled* 1984 stoneware vessel seems to be an entity within itself, lending to the space around it the tranquillity of a Japanese tea house, fusing the highly refined with the natural and creating a sense of beauty expressed through naturalness and ease.

On the other hand the steel sculpture, *Tapia* 1999 by David Horton, is an effective expression of boldness through simplicity and if anything spiritual is involved, it would be to do with Greek mythology's Priapus, a fertility god, protector of livestock, fruit, plants and gardens.

'Dramatic simplicity' are the words Russell McQuilty uses "to describe the single objective he strives for in every sculpture he makes. This description not only echoes the striking steel works he creates, which are pared back to an

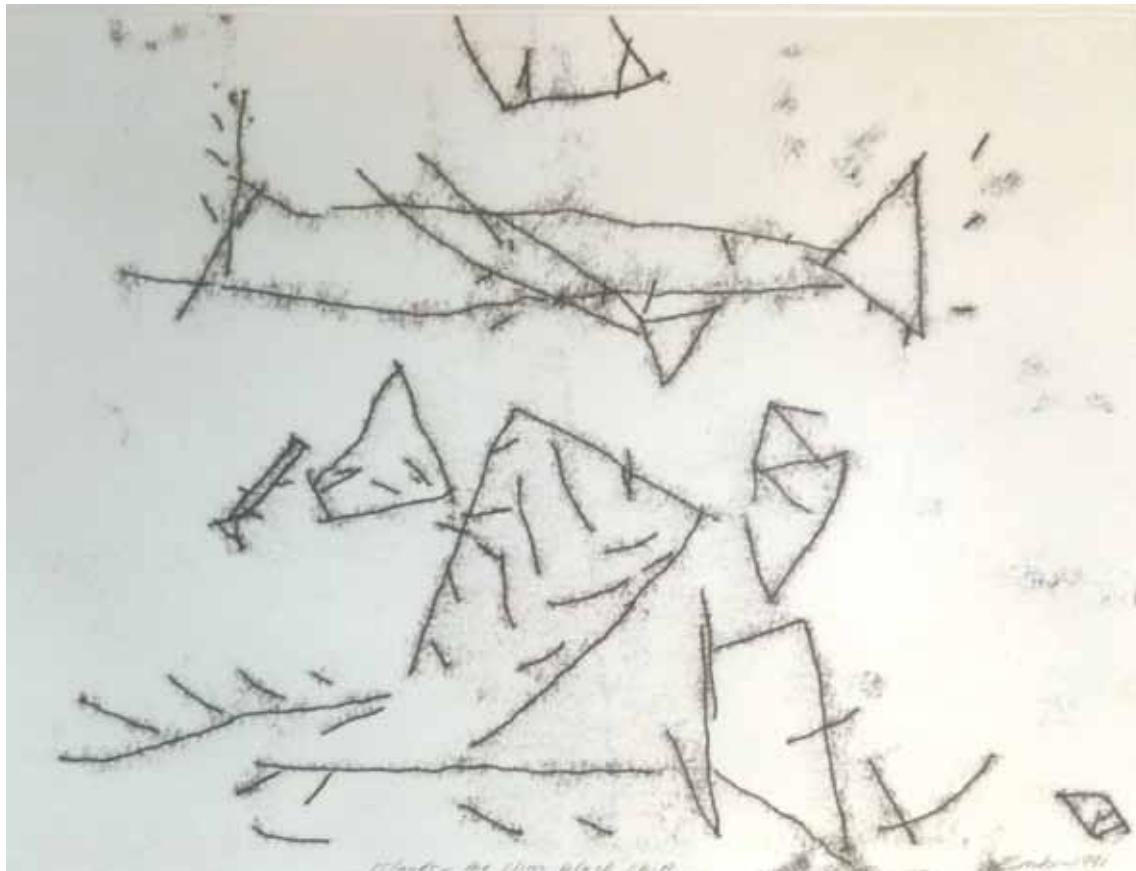
essential minimum, but also reflects the sense of purpose that drives him. Working on the less is more principle and using solely steel and paint while relying largely on intuition, McQuilty searches for structural solutions and eschews decoration in his rigorous search for 'rightness', which is only reached when the work is complete and nothing can be added or taken away." \*

In 1994 Hal Foster, in his essay *The Crux of Minimalism*, argued that minimalism is not a "dead end" of modernism, but a "paradigm shift toward postmodern practices that continue to be elaborated today". Since the 1960s/1970s, many artists have embraced minimal styles and various labels such as "post minimal" or "post modern" have been attached to them\*. Though, just as for artists in the 1950s when Abstract Expressionist was "The Unwanted Title", the motto of a symposium organised by the painter Phillip Pavia in 1952 for group of New York artists known as The Club, not all artists want to be filed away under particular labels. They prefer to roam across historic styles and cherry pick influences that can assist in their efforts to capture a psychological essence, a mood or a sense of place and to be able to explore the potentialities of elimination without the loss of meaning or self expression.

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## GEORGE BARKER

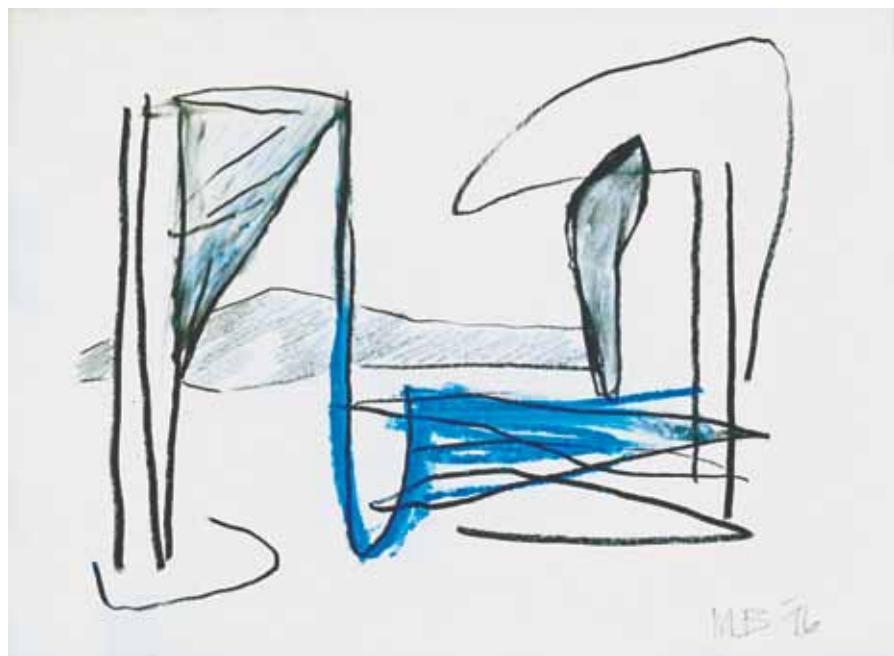


***Islands – The Long Black Ship***

(1991) etching 1/1 55 x 74 cm

This 'extravagant' etching, only one print taken from the plate, with its fragmentary forms and markings, appeals to a love of nature's randomness but it is also evocative of the Japanese "long black ship" scroll from 1854, depicting the American 'long black' ships and Commodore Perry's visit to Shimoda Harbour.

## MALCOLM BENHAM



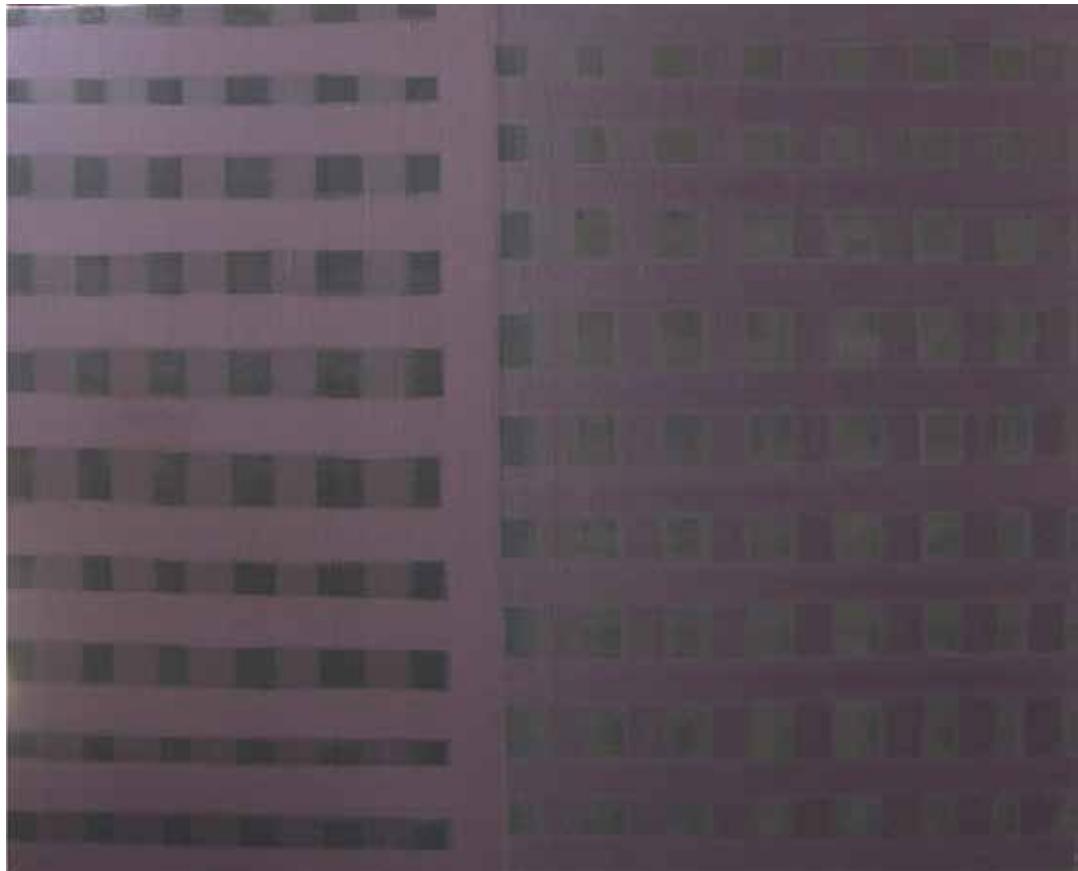
**Granite Falls** 1996 oil crayon on paper 61 x 47 cm.



**Granite Falls – pink & blue** 1996 oil crayon on paper 61 x 47 cm.

These two oil crayon drawings, done just after a visit to Granite Falls in Morton National Park, captures the drama of the falls in an economy of line and colour.

## VIRGINIA COVENTRY



### ***Second Nature***

1996, acrylic on canvas 88 x 110 cm

In this painting the black purple and the black paint, depending on the viewer's position, alternate from foreground to background producing a three dimensional "optical" effect that is totally fascinating. The texture of the paint finish gives the impression of soft velvet alternating with satin.

## VIRGINIA COVENTRY

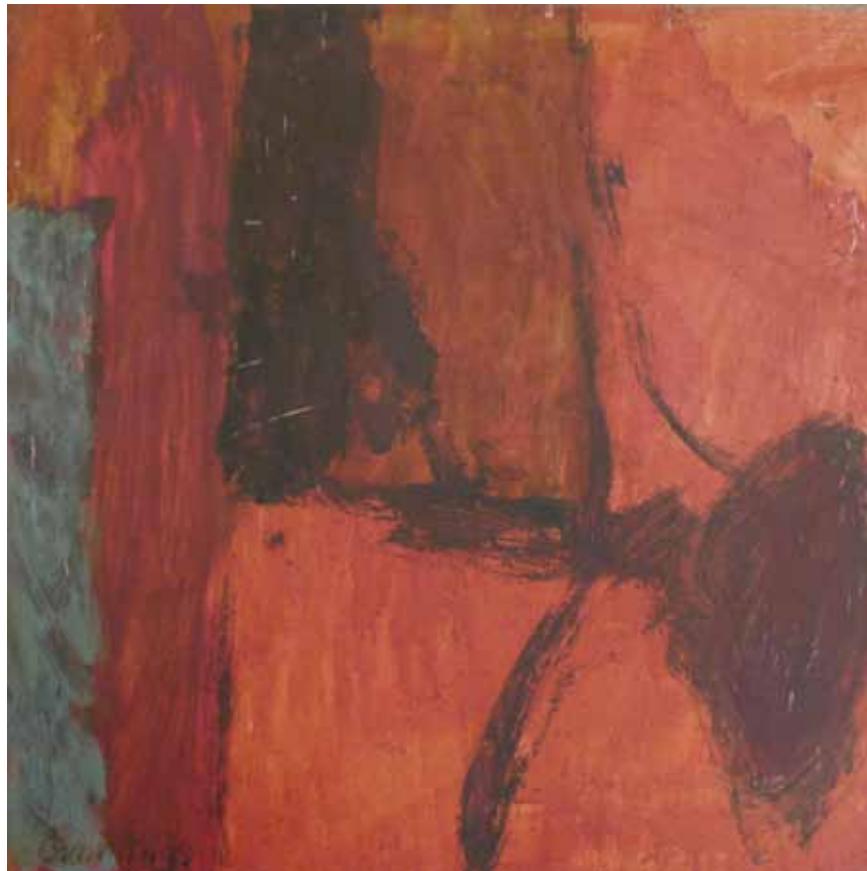


***Unbounded No 9***

1994 3/4 lithograph on rag paper 50 x 37.5 cm

This delicate tracery of lines hangs balanced, secured by a tiny shimmer of horizontals  
while floating in a void with no limits in time or space.

## ELIZABETH CUMMINGS



**See Saw**

1995 oil on board 35 x 35 cm

A fine abstraction done with a minimal palette that is in composition a balancing act of forms sitting on the edge of tipping between stasis and randomness.

## MARGARET DREDGE



***Untitled (Black and White)***  
1969 oil on board 48 x 70 cm

A painting from the period when the artist was drawn to hard-edge abstraction, and in this elegant exploration of form in black, white and greys, the softness of the curved elements are anything but "hard edge".

## MARGARET DREDGE



**Untitled (blue and orange)**

1974 oil on board 32 x 124 cm

A work from the post-expressionist/minimal era of the 1960/70s when the dictum was that artist should exclude self expression and 'the pictorial, illusionistic and fictive in favor of the literal' and favour the 'geometric, forms purged of metaphor, equality of parts and repetition.'

## RUTH FAERBER



***Something passes – Some things remain***

c 1973 screen print and pressed paper. 60 x 90 cm

This emotive print, almost a sculpture with the pressed paper, contains a slight sadness that is integral to the joys of living, and a quiet simplicity that remains, long after leaving the work.

## VIVIENNE FERGUSON



### ***Goings on***

1999 acrylic on canvas 110 x 90 cm

The rewards of this painting are not reaped by a casual viewing, it requires time from the viewer so as to experience this portal to infinity. The depth and three dimensionality is such that after some close study you almost feel that to dive in would be to lose yourself in an endless cloud of coloured cosmic dust motes.



**No such thing**

2000 acrylic on canvas 152 x 152 cm

With translucent and washed out colours thinly spaced on a white ground this work has transcendental properties. To quote John McDonald, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH 21/9/96) "The most purposeful gaze is dissolved in Ferguson's pale ethereal pictures."

## VICTOR GREENAWAY



### ***Untitled***

c.1984 stoneware 17 x 25 x 17 cm

Vic Greenaway's *Untitled* 1984 stoneware vessel seems to be an entity within itself, lending to the space around it the tranquillity of a Japanese tea house, fusing the highly refined with the natural and creating a sense of beauty expressed through naturalness and ease.

## STEVE HARRISON

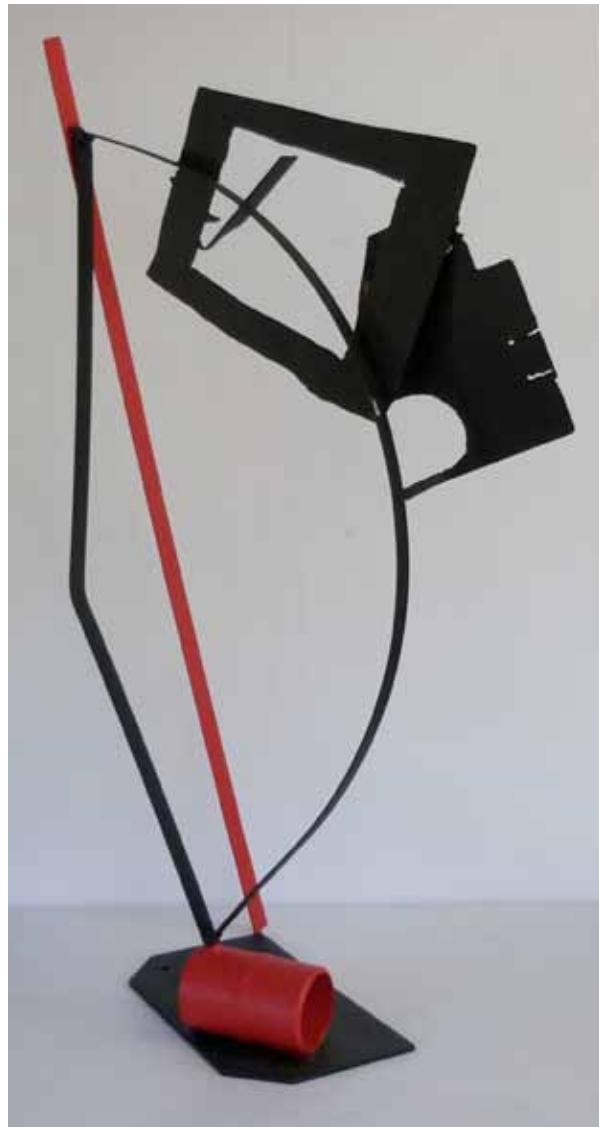


***But I know so little***

1996 Porcelain 9 x 29 (diameter) cm

This work embodies a quiet simplicity combined with a sumptuous glaze that you almost want to eat. It brings to mind that an empty bowl symbolises the willingness to be filled with new knowledge.

## JENNY HERBERT SMITH



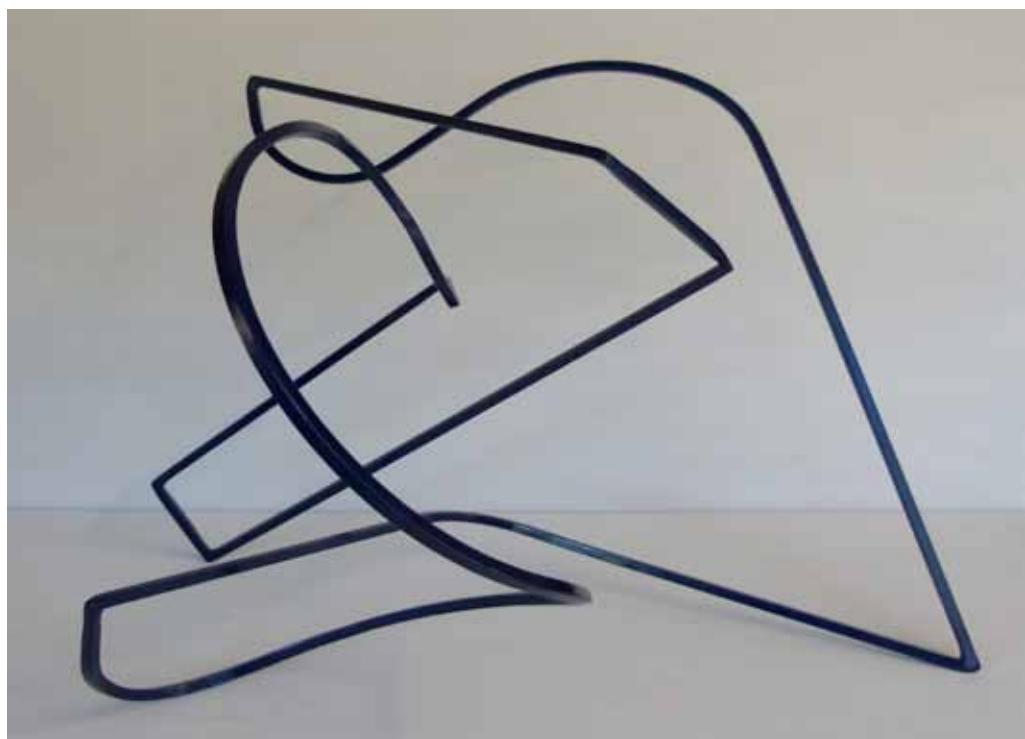
### ***Attached Detachment***

2010 painted steel 54 x 105 x 30 cm

"The sense of movement, application of colour and the essence of joyful creation which are peculiar to the Modernist period are elements I like to embrace with my work."

Jenny Herbert-Smith

## JENNY HERBERT-SMITH



***It will be all right on the night***  
2011 painted steel 58 x 69 x 66 cm

"My work is largely minimalist in form, exploring shapes in space and in particular line, but above all, my focus is on the completed work." Jenny Herbert-Smith

## ANNA HEROLD POLA



**White Orchid Blue**

2011 oil and mixed media on board 59 x 62 cm

*White Orchid Blue* has a three-dimensional quality and, while Anna Herold Pola acknowledges an understanding of minimalism, she says her art could also be said to float on the fringes of expressionism. Anna's current art is more directly influenced by pushing the still life genre to the limits of form within space.

## DAVID HORTON



***Tapia***

1999 painted steel 100 x 30 x 25 cm

*Tapia* is an effective expression of boldness through simplicity and if anything spiritual is involved, it would be to do with Greek mythology's Priapus, a fertility god, protector of livestock, fruit, plants and gardens.

## MELANIE HOWARD



### ***Mind's eye***

1986 oil on canvas 80 x 100 cm

Complex, minimal, intriguing, mysterious are all words that could be used. This painting requires contemplation and rewards those who do. The blurring of colours, the markings and scratching in the paint surface, the totemic poles disappearing into the background and the faintly discernable red line meandering through the composition all combine into an almost zen state of meditation.



**Contemplation – Synergy Series**  
1994 oil on timber tiles 42 x 42 cm.

The four timber tiles in this work bring to mind that four is significant in a number of religions, in Buddhism there are four foundations of mindfulness, contemplation of the body, contemplation of feelings, contemplation of mind and contemplation of mental objects and St Teresa has described four stages of contemplation in her "Life", the prayer of quiet, the prayer of union, ecstatic union and transforming union.

## MELANIE HOWARD



***Untitled (yellow & red circles)***

1991 oil on linen 190 x 190 cm

Paintings by Melanie Howard require the viewer's complete attention as well as reflection and deliberation of and on the "other". The viewing experience can be akin to watching clouds, as Charles Nodrum has noted "Minimalist painters keep reminding us about emptiness and nothingness. They seem to say 'slow down – look very carefully' – so force us to sharpen our eyes."

## MELANIE HOWARD



**Untitled (Shell)** 1988/89 oil on canvas 46 x 61cm



**Untitled (Crystal)** 1988/89 oil on canvas 46 x 61 cm

Melanie Howard's colour and paint work seems to come from a very subtle self expressionism which has more to do with painting as mystical or religious experience than any attempt at minimalism.

## SANDRA LEVESON



**Untitled (Blue and silver stripes)**

c.1965 screenprint 80 x 100 cm

The simplicity of this linear/hard edge abstraction from the very early days of this artist's career belies the complexity of intellectual thought behind producing such a visually appealing composition. One element more or less would detract from its integrity.



***Fin de Siecle Study 5***

1992, pastel on paper 42 x 43 cm

For some viewers this study contains a strong mystical element, like a door opening to a new future, offering rewards for the contemplative viewer. *Fin de Siecle*, literally the end of the century, is a term also used in the context of the closing of an era, passage or period as well as the opening of a new path or a way forward. The work draws the viewer through the dark red portal to a bright unknown future. To a few it might evoke the bright light at the end of a dark tunnel that some who have stood at death's door maintain they have witnessed or for others the remembered experience of being born, from the dark warmth of the womb to light and love.

## FRANK MARINELLI



### ***Waiting at the Stairs***

1980 pencil on paper 50 x 70 cm

The interest in this pencil drawing comes from the fact that the stairs are the main subject matter and are nonexistent, left to the imagination, while the waiting figure and ceiling are detailed. The perspective from the bottom looking up personalises the scene to the viewer, 'about to ascend the stairs', while the figure waiting at the top is unaware of the viewer's existence.



***Out Turn***

2002 painted steel 40 x 60 x 15 cm

Russel McQuilty's sculpture comes from his fascination with the interaction of elements, where the planes and angles cross and touch each other and how the shadows fall. "A lot of my sculpture is about what's not there as well. Negative space is an element. The steel dictates."

*Russell McQuilty: Rhapsody in Red* Lauren Harvey & Jan Howlin, Dubbo Regional Gallery catalogue

## MIRANDA PARKES



***Isadora***

2000 oil on canvas, 2 joined panels 80 x 180 cm

To arrive at such a satisfying "whole" is very difficult, there is a complexity within the work that very few artists working within the "western/European" tradition ever achieve. The painting has an empathy with some work by artists who still connect to their indigenous traditions, in particular some Australian Aboriginal artists as well as textiles by indigenous peoples in South America.



***Desert Twilight***

1990 Etching 75 x 60 cm

This is an enigmatic work that smells of dry, cracked, cooling earth under the emerging beauty of the night. The artist has made full use of the velvet blacks produced through the process of etching.

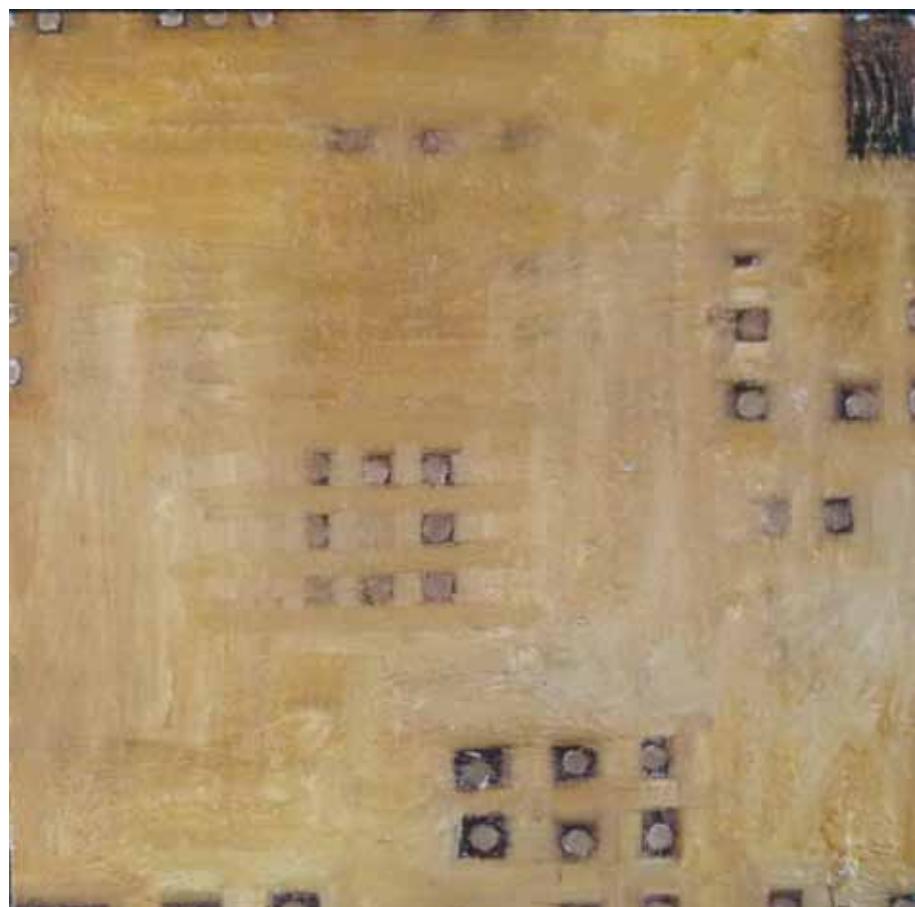
## PEGGY RANDALL



### **More Room**

1998 oil on canvas 80 x 100 cm

As usual Peggy Randall follows her artistic instinct and provides the viewer with a deeply satisfying expression of cool, calm and collected content, where every tone, colour and shape has been intellectually analysed, carefully weighed and artfully placed.



***Untitled (grape sorter)***

2001 gesso and acrylic 30 x 30 cm

In her work, Mildura artist Jai Smith explores her emotional relationship between colour and texture in response to the local environment.

## CARLY SNOSWELL

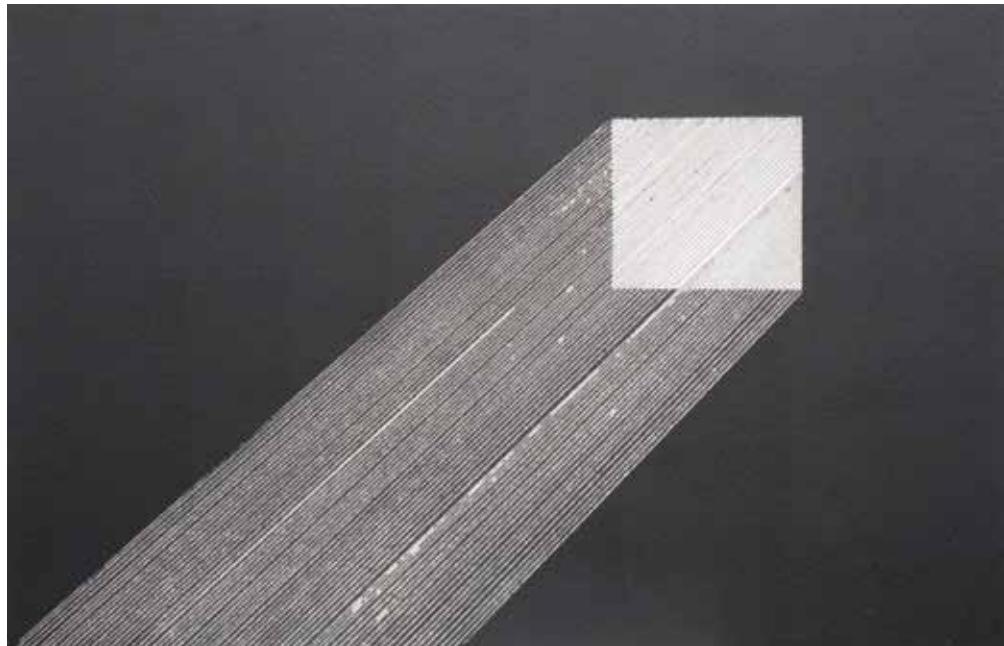


### ***Untitled***

2010 plastic ties. size variable.

This delightful installation is as delicate as lace, as bright as dew on a web in the early morning and as common as the plastic ties that hold the label to your new clothes. This work transcends the mundane nature of the material it is made from.

## DANIEL TEMPLEMAN



***Friction***

2004 acrylic on board, 60 x 40 cm

Almost cartoon like in its simplicity, this immediately engaging work evokes the old masters' use of black to evoke light, particularly Caravaggio's use of a light source from out of frame to highlight a scene. It may also evoke a Christian message ( John 1:9 ) – "the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

## AIDA TOMESCU



**Sweet Water III**

1986 etching 10/10 30 x 30cm

Three forms in stasis, held by the negative (white) space, only for a moment, as if frozen within the flashlight of a camera, blink and they will resume their trajectory along the space time continuum.

This work dates from 1986, when Aida Tomescu first took up print making with John Loane of the Viridian Press early in her career.









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