

colored, and decorative intings on paper. They ously cheerful — airy ately rendered. The e sleek and smooth. It matter what medium n," he says inspecting a which rain has leaked. intasy that counts."

ears, Icilio has worked Many of these drawings ew and are somewhat it of sophisticated is. On a large scale they dramatic and on a d scale one can only the patience involved in n.

eat majority of Icilio's telephone-book size and seem to demand being larger canvases. He gives explanation: "It needs y to paint big pictures. of money has often me from being creative. regret that I've had this for 28 years, but I feel it affected my art."

ere are still more troubles artist. The warehouse, cilio cleaned for three in hopes of being able to work on the walls for six has been sold. He and his s will have to go. But still one week to go. It's up.

AUSTRALIAN  
TUES 3 APR  
1979

THREE solo shows by women and all running concurrently give some indication of the success of the women's movement in winning a better deal for women artists.

At Melbourne's Gryphon Gallery, Margaret Dredge is exhibiting a group of recent paintings which show her to be a skilful maker of pictures, sensitive to the demands and possibilities of her medium. Predominantly dark in tone, the paintings have a sombre air which is relieved to some extent by her use of texture, subtly related color and dynamic linear movement radiating across and around her picture plane.

The best picture in the exhibition is *Merapi*, a large work in which the various simple geometric figures are juxtaposed and embellished with great assurance. Texture, tone and color are all made to contribute precisely to her intention. With this exhibition, Margaret Dredge has assumed a place among the top dozen women working in Melbourne.

## ART

### GRAEME STURGEON

The variations in approach from one picture to the next in Dredge's work indicate that for her each new painting is a fresh problem demanding new solutions. But clearly, despite the competence of her work, she remains to some degree uncertain about her direction.

Paula Dawson (Union Gallery, RMIT) on the other hand is quite confident about hers, every time she finds one. On this occasion she is exhibiting an installation which is an attempt to be enigmatic and profound.

Called *Sub Sets*, an Exhibition of Sculpture, it is in fact an investigation into the nature of reality. Two rooms are set up in the gallery, one to look like a seedy living-room, complete with dirty walls and down-at-heel furniture, pictures, ornaments, books and papers, all the accumulated, rubbish of an old and much

lived-in room. The other is completely empty except that slides of the walls of room number one are projected on to the bare walls of room number two.

Illusion and reality, the basic problem of a great deal of western art, is here presented in an updated version but without anything new to say. The "real" room, which is itself an illusion, that is, it is only real to the same degree as a stage set, is much more interesting and "real" than the slide-decorated room which, for all its technology, is immediately understood and therefore banal.

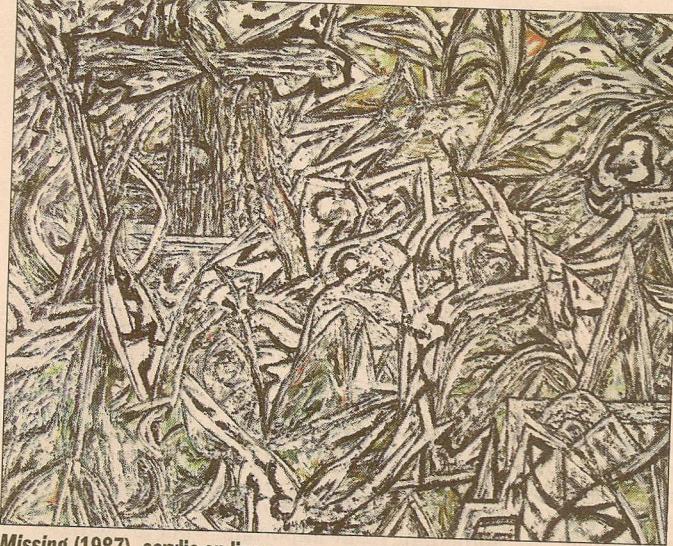
From time to time the Victorian Ministry for the Arts mounts small exhibitions in its offices in Exhibition Street. This time the space is given over to small three-dimensional works by Christine Chappell. She calls them table sculpture but, despite their small size, they lack the necessary degree of craft skill to make them appropriate to such prolonged and close examination.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2003 • THE AGE  
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## AROUND THE GALLERIES

### MEGAN BACKHOUSE

#### Remembering Margaret Dredge



*Missing* (1987), acrylic on linen.

Despite early success, abstract artist Margaret Dredge withdrew from the exhibition circuit in the late 1960s, holding only one solo show (in 1979) between 1967 and her death in 2001. An exhibition of the artist's paintings dating from 1985 to 2001, at Deakin University's Icon Museum of Art (221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, phone 9244 5344), highlights her place in Australian art history. *Margaret Dredge: An Abstract* runs until November 15.

# Margaret Dredge exhibition an eye-catcher

Margaret Dredge's current exhibition of paintings at the Pinacoteca Gallery, 1 Fitzroy St., St. Kilda, is a reminder that there is wealth of talent centred around the Beaumaris Art Group that is ally outstanding in its diversity and ability.

Margaret has been painting eight years and already achieved a us many strive for all r lives.

er work has the painter quality of an out-  
ding talent, but this either the beginning  
the end of her appeal.  
re is a symbolism and  
ce of color and  
gn that talks to the  
er in a confidential  
o voice. It is indicative  
er power to impart a  
age that she has no  
i to shout.

Margaret Dredge is con-  
emporary without being  
antly abstract. Indeed  
e is nothing blatant,  
one jarring note in  
exhibition. Glowing  
ples transform into  
ly translucent blues  
warm yellows shoulder  
thy mustards in her  
ure in Landscape (No.  
that is not noticeably  
rative.

analysis (No. 2) is, in  
opinion, an outstand-  
ly good painting. It  
ds together with  
ength and authority,  
sympathy and under-  
standing are there in equal  
portions, posing the  
estion of whether this  
the artist's self-analysis  
is she looking out-  
wards with an under-  
standing eye and laying a  
tle brush on our sins  
commission and omis-  
n?

I think Analysis is an  
tstandingly good paint-  
g. I will make a point  
seeing it again. Frankly,  
would enhance any  
lection and I feel cer-  
in it will be a collector's  
y.

Stria (No. 11) again evokes imagery. This time the modernity of the freewayed landscape is tied closely, texturally, with the rock stratum through which the asphalt and white lines snake endlessly. Indeed, the man-made landscape pervades a great deal of Margaret Dredge's work. Right Turn (No. 12), Left Turn (13), Forward March (14) and About Turn (15) are analogous of today's regimentation, of conformity running

rampant, of a community of Sunday drivers, or a community marching in a political rally, faceless, voiceless, uniform and unformed.

In case we miss the point, No. 16 is Woman and Flag. Every one of these paintings is worth mentioning. There is a provocative symbolism that is brought to the verge of positive statement by a painterly hand, an observant eye and a high degree of intelligent application.—HARRY BLAKE.

Thursday, October 5, 1967

# Dredge painted the

At the height of her career, and following good reviews, Margaret Dredge went into exile. Her work from that time is now showing, writes Chris Beck.

MARGARET Dredge had wanted to paint from an early age but circumstances and the times forced her to wait until she was in her 30s. She died in 2001, leaving an extensive body of work that spans five decades.

Her children, Peter, Rhonda and Lesley, are now cataloguing her abstract work with a view to mounting a retrospective of a significant and largely unseen collection.

Two years ago an exhibition of 14 works from the mid-'80s to 2001 was mounted at Icon gallery at Deakin University and another exhibition of the same period is now showing.

Dredge's mother died when she was two; she and her father boarded with 17 different families while enduring the Depression and the war. Her father insisted she seek secretarial work, deciding that art was impractical. Then she married at 22 and started a family.

In 1959, after Peter was born, she dusted off her main ambition and began to immerse herself physically and academically in art. She started by doing figurative work and portraits but at art classes with Australian abstract painter Robert Grieve she developed an abstract style. She contributed to group exhibitions, got involved in artists' societies and had her first solo exhibition in 1964.

"Her early work had birdlike figures, which were abstracted," Peter says. "But she was soon moving into pure form for its own sake; paint for its own sake."

By the time of her second solo exhibition in 1967, Dredge had become interested in the pure abstract form of colour field painting, which was characterised by large areas of a more or less flat single colour. The purpose was to compress the idea to a ½-millimetre-thick plane of colour on the canvas.

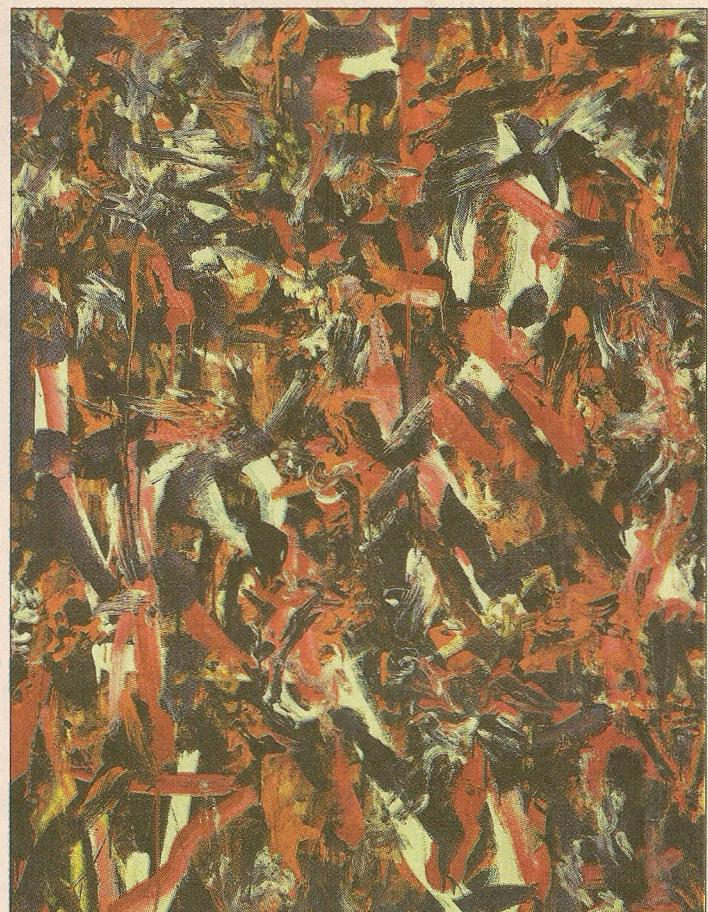
At the height of her career, and following good reviews for her exhibitions with several paintings in public collections, she chose to withdraw into self-imposed exile without a clear explanation. She hated the increasingly political nature of the art world. At the time there were culture wars between hard-edged abstraction and abstract expressionism.

"She wasn't someone who wanted to throw herself into the bull pit," Peter says. "She was politically active in things that involved principle; the Vietnam war, women's rights, Springboks. She was interested in the whole world but wasn't going to be part of that art-world political intensity. She hated the cult of personality of the art gods and she didn't like critics and others dictating what people should paint."

Despite her exile, she remained prolific as a painter. The paintings became increasingly hard edge, and with that developed an interest in optical effects, generated by an intense compression of parallel lines.

Dredge's husband, Peter, a bank manager and amateur builder who died in 2000, constructed a studio around an old Victorian window, attached to the garage of their home in Cheltenham.

In the early '70s Dredge dis-



carded the oils from the previous years and explored the layering potential of acrylics.

She also returned to a more painterly technique. On top of the dribbles, daubs and strokes, Dredge always overlaid a taut field of colour, representing a struggle between raw emotion and the desire to order.

"Her paintings became much more expressive," Peter says.

She would start with an emotional idea and then pour that out in paint. She put the paint on quickly, used the pallet knife, poured water in quite a robust way and the painting was worked up to some sort of structure. Peter says it was an

active process that also involved her three teenage children.

"Lesley, Rhonda and I would often see paintings in early formation and say, 'gee Mum that looks pretty good'. And she'd say, 'oh no, it looks dreadful; I'm going to keep working on it,'" Peter says. "She was very self-critical. In the '70s she was going through a struggle of expression in terms of what she really wanted to paint. It was expressive in terms of paint and brush stroke but then she applied some sort of order over it, which was hard colour and hard-edged lines."

Peter, an architect, says that his mother could be emotional, which came out in her paint-

# e blues



Margaret Dredge's vertical artwork *The Mask Cried* and the artist at work in her studio, circa 1976.

ings, and at the same time had a very good eye for three-dimensional structure. So the two facets combined in her paintings.

As a teenager Peter helped his mother by stretching canvases and framing them. He studied art at secondary school and did most of his folio in the studio. His work, he says, was remarkably similar to hers. His mother's visual structure was an influence on his interest in architecture.

During the last 22 years of her life, Dredge exhibited her paintings only twice in small group shows. Yet this last period was the most prolific; she painted more than 60 major works, few of which have been exhibited.

Art historian Dr Christopher Heathcote wrote of Dredge's work in the 1990s: "The solemn emotional import of these, her final completed works, is unmistakable. This is the visual equivalent of blues music. The paint is gathered into simple, yet inexplicably moving struc-

tures of sombre form that act upon the sensitive viewer as a psychological medium, a melancholy transport.

"Technically, it would be incorrect to describe the broad strokes in black and white acrylic as calligraphic; and yet these late works by the artist are, indeed, true to the intention of Chinese calligraphy. There is a raw emotional honesty to the movement of the brush: it seems directly to convey the inner emotions of the solitary artist, her inner passions, thoughts, joys, and anxieties."

Peter says that this period was when his mother distilled her knowledge and abstract journeys. She returned to a direct relationship between her emotion, aesthetic sensibilities and the physical properties of the paint. "She struck artistic maturity. She was there on her own doing all this great work and not showing."

*Margaret Dredge: Impulses of the Mind selected works 1985-2001*, until July 30 at Spain Galleries, 45 Flinders Lane, city.

## AROUND THE GALLERIES MEGAN BACKHOUSE

### All features great and small

The edges are uneven and the surfaces lumpy in these whimsical ceramics with 18th century leanings by Stephen Benwell. The plates, figurines, busts and vases range from tiny (barely five centimetres high) to seriously large, although most of the more than 50 works edge towards the smaller side. The colours are soft, the detail fine and the imagery homoerotic, with the exhibition at Niagara Galleries (245 Punt Road, Richmond, phone 9429 3666) until July 30.

### Thrift-wrapped ceramics

Paul Wood's great stacks of cups, plates, teapots and other discarded ceramics have a much more sturdy mood. Collected from thrift shops and friends, Wood piles up this mass-produced domestic ware then fires it so that the individual pieces run into each other at the edges, becoming forever fused. *Domestic Slump* is at Craft Victoria (31 Flinders Lane, city, phone

9650 7775) until August 20.



### 'Pool of talent

Alfred Gregory's best-known pictures were taken in 1953 on the open white expanses of Mount Everest but here the now 92-year-old photographer also shows his photographs of a densely populated 1960s Blackpool. So, alongside photographs of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay beginning their famous ascent, we get anonymous women in hair rollers, couples kissing and masses of people reclining in deckchairs at the British seaside. Gregory's photographs are at LAB X Gallery (40 Pakington Street, St Kilda, phone 9534 8838) until August 11.

### A cordial welcome

Thread is stitched into paper, embroidered into text and stretched taut throughout the gallery in this exhibition looking at how three drawing students weave fine cord into their practice. *Highly Strung* comprises works by Edwina Carrall, Andrea Kalivaiotis and Lara Davies and closes today at First Site RMIT Union Gallery (Storey Hall basement, 344 Swanston Street, city, phone