



The Metaphysical Edge

seeing abstraction

19 September – 21 November 2015

Shoalhaven City Arts Centre
12 Berry Street Nowra NSW

Selected works from the M. G. Dingle & G. B. Hughes Collection – a bequest to the Shoalhaven City Arts Centre

The Metaphysical Edge

Seeing abstraction

Artists do not usually make a work of art for a particular audience, they make art in order to capture the raw essence of their immediate experience.

The art they make reflects three things:

- In the first place their personality, their likes & dislikes will have an effect on the art works produced.
- In the second the current fashion or style of art will also have effect on the work and on the way it is seen by a viewer.

For example, today we look at an ancient Greek bronze and see an exquisite and timeless work of art, whereas a Greek of the period would have viewed the work through a religious context, the work would have summoned a variety of communal ways of worship and living.

- The third and most important factor, one that all great artists are united in their drive to achieve, is to exercise power through their artistry and sensitivity to the mystery of existence and the ability to channel that mystery into a work of art using arrangements of symbols and colour.

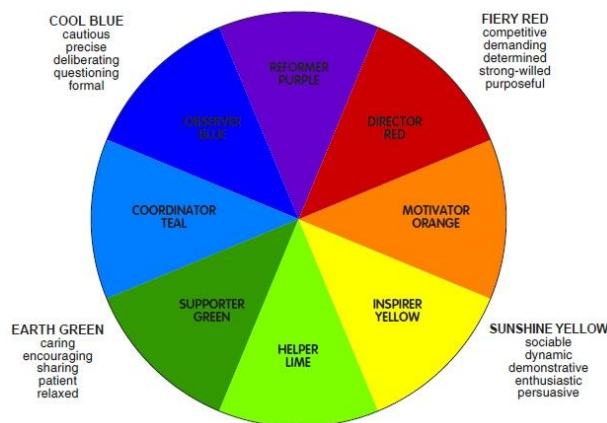
Mark Rothko, the American artist known for metaphysical abstraction, put it this way :
“Pictures must be miraculous, the instant one is completed the intimacy between the creation and the creator ends. The completed picture, for the artist, must be a revelation, as it should be for later viewers, an unexpected and unprecedented resolution of an eternally familiar need.”

While a great naturalist painting and a great abstract expressionist work could scarcely differ more in terms of style and interest, it is this third factor that they have in common.

Only truly great works of art will express this inner artistry that can still be recognized decades or centuries after the first two factors, personality and style, have lost any resonance.

For the person who seeks to connect to the art it is not what the artist sought to express but the mindset that they, the viewer, brings to the interaction that is important.

For Jung, colour was the primary manifestation of images, patterns, and symbols that rise out of the collective unconscious. Colour influences us through our associations of emotions and feelings; exciting reds, calm greens, cool blues.



A mundane example : Corporations, in their marketing, use the psychology of colour in packaging and displays in supermarkets.

An infinity of a single colour can only exist within your mind, colour always has an edge where it meets another colour or tone.

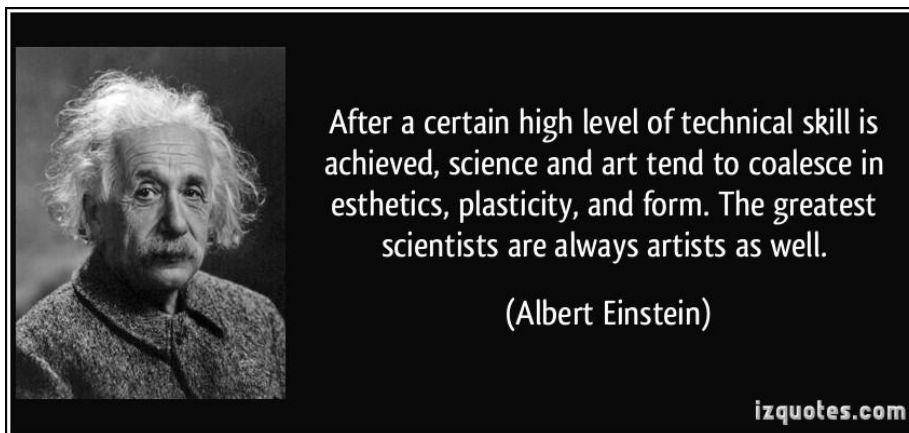
Colour sits within symbols or shapes, the construction incorporates line, mass, space and rhythm.

Within works of art, symbols are dynamic, not static, and emerge within a field of awareness, within the context of the life experience of the viewer. Geometric forms, such as triangles and circles can give indicators of stability, direction or wholeness.

It is when the viewer approaches the work of art as though it was intended especially for them, as though the artist has specifically used a particular combination of colours and symbols especially for the viewer in question, that the viewer can utilise the artistic experience to influence the dynamics of their life.

Aristotle noted that knowing art, provides more understanding and more profound insights than any other way of knowing.

Even that great scientist, Einstein wrote that the most important function of art is to arouse and keep alive in people who are receptive, a feeling for fundamental truths about the universe.



The artist need not be driven to make a work of art by metaphysics or philosophical musings on the human condition. For the artist it is, at the most fundamental, the need to accurately express an artistic vision. For the viewer, if they are open to the demands of art to feel and think of the mysteries of our existence, they can come to the realization that the world, the universe, is not quite what we think it is. Something hidden, something hard to communicate, though clearly expressed in the art, has come into existence.

When we view and engage with art we of course also bring to that experience a cultural mindset, things that we learnt or absorbed through growing up in a particular cultural landscape of beliefs and the influences of religion, politics, media, myths, family stories and the art of the past .

Take “Granite fragment” as an example.



One of the most ancient and enduring religious practices has been holding as sacred and as objects of veneration, mountains and the stone they are made of; from the single upright stone revered by the Celts, through Stonehenge, Egyptian obelisks and the pyramids, the largest of the stone “cairns”, there are examples of sacred stones in nearly all cultures from the Neolithic to the present. The Muslim Black Stone at Mecca, the Jewish “Rock of Foundation” which is today in the Muslim Dome of the Rock and for medieval Christians the center of the universe was at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, near the sacred rock of Golgotha. References to rock and stone litter all manner of religious texts.

When I look at this sculpture, I am influenced by my exposure to cultural tropes and my thinking runs along the lines that the artist has understood the love of nature and of the miracle of our existence in what is essentially a hostile Universe and has strived to liberate the monumentality of stone, to distil the essence of the earth’s geological processes and help me see rock and stone in a new light.



When I look at art created by Australian Aboriginal artists, I see, analyze and react on a personal level but am aware that for the artist the visible patterns, marks or design are associated with creative spiritual forces: the mark may be attributed to these forces, or it may symbolize and represent them and events associated with them. The Aboriginal peoples’ system of beliefs and philosophy incorporate the relations and balance between the spiritual, natural and moral elements of the world and span the past, present and future. But my cultural upbringing does not allow access and therefore I must bring to bear my own intellect and emotions to create meaning



Kyle Murrell's *Matter & Object III* in the first instance is so minimal that it is almost a locked door, but with contemplation various ideas are generated, and mine started along the lines: Triangles are normally symbols of stability and / or direction and can represent spiritual beliefs such as the Holy Trinity in Christian religions, or to the Greeks, the triangle is seen as the delta glyph and is symbolic of a doorway; i.e. balancing thought and emotion provides a doorway to higher wisdom.

In *Matter & Object* the three lines are a broken, unstable triangle floating in a grey void with a faint patch of blue opening up to infinity.

Or it could be that this is a meditation on Buddhist metaphysical philosophy and the relationship between matter and object.

Of course the lines of thought, the tools used to open up access, will be individual to each viewer, bringing with them their own intellectual and cultural understandings.

With my own art I do not paint or sculpt with anyone else in mind and I do not expect anyone to look at my work and see the "story" or influence. I read and enjoy poetry, listen to music and attend contemporary dance, and certain parts of these will inspire me to try to capture the emotional essence, another way of seeing or feeling what I have just experienced.



"a pale whisper of light" is inspired by a particular prose poem of Federico García Lorca and in telling you this I do not expect that the painting will act as a gateway to the inner meaning of the poetry, even if you are familiar with the poets work. However I do hope that when you look at the work you will find a meaning or a story that will resonate with some emotion, experience or memory of your own.

You can study the mechanics; line, mass, space, rhythm, texture, depth of field, colour and tone, that make up a technically good work of art and this will provide you good foundations, but to acquire a instinct for the mystery and unique artistry incorporated in a great work you need an open mind, a willingness to trust your own feelings and instincts and to also question and analyze why you like or dislike a work of art, to take time to really look, time to allow a work of art to blossom and reveal the metaphysical world within.

Max Dingle
Curator

August 2015

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www.maxdingleart.com

One of the most ancient and enduring religious practices has been holding as sacred and as objects of veneration, mountains and the stone they are made of; from the single upright stone (menhir) of the Celts, through Stonehenge, Egyptian obelisks and the pyramids, the largest of the stone “cairns”, there are examples of sacred stones in nearly all cultures from the Neolithic to the present. The Muslim Black Stone at Mecca, the Jewish “Rock of Foundation” which is today in the Muslim Dome of the Rock and for medieval Christians the center of the universe was at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, near the sacred rock of Golgotha. References to rock and stone litter religious texts, from “Rock of Ages” to “God's kingdom is a stone cut without hands (Daniel 2:34)”.

Max Dingle



May Barrie *Granite fragment* 2011 polished granite 25 x 12 x 11 cm



Grace Burzese *Lines of Violet* 1997 acrylic on canvas 59 x 58 cm



Liz Cuming *Bundanon* 1994 oil on canvas 76 x 60 cm



Elisabeth Cummings *Untitled* 2000 oil on board 62 x 70 cm



Max Dingle *a pale whisper of light* 2012 acrylic on canvas 120 x 82 cm



Margaret Dredge *Untitled* 1980 acrylic on canvas 91 x 122 cm

The Aboriginal peoples' system of beliefs and philosophy incorporate the relations and balance between the spiritual, natural and moral elements of the world and span the past, present and future. These beliefs have different names depending on the language of the speaker. Many artworks are visual representations of the symbols associated with the artist's beliefs. For example, for the Warlpiri of the Tanami Desert region the word for these visual representations is *Kuruwarri* - visible pattern, mark or design associated with creative Jukurrpa spiritual forces: the mark may be attributed to these forces, or it may symbolize and represent them and events associated with them; mark, design, artwork, drawing, painting, pattern.

<http://theconversation.com/> & *Warlpiri Dictionary*



Philip Gudthaykudthay *Minytji - landscape* 1993 screenprint 57x76cm



Jenny Herbert-Smith *It will be alright on the night* 2011 painted steel 56 x 69 x 66 cm



Anna Herold Pola *White Blue Orchid* 2011 mixed media 59 x 62 cm



Melanie Howard *Untitled (shell)* 1989 acrylic on canvas 60 x 30 cm

“All people by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves. Of all the senses, we prefer seeing, it makes us know and brings to light many differences between things. Art is the capability to make universal judgments that cover all cases of a certain type; thus, it is a "universal knowledge" that includes also the reason why something is so and provides more understanding and more profound insights than any other way of knowing.”

Aristotle



E J *Piti (Coolamon)* c. 1995 wood with burnt incisions 56 x 19 x 10 cm



Ron Lampert *Eyadies* 1986 oil on canvas 70 x 70 cm



Peter Liiri *Fresno Street* 2007 mixed media on board 92 x 60 cm



Sally Morgan *Ocean Fire* 1989 screenprint 70 x 90 cm

“In accordance with Tibetan metaphysics matter emerges from four basic “energy origins,” such that energy is seen as both the basis of matter, and is continuously pervading matter. From the energy resource all forms of existence arise and return again in a continuous movement of birth, existence and death, taking place every instant of time. It is because of the relationship of subject and object that we can change our object-experience, as well as our experience of the world and of the situations which arise in it.”

H H Handberg



Kyle Murrell *Matter & Object III* 2013 oil hessian 46x61cm



Nancy Nararula *Bush tucker corroboree at Coniston* c.1990 acrylic on canvas 51 x 41 cm



John Peart *Nocturne II* 1998 oil on board 50 x 60 cm



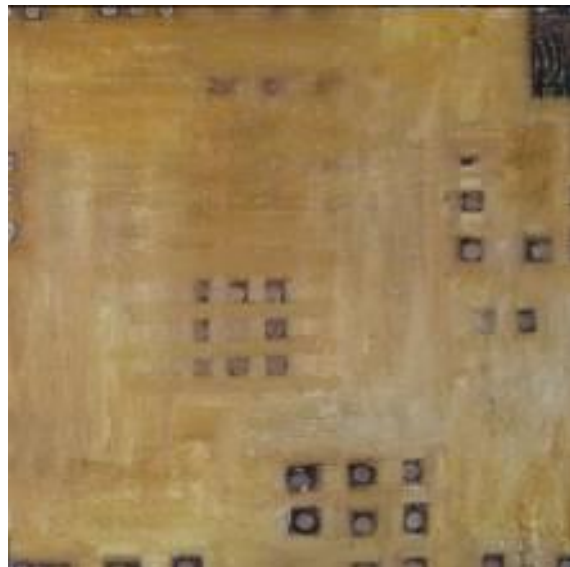
Peter Poulet *Untitled (No 9)* 2008 acrylic on canvas 56 x 76 cm

“A work of art embodies and portrays the artist's idea of vital experience. The artist apprehends, abstracts, and recreates the form of feeling in tones, lines, colors, mass, and space for others to behold. The work of art becomes an image of the reality which the artist has found in the world and of which they want to give a clear conception.”

Susan Langer



Sue Smalkowski *Refractions of light* 2014 oil on linen 122 x 122 cm



Jai Smith *Untitled* 2003 gesso & acrylic on canvas 50 x 50 cm



John Vickery *Invincible* c.1959 gouache on hardboard 76 x 50 cm