The background of the poster is a vibrant abstract painting. It features a dense field of small, light blue and white flowers or petals. Interspersed among them are dark brown, almost black, organic shapes that resemble leaves or perhaps small figures. Red and orange paint is used in several ways: a prominent red brushstroke is visible on the left side; red and orange dots are scattered throughout; and large, expressive splatters of brown and orange paint are concentrated in the lower right quadrant. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and emotional intensity.

# *Personal Journeys*

40 years of Australian Women's Abstract Art



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40 years of Australian Women's Abstract Art

**Shoalhaven City Arts Centre  
Main Gallery**

Friday 6 February to 1 April 2009

Launch Saturday 7 February 12–2pm

12 Berry Street, Nowra

FRONT AND BACK COVER IMAGE:  
DETAIL MARGARET DREDGE UNTITLED 1980

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# *Personal Journeys*

40 years of Australian Women's Abstract Art

## **Introduction**

The making of art is a personal journey, one that can take an artist from a simple idea through to an obsession. The challenge is to make an idea come to life on a canvas or as a sculpture. How to give outward expression to the feelings and emotions involved in living and relating to the people and environment around you. The works in this exhibition were produced by Australian artists between 1960 and 2000, and they form a part of the M G Dingle and G B Hughes collection. The artists were all known to Max and Gavin and the works were chosen for the collection because they represent the artist's journey through the landscapes of the mind.

# The M G Dingle and G B Hughes Collection

The collection has been assembled over a period of forty five years and as a whole reflects two personalities and, considering purchases have been made individually and jointly, shows a remarkably consistent curatorial vision.

There are a number of thematic strands within the collection and a strong representation of art made by Australian women artists.

There is also a leaning toward “black and white” and “less is more” or minimalism and it could be argued there are elements of a number of artistic movements ranging from colour field through optical, minimalism, constructivism, suprematism, and hard edge, but in the main, linear abstraction and abstract expressionism are the main focus.

One of the main interests in acquiring art is meeting and getting to know the artists, and where possible tracking development from their early career though a number of works purchased over extended periods.

Margaret Dredge is an artist we first met in the 1960s in Melbourne and became and remained friends for all her life, she died in 2001. 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. Five of her 15 works in our collection are in this exhibition.

After seeing a great painting hanging in the Suluman prize at the Art Gallery of NSW, a request was made to talk to the artist’s representative and eventually a young woman, Grace Burzese, telephoned to say she was not represented by a gallery but issued an invitation to visit her studio. The Suluman entry was purchased and a friendship forged. We have followed Grace’s career now for over ten years and have acquired six of her works as well have seen her get married and now she and her husband have a baby girl. Three of Grace’s paintings are on display in this exhibition

These are just two examples of friendships that are formed and are integral to the way the collection is seen. We are also led through the artist’s endeavours, down a number artistic highways and byways, from poetry, literature to music. And of course our own love of and taste in music is linked to our choices of the art we live with.

The collection constantly gives pleasure and stimulates the way we look at the world, each and every art work reminds us of the people who have strived to encapsulate their thoughts, their imagination and their ways of viewing Australia.

In 2007 we offered to bequest our collection to the Shoalhaven City Arts Centre and, on 5 July 2008, the Shoalhaven City Council and Gavin and I signed a deed of agreement accepting the bequest. The agreement included the offer for the Arts Centre to make use of the collection in the interim period before the bequest comes into effect.

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This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Gavin Hughes who died on 25 October 2008 just as we were finalising the selection of paintings that would be included in this exhibition. He was very pleased that our collection was being given a wider audience and that we were able to provide an artistic legacy to our beloved South Coast.

# Personal Journeys

*abstract art / - n. a 20th-century concept of art, which rejects the function of art as portraying perceived reality; non-representational art.*

(Select) dictionary definitions:

*Abstract*

*Conceived apart from matter and from special cases*

*That which concentrates in itself the essential qualities of anything more extensive or more general, or of several things; essence*

*Macquarie Dictionary*

Conventional wisdom says that abstract art, in the west, developed in the early 20th century via the Fauve, Expressionist and Neo expressionist movements, the art of Cézanne and the various movements, Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, Suprematism that sprouted across Europe. Monet, particularly the waterlily paintings and the context of Surrealism with its stress on visual free association are seen to be keys to the development of Abstract Expressionism.

Abstract patterns, geometric or otherwise are not new, they have been used, decoratively and symbolically in architecture, ceramics, textiles and jewellery from the time humans developed these skills. In Islamic countries where the depiction of human likeness is forbidden, the use of abstract, in tiles and carpets, developed, in a close parallel to abstract painting, into a sensual and mind delighting art form that transcends mere decoration.

Abstraction can also be seen in nature such as the lichen on rocks and tree trunks or the bark on scribbly gums. What sometimes seems to be a work of abstraction



"SCRIBBLY GUM" 2008  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH  
MAX DINGLE

can almost be a literal depiction of the artist's inspiration. Anabel Walters says of her work at the time *Angophora* was painted: "My earliest years were spent in the bush country of South Australia and those early impressions have remained with me. The images come from an engagement with the Australian bush which is very close to where I live. My fascination with Australian eucalypts has led to an exploration of the surface of these trees and how they shed bark at a certain time of year, their colours and their living vitality. I'm fascinated with the texture, the tiny micro organisms that inhabit the bark and the overall movement of the surface, how the bark is layered, its shapes and how it peels off. The surface is really about landscape and my images are landscapes of eucalypts. Each individual tree has a story to tell and a message which is reflected in its skin or bark. I've tried to capture a bit of that story in my exploration of paint on board. The multi-layers of impasto paint reflect the dynamic surface of these trees and I have experimented with different materials such as soil, sand and ash."

In the urban environment abstraction can be seen in steel, paint, bitumen and in the peeling remnants of posters.



"SHADOWS AND POSTERS"  
2008 DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH  
MAX DINGLE

Judy Overheu views her surrounds, be they urban or nature, as a colour palette that provides a key to developing the art of colour relationships. *Blue Water II* is not about sweeping views of the blue and briny sea, but recording the colours reflected and refracted in water rippling in the wind and glittering in the sun.

"Using the colours I see in the landscape and the world around me, I build a palette that represents a particular memory of place. The concept of an art work is developed from this palette. While I am sometimes torn between expressing

reality and abstraction I do try to capture a dreamlike sequence of colours that influence each other or go together like the green and red or pink of a watermelon. My colour sensibilities are influenced by artists like Joseph Albers, Matisse, Helen Frankenthaler and Frida Kahlo. I also keep in mind something that Joseph Albers taught, “The basic rules of colour must be practiced continuously and are never fixed, exercises toward distinct colour effects are never finished, new and different effects are discovered time and again”.

My personal view on the abstract is that these works represent a glimpse into the landscapes of the artist’s mind or their “private vision”. As Kirk Varnedoe, in the A. W. Mellon lectures in the Fine Arts held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC in 2003 noted:

*“What is remarkable is that abstract art ... should have been reinvented and flourished (over) the last fifty years as a paradigmatic example of secular diversity, individual initiative, and private vision.”*

PICTURES OF NOTHING: ABSTRACT ART SINCE POLLOCK BY KIRK VARNEDOE . PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS 2006

Abstract paintings and art works also allow room for the mind and the imagination to explore the intricacies and complexities and arrive at different destinations with every viewing. There is also an emotional gut reaction, be it cool and calculated, a sharp blow to the cerebrum or somewhere in between. Grace Burzese’s works, *Temple*, *Lines of Violet* and *Crossing Paths* all give an immediate emotional charge, in Grace’s words:

“Within each of these works there is a preoccupation with the materiality of painting. Abstraction for me is the means by which the essence of an experience can be portrayed. The process of painting is a continual act of creation and destruction, until at some point the work sings true of an emotion or embodied experience. Within these three paintings I explore questions of existence and my relationship to nature.”

Abstraction appeals directly to our emotional response to colour, shape, their mutual and multiple relationships. It gives emphasis to the gestural marks and brushstrokes of the artist and imbues each of them with meaning. Sue Smalkowski, *What Remains?*, noted in her exhibition “subtle inflections”:

“Repeated applications of poured paint (in both my oils and watercolours) directed and spontaneously creating transparent and opaque, often inert layered accumulations, the fusion – imagery suggestive ambiguous. The contrast of rhythmic vertical strokes and looser, irregular brushwork intensifies these oppositions where each stroke becomes a ‘visual feast of subtle inflections’.

I believe that the landscape comes alive gradually as each layer of surface is revealed, reminiscent of times past – as underpainting is glimpsed between layers of thicker paint, layers tucked beneath transparent glazes, the surface sometimes heavily impastoed and sometimes scraped back. I explore surface – the intricate

patterns within our environment, formations eroded by wind and water. I am captivated by their properties, seduced by the paint and look for ways to abstract and juxtapose their similarities.”

The works in *Personal Journeys* invite the viewer to experience the essence of the various artist’s explorations of their art and give a glimpse of the personal journey that every artist makes when transforming their view of an object, a feeling, emotion or the everyday landscape into a painting or sculpture.

*“The greatest adventure lies in the impulses of the mind and the struggle to make something live out of it.”* MARGARET DREDGE

# Grace Burzese



**Temple** 1995 acrylic and beeswax on linen 150 x 120 cm

*Temple* is an extraordinary painting in how its limited palette of colours and frantic scratching and markings in the beeswax combine to produce a calm almost contemplative harmony.

# Grace Burzese



***Lines of Violet* 1997 acrylic on linen 59 x 58 cm**

*Lines of Violet* a modestly sized work, ‘punches above its weight’, the softness of the pale blues, whites and violet belie the energy massed in the palette knife and brush marks, in the scratching and gouging of the surface. There is a real depth, a three dimensional feeling, given by the placement of the verticals, some dimly seen white lines overlaid by the blue and finally the violet.

# Grace Burzese



***Crossing Paths* 2001 acrylic on board 137.5 x 137.5 cm**

The movement and swirl of paint and colour in *Crossing Paths* sweeps the eye around the painting in strong primeval surges. While underneath, the violence implicit in the punctures in the hardboard speak of forces driving the rhythm of the paint.

# Elizabeth Cummings



**Kimberly Water Hole** 2002 oil on canvas 51 x 56 cm

With the lattice of brushstrokes and thick layering of paint that still allows the under painting to show, this painting is by the hand of a confident and experienced artist. To quote Sebastian Smee, Art Reviewer, *The Australian*: “Such is the complexity of Cumming’s orchestration of mark and colour, of description and abstraction, that resolution becomes a dream and the eye never comes to rest.”

# Liz Cuming



***Kuring-gai Bush* 1993 150 x 120 cm oil on canvas**

A chameleon of a painting, it changes colour and tone when viewed from close or afar, or under differing light conditions. It changes in an instant from pure lyrical abstraction to a depiction of the Kuring-gai landscape of sandstone and twisted gums, spiky hakea and golden wattle.

# Rachel Douglas



**Avesbury Solstice** 2000 steel painted 50 x 53 x 41 cm

Stark, monumental, uncompromising and grounded, yet the soft curves are seemingly modelled from leather. An internal force is straining to break free.

# Rachel Douglas



***Tsunami* 2000 forged and welded steel 60 x 60 x 40 cm.**

Tossed on a sea churned by one of the fundamental forces of nature is the initial impression derived on a first viewing, yet further study reveals the lyrical abstract nature of the steel supporting the dominant element, and the negative spaces which are just as, or possibly, more important than the structure.

## Margaret Dredge



***Untitled (red/black abstract)*** 1964 oil on board 124 x 93 cm

The drama of red and black evokes a reading of passion and hot emotions while the placement of shapes and markings, that provide the rhythm within the painting, provide a sense of landscape or even of a still life.

# Margaret Dredge



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

The drama in this painting comes from the abruptness of the diagonal cut-off of the swirl and splashes of colour in the upper half, and in turn a second black diagonal has been almost engulfed by this eruption of paint. There is a fabulous tension between the busy top section and the almost plain lower half. Is that splash of brown paint the start of an explosion of colour or is it about to be extinguished?

# Margaret Dredge



**Ajax** 1965 acrylic on board 114 x 76.5 cm

Enigmatic and powerful in its embedded signs and symbols this painting is as potent as a myth. With its textured surface and muted colour it could be a fragment of fresco from an ancient civilization, hinting at stories waiting to be discovered.

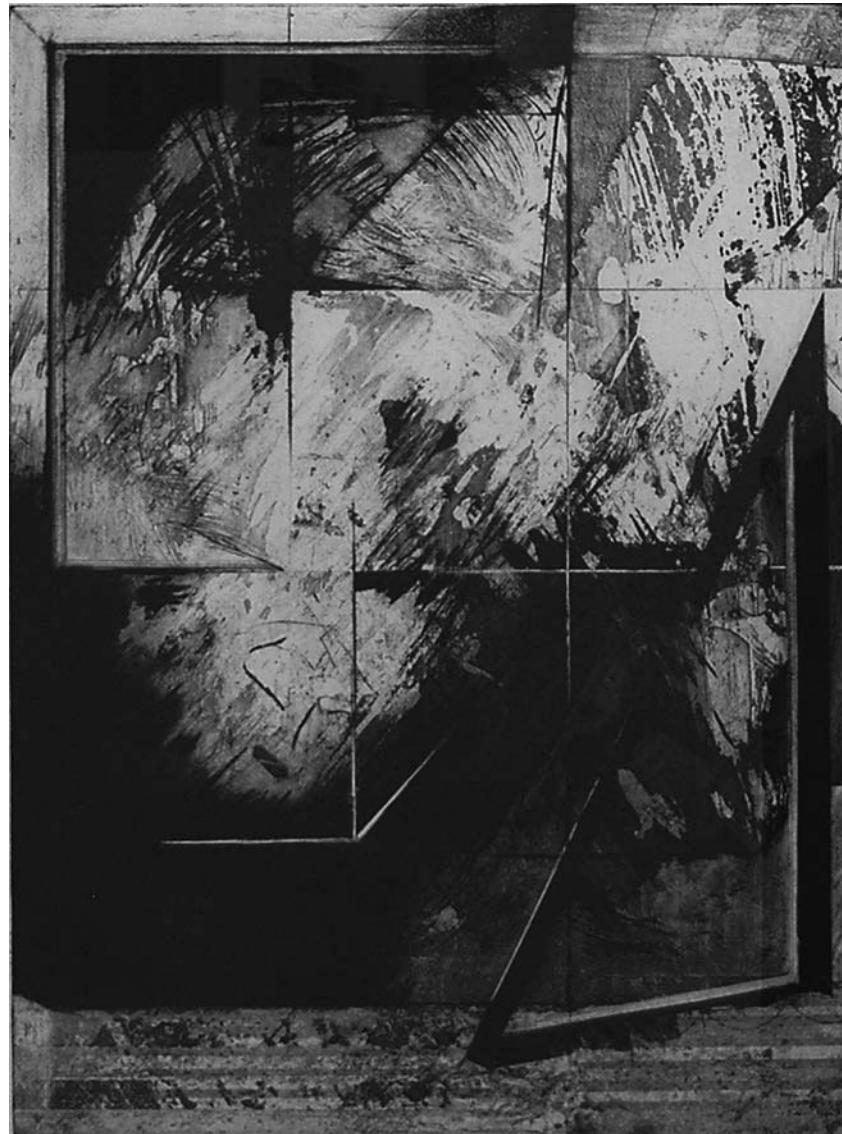
# Margaret Dredge



**Nomadic Journey** 1981 etching 92 x 120 cm

The sumptuous blackness, together with the strength and placement of the linear forms and diagonals contrasting with the fine markings and grey graduations created by the artist working on two large plates makes this etching is a technical and artistic masterpiece.

# Margaret Dredge



***Homonculus through the looking glass* 1982 etching 90 X 70 cm**

Though meaning cannot be read into the title an artist gives a particular work, the theme of "through the looking glass" with its frequent changes of spatial direction, opposites and time running backwards, coupled with a spirit conjured into being, makes the title appropriate to this etching.

# 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.

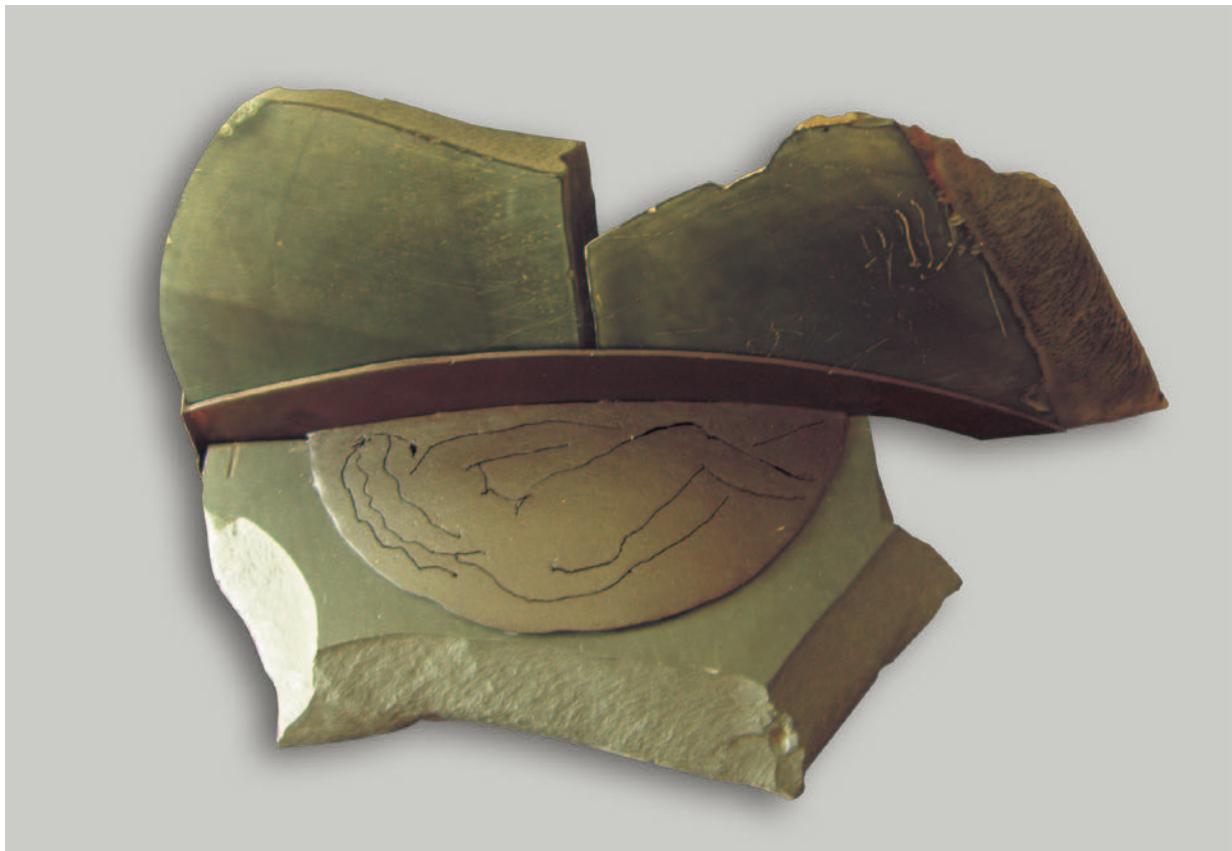
# Melanie Howard



***Mind's eye* 1986 Acrylic on canvas 120 x 90 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.

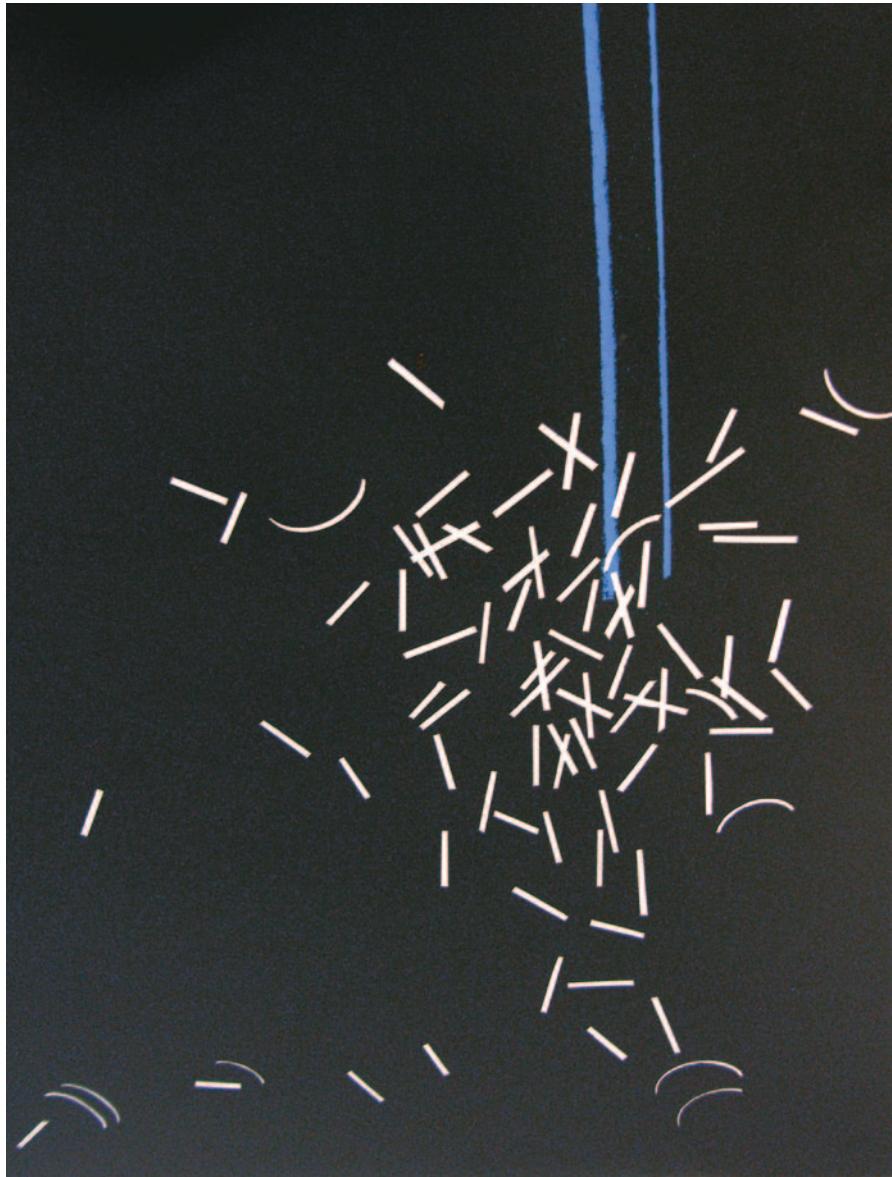
# Jan King



***Nude and the Mountains*** 1998 slate and oiled steel 36 x 81 x 30 cm

This work retains a strong landscape feel, and an almost rural simplicity. The finely “drawn” nude, cut, via a fine flame, into the curved steel at the base of the mountain completes the rural idyll. The boldly drawn delicacy of the nude against the texture of steel and slate provides a strong focus however on moving to the opposite side a more abstract composition presents itself, where the steel suggests a reclining nude in an abstracted landscape.

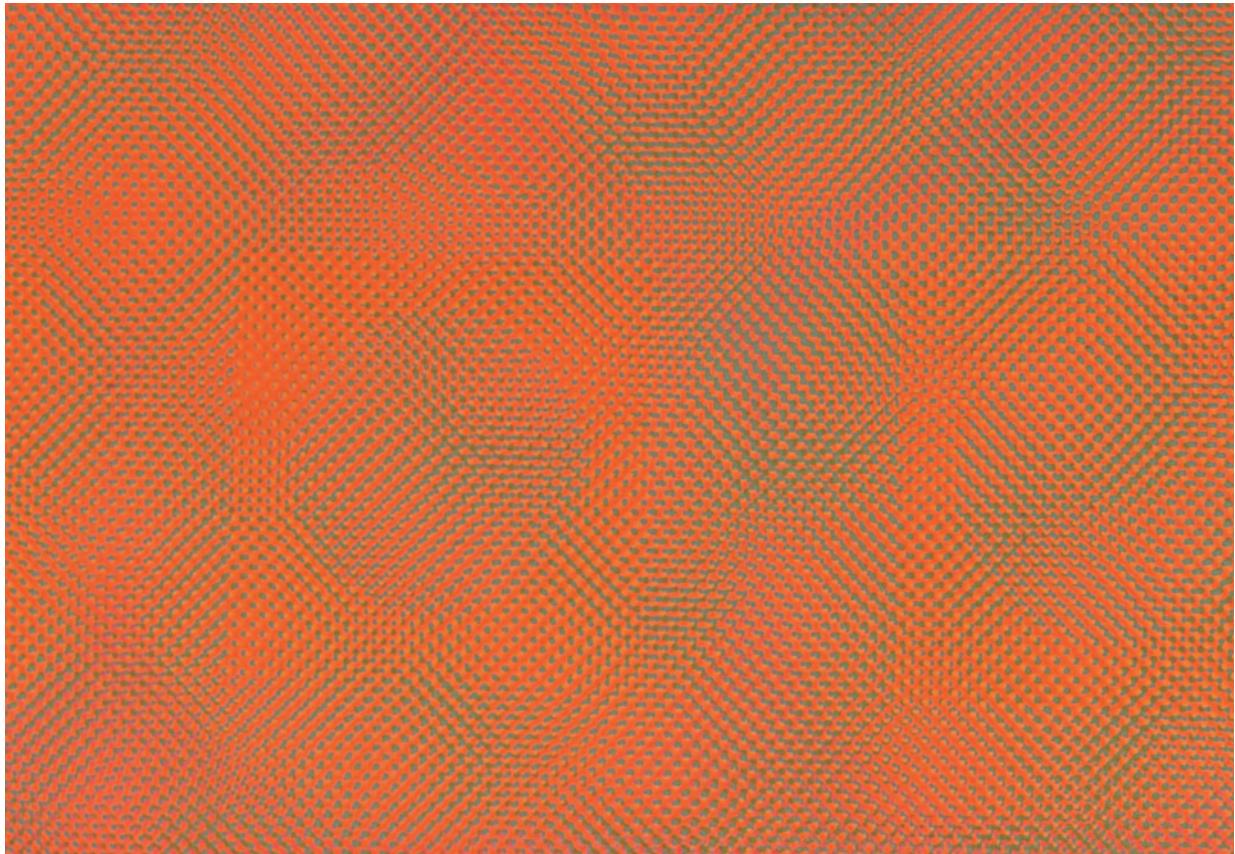
# Sandra Leveson



**Detail *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.

# Sandra Leveson



**Detail *Untitled (optical Art)* c 1970 screenprint 98 x 146 cm**

In this multiple screen print, the artist has moved on from linear abstraction into her early “optical” period. The end effect might have the hallmarks and visual movement of optical art, but the artist though the use of tiny dots of colour with varying modulation: “confounds visual expectation … (Leveson has) arrested, modified and contested the theoretically predictable movement of colour through the spectrum”.

**SANDRA LEVESON BY HELEN IVORY CRAFTSMAN HOUSE 1993**

# Judy Overheu



***Blue Water II* 1977 acrylic on canvas 168 x 162 cm**

This lyrical abstraction is all about the joy of colour, the nuances of tone, the expected relationships and the surprise of finding compatibility where contrast is expected. Reflections, ripples and refractions in water, lollies, watermelons, wildflowers and peaches, Spring on a sparkling sunlit day ...

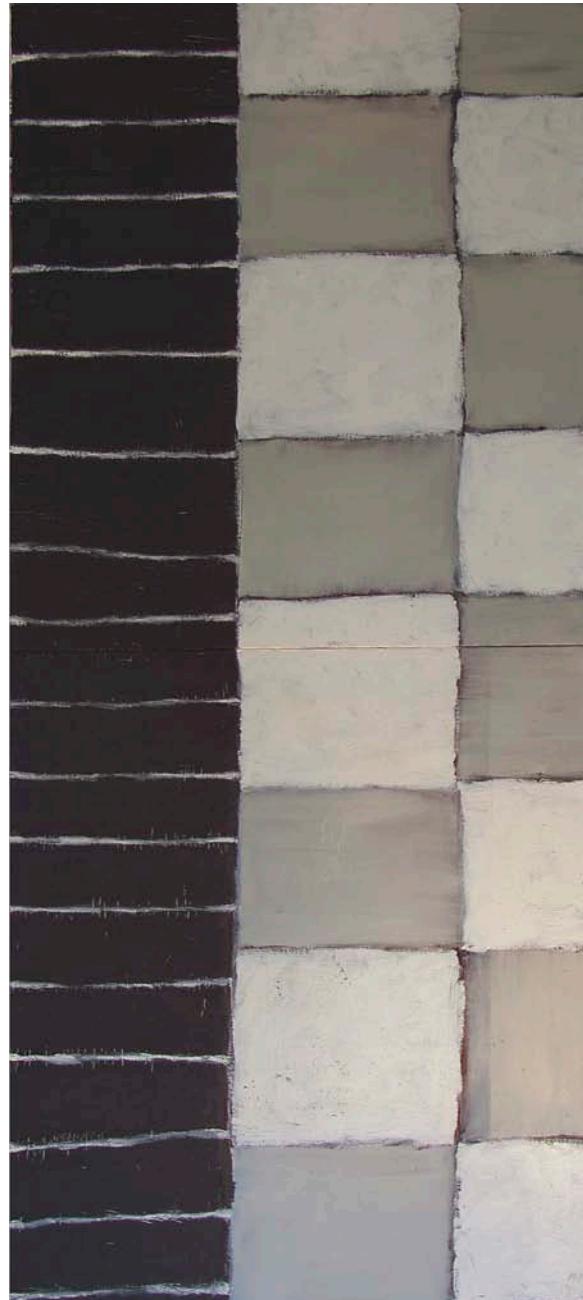
# Miranda Parkes



***Three Forms* 1993 oil on canvas 120 x 150 cm**

The colours are somber yet there are slight hints of brightness underneath. There is exuberance in the brush work that has given the black paint an almost calligraphic quality. These brushstrokes are purposeful. Nothing is superfluous. The palette knifed "X" places a focus in the center of the work and from here the eye encompasses the three forms rather than roaming from one to the other.

# Miranda Parkes



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

To arrive at a satisfying “simplicity” such as this 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 to some work by artists who still connect to their indigenous traditions, in particular certain Australian Aboriginal artists as well as textiles by indigenous peoples in South America.

# Peggy Randall



**Spain** 1996 oil on canvas 100 x 80 cm

Cool, calm and collected, every tone, colour and shape has been intellectually analysed, carefully weighed and artfully placed. This artist's work allows no compromise for fads or fashion, Peggy Randall follows her artistic instinct and provides the viewer with a deeply satisfying expression of abstracted emotional content.

# Sue Smalkowski



***What Remains? (triptych) 2006 oil on canvas 240 x 60 cm***

The landscape has invaded the canvas, sand, lichen and moss, rocks and dripping water, the earth viewed from a great height, all come to mind. The worked surface and placement of colours and tones work together to provide a slice of the earth in all its abstract glory.

# Anabel Walters



***Angophora* 2006 oil on canvas 91 x 121 cm**

There is a naturalness to this work that immediately gives a sense of the bush, the colours are the bush. There is a sense of leaf litter, sandstone, twigs and bark. The artist captures the Australian landscape, in close-up.





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