THE WRONG PLACE
Five Sydney Painters

David Aspden, Sydney Ball, Michael Johnson, John Peart, John Firth-Smith

Tasmanian School of Art Gallery, University of Tasmania, Mt. Nelson Campus.

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Gallery hours: Mon-Fri 10-4 Sat 10-12 Noon

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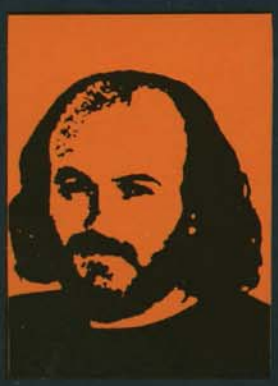


"The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and still I felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the wrong place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring."

(G.K. Chesterton)

THE WRONG PLACE

An Essay on Sydney Abstract Colour Painting;
Represented by the Work of David Aspden, Sydney Ball, John Firth-Smith, Michael Johnson and John Peart.

"But what of those Australian abstract painters who were big in the '60s and early '70s? How are they coping with the neo-expressionist onslaught? Is there, indeed, a life after Patrick McCaughey?"

(Robert Rooney, 'The Australian', 25-26 June 1983)

It has been a feature of modernist painting that it has in various ways accommodated a permanent state of crisis. Modernist ambitious painting in the last thirty years has been locked into a programme of searching out what any single position takes for granted, to isolate it, and set about making it a matter of achievement, not assumption. In Sydney during the 1960's this programme became radically directed by formalist ideology: the Greenberg interpretation of the idea of 'mainstream', a fundamentally Hegelian conception of art history, in which styles are described as succeeding one another in accord with an internal dynamic or dialectic rather than in response to social, economic, or political developments in society at large. Painting became increasingly more concerned with problems and issues intrinsic to itself. The radical step in Sydney painting was to make a painted object (in reaction to expressionist painting), that was primarily concerned with the choice disposition of appropriate shapes, the plastic play of the surface of shape and colour in harmony, dissonance, and disturbance; and to deny verisimiltude and illusionism, eliminating the need for a square or rectangular support. These paintings were illustrations of an idea about limiting the language of painting. But no matter how strongly the physical reality of the painted surface is asserted, painting cannot deny the ability and the imperative of the surface to contain imaginary space and objects.

The insistent polemical stance of formalist theory lead to its own conclusion that painting would simplify itself down to nothing. The mainstream view of painting could only see the death of painting, because it ran out of possibilities; and without any apparent ethical commitment, other than to painting, it began to look like a passe craft activity. The enormous frustration caused by the realisation of the limits of painting was heightened by attacks from alternative means of expression that appeared to demand art to be more moral, conceptual, social, and political. Ambitious painting was in an ideological void. In a frenzy to survive it began a programme of re-doing its history in an attempt to regain its authenticity.

"Abstract painting isn't dead, it just smells funny."

(A.H. Lehman, 1976)

The five painters in this exhibition have worked from the 1960's through to the 1980's emphatic that painting is about painting, concentrating on the subject matter of making paintings, and as they have continued to paint they seem to be not so polemical or ideological as personal. But they are ultra-representative of the abstract colour painters in Sydney who emerged from the 1960's as leaders of their generation of Australian Painting. They emerged as both an academy and the avant-garde, for here they were seen to be genuinely radical, extreme, but they were also working in an established international style, and they were painting to a text. The style was an Anglicized version of New York School Post-painterly Abstraction; in Australia it was commonly called Hard-edge painting.

The late-1960's were the halcyon days of Australian modernist painting: galleries flourished, paintings sold for big money, and collectors proliferated for what appeared to be Australian avant-garde painting. There was a painting market boom, caused by a stock market boom that had been created by artificial dealing in mining company shares: the Poseidon adventure. A new rich wanted to buy new Australian painting.

The new Australian painting seemed artificial too, it was mostly imported; but it would be wrong to say that, "In no sense did the style grow out of previous Australian art." (Terry Smith, 1970). The history of abstract colour painting in Sydney began early this century, with radical attempts to make painting as autonomous and abstract as music by trying to be like music, likening the colour spectrum to the musical scale. The idea was to orchestrate hues like notes, the combination made a rhythmic form to express emotion aesthetically. (Both music and landscape were catalysts for the first European and American abstract paintings). In Sydney, circa 1919, Wakelin and de Maistre exhibited their 'Synchromies', but they quickly covered up with the alibi that they were really landscapes; that was to be the constant ploy of Australian modernism. Abstracting the human figure is not

SYDNEY BALL Cat.No.6
BLACK COCKATOO RIDGE 1982
(2185 x 3795)mm.
Oil on Canvas

used by colourists to the same extent or cause, yet, when abstract painting got going again twenty years later, Crowley, Balson, Fizelle, and Hinder developed figure work into geometric shapes of flat paint. By the 1950's Balson radically changed from this constructivist hard-edge style to a free painterly mode, a divisionist style that looked like American abstract expressionist all-overness. This phase of Balson's work must have influenced the Sydney dappling, painterly colourists in the late-1960's, like de Teliga, Earle, Peart, and Aspden. The Hard-edge painters of the mid-1960's certainly recognised him as their precursor; if he didn't influence them directly, he was a father figure.

There was a large group of painters in Sydney during the late 1950's, who worked in a variety of European styles of abstract expressionism (COBRA and Paris School), exemplified by John Olsen, and their central theme was the Australian landscape; the 'you beaut country.' They were self-consciously nationalistic, proud provincialists, and the next generation of artists reacted as strongly against their philosophy as they did their mode of painting. The joyful expressionist colourists presented the unbridled creativity of the 'infantine eye', and they were part of a long line of romanticism in Australian painting; a mythic decorativeness of bush fantasy, that was particularly cloying to young painters in the 1960's, the Age of Cool.

"If you change your city you are sure to change your style."
(Vivian Smith, "Twenty Years of Sydney", 1977)

"I've never really been
So I don't really know
Guess I'll have to go now"
(James Taylor)

". . . finally went to London.

The next day I went to the Tate. And the National, etcetera. The real stuff. So then began a series of very badly paid jobs – pubs and things – when you knocked off that's all you were good for. . .

Then Brett arrived. He'd won the Italian scholarship. He'd been to Italy for a while and he came to London. He discovered this house in Ladbroke Grove. Everybody's been there. Wendy Paramor, Tony McGillick, Mick Johnson and I shared a room. A bit of painting went on. Spasmodic.

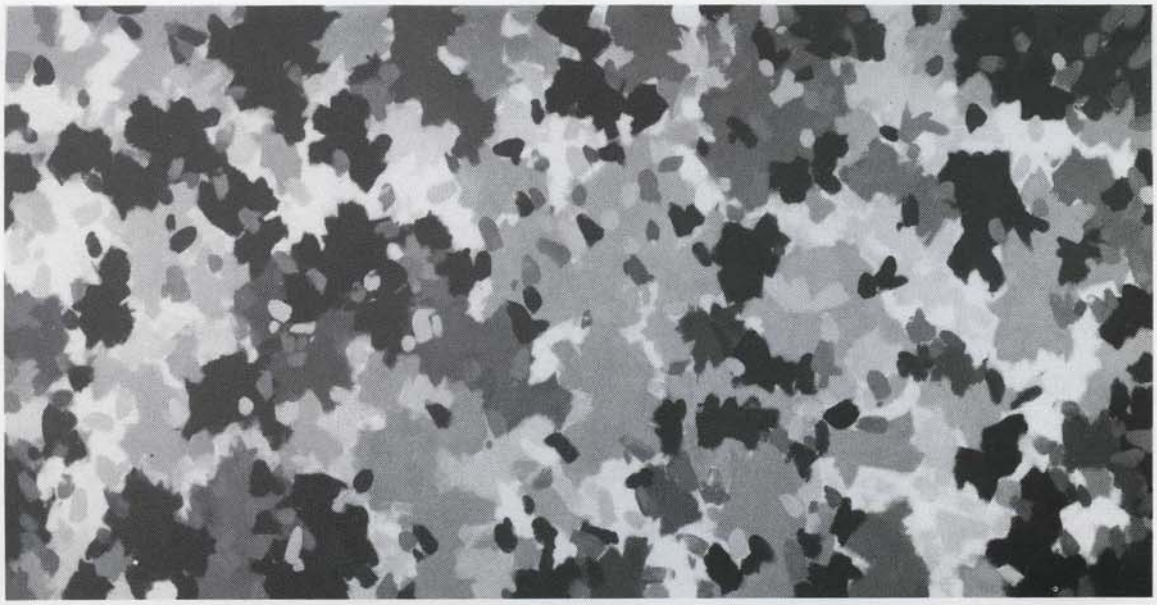
In London I painted abstract expressionist pictures. In a sort of way. Everybody was doing it. Just before everything burst. All this was just apprenticeship stuff. Playing around."
(Dick Watkins, 1968)

London had been the Mecca for all the previous generations of Australian artists. The 1960's generation of artists were the last to make the pilgrimage. They went there as students, apprentices, and as competitors in the big time, not because London was the art centre of the world, but because it was for Australia the home of taste: we got the right taste – good taste. Australia got modernist painting, of Paris, Europe, and America, in an Anglicized package from expatriate artists.

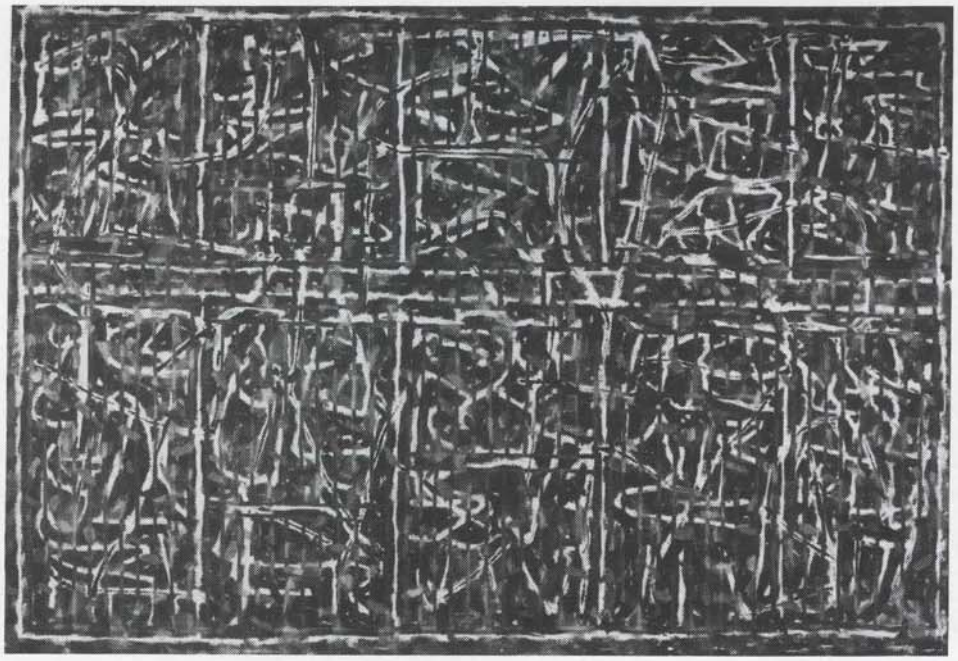
The most important effects of this lemming phenomenon on our painting was a puritan attitude to professionalism, an emotional stricture, a work ethic, a literary bent, and an obsession with landscape. To the Anglicized a painter was supposed to be seen as a moral idol (like a cricketer), above the taint of doing anything for money; this meant the painter had to sing for his supper by entertaining society, impersonating the endearing English eccentric. The only way the artist could take a responsible place in society was by a display of work and skill: the drawing dimension.

The shift of innovative energy in modernist painting, from Europe to New York, in the late 1940's, was not recognised in England until the end of the 1950's. (Even then Patrick Heron reckoned they invented the New York School in Cornwall). The eventual identification of New York as the art centre of the world by young artists in London was a sign of a radical change in British culture. It was not merely an Americanization programme. There was talk about the end of the empire and nationalism. The Beat generation was an internationalist movement, and the centres of internationalist culture were London, Paris, and New York; and New York became the main centre of cultural convergence. The place with the most confidence could most easily get out of the regionalist and nationalist binds. Perhaps the internationalist camaraderie set the scene for the revolution of students who invented Pop Art and The Beatles: the 1960's.

Abstract colour painting in London moved away from expressionism to concentrate on colour and in reaction to the dominance of the drawing ethic of British art, towards the most brilliant colourists of painting, Robert and Sonia Delaunay. This move coincided with a big influx of New York painting. (The years of Coca-cola cultural imperialism, when America flooded Europe with its contemporary art). It was the youngest Americans, like Poons and Stella who were the most influential in their 'toughness' about formalist painting; that encouraged English artists to be more articulate, more professional, and to be urban: to make city art. They set out to make paintings for the city, not about the city. The young Australian artists in London were part of Anglo-American abstract colour movement, but most of them returned to Sydney by the middle 1960's, bringing with them a style of painting and a new professionalism.



DAVID ASPDEN Cat.No.1
UNTITLED (Castle Hill Series) 1975
(1570 x 3010)mm.
Acrylic on Canvas



JOHN PEART Cat.14
RED KIRTAN 1982
(1695 x 2440)mm.
Acrylic on Canvas

Hard-edge painting in Sydney was developed by a small group of painters influenced by international art magazines and occasional original works that came to town; and by the group of expatriates living in London, who were going through the same influences, but who got to see more of the real thing. By 1966 the two groups were together in Sydney, forming a strong school of Hard-edge painting. In that year a number of these artists joined a co-operative gallery in the middle of the city, at Central Street, which they took as their name. The Central Street Gallery opened with an exhibition of American prints, including work by Jasper Johns, Warhol, Rosenquist, Lichtenstein, Stella, and Rauschenberg. This was followed by an exhibition of Verve lithographic prints of Matisse's cut-out gouaches from 1950-54. In the next few years a series of exhibitions of the members and many English and American artists were shown, individually and together; all promoting the variations of Hard-edge painting.

"Curiously enough there have only been two real avant-garde groups in the whole history of Australian art: the group of young painters who introduced impressionism to Australia with their exhibition of 9 x 5 Impressions in 1889, and Central Street."

(Bernard Smith, 1970)

At the same time other galleries in Sydney were strongly supporting the style, particularly Gallery A and Watters. Aspden, Ball, and Peart showed at Watters; while Firth-Smith was at Gallery A, and Johnson showed first at Central Street, later at Gallery A.

The movement gained momentum to the extent that when the new National Gallery of Victoria was opened in 1968 it featured a survey exhibition of the Hard-edge style in Australia, called 'The Field'. It is one of the great myths of Australian painting that this exhibition killed off the style. It is a fact that very soon after the show the participants scattered, going into a vast range of disparate styles. It was as if 'The Field' was a cue to change.

"The Field? It's already happened, it's nearly finished. They were looking under stones for them at Alice Springs."

(Aspden, 1969)

Four of the painters in this show were in 'The Field', John Firth-Smith was the odd one out, probably because he wasn't pure enough at the time, yet he was to be the finest exponent of Colour Field painting in Australia; but his field wasn't just colour, it was Sydney Harbour. He pre-empted the loss of faith in pure abstraction, putting colour painting back in the landscape.

It is obvious that many of these painters were hindered by dogma, by an overdetermined theory of painting, and they set out to find a more personalised mode of painting; which has characterised all previous painting in Australia since the Heidelberg School.

"There is generally a preference for flat picture space, and 2-dimensionality, a non-tactile, non-gestural technique and a conceptual approach to composition which allows little room for schematic revision after the decisions have reached the canvas."

(Catalogue statement, Central Street Gallery, 1967)

Hard-edge painting was confronted by the dilemma that its obvious decorativeness invited the great modernist jibe that it was 'merely decorative'; it had an intellectual vacancy that required a constant verbal alibi. Not only did this work have the formalist text of directions for reading it, it had a prescription for making it. However, the dogma was self-critical rather than an instrument for criticizing others.

In the 1970's threats to the viability of painting appeared from throughout the whole web of painting's social relationships. Painters were more frequently made to feel they should justify what they do in terms that are not to do with painting. Painting was increasingly pressed into other intellectual activities: moral, aesthetical, and political.

At the end of the 1960's, the formalist point of painting was vanishing: nothing as art, that 'nothingness'. The minimalistic trend of Hard-edge painting had been seen as the most ambitious painting then, but the reaction to its nothingness spread throughout the spectrum of painting, and lead to a general realization that painting was limited. Many artists and critics did not merely believe their painting ideology was wrong, they had a complete loss of faith in painting. Painting seemed defunct and they went elsewhere. It was the reality of painting that was unacceptable: it did not do a lot of things it was supposed to.

Throughout the 1970's this caused the greatest general crisis of heart in the history of painting since the invention of photography and it was just as liberating. Some painters gave up painting for other media, particuarly the 'theatre of mixed means'; they were rejecting the idea that the arts shouldn't mix, that painting should be autonomous by being purely faithful to the subject-matter of its medium. It has been a long running idea, at least since the Greeks, that all the arts want to be theatre, and this admits the need of an audience. Painting was too private for an increasingly community-minded society, which was raising a number of ethical considerations the art could not ignore. The issues were political, religious, sexual, social, scientific, technological, environmental, and educational.

The problem was that painting struggled to meet the needs of these audiences. Painting could not compete with photography, printing, film, video, or television, for speed and accuracy, or as propaganda. It was always morally suspect anyway, in its politics, its economics, and its sexual preference. Painting was stuck with the problem that there is no audience with a consensus of beliefs in moral or political certitudes; and increasing numbers of critics saw it as having failed to fulfil the demands of the political and moral factions of society, and has tended to collaborate, even wallow in our decadent mass consumer society; their prognosis is that painting is dying of corruption, and their treatment is to finish it off by giving it up.

Painting was also aware now that it was unable to maintain the primary role of modernism: to initiate the shocking new. The extreme limitations of painting cannot match the scientific and technological belief in progress.

"It's a pretty archaic process; like the caveman. It doesn't really get any better. It's different at different times, but you don't get progress . . . for instance, in a technological sense."

(Aspden, 1969)

Some painters have merely ignored these extra-issues concerning the relevance and authenticity of painting in our time, and stuck to the problem of mainline painting.

"You swim all huddled up
alone with your ideas about the world
which no longer fit the world outside
And why should you care about the world outside
For me the only reality is imagination
the world inside myself
The Revolution
no longer interests me"
(Peter Weiss, 'Marat/Sade', 1965)

The academy is arguably the only place left for painting. But there remains that modernist drive to look new, modern, and experimental, no matter how worn the cliches being dealt with, and experiment itself becomes a style. The history of modernism is written in terms of continuously accelerating change from one style to another. The machinery of communications and publicity is now so efficient that the styles change with such rapidity that there seems to be no longer any real styles at all; instead there are fashions, idiosyncracies, group mannerisms, and obsessions, which are all different from genuine style, which in the past has always been an expression of a certain fundamental coherence, an agreement about the ways random experience can be made sense of. Style is bound up with belief of one kind or another. There are as many viable styles as there are good artists.

"I can compete with the ultra-modernists in hunting for new forms and experimenting with my feelings. But I keep realizing that the essence of art is simplicity, grandeur, and sensitivity, and that the essence of its form is coolness."

(Bertolt Brecht)

It may be that the biggest leap out of crisis at the end of modernism is to get over the belief that for art to be good it must be contemporary, in the sense that it has to appear new rather than original. Newness is a high speed chase that misses most of the possibilities. (The imperative of originality in the guise of newness makes it easy for art schools, because originality can't be taught and fashion can).

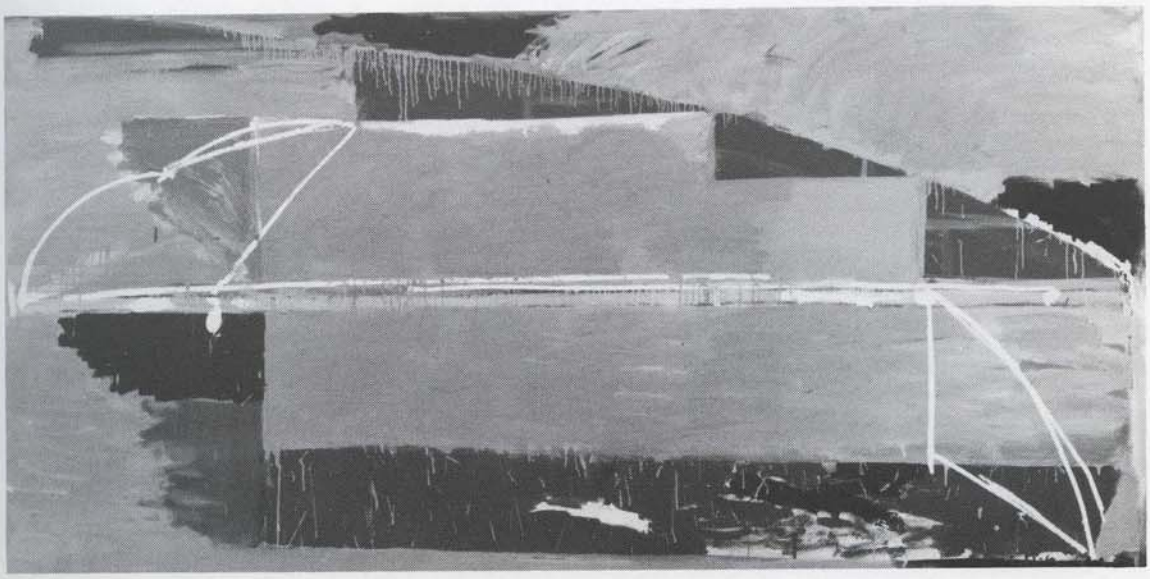
'There is no new art, if it's art it's new.'

(Anon.)

In the quick move out of the straight Hard-edge mode some of the painters kept to solutions on the formalist line; to keep abstraction viable by recomplicating the surface and structure of the picture. They attempted still to achieve by formalist standards the self-referential, autonomous work of art, but it wasn't somehow able to achieve the same purity: the work seemed always to point elsewhere, rather than to itself for meaning — their latent content was manifest in an emphatic identification with landscape. It was impossible to deny despite the protestations of the artists and critics.

"There is no such moment in viewing Aspden's work — it is always paint and always painting."

(Terry Smith, 1970)



JOHN FIRTH-SMITH Cat.8
BUILD 1978
(1365 x 2740)mm.
Acrylic on Canvas

"And I like the paintings to be painting and nothing more than paintings. They're not about anything other than what's in front of you. They're not trying really to be anything more than that."

(Firth-Smith)

While the artists said they're really about painting, the audience said of course they're really landscapes. The artist ignored they were essentially landscapes by concentrating on extending and enriching techniques; but more often the paintings evoked a sense of place, alluding to natural elements in the usage of gestures and shapes and marks, not so symbolic as functioning as abstract elements and pictorial devices that mimic nature in their movement and tactility. John Cage said that the object of art was not to imitate nature, but to imitate nature in the manner of its operation.

This tendency to abstract nature, or rather, to see the signs of abstraction in nature, is a mainline connection from Leonardo to Turner to Pollock. It is a particular trait of the limits of English abstraction that it is bound to nature, to landscape; which moved the English critic Lawrence Alloway in the 1950's to comment that English Abstract Expressionism was the transformation of the New York School into a weather report. In the mid-1790's Turner was involved with the Picturesque movement; the movement's theorist, Uvedale Price, explained their aesthetic, echoing Leonardo:

"There are many colours which, having nothing of the freshness and delicacy of beauty, are generally found in objects and scenes highly picturesque, and admirably accord with them. Among these are to be reckoned the autumnal hues in all their varieties, the weather-stains, and many of the mosses, lichens, and incrustations on bark, and on wood, or stones, old walls, and buildings of every kind; the various gradations in the tints of broken ground, and of the decayed parts in hollow trees."

"I believe the colours in my paintings have always been affected by my interaction with and response to the landscape, not only in the pictorial qualities of getting light and colour onto the canvas but also to enable the observer to be enveloped by the landscape rather than merely looking at it."

(Ball 1981)

None of these artists would underestimate the rapport they have with their environment, the characteristic physical surroundings in which they find themselves, or where they choose to locate themselves. But it is unlikely these connections are recognised by them as part of any regionalist or nationalist concepts. This may be the issue for some of their audience, however, it is not the problem of the painter to address any audience; that would require an accuracy beyond painting, especially if the issue is not about painting. The painter has an audience of no-one, because the audience is unknown; if they are identified, either the audience has demanded it, or the artist sought them; and in each case the art would be compromised — by commission or propaganda (what the audience wants, or what the artist wants them to want). A work of art is the result of imagination, chance, and skill; and it exists in an independant world that for the audience to enter requires something of the same stuff needed to make the art.

"It was as if I suddenly went to a foreign country but I didn't know the language, but had read enough and had a passionate interest, and was eager to live there. I wanted to live in this land; I had to live there and master the language."

(Helen Frankenthaler)

The painting-about-painting formalist presents you with an invitation *just* to look at the picture, to see what you see, and you are not invited to speculate that there might be something there besides the paint pushed to art.

"If painting were lean enough, accurate enough, or right enough, you would just be able to look at it."

(Frank Stella, 1964)

Here the only idea is the fact of the painting, and you shouldn't see anything else: "What you see is what you see." But the eye is the most intellectual of the senses, as Aristotle reckoned, because it wants to attach concepts to it. So it is more likely that what you think you see is what you think you see; and what you believe you see is what you believe you see; and what you feel you see is what you feel you see. There are no laws of significance or reference; you can read it how you like; it is a pigment of your imagination, or it isn't art.

"I can imagine . . . a man of the future, who may be born without the sense of feeling, being able to see nothing but light variously modified, and that such a way of considering Nature would be just. For then the eye would see nothing but what in point of harmony was beautiful. But that pure abstract enjoyment of vision, our inveterate habits will not let us partake of."

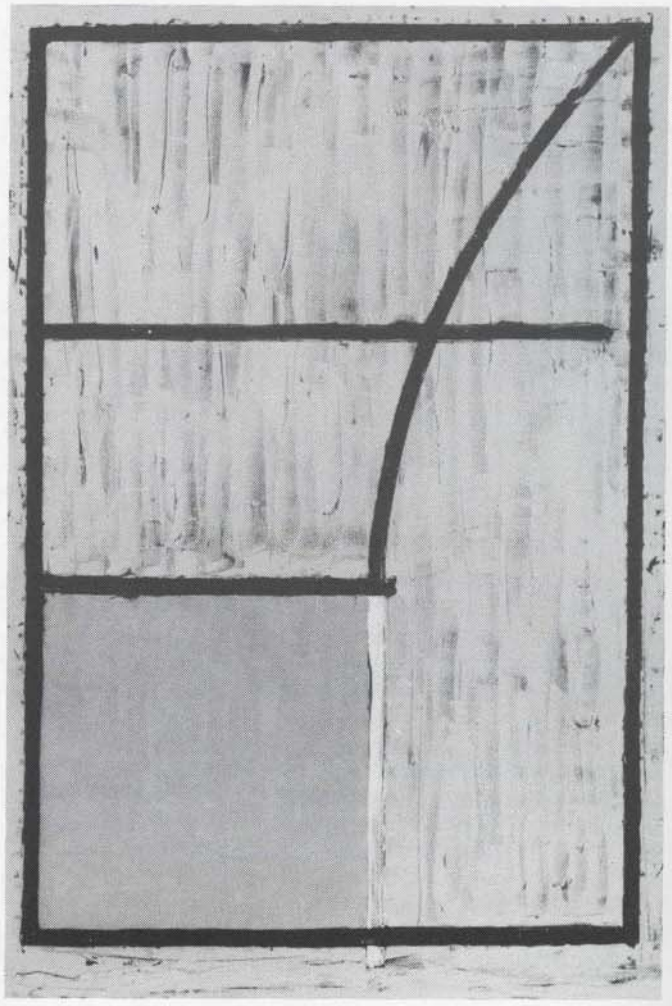
(Uvedale Price, 1801)

"I think one of the things about a lot of the arts generally is that it takes a long time to develop some sort of sensibility about the environment in which you're working."

(Firth-Smith)

Where these five painters choose to locate themselves is painting. Their sense of place is painting, no matter where they live. Any of their paintings may suggest to the audience that it depicts a scene, or something of a landscape, but it will express more strongly a sense of the fact that art exists in artifice and deliberated structures, and of the peculiar presence of painting's finite form: its expressive objectness. Paul McGillick wrote about Johnson's paintings, in 1979:

MICHAEL JOHNSON Cat.10
UNTITLED 1981-82
(1820 x 1210)mm.
Oil on Canvas



"These . . . are dialectical paintings. They argue first for one way of looking at them, then for another. They are dialectical, too, because looking at them is experienced first as a process and only then as an extended moment of contemplation . . . They are both engaging and distancing. They distance us because at first they seem so contrived, so artificial. Yet, at the same time, they also engage us, they invite us to participate. The painter's journey becomes also ours. We are asked to make adjustments, to imaginatively re-arrange the components of the painting, to read in the sub-text."

The 'other place' for Johnson is the city, which fits that view of English formalists in the 1960's to make urban art rather than the pastoral. What makes his work different from New York painting, and it is that Anglicized look, is the scale: the size of the paintings tend to be related to our size; the human fit is a door or window: the domestic size.

If you look at these paintings you may step in or look in: the shape of the canvas as well as the size invites you. The invitation comes also from the edges, where the colours meet; and the colours come back or forward, interrupted in that push-pull by the lines and the texture of the paint: you follow the lines or look around them, and the texture sucks you into the quality of the paint and the way it was made – the process.

The process brings you back to reality: it's just a painting. Oil paint used like this looks as artificial as acrylic paint. Any paint has a tendency to look artificial when it is applied systematically in some process, because it disguises the drawing and it looks untouched by the hand. This is what Post-Painterly Abstraction has always been about: the sublimation of drawing for colour. The history of colour contra drawing is as old as painting.

The two major elements of painting have been seen to be in conflict for at least far back as the Renaissance, and up until the end of the eighteenth century the dominant attitude was to regard colour as a minor element, separable from and opposed to form.

Anyone who allowed colour to assert itself was considered a minor artist. The marriage of colour and drawing is expressionism, but even in modernism the union was shunned and the mainstream move was to reverse the dominance of drawing over colour, culminating in 1960's minimalist colour painting.

The drawing ethic always persists: hardly anybody doesn't believe that the true basis of painting is drawing. But neither stance is conducive to good painting, in that both tend to subvert the quality of the paint: the essence of painting. Hard-edge painting technique put drawing down to diagrams, and eventually to its lowest status – merely the shape of the canvas: colour's revenge. Colour painting employed the same gambit as painting dominated by drawing, that is to eradicate any sign of the paint. The abject flatness of post-painterly abstraction was the basis of a reductive programme, a series of logical and ruthless decisions that concentrated on the essential practicalities of painting: the size and shape of the canvas, the physical characteristics of the paint, the extent to which the final image was free from the taint of illusionism. Fundamentally colour was supposed to dominate every other aspect of painting, in an attempt to save painting as its prerogatives were whittled away.

"What had to be made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects and peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this, each art, would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure . . . It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance."

(Clement Greenberg, 1961)

The notion of art determined by material has a long prehistory that goes back to Aristotle's "Metaphysica"; and there are many cautions for that prejudice. Fredrich von Schlegel wrote in 1803, "Every art should strive to attain perfection in what peculiarly characterises and distinguishes it from others." But he cautioned against further systematic subdivision of painting as a species, into "certain fixed elements, stylized design, expression, colouring, and I know not what . . . If people must divide and analyse, let them confine their operations to things which may be divided – and what are these? The *letter* and the *spirit* – *words* and *ideas* . . . the most important principal is – painting must be painting and nothing else – and however trite and commonplace this observation may appear, it is in general far too little regarded."

The Greenberg line appeared to make a gross error of judgement in determining what painting did best. In the belief that painting would ensure its survival within the terms of its own physical existence and in no other way, its process of radical self-criticism to define what painting could still do incomparably well, appeared to rob painting of almost all its attributes. The idea was to place all their bets on colour and eliminate any distraction from colour by killing the drawing and the quality of the paint, so that colour made all the action. But in an attempt to raise the chromatic power they tried also to kill tone: by making the hues as atonal as possible to try and get the colours to meet and interact and contrast purely in terms of their hue. Thus they murdered colour too. The degree to which any colour interaction works depends on the status of the hues: their temperature, tone, intensity, quantity, and placement. The great colourists constructed their paintings on a tonal architectonic extending to the extremities of the tonal range. The chromatic power that they were able to generate through the orchestration of hues was in fact as much the result of the mastery of the problems of tone dispersal, the placing and contrasting in tone juxtaposition. Colourist painting has been synonymous with atonal colour since the 1960's, as it is with a rejection of the volumetric, and a manic control of paint texture.

The abandonment of the Hard-edge style in the late-1960's by colourists in Sydney was followed by two major modes. One a quasi-divisionist style, that was an all-over system of patterning by measured patches of colours, giving a dappling effect that related to foliage. Aspden emerged as the master of this mode. The style relates to Balson's work, but it was also strongly linked to the current New York School's Lyrical Abstraction, as was the second mode, which was based on process – painting techniques that hide the hand that makes the thing. Process painting attempted to let the paint do the work, by pouring, spilling, splattering, and dripping the paint, which formed skins of colour on the canvas, or by allowing the paint to sink into the canvas, dying or staining it, making coloured canvas. The drawing in both cases, sometimes combined, was the directing of the splash, or pushing around the pools of paint on the canvas. The result was to avoid the look of the touch of the hand, the same as Hard-edge painting.

In the early-1970's, Ball and Johnson were living in New York, and Peart and Firth-Smith were travelling around Europe and America. At Gallery A in Sydney a number of New York painters were regularly showing the latest modes of colour painting – Bhavsar, Rich, Reich, Ruda, Dao, and Seery.

More than any other Australian painter Ball has engaged in the premises of the New York School. He was the first Australian painter to go to New York instead of London for his education. The roots of his art are firmly laid in the first generation New York School; although he was never an abstract expressionist (he always reacted against that mode), his work has always showed the signs of their high seriousness in his colour. His American connection has never been well met here; his development has been as pure yankee opportunism, reflected in his energetic pursuit of ambitious painting. The works here are most recent and show that expressionistic tendency that the least sceptical observer would think Ball was jumping on the Neo-Expressionist bandwagon.

However, these paintings primarily evolved out of his previous work. Initially, in the late-1970's, he was attempting to paint small pictures, going from (12 x 18) feet to (12 x 18) inches, and the particular problem this caused was the difficulty in

using a mode of process painting that was tailored for the grand scale. He was forced to adapt his technique, which he did by using bits and pieces of his discarded paintings and prints he had cut up, as collage. The size and the collage invited the reintroduction of the hand – drawing by linear marks that became more and more controlled. These activities gradually sneaked into the larger works and eventually synthesised into straight painting. The drawn shapes still show their origins in collage.

Ball is the only painter in Australia to consistently work in the large picture size of the Americans; it relates to that human scale in Johnson's pictures, but it is environmental size, it envelops you if you walk up to it, the transaction is unavoidable.

"It's an environmental thing. It makes you do the work. The fact that you could walk past it is important – it isn't just a thing hanging on a wall. It's twenty foot long because it had to be big enough for you to get lost in it . . . it lets you in, keeps you out at the same time."

(Aspden)

The big painting is connected to the wall at a scale-size to create an intimacy of environment. It requires the proportions to be correct, to match. A long, horizontal painting if it stretches out and loses height, if it does not exceed our height, top to toe, and is not in touch with the floor and ceiling, as well as wall to wall, then it is a strip, a line, close-up or back. Unless you narrow your vision, a twenty foot painting that doesn't have height is a walk along a line. Looking at Aspden's longest painting here, we walk along an orchestration, a linear arrangement of coloured marks, varying only slightly in size and shape; the variation in the hue and tone of the colour makes a rhythm that takes us along the line. The paradigm for these paintings is the carpet, a runner.

The paintings of Aspden and Peart are the closest to the primary origins of colour abstract painting – the history of European painting's links with interior decoration and music. It is here that such painting is strongly connected to cultures outside the Western tradition. To make singular analogies, like they all do to landscape, even recognising the primacy of painting, its material determination, is a misreading without balancing the view. All these paintings have connections in the way they operate, to various paradigms – music, interior decoration, carpet and wallpaper. If an Aspden is a landscape it is also a carpet, and a Ball is wallpaper; in fact they are more realistically connected to the finiteness of the room and the flatness of the wall.

"Nor, in its primary aspect, has a painting, for instance, any more spiritual message or meaning for us than a blue tile from the wall of Damascus, or a Hitzen vase. It is a beautiful coloured surface, nothing more, and affects us by no suggestion stolen from philosophy, no pathos pilfered from literature, no feeling filched from a poet, but by its own incommunicable artistic essence – by that relation of values which is the draughtsmanship of painting, by the whole quality of workmanship, the arabesque of the design, the splendour of the colour, for these things are enough to stir the most divine and remote of the chords which make music in our soul, and colour, indeed, is of itself a mystical presence in things, and tone a kind of sentiment."

(Oscar Wilde, 1890)

The problem with colour abstract painting is the internalization of problems and solutions that make it difficult to appropriate outside ideas and forms openly. It is difficult to deal with anything outside painting concerning these paintings, even when there are 'real' analogies and connections to be made. Efforts to use influences outside the past modernist orthodoxy are stilted and tenuously linked to the paintings (despite the history of the modernist strategy of appropriation). So within the literature of these paintings the connections that are made to various influences seem incredibly false. What makes Firth-Smith's paintings convincing are their good connection to their extra influences, they are concise and coherent. His painting is believable not only as painting but also as Sydney paintings – their sense of other place.

"One of the things that becomes a problem is to get the paint absolutely right and to get the quality in the paint, to get the actual proportion. Everything about the colour the whole way the paintings resolve to work is for its own sake."

(Firth-Smith)

But the quality of the paint makes the surface and illusion of the tension between boats and water. It is as if the idea of boat has got mixed up with water and light, to become a painting that has the patina of boats that comes from the interaction with water-light and that paint surface on boats from continual repair, re-painting and sanding. The painting is the boat is the painted object.

"Make no mistake, the 'Spirit of Place' in Australia which Goanna talked about isn't in the Red Centre, it's in modest, grubby little terraces in places such as Darlinghurst – Mental's country."

('The Mercury', April 1983)

The increasingly moralist tone hanging over painting in the late-1970's moved artists to justify their formalist stance once more with landscape, however this was moral landscape. Modernism survived in Australia disguised by a veneer of regionalism, which meant you hid it in the bush: 'the rural idiocy of Australian painting', in which every style of modernist painting has been made to have a go at the Australian landscape; so we got art deco bush, cubist bush, surrealist bush, expressionist bush, hard-edge bush, pop bush, etc.. By the end of the 1970's colour abstract painters had not only started referring to their landscape subject-matter as a national trait, but it now had a strong ethical bent: the land had come to represent purity, authenticity in opposition to, and as an alternative to the decaying and decadent city. But the big city artists got lost in the bush looking for authenticity, and tried to find their way out by following the Blacks: Australian painters returned to the Jindyworobak Dreaming.

The dilemma for colour abstract painting is not the (mis)appropriation of elements of aboriginal art, nor even the visiting intrusion to tribal lands, it is the convergence of the two cultures that brings about a corruption of aboriginal art, when it becomes what is often seen to be, merely decoration, and its true meanings are lost. Our art is incorruptable, because corruption is part of its expression. To be nostalgic for values and ideals wholly outside our experience is a form of snobbery, and that effectively cuts us off from the strength and excellence of our situation as it is, making it impossible to deal with our urban technological society. We can't return to that sense of community and natural order and moral awareness that ancient tradition was supposed to have, and survive.

The Modernist Dreaming is living in the city wondering what-to-paint, and looking for the answer in how-to-paint; and finding a solution to that, and still not knowing what-to-paint, comes the Monet Syndrome: looking for Giverny. Like the Papunya Tula artists, the problem is not how-to-paint, it is subject matter. The alibi for a lack of content is to say that it lies simply in the tradition of painting, and that won't let them off the hook. The solution is not going to come from an audience, or maybe even from a place. If there is an authentic subject matter to be had, it will come from the Dreaming: imagination. However, to make that into art requires 'the knowledge'.

"Before deciding what is wrong and what is right
first we must find out what we are
I
do not know myself
No sooner have I discovered something
than I begin to doubt it
and I have to destroy it again
What we do is just a shadow of what we want to do
and the only truths we can point to
are the ever-changing truths of our own experience."

(Peter Weiss, 'Marat/Sade', 1965)

CHRISTOPHER COVENTRY

SYDNEY BALL

1933 Born in Adelaide
1960 Part-time study at South Australian Schools of Art in Painting, Drawing and Printmaking
1963 Travelled to New York. Full-time study Art Students League of New York in painting and printmaking (lithography)
Part-time at Printmaking Summer School, Pratt Graphic Centre, New York, in Lithography
Travelled USA, Canada, Peru, Japan
Awarded Ford Foundation Scholarship for painting by the Art Students League
1965 Returned to Australia appointed Lecturer in Art at South Australian School of Art
1969 Travelled to New York, painting full-time
Travelled to London, Paris
1971 Returned to Australia taught part-time then appointed full-time lecturer at the National Art School, Sydney
1973 Visual Arts Board Grant
1975 Appointed Senior Lecturer/Programme Co-ordinator at Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, School of Art.
1975 Travelled South Pacific
1975 Artist-in-Residence, New England University Painting Summer School
1979 Six months study leave – travelled extensively England, Europe, Hungary and Greece
1981 Seminar Workshop Brisbane Art School, Queensland
Currently Director of Post Graduate Studies, City Art Institute, Sydney

Lives in Annandale, inner-city suburb, Sydney

Individual Exhibitions

1964 Westerly Gallery, New York
1965 Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
1966 South Yarra Gallery, Melbourne
Watters Gallery, Sydney
1967 Bonython Gallery, Adelaide
Strines Gallery, Melbourne (prints sculpture)
1968 South Yarra Gallery, Melbourne
1969 John Gild Gallery, Perth
Bonython Gallery, Adelaide and Sydney
1971 Bonython Gallery, Sydney
1973 Bonython Gallery, Sydney
1974 David Chapman Gallery, Melbourne
Bonython Gallery,Sydney (prints)
1975 Solander Gallery, Canberra
Greenhill Gallery, Adelaide
Newcastle City Art Gallery, Newcastle (Survey Exhibition 1965 to 1975)
1976 Rex Irwin Gallery, Sydney
Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
1977 St. Johns Cathedral, Brisbane (Survey exhibition of large paintings)
Solander Gallery, Canberra
1978 CAS Gallery, Adelaide
Rex Irwin Gallery, Sydney
Printmakers Gallery and Workshop, Brisbane (prints)
1980 Solander Gallery, Canberra
Axiom Gallery, Melbourne
1981 Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
Tynte Gallery, Adelaide (prints and drawings)
1982 Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
Solander Gallery, Canberra
1983 Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
Macquarie Galleries, Sydney

Selected Group Exhibitions

1964 American Drawing, Green Gallery, New York
The New York Scene Travelling Exhibition, Pennsylvania, USA
American Drawing, Westerly Gallery, New York
1965 Highlights of the Art Season, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Connecticut, USA
The New Edge, Westerly Gallery, New York
*Mirror-Waratah Invitation Prize Exhibition, Sydney
1966 Contemporary Australian Drawing, Newcastle City Art Gallery
Wardle Invitation Award, Skinner Gallery, Perth
Four South Australian Painters, Kym Bonython, Hungry Horse Gallery, Sydney
1967 Contemporary Australian Painting, Touring Exhibition Los Angeles and San Francisco
'Engine' Group Exhibition, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney
The Mertz Collection, Art Gallery of South Australia
Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, touring USA
'Directions', Art Council of Australia, Canberra
'The Field', National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of New South Wales
*'Corio' Prize Exhibition, Geelong
Contemporary Australian Painting, India
*Benalla Purchase Award Invitation Exhibition, Victoria
1968 *Georges Invitation Art Exhibition, Melbourne
Crouch Prize Exhibition, Ballarat Art Gallery, Victoria
1970 First Leasing Exhibition, National Gallery of Victoria
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery of South Australia
1971 *Graphic Art Design Award, New York
1972 Australian Paintings of the Past 20 Years, London, Sydney
Sir William Angliss Memorial Art Prize, Melbourne
*Latrobe Valley Invitation Art Purchase Prize
1973 Biennale of Sydney, Sydney
Sir William Angliss Memorial Art Prize, Melbourne
*Trustees Prize Exhibition, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
1974 Expo '74 Spokane, USA
Fifty Years of the National Art School, Bonython Gallery, Sydney
Ten Australians Touring Exhibition, Paris, Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
Stuttgart, Institute of Auslandabeziehungen
Venice, Galleria Internationale d'arte Moderna
Milan, Castello Sforzesco
Florence, L'Accademia E Disegno
Rome, Palazzo Braschi
1975 Ten Australians, Art Gallery of New South Wales
1976 Sir William Angliss Memorial Art Prize, Melbourne
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Travelling Art Exhibition NSW
1977 *Australian Colourists '77, Western Australian Institute of Technology
*Purchase Award National Print and Drawing Award, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
1978 Artists from the Powell Street Gallery, Cunningham-Ward Gallery, New York
Works on Paper, Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
1980 First Sydney Annual, David Reid's Gallery, Sydney
1981 Visions After Light, Art in South Australia 1836-1981, Art Gallery of South Australia
1982 4th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney
ANZAAS Conference Exhibition, Macquarie University
'The Seventies' National Australia Bank Collection, National Gallery of Victoria
'Inaugural Exhibition' Australian National Gallery, Canberra
1983 The John McCaughey Memorial Art Prize, Melbourne

* Awarded the Prize

Collections

Adelaide Festival Theatre
Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Connecticut, USA
Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education
Alice Springs Art Foundation
American Express Art Foundation, New York
Armidale City Council Art Gallery
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Artbank, Sydney and Melbourne
Art Gallery of South Australia
ANZ Banking Corporation
Australian Embassy, Paris
Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, Thailand
Australian National University, Canberra
Australian National Gallery, Canberra
Australian Broadcasting Commission, Adelaide
Bathurst Regional Art Gallery
Brazilian Embassy, Canberra
BHP House, Melbourne
Ballarat City Art Gallery
Benalla Art Gallery, Victoria
Canberra College of Advanced Education
Caulfield Municipal Art Gallery, Victoria
Christchurch City Art Gallery, New Zealand
Darwin Community College
Family Law Court, Canberra
Fremantle Art Centre
Geelong Art Gallery, Victoria
Griffith University, Queensland
Heide Collection
ICI Collection
Kuringai College of Advanced Education, Sydney
Latrobe Valley Municipal Art Gallery, Victoria
Macquarie University, Sydney
Melbourne State College
Mertz Collection, USA
Monash University, Melbourne
Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje, Yugoslavia
Museum of Modern Art, New York

National Bank of Australasia
National Gallery of Victoria
Newcastle City Art Gallery
Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education
Print Council of Australia
Queensland Art Gallery
Queensland Arts Council
State College of Victoria at Frankston
Sydney College of the Arts
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
University of Melbourne
University of Queensland
University of Western Australia
Western Australian Art Gallery
Western Australian Institute of Technology
Private Collections throughout Australia, USA, France, United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden and Malaysia

Bibliography

'Ten Australians – Sydney Ball – 1975', ABC-TV Documentary

'Contemporary Australian Art, ABC Feature for Secondary School', ABC Radio Vision

Art and Artists of South Australia, 1969, Benko, Nancy

Modern Australian Painting, 1960-70; Modern Australian Painting, 1970-75; Modern Australian Painting 1975-80, Bonython, Kym

Introduction Sydney Ball Survey, Newcastle City Art Gallery, Fine Arts Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1974, Burke, Janine

Artists on Australia and New Zealand, 1980, Germaine, Max

Australian Painting – Modern Painters – 1931-1970, 1971, Gleeson, James

Notable Australians, Hamlyn Pty. Ltd., Paul

Australian Painters of the 70's, 1975, Horton, Mervyn

Present Day Art in Australia, 1969, Horton, Mervyn

Contemporary Australian Printmakers, 1976 Kempf, Franz

A Guide to Australian Painting, 1969, Luck, Ross

The Australian Painters, 1964-66, Luck, Ross

Introduction Catalogue, South Yarra Gallery., Lynn, Elwyn

Australian Abstract Art, 1969, McCaughey, Prof. Patrick

'Ball and the Sixties', *Art and Australia*, Vol.7, No.4, March, 1970, McCaughey, Prof. Patrick

'Sydney Ball', *Art International*, Vol.xviii No.8, October 1974, McCaughey, Prof. Patrick

National Times Magazine, February 1973, McCaughey, Prof. Patrick

'Varieties of the Painterly in Recent Australian Art', *Melbourne University Magazine*, 1974, McCaughey, Prof. Patrick

Catalogue, 'Ten Australians' European Exhibition, 1974, McCaughey, Prof. Patrick

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Encyclopedia of Australian Art, 1968, McCulloch, Allan

In the Making, 1969, McGregor, Craig

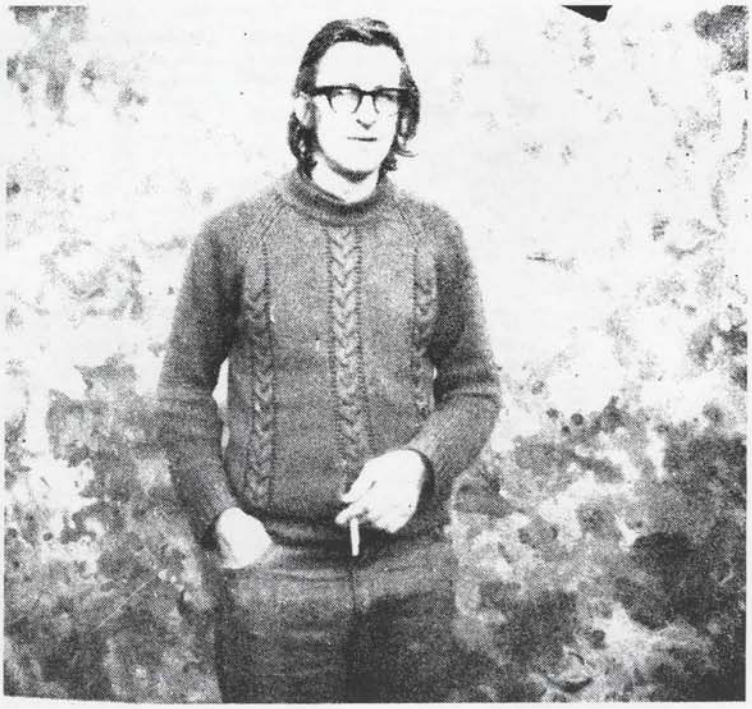
Australian Painting 1788 - 1970, 1971, Smith, Bernard

Outlines of Australian Art, The Joseph Brown Collection, 1973, Thomas, Daniel

The Most Noble Art of Them All, 1976, Thomas, Laurie

Introduction Catalogue, Macquarie Galleries Exhibition, 1981, Townsend, Dr. Peter

'Da Gama Ball' *The Mercury*, Hobart, February 1982, Christopher Coventry



DAVID ASPDEN

1935	Born in Bolton, Lancashire, England
1950	Migrated to Australia
1950-63	Lived in Wollongong, N.S.W. Worked as a Signwriter-painter
1964	Moved to Sydney; became a full-time artist
1971	Represented Australia, Sao Paulo Bienal, Brazil
1980	V.A.B. studio, New York
1981	Lived in New Guinea
1982	Visited Arnhemland
1982-83	Travelled in India

Lives in Balmain on Sydney Harbour

Selected Individual Exhibitions

1963	Watters Gallery, Sydney
1966	Watters Gallery, Sydney (exhibitions in March and November)
1967	Watters Gallery, Sydney Strines Gallery, Melbourne
1970	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney
1971	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney
1973	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney
1974	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney
1975	Solander Gallery, Canberra
1976	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney Monash University Gallery, Monash University, Melbourne
1977	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney
1979	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney
1981	Rudy Komon Art Gallery, Sydney Realities, Melbourne
1982	Roslyn Oxley 9, Sydney Realities, Melbourne

Selected Group Exhibitions

1966	'Contemporary Australian Painting', Los Angeles and San Francisco, U.S.A.
1967	Georges Invitation Art Prize, Melbourne
1968	'Group 1', Gallery A, Melbourne Gallery A, Sydney 'Group 3', Gallery A, Melbourne Georges Invitation Art Prize, Melbourne 'The Field', National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1970	'Colour and Structure', Blaxland Gallery, Sydney
1971	'XI Bienal de Sao Paulo', Brazil (awarded Gold Medal) Alice Prize, Alice Springs, Northern Territory
1972	'The Australian Landscape', touring exhibition, Art Gallery of South Australia and other State Galleries 'Australian Paintings and Tapestries of the Past 20 Years', New South Wales House, London, and Bonython Gallery, Sydney Sir William Angliss Memorial Art Prize, invitation exhibition, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Gold Coast City Art Prize exhibition, Queensland
1973	Travelodge Art Prize exhibition, Melbourne 'Recent Australian Art', Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 'Biennale of Sydney', Sydney Opera House, Sydney
1974	'Five Festival Artists', (organised by the Visual Arts Board, Australia Council); toured European venues in France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain
1974-75	'Ten Australians' (organised by the Visual Arts Board, Australia Council), toured European venues in Paris, Stuttgart, Venice, Florence, Milan, Rome and London
1981	'Australian Perspecta 1981', Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney '6 Artists', Wollongong City Gallery, Wollongong, New South Wales

Selected Bibliography

Terry Smith: Color-Form Painting: Sydney 1965-70, *Other Voices*, Melbourne Vol.1 No.1, June/July 1970

Terry Smith: 'The Painting of David Aspden', *Art International*, Vol.XIV No.8, October 1970

Noel Hutchison: 'The Dynamiting of the Picture – David Aspden's Paintings', *Art and Australia*, Vol.9, No.3, December 1971

Patrick McCaughey: *Ten Australians* (exhibition catalogue), Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, Sydney, 1974

Rudi Krausmann: Interview with David Aspden, *Aspect*, Sydney, Vol.4 No.3 1979

Patrick McCaughey: 'Surviving the Seventies in Australia', *Artscribe*, London No.23, June 1980

Bernice Murphy: Australian Perspecta 1981 (Catalogue), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1981

Bernice Murphy: 'Painting' *Australian Art Review*, Sydney, 1982

Collections

Most state and provincial galleries; many municipal, institutional, and private collections in Australia and overseas.

Awards

1963 Wollongong Prize
1965 Drummoyne Prize
Wollongong Prize
1967 Muswellbrook Prize
Berrima Prize
1971 Alice Springs Prize
H.C. Richards Memorial Prize, Queensland Art Gallery
Gold Medal, XI Bienal de Sao Paulo, Brazil

JOHN FIRTH-SMITH

1943 Born in Melbourne
1942-52 Lived in New Zealand
1961 Studied at National Art School, Sydney
1971 Visited Northern Europe and worked in New York
1982 Visited United States and worked in New York
1983 Artist-in-Residence, University of Melbourne

Lives in North Sydney on Lavender Bay, Sydney Harbour

Individual Exhibitions

1966 Gallery A, Sydney
1969 Gallery A, Sydney
1970 Gallery A, Sydney
1972 Gallery A, Sydney
1973 Gallery A, Sydney
1975 Gallery A, Sydney
1976 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane
Realities Gallery, Melbourne
1977 Gallery A, Sydney
1977 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane
1978 Bonython Art Gallery, Adelaide
1979 Gallery A, Sydney
1979 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
1981 Gallery A, Sydney
1981 Bonython Art Gallery, Adelaide
1982 Gallery A, Sydney
1982 'Works from New York', Axiom Gallery, Melbourne

Selected Group Exhibitions

1962 Clune Galleries, Sydney (with Ian Van Wieringen)
1963 Hungry Horse Gallery, Sydney (with Ian Van Wieringen)
1964 *Survey 4*, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney
1965 *Survey 5*, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney
1966 Helena Rubinstein Travelling Scholarship, Sydney
Survey 6, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney
1967 *New Generation Sydney*, Gallery A, Melbourne
1968 *Group 2*, Gallery A, Sydney and Melbourne
1969 *Japanese Forum Exhibition*, Tokyo, Japan
1970 First Leasing Prize, Melbourne
Georges Invitation Art Prize, Melbourne
1972 *Twenty Years of Australian Painting*, London, England
Gallery A, Sydney (with Michael Johnson and Andrew Nott)
Georges Invitation Art Prize, Melbourne
1973 *Biennale de Paris*, France
Contemporary Australian Painting and Sculpture, New Zealand
First Biennale of Sydney, Opera House, Sydney
1974 *Return to Sender*, Florence, Italy
Ten Australians, Paris, Stuttgart, Venice, Milan, Florence, Rome
William Angliss Prize, Melbourne
1975 Monash University, Melbourne (with Tony Tuckson)
The Ocean, Expo '75, Okinawa, Japan
1977 Gallery A, Sydney
Australian Colourists '77, Western Australian Institute of Technology, Perth
1978 *Landscape and Image* (contemporary Australian art to Indonesia)
Water Works, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, Sydney
1979 *Lis '79*, International Exhibition of Drawings, Lisbon and Opporto, Portugal
1980 *Summer Exhibition*, Gallery A, Sydney
1981 *Lis '81*, International Exhibition of Drawings, Lisbon, Portugal
Survey 16, John Firth-Smith, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne and Penrith Art Gallery and Lewers Bequest Museum, Penrith, New South Wales
Survey of the Seventies, Bendigo Art Gallery, Bendigo, Victoria
1982 *Sydney Harbour Bridge, 1932-1982*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Betty Cunningham Gallery, New York, USA (with Lesley Dumbrell)
Structures, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle, New South Wales
Singleton Art Prize, Singleton, New South Wales
Anzas 82, Macquarie University, Sydney, New South Wales
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin (works executed at artists camp, Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory)

Collections

Australian National Gallery, Canberra
Commonwealth Loan Collection
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Newcastle Region Art Gallery, New South Wales
Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria
Townsville City Gallery, Queensland
Geelong Art Gallery, Victoria
Grafton City Council, New South Wales
Bathurst Art Gallery, New South Wales
Dalby Art Gallery, Queensland
Broken Hill City Art Gallery, New South Wales
Power Gallery, University of Sydney
Monash University Collection, Melbourne
University of Western Australia, Perth
Mildura Arts Centre, Victoria
Windsor Council, New South Wales
Visual Arts Board, Australia Council
B.H.P. Collection, Melbourne
The Philip Morris Arts Grant, Melbourne
ALCOA Pty. Ltd., U.S.A.
Georges Limited, Melbourne
Sydney Morning Herald Collection
C.B.A. Bank, Sydney
A.N.Z. Bank Commission, Melbourne
National Bank of Australasia
Art Gallery of Queensland, Brisbane

Awards

1962 Mirror-Waratah Under 22 Years Contemporary
1963 Young Contemporaries, 'B' Section
1964 Young Contemporaries, 'B' Section
Mirror-Waratah Under 22 Years Contemporary
1968 Young Contemporaries
Royal Easter Show – Modern
1972 Grafton Art Prize (purchase)
Georges Art Prize (purchase)
1974 Townsville Art Prize (purchase)
1975 The John McCaughey Memorial Art Prize, Melbourne
1977 Bathurst Art Prize
Dalby Art Prize
Capital Permanent Award, Geelong Art Gallery
1978 Sydney Morning Herald Art Prize
Civic Permanent Art Award, Canberra
Broken Hill Art Prize

Selected Bibliography

Alan McCulloch: *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, London, Huchinson, 1968
(Editors): 'Young Australian Artist, 4: John Firth-Smith', *Chance*, Sydney and Melbourne Vol.1, No.7, 1968

Daniel Thomas and Mervyn Horton: *Present Day Art in Australia*, Sydney, Ure-Smith, 1969

Kym Bonython: *Modern Australian Painting 1960-1970*, Adelaide, Rigby, 1970

Laurie Thomas: *200 Years of Australian Painting*, Sydney, Bay Books, 1971

Patrick McCaughey: *Ten Australians* (catalogue), Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, Sydney, 1974

Janine Burke: 'John Firth-Smith', *Art and Australia*, Sydney, Vol.12, No. 1 July 1974

Grazia Gunn (ed): *Tony Tuckson, John Firth-Smith: Two Sydney Painters* (catalogue) Department of Visual Arts, Monash University, Melbourne, 1975

Kym Bonython: *Modern Australian Painting 1970-1975*, Adelaide, Rigby 1976

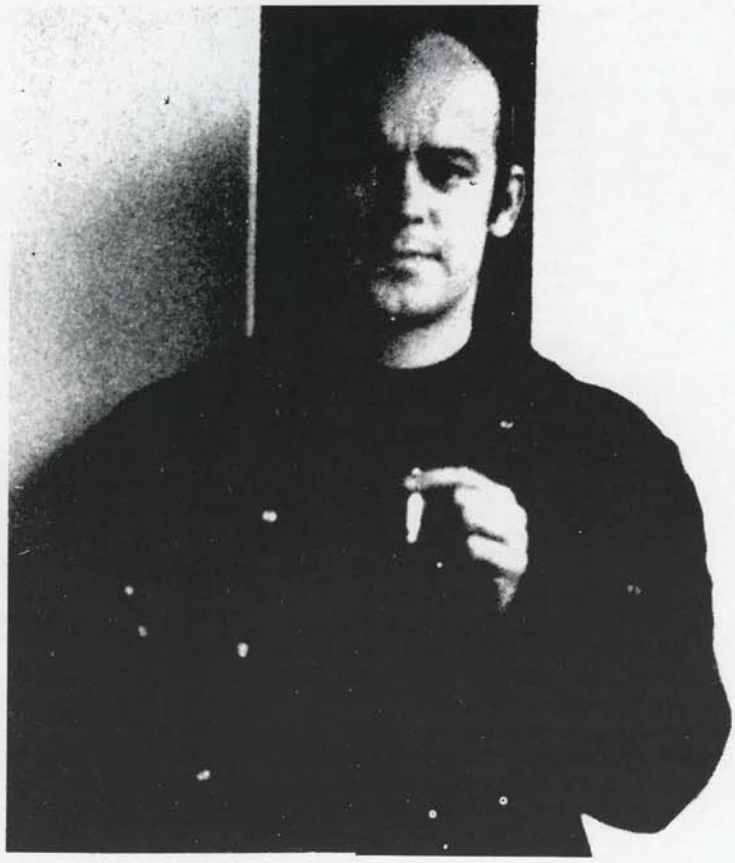
Rudi Krausmann: John Firth-Smith' (interview), *Aspect*, Sydney, Vol.6, No.3, 1979

Bernice Murphy: *Pemandangan alam dan Kayal/Landscape and Image; A Selection of Australian Art of the 1970s* (catalogue for exhibition to Indonesia), Australian Gallery Directors Council, Sydney, 1978

Pam Bell: '. . . like a gentle whale following the currents . . . ' *Hemisphere*, ACT, Vol.24, No.1, January/February 1980

Kym Bonython: *Modern Australian Painting 1975-80*, Adelaide, Rigby, 1980

Robert Lindsay: *Survey 16: John Firth-Smith* (broadsheet catalogue), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1981



MICHAEL JOHNSON

1938 Born in Sydney
1960-67 Lived in London
1953-59 Studied at Julian Ashton's Art School and National Art School, Sydney
1961-62 Studied at Central School of Art, London
1962-63 Studio Assistant to Brian Wall (Steel Sculpture)
1963-64 Lecturer,Art History,St. Michael's School of Art, London
Studio Assistant to Michael Kidner (built and painted three dimensional painting)
1964-65 Studio Assistant to Anthony Caro (rebuilt and painted 'Madam Pompador', aluminium; and with Ron Robertson-Swan repainted all steel works of Caro 1960-65)
1965-67 Lecturer, Croydon Art School, Croydon
U.K. (1st year Preliminary Studies Post Graduate and Directed an Advanced course for Art Teacher's in Secondary School of South London)
1967 Awarded R.H. Taft Prize (painting), Contemporary Art Society Open Annual
1967-69 Lived in Sydney
1968-69 Lecturer, N.S.W. University, (Visual Communications)
Lecturer, National Art School, (Drawings)
1969-75 Lived in New York
(Full-time painting)
1974 Lectured, Birmingham Art College Birmingham, U.K.
Awarded Visual Arts Board Grant
1975 Returned to Australia
1975-76 Artist-in-Residence; James Cook University, Queensland
1976 Awarded Gold Coast Prize (Painting), Queensland
1976-78 Lecturer; Sydney College of the Arts, (Drawing, Illustration).
1976 Lecturer; Sydney College of the Arts (Summer School Painting) six weeks
1977 Lecturer; Brisbane Art's Council, (Summer School, Painting) two weeks
Lecturer; Goulburn College of Advanced Education, (Summer School, Painting) two weeks
1977-81 Lecturer, Alexander College of Advanced Education, (Drawing, Painting)
Lecturer, East Sydney Technical College, School of Art, (Post Certificate Painting)
1980-81 Studio Assistant to Robert Klippel (Painted Steel Sculpture)
1979-81 Lecturer, Newcastle College of Advanced Education, (Post Graduate), Painting
1980 Awarded Camden Art Society Prize (Work on Paper)
1981 Lecturer, East Sydney Technical College, School of Art, (Post Certificate Painting), City Art Institute, (Painting)
V.A.B. New York Studio (plus fare grant)
Lecturer, Silpakorn University, Bangkok and Nakhon-Pathom Campus, Thailand
1982-83 Lecturer, E.S.T.C., School of Art (Post Certificate Painting)
Sydney Art Institute (Post Graduate Painting)
1983 Tapestry Commissioned Melbourne Council, Town Hall

Lives in Cammeray, northern Sydney suburb

Individual Exhibitions

1967-68 Central Street Gallery, Sydney
1969 Gallery A, Sydney and Melbourne
1970 Gallery A, Sydney
Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York City, U.S.A.
1973 Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York City, U.S.A.
1974 Gallery A, Sydney
1974 Studio, Bowery, New York City, U.S.A.
1975 Studio, James Cook University, Queensland
Gallery A, Sydney
1976 Gallery A, Sydney
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Queensland
1977 Gallery A, Sydney
1979 Gallery A, Sydney (Taylor Square Series)
1980 Gallery A, Sydney
1981 Gallery A, Sydney
1982 Studio, Green Street, New York City, U.S.A.
237 Lafayette, New York City, U.S.A.
Pinacotheca Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria
1982 Studio, Oxford Street, Sydney

Group Exhibitions

1962 R.B.A. Galleries, London (Young Contemporaries)
1963-64 R.B.A. Galleries, London (Young Commonwealth Artists)
Molton Gallery, London (Water Colours)
New Vision Centre, London (Gauche)
Qantas Gallery, London (Water Colours)
Folkstone Art Gallery England, Frankfurt-Am-Main, West Germany (Australian Painting and Sculpture Today)
John Moore's Gallery Liverpool, England
Commonwealth Institute, London (Biennale)
1967 Gallery A (New Generation Sydney), Melbourne
Contemporary Art Society, Sydney
1968 Museum Grimaldi, Cagnes Surmer, France (Sole Australian Representative U.N.E.S.C.O. Biennale)
'The Field', National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Pinacotheca Melbourne
Georges Gallery, Melbourne
1969 Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil
1970 Blaxland Gallery, Sydney (Colour and Structure)
1972 Twenty Years of Australian Painting, London
1974 Travelling Show of Young New York Artists, U.S.A.
1975 'Ten Australians', Gallery A, Sydney
1977 W.A.I.T. Gallery, Perth, W.A. (Australian Colourists - 77)
1978 Contemporary Australian Art to Indonesia (Landscape and Image)
1979 Central Street Gallery - Cambodia
1980 Axiom Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria (Opening Show)
1981 Survey of the Seventies, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
1982 Anzaas 82, (Eleven Sydney Artists), Macquarie University Library
McCaughey Invitation Prize, Melbourne
1983 Survey Australian Painting, Commonwealth Bank, Sydney
Australian Painting 1973-1983 Art Gallery of South Australia
Aspects of the Landscape, Gallery 52, Perth, W.A.
Survey of Australian Art, Art Gallery of West Australia, Perth
Burnie Art Gallery, Tasmania

Collections

Croydon Education Committee, London UK
The Australian National Gallery, Canberra, A.C.T.
The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria
The Art Gallery of N.S.W., Sydney, NSW
Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria
Esso Oil Company, Australia
Philip Morris Australia
Chase Manhattan, U.S.A.
New England Region Art Museum, NSW
Queensland State Art Gallery, Brisbane, Qld.
Melbourne University, Melbourne,Victoria
Gold Coast City Art Collection, Qld.
National Bank of Australia
Newcastle Region Art Gallery, NSW
Wollongong Region Art Gallery, NSW
Visual Arts Board, Australia
C.B.A. Bank, NSW
Texas Art Collection, Qld.
Camden Art Collection, NSW
Artbank, NSW
Doyle Bane Burbank, NSW
Knights McGillick Jones, NSW
Canberra University, ACT
City Council Melbourne, Victoria
Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Tasmania

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Present Day Art in Australia, Mervyn Horton, Ure Smith 1969

Modern Painters 1931-1970, James Gleeson, Lansdowne 1971

200 Years of Australian Painting, Lawrie Thomas, Bay Books

Australian Painting 1788-1970, Bernard Smith, Oxford University Press 1971

Australian Painters of the 70s, Daniel Thomas and Mervyn Horton, Ure Smith 1975

Modern Australian Painting 1970-75, Kym Bonython/Elwyn Lynn, Rigby 1976

Michael Johnson's Taylor Square Series, Paul McGillick, Institute of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1979

JOHN PEART

1945 Born in Brisbane
1962-64 Studied at Brisbane Technical College Art School
1964-69 Lived in Sydney
1967 'Interaction', a performance with Sydney Symphony Orchestra; music by Nigel Butterly
1968 Awarded the Mirror-Waratah Prize
Awarded the Transfield Prize
1968 Awarded the NBN3 Prize, Newcastle
1969 Myer Foundation Grant
1969-71 Lived in U.K., Europe and U.S.A.
1976 Awarded V.A.B. Grant

Lives outside Sydney near Campbelltown

Individual Exhibitions

1967 'Monochromatic paintings', Watters Gallery, Sydney
1968 Watters Gallery, Sydney
1969 Watters Gallery, Sydney
1970 Watters Gallery, Sydney
1971 Watters Gallery, Sydney
1972 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
Watters Gallery, Sydney
1974 Watters Gallery, Sydney
Abraxas, Canberra (Inaugural exhibition)
1976 Watters Gallery, Sydney
Abraxas, Canberra
1977 Realities Gallery, Melbourne
1979 Watters Gallery, Sydney
Victor Mace Fine Art Gallery, Brisbane
1980 Solander Gallery, Canberra
1981 Watters Gallery, Sydney
1982 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
Watters Gallery, Sydney

Selected Group Exhibition

1965 *John Peart and Robert Williams*, Watters Gallery, Sydney
Four Young Painters, Watters Gallery, Sydney
Survey of Young Australian Painters, Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
1966 *Sydney Painters*, Auckland Festival of Art, New Zealand
John Peart and Geoffrey de Groen Watters Gallery Sydney
The New Art Scene, Contemporary Art Society, Adelaide
1967 *Four Sydney Painters*, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
1968 *The Field*, inaugural exhibition, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1969 *Australian Art Today*, exhibition toured Indonesia
1973 *Contemporary Australian Painting and Sculpture*, exhibition toured New Zealand
Recent Australian Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1974 *Philip Morris Art Grant*, first annual exhibition, Ballarat
Ten Years, Watters Gallery, Sydney
1975 *Inaugural exhibition*, The Little Gallery, Devonport
Caltex Alva Awards, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell
Philip Morris Art Grant, second annual exhibition, Melbourne City Square
1976 *Outlines of Australian Printmaking*, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery
1977 *Australian Colourists '77*, W.A.I.T., Perth
1978 *21st Tasmanian Art Gallery Exhibition*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
Abstraction (with Stephen Earle, Ron Lambert, Richard Larter, David Rankin and Tony Tuckson) Watters Gallery
1979 *Works on Paper*, Watters Gallery, Sydney
1980 *John Peart, Peter Clarke, Anthony Pryor*, Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
1980 *Recent paintings from the studio of . . .* (with Richard Larter, Jon Plapp and David Rankin), Watters Gallery, Sydney
Works on Paper, Watters Gallery, Sydney
1981 *John Peart and David Rankin*, Watters Gallery, Sydney
1982 *Acquisitions to the Australian Collection 1956-1981*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Australian Drawings in the Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle
The Seventies: Australian Paintings and Tapestries, (National Bank of Australia Collection), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1983 *The Mosaic. The Grid.*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

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Wood, Lilian: *Directory of Australian Printmakers*, Print Council of Australia, Melbourne, 1976

Collections

Australian National Gallery
Newcastle Region Art Gallery
Art Gallery of New South Wales
National Gallery of Victoria
Art Gallery of Western Australia
Wollongong City Art Gallery, N.S.W.
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria
Art Gallery of South Australia
Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Victoria
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Victoria
Armidale City Art Gallery, NSW
Warrnambool Art Gallery, Victoria
Orange City Art Gallery, NSW
Dalby Art Gallery, Qld.
Queensland Art Gallery
Monash University
University of Western Australia
University of Sydney
Australian National University
Tasmanian College of Advanced Education
Macquarie University
Family Law Courts, Canberra
Applecross Evening Technical College, Perth
Townsville Teachers College
Western Australian Institute of Technology
J. Walter Thompson
Philip Cox & Associates
Patrick White
Allen Allen & Hemsley
Dawson Waldron
BHP
Philip Morris Art Purchase Grant
National Bank

LIST OF PAINTINGS

DAVID ASPDEN

1. "Untitled" (Castle Hill Series) 1975
   (1570 x 3010)mm. Acrylic on Canvas
2. "Untitled" (Pennant Hills Series) 1975
   (1580 x 3040)mm. Acrylic on Canvas
3. "Castle Hill Summer" 1975
   (1595 x 5650)mm. Acrylic on Canvas

SYDNEY BALL

4. "Totems on Ancient Ground I" (The Cattai Trilogy) 1982
   (2745 x 2745)mm. Oil on Canvas
5. "Totems on Ancient Ground II" (The Cattai Trilogy) 1982
   (2745 x 2745)mm. Oil on Canvas
6. "Black Cockatoo Ridge" 1982
   (2185 x 3795)mm. Oil on Canvas

JOHN FIRTH-SMITH

7. "Jump This" 1975
   (1520 x 2430)mm. Oil on Canvas
8. "Build" 1978
   (1365 x 2740)mm. Acrylic on Canvas
9. "Cross Spall" 1977
   (1520 x 4570)mm. Oil and Acrylic on Canvas

MICHAEL JOHNSON

10. "Untitled" 1981/82
    (1820 x 1210)mm. Oil on Canvas
11. "Untitled" 1981/82
    (2120 x 1210)mm. Oil on Canvas
12. "Untitled" 1981/82
    (2125 x 1520)mm. Oil on Canvas

JOHN PEART

13. "Diwali Night" 1982
    (1215 x 1730)mm. Acrylic on Canvas
14. "Red Kirtan" 1982
    (1695 x 2440)mm. Acrylic on Canvas
15. "Bhajan" 1982
    (1695 x 3360)mm. Acrylic on Canvas

This exhibition was organised under a curator-in-residence programme at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, financially assisted by the Visual Arts Board and the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board.

All the paintings were lent by the artists:

Michael Johnson, David Aspden, John Peart, John Firth-Smith, and Sydney Ball (whose paintings are dedicated to those who fought to save the Franklin River).

The collection was put together in Sydney with the assistance of:

Frank Watters of Watters Gallery for John Peart

Julie Mott of Gallery A
for John Firth-Smith

Eileen Chanin of Macquarie Galleries
for Sydney Ball

Roslyn Oxley of Roslyn Oxley 9 for David Aspden

Curator: Christopher Coventry

The curator was assisted, as a fourth year art theory project, by:

Gail Loney and Ann-Maree Reaney
Catalogue and Invitations

Michael Eather
Research and Education

The organisation of the exhibition was assisted by the following staff and students:

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