

Debra Dawes

Everydaynow

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 Oil on canvas, 180 x 260 cm

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Debra Dawes would like to acknowledge and thank Professor Ross Gibson as curator of the exhibition *Everydaynow*.



Foreword

One of the objectives of the ANU Drill Hall Gallery is to present exhibitions that are innovative, critically engaging and which highlight achievements in contemporary visual arts. To this end it is a pleasure to present the work of Debra Dawes, one of this country's leading abstract artists.

For the last two decades Debra Dawes has been working in a style that now marks her as one of the finest exponents of abstraction in Australia. Essentially, it has been a long exploratory journey into the potential of colour - its purity, its subtle sensuality and sensitivity, its infinite capacity to articulate narrative and meaning - and into the possibilities of abstraction, which can be tightly disciplined but open to limitless expressions of self.

The abstraction that she espouses is reductionist to the point of austerity. All elements of recognisable subject matter have been abandoned as her images are distilled into their purest essentials. Her work speaks of a preoccupation with the pure concerns of colour and shape, notably, in this exhibition, the vertical stripe or panel that establishes an order that can be repeated in a march towards infinity, thus making each stripe a fragment of an infinite reality.

Everydaynow includes key paintings from 1990 to the artist's most current work. The exhibition highlights Debra Dawes' ongoing dialogue with abstraction as a central concern in her practice but also emphasises the manner in which each body of work has a discrete set of considerations. The conceptual parameters of these considerations are described in the essay in this catalogue and are a pivotal component of the exhibition. For some years now Debra Dawes' work has been engaged with perception and, specifically, the arrangement of space within painting as a social construct. This has provided a rich field within which she has explored the dialectical relationship between the universal and the particular, a central tension in the discourse of abstraction. Within this field of investigation we can identify the artist's concerns with the way experience and memory of place inform her practice and how this in turn may be located within the international context.

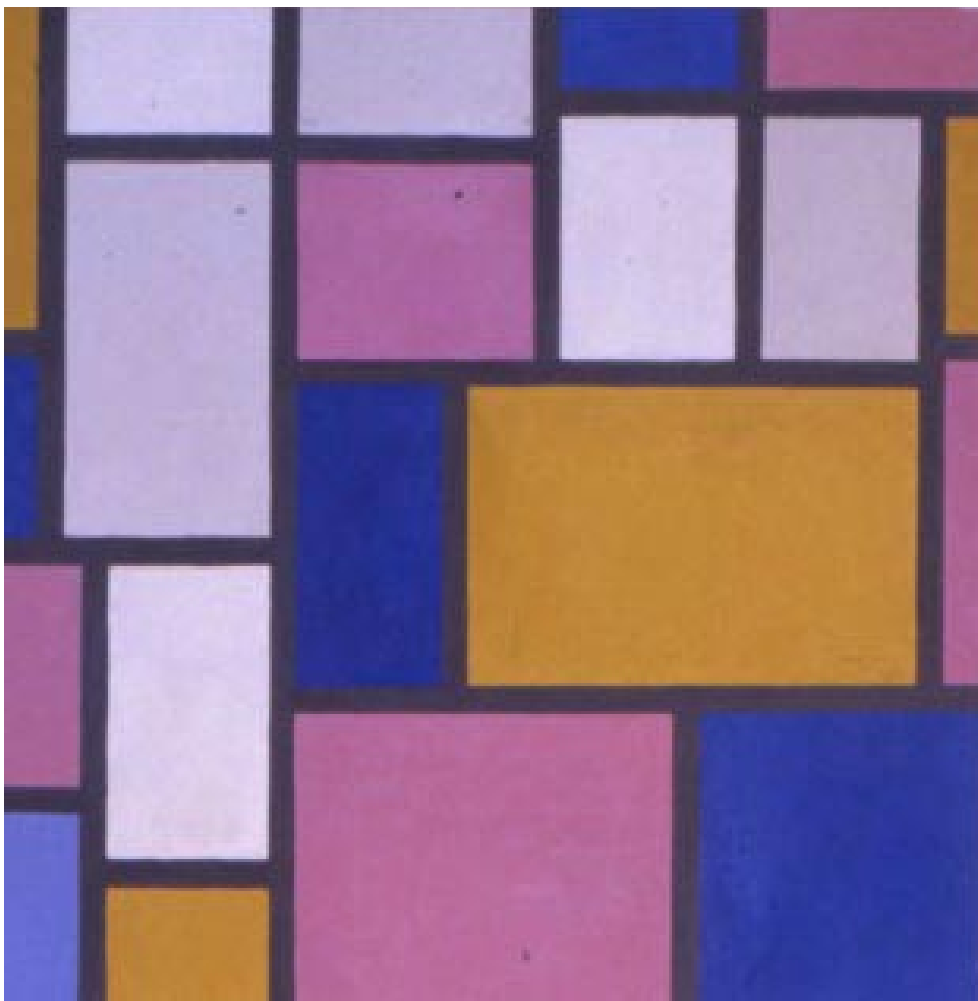
I would like to thank Debra Dawes for accepting the Drill Hall Gallery's invitation to exhibit. I am indebted to Helen Grace for her scholarly and informative essay about the artist and her practice, and the Australia Council for its support of the artist and the exhibition.

Nancy Sever

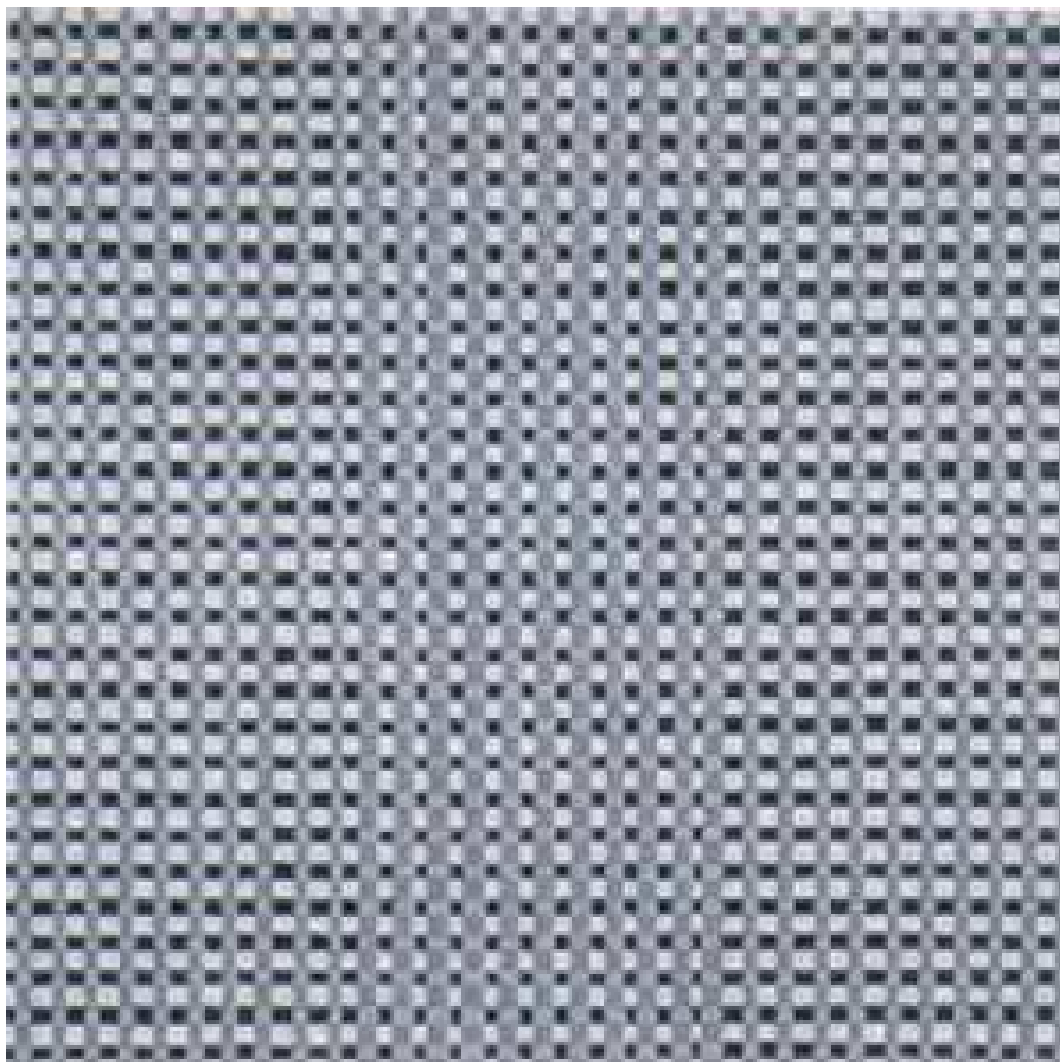
Director

Drill Hall Gallery and Art Collection

The Australian National University



Three Narratives: An Autobiography 1986
Narrative one #10
Oil on board, 40cm sq



Abstract Painting # 4 1988
Oil on canvas, 56cm sq

Debra Dawes

The Dynamism of Equilibrium

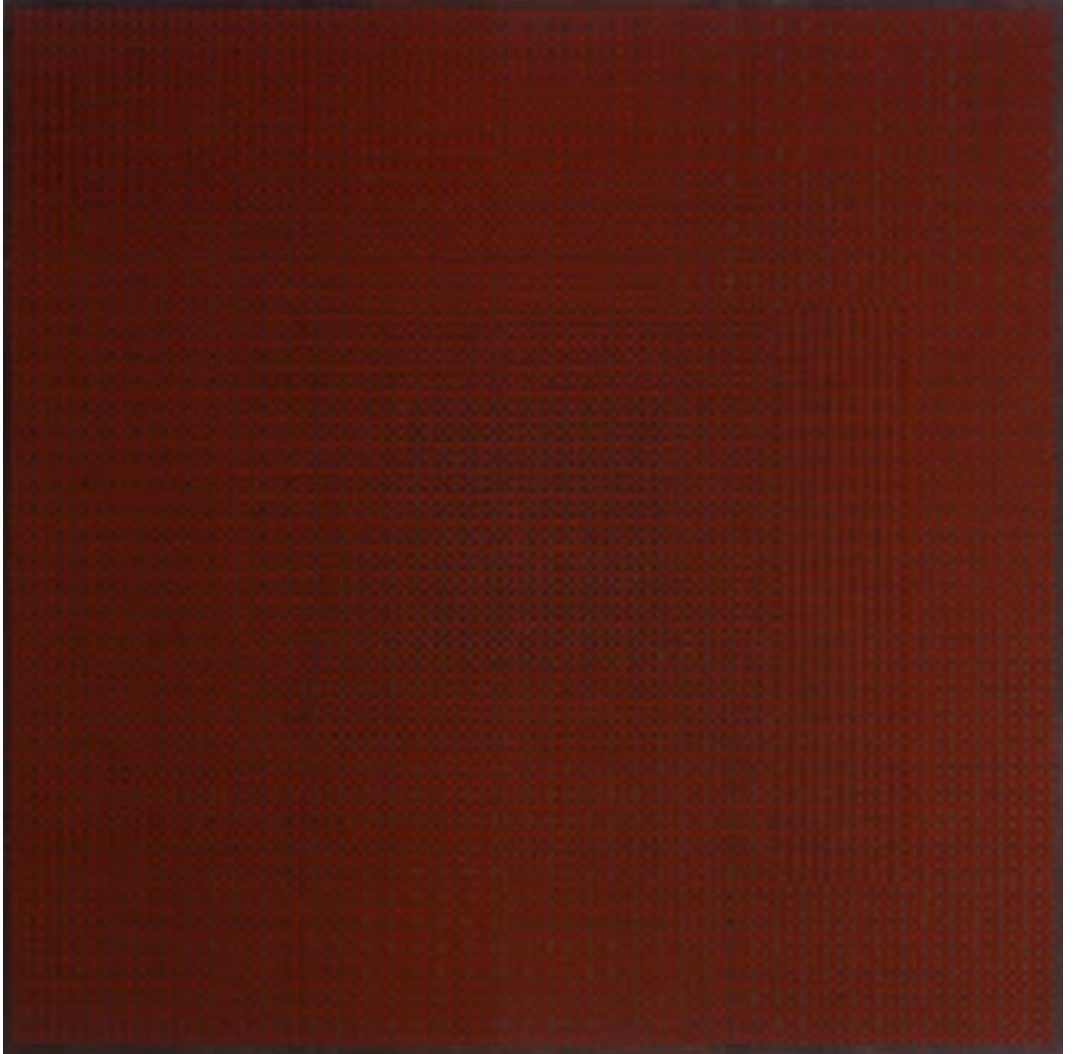
Something is revealed in a work of art, but it is not so much what the author sacrifices to the language that makes it into a text nor the symptomatic truth that the manifest level of the work hides but, rather, what the movement from hidden to manifest reveals of its own conditions of emergence¹

In the mid 1980s, the subdued still lifes of domestic details, which Debra Dawes was then painting dissolved into a muted abstraction to which she has been committed ever since. For almost twenty years she has painstakingly painted exquisite surfaces of elegant and shimmering monochrome stripes and grids. And then quite suddenly from the end of 2003, a remarkable set of new paintings emerged, representing the major breakthrough of her career to date. These new paintings, from the series, *clock wise*, embrace colour in an entirely new way for this painter of colour.

Until now, her low-key tones have been grounded in earthy pigments and natural oxides of burnt sienna and

umber, or given depth with ultramarine. Having worked thoroughly with a restrained and largely grey/blue palette, within which movement occurs at the edges of perception, like a mirage on the horizon, the clock wise series suddenly dispenses with reticence, throwing into play rich secondary and tertiary colours. Acid oranges, pinks and greens engender a heightened synthetic effect sometimes yielding strange harmonies and at other times, an unnerving, unsettling dissonance.

The 'technological' colour of clock wise engages with an image space dominated by television and video and the format of these large canvases evokes the wide screen installations of new media art, but these works belong to the history of painting and the light-filled space rather than the darkened room – and they illuminate more than the space they occupy. These are paintings which arise from the everyday attempt to keep art and life in balance, in a time of accounting for everything. And in accounting for these paintings, let's go back a bit.



Abstract Painting: Two objects 1988/89
Oil on canvas, 160cm sq



Houndstooth (large verticals) 1991
Oil on canvas, 180 x 120cm
Installation Mori Gallery

Scene 1: Situation-ism: It's Now Or Never

But then conflict is as much a part of the process of painting as is the joy of resolve.²

In a short piece on the status of abstraction in the 1950s in the catalogue for the exhibition, *Geometric Painting in Australia 1941-1997*, Chris McAuliffe sets up the terms and explores the space between two key moments forming a rhetorical polarity in Australian art – the 1959 *Antipodean Manifesto* and *The Field* exhibition which opened the new National Gallery of Victoria in 1968³. In the same catalogue Rex Butler, commenting on the Ian Burn essay, ‘Purity, Style, Amnesia’ written for a revisiting of *The Field* show in Melbourne in 1984⁴, refers to the undecideable status of *The Field* – ‘at once ordinary and only the repetition of what comes before... forgotten almost immediately at the time and returned to incessantly over the years’⁵.

This framing of the field of Australian art between ‘Antipodeanism’ and *The Field* and the granting of undecideable status to *The Field* brings into focus a particular dilemma which appears to strike Australian

art at the point of its institutionalisation (which, it is generally agreed, *The Field* registers for the first time). To get things moving, Butler interrogates the project in which he is himself located, suggesting that an unasked question haunts any selection of non-representational, non-objective painting here: why has no account of abstract painting in Australia been attempted yet?⁶ (my emphasis) Curiously, the structure of this question echoes an earlier point made by Ian Burn in the ‘Purity, Style, Amnesia’ essay: of *The Field* show, Burn observes that, in terms of dependency, ‘there is *yet* to appear anything resembling an adequate analysis’⁷ (my emphasis).

In both statements, the ‘not yet’ complete critical/historical project implies a deferral (‘It should be done, but it’s not really my job’) – a deferral, I would suggest, which represents not so much the ‘necessity of Australian art’⁸ but rather, the impossibility of it, since any account of it is deferred to some future time, which might never arrive⁹.

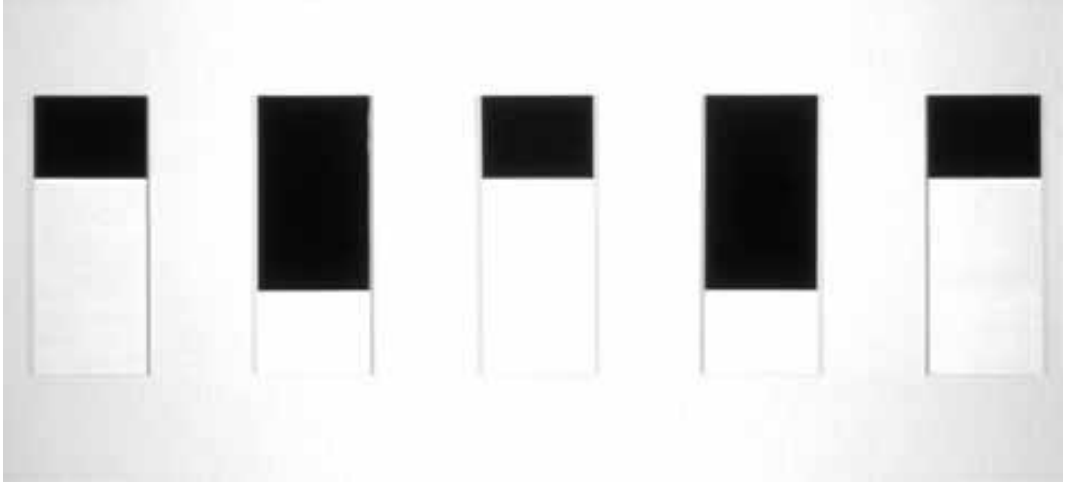
Alongside this ‘not yet’, which has the potential to become the ‘never-never’, there is its counterpart in the Now: the very latest thing, located here in the present, unconnected to origins (unless they are elsewhere).¹⁰ The Now erases the past, the ‘not yet’ erases the present. This does not represent an opposition between present and past in the name of a possible future; rather, it typifies a kind of amnesia which we regularly encounter in relation

to the culture of the post-war period in Australia,¹¹ which we might see as the very process by which a sense of ‘the original’ is produced, even though that original will always be a hybrid object - a ‘quasi-object’ as Latour puts it¹². I want to hold onto this idea of the ‘original’, not in the sense of a debate between ‘original versus copy’ or some idea of fundamental authenticity but rather to insist on the importance of sources, belonging to a regenerative space which allows us to access the possibility of cultural renewal.

Debra Dawes’ earliest abstract works were motivated by the mid-1980s return to *The Field* exhibition and she has spoken of the influence of the 1984 *The Field Now* show and the Burn catalogue essay on her shift, at that time, to abstraction. In the mid 1980s when she first began to exhibit, Australian contemporary art was in its most energetic and assured period ever. The decade from 1973 to 1983 had experienced an unprecedented – and unrepeated – level of funding, artists’ organisations had formed, gaining official sanction for a time, magazines flourished and – until the 1987 stockmarket crash – a healthy market for contemporary art had come into existence. The polemical ‘provincialism’ fervour, which provided the justification for renewal after 1972 had subsided – or, more likely, was ‘appropriated’ itself in the wave of appropriationism which was a feature of this time.

New artist-run spaces emerged¹³, as critical debate resituated the locus of meaning from work to its institutional framing, within which -- for critical purposes -- all art had become more or less abstract. By the late 1980s it seemed that a semi-official art canon had emerged, sanctioned by a new commercial and public gallery alliance and funding structures requiring a much neater picture for reasons of administrative logic; the language of accountability necessarily accompanied the more or less successful transition from artisanal 'cottage industry' art to an 'industry model', with its language of innovation, promotion and marketing.

To simply paint without thinking about the market was a risky business, especially since painting was now in a paradoxical position, having moved from its traditional representational focus on recognisable images to a focus on its status as object or 'thing' in a world which had moved in the opposite direction, shifting its focus from things to images. How is a painter to negotiate this shift? This is the challenge to which Debra Dawes' painting rises.



Houndstooth (horizontal) 1991
Oil on canvas 152 x 61cm
Courtesy Art Gallery of NSW



On the Edge 1992
Oil on canvas, 30cm sq
Wish Hard, Satellite exhibition, Biennale of Sydney
Wollongong City Gallery

Scene 2: The Equilibrated Relationship of Position

*There is one permanent relationship among all these changing ones; it is expressed as the perpendicular position, which plastically affords stability.*¹⁴

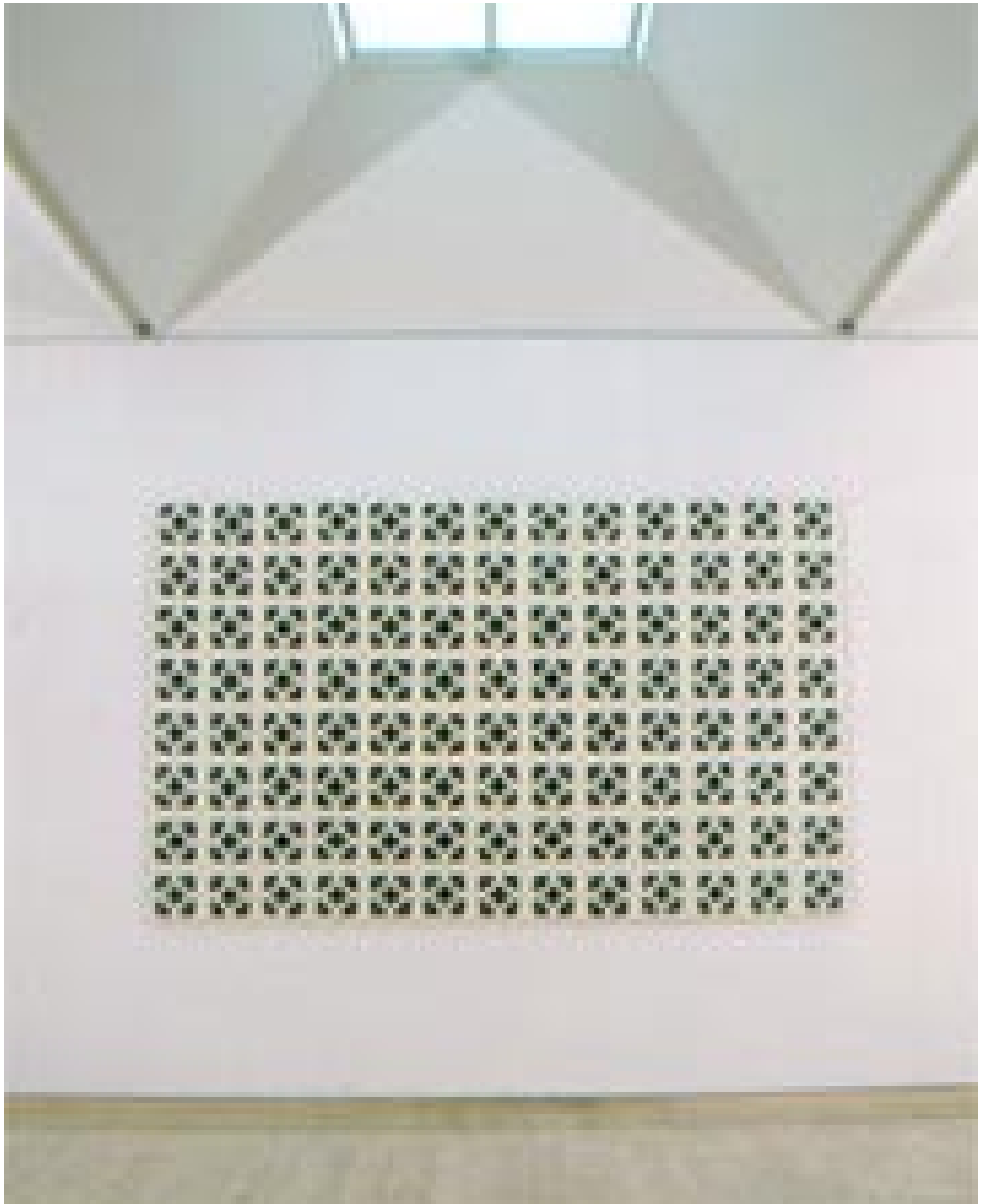
Dawes' early works are finely wrought figurative paintings in muted colours, lines and edges softened and blurred. In *Three Narratives: An Autobiography* (1986), she paints the details of domestic space, her immediate surroundings rendered through a mix of Morandi and Mondrian. The question of the immediate and the intimate is at this time both a personal and a theoretical concern, via the impact of French feminism in the work of Kristeva and Irigaray.¹⁵ Although this work proves to be of no use to her as a painter¹⁶, its theorisation of difference provides the philosophical framework through which she subsequently develops her serial work.

Of much greater use is the work of Mondrian – both the writings and the paintings which she sees for the first time in 1983, while living in The Netherlands. She speaks of

the shock of seeing the paintings, which ‘completely undermined everything I’d read about them; they had a life of their own outside of the texts’.¹⁷

Although the symbolist/Theosophical legacy of the gendered horizontal/vertical opposition (passive/active) used by Mondrian is initially off-putting for the feminist artist, it is perhaps ironic that theories of difference, in their challenge to literal readings of such oppositions allow for a greater emphasis on the idea of dynamic equilibrium with which, in the early 1930s, Mondrian replaces his earlier focus on the immobility of repose. In Dawes’ work, the achievement of a dynamic equilibrium is without question and those who write about her painting often speak of the way in which the works move, flutter, quiver or fizz.¹⁸

The presence of the painting – in the brushmarks, the underpainting and the ‘intimacy of them’ – resonates for her, providing the basis of her subsequent commitment to the practice of painting as an ethics in itself. Dawes’ work achieves a unity in its overall practice – from the early still lifes, through *Houndstooth* (1991), *On the Edge* (1992), *Starlite* (1993), to *Gingham* (1995), *Gray Spectra* (1995), *Lifting the Sky* (1999), *Glare* (2001) and *clock wise* (2004). Its ethics is based not simply on the use (and honouring) of everyday material reality, but more particularly in its disciplined commitment to everyday work. This is a practice which is systematically continued beyond the moment of novelty of



Starlite 1993
Oil on board 240 x 390cm
Installation Art Gallery of NSW



Gingham
Robert Lindsay Gallery
Melbourne 1995

Gingham 1995
Installation Robert Lindsay Gallery

overstimulated consumerism ('the shock of the new') with which many artists remain self-satisfied. Dawes' practice remains alert to the possibilities of materials and the play of techniques, the establishment and breaking of routines, the exploration of the tangible matter of painting.

As Dawes develops her practice, she finds herself somewhat isolated. Mid-1980s artistic postmodernism concerns itself with the frequently clumsy transcription of abstract theoretical concepts - transgression, abjection or the sublime - and local painting is predominantly figurative irony, in partial response to neo-Expressionism. There are artists whose work she admires and who are influences at this time: artists such as Dale Hickey, Robert Hunter, Robert Rooney, Lesley Dumbrell or Janet Dawson. Women artists in this period are generally seeking alternatives to 1970s feminist styles, but there is still a commitment to an affective register which precludes abstraction's non-representative, non-objective benchmarks.

She teaches herself colour theory at a time when such precise attention to technique has disappeared in art schools. Two decades later, colour theory is inescapable for the artist, facing the centrality of colour in new computer-based techniques and students are paralysed without a good understanding of the relationships between hue, value, saturation or an understanding of colour balance. Interestingly, it is the very systematicity of her painting which makes it now seem so fresh and current.

The 1992 series, *On the Edge* partially registers the artist's own position at this time – but of more interest are the explorations of painterly space which she undertakes in this series, experimenting with the possibilities of openness and closure in the contrasts of light and dark, illuminating the distinctions between order and unity for the painter and the designer (that key distinction which separates Mondrian and van Doesburg).

Gingham (1995) extends the spatial experimentation of *On the Edge* but moves away from the absolute equilibrium or repose of the apparent harmony between vertical and horizontal. Each of the four paintings in this series activates the eye's movement in a different direction, from *Gingham (Vertical)*, with its dark, bounded edges, extending the eye – and the painting – vertically, to the complete openness of *Gingham (Centrifugal)*, the 'implosion' of the completely closed *Gingham (Centripetal)* and the broadening of the laterally open *Gingham (Horizontal)*. The perpendicular – that definitive relation for Mondrian – is, in these works, rendered *fully* dynamic, resulting for the spectator in an *animation* of the viewing space. The push-pull of dimensions in these resonant works detaches the painting from its planar geometry, taking it into a stereoscopic three-dimensionality.

What is also at stake in this move is a shift from the rigid flatness of Greenbergian purism, which is nonetheless still able to foreground the very materiality of the painting surface and substance – and the painterly act itself. It achieves these effects not simply in terms of

the materiality of the painting as a *thing* but also by creating an actual *image* of itself. There is thus a collapsing of the figure/ground relation – or more specifically of the line/plane relation – in the precise rendering of textured ‘surface’.

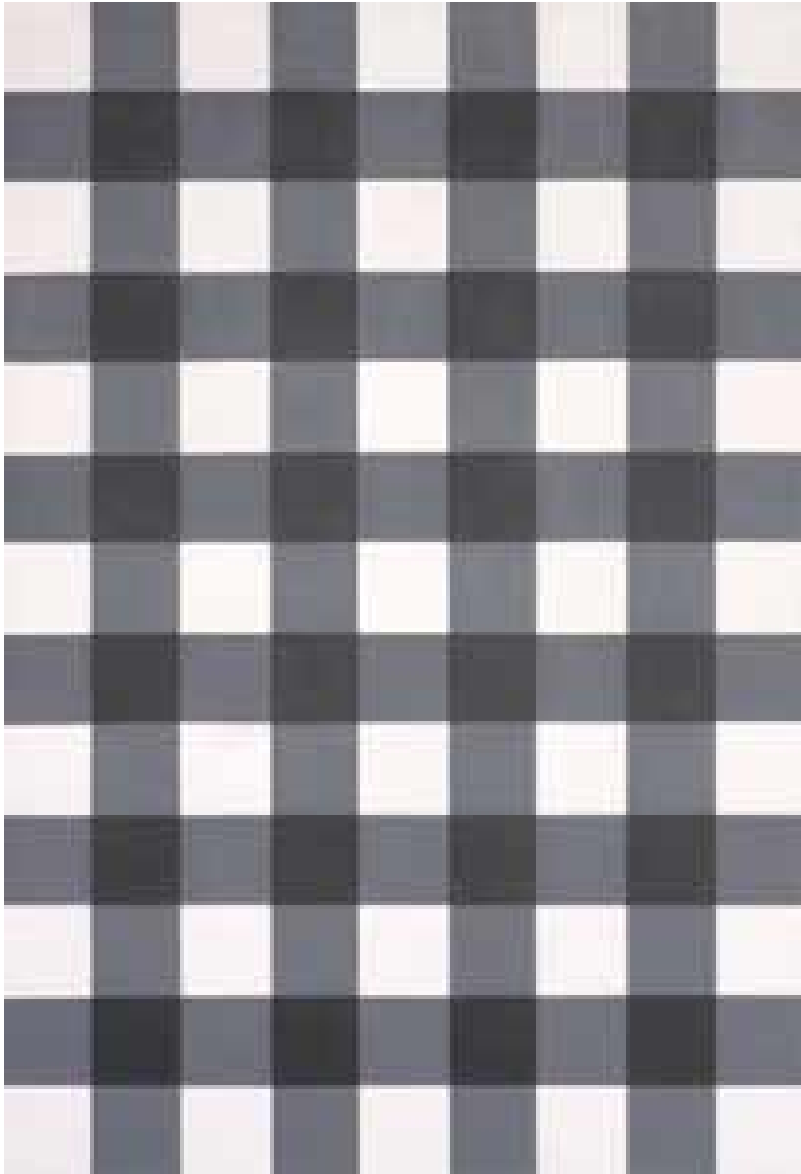
This is achieved through the specific over and underbrading in this series, but more especially in the fine grain of *Gray Spectra* (1996), in which the brading of ‘layers’ is much more delicately wrought. In *Gingham*, the perpendicular relations are more tensed, more ‘tightly-strung’ but the scale of these works guarantees an overall effect of expansiveness. The much more obsessive – and in fact much more tensed – *Gray Spectra’s* texture seems to involve a ‘stretch’ which is more uneven – though this is purely the effect of the painting and has nothing to do with the stretching of the support, upon which the paint appears to sit ever so lightly.

The melancholic, yet scrupulous intensity of *Gray Spectra* marks the end point of a particular period of interiority for the artist’s work. It is followed by an opening up and outward in subject matter, which has already been signalled in *Starlite* (1993), an abstract engagement with the suburban readymade. *Lifting the Sky* (1999) and *Glare* (2001) begin to explore landscape in the artist’s own return to cultural and ancestral sources. But a new problem is encountered: how to deal with spaces overdetermined by a particular tradition of landscape painting now completely challenged by a decade of new landrights. Barbara Bolt has made some interesting

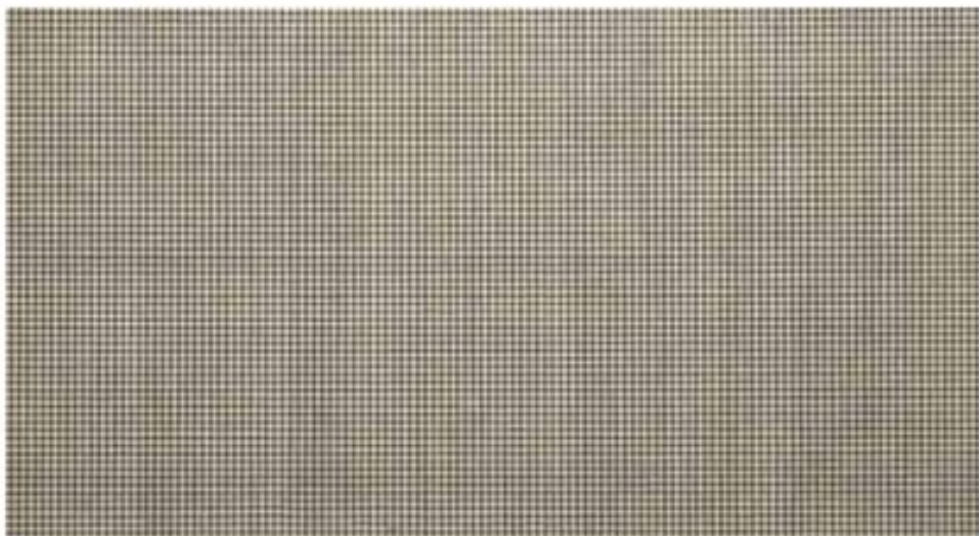
comments on 'glare' as an aspect of this new problem of representability, thought through an awareness of the blind spots of settler society, with its blinds drawn against the piercing glare, filtering through nonetheless in stripes of insistent light: 'There is nothing to grasp hold of, no point of access for the classifying eye. The quivering of the light and the fragmentary and broken lines of the landscape produce an intensity and mark an ascent towards a paroxysm.'¹⁹

She goes on to refer to what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'passional'²⁰ line, which we will rename here, 'engagement', for the purposes of characterising Dawes' painting from the late 1990s. Bolt argues that the intensity of the sun's glare ruptures the plane of organisation, creating a massive deterritorialisation: 'The dazzling glare undoes fixity, and, in the glare of the sun's light, different strategies for mapping are required.'²¹

For Dawes, the act of painting is an act of acquiring knowledge, a way of mediating experience and a means of processing the relation between knowledge and experience. In the opening out to landscape which Dawes embraces in *Lifting the Sky* and *Glare*, the *experience* of landscape impacts upon its expression in painting in ways which manifest the rupture of the plane of organisation, as Bolt describes it. There is a field of the social and cultural which, at this stage, cannot be excluded from abstraction and does not need to be, since it is a source of the motivation to paint as a means of remembering and mourning.



Gingham (centrifugal) 1995
Acrylic on canvas, 240 x 165cm
Courtesy Queensland Art Gallery



Gray Spectra (light) 1996
Acrylic on canvas, 202 x 367cm

In the mid 1990s Dawes returns to the town of Moree, where she had lived as a child, through the 1965 Freedom Ride, in which a busload of young, radical and predominantly white urban-dwellers, led by Charles Perkins – the first Aboriginal person to attend university – travelled to country towns, confronting the endemic racism, which had been taken for granted until this period of questioning. She reconsiders the experience of these events and the intricacies of black-white relations in the town, mediated through memory and history. The interweaving of discretely executed shades of grey – light, dark and mid-grey – in *Gray Spectra* (1996) interprets this complexity.

A moment of heightened excitement disrupts the quiet of a country town – a temporal disruption which nonetheless changes everything, though this is only realised years later. Otherwise, the memory of place is marked spatially in lines, paths, roads and the flatness of a landscape, grounded by the line of the horizon. Time, space, memory and geometry reorganise this landscape and the paintings derived from the attempt to remember the lived experience of place are located in a kind of time and space warp, reflected in the oscillation between top and bottom sections of both *Lifting the Sky* and *Glare*. The former body of works tries to approach the horizon, rendering a more close-up view, elongating the spatial relation between sky and ground, emphasising the vertical. In *Glare*, on the other hand, the distance recedes, and the horizontal dominates.

Like Clock Work

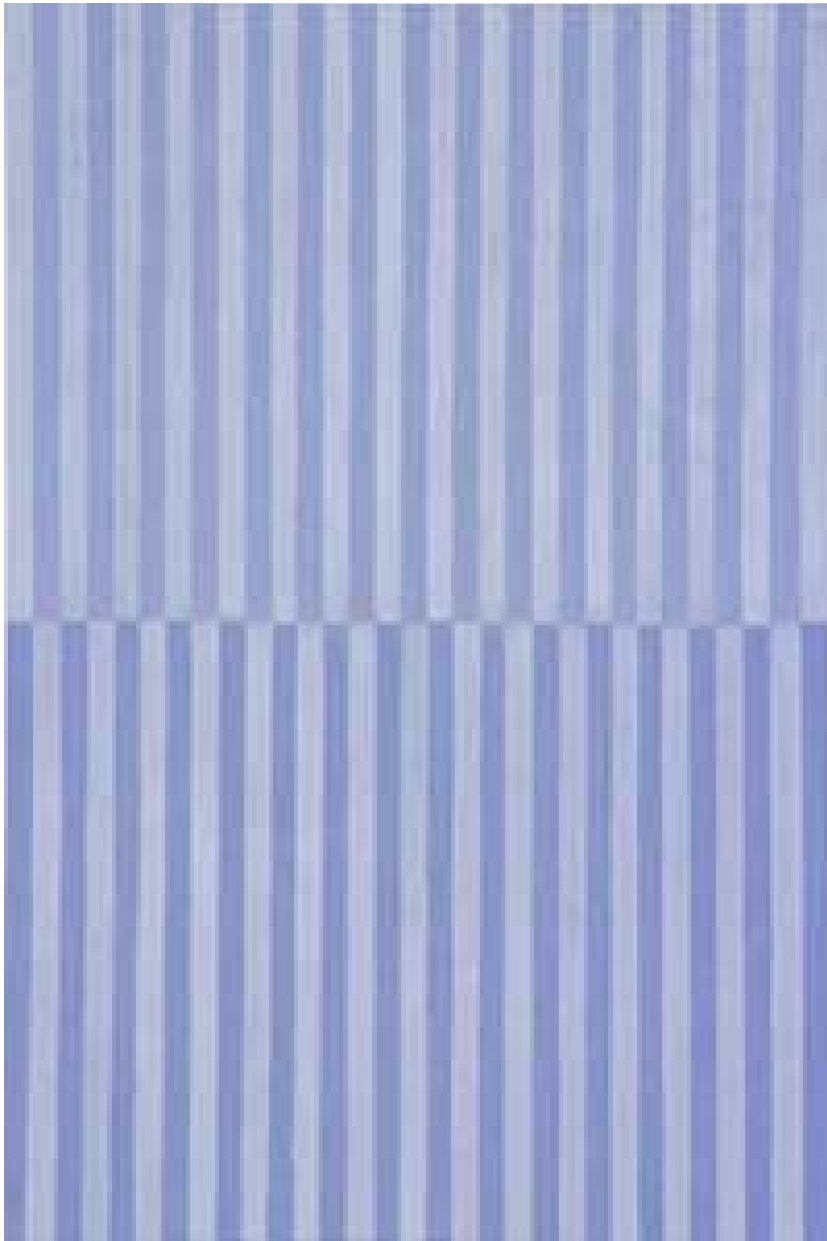
If the geometry of spatial relations organises Dawes' painting from 1985, *clock wise* (2004) fundamentally overthrows the structure of oppositions – the 'dynamic equilibrium' – which has characterised her painting until this point. The horizontal disappears as line but reappears as plane. A new harmony is achieved through the relation of colour and geometry (between the chromatic and the linear) – though with hindsight we can already see this new direction being set up spatially in both *Lifting the Sky* and *Glare*. But it is the chromatic shift which is the striking thing about *clock wise*.

Until *clock wise*, the work is focused on geometry – on the artistic rendering of natural or social space (social fabric); *clock wise* extends the concern with memory of the earlier work into a consideration of duration itself. Space is subordinated to time in the differential dimensions of the line-planes, varied according to the temporality of a given frame-month. The frame sizes are the same but their division varies, so there is never repetition of geometric relations.

There is a new lightness of touch, a sense of liberation in these paintings, which transcends the circumstances of their production and the order which Dawes has imposed upon her practice in their execution. Setting herself the task



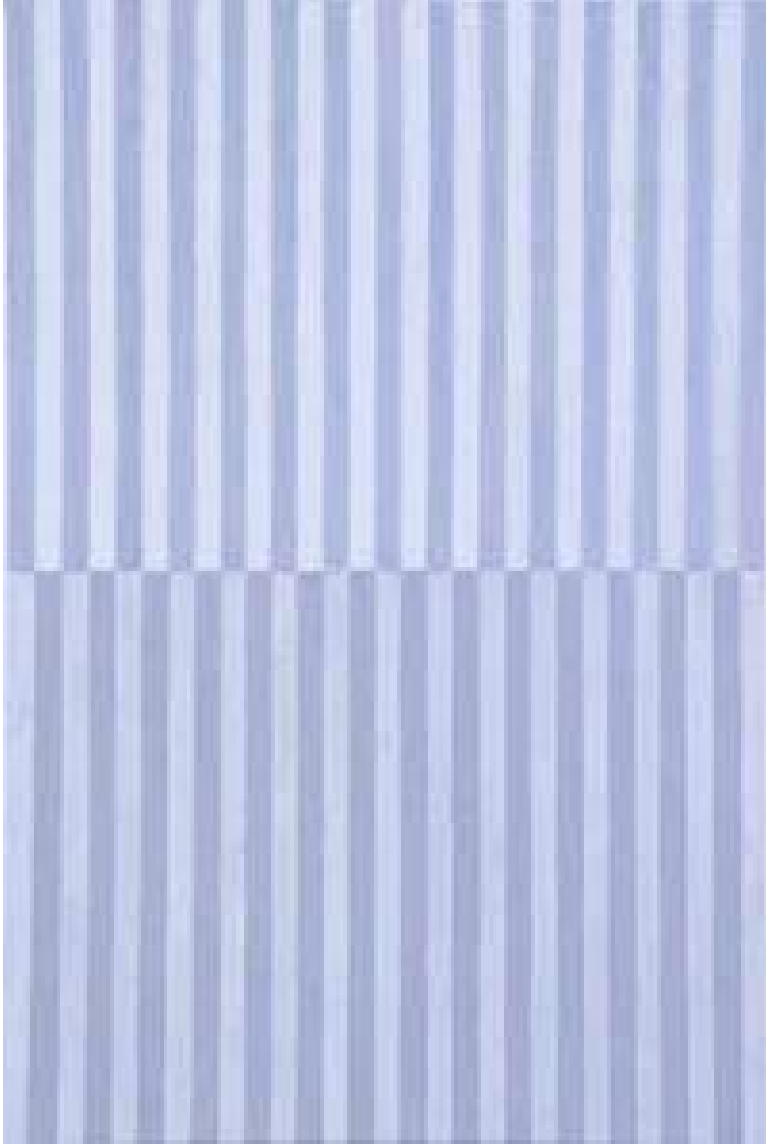
Lifting the Sky #10 1999
Oil on canvas, 100 x 60cm



Lifting the Sky #11 1999
Oil on canvas, 100 x 60cm



Lifting the Sky #12 1999
Oil on canvas, 100 x 60cm



Lifting the Sky #13 1999
Oil on canvas, 100 x 60cm

of completing one painting a month, under the difficult conditions of teaching full-time and the limits this puts on working in the studio, she devises a deceptively simple system for allocating time to painting. A canvas is divided into equal-sized stripes, according to the number of days in the month. Her aim is to paint a stripe a day; if she is unable to work on a particular day, her discipline requires that her next painting session must involve the completion of a block of colour, covering the days she has missed. Quite separate from the spatial/temporal logic of the work, which routinises the *labour* of applying paint, the main decision-making part of the process involves the choice of colour which probably takes longer than the actual painting. And here the years of colour theory pay off.

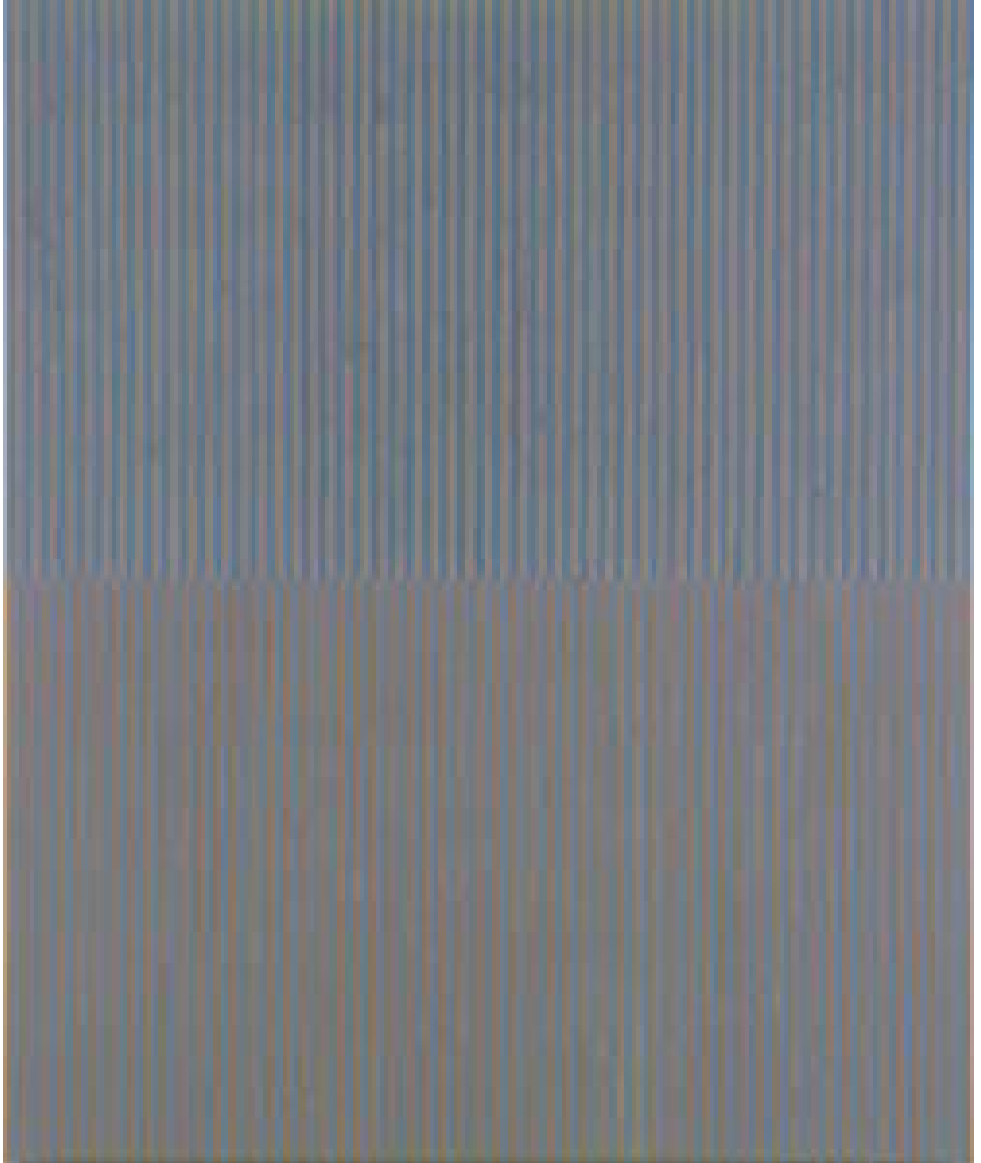
Let's speculate a bit on how this process might work, in the language of a manager who needs to know that time is not being wasted ...

Abstract-Real

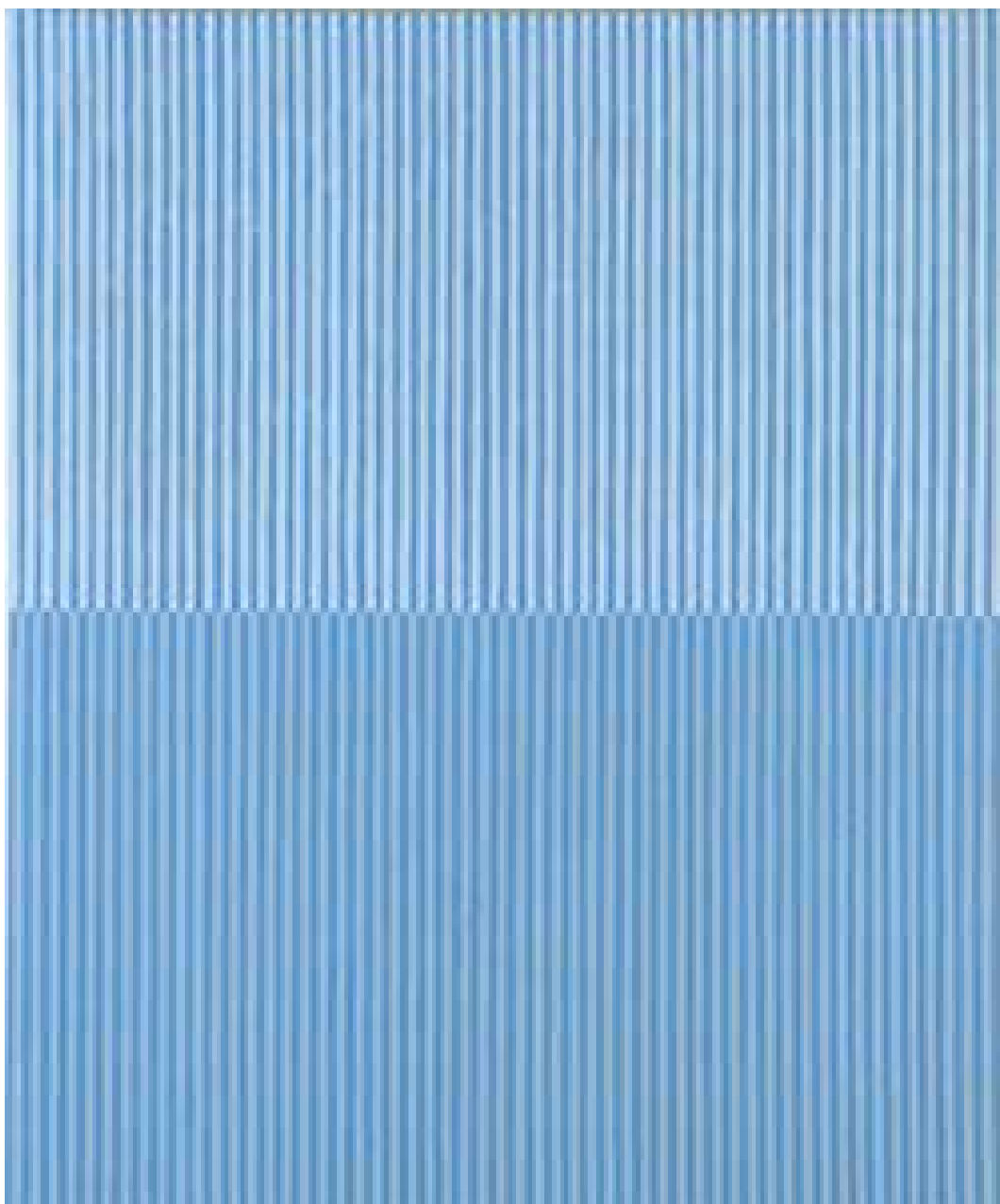
*... in aesthetic matters, intuition – that is, reflexive aesthetic judgement – comes first.*²²

On Monday December 1st, 2003, at approximately 11am, the artist enters the light-filled studio, where a primed canvas is leaning against the wall. She has not yet made a decision about the colour – except that it will not be from the blue range of the spectrum, where she has worked for several years. The decision-making process takes perhaps two hours during which the light in the studio reaches its greatest strength and clarity, filtered through the skylights. She deliberates for a long time, carefully choosing and mixing the colour she will use. She paints an orange stripe about 85mm wide along the full 1800mm height of the primed canvas.

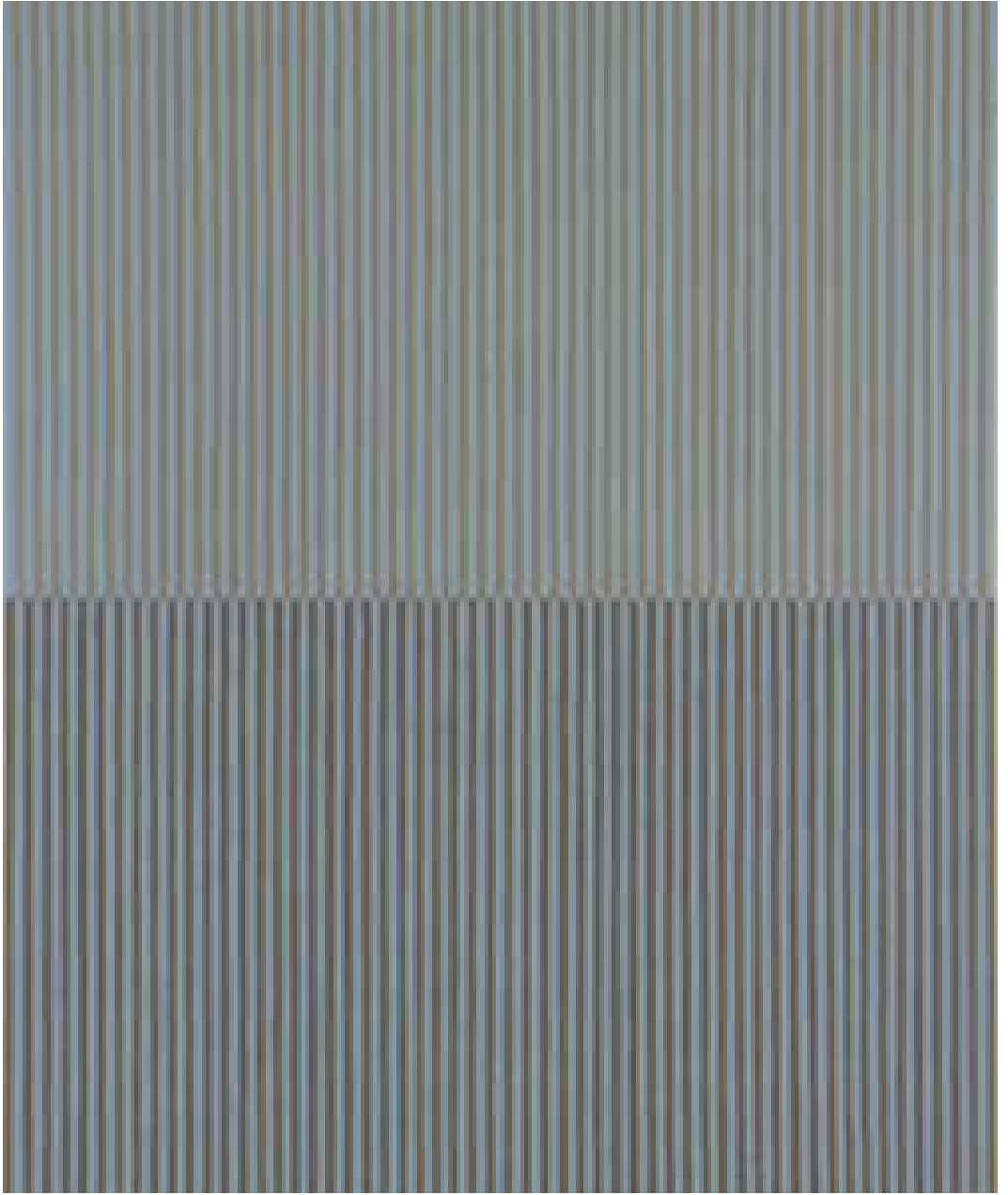
She does not re-enter the studio for two days and when she returns, on Wednesday, December 3rd, she repeats the careful choosing and mixing of colour – or non-colour – before applying a grey stripe twice the width of the completed orange one. She considers the impact of the new stripe on the existing one, the effect which each colour



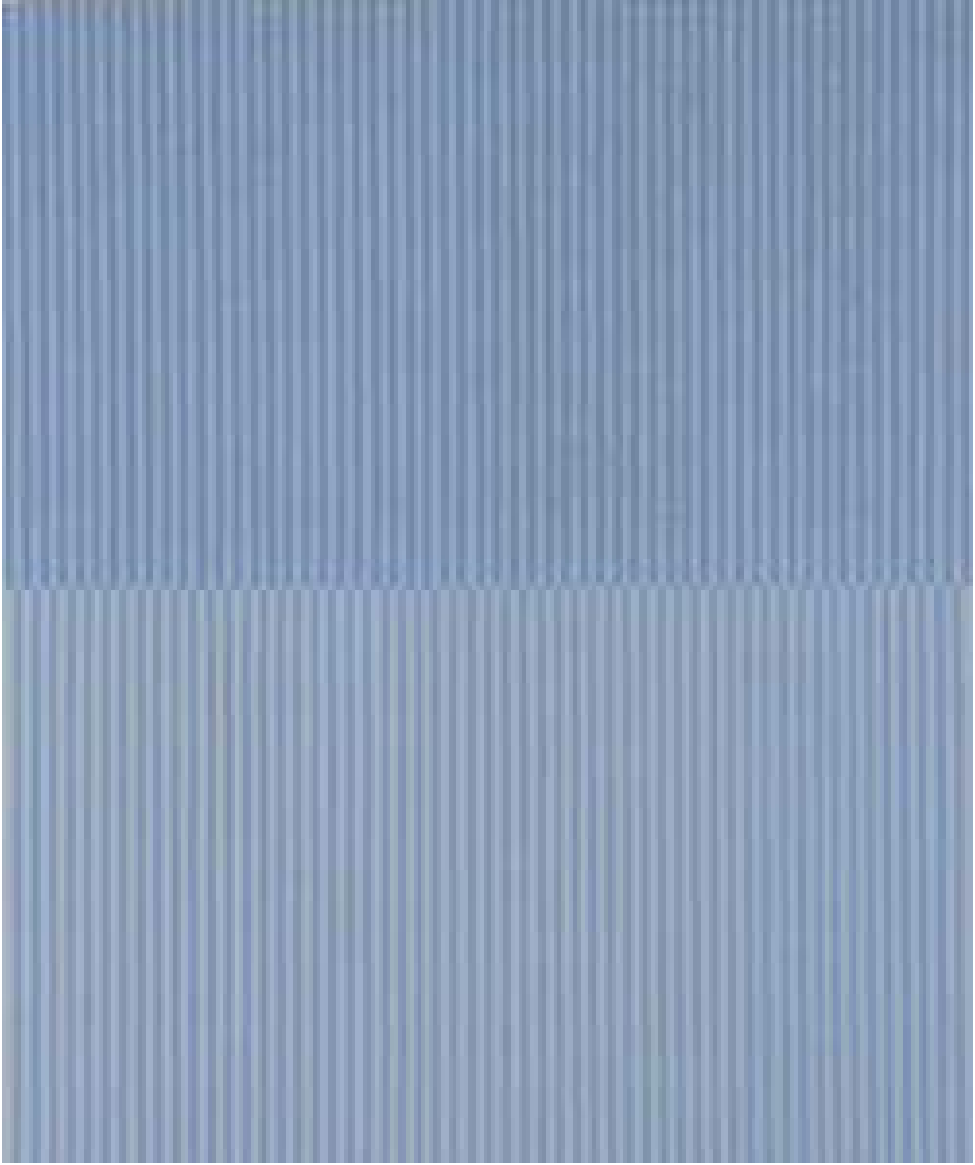
Glare #4 2001
Oil on canvas, 100 x 120cm



Glare #6 2001
Oil on canvas, 100 x 120cm



Glare #7 2001
Oil on canvas, 100 x 120cm



Glare #9 2001
Oil on canvas, 100 x 120cm

produces on the other; the relation of hue and saturation which arises in the juxtaposition and the value which is spatially engendered by the different width of the stripes.

A pause: is this working? A question asked each day in the studio, as each painting grows in organic fashion, and suspense builds. Will the final painting, with its thirty-one divisions for each of the days of the month, achieve any kind of unity to the extent that it can be said to ‘work’? The artist is stepping into unknown territory, exploring what for her is a new palette.

When we speak of the palette we are generally speaking metaphorically, referring to the colour range which has been used rather than the tool upon which colour mixing occurs. But in this Photoshop/Illustrator world, the palette has moved to the foreground of artistic consciousness once again, so it is worth remembering where it first appears in the history of painting – in the hands of women painters.²³ The seventeenth century French art critic Pierre LeBrun regarded the palette as ‘the mother of all colours’; through it, in the mixing of ‘three or four principal colours, [the painter’s] brush will create and ... cause to bloom all kinds of colours.’²⁴

Although LeBrun is describing a ten-colour palette for flesh painting in a period in which painting was primarily a system for producing form and flesh, the question of colour

becomes all the more intense when the necessity to represent no longer applies, when abstraction dispenses with 'the useless clothing of the world'.²⁵ In facing the palette, we begin to see what is at stake for a painter at the beginning of each painting.

On Thursday, December 4th, the painter once again enters the studio, undertakes the same process and paints a mauve stripe the same width as the orange three days earlier. The vibrancy of the mauve and orange are kept in tension by the non-colour neutrality of the grey separating them, but overall the painting is beginning to pulsate. As the colour brings the canvas to life at one end, a kind of animation is occurring, which is already causing ripples along the rest of the inert surface, blank except for the marked up stripes awaiting colour.

So vivid is the effect that Dawes leaves the work for two days, returning to it again on Saturday December 6th, when she tries to control the dynamic energy she has unleashed by painting another broad stripe of non-colour, this time a neutral white. The next day, a Sunday, she paints a single stripe of grey, ending the week's work by retreating from the *sforzato* tone she inaugurates at the start. On Monday December 8th, she begins again with another orange stripe, leaves the work for several days and returns on Friday December 12th, painting a broad stripe of bright green, as wide as the grey and white stripes combined.



clock wise June 2004
Oil on canvas, 180 x 260cm



clock wise February, March, April, May 2004
Installation Sydney College of the Arts





clock wise August 2004
Oil on canvas, 180 x 260cm

The effect is to overwhelm the balanced neutrality of the painting, overwriting the spatial dominance of the non-colour with a vibrancy and chromatic force which re-establishes the momentum with which she began. Two days later she firmly commits to this direction with a double stripe of subtle pink, which plays against the green in a relational tension she repeats in other paintings in the series, though varying the hue and saturation. This sets up a kind of musicality which resonates through the series, especially in the first few months, setting up a beat, a rhythm, an improvised syncopation, which is dazzling. The control of colour is so assured that a striking unity is achieved, in each individual canvas, but more impressively from one canvas to the next.

We could continue in this forensic investigation of the artist at work and we could establish a work rhythm, we could identify which days she worked and which she didn't; the surveillance potential is unlimited and in the era of accountability, this painting fits the bill. Except for one thing. You can describe a process, but you cannot predict an effect. There is a force in this work, and lots of humour, as if it is saying, 'OK, I'll play your game, I'll do the accountability thing, I'll fill out the forms and put in the time, but at the point you think you've got me under control, I escape you, and the work goes off singing and dancing, while you are left counting the numbers, not knowing what has happened'. Was it Einstein who

said, 'Not everything which is counted, counts and not everything which counts, can be counted.'?

In *clock wise*, Debra Dawes' painting rises to the challenge of the times, not by painting a picture of them, but by taking their pulse, painting the sensation, or 'sense-experience' of the desire to arrest time, holding it for long enough to insist that the spectator perceives the purity of colour and its relations. Or, in other words, we are invited not simply to look but to experience painting as a logic of sensation, in a world which otherwise overloads the sensorium, leaving no room for thought or feeling. These paintings measure time – and the times – in ways which restore the space of action and memory.

Helen Grace,

June 2005



clock wise September, October 2004
Installation Sydney College of the Arts



clock wise December, January 2004
Installation Sydney College of the Arts

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- 1 Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p1.
 - 2 Debra Dawes, Interview with Vicki Kirby, *West*, Vol 2, No 1, 1990, p13,
 - 3 David Pestorius (ed), *Geometric Painting in Australia 1941-1997*, University of Queensland, 1997.
 - 4 Ian Burn (with Nigel Lendon), 'Purity, Style, Amnesia' in Burn, *Dialogues: Writings in Art History*, Allen & Unwin, 1991; The Field Now, Heide Park and Art Gallery, 1984. The Field was revisited yet again, for the opening of the National Gallery of Victoria's new Federation Square building, and it has functioned as a kind of measure of Australian art since 1968. See *Fieldwork: Australian Art 1968 - 2002* National Gallery of Victoria, 28 November 2002 to 16 February 2003.
 - 5 Rex Butler, 'The Anamorphic Monochrome' in Pestorius, op cit.
 - 6 In some ways, this question is of a similar order to the question, 'Why have there been no great women artists?' posed in the early days of feminist art history. We might suggest that the answer to both questions is the same.
 - 7 Burn (& Lendon) op cit, p99.
 - 8 See Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether, Ann Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay on Interpretation*, Power Publications, 1988.
 - 9 As it happens, the idea of the impossibility of Australian art in fact coincides with the exact moment of a kind of eclipsing of white Australian art in global terms. Quite unbeknown to urban-based artists, orienting themselves towards Europe and the US in the early 1970s, the Papunya Tula Artists Association was just forming. This movement formed the first wave of a development which has come to represent contemporary Australian art to the world.
 - 10 For example, *The Situation Now*, Central St Gallery, 1971; The Field Now, Heide Park and Art Gallery, 1984; *2004: Australian Culture Now*, National Gallery of Victoria/Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 2004.
 - 11 And here I regard the term 'post-war' as a global condition and not just

a temporal description – though it may now be necessary to replace the word ‘post’ with the word ‘permanent’.

- 12 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, 1993, p6.
- 13 The two most significant in this period in Sydney were Union Street and First Draft. Union Street was established in 1985 by Debra Dawes, Jelle Van Den Berg, Deborah Singleton and Jeff Gibson; and First Draft was established in 1986 by Narelle Jubelin, Paul Saint, Tess Horwitz and Roger Crawford.
- 14 Piet Mondrian, *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality: An Essay in Triologue Form*, 1919-1920, George Brazillier, 1995, p26.
- 15 Dawes’ initial encounter with this work was via Elizabeth Grosz, who taught a course at Sydney College of the Arts in 1986, as Dawes was completing her postgraduate degree.
- 16 ‘Kristeva proved to be a little too orthodox’, Dawes, Interview with Vicki Kirby, *West*, Vol 2, No 1, 1990, p13.
- 17 Debra Dawes, conversation with author, Coledale, 24 April 2005.
- 18 Ross Gibson, notes on *clock wise*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis, 2004.
- 19 Barbara Bolt, ‘Shedding Light for the Matter’, *Hypatia*, Vol 15, No 2 (Spring 2000), p208.
- 20 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p187.
- 21 Bolt, p208.
- 22 Thierry De Duve, ‘Intuition, Logic, Intuition’: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 25, No , Autumn, 1998
- 23 The palette first appears in a fifteenth century illustrated manuscript by Bocaccio, depicting the lives of noble and famous women in Burgundy. See John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, Thames and Hudson, 1992, p177.
- 24 Ibid, p178.
- 25 Yve-Alain Bois, The Iconoclast in *Piet Mondrian*, 1872-1944, Bullfinch Press/Little Brown & Co, 1994, p313.

Biography

Born	Goondiwindi, Queensland
1979	Art Certificate, Newcastle TAFE
1980-82	Diploma in Art, Newcastle College of Advanced Education
1984-85	Post-graduate Diploma in Painting, Sydney College of the Arts
1985-86	Co-director of Union Street Gallery, Sydney
1990	Recipient of Australia Council Grant
1994-2000	Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong
1994	Recipient of Australia Council Grant
1997	Recipient of Australia Council Grant
2004	Recipient of Australia Council Grant

Debra Dawes currently works as a lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney

Solo Exhibitions

- 2005 *Everydaynow*, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra
- 2005 *clock wise*, Sydney College of the Arts Galleries, University of Sydney, Sydney
- 2004 *clock wise*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Dank Street, Sydney
- 2002 *Afterthought*, Sherman Galleries Hargrave, Sydney
- 2001 *Glare*, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney
- 2000 *Afterthought*, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne
- 1999 *Lifting the Sky*, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney
- 1997 *Trace of Passage*, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne
- 1996 *Gray Spectra*, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney

- 1995 *Gingham*, Robert Lindsay Gallery,
Melbourne
- 1993 *Starlite*, Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney and Wollongong City Gallery,
Wollongong
- 1992 *On the Edge*, Deutscher Fine Art, Melbourne
- 1991 *Houndstooth*, Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1989 *Abstract Painting* 1989, Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1988 *Abstract Paintings*, Mori Gallery, Sydney
and George Paton Gallery, University of
Melbourne, Melbourne
- 1987 *Psychedelia and Other States*, Mori Gallery,
Sydney
- 1986 *Three Narratives: An Autobiography*, Union
Street Gallery, Sydney
- 1983 *Drawings and Paintings*, A-Weg Gallery,
Groningen, The Netherlands

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2005 *International Painting on Paper*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney
- 2004 *Open Gallery*, Art & About, City of Sydney, Sydney
- Sight-Seeing*, War Memorial Art Gallery, University of Sydney and Sydney College of the Arts Galleries, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney
- Talking About Abstraction*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, The University of New South Wales, Sydney
- Sight-Seeing*, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing Down Town Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2003 *Shangrila Collective*, Art Space, Woolloomooloo, Sydney
- 2002 *Good Vibrations*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, Victoria
- Group Exhibition, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney

- 2001 *Phenomena: New Painting in Australia, 1*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney and Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne
- Group Exhibition, Sherman Galleries Hargrave, Sydney
- Group Exhibition, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney
- 2000 *Suburb*, Museum of Sydney, Sydney.
- On The Brink: Abstraction of the 90s*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, Victoria
- 1998 *VERVE: An exhibition of Visual Poetry and Poetic Visuals*, S. H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust (curated for the Sydney Writer's Festival), Sydney
- 1997-98 *Containment*, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart, and University Gallery, University of Tasmania, Launceston

- 1996-98 *Flagging the Republic*, Sherman Galleries,
regional gallery tour
- 1997 *Geometric Painting in Australia 1941-1997*,
University Art Museum, The University of
Queensland, Brisbane
- Ornamentalism*, Institute of Modern Art,
Brisbane
- 1994 *The John McCaughey Memorial Art Prize*,
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- Reinventing the Grid*, Robert Lindsay Gallery,
Melbourne
- 1992 *Wish Hard*, Biennale of Sydney Satellite,
Wollongong City Gallery, Wollongong
- 1991 *Rules for Drawing*, Mori Gallery, Sydney
- Microcosm*, Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney
- The Subversive Stitch*, Monash University
Gallery, Melbourne and Mori Annexe,
Sydney
- 1990-91 *Abstraction*, Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney and touring

- 1990 *Pure*, Queensland College Art Gallery,
Brisbane
- Architecture of Light*, Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1989 *Pure*, Mori Gallery, Sydney
- Australian Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New
South Wales, Sydney
- Colour Blind*, Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1987 *Feminist Narratives*, George Paton Gallery,
University of Melbourne, Melbourne
- 1986 *Union Street*, George Paton Gallery,
University of Melbourne and College
Gallery, Brisbane
- 1985 *Joint Show*, Union Street Gallery, Sydney
- 1984 *Last Past the Postism*, Art Unit, Sydney
- 1983 Installation in collaboration with Jelle van
den Berg, Academia del Arte, Florence, Italy
- 1982 Curatorial Committee and Exhibitor in
Women and Arts Festival Gallery 62,
Newcastle

Collections

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale NSW

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Powerhouse Museum

University of Wollongong

Art Bank

Macquarie Bank

Allen, Allen & Hemsley

News Limited

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Garside, Sioux. 'Sightseeing', exhibition catalogue, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney, 2004

Stanhope, Zara. 'Good Vibrations: the Legacy of Op Art in Australia', exhibition catalogue, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, Victoria, 2002

Wardell, Michael. 'Phenomena New Painting in Australia: 1', exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2001

Broadfoot, Keith. 'In The Name of Painting', *Postwest*, No. 16, 2000

Broadfoot, Keith. 'The Mirage of Memory: Lifting the Sky', exhibition catalogue, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney, 1999

Quillaen, Diana. 'Verve and After The Masters', *Art Monthly*, No. 110, June 1999

Hallett, Bryce. 'Sorry seems to be the hardest word - to see', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 May 1998

Bond, Clare. 'Containment', exhibition catalogue, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, 1997

McNamara, Andrew. 'Ornamentalism', exhibition catalogue, Institute of Modern Art and Power Institute of Fine Arts, Brisbane, 1997

Gibson, Ross. 'Restless, Abstract and Realist', *Art and Australia*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1996

Moore, Catriona. 'Supermodels: Women artists enter the mainstream', (ed) Butler, Rex. *What is Appropriation: An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s*, IMA and Power Institute publication, 1996

McNeill, David. 'Debra Dawes', *Art + Text*, May 1996

Auty, Giles. 'Obsessive Convulsive', *The Weekend Australian*, 13-14 April 1996

Mendelssohn, Joanna. 'Sydney Art: Bill Henson, Debra Dawes', *The Australian*, 19 April 1996

Green, Charles. *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art 1970 - 1994*, A World of Art Book, Craftmans House, 1995

Bruce, Candice. 'Performance Peace', exhibition catalogue, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne, 1995

McKenzie, Robyn. 'Gingham: Debra Dawes', *The Age*, 17 May 1995

Kent, Rachel. 'Reinventing the Grid', exhibition catalogue, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne, 1994

Rooney, Robert. 'How lines of thought converge on the grid', *The Weekend Australian*, 22-23 October 1994

Gibson, Ross. 'A Constellation of Options', exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993

Holder, Jo. 'Wish Hard', exhibition catalogue, Wollongong City Gallery, Wollongong, December 1992

O'Donnell, Marcus. 'Debra Dawes On the Edge', *Agenda* No. 25 September/October 1992

Rooney, Robert. 'Reductive Geometry in Many Colourful Guises', *The Weekend Australian*, 4-5 July 1992

Green, Charles & Wickham, Stephen. 'Abstract?', *West* Vol. 3, No. 2 1991

Lynn, Elwyn. 'Modernism minus authoritarian bombast', *The Weekend Australian*, 7-8 December 1991

Kleinert, Sylvia. 'On the idea of being sub.ver'sive', *Crafts NSW* Summer 1991

Green, Charles. 'Debra Dawes', *Artforum*, October 1991

Murray, Kevin. 'Contemporary Twists', *Craft Victoria*, October/November 1991

Rooney, Robert. 'Serious funny business', *The Weekend Australian*, 21-22 September 1991

Forsyth, Graham. 'Houndstooth - Debra Dawes', *Agenda* No. 19, September 1991

Lynn, Elwyn. 'Back to the square ones', *The Weekend Australian*, 22- 23 June 1991

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Snell, Ted. 'Abstraction', *Art and Australia* 1990

McDonald, Ewen. 'Variations on a Minimalist Theme', *Eyeline* No. 13 1990

Lumby, Catherine. 'Abstraction', *Tension* No.22 1990

Lynn, Victoria. 'Abstraction', exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, June 1990

Moore, Catriona. 'Debra Dawes', *Flash Art* No. 144 January/February 1989

Lindsay, Eloise. 'Australian Perspecta', exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1989

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Lynn, Elwyn. 'Unashamedly Abstract', *The Weekend Australian*, 10-11 September 1988

Rooney, Robert. 'Mapping the realm of ambiguous vision', *The Weekend Australian*, 19-20 November 1988

Lindsay, Eloise. 'Abstract Paintings', *Eyeline* No. 7, December 1988

Holder, Jo. 'Who is Mondrian?', *Feminist Narratives*, exhibition catalogue, George Paton Gallery, Melbourne, June 1987

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