





MONOCHROME: EMPTY & FULL



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**4 MAY – 2 JUNE
2018**

**MARGARET
LAWRENCE
GALLERY**

**Hayley Millar Baker
David Batchelor
Brian Blanchflower
Louise Blyton
Vicente Butron
Eugene Carchesio
Deb Covell
Christoph Dahlhausen
Julian Dashper
Adrian De Vries
Matthew Deleget
ADS Donaldson
Craig Easton
Marcia Hafif
Chris Heaphy
Suzie Idiens
Aldo Iacobelli
Raafat Ishak
Noel Ivanoff
Wjm Kok
Robert MacPherson
Aaron Martin
Anne-Marie May
Allan Mitelman
Darren Munce
April Spencer Napaljarri
Winkie Spencer Napaljarri
John Nixon
Rose Nolan
Derek O'Connor
Lenton Parr
Yioryios Papayioryiou
Paul Partos
Kerrie Poliness
Steven Rendall
Ayako Saito
David Serisier
Ron Robertson Swann
David Thomas**

Curator: David Sequeira



VCA
Victorian College
of the Arts



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Implicit in each of the works in *Monochrome: Empty & Full* is the notion of colour as its own entity—a kind of presence that has the capacity to both embody and conjure a range of meanings and associations. In these works, colour is connected with form but not beholden to it. Artists who engage in contemporary monochrome art practices tend to perceive themselves as part of a growing lineage. Often grounded and/or informed by a range of practices, philosophies and movements which include but are not limited to geometric abstraction, abstract expressionism, minimalism, conceptualism, Tantra and Zen, many of them explore the types of resonance and relevance that monochrome art practices can have right now—‘a silent oasis of contemplation in the noisy overstimulated contemporary world of mass culture that is geared to ephemeral fashion and instant gratification.’¹¹

The exhibition has been organised into the following three non-sequential sections: Colour is a substance; Monochrome manifesto and Monochromes out in the world.

Colour is a substance comprises of *Sabco No 5*, 1978 a single work by Australian artist Robert MacPherson. Each of the small square black canvases in this work is numbered from 1-46. The number of each individual canvas corresponds to the number of layers of black paint applied. For example, Number 1 has one layer of black paint and Number 46 has forty-six layers of the same black paint. Displayed in a single line across the gallery wall, the work demonstrates an evenly graduated progression in the density of paint surface. *Sabco No 5* has a visual rhythm generated by its composition as a series of objects that are similar in size and colour. Their display is suggestive of a production line—an idea echoed in the title which refers to the brand of the household paint brush used in the work’s creation. Colour here is a substance through which the authorship of the artist

is asserted simply and powerfully and there is no confusion or mystery about the way the work was made.

Monochrome manifesto can be understood as a glimpse into the range of forms that monochrome art can take. Far from a complete survey of monochrome practice the extensive list of Australian and international artists in this section includes Hayley Millar Baker, Brian Blanchflower, Louise Blyton, Vicente Butron, Eugene Carchesio, Christoph Dahlhausen, Deb Covell, Julian Dashper, Adrian De Vries, Matthew Deleget, ADS Donaldson, Craig Easton, Marcia Hafif, Suzie Idiens, Aldo Iacobelli, Raafat Ishak, Chris Heaphy, Noel Ivanoff, Wjm Kok, Anne-Marie May, Aaron Martin, Allan Mitleman, Darren Munce, April Spencer Napaljarri, Winkie Spencer Napaljarri, John Nixon, Rose Nolan, Derek O’Connor, Lenton Parr, Yioryios Papayoriyou, Paul Partos, Steven Rendall, Ayako Saito, David Serisier, Ron Robertson Swann, and David Thomas. The materials are diverse—paint, plaster, glass, bronze, aluminium, plastic, cardboard, paper, canvas, plaster, rubber, steel, fabric and timber and this selection highlights the endless possibilities of expression within the confines of a single colour.

Monochromes out in the world includes works by David Thomas, Kerrie Poliness and David Batchelor. In these works, photography and video are important devices used to generate an understanding of the monochrome existing in time and space outside of the gallery or studio.

In David Thomas’ photo paintings, the reflective painted enamel monochrome surfaces that interrupt photographic images allow viewers to insert themselves as part of the work. More importantly, the painted monochrome is a device that brings together a range of highly personal human experiences. As Thomas states, ‘*In the act of painting you feel; thought, touch and emotion are connected.*’¹²

The perfect geometry of Kerrie Poliness' monochrome diamond paintings is at odds with the organic coastal rock formations in which they are installed and their subsequent interaction with flora, fauna and the elements. The colours of her monochromes are drawn from the landscape in which she paints them and her videos record the monochrome's existence within the context of the passing of time.

David Batchelor's work results from many years of photographing white squares and rectangles found in a range of urban settings. *'Together the series forms a map of sorts: a city map; an autobiographical map; a mildly psycho-geographical map; and a map that principally indicates the location of something that is no longer there.'*¹³

The blankness of the white monochrome, especially in the context of the city can be considered a moment of quiet—a time to consider the absence of something.

Monochrome paintings are both full of colour and empty of content. They are full in the sense that coloured paint occupies the totality of the surface. Monochrome paintings can be seen as empty of meaning—a space that can be filled with interpretation gleaned from an experience of colour. There is no single focal point on the painting to attract the eye and unlike the process of reading words on a page, there is no direction for viewers as to where to start or finish. Readings of the colour are based on 'consuming' the whole work at once—viewers are not called to progress from one section of the canvas to another, but rather to engage with the totality of a single colour.

Curator and writer Barbara Rose describes the monochrome as being 'a moment of silence in a world of noise. It goes nowhere and everywhere, it is specific and universal, tangible and immaterial. It is the ultimate paradox.'¹⁴ This 'ultimate paradox' can be connected to the concrete and metaphysical

possibilities of the monochrome. The often deeply personal gesture of making a monochrome has reverberations that extend into the broader realms of art, social history and contemporary culture. Monochrome works can be understood as a potent form of self-portraiture. In this light, monochromes allow artists to constitute themselves as colour, placing their concerns within the physical and symbolic qualities of the work. The collection of works in this exhibition suggests that issues and themes around unity and indivisibility, endlessness and boundlessness, and infinity and nothingness lie at the heart of monochrome art. Further, discussion of the monochrome invariably leads to discussion of its power to fluently express the metaphoric quality of pictorial space—'Its nature is emptiness and because it is empty it can contain and embrace everything.'¹⁵ Perhaps most importantly, through monochromes, the artists in this exhibition articulate the rich intersection of their everyday work, the materiality of colour and the experience of being in the world.

Dr David Sequeira
Director Margaret Lawrence Gallery

The Margaret Lawrence Gallery thanks all of the artists, private collectors and art dealers who have generously lent works to this exhibition.

Notes

1. Barbara Rose, *Monochromes from Malevich to the present*, 2006 p 9
2. David Thomas, <http://artguide.com.au/david-thomas-colouring-impermanence>
3. David Batchelor <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/bit-nothing>
4. Barbara Rose, *Monochromes from Malevich to the present*, 2006 p 80
5. L. A Govinda cited in Keith Critchlow, *Order and Space*, New York, Thames and Hudson, 1987 p 3