

Betty Nolan
NEW WORLD

Artist statement

I studied art at Newcastle School of Art between 1972 and 1976. Abstraction was fashionable then and I studied a course called Colour and Visual Perception taught by John Montefiore. Useful for figurative as well as abstract painters, the rather dry exercises trained our eyes to see colour properly. We learnt how to perceive and use advance and recession, temperature, juxtaposition and visual tricks like after images and simultaneous vibration. It was the time of Op Art and Brigit Riley. In painting class we studied the American Abstract Expressionists and Hans Hofmann their teacher.

Hofmann believed fervently that a modern artist must remain faithful to the flatness of the canvas support. To suggest depth and movement in the picture - to create what he called "push and pull" in the image - artists should create contrasts of color, form, and texture.

Hofmann worked largely in rectangular blocks of saturated colour that floated forward and back on the picture plane. He loved Matisse. Despite the *Non Objective* appearance of his work he tried to retain a relationship to the visual world which can be seen through his titles. He followed a course of reductionism like many abstract painters such as Mondrian and much earlier, Kandinsky.

Anyhow I painted abstractions all through art school. When I graduated and was sent to the country as a young teacher of art, abstraction seemed irrelevant to the sheep and wheat farming world that was my new home.

Spending my time teaching traditional skills to rural kids had its effect and I returned to painting *things*.

In Hobart, quite a few years later, I painted prolifically, painting nature but pushing expressive boundaries with a variety of materials. A stint at Unitas to do Honours in Fine Arts in 2008 focussed my work around expressive experimentation and large scale works. In 2015 pure abstraction returned in a show called A to B and Back Again titled around the rediscovery of abstraction but also about the immersive nature of the show as a journey.

New World is another journey into the past. I have always been fascinated by science and science fiction. I have watched with interest as satellites from Earth transmitted remarkable images of planets in our solar system. The Hubble telescope generated images of galactic richness and remarkable beauty and also recast the way people thought about the Earth. Before the new astronomy, the Earth might have been the only planet in the only solar system. After Hubble the *Goldilocks Zone* (where there are earth like planets that are potentially habitable) is literally out there.

The exhibition is about thinking rather than outer space. Earthfall is the idea that now we may have alternatives to our own planet so it's OK to let ours fall away. Little Blue Dot is named after Karl Sagan's book. Precious World is how I feel about our planet. Un Idee is a thought. Trappist 1 is the name of the star around which the first Goldilocks zone of 7 planets was detected.

The works are painted on black surfaces with opalescent paints, metallic mediums and inks. The shine and glimmer represents the attraction of new ideas of the cosmos for me. Application is without a brush to echo the random nature of creation. Stencils are sometimes used. Once begun the work itself suggests where the next marks will be. The process is slow, meditative, occasionally frenzied, but starting with an idea and finishing somewhere adjacent. The ceramics are the same but the experimentation is with glaze recipes and firing schedules. Like the paintings I layer until the work is done.

Betty Nolan