

BETWEEN SHADOW AND LIGHT

Robert Owen



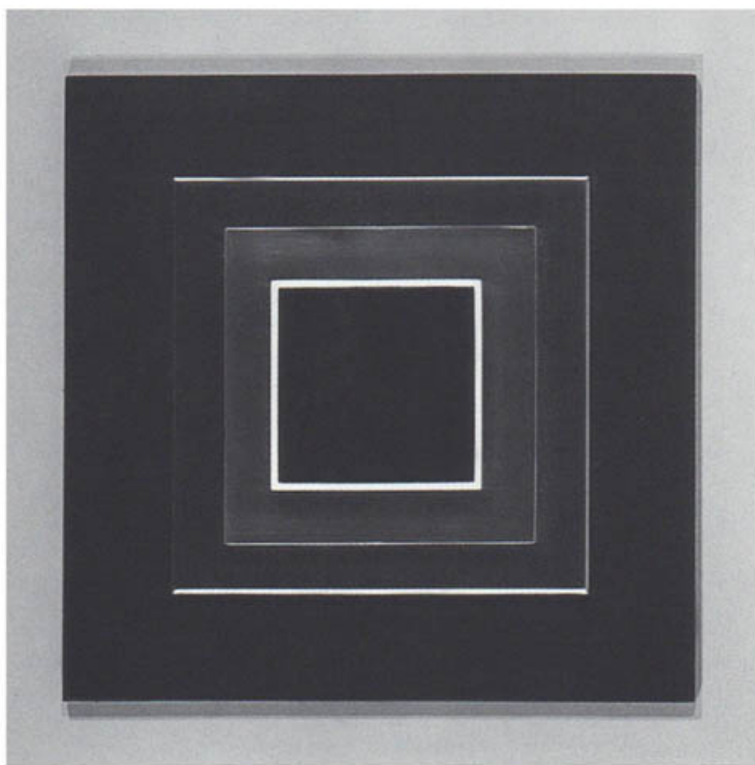


Studio, London 1969

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*Square relief #3* 1968 (detail)

aluminium, perspex, stainless steel and oroglass

62.0 x 62.0

## Foreword

Jenepher Duncan

. . . Close your eyes and open them:

There is nobody not even yourself

Whatever is not stone is light.

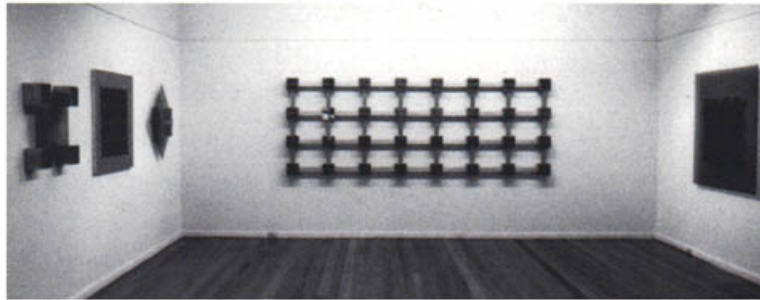
From *Piedra Nativa*, Octavio Paz, *Early Poems 1935 – 1955*

The Monash University Gallery's Exhibition Program has regularly featured comprehensive mid-career surveys of artists whose work has contributed significantly to the development of contemporary Australian art.

This exhibition *Robert Owen: Between Shadow and Light* presents the first account of Owen's work created in London between 1966 and 1975 and consists of wall reliefs and drawings. It was a period of intense creative exploration and discovery for the artist after living in Greece in the early sixties. Owen had felt deeply connected to the hard light-absorbing Greek landscape – a place similar to the light-filled land of rural New South Wales where he grew up. It was Owen's experience of 'remembered light' which motivated the technological enquiry behind his work in London after he arrived there in 1966.

Owen's work of the London years drew inspiration from the compositional elements of constructivism: light, the structure of verticals and horizontals and the space created by their intersections. In his pursuit of the notion of internal light, Owen approached the optical company Bausch and Lomb who were just developing light refraction technology. With diffraction grating, produced in strips printed on acetate, Owen found what seemed like 'little landscapes' of remembered light.

His development of wall reliefs constructed out of contemporary materials, such as perspex and aluminium, was encouraged by the London community of artists he mixed with and worked for, principally Anthony Hill, one of a group of young British constructivists. Owen also worked as a conservator for leading abstract artists of the previous generation, Victor Pasmore and Ben Nicholson who had been a conduit for Mondrian's ideas in London in the thirties through their painted reliefs.



*Relief constructions*

Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne 1971

installation view

centre: *Wiradjuri*, 1970 (destroyed)

aluminium, perspex and oroglass

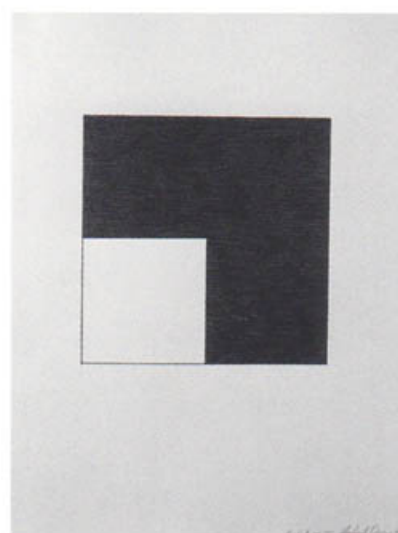
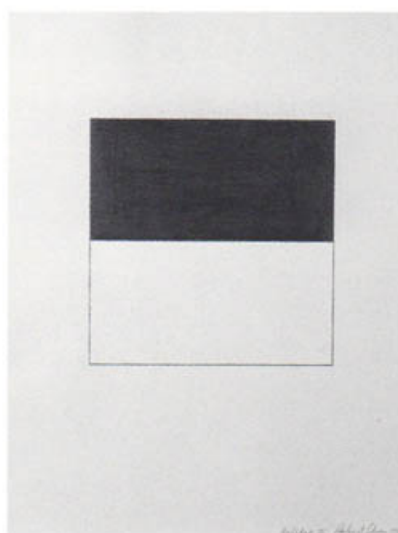
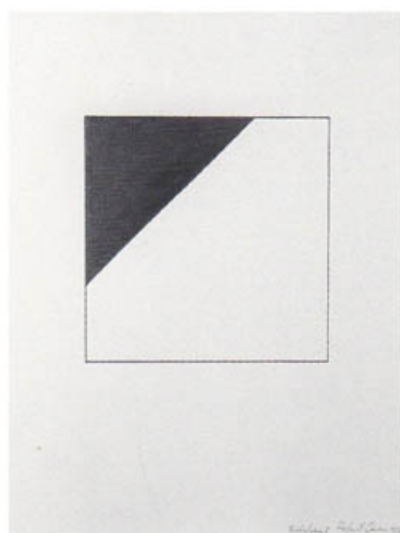
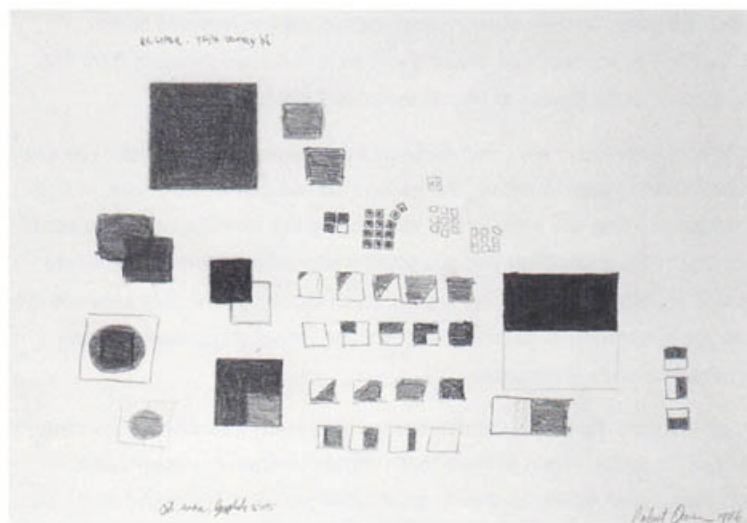
122.0 x 335.0 x 12.7

Owen's wall reliefs, despite their abstract appearance, always involved some reference to nature, experience and memory and were therefore different from the more minimal constructivist work of his contemporary peers.

Owen returned to Australia in 1975 and continued to concentrate his artistic practice on the sensory investigation of nature, the perceptual and emotional effects of light, colour and space, moving into installation work and, in the nineties, to computerized graphics, abstract colour paintings and sculpture which refer back conceptually to his London wall relief works. Owen has always concentrated on the play between the physical and the metaphysical, between intimacy and detachment, harmony and sensuality, presence and significance.

The essays by Margaret Plant and Carolyn Barnes eloquently describe the creative development of the artist. I want to thank both writers for their comprehensive accounts of Owen's work which illuminate a definitive period of his professional life.

I am grateful to Susie Shears whose work has been important to the realisation of this exhibition. Special thanks are also due to Robert Owen for his sustained engagement with this exhibition project for the Monash University Gallery.



# The Eclipse of Self

## Robert Owen in Greece and London

Margaret Plant

On 20 May 1966 Robert Owen witnessed the eclipse of the sun at Hydra, in the Greek Islands. It was an optical phenomenon, a rare natural event which directed his interest to scientific matters, and the heavens.

The Hydra eclipse was first explored in a sketch of the intense colour which appeared across the water on the summit of the Peloponnese – a brilliant line above darkness, 'like the bevelled edge of a mirror', as the artist remembered it. This is the effect known as Baily's Beads, 'the result of a point of light from the photosphere peering through a lunar valley, or between two of the Moon's mountain peaks'.<sup>1</sup> As the eclipse proceeds, the Beads flicker off one by one. On the crucial sheet on which Robert Owen made his notes of the event are sets of pencil lines in stratified form, mapping the vibrations, the bands of shadow like faint ripples of grayish light which move across the landscape. The effect is due to the contortion of the last rays of the sun prior to the eclipse.<sup>2</sup> Two trees were drawn to record the effect of the light/colour shift as a kind of sharpening of focus. Then came a schematic representation of the eclipse darkening a set of squares. It was here – although at this stage the artist did not know it – that the premises of his mature art were stated.

Robert Owen's fixation with this eclipse lasted until 1973, through the period of work after Hydra in London (and 'becoming educated', as the artist described it) and afterwards, in Australia. The colour experience was extended by an accidental happening: a piece of foil from a soup cube caught alight and took on metallic colours. Still in Greece, Owen began his search for materials that might emulate that colour. Various experiments generating colour by burning followed: he held foil over a candle (Hydra's normal lighting) so that the melting glue on the backing liberated colours. Colour effects were filmed with a super 8 movie camera (some of the filmic

facing page  
top: from *Notes to myself*  
Yapa 20 May 1966  
35.0 x 55.5

bottom, left to right:  
*Eclipse #1, #2 and #3* 1966  
all pencil on paper  
each 45.5 x 34.8

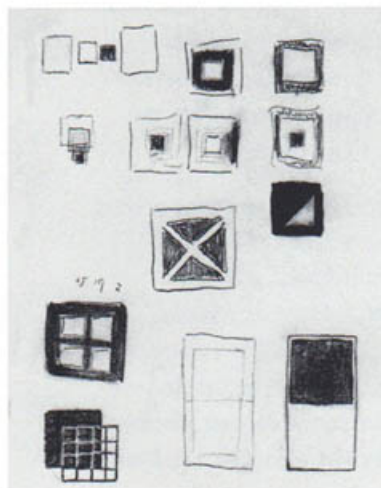




effects were recorded in 35mm slide form, but the actual film has not been recovered). The burning effect produced other cosmic-related works, such as the singed-edged circle that floats above six smaller circles made from the candle burning the soup foil then mounted on an old piece of wood.

Owen was in Hydra for three years from 1963 to 1966. He left well aware of the activity of the Junta in Greece, where acquaintances were implicated in the political difficulties, and where artistic friendships had been made – with George Johnston and Charmian Clift, and with the singer-writer, Leonard Cohen. Hydra had developed a foreign enclave since the 1950s. George Johnston and Charmian Clift were established residents, with children born there, and attending school.<sup>3</sup> Sidney Nolan had visited the Johnstons in 1955 and from there moved towards his Gallipoli series. Artists were drawn to the island still without the service of electricity, but having the quint-essential Mediterranean admixture of rocks set in blue water and white-washed houses set on the stone face against the blue sky.

From Hydra, there had been expeditions across the Adriatic to Italy, including the Biennales in Venice in 1964 and 1966. These voyages were the introduction to contemporary practice, to the Peggy Guggenheim collection, and the controversy that surrounded Rauschenberg's win in the 1964 Venice Biennale. There he would have seen the first substantial showings of the 'New Tendency' artists with their geometric, high tech and kinetic art. He also saw Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel in Padua and together with the experience of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* in the Uffizi, it was another epiphany, something akin to the experience so beautifully described by Julia Kristeva in her essay 'Giotto's Joy'.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the characteristic deep blue that recurs in Owen's later sculptures celebrates the ethereal heavens in Padua as much as it does Yves Klein.



Even on the lotus island, art activity had continued, although with restricted materials.<sup>5</sup> A life class was organised. Owen sent two exhibitions to the Barry Stern gallery in Sydney: figure drawings from life and landscapes, (but never with descriptive views of Hydra, never with a concession to the picturesque). Materials were not abundant, so burlap was utilised, cut into silhouette shapes of figures and hills. Robert Owen sold work to the tourists in the island's small gallery.

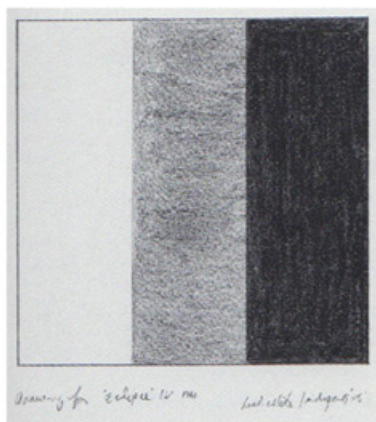
As the new work took over, old formats departed. An envoi work, *Out of my head*, was made of welded-together junk, from such materials as the island offered, old frying pans, olive oil cans, door locks, and the principal contributant, the condensed milk cans (the milk staple on the island) joined together into tubes.<sup>6</sup> Mounted on a formica base, this head-like structure was formed with a protrusion at its summit, a tantra-like encircled lid from an olive oil can.

The London scene was very different when Robert Owen arrived in 1966 with a backpack and \$25, but the work in hand was certain preparation. A contact with Leonard Hessing meant that he was able to take over Colin Lanceley's old studio – 16 cubic squares, the perfect space for him, virtually Palladian. He also had the advantage of a lively community around him with Hessing, Robert Hughes next door, Germaine Greer, and Ben Brewster, the editor of the *New Left Review*. It was a high point in the life of London with Carnaby Street and the Beatles, but most importantly the phenomenon of geometric, kinetic and constructivist art, not to mention the British pop artists, concrete poetry, Art & Language, and the Institute of Contemporary Art.

Not long afterwards, he was exhibiting with one of the most sophisticated galleries in London, the Marlborough, (*Constructions* were shown in 1968 and 1969), and also at their branch in New York, the Marlborough-Gerston gallery. Works were purchased, and remain today in the U.K. and the U.S.A. The transition appeared relatively smooth. The work changed decisively, and has been maintained in extension of the experience of the London years.

In London, Owen went in search of a material that might have the iridescent effects of the burnt Maggi soup cube, and sent an example for chemical analysis. Eventually he discovered diffraction grating, available in an accessible strip form printed on acetate (at that time it was novel but it became ubiquitous for record covers and psychedelic collectibles). Finding the material permitted the marriage of two experiences: the Greek eclipse and the very current constructivist mood, especially evident in London, and colours remembered from Australia.

But the eclipse was also an experience in black and white. Diffraction grating mimicked that effect: one inch of the material carries an inscription of 13400 lines which breaks up light, but it was also this invisible density of the material that fascinated the artist who imitated its structure with the austere means of lead pencil. Within square formats, he essayed to draw up a maximum number of horizontal lines, and to count the number achieved (with the figures sometimes overwritten on the drawing). Of course on a hand-made scale the number might be in the fifties or sixties, for the human hand is a long way from machine-induced refraction. It was the tonal scale from white to black which was crucial to these works. The absence of light, and white as unsullied light were achievable graphic conditions parallel to the progressive shadowing that resulted from the eclipse and the 'black sun'.

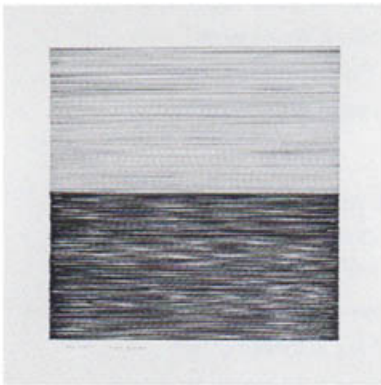
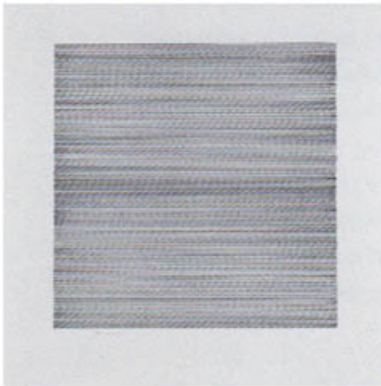


above  
*Drawing for Eclipse #4 (painting) 1967*  
 pencil on paper 32.5 x 25.5

facing page  
 top: from *Notes to myself 1966*  
 pencil on paper

bottom: from *Notes to myself*  
*Area code (Binocular series) 1967*  
 pencil on paper 25.5 x 18.5





above

*Still life, 361 lines 1967*

and

*Still life, 314 lines, Two blacks 1967*

both pen and ink on paper

each 28.0 x 38.3

facing page

*Kinetic relief #23 1972*

aluminium, arborite, perspex, oroglass on wood

92.0 x 92.0

Collection Newcastle Regional Art Gallery

Robert Owen is intensely aware that in working as an artist he works with 'matter' and that at some point of genesis it has a relation with the earth. Graphite, a surface built up with dense markings from lead pencils, was a favoured medium. No material is casual or innocent. Graphite is the crystalline form of carbon, chemically identical with diamond.<sup>7</sup> Like the strict format, the use of pencil might seem austere and remote from colour, but it was made to yield up a particular sensuousness, with its own characteristic sheen, like an old mirror.

The graphite surface was built up by means of a suite of hard and soft pencils familiar to every school child, from 6H though to HB in the neutral centre, then blackening through to 6B, the softest and densest of the pencils which makes a broad sinking line at the opposite extreme to the precision-tough 6H. The mesmeric production of over 13000 lines in these various pencils became, like so many of Robert Owen's procedures, one of repetition but with potential for the practice of meditation. Self must be transcended, emotion – the primitive desire to scribble – must be distanced. The summation of this process was a large scale work that came towards the end of the London period on the four feet square (standard size) paper mounted on board in which the artist was determined to replicate the full 13400 lines. The title *Still life* suggests not a table top with inanimate objects but the stilling of life, the achieving of a still centre.

Thus geometry took over as discipline and as a conspicuously Modernist direction, gathering up traditions in the twentieth century that the artist felt to be crucial to his orientation as an artist. The square and the discipline involved in the subdivision and multiplication of lines, both as format and means of application, holds feeling at bay. Impulse is neutralised. Feeling takes on the equilibrium of the form; the austerities of geometry; the square and the grid, harmonise feeling. The grid was the format of the moment, explored memorably by Rosalind Krauss (although later, in 1978) as central to Modernism from Cubism onward.<sup>8</sup> Krauss reminds us of the grid's power as 'myth': to work with it in itself is to identify not only with a format, but also with a history. But the grid and the square are not reductive for Robert Owen, or too pure to carry allusion, nor does he encounter the repression that Krauss finds among adherents. While (for painters) the modernist grid refers back to the colour theorists of the nineteenth century, Robert Owen a century later was looking to colour optics and interferometry. And it was, after all, the psychedelic sixties. The logical projections from the square also courted the fourth dimension, leaving the pictorial descriptions of the literal world.<sup>9</sup>



With his precision skills and his familiarity with materials practised early in window dressing days in Wagga Wagga and, in Sydney, directed through the Bauhaus-inspired training of Lyndon Dadswell, Owen was able to take on studio assistant work for Anthony Hill. Hill was one of an active group of young British constructivists which included Gillian Wise and John Ernest. Owen's work was to flower in this context. He used the wall relief as his main format, for it retained the planar nature of painting, but it also had the materiality of sculpture. The contemporaneity of materials was important: the aluminium, perspex and diffraction grating, and the acrylic colours. With this orientation towards the technological, the measured and the precise came a history that he readily absorbed, taking in the tradition of Neo Platonism, Russian Constructivism, the Bauhaus and the Dutch De Stijl with their aspirations to an art that belonged pointedly to the twentieth century, while also reckoning with spiritual forces.

The transition from the genial works from Hydra to this opus in new materials and new precisions appears momentous. The London context was timely, it was abundant, and Owen had the independence and poise to realise the relevance of what he was seeing. It was an intensely theoretical period. In London, St Martin's School of Art was famous for debate and the production of a dynamic sculpture school. International publications abounded.<sup>10</sup> The Institute of Contemporary Art was at the forefront of discussion. Jascia Reichardt was an eloquent spokesperson; her *Cybernetic Serendipity on the Computer and the Arts* was one of the first comprehensive displays of the computer's creative potential.<sup>11</sup> Owen made a contribution to the exhibition, preparing the model for Lionel Penrose's exhibit on self-replication.<sup>12</sup>

Among the most admired theorists in the 1960s was the American Charles Biederman, freely acknowledged by Anthony Hill to be of major importance for the British constructivist movement.<sup>13</sup> (Victor Pasmore was an important predecessor). Biederman's 1949 *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge* became a canonic text which recommended that the artist as part of the natural world, worked creatively in the science-machine culture in a manner that was parallel and not separate.<sup>14</sup> Hill edited an influential anthology of primary texts, *Data, Directions in Art Theory and Aesthetics*. Invariably the contributors, such as George Vantongerloo, Max Bill and Victor Vasarely, reflect on space and press for a 'new unity' in art that recharges the premises of the De Stijl group and the Russian Constructivists. Logic, discipline and the serial processes of working place art alongside mathematics. However, Biederman's own centred reliefs bear little resemblance to Owen's work. Lyndon



Dadswell's key role in Owen's education must also be remembered (and the artist is the first to recognise it). Dadswell was early interested in Naum Gabo as indicated in his work from the 1950s and 1960s using metal armatures covered with paper.<sup>15</sup>

It was also the moment when the two cultures were defined in their conspicuous separation by C.P. Snow. A generation of artists and writers worked, consciously or unconsciously, to belie Snow's schism, to reassert the continuity and evolution of the constructivist tradition in the visual arts, the investigation into materials, the use of machinery, the inspiration of new mediums such as those illustrated in the anthologies of Gyorgy Kepes – notably scientific model making and photo micrography.<sup>16</sup> Biological laws were expounded by Lancelot L. Whyte and a format of architectural modules was famously expounded by Buckminster Fuller in reference to his creation of geodesic domes. Galleries specialised in the new constructivist and kinetic art in the 1960s: Denise Rene in Paris, and Signals, Axiom, and Annelly Juda in London.



*Round about #1* 1968  
aluminium, steel, perspex and oroglass  
101.5 x 101.5

With great ease Robert Owen appears to have welcomed apparently rigid schemas and geometric formats worked through in various variations. But they were never without well-understood meanings, as in the paintings with red, yellow and blue. *Terminus (red, yellow, blue)* (see page 45) tells of the past, the present and the future through a (past) closed structure, a present poised structure and an open (future) structure. The seasons hang together with these numerologies in the drawing works *Four x four* in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia. Spring spirals outwards in pursuit of growth, for she is a circle. Summer has achieved horizontality, winter is dull, grey, fog-like in graphite, autumn swirls, and still gathering movement from the earth. These works relish the discipline of the grid, as well as its poetry. A pencil grid is inscribed on the wall and these works, described by the artist as 'a visual code to the seasons' hover in front. The projected pieces cast shadows, making space in relation to the wall ambiguous and challenging focus with the very repetition of the grid. A suite of four even more austere drawings on graph paper also attend to the seasons and their contrast of energy rendered by degrees of black and white.

The square within a square was an alternative to the box or the grid format. With superimpositions of squares one above the other, it was capable of contrasting or blending colours and sharing transparencies in seductive low relief with its discrete shadows as in *Square relief #8*, from 1968–70, in the Monash University Collection. The format inevitably suggests Joseph Albers' famous series of painted squares within squares, developed in America from his Bauhaus practice. Yet there is little

that is inertly derivative in Robert Owen's sculptural creations as they shadow the gentlest of colours, and, through the transparencies of perspex, establish their ambiguities and poetics.

While the relief works were the mainstay for exhibitions, there were also colour paintings that recalled Baily's Beads and nature's intensified effects. These effects were now enhanced by the physics of colour production and the use of acrylics with high pigment saturation. Studies were worked from square and rectangular bands in permutation, grid-controlled again, but the colours defy focus; they challenge the perpendicular and belie the grid. The long bands of colour painted on the wall for *Sunrise* at City Gallery in 1993, and the colour block walls of *Ghost tantrtras* and *Coloured spaces* at Anna Schwartz Gallery in 1995, have their genesis in the London colour grids. They are monumental extensions of the London structuralist work, and of an earlier lyricism. In the 1960s, Paul Klee's notebook *The Thinking Eye* was in circulation, teaching the lessons of gravitation, of the shifting vertical, of the construction of a space with displaced centre, and exploring the full range of colours from primary to tertiary arranged around the still centre of grey.<sup>17</sup> In London, Owen studied the classic text dealing with the orientation of the body: Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, first published in English in 1962.<sup>18</sup>

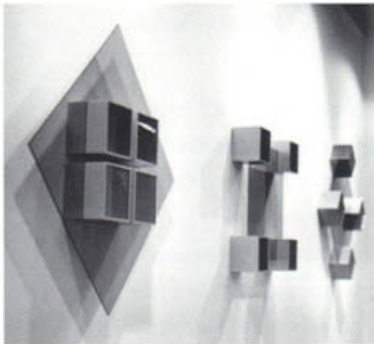
A point of professional acceptance that must have been gratifying in the London years was an award in the *John Moore's Liverpool exhibition* held at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1969. The prize, open to all artists working in the UK, asked for the submission of a work designed to hang on the wall, but projecting no more than six inches. The prizewinners were Richard Hamilton and Mary Martin, and Robert Owen was one of five subsidiary winners, with the work called *Four x four*, now in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia. It consisted of four separate boxes in aluminium displayed in a row, each having four subdivisions within, and casting a shadow by virtue of a perspex sheet fixed behind. The diffraction grating was used underneath perspex squares of translucent greys on the front surface of the boxes which, as a result, shone with metallic light – lime green, red, purple, as if they were windows onto an intergalactic sunset. The colour changes with the position of the viewer and the nature of the light: this is the classic effect of Owen's London reliefs. Reviewing the Liverpool Prize, John Russell remarked in *The Sunday Times* that 'few have Owen's perfection of finish'.<sup>19</sup> When the work was exhibited later at the Coventry Gallery in Sydney, Nancy Borlase responded to it as 'a grave and supremely beautiful work'.<sup>20</sup>

The grid constructed in aluminium has a cool, lunar precision which is warmed at the junction points by the colour squares. Two-inch squares set up *Orion* (Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra), named for the constellation, in mid-heaven in the northern hemisphere when the artist's daughter Lisa was born in 1971. In *Terminus 2*, (National Gallery of Australia) the grid is turned on its edge and the interstices are marked by larger squares. The diamond format was a knowing homage to Mondrian.

Two exhibitions took place in Australia during the London years. George Mora showed relief constructions at his Tolarno Galleries in Melbourne in 1971 and 1972. In 1971 the work *Wiradjuri* was exhibited – it was among the most complex of the relief constructions, having a 32 box format on a wide span of grid. The title given in London referred to the aboriginal tribes of Wagga Wagga where Owen had spent his childhood. The exhibitions were well received in a climate when Minimalist art and sculpture in industrial materials had some currency.<sup>21</sup>

In 1974, during a dock strike which held up the delivery of works for a further Melbourne exhibition, Owen produced *Seven days*, a process work of drawing over a week, one drawing generating the next, with photographs of each stage. Here was an indication of the broadening of media in works to be confirmed after the return to Australia. Three eclipse drawings once again related back to the Hydra experience. Photography was now a deliberately utilised medium that began to play its role from 1969 to 1970 in response to the conceptual works shown in Harald Szeeman's *When Attitude Becomes Form* at the Institute of Contemporary Art. Robert Owen dates a more consciously structuralist approach to his practice from the impact of that seminal exhibition.

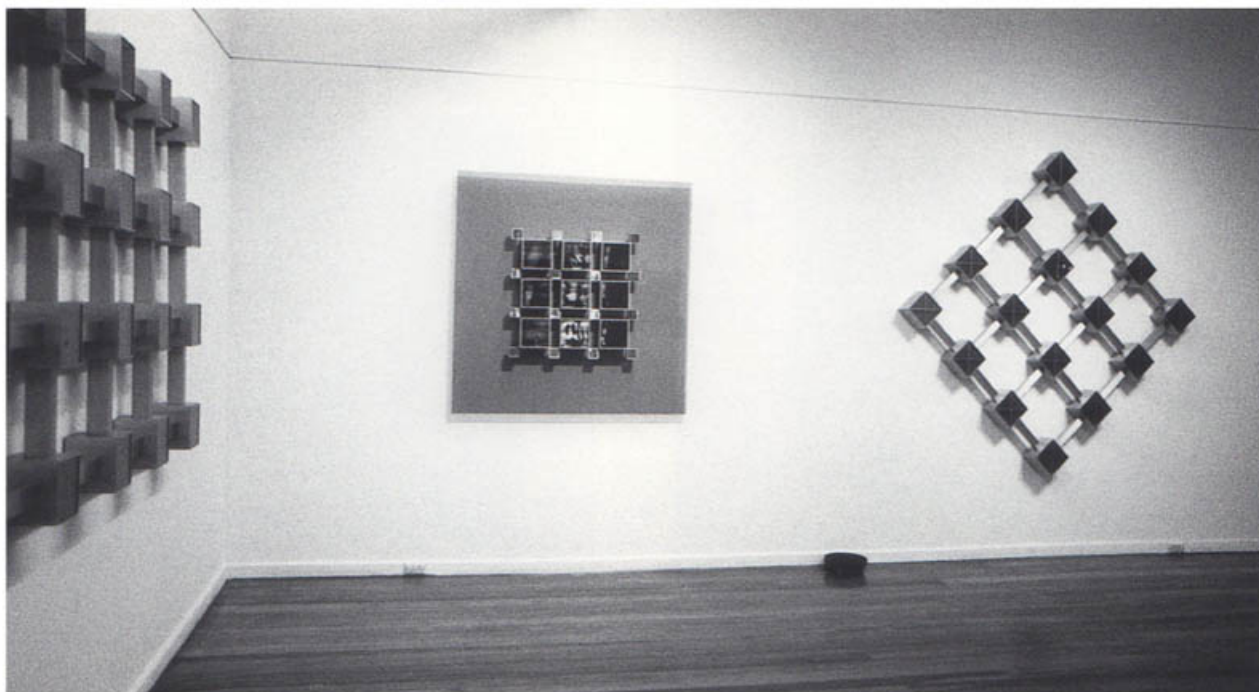
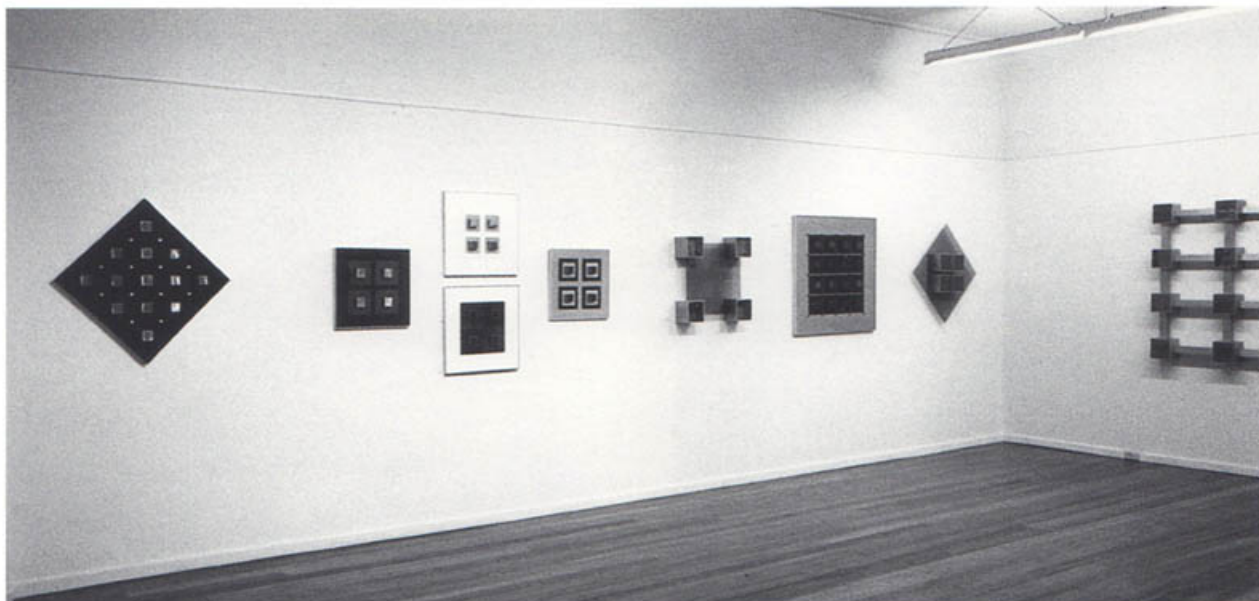
The London years also saw the first installation work. In 1970, Robert Owen learnt of Mark Rothko's tragic death. He paid tribute in a series of drawings *Rothko died today*, and in an installation on the floor of David Troostwyk's London studio (Troostwyk had exhibited in *John Moore's Liverpool exhibition* at the same time as Owen and practised various forms of installation art and concrete poetry). The memorial work was of four sections moving from white through grey to black, accepting the darkening of night, the distancing of light, and finally the dark termination point of death. The four mounds were of white talcum powder, white chalk and grey graphite, all materials of fine particles, and charcoal, the product of fire. In this homage, the furring of the edges gnaw at geometric certainty, as they do in Rothko's own colour fields.

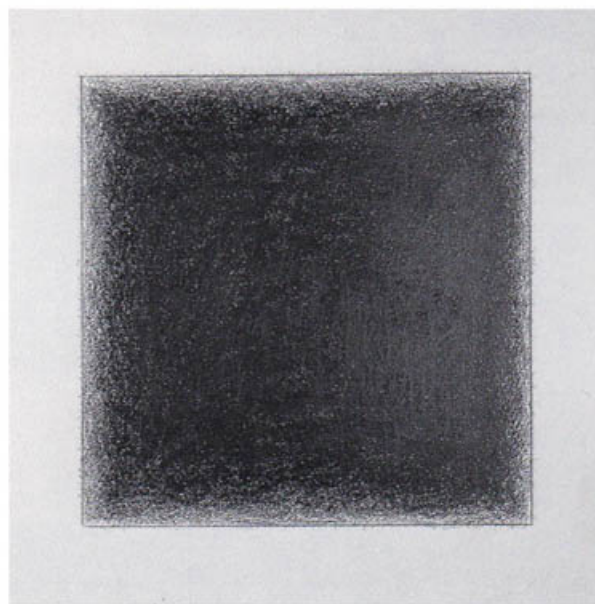
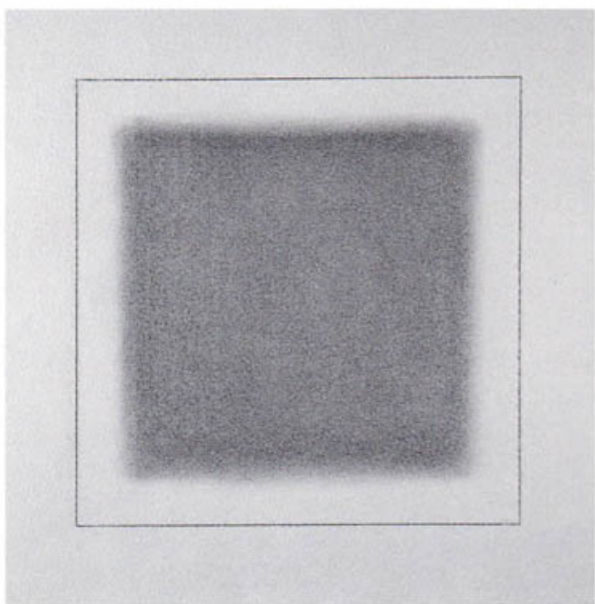
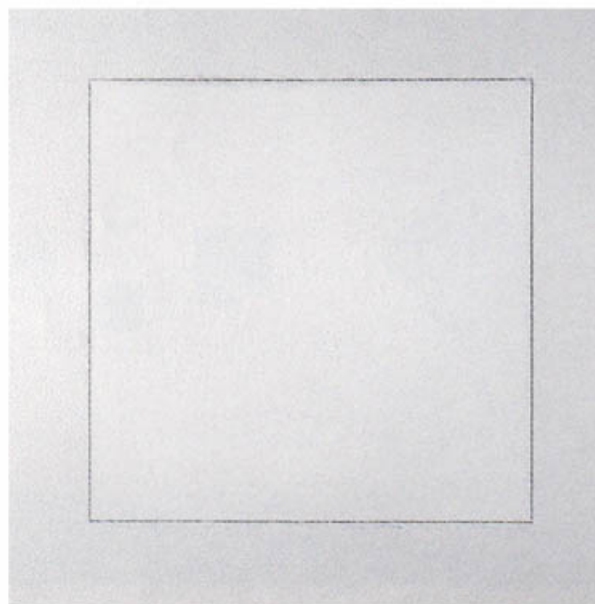
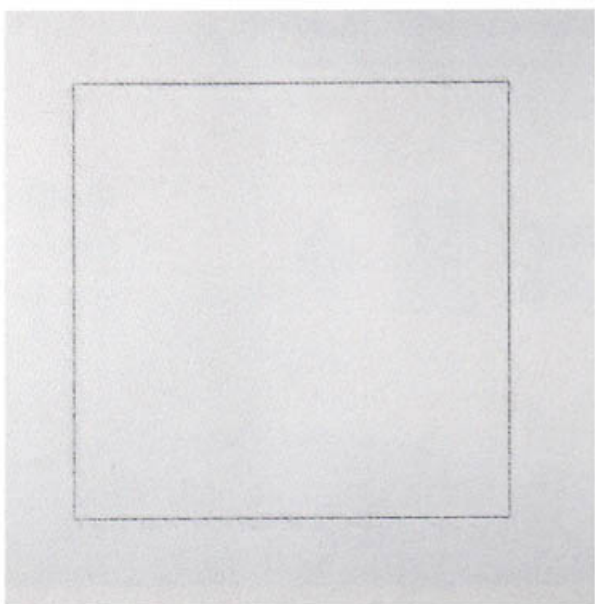


above  
installation view of Robert Owen works  
in the exhibition *Four Australian artists:*  
*Boyd Hessing Nolan Owen, Richard Demarco*  
Gallery, Edinburgh 1970

facing page  
*Relief constructions*  
Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne 1971  
installation views







Here is a beginning for Robert Owen's installation practice. The Rothko work already has the sense of both tomb and altar, assembled in homage. It is the first of many installations that have spiritual reflection as their agenda. Later came formal altars and burning candles, gold dust and Promethean blue, seeking empyrean realms and the translations and permutations of matter.

Owen's work has apparent dissimilarity from Greece to London to Sydney, but in fact he works constantly with the reverberations within his body of work, constantly creating and revisiting, consulting his 'Notes to myself'. He is born with Cancer as his Sun Sign and with that we might believe he inherits famous forerunners of self-scrutiny and recall: Rembrandt and Proust.

The last London work (in 1974) was black and white circles and squares, replete with a velvety graphite surface and having embossed lines in further enrichment of that surface. Darkness lives beside light.

### Coda...

In some form or another, the post-London works appear as meditations beyond the self, willed by geometry, by colour or its deliberate absence, and by the scrutiny of matter. Many of the later works are, at least in part, the fruits of the Hydra eclipse, of light's momentary extinction, and heightened colour. Others are more specifically bound to the black sun and the night-time of the moon.

On return to Australia in 1975, Robert Owen worked on the cycle of wall-floor sculptures and related diagrams and paintings shown at the Venice Biennale in 1978. The *Memory and logic units* deal with an apparent contradiction, for we know memory so often to be beyond deliberate recall, to be deep-buried, to be inadvertently triggered, to be (in short) beyond logic. To show the conduits, by strings and apparent processes of transmission from grey wall slabs to floor to adjoining work, gives every appearance of control, while at the same time, suggesting the illogicalities of recollection. Colours in drawings extend in triangles, becoming 'reflection wedges'. During the time in Venice, Owen photographed the intense colours characteristic of the fishermen's cottages on the island of Burano as virtually abstract blocks of colour.<sup>22</sup> Here was an application of the London colour geometries transferred with dignity to a notoriously picturesque subject.

Later works are much more obviously meditative in form. The columnar sculptures called *Persephone's towers* are like the Buddhist stupa, (as other works were tantric

facing page

upper left

*Edge of a season* 1970

pencil and conte on paper

57.5 x 44.5

upper right

*Edge of a season #2* 1970

pencil and conte on paper

57.5 x 44.5

lower left

*Edge of a season #3* 1970

powdered graphite, pencil and

conte on paper, 57.5 x 44.5

lower right

*Around midnight*

(*Rothko died today*) 1970

pencil on paper, 57.5 x 44.5



in form) and are surmounted with discs and balls suggesting planetary references, suns and moons, and with a passage of that ultramarine, for Robert Owen the colour of meditation and transcendence.<sup>23</sup> The return to Australia deepened interest in the mythologies of the East, for their geographic relevance, and the practices of meditation.

Circles of light contrived to be cast on gallery floors in installations are likewise reverberations, testimonies to planetary starshine and the eclipsing of distant light – as in the exhibitions *Trace of a silent bell* (Palais du Rhin, Strasbourg, 1988 and City Gallery, Melbourne, 1989), and the diagrammatic circles and triangles of the astrological charts included in the installation *Phase zone three (into the light)* (Victorian College of the Arts, 1988).

The spheres of myth, alchemy and astrology only deepen their interest in southern spheres. *Turn of the moon* (shown in 1984 at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery), is a tall, dark painting with a cosmological diagram on high from which issue moonbeams, small shafts of diffraction grating, raining from the heavens as they pass through various degrees of black to find the earth's grid below. For *Four seasons, from the centre* (installation in 1988, City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga) blue lights illuminated the gallery floor below four astrophotographs of the southern skies in the four seasons, by courtesy of the Mt Stromlo Observatory.<sup>24</sup>

The hand-drawn grid ceded to the computer in the 1990s. In Piero della Francesca's fresco *Legend of the True Cross* there appears a row of figures wearing the distinctive headdresses of the Orthodox Church. Owen computed the measurements of the hats in combination with the famous egg in Piero's Brera altarpiece, projecting them into the third dimension.<sup>25</sup> These calculations gave birth to a pure, shining hat created in fibreglass to stand on the floor, satin-lined, about one metre high.

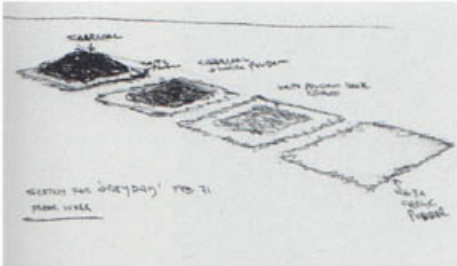
The geometric form which appears next to the brooding figure in Dürer's *Melancholia* is computer-analysed and yields up its calibrations. In *Re-vision (Melancholia)*, from 1987, sombre octahedrons in three dimensions cast their firm shadows below a colour grid on the wall which carries diagrams of that shape. This is the hypercube, capable of many projections, and here in interplay in two and three dimensions. It consists of 16 corners, 32 edges, 24 square faces and 8 bounding cubes. The colour grid behind the hypercubes in *Re-vision* is tied to the numerology of the planets, driving towards the red energy at two edges. Julia Kristeva declares that *Melancholia* 'belongs in the celestial realm. It changes darkness into redness or into a sun that remains black, to be sure, but is nevertheless the sun, source of dazzling light'.<sup>26</sup>



above  
from *Notes to myself* computer drawing  
for *Untitled (Hearing)* 1992

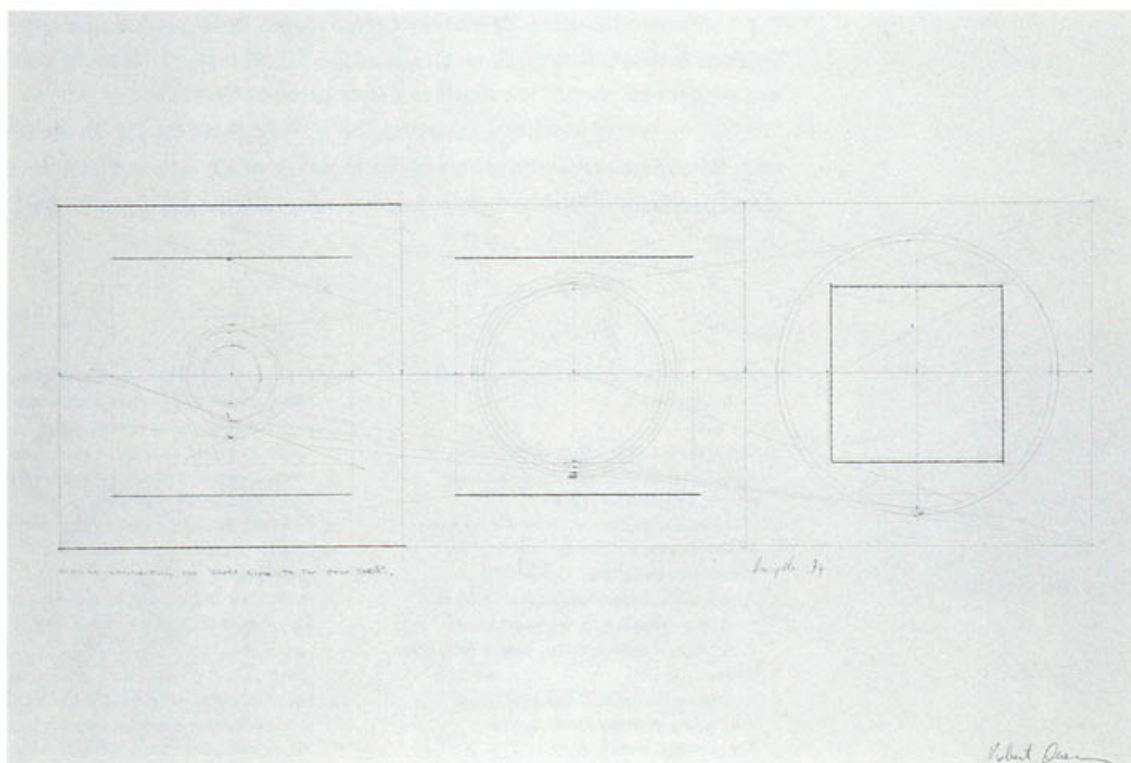
facing page  
*Sketch for grey day, Floor work* February 1971  
22.0 x 28.0

To accompany his *Leaving the memory behind (Cubes and hypercubes)* in 1997 at the Anna Schwartz Gallery, Owen presented Ibu Tufail's fable of the soul's journey and the decay of matter. The soul is in a state beyond physical bodies, witness to 'the highest sphere which has no physical body' – just above the sphere of fixed light. Decayed matter in the sphere is akin to Hades, which is turned from the sun, causing surfaces to tarnish. Light and dark remain fundamental states for the artist's journey.



## Notes

- Philip S. Harrington, *Eclipse*, John Wiley, New York, 1997, p. 45.
- Ibid. p. 43.
- Gary Kinnane, *George Johnston A Biography*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1996, gives an account of life at Hydra.
- Julia Kristeva, 'Giotto's Joy', *Desire and Language*, Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 210ff.
- The allusion is to Charmian Clift, *Peel me a Lotus*, Hutchinson, London, 1959. George Johnson in *Clean Straw for Nothing*, Collins, Sydney, 1969, wrote of life on Hydra.
- Illustrated in George Alexander, Robert Owen *Transits*, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga., 1988, p. 31.
- George Alexander makes this connection in 'Meditations on Robert Owen', Roslyn Oxley, Sydney, 1984.
- Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Grids', *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1986, p. 8ff.
- Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983.
- For instance, *The Structuralist*, edited by Eli Bornstein of the University of Saskatchewan, and *Form*, edited by Philip Steadman, Mike Weaver and Stephen Bann.
- Cybernetic Serendipity, The Computer and the Arts*, a *Studio International* special issue, edited by Jascia Reichardt, 1968.
- Ibid. p. 52.
- George Rickey, *Constructivism, Origins and Evolution*, Studio Vista, London, 1968, p. 119.
- Charles Biederman, *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge*, Red Wing, Minn., 1949. See also Anthony Hill, 'The Climate of Biederman', *Studio International*, September 1969, p. 68.
- Cf. Robert Owen's *Untitled Work*, 1957–58 in perspex, nickel, wire, wood and formica which is an indication of his constructivist interests while still a student in Sydney. Illustrated, Alexander, *Transits*, p. 29.
- Gyorgy Kepes, ed., *Structure in Art and in Science*, George Braziller, New York, 1965.
- Paul Klee, *The Thinking Eye, The Notebooks of Paul Klee*, ed. Jörg Spiller, Lund Humphries, London, 1961.
- M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962.
- John Russell, *The Sunday Times*, 7 December 1969.
- Cited from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 30, 1975, Ken Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1980, p. 487 (with reviews also of the 1967 exhibition of works from Hydra).
- The Transfield Prize (1961–1971), and the Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture (1967–1972), (the latter given by an aluminium firm) encouraged sculpture in industrial materials.
- Three photographs are in the Parliament House, Canberra collection.
- Column sculptures were shown as 'Persephone's Towers' in 1985, see Alexander, Robert Owen *Transits*, p. 55. (Owen pointed out the connection with the welded sculpture work produced at Hydra.)
- Illustrated in George Alexander, *Transits*, op. it. p. 44.
- The Angelic Space, A Celebration of Piero della Francesca*, curated by Harriet Edquist and Juliana Engberg, Monash University Gallery, 1992.
- Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun Depression and Melancholia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, p. 151.



above

*Devices connecting the shoreline  
to the seasons — Recycle 1974*

pencil on paper

39.4 x 58.5

facing page

top: *Eclipse recycle 3 1/5 1974*

collage, pencil and embossing

on T.S. Saunders paper

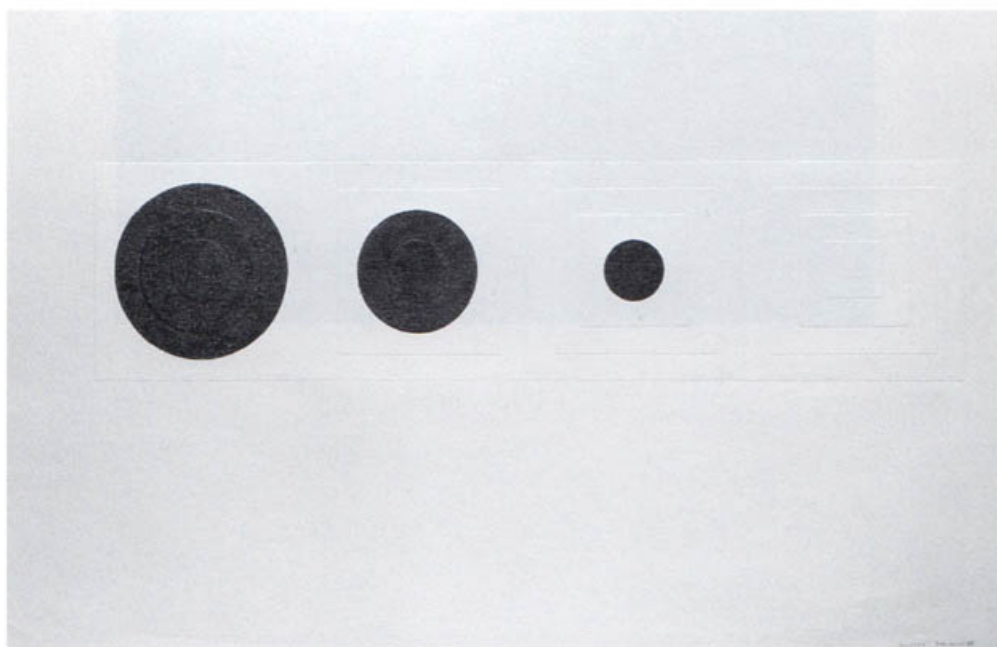
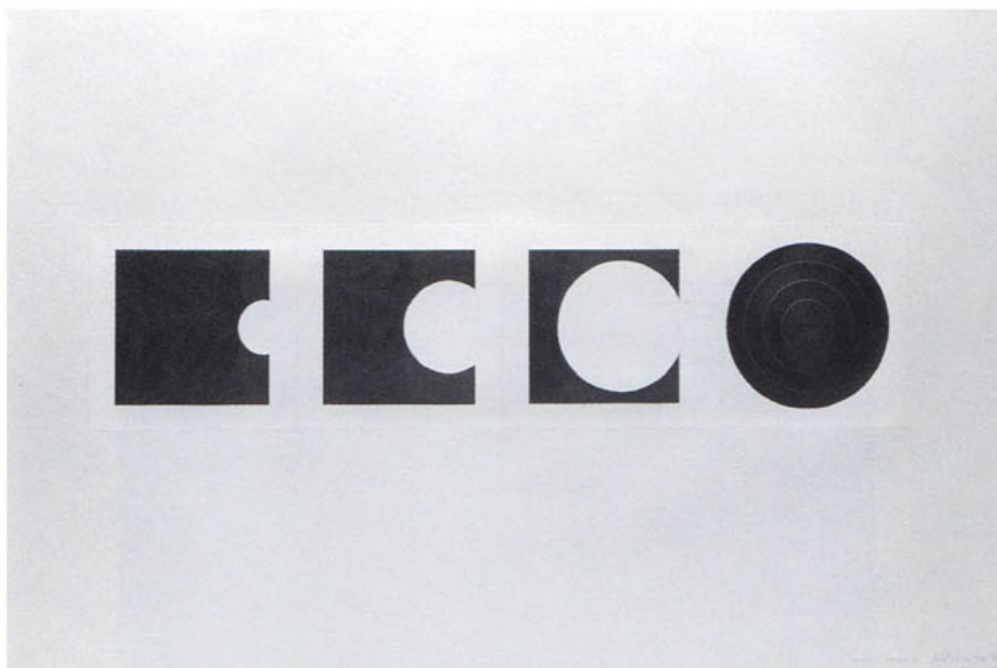
69.5 x 102.0

bottom: *Eclipse recycle 4 A/P 1974*

collage, pencil and embossing

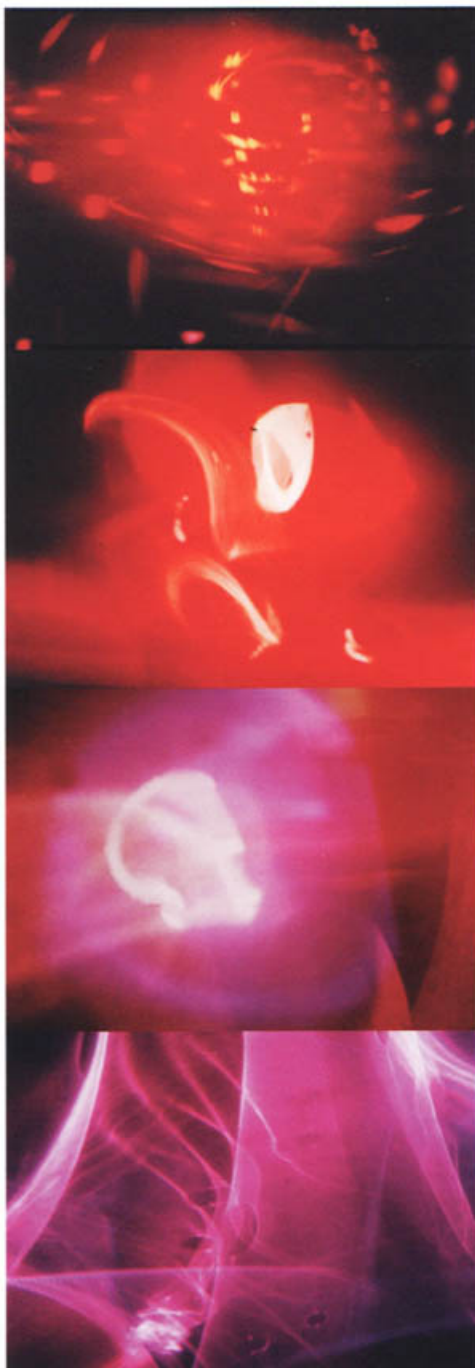
on T.S. Saunders paper

69.5 x 102.0









right  
*Light moves* 1965  
 film stills

facing page  
*Eclipse (recycle)* 1966–1973  
 powdered lead, graphite  
 and wax on wood  
 122.0 x 122.0



above left  
*Eclipse version #2* 1966  
 aluminium, arborite, perspex,  
 oroglass on wood  
 63.5 x 54.0



above right  
*Square relief #1* 1967  
 aluminium, perspex, oroglass  
 47.0 x 47.0

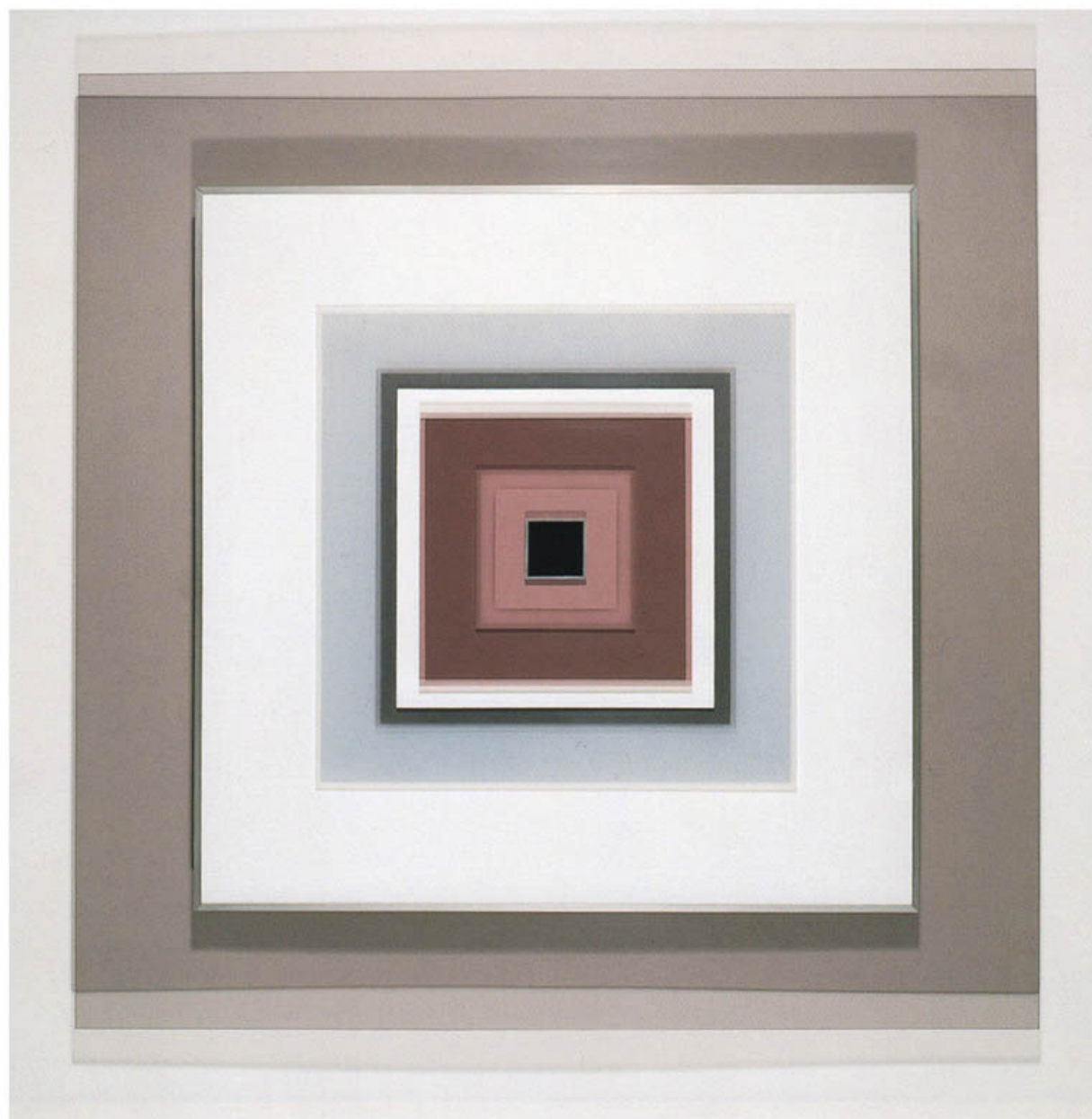


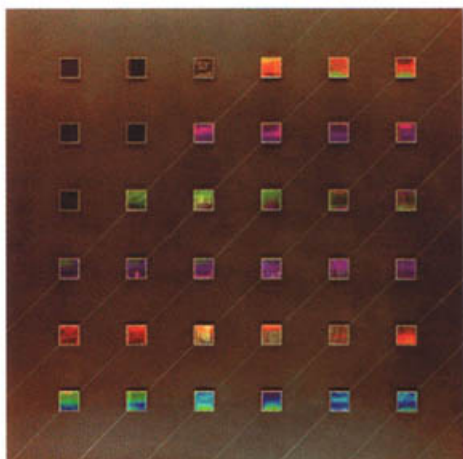
right  
*Square relief #7* 1967  
 aluminium, perspex, oroglass  
 92.0 x 92.0



*Bird sound* 1968  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
46.5 x 46.5



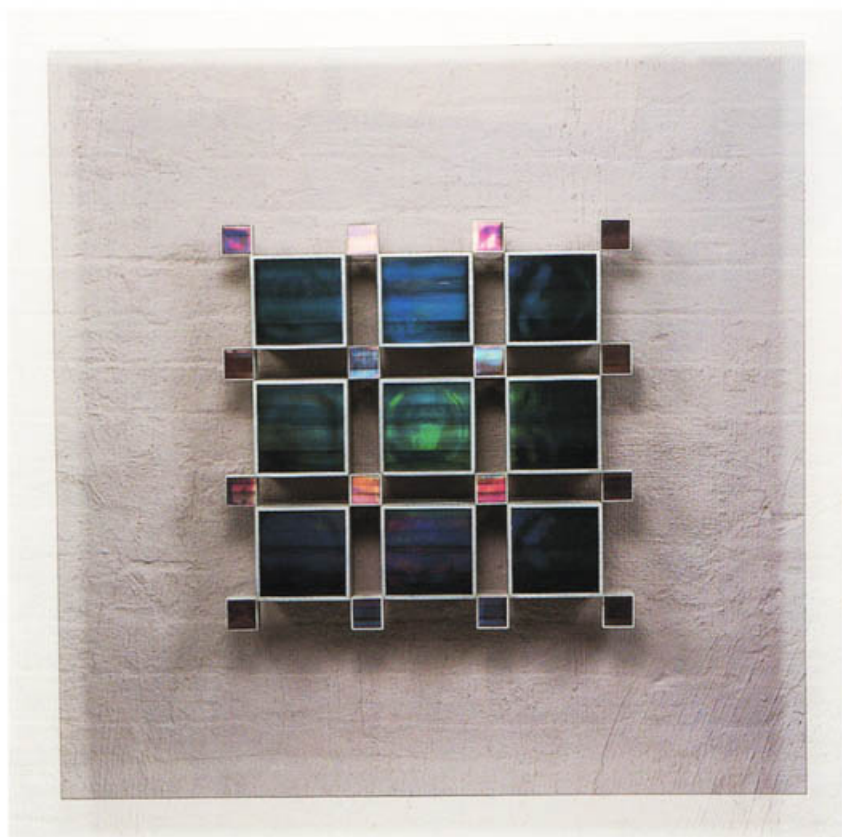


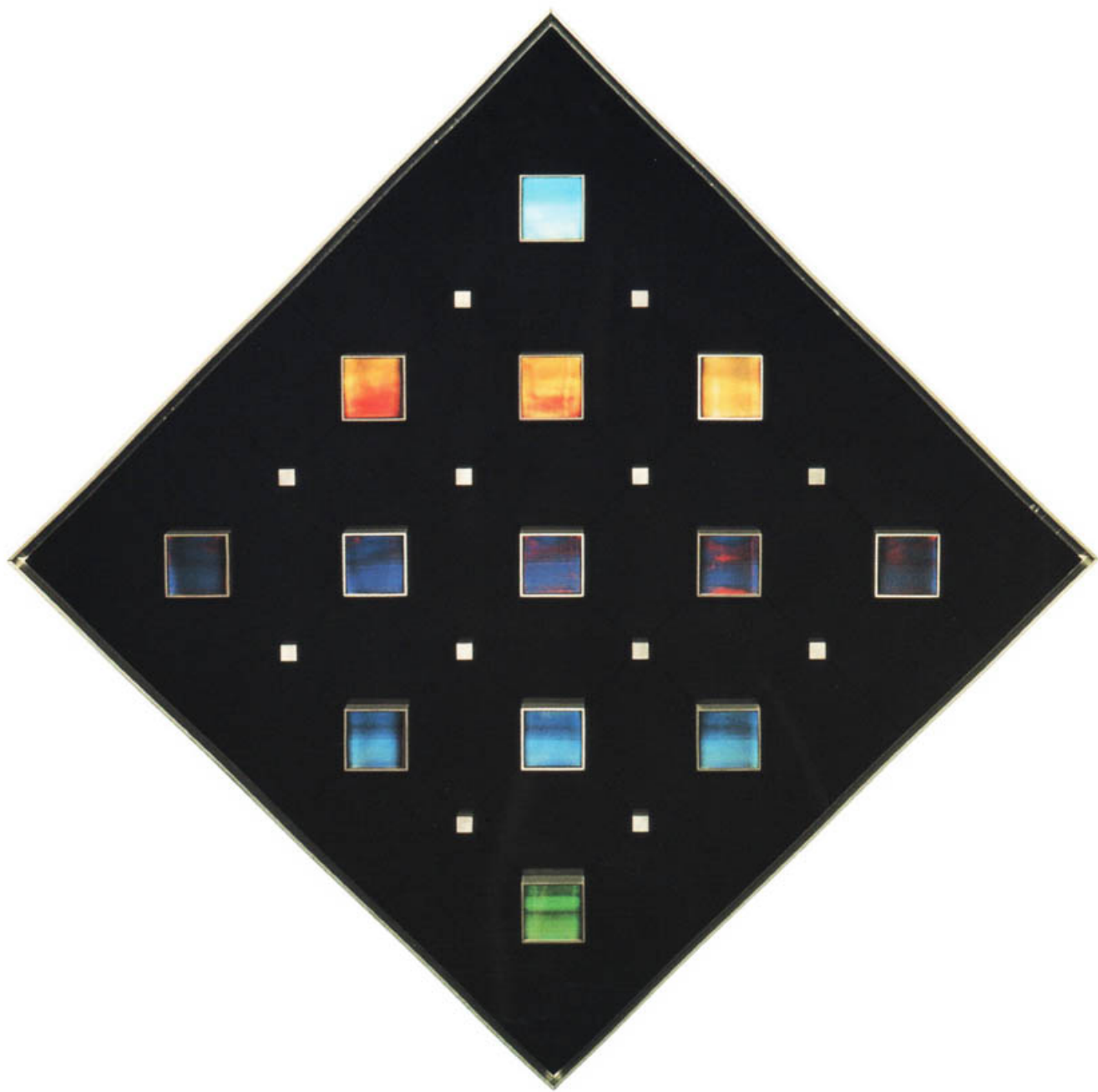


facing page  
*Square relief #8* 1968  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 122.0 x 122.0  
 Collection: Monash University

above  
*Kinetic relief (Eclipse #2)* 1973  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 122.0 x 122.0

right  
*Kinetic relief #9 (Projection 3)* 1970  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 122.0 x 122.0



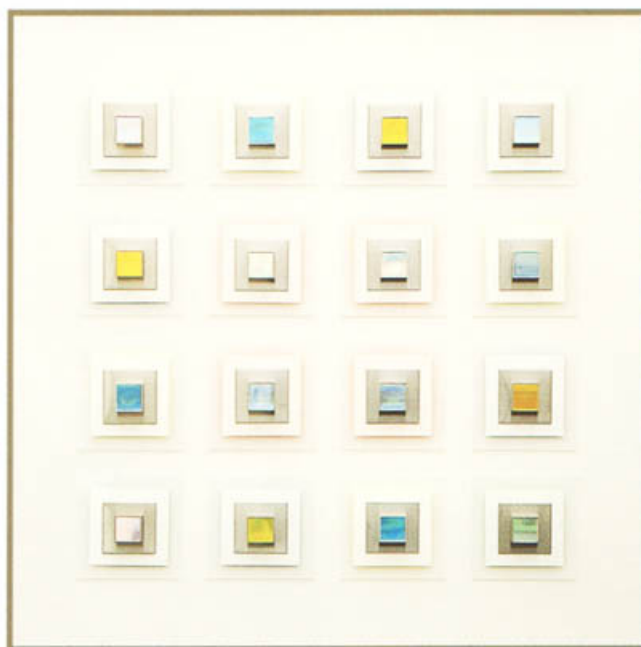


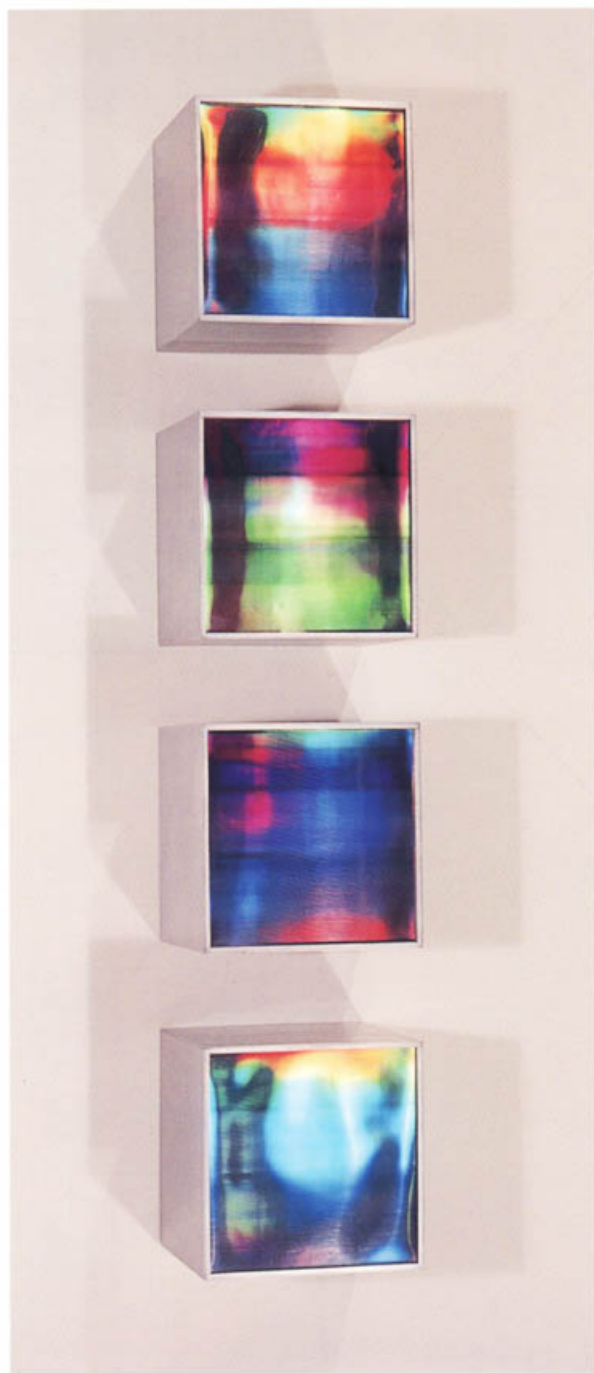


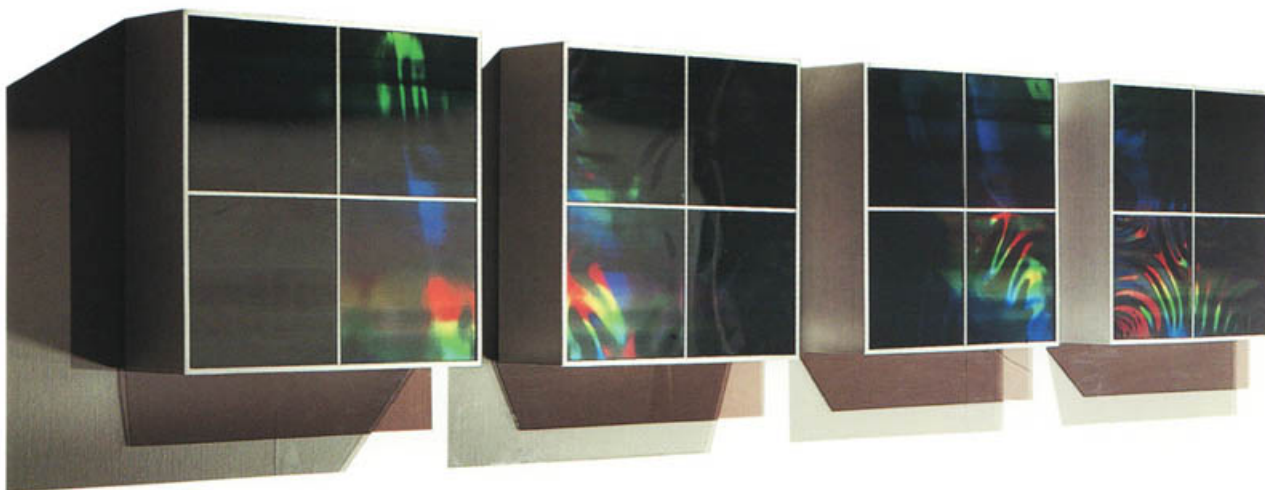
facing page  
*Kinetic relief (Cube #3)* 1968  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 62.0 x 62.0

above  
*Kinetic relief #17* 1971  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 92.0 x 92.0  
 Collection: Peter and Joan Clemenger

right  
*Kinetic relief #20 (Rotation 2)* 1972  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 122.0 x 122.0  
 Collection: W.R. Burge







facing page

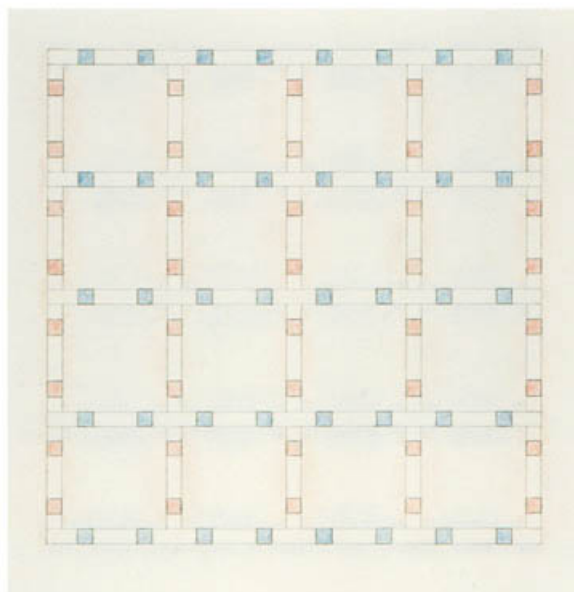
*Four x four #2* Edition 4/5 1969  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
76.0 x 15.0 x 13.0

above

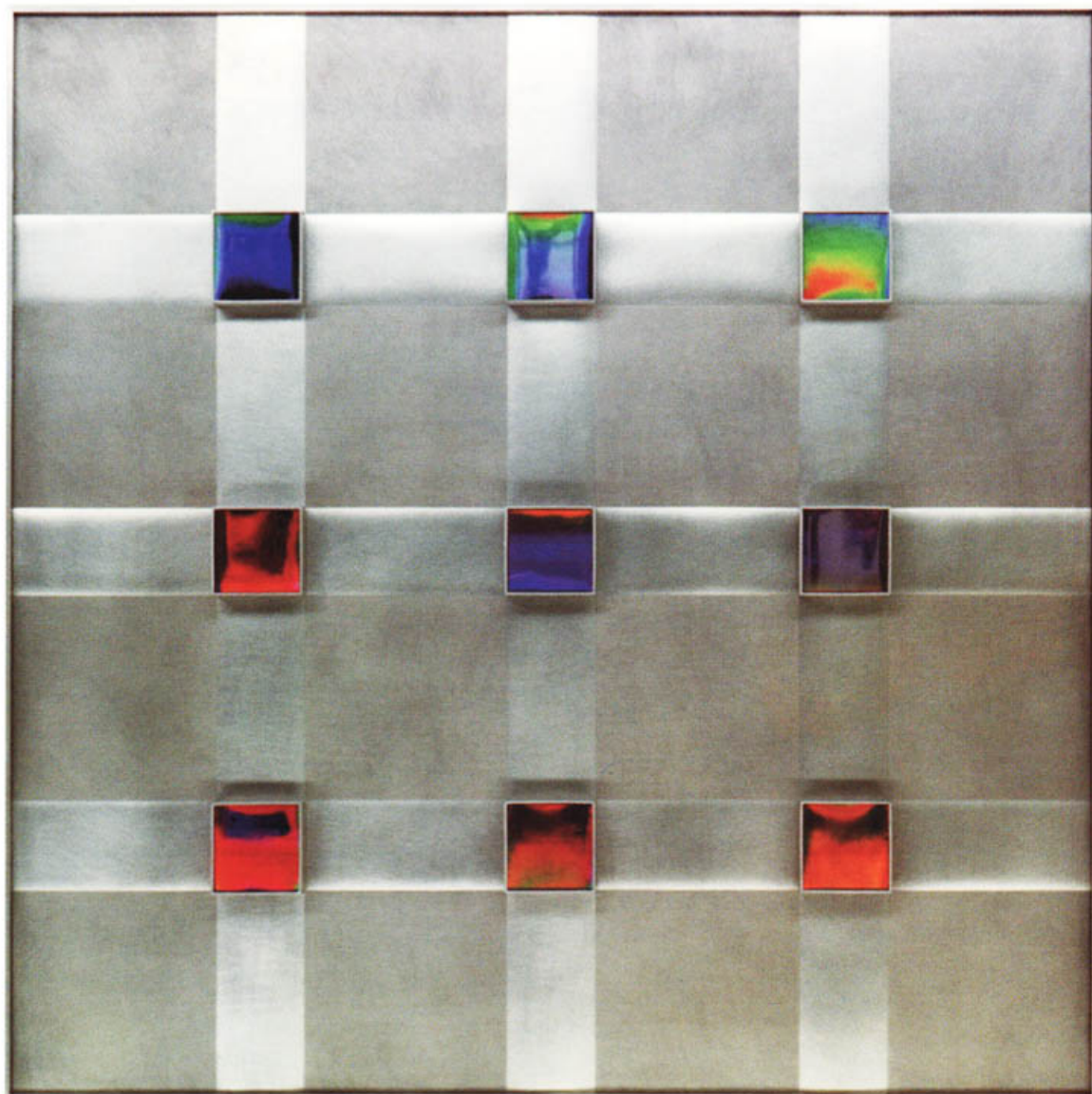
*Four x four* 1969  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
212.0 x 51.0 x 13.0  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia

right

*Inland summer #2*  
pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7



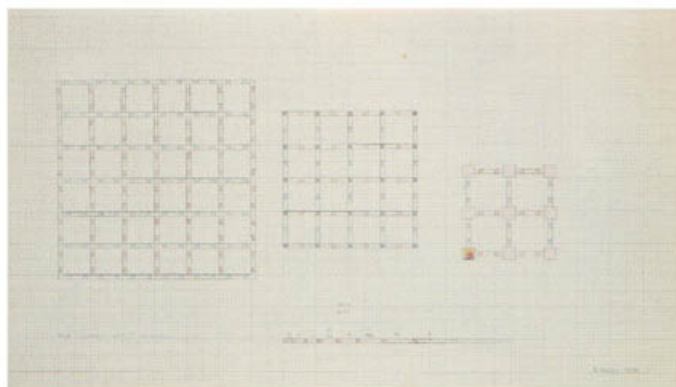
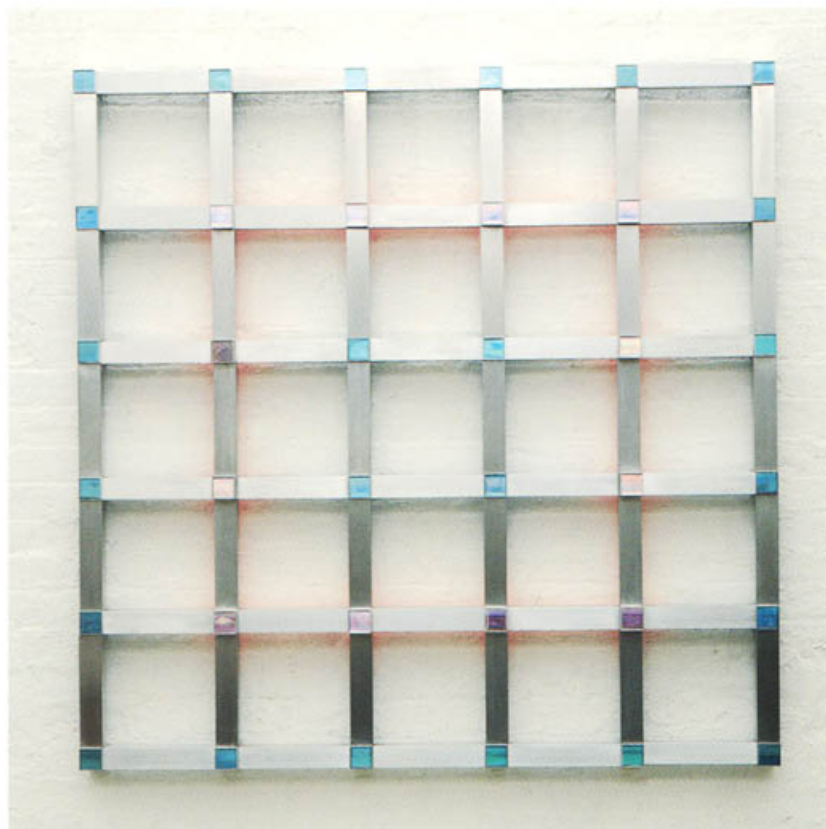




facing page  
*Kinetic relief #24* 1971  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 62.0 62.0

right  
*Orion* 1971  
 aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
 158.0 x 158.0 x 13.0  
 Parliament House Art Collection

below  
 from *Notes to myself*  
*Fire – water – spirit – matter* 1970  
 coloured pencil on graph paper  
 29.0 x 55.8







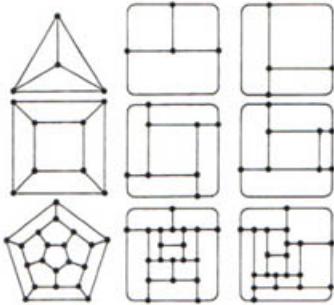
# Sunrise

## Mediated transcendence: Robert Owen and the representational sublime

Carolyn Barnes

Perspective limits space; it has made it finite, closed.

El Lissitzky, 'A. and Pangeometry', 1925.<sup>1</sup>



facing page

*Terminus #2* 1970

aluminium, perspex and oroglass

182.4 x 182.4 x 13.0

Collection National Gallery of Australia

above

Topological graphs in

"Anthony Hill: Programme. Paragram. Structure"

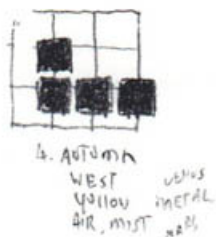
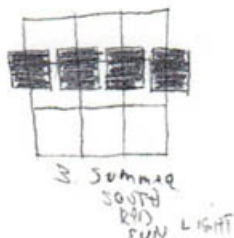
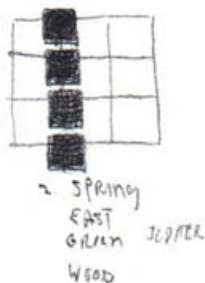
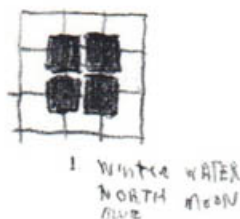
in *DATA Directions in Art Theory*

and *Aesthetics*, Ed. Anthony Hill,

Faber & Faber, 1968, p.261

In 1992, Robert Owen gained access to facilities in advanced computer graphics, allowing him entry to the pixel world, a place where he found everything was ultimately reducible to a grid of coloured rectangles. For an artist whose work had often steered a path between science, metaphysics and abstraction as a way of investigating the representational sublime, digital imaging presented possibilities from the aesthetic to the metaphoric.<sup>2</sup> It also set off a chain of connections reaching back to an earlier time in Owen's career when the grid had been an important formal, conceptual and expressive device. Although the digital sphere was there to explore, Owen relinquished the opportunity to use it as a new medium and context for art. Instead he returned to the grid formats of his early work, intrigued by their seeming relationship to the descriptive order of computer graphics, both constituting a highly mutable representational field governed by binary codes of exchange. The immediate result was a series of geometric paintings, each featuring an irregular, eight unit grid, formed of rectangles of strong, flat colour. This body of work has since expanded into a major project for Owen. Ranging across painting, sculpture and installation, it uses the translation of ideas from one format to another to correspond more fully to intangible aspects of the experience of space, light and colour, especially as their understanding has been transformed by wider cultural and socio-economic forces, notably the reshaping of ideas about the world through the impact of science and technology.

The grid works on which Owen's geometric paintings of the early 1990s are based date back to 1968 and 1969, a time when he was working in London as an assistant to the British artist and mathematician Anthony Hill. Hill was part of a group of artists operating in the wake of European Constructivism.<sup>3</sup> Through his activities



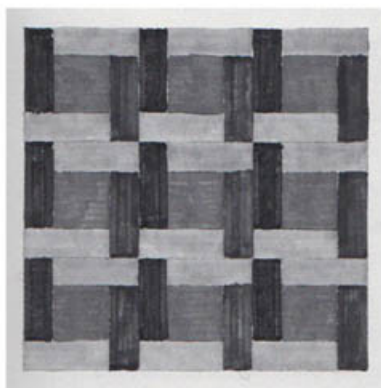
which allied art and mathematics in the search for notational systems able to describe representational problems such as the Moebius strip, non-isomorphic polyhedra and organic molecules, Hill successfully applied abstract imagery to solve a conceptual impasse in this field of inquiry. Inspired by Hill's work, Owen used diagrams related to Hill's cubic identity graphs as the basis for two sets of drawings. These were *Rotation* (1968), a group of four drawings extrapolated from the geometry of the cube and featuring a large central square surrounded by smaller rectangles, and *Terminus* (1969), a sequence of drawings featuring a grid of sixteen rectangles formed by joining together topographical notations known as 'identity trees'. Identity trees represent a point in space by the intersection of three lines, meaning that three-dimensional objects are drawn in two dimensions without the need for perspective. This capacity to represent the idea rather than the appearance of things stirred Owen's interest, the identity trees paralleling his own aim to translate complex, overpowering experiences into art.

The resultant works had broad connections for Owen. Their abstract character addressed the contemporary imperative to state art's material, procedural and aesthetic conditions while advancing Owen's interest in the capacity of effects of light, space and colour to produce a sense of the sublime from the experience of the landscape. Although by the mid-1960s Owen had chosen to live in London, nature constituted his deepest experience. He has acknowledged on a number of occasions that as a child in rural New South Wales the impact of the landscape had an intensity beyond words.<sup>4</sup> This power was only re-emphasised during the three years Owen spent living on a Greek island between leaving Australia in 1963 and arriving in England in 1966. By contrast the attraction of London for Owen was the city's status as an international centre of contemporary art and youth culture, hence its potential as a source of new ideas. In a way characteristic of many other Australian artists and intellectuals of the postwar period, Owen felt bound to leave Australia to encounter what were typified as broader cultural horizons. In a sense he readily incorporated modernist art idioms and concerns into his practice, notably the legacy of Constructivism with its rich exchange of principles between art, science and technology aimed at transforming human consciousness. This acceptance, however, was on Owen's terms, his interest in abstraction exceeding teleological interpretations of the history of modernism and the radical limitation of its sphere of contemporary operation to formal and categorical concerns.

From the time that Owen had spent living in Greece reflecting on his life in Australia, he knew the experience of the Australian landscape was central to his philosophical



and psychological outlook. Problems of mathematics and physics, as much as the practice of non-objective art, were interesting not in themselves but for their metaphysical and conceptual potential. In the *Rotation* drawings, aspects of nature were reflected in abstract formal relations. The character of each grid arrangement, one seeming to rotate forward, one backward, the third symmetrical and combining both rotations, a fourth static, represented the essence of the seasons: Spring, Autumn, Summer, Winter. Adding a title was a way of suggesting content without reverting to representation. However when many people connected this work solely with aesthetics and contemporary art world debates, the place of the grid in his work was compromised. Two-dimensional art was consequently replaced by a combination of object production, installation and photography to create a more palpable sense of the physical.



facing page  
*Drawings for Four x four*  
 from *Notes to myself* 1968  
 pencil on paper

above  
*Drawing for Cross over rotation #2* 1992  
 watercolour on paper 43.0 x 35.5

During the 1970s and 1980s, this quality of physicality was extended to include the material and semiotic interplay of elements like metals, glass, pure pigment and new synthetic materials. While these works always included some reference to the landscape, Owen's previously generalised idea of the sublime in nature was transformed into a more theoretical engagement with the place of experience in the contemporary world, focusing on its construction through science and technology. By 1992, however, Owen was questioning installation's inflated cultural currency, hence his experiments with computer graphics and ultimate decision to significantly reduce his artistic means by shifting to a variant of geometric painting contained within strictly defined parameters of pure colour and form. Nevertheless his concern for the construction of ideas of space and light continued, the presence of references to virtual systems of representation, as indicated in the proximity of his paintings to the pixel field, standing as another layer of cultural distance between the human subject and the physical world.

Like the grid format Owen used in these paintings, their colours also came from his past, being based on those in a packet of origami paper he had bought in 1971 to make small objects to amuse his baby daughter Lisa. Owen came across the remnants of the pack in 1987. Charged with personal significance and temporal distance, the coloured papers captured his attention, constituting colour as a 'thing-in-itself', emanating coloured light into space much as the powdered pigments he had used in his installation work.<sup>5</sup> When combined with the programmatic rearrangement of elements of the grid, this set of colours allowed for almost unlimited formal variation to the extent that for Owen, free choice and the complex *mise-en-scene* of his installations came to seem like a limiting principle. To this end





Owen has returned to the computer, using it to generate continual permutations of the eight unit grid, thus avoiding the painstaking work of developing new variants from the existing examples without repetition or the need to draw each out by hand prior to painting. The significance of the computer in this work, however, is greater than procedural facility, and relates to its world historical role in the proliferation of virtual imaging.

For Owen, one of the challenges in understanding the world of experience is the inability to adequately account for any one dimension of it in singular terms. The computer can tabulate and represent things in unprecedented ways but whether this means the nature of the world or its experience are any more directly or sufficiently achieved is questionable. In his current work, the translation of tangible and intangible entities from one ideational context to another suggests the systematised nature of representation and its general failure to embrace all meanings and significance. This insufficiency is signified in the way the self-contained formal nature of geometric painting stands as antithetical to any investigation of human experience. However, in embarking on this path Owen had the historical avant-garde postulation of the transcendental character of abstract art as a forceful model. While in his grid works, paint determines both form and colour, stressing the flatness of the painting surface, for Owen, as for earlier artists, this does not preclude their ability to translate form into experience and experience into understanding. This sequence of possibilities is set off by the tendency of areas of flat, pure colour to vibrate where they meet and to float or recede in space, encouraging human perceptual apparatus to defy the state of painting's actuality much as Owen believes human intuition can exceed singular, rational projections of the physical world.

It is characteristic of Owen's philosophical perspective and way of working to make unrestrained connections from one idea to another, freely linking diverse fields of human endeavour while translating ideas from one culture or time to another. In connecting mathematical constructs to formal relations in painting, Owen interprets all t-intersections formed at the edges of the coloured planes in his grid paintings as points in space, the perceptual effects of colour suggesting, if not directly facilitating, this possibility. Since 1992, this alliance of colour, form and mathematical principles has produced many paintings and drawings, including a large scale wall painting executed at Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, for the 1995 exhibition *Sunrise*. Hanging opposite this vast, exploded version of the grid composition was a row of smaller grid paintings, the shift from wall to canvas an important mechanism in asserting the paintings' fundamental relationship to space.

facing page

*Ghost tantras #1* 1964

pen and ink on paper 17.7 x 12.6

and

*Ghost tantras #2* 1964

pen and ink on paper 22.8 x 17.7

below

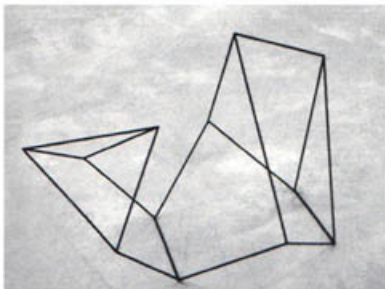
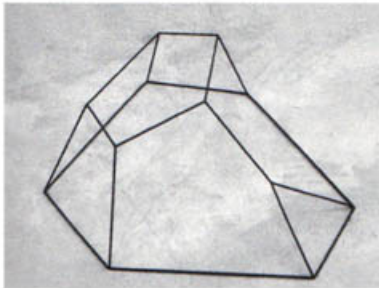
Topological models, painted steel

each 30.0 x 40.0 x 60.0 approx

from *Ghost tantras and coloured spaces*

Anna Schwartz Gallery

Melbourne, 1995



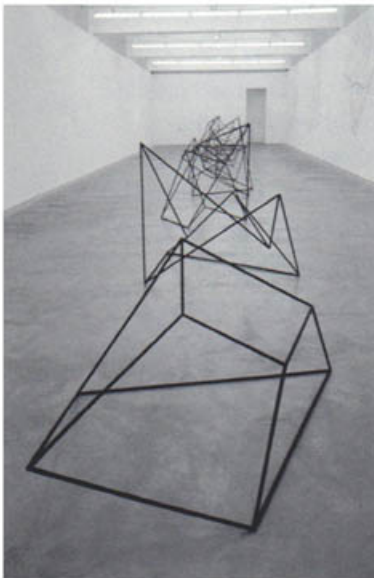
This link was amplified in the wall painting by the effects of after-sight and optical vibration that began to dissolve the corporeality of the gallery, transforming its visually neutral, rectilinear structure into something highly energised and spatially unstable.

Owen's dramatic mobilisation of the gallery space through planar arrangements of colour related to the interior 'colour solutions' of Theo van Doesburg, especially his work at the Cafe Aubette, Strasbourg. For Van Doesburg, abstraction addressed humanity's spiritual needs, his application of it to interior design aiming to transform the daily experience of the city dweller. Here the impact of planes of pure colour sought to 'oppose to the material room in three dimensions a super-material and pictorial, diagonal space,' eliciting heightened existential understanding.<sup>6</sup> In this Van Doesburg was driven by the emancipatory discourses of utopian modernism, narratives that related formal and technology progress to human liberation. While not discounting transcendental outcomes, Owen's interest in disturbing spatial perceptions relates more to how the computer, as with science and technology in general, has mythologically reordered the world, infiltrating human thought with veils of meaning that mediate and produce experience.

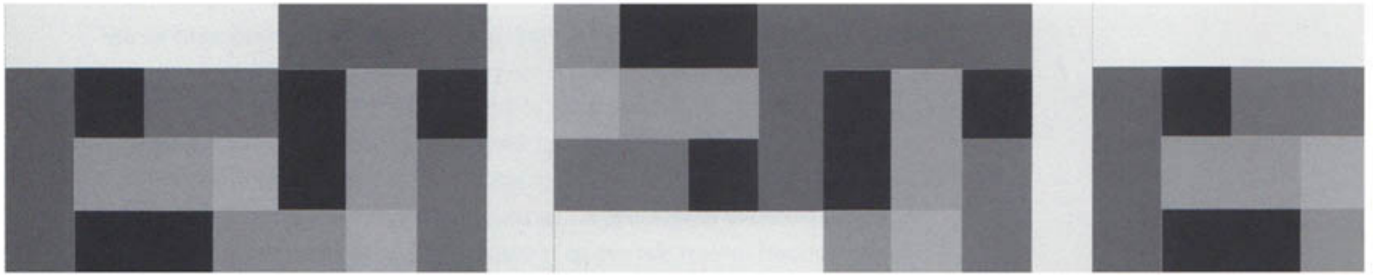
In *Sunrise*, the paintings' titles pointed to themes beyond the purely perceptual and aesthetic, their names revealing concerns for both the computers' ideological permeation of language, and the politics and pathology of sunlight in the contemporary world. It is more than incidental that these works focus on ideas of light at a time when the inherent metaphors of light are undergoing profound change. Their coloured glow pervaded space, much as the conceptual authority of the computer, with its imagery of electrically charged circuits and networks, infiltrates contemporary ideas of time, space and thought with a new regime of proliferating, commodified information. In this sense the 'sunrise' of the exhibition's title referred as much to the over-the-horizon status of high-tech industries as any natural event, just as *'gleam'* and *'Iris'* reference the specialised language of computing while pointing to the ongoing supplanting of nature by technology. The coloured emanations of these paintings cast an unnatural glow in the gallery, suggesting the demise of mythologies of light founded on notions of purity or truth, the title of *'UV'* signalling the demise of the sun's symbolic role as life giver. Such shifts of meaning in entities from outside the realm of culture but hardly beyond the imposition of human values, constitute Owen's ongoing representational challenge that seeks to restore integrity to experience in the face of the atomization of knowledge and the social incommensurability of ideas.



Since the mid-1990s Owen has also used the computer to produce eccentric translations of regular geometric solids. After arbitrarily plotting the points where any three edges meet on a grid, Owen then allows a computer program he had designed for the task to re-establish the edges connecting these points. The result is a sequence of 'impossible' objects, extrapolated from the physical characteristics of cubes, dodecahedrons, and hypercubes, no longer realisable in three dimensions as solid objects but only as a network of steel rods, the juncture of their external planes described as a series of lines and points in space. This work was presented in the exhibition *Leaving the memory behind (cubes and hypercubes)* that featured both wall drawings of a hypercube, as plotted in two dimensions by the computer, and three-dimensional sculptures of cubes that had gone through the whole distortion process.<sup>7</sup> Suggesting the clarificatory power of the elemental in opposition to the complexity of computer imaging, primary colours predominated in the exhibition, one group of wall drawings inscribed in red, the other in yellow. Down the centre of the gallery was a line of ten sculptures painted in an intense ultramarine, each a reconfigured variation on a cube. When viewed head on the row of sculptures appeared as a chaotic web of lines, only attaining a degree of rational integrity from the side. Accompanying the exhibition was a short extract from the text *The Journey of the Soul*, written in the twelfth century by Abu Bakr Muhammad Bin Tufail.<sup>8</sup> It discussed the role of the senses in establishing a higher order of truth in opposition to reason and language as a path to the unrepresentable or conceptually unreconcilable. Due to the multiplicity of elements there was much to account for in this exhibition, though the possibility of achieving this was encouraged through its lucidity of conception.



Reflecting Owen's ongoing project, the works in the exhibition used formal experiment facilitated by the computer but realised in physical form by traditional artistic processes of aesthetic choice, spatial estimation, enlargement drawing and manual construction, to exemplify the effects of epistemological change, specifically the shift to a time where the real is a wholly mediated principle driven by complex representational mechanisms grounded in technology. Owen's mobilisation of processes of representational exchange, namely the generation of objects from theoretical constructs and digital processes, reflect the ongoing realignment of human consciousness and physical experience. Central to this reading is Tufail's text. In some sentiments and language the text appears modern but emanates from a time when issues of the spirit, experience and understanding had a much different expression and focus than in the present, where exponentially accelerating, economically oriented technological change monopolises thought and activity.



above  
from the *Origami* series, (rotated) 1992  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
122.0 x 122.0

facing page  
installation view  
*Ghost tantrtras and coloured spaces*  
Anna Schwartz Gallery  
Melbourne, 1995

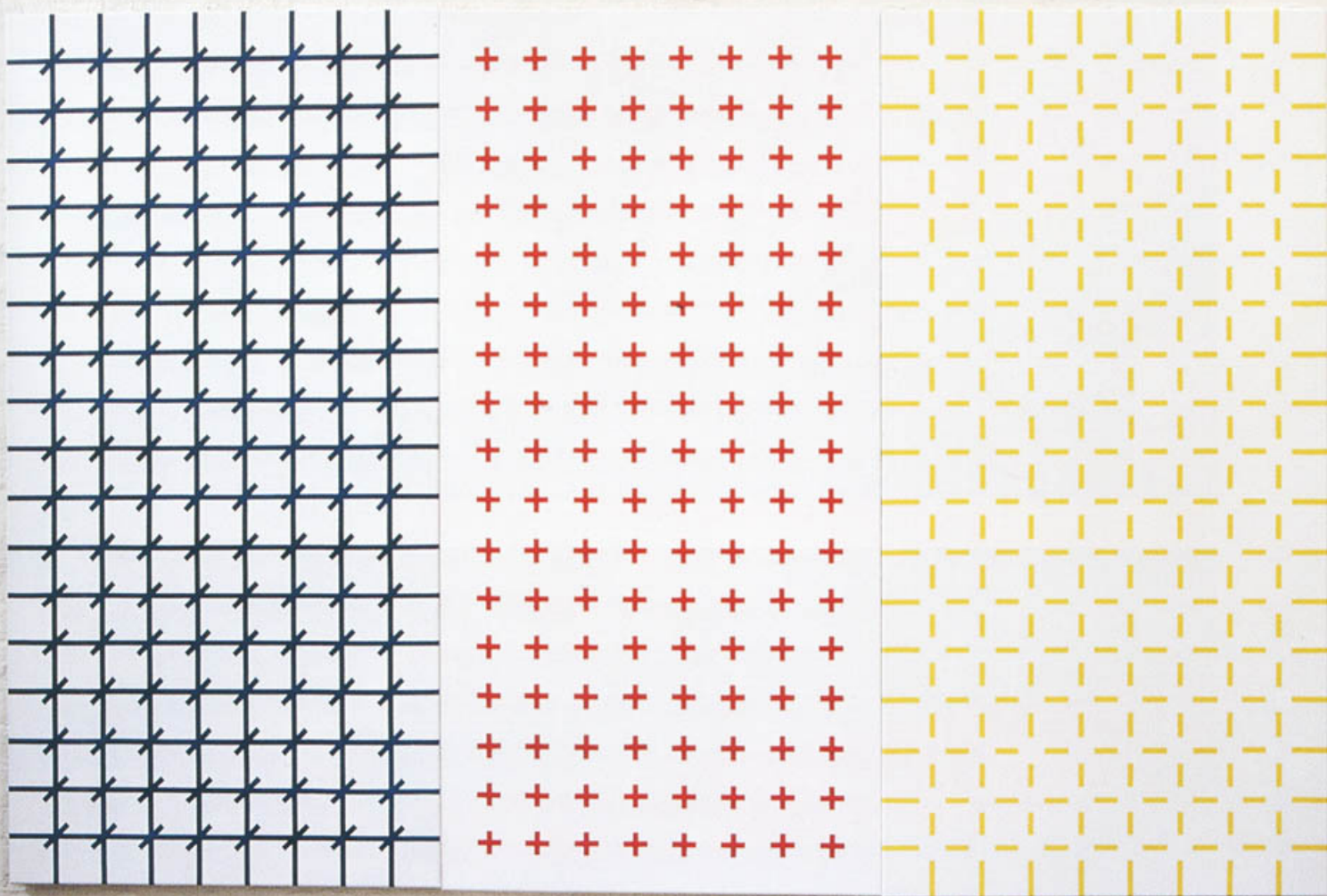
Owen's present work thus revolves around the role of art in a time when representational systems are proliferating, questioning whether this further marginalises or wholly invalidates art, or by contrast, accords it an important historical role in establishing the locus of reality. The history of modernism, out of which Owen's career developed and to which his present work owes a clear legacy, was defined by a retreat from traditions of representation, culminating in the modernist value of aesthetic autonomy from whence many artists employed non-objectivity to address matters of existence and the spirit. Owen's work continues this program while acknowledging how developments outside art impinge on art's status and capacity to speak in such terms. Given his knowledge of theoretical debates in the twentieth century, Owen accepts that formal structures, like words, are empty vessels whose meaning changes according to context. If the genesis of his recent work relates to his personal history, he recognises that the grid and geometric abstraction, thrown up by the historical trajectory of modernism, are a sort of cultural readymade. The grid, in particular, occupies the nexus of varied debates about the condition of art as much as it is product, sign and agent of western mathematical and scientific rationalism. The history of abstraction is marked by wide dichotomies of intent, typifying the gap between form and meaning while identifying the field of interference between collective stylistic and cultural determinations and the work of any one artist. The history of twentieth century art, furthermore, is one in which the status of painting and sculpture has swung widely between positions of pre-eminence, and cultural and ideological impoverishment. These histories necessarily resonate through Owen's work and he now accepts that it may be read as circumscribing purely formal concerns.



Recently Owen's grid paintings have become more complex, with any one eight-unit grid now replicated nine times across the canvas. To do this, Owen has again turned to the computer, sequentially rotating any grid unit 90 degrees forwards or backwards in rows of three. The result of this arbitrary process is that certain colours accrete where they meet by chance. For Owen, one of the significant differences between his paintings and computer graphics, exploded to the point where the individual pixels are observable, is that computer imagery still pertains to some representational content that can be restored. If his use of abstraction might suggest the inability of painting to reflect on anything other than itself, multiplying the grid means there is always the possibility that figurative elements will emerge in the geometric field. This reflects a paradox of contemporary systems of representation as the human capacity to theoretically and technologically 'depict' the world has expanded over time, with the ability to project the unrepresentable in synthetic form. However, as such representations grow in number and complexity, the capacity to relate them to one another is lost. This social reality is Owen's representational sublime, a state in which all systems of depiction and conceptualisation are technologically contingent or limited in their efficacy, granting an agency to art to restore a plenitude to experience, now diminished as a way of engaging the world.

#### Notes

- 1 El Lissitzky, 'A. And Pangeometry', Carl Einstein and Paul Westheim (eds.), *Europa Almanac*, Potsdam, 1925, reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory: 1900–1990*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 303.
- 2 In using this term I refer to the philosophical tradition of the sublime established by Kant in which the sublime is constituted of ideas and experiences for which no representation or presentation is possible.
- 3 Others in the group were Victor Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, John Ernest, Gillian Wise Clobotaru and Malcolm Hughes.
- 4 See for example Owen's comment in George Alexander, *Transits*, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, 1988, pp. 13–15.
- 5 As artist in residence at Victorian College of the Arts Owen produced an installation entitled *Because of This (for Piotre Olszanski)* (1997), among its parts a painting divided into nine squares, each painted to represent one of the colours of the origami paper.
- 6 Theo van Doesburg, "Notes on L'Aubette at Strasbourg", quoted by Nancy J. Troy, "The Abstract Environment of De Stijl" in Mildred Friedman (ed.), *De Stijl: 1917–1931 Visions of Utopia*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1988, p. 188.
- 7 Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, October 1997.
- 8 Abu Bakr Muhammad Bin Tufail, *The Journey of the Soul*, London, The Octagon Press, pp. 47–50.



*Terminus (Red, yellow, blue)* 1967–1999  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
183.0 x 274.5 overall





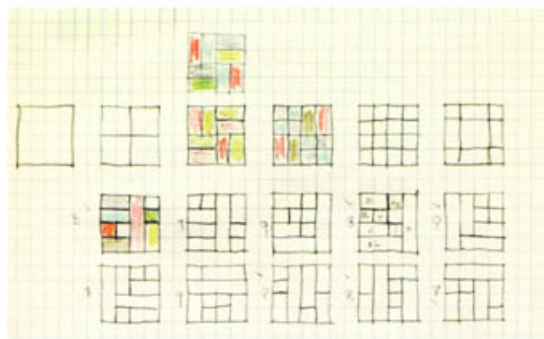


facing page  
*Sunrise* 1993, installation view  
 and  
*Sunrise* 1993  
 synthetic polymer paint on wall  
 420.0 x 2165.0  
 City Gallery, Melbourne  
 Photographs: John Gollings

above  
*Sunrise* 1994, installation view  
 Annandale Gallery, Sydney

immediate right  
*Drawing for Gleam* 1991  
 from the *Isis* series  
 watercolour on paper  
 34.5 x 28.0

far right  
*Terminus* series  
 from *Notes to myself* 1969  
 coloured pencil on graph paper  
 22.0 x 34.0

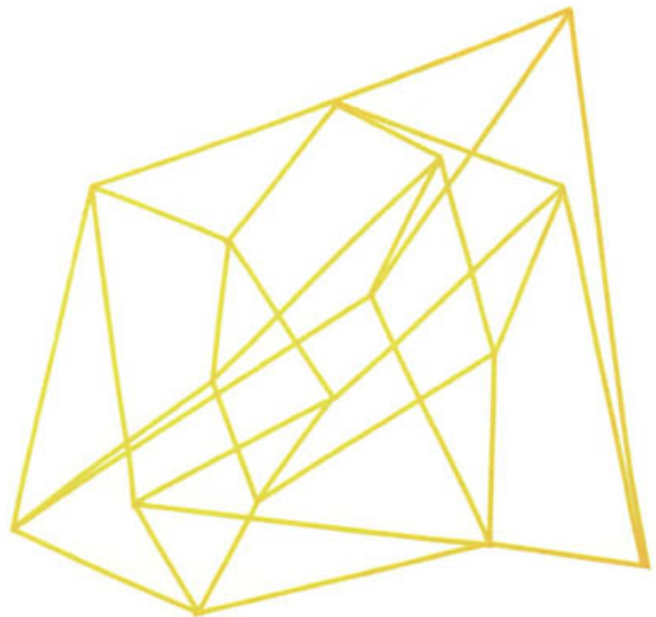
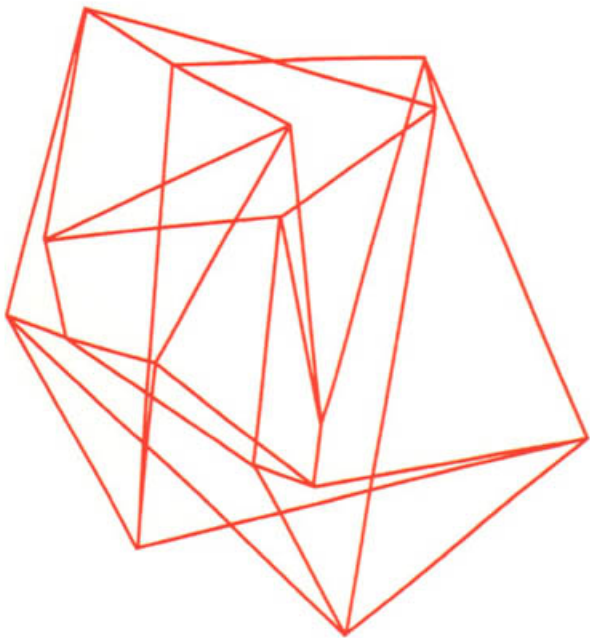






*Ghost Tantras and Coloured Spaces* 1995  
synthetic polymer paint and pigment on walls  
and painted steel models  
installation views  
Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne





above left  
*Hypercube #1*  
 12 mm red tape on wall

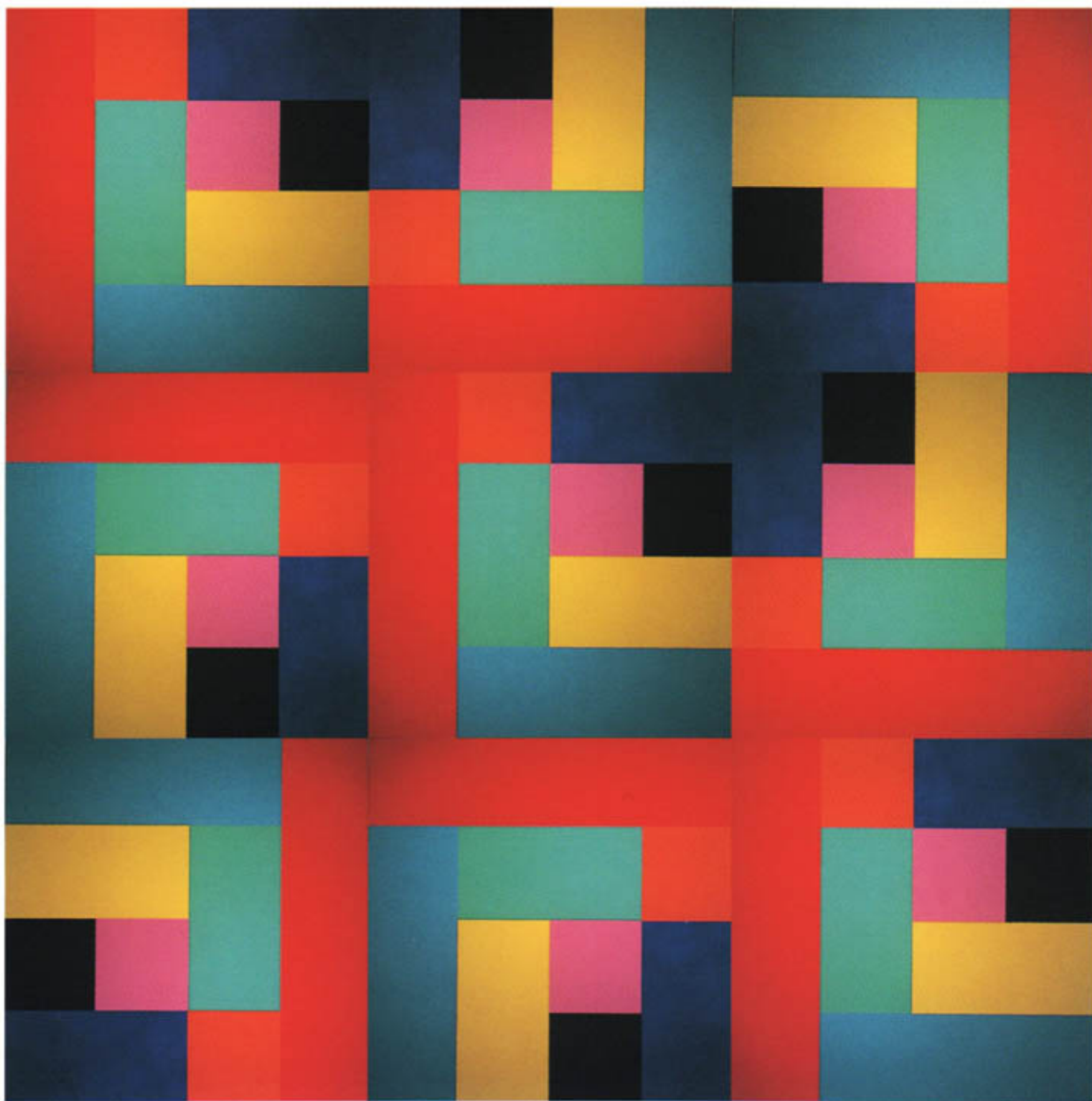
above right  
*Hypercube #3*  
 14 mm yellow tape on wall

left and facing page  
 installation views  
*Leaving the memory behind*  
*(Cubes and hypercubes)* 1997  
 painted steel and tape on walls  
 344.0 x 658.0 x 2673.0 overall  
 Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne









*Terminus (Rotation #4)* 1998  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
152.5 x 152.5

# List of Works

- Paintings, Sculpture, Installations
- 1 *Eclipse (YAPA)* 1966–1999  
oil and wax on canvas  
152.5 x 152.5
  - 2 *Eclipse version #2* 1966  
aluminium, arborite, perspex, oroglass  
on wood, 63.5 x 54.0
  - 3 *Square relief #1* 1967  
aluminium, perspex, oroglass  
47.0 x 47.0
  - 4 *Terminus (Red, yellow, blue)* 1967–1999  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
183.0 x 274.5 overall
  - 5 *Bird sound* 1968  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
46.5 x 46.5
  - 6 *Round about #1* 1968  
aluminium, steel, perspex and oroglass  
101.5 x 101.5
  - 7 *Square relief #8* 1968  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
122.0 x 122.0  
Collection: Monash University
  - 8 *Four x four* 1969  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
212.0 x 51.0 x 13.0  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia
  - 9 *Four x four #2* Edition 4/5 1969  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
76.0 x 15.0 x 13.0
  - 10 *Four x four (Spring)* 1969–73  
pencil and synthetic polymer paint  
on paper on wood  
259.0 x 198.0
  - 11 *Kinetic relief #9 (Projection 3)* 1970  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
122.0 x 122.0
  - 12 *Kinetic relief #25* 1970  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass, tape  
and pencil on wood  
62.0 x 62.0
  - 13 *Terminus #2* 1970  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
182.4 x 182.4 x 13.0  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia
  - 14 *Isis* 1971  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
126.5 x 126.5 x 13.0  
Collection: David and Cathy Mist
  - 15 *Kinetic relief #6* 1971  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass on wood  
122.0 x 122.0  
BHP Collection
  - 16 *Kinetic relief #17* 1971  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
92.0 x 92.0  
Collection: Peter and Joan Clemenger
  - 17 *Orion* 1971  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
158.0 x 158.0 x 13.0  
Parliament House Art Collection Canberra
  - 18 *Grey day* 1971–1999  
charcoal, graphite chalk and talcum powder  
30.0 x 92.0 x 390.0
  - 19 *Kinetic relief #20 (Rotation II)* 1972  
aluminium, perspex and oroglass  
122.0 x 122.0  
Collection: W.R. Burge
  - 20 *Lisa's Lake* 1972–75  
nickel-plated aluminium, synthetic polymer  
paint and glass  
167.1 x 167.5 x 12.7  
Collection: New England Regional Art  
Museum – Gift of Chandler Coventry
  - 21 *Inland summer* 1973  
aluminium, perspex, oroglass and acrylic  
148.0 x 148.0 x 12.0
  - 22 *Still life (recycle #1 13400 lines)*  
pencil on paper on wood  
122.0 x 122.0  
Collection: Wagga Wagga Regional  
Art Gallery
  - 23 *Terminus (Rotation #1 blue)* 1998  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
152.5 x 152.5

24 *Terminus (Rotation #2 red)* 1999  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
152.5 x 152.5

25 *Terminus (Rotation #3 yellow)* 1999  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
152.5 x 152.5

#### Drawings

26 *Drawing for Eclipse* 1966  
oil, wax and graphite  
35.0 x 55.5

27 *Eclipse 1* 1966  
pencil on paper  
45.5 x 34.8

28 *Eclipse 2* 1966  
pencil on paper  
45.5 x 34.8

29 *Eclipse 3* 1966  
pencil on paper  
45.5 x 34.8

30 *Still life, 123 lines* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

31 *Still life, 150 lines* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

32 *Still life, 245 lines* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

33 *Still life, 291 lines* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

34 *Still life, 314 lines* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

35 *Still life, 314 lines, two blacks* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

36 *Still life, 419 lines = 1/32°  
of diffraction grating* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

37 *Still life, 421 lines, 3 blacks* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

38 *Still life, 481 lines* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
28.0 x 38.3

39 *Cross reference 3* 1967  
ink and tape on paper  
39.8 x 38.2

40 *Monk's belt* 1967  
pencil on graph paper  
21.5 x 52.0

41 *Terminus 1* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
34.6 x 25.4

42 *Terminus 2* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
34.6 x 25.4

43 *Terminus 3* 1967  
pen and ink on paper  
34.6 x 25.4

44 *Rotation* 1967  
coloured pencil on paper  
25.4 x 18.5

45 *Binocular 1* 1968  
graphite on paper  
33.0 x 45.4

46 *Binocular 2* 1968  
graphite on paper  
33.9 x 45.4

47 *Stella 5* 1968  
wax, graphite and tape on paper  
67.5 x 49.6

48 *Cross over 6* 1969  
graphite, wax and pencil on paper  
67.4 x 49.8

49 *One, two, three, four* 1969  
coloured pencil on paper  
57.5 x 45.8

50 *Rotation 1 (Spring)* 1969  
pencil and tape on paper  
36.0 x 28.0

51 *Rotation 2 (Summer)* 1969  
pencil and tape on paper  
36.0 x 28.0

52 *Rotation 3 (Autumn)* 1969  
pencil and tape on paper  
36.0 x 28.0

53 *Rotation 4 (Winter)* 1969  
pencil and tape on paper  
36.0 x 28.0

54 *Terminus 1 (Four sets)* 1969  
coloured pencil on graph paper  
36.0 x 28.0

55 *Terminus 4* 1969  
pencil on paper  
35.0 x 28.0

56 *Rothko died today 1* 1970  
pencil and conte on paper  
25.5 x 35.5

57 *Rothko died today 2* 1970  
pencil and conte on paper  
25.5 x 35.5

58 *Rothko died today 3* 1970  
pencil and conte on paper  
25.5 x 35.5

59 *Rothko died today (fuck it)* 1970  
pencil and conte on paper  
25.5 x 35.5

60 *Around midnight  
(Rothko died today)* 1970  
pencil and conte on paper  
67.5 x 44.5

61 *Rothko died today  
London 25/2/70*  
oil and pencil on paper  
30.0 x 37.0

- 62 *Edge of a season 1* 1970  
pencil and conte on paper  
67.5 x 44.5
- 63 *Edge of a season 2* 1970  
pencil, graphite and conte on paper  
67.5 x 44.5
- 64 *Edge of a season 3* 1970  
pencil and conte on paper  
67.5 x 44.5
- 65 *Cross reference 5* 1970  
graph paper on paper  
38.0 x 38.0
- 66 *Fire – water spirit – matter* 1970  
pencil on paper  
29.0 x 55.8
- 67 *Day's journey 1* 1970  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7
- 68 *Day's journey 2* 1970  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7
- 69 *Orion, round about, cross over  
from Notes to myself* 1970  
pencil on graph paper  
24.0 x 55.8
- 70 *Orion I* 1970  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7
- 71 *Orion 2* 1970  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7
- 72 *Terminus* 1970  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7
- 73 *Inland summer 1* 1971  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 38.0
- 74 *Inland summer 2* 1971  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7
- 75 *Inland summer 3* 1971  
coloured pencil on paper  
56.0 x 40.7
- 76 *Origami 1, for Lisa* 1971  
collage, pencil and paper on paper  
36.0 x 28.0
- 77 *Origami 2* 1971  
collage, pencil and paper on paper  
36.0 x 28.0
- 78 *Origami 3, for Lisa* 1971  
collage, pencil and paper on paper  
36.0 x 28.0
- 79 *Origami 6* 1971  
collage, pencil and paper on paper  
36.0 x 28.0
- 80 *Stopover 4* 1971  
graphite, wax and conte on  
silver paper  
50.0 x 40.5
- 81 *Wave series* 1971  
biro and pencil on graph paper  
43.6 x 29.5
- 82 *Lisa's lake 2* 1972  
graphite, wax and tape on paper  
67.2 x 49.5
- 83 *Stop over 4* 1972  
powdered lead, wax, pencil and tape  
34.1 x 27.2  
Collection: New England Regional Art  
Museum – Gift of Chandler Coventry, 1979
- 84 *Untitled* 1972  
powdered lead, wax, pencil and tape  
33.9 x 27.1  
Collection: New England Regional Art  
Museum – Gift of Chandler Coventry, 1979
- 85 *Eclipse 3* 1973  
pencil on paper  
63.5 x 45.8
- 86 *Area code 251* 1974  
graphite and coloured pencils  
sheet 56.2 x 38.4  
Collection: New England Regional Art  
Museum – Gift of Gunter Christmann, 1975
- 87 *Devices connecting the shoreline  
to the four seeds – Recycle* 1974  
pencil on paper  
39.4 x 58.5
- 88 *Eclipse, Recycle 4* 1974  
pencil and embossing on paper  
69.5 x 10.2  
A/P
- 89 *Eclipse, Recycle 5* 1974  
pencil and embossing on paper  
69.5 x 10.2  
ed. 1/5  
Collection: Peter Rayner
- All measurements  
in centimetres  
height x width x depth
- All works  
courtesy the artist  
unless otherwise stated



## Exhibitions, Collections, Bibliography

Robert Owen was born in Sydney, Australia in 1937 and spent his first nineteen years in Wagga Wagga. He moved to Sydney and studied Sculpture at the National Art School, under Lyndon Dadswell, from 1958 to 1962. He has travelled widely, living in Greece from 1963 to 1966 and then London until his return to Sydney in 1975. His work has been shown in Britain, New York, Tokyo, Paris and throughout Australia. He represented Australia in the 38th Venice Biennale in 1978. He now lives and works in Melbourne.



Robert Owen in his London studio

### Selected solo exhibitions

- 1965 Barry Stern Gallery, Sydney
- 1966 Barry Stern Gallery, Sydney
- 1971–72 *Relief constructions*, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
- 1974 *Seven days (Drawings 1966–1974)*, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
- 1975 *Constructions and drawings*, Coventry Gallery, Sydney
- 1976 *Some past, some future work*, Coventry Gallery, Sydney
- 1977 *Memory and logic units*, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
- 1978 *Cross reference*, Coventry Gallery, Sydney
- 1979 *Burano colour works*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; Solander Gallery, Canberra; Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga
- 1980 *Apposition*, Coventry Gallery, Sydney
- Plain images* (installation with Mike Parr), Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
- 1981–82 *Burano colour works*, The Developed Image, Adelaide, Axiom Gallery, Melbourne and New Zealand tour
- 1982 *Hammer on rock* (sound installation), Coventry Gallery, Sydney
- 1983 *From the centre*, Art Projects, Melbourne
- 1984 *From the centre, Turn of the moon and Folds in the lake of light*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

- 1985 *Resurrections*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
- Persephone's towers*, Air and Space Studio, London, England
- 1987 *Easy science*, United Artists Gallery, Melbourne
- 1988 *Trace of a silent bell*, Palais du Rhin, Strasbourg, France
- The time falling bodies take to light*, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga
- A warring peace, a sweet wound and a mild evil*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
- Phase zone three, Into the light*, Victorian College of the Arts Gallery, Melbourne
- 1989 *Trace of a silent bell*, City Gallery, Melbourne
- 1990 *Re-vision (three works)*, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart
- 1991 *Re-vision*, Annandale Gallery, Sydney
- 1992 *Sunrise*, Pyo Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1993 *Sunrise*, City Gallery, Melbourne
- 1994 *Sunrise*, Annandale Gallery, Sydney
- 1995 *Ghost tantras and coloured spaces*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 1997 *Leaving the memory behind (cubes and hypercubes)*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 1999 *Between shadow and light: London works 1966–1975 and new works*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne

### Selected group exhibitions

- 1961 Terry Clune Gallery, Sydney
- 1966 *Transfield sculpture exhibition*, Sydney
- 1969 *John Moore's Liverpool exhibition 7*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, England
- Constructions*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham and Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, England
- Marlborough Fine Art, London, England
- 1970 *Four Australian artists* (with Boyd, Hessing and Nolan), Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
- Constructions*, Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York, USA
- Three to infinity*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, England
- 1971 *Contemporary British art*, Guilford Art Gallery, Guilford, England
- 1978 *From nature to art, from art to nature*, 38th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
- Documentation*, Maki and Tamuta Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura
- 1979 *European dialogue*, 3rd Biennale of Sydney, Sydney
- 1980 *Frame of reference*, Ewing and George Paton Gallery, Melbourne and Australian tour
- 1981 *Re-constructed vision*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Eight x two x three*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney

- Anzart – art encounter, Art Gallery of Christchurch, Christchurch, New Zealand
- 1st Australian Sculpture Triennial, La Trobe University, Melbourne
- 1982 *The seventies into the eighties*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- Ambiente*, Rimini, Italy
- Australian art of the last ten years*, Australian National University, Canberra
- 1983 *Drawings (Schematic, Expressionist and Psychological)*, Art Projects, Melbourne
- D'un autre continent: l'Australie le reve et le reel*, Musee d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, Paris, France
- Continuum 83, Australian contemporary art in Tokyo*, Ginza Club, Tokyo, Japan
- Presence and absence*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
- 1985 *Biennale des Friedens*, Kunsthaus Hamburg, West Germany
- Australian Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Ten years*, Air Gallery, London
- 1986 *Geometric abstraction*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
- Origin, originality and beyond*, 6th Biennale of Sydney
- 1987 *Ormond College welcomes new art*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
- What is this thing called science*, University Gallery, Melbourne
- 3rd Australian Sculpture Triennial*, Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne
- In print vol.1: Artists books*, Power Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- 1988 *Olympiad of art*, Seoul Olympic Park, Seoul, Korea
- Prints by twenty-five Australian artists*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
- Plus-moins-zero*, Institut Supérieur pour l'Etude du Language Plastique, Brussels, Belgium
- Deus ex machina*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- Europe and back*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- France-Australie exchange d'artistes*, Chapelle de la Salpetriere, Paris, France
- 1990 *Inland, corresponding places*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
- Out of Asia*, Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne
- Artists for Greenpeace*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
- Deus ex machina*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
- Australian photography*, The Waverley Centre, Melbourne
- Artists against animal experimentation*, Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne
- New acquisitions*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- 1991 *Three installations, Echo (A warring peace; A sweet wound; A mild evil)*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Artists make books*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne and tour

- Off the wall – in the air, a seventies selection*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- Sculpture show*, Annandale Gallery, Sydney
- Models*, Ars Multiplicata, Sydney
- 1992 *The Angelic Space, a celebration of Piero della Francesca*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- 1993 *Inner space, 5th Australian Sculpture Triennial*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- Lightworks*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- 1994 *Aussemblage!*, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, NZ
- Reinventing the grid*, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne
- Circle, line, square, aspects of geometry*, Campbelltown City Art Gallery and Newcastle Region Art Gallery
- Colour*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- Contemporary Australian art*, Government House, Perth
- Going public*, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1995 *Australian contemporary painting*, Annandale Gallery, Sydney
- 1996 *Spirit + Place: art in Australia 1861–1996*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- 1997 *Wall as medium*, David Pestorius Gallery, Brisbane
- Geometric abstraction in Australia 1941–1997*, University Art Museum, Brisbane
- 1998 *The bridge: construction in progress VI*, Collins Street, Melbourne
- Silver*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney

#### Public commissions

- 1980 *Interiors*, design production (costume, stage and lighting), Sydney Dance Company
- 1988 *Night companion*, sculpture tower, Brisbane for World Expo 88,
- 1989 *Vessel*, Nippon Exhibition Centre, Chiba, Japan
- 1999 *Axiom*, sculpture installation, New Commonwealth Law Courts, Melbourne
- 2000 *Discobolus*, sculpture installation, Hellenic tribute, Homebush Bay Olympic park, Sydney for Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

#### Awards

- 1969 Prize winner, *John Moore's Liverpool exhibition 7*, Liverpool, England
- 1978 Visual Arts Board, Project grant to participate in *From nature to art, from art to nature*, 38th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
- 1983 Visual Arts Board, Project grant to participate in *D'un autre continent*, Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris, France
- 1985 Artist-in-residence 1985, Air and Space Studio, London, England
- 1987 Artist-in-residence, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne
- 1988 Artist-in-residence, Centre Europeen d'Actions Artistiques Contemporaines, Strasbourg, France
- Artist-in-residence, Gertrude Street Artists' Studios, Melbourne
- Visual Arts Board Project grant, Australia Council



## Selected publications

- John Russell, 'New Names in Britain', *Art in America*, September 1970
- Daniel Thomas, 'Australia', *From nature to art, from art to nature*, 38th Venice Biennale, catalogue, Electa, Milan, 1978
- Roland Millen, 'The Venice Biennale', *Art and Australia*, vol.16, no.1, 1979
- Elwyn Lynn, 'The Sydney Biennale', *Art International*, Summer 1979
- Nick Waterlow, 'European dialogue', *Flash Art*, no.90-91, 1979
- Pierre Restany, 'Advance Australia Fair', *D'ars periodico d'art contemporanae*, vol.XXI, no.92, 1980
- Maurice K Symonds, Coll Portley, Ralph E Phillips, *The visual arts*, The Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1980
- Mike Parr, 'Robert Owen's Apposition', *Aspect*, vol.5, no.2, 1980
- Giorgio Colombo, *Australian Perspecta*, catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1981
- Suzi Gablick, 'Report from Australia', *Art in America*, vol.169, no.1, 1981
- Leon Paroissien, ed. *Australian Arts Review*, 1982
- Nick Waterlow, 'The Sydney Biennale', *Art Monthly*, no.57, 1982
- Bruce Adams, 'Presence and absence: the Gallery as other place', *Art and Text*, no.10, Winter 1983
- Judy Annear and Robert Owen, 'The immaterials', *Tension*, no.9, May 1986
- Pamela Hansford, 'Robert Owen', *Art and Australia*, vol. 24, no.2, Summer 1986
- Thomas McEvilly, '6th Biennale of Sydney', *Artforum*, November 1986
- Ante Gliboto, ed., *Olympiad of art*, Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, 1988
- Urszula Szulakowska, 'Alchemy and the avant-garde: some contemporary Australian artists', *Studies in Hermeticism*, Department of English, Washington State University, USA, vol.2, Fall 1988
- Urszula Szulakowska, 'Robert Owen', *Art and Text*, no.30, September – November 1988
- Sue Cramer, *A warring peace, a sweet wound and a mild evil*, catalogue, IMA, Brisbane, 1988
- George Alexander, *Transits*, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga, 1988
- John Barbour, 'Echo', *Europe and back*, Monash University Gallery, 1989
- Goji Hamada, *The international exhibition of steel sculptures*, catalogue, Chiba, Japan, 1989
- Paul Guerin, *Trace of a silent bell*, catalogue, City Gallery, Melbourne, 1989
- 'Kerb your dog', independents' number, *Art and Text*, no.35, Summer 1990
- Alison Carroll, *Out of Asia*, catalogue, Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne, 1990
- Charles Green, 'Animals for art', *100 artists against animal experimentation*, catalogue, Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne, 1990
- Ashley Crawford, 'Inland', *Tension*, no.24, 1990
- Ashley Crawford, 'Robert Owen, Singing the body electric', *Tension*, no.22, 1990
- Carolyn Barnes, 'Law and change', *Re-vision (three works)*, catalogue, Chameleon Contemporary Art Gallery, Hobart, 1990
- Robert Owen, 'Sculpture supplement', (guest editor), *Agenda*, 12, Aug. 1990
- David Goodman and Gail Hastings, 'Inland – a spatial heritage', *Agenda*, 15, December 1990
- Carolyn Barnes, *Dis-location*, catalogue, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Gallery, Melbourne, 1990
- Kristina Hampel, 'Inland, corresponding places', *The Interior*, vol.1, no.1, 1991
- Anthony Bond, *Three installations*, catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1991
- Carolyn Barnes, 'Inland', *Art and Text*, no.39, 1991
- George Alexander, John Barbour and Paul Carter, *Inland*, corresponding places, catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1991
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## Public collections

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
 Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane  
 Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart  
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney  
 New Parliament House, Canberra  
 Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga  
 Wollongong City Art Gallery, Wollongong  
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**Robert Owen**

**Between shadow and light**

**London works 1966–1975 and new directions**

21 September – 30 October 1999

Curatorial management: Jenepher Duncan, Susie Shears

Monash University Gallery Wellington Road Clayton

Victoria Australia 3168 tel: +613 9905 4217

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