

LINK IV: PAINTINGS: SPACES / PLACES / TIMES

With artists Peter Clarke and William Ferguson
Curated by A/Prof David Thomas

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER TO FRIDAY 1 OCTOBER 2010
OPENING WEDNESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 5-7PM
FLOOR TALK THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 1-1.30PM



BUILDING 2 LV B, BOWEN STREET, MELBOURNE

CURATOR/COORDINATOR Stephen Gallagher **ADMINISTRATOR** Andrew Tetzlaff

CATALOGUE DESIGN Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison **TELEPHONE** +61 3 9925 4971

WEB www.schoolofartgalleries.dsc.rmit.edu.au **OPENING HOURS** Monday to Friday 10–5pm

MANAGED BY RMIT University School of Art **SUPPORTED BY** Baddaginnie Run



Peter Clarke was born in Deloraine, Tasmania in 1935. He studied at Prahran Technical College from 1951–52 and the Royal Melbourne Technical College 1953–54 (RMIT University). He lectured at RMIT from 1963 and was Head of the Fine Art Department from 1981 until his retirement in 1990.

Since 1957 Clarke has held numerous exhibitions. During the 1960s and 70s he showed with: Gallery A, Melbourne and Sydney; and the Powell Street Gallery, South Yarra. He participated in *Contemporary Australian Painting*, Los Angeles and San Francisco, USA (1966); Georges Prize (1967 and 1974); *Australian Art Today* (1968), touring South East Asia; *Peter Clarke; Selected Works 1957–1979* (1979), RMIT Gallery, Melbourne; *12 Australian Painters* (1983–4), Art Gallery of Western Australia, touring Darwin, Wollongong and Brisbane; and *Works on Paper 1970–2000* (2000), Gallery SP, Seoul, South Korea.

His work is held in the following collections: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Armidale Regional

Gallery, New South Wales; Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria; Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria; Geelong Art Gallery, Victoria; Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart; Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston; Gold Coast City Gallery, Queensland; Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Newcastle Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; University of Melbourne, Melbourne; University of Queensland, Brisbane; TarraWarra Museum of Art, Victoria; and private collections in Australia, USA, UK and South Korea.

His awards include: the Trustees Prize, Queensland Art Gallery; Crouch Prize, Ballarat Art Gallery; Capital Permanent Award, Geelong; and recipient of the Visual Arts Board grants in 1973 and 1975. His commissions include: a patron print for the Print Council of Australia; a tapestry for the Commonwealth Law Courts Building, Tasmania; and a mural for a private residence in London, UK.

Peter Clarke is represented by Bridget McDonnell Gallery, Melbourne.



William Ferguson was born in Melbourne, Victoria in 1932. He studied painting at RMIT (RMIT University) and Melbourne Teachers College. He was a Senior Lecturer in painting at RMIT from 1982–89 and has since worked for the School of Art in both Australia and Hong Kong.

Ferguson has held over 32 solo exhibitions since 1962 in Australia and Germany exhibiting with: the Argus Galleries, Melbourne; Realities Galleries, Melbourne; Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne; and the Catherine Asquith Gallery, Melbourne. His numerous group exhibitions include: Blake Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; McCaughey Prize, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and the Düsseldorf International, Germany.

His work is represented in private public and corporate collections in New Zealand, United Kingdom, India, USA, Germany, Switzerland, Hong Kong and Japan. In Australia they include: the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart; Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Mornington; Monash University, Melbourne; University of Melbourne, Melbourne; Rothschilds

Bank, London; German Ministry, Bonn; Parliament House, Canberra; Maryvale Foundation, Gippsland; Holmes à Court Collection, Perth; Artbank, Australia; Casino, Canberra; Arnold Block & Leibler, Melbourne; Commonwealth Bank, Adelaide; Stress Technology Inc., USA; Crown Casino, Melbourne; Leeuwin Estate, Fremantle; KPMG; BHP; and the ANZ Bank. Ferguson has been awarded numerous prizes including: Kanyana Prize (1962); ESU Watercolour Prize, Melbourne (1966); City of Doncaster Prize (1967); Inez Hutchison Prize (1974); and a Commendation in the 1994 Blake Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales.

William Ferguson is represented by Catherine Asquith Gallery, Melbourne.

PETER CLARKE WILLIAM FERGUSON



IN TIME:
THE ART OF WILLIAM FERGUSON
AND PETER CLARKE.

HERE AND THERE.
COLOUR AND TONE.
MATERIAL AND ACTION.
CONTENT AND FORM.
NOW AND THEN.
THEN AND NOW.

The aim of this exhibition is simple; to celebrate the continuing contribution of two important artists and to bring their work into focus for a new generation of viewers and art students at RMIT University and beyond. In many ways the work of William Ferguson and Peter Clarke needs no introduction, in that it is already part of the history of Australian art and is widely represented in collections here and abroad.

William Ferguson was born in 1932 and Peter Clarke in 1935. Both have had distinguished careers as painters and educators at RMIT and elsewhere. With a reputation for independent practice as artists and as generous, open and informed teachers, they have touched generations of artists, art students and art lovers.

We in Australia, as in most countries tend to focus on the 'newest' art, often this means young – mid career art and we are perhaps lacking in the acknowledgment of the work of older living artists. In preferring to relegate them to a past period of practice, we can forget that their recent work can also be new and most importantly, original and relevant to the concerns of today. Ferguson and Clarke continue to make works that address issues of sensibility, perception, belief, place, history, materiality and spirit, as well as the formal concerns of picture making. Through their art they demonstrate what it means to be a feeling, thinking artist with years of practice and the experience of living behind them.

Since the 1960s Peter Clarke has practiced an abstract painting that has emphasised texture, colour and gesture. His practice has always respected the local variant of global concerns. Early in his career he recognized the worth of continental European painting, in particular that stream of Spanish art that may be linked with matter painting. He studied the facture of Fautrier and Tapies whom he met in the 1960s. (These artists also have connections with Asian ideas). Clarke's practice was complimented by an interest in contemporary American abstract painting of the time; this was filtered through his experiences in England and importantly Australia. His colours, textures, scale responding to the particularities of its light, landscape and traditions of an Australian practice.

In the 1960s Clarke spent time living in Madrid, Barcelona and Britain. A work from around this time *Castille Suite* (1967) completed after his return to Melbourne became a keystone for future development. It contains an inventory of formal material and content that would occupy him for decades. Clarke would often develop parallel streams of practice, working through complementary bodies of work to explore issues of form, process and content. One series of works

bouncing off another, generating new questions and possibilities, for example, his white works become a foil to the black paintings, the fragmented complexity and materiality of his collages sat in relationship to the more unified fields of his colour paintings. Unlike the dominant flat paintings of the 'Field artists' these colour works reconciled optical energy with the physicality of his unique texturalism and gesturalism.

Clarke's works differ from much hard edge painting of the late 1960s and 70s in terms of content and technique but also in time, in speed; they are slower more contemplative. Stella's materialist maxim of 'what you see is what you get it' does not fit these works. Clarke's work contained a more romantic poetic and spiritual intention, which can be linked to the Asian and European mix explored by a number of Australian artists in the 1960s and 70s.

William Ferguson was an early exponent of acrylic painting in Melbourne. He still makes his own paints enabling a great refinement of colour intensity, range of mark making and gesture to be part of his nuanced visual language. For example in *Colours of the Desert Night* (2008) or *Landscape for the Nangu* (2010), touch and structure are not simply abstract but are informed by responses to the external world, an interpretation of what is out there in the world, translated through what is inside, that is a lived and contemplated reality transformed into painting.

In this regard Ferguson's work and sensibility to colour reminds me of Pierre Bonnard's painting where colour is sensitively applied, frozen in an apparent state of transition. Ferguson has a similar ability to adjust colour, he generates movement and light though colour and gesture. His works have a remarkable range of speeds from quick mark to scumble, glaze, layer and smudge, all with a controlled and intuitive purpose.

Ferguson was part of the first generation of artists who directly engaged with the Australia landscape via abstraction. He was to combine this with an ongoing concern in his art with sign, symbol and archetype. His work can be read as a reconciling of the phenomenal with the symbolic.

He was respectful of indigenous works in particular that of the central desert before it became fashionable or mainstream. Since the 1950s he has visited central desert and has been described as a translator of indigenous understandings into a western painting. Indigenous dreaming and western dreaming meet in his work. His work contains both external observation of colour and light and an internal sense of light. Ferguson is not a 'white fella doing blackfella art', his works have as many sources in Klee, Western

abstraction, Indian and Chinese painting. What is common to all his work is a universal questioning about the world and our place in it.

He has travelled widely in Asia and Europe forming an understanding of diverse practices. His continuing interest in the phenomena of colour continues to be married with his interest in archetypes. Although highly informed and open to contemporary practice Ferguson has continued to paint this place, Australia, and his place in it and it in him.

THE ART OF AND CRAFT OF PAINTING. ON
REFINEMENT AND SENSIBILITY. PLACES, TIMES
AND SPACES.

I do not wish to tell people how to look at or interpret what they see in this exhibition, but I would suggest that it is necessary to pay attention to what one sees, the how and the why and how this contributes to the what. In an age of cynicism we can do well by engaging with the art of these two artists.

David Thomas
Melbourne, August, 2010



Inside pages, Clockwise from Top Left
William Ferguson
Landscape for the Nangu, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
180 cm x 120 cm

Peter Clarke
Saeta. For March 30th, 1989
Acrylic on linen
152.5 x 152.5 cm

Outside Pages, Left to Right
Peter Clarke
Castille Suite, 1967
Mixed media on hardboard
148 x 185 cm

Peter Clarke
Yellow Opening, 1967
Mixed media on linen
153.5 cm x 183.5 cm

William Ferguson
Celestial Journey, 2009
Acrylic on canvas
84 x 100 cm

William Ferguson
Colours of the Desert Night, 2008
Acrylic on canvas
115 x 100 cm