

## Painting in Space

By Paul Bai

Painting should breathe and be alive, occupying the living space, existing as an ongoing event, a situation, a realm, continuously interacting with the audience. By standing in front of a cave painting, we are facing and communicating with a painting moment that lasts 40,000 years and continues, no future, past and present - we are in the painting zone.

“Something More” is a very unassuming and vague title for an exhibition based on abstract painting. This prompts one to think the artists are not really sure how to describe their work or the exhibition. I think this is precisely it, and is a good place to begin. What is ‘more’? More than what you see, more than the surface, put simply, more than painting.

Abstraction is more about how it was made than what it looks like. Black paintings by Kazimir Malevich, Ad Reinhardt, John McCracken and Günter Umberg are painted differently through respective methods, subsequently the surface and form of these black paintings are different, such differences have produced significant arguments toward the understanding of abstract painting or indeed painting in general. In addition to various painting constructions, spatial position of the artwork also played an important role in relation to the paintings’ content. Malevich placed the Black Square high up on the wall across the corner of the exhibition room, a sacred spot where a Russian Orthodox icon of a saint would sit in a traditional Russian home. John McCracken leans his black panel against a wall to create a bridge between painting and sculpture and Umberg’s painting often is placed off centre to emphasis the centre-less black void the painting represents.

Most of the paintings in this exhibition are coming off the wall and interact with the space where the audience stands. In 1922, German artist Erich Buchholz contextualised his geometric abstract paintings with the architectural settings in his Berlin studio. 40 years later, spatial contextualisation became one of the main features in Minimalism and Conceptual Art movement. Having said this, it doesn’t mean the exploration is over. Painting continues to live; sharing the space with us, remembering space is a changing and tentative entity.

This group of young artists each placed their research interest through the genre of abstraction. While acknowledging colour, form, texture and the material qualities in painting, these artists also recognised the importance of contextualising artwork with the immediate spatial context. It is easy even lazy to assume these works are a cross between sculpture and painting. Sculpture is not merely about the object, or the physical construction, painting is not only about the images, or surface. I am more inclined to describe these works as installation, an event, or a living moment.

Abstraction in Australia has travelled a rocky road. Not until Grace Crowley was in her 60s was she able to exhibit in a public gallery. Times have changed somewhat, and it is encouraging to see this group of young female abstraction artists forming an exhibition in Brisbane. Hailey Atkins, Sharna Barker, Natalie Lavelle, Dana Lawrie and Molly Smith, like artists before them continue to search and redefine the liminal moment between abstraction and real, art and life.

— I would like to congratulate and thank Outer Space for providing this exhibition opportunity as a steppingstone for these young graduates in their long artistic journey to come.