

OCTOBER 2024

Information - stimulation - inspiration



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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of the Nambucca Valley Arts Council

Editorial

This October NVAC newsletter covers some basics of the subject of abstract art. People either love it or hate it; understand it or are confused by it. They either know what it's all about or don't know; think they know or aren't sure. I once encouraged an elderly relative to paint in her twilight years. She had no fear of doing naïve landscapes and churned them out. I asked her to try an abstract because I thought she'd do well. The short version of how that went says she went into a mild state of shock at the very idea of doing something "way out". Just the word "abstract" is enough to scare the horses. She never had a go. Later, we feature a 92-y.o who did. Wow!

Real abstract art doesn't attempt to represent an accurate or camera-like depiction of a visual reality but instead uses shapes, colours, forms and gestural marks to depict a very different reality that appeals to the soul more than the intellect. Earlier (1917) Cubism is in fact abstract art. Specifically, it is a *type of* abstract art. That means that all cubist paintings are abstract, but not all abstract art is cubist. There are many types of abstract art that do not follow the Cubist school of painting. Just as jazz is the original American music, abstract expressionism is its art style. More needs to be understood about it—for the benefit of all mankind. C.H.

FROM THE PRESIDENT: Now that we've received the go-ahead for the mural outside the side door of the gallery, Keir and Ali Tupper have been beavering away and have come up with a draft. It depicts both the seaside and the bush and I'm sure it will look wonderful when completed. Watch this space. - Celia

Unlike art, craft can be perfected

A work of craft is typically made to fit a specific template, sometimes a painstakingly difficult template requiring years of hands-on apprenticeship to master. It's staggering to realise that nearly all of the truly great violins ever produced were made in the course of a few years by a few artisans living within a few blocks of each other in Cremona, a city famous for the violins and violas made there in the 16th-18th centuries by the Amati family and their pupil Antonio Stradivari. The accomplishments of Antonio



Stradivari and his fellow craftsmen point up one real difference between art and craft. With craft, **perfection is possible (!!)** In that sense, it's clear that the Western definition of craft closely matches the Eastern definition of art. In Eastern cultures, art that faithfully carries forward the tradition of an elder master is honoured, whereas in the West, unfortunately, it's frowned upon and considered to be derivative, copying.

JENNY THORBY'S LINOPRINTS



I've been a member of the Nambucca Valley Art Group for seven years and this is the third time I've been the Artist of the Month. In this exhibition, I've chosen to show just my Linoprints, both old and new. Originally, I was only going to show black-and-white Linoprints, but I couldn't resist the urge to colour them, so now I'll combine both monochrome as well as coloured. My most recent prints focus on Australian wildflowers in baskets, a subject I'll never tire of making. I love to travel, particularly around Australia. It's nothing unusual to see me photographed amongst a field of wildflowers. I'm looking forward to getting back to Western Australia where the greatest displays of wildflowers happen.

Other subjects include birds and images from Tasmanian bush-walks I've done. I really hope and trust you'll enjoy the exhibition.

Jenny's exhibition will open on 1st October with a 10.00am morning tea.



FEATURE EXPO FOR OCT-NOV "FLOWER POWER"

This will be opening on 1st October 2024 as well as Jenny's exhibition, come and meet the artists whilst having a top-notch cup of tea, some nibbles and a bit of top-notch shop talk.



Allison Tupper



Christine Hamilton

WHAT'S ON IN THE AREA

Urunga ArtSpace: "Watershed" 16th October to 3rd November – Small Sculpture Prize 14th September to 13th October 2024.

South West Rocks Community Gallery: entries for Members' Exhibition 30th September.

Gladstone: Martin Hanson Memorial Art Awards 24 – entries 1st to 5th October.

Bellingen Nexus: "Just Because" 6th October to 1st November Rose Burke – Yvonne Kiely – Jane Whitfield – in the Main Gallery. Chris Campbell in the Studio.

Sawtell Art Gallery: 28th September to 27th October "Fashion – Faces & Figures"

Coffs Harbour Art Group: "What do you see?" Abstract exhibition 20th September to 4th Dec.



Avant Garde ... the real thing

A special report
by ace sleuth Christine Hamilton

A visitor asked me why there are so few abstract paintings in the Stringer Gallery. One reason is that it just doesn't make sense to sensible observers. Normal people, that is. Over the next few months I'll be reporting more widely on this subject. Some context would be handy at this early juncture to show why it's not all the rage today that it could be. Several highly traumatising things have happened in the last century or so that might have changed the world radically as well as our good selves had we all known what they were and understood what they meant. If you did understand, you were considered a weirdo. Scholars maintain that the Great War of 1914-18 did irreparable damage to the human psyche that remains festering, untreated, today. Our self-confidence took a hit.

In 1901, quantum physicist Max Planck and others made a discovery that turned Newtonian physics on its head: "I regard consciousness as fundamental. Matter is derived from consciousness. Science can't solve the ultimate mystery of nature because we ourselves are a part of the mystery we're trying to solve." We aren't ambulant cadavers but mind – pure consciousness, albeit somewhat dulled. (...) The news fell flat. We remained indifferent. Nicola Tesla agreed with the quantum physicists: "The day science begins to study non-physical phenomena it will make more progress in one decade than it has in all the previous centuries of its existence." Today, most people know nothing about it and probably care even less. We remained in the dark, shut off from psychic evolution. It led Carl Sagan to observe: (quote) "One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We're no longer interested in finding out the truth." (unquote)

At around the same time, Sigmund Freud and others discovered that, in addition to our long evident conscious mind, we have a far more elusive, mysterious and extensive subconscious mind. If that fact seems obvious to many now, it's still classed by "normal society" in the same category as astrology and Tarot cards. William James, Harvard psychologist, said that the greatest leap forward in a century was the discovery of the subconscious mind. Recognition of the fact that the subconscious aspect of mind can be directed and controlled by the conscious part of the mind **is the greatest discovery of all time.** *And it happened on our watch* (—or close!) Early last century, the greatest thinker on art, Carl Jung, offered this to the world: "The artist's life cannot be otherwise than full of conflicts, for two forces are at war within him; on the one hand, the common human longing for happiness, satisfaction and security in life, and, on the other, a ruthless passion for creation which may go so far as to override every personal desire. There are hardly any exceptions to the rule that a person must pay dearly for the divine gift of creative fire." Cubism arose at this time. Later, in the 1940s, trouble was brewing in New York City, with the advent of "anarchists, troublemakers and dissidents" to the art world, knocking Paris off its pedestal as Art World Central. The French were delighted to see they'd been eclipsed by philistine Anglo crackpots.

That new art movement went on to **become the biggest revolution in art in all of human history**—bigger than the Renaissance and the Enlightenment combined. It was called Abstract Expressionism (AE) or Action Art and was led by fifteen people like Jackson (Jack the Dripper) Pollack. Like all the events listed here, it happened as a starburst then faded out, killed off by the biggest joke in all art history—Pop Art, led by Warhol the Warthog. Pop Art degenerated into the self-delusional farce called Postmodernism. The people shown below understood the queer universe we live in and went deep into that abyss. The confusion, lack of understanding and fear-filled ridicule they were served was, akas, to be expected. Today, it's more than likely that too much abstract painting is done superficially, the way orthodox figurative painting was done before the Abstract Expressionists' revolt.



Compared to those heady days of mid-last century, art today is at a low ebb—in an existential rut, a state of profound decay and decline. Because capitalism and democracy are mutually exclusive, the market economy won and impoverished art in an abominable way. Art critic Lewis Hyde's central theory is that true art must stand outside the market economy, and therefore presents a serious problem for the artist forced to live in a world where everything is considered a commodity that has a price. It all makes perfect sense when expressed in dollars and cents.

There really is no place for genuine art in our time, and that's why art will outlive it, Hyde emphasized. "There's something primal and fundamentally human in art and the

psychological and poetic economies that sustain it. Both are necessary functions in the quality of human life." The predicament we're all in today won't allow artists to rise out of the rut of quasi-irrelevance unless and until there's a general rise in awareness and responsibility across the global population. It may happen before we render Earthlife extinct but there are no more grounds for optimism about that today than when Pollack's crusaders depleted and spent themselves. They drank themselves to death, too aware of the dysfunction of the modern world. The most obvious question is: **Was their sacrifice to have been all for nothing?**

"It is a widely accepted notion among painters that it does not matter what one paints as long as it is well painted. This is the essence of academic painting. However, there is no such thing as good painting about nothing."

MARK ROTKO

Why abstract art is a turn-off for some:

There are a few key reasons why some smart people may dislike or be sceptical of abstract art:

1. Lack of representational meaning: Abstract art does not depict recognizable objects or scenes from the real world. This can be challenging for those who prefer art that has a clear, representational meaning or subject matter.
2. Perceived lack of skill: Some argue that abstract art requires less technical skill compared to more representational forms of art. This leads some to view it as less impressive or demanding.
3. Subjectivity and ambiguity: The meaning and interpretation of abstract art is highly subjective. This ambiguity can be frustrating for those who prefer art with clearer, more concrete messages or narratives.
4. Unfamiliarity and discomfort with the unknown: Abstract art often pushes the boundaries of traditional art forms. The unfamiliarity and discomfort with the unconventional nature of abstract art can lead some to dismiss or dislike it.
5. Preference for realism and naturalism: Many intelligent people are drawn to art forms that realistically depict the natural world. Abstract art's departure from realism can make it less appealing to those with this aesthetic preference.

Ultimately, the dislike of abstract art often comes down to personal preferences, cognitive styles, and familiarity with unconventional artistic forms. While some highly intelligent people embrace and appreciate abstract art, others may find it challenging or unsatisfying compared to more representational art.

The creation of art is not the fulfilment of a need but the creation of a need. The world never needed Beethoven's Fifth Symphony until he created it. Now we could not live without it. - Louis I Kahn (architect)

Ways to appreciate abstract art better:

1. Approach it with an open mind: Try to let go of preconceptions and judgments about what art "should" be. Approach abstract art with curiosity, openness and a willingness to explore.
2. Focus on the formal elements: Pay attention to the use of color, line, shape, texture, and composition. Analyse how the artist has used these elements to create a visual experience.
3. Engage your senses: Look closely and let the artwork evoke emotions, sensations, or memories within you. Don't just try to "understand" it intellectually. It needs more than that.
4. Seek out information: Read about the artist's intentions, the historical context, and the techniques used. This background can provide helpful context.
5. Make personal connections: Reflect on how the artwork makes you feel. What does it remind you of? How does it relate to your own experiences?
6. Allow yourself time: Don't expect to "get" an abstract work immediately. Spend time with it, come back to it, and let your understanding gradually develop. It comes bit by bit.
7. Attend artist talks or museum tours: Hearing directly from artists or art experts can provide valuable insights into the creative process and meaning behind abstract works.
8. Start with more accessible abstract art: Begin with pieces that have recognizable elements or evoke familiar imagery, then gradually explore more purely abstract works.

The key is to approach abstract art with patience, curiosity, and a willingness to experience it on an intuitive, emotional level, rather than expecting a clear, literal meaning. With an open mind, abstract art can reveal rich layers of meaning.

