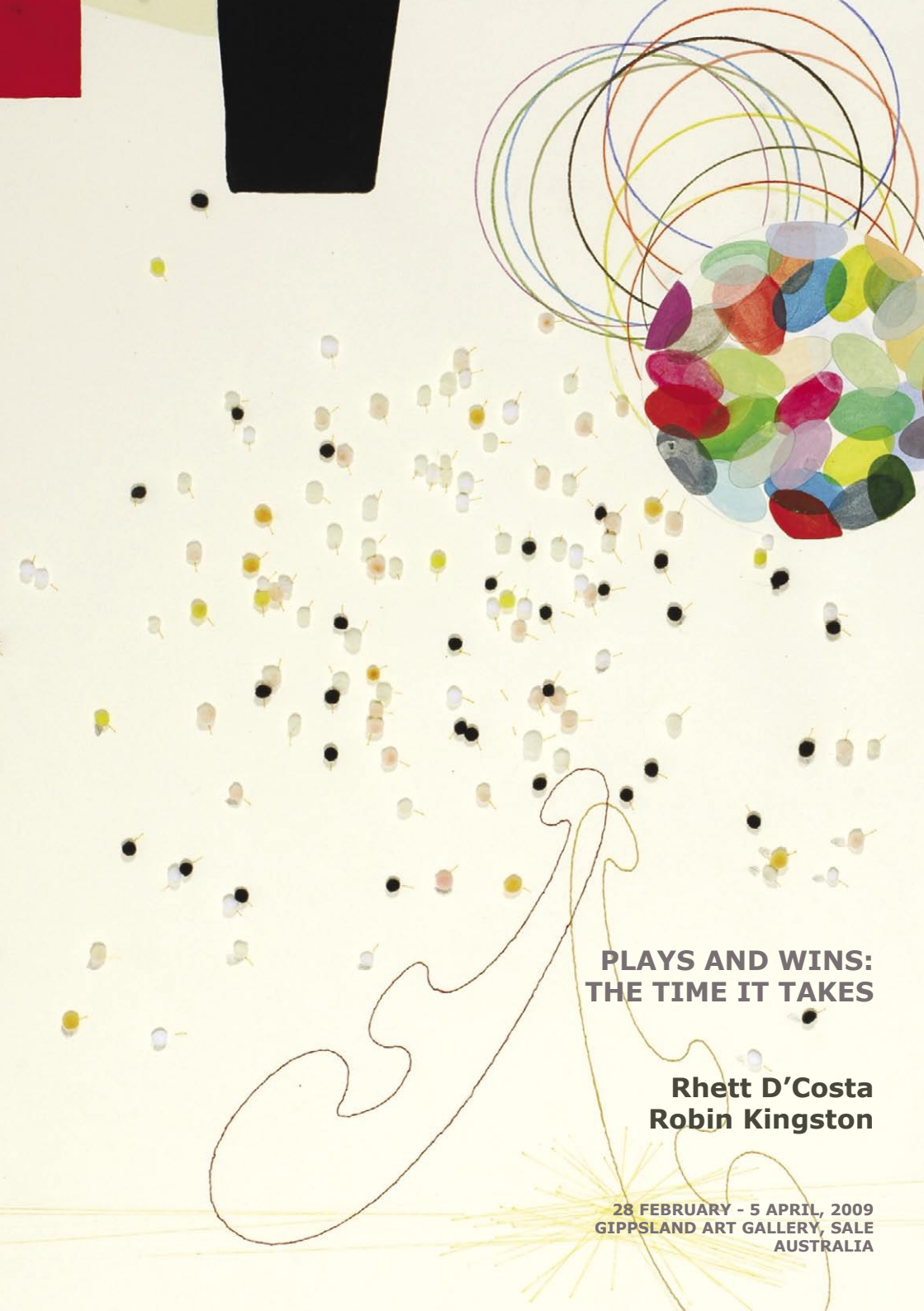


PLAYS AND WINS: THE TIME IT TAKES

Rhett D'Costa
Robin Kingston

28 FEBRUARY - 5 APRIL, 2009
GIPPSLAND ART GALLERY, SALE
AUSTRALIA

The raw data of the unconscious remains equally relevant today in contemporary art as it did when the Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists first actively traversed this fertile ground. The instantaneity of abstraction holds universal connotations, constantly drawing us back into a deeper reflection of what it is to be creative.

Robin Kingston and Rhett D'Costa tread knowingly into these realms and yet their work delivers an astute awareness of the process of drawing and painting – the inherent subtleties, ambiguities and fluctuations of these media and their propensity for articulating order and disorder. Each of their works exist as a meditative reverie, revealing the interface between individual expression and the universal experience of being human.

Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, is delighted to present Plays & Wins and acknowledges the wonderful work of Martina Copley who first presented these two artists' works together. The luminosity of these works - their simultaneous intensity and subtlety - reveals an alchemic process by the artists' hand, manifest as playful and winning treasures.

Claire Watson
Curator - Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, Victoria
October, 2008

The Time it Takes

There is a fable which has come down in Chinese art literature which seems expressly designed to illuminate an aesthetic insight. One version goes like this. A great painting Master was summoned by the Emperor for a first-hand demonstration of his skill. Carefully and deliberately he set out paper and brush, poured water and ground his ink. Then, with five strokes of the brush he brought to life on the paper a bamboo plant, stepped back, and bowed. The Emperor, no connoisseur, marvelled at the speed with which the artist had so perfectly delineated the plant. "Ah, but, your Majesty", the painter explained, "it has taken me many years to paint this. The five strokes are the result of thirty years of work."

In mid career D'Costa and Kingston present us with the fruits of a prolonged, sustained and organic development. The work in this exhibition showcases their ability to evolve work which represents the expressive and visual summation of a series of both long term and short term decisions, anchored in a wholistic approach to practice but also connected by threads as delicate and strong as spider's webs to times and places.

In viewing this work I suggest we have a sense of the emplotment of space - whether that be the space of the substrate sheet of paper, or the space of a structure which articulates three-dimensionally the spatial references of painting - and of a complex set of relational forms and colours which move and satisfy us, not only in their givenness, but also in our intuitive grasp of the incremental depth of practice in handling materials and exercising aesthetic judgement which they represent.

Artists from both East and West have always valorized the gains of slowness, of length as well as depth of engagement. This is not at all simply or merely in the sometimes misunderstood sense of an apprehension of time consumed, effort expended and a correlated economic value, but rather demonstrates a grasp of the value of the execution process encompassing both thinking and making, and the possibilities it offers of conveying a complexity of subtleties which are suspended within the meditative engagement which whole-hearted cognition demands. Instant coffee, microwaved meals, disposable art are readily available, but not only the nutritional value but the multisensorial richness of Slow Food and slow art offer an infinitely expansive experience which is aborted in the quest for instant gratification.

The use of shimmering surfaces - sparkle, subtle luminescence, glancing glimmer which the artists seek through a variety of materials and techniques is also a way of gently frustrating our grasp for quick resolution. Traditionally, and notably in periods when the gaze of the artist and viewer were attuned to a spiritual reality, gold, coloured glass as window or mosaic and gems offered material metaphors for entry into an alternative reality and encouraged the viewer into a state attuned to a mutable time/space, dissolving and reforming before the eyes. It provides a glimpse through a peripheral vision which cannot be grasped and quantified, activities which involve an externalised, objectified relationship to things, but rather it presses on us with the insistence of an engulfing cloud the necessity of an abandonment of the boundaries between subject and object.

The Wager

Number, sequence, line and grid; formal components undergird these works. From the time of the establishment of ancient Greek culture, mathematics and geometry have been equated with the ultimately Real, and the role of abstraction has often been equated with the revelation of that reality.

How terrifying, from such a viewpoint, the abyss of unknowing opened up by Gödel's apparently logically irrefutable first and second incompleteness theorems.

Yet it was the brilliant mathematician Blaise Pascal who proposed the famous wager:

"'God is, or He is not.' But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separated us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? Let us estimate these two chances. If

you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is."

It was not within the realm of logic, but in the realm in which art has its being that Pascal proclaimed, "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing."

The artist gambles with innumerable factors in the creation of a work. Duchamp's advice to John Cage on playing chess "Don't just play your side of the game, play both sides" surely applies equally well to the game of art where the presence of aleatory conditions modulates outcomes within a network of possibilities. Pascal's wager is one he believed could not be lost; to engage in the play is already to win.

Threads

Both Kingston and D'Costa have referred directly and indirectly to textiles in their past and present work. The multiple allusions of threads and their structures of linkage are one aspect of this interest; their readiness for deploying rhythmic patterning is another. In addition, textiles subtly allude to the rich cultural resonances coded in the artist's personal and aesthetic trajectories. Kingston's grids evoke sources in Weiner Wërkstatte fabrics and New York architecture, serendipitously united in the Neue Galerie. D'Costa's interest in Indian culture with its proliferation of textiles and patterns has the refraction of distance via Singapore and Australia. In this exhibition these sources dwell covertly, subsumed into an evolved aesthetic.

In experiencing art we, as Louis Arnaud Reid puts it "know feelingly." He writes "conscious experience in human beings includes bodily sensations, actions of various kinds, thinking, imagination, having moral and aesthetic experiences, maybe religious ones, coming to know and coming to terms with the external world, ourselves and other people... Feeling is the immediate expression of indwelling in that conscious life in its most inclusive sense."

The artists' investment of time in developing work is an offering to us, as well as themselves, of a gift which can be reciprocated in kind in terms of openness to the experience of knowing feelingly. This gamble cannot be lost.

Dr Sophia L Errey
Melbourne 2008

1 The First Theorem states, "Any effectively generated theory capable of expressing elementary arithmetic cannot be both consistent and complete. In particular, for any consistent, effectively generated formal theory that proves certain basic arithmetic truths, there is an arithmetical statement that is true, but not provable in the theory."
2 Pascal Pensée. 233
3 Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point. Pensées, marginal note.
4 Louis Arnaud Reid "Intuition and Art" Journal of Aesthetic Education Vol 15, No.3, Special Issue: Aesthetic Education Conference 1980 Roehampton Institute, Southlands College July 1981 pp. 27-38.

RHETT D'COSTA

Born in Bombay, India, Rhett D'Costa studied a Bachelor of Arts [Fine Art, Painting] and a Master of Arts [by Research] at RMIT University in Melbourne. D'Costa is currently undertaking a Phd at RMIT University. His research project is 'Shimmering Spaces: Investigating the relationship between Western abstract painting and Indian material culture, through studio practice.' D'Costa is lecturing in Painting in the School of Art at RMIT University. In 2003 he was a finalist in the Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria. D'Costa has participated in several solo and group exhibitions including Carte Blanche – A Drawing Exhibition, Alliance Francaise, Singapore, 1999; Works on Paper, Sungshin Museum, Seoul, Korea, 2000 and Possible Worlds, Switchback Gallery, Monash University, Gippsland, 2007 (with Robin Kingston). Rhett D'Costa's work is part of private collections nationally and internationally.

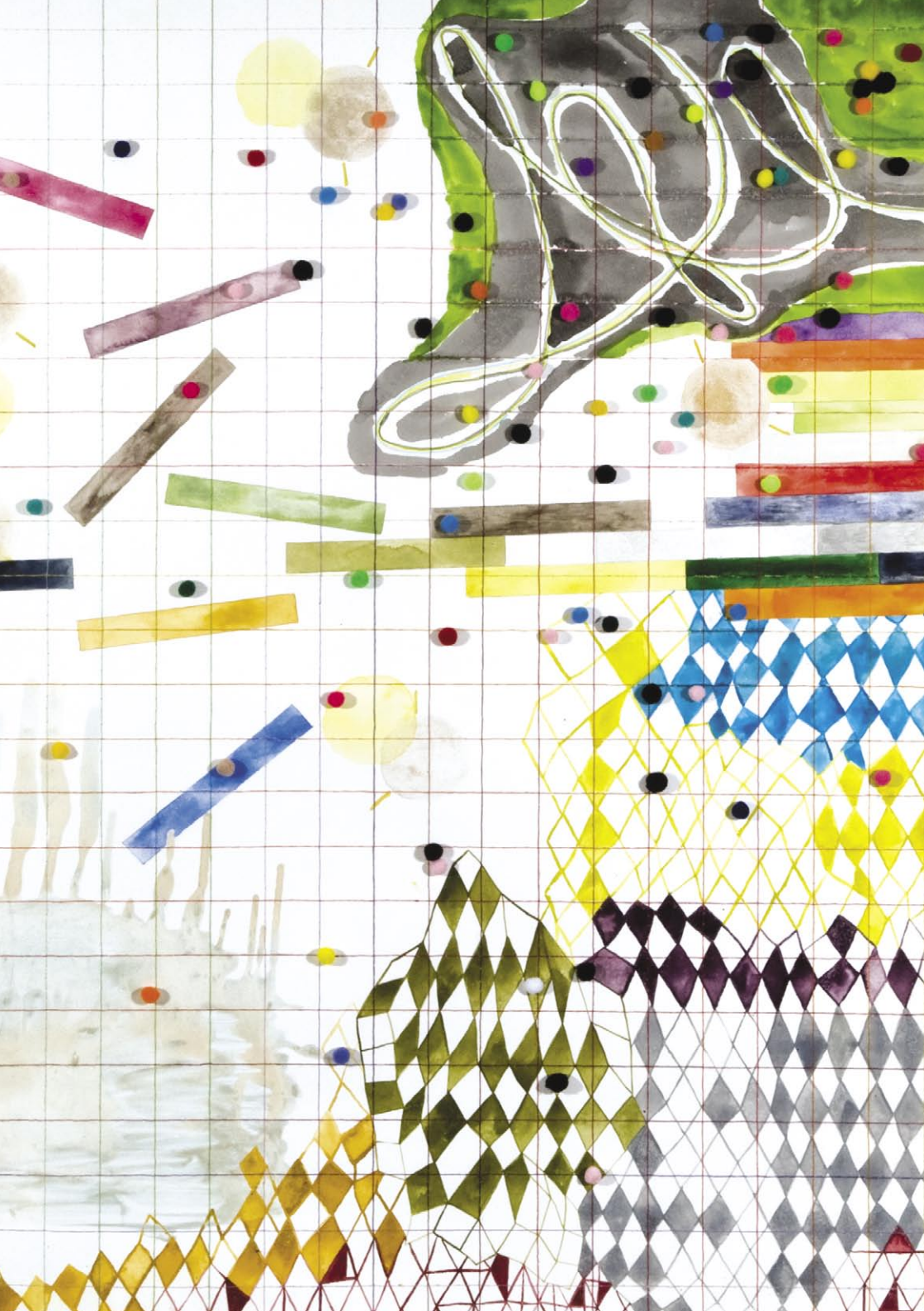
Rhett D'Costa is represented by Gallery 101, Melbourne, Australia.

ROBIN KINGSTON

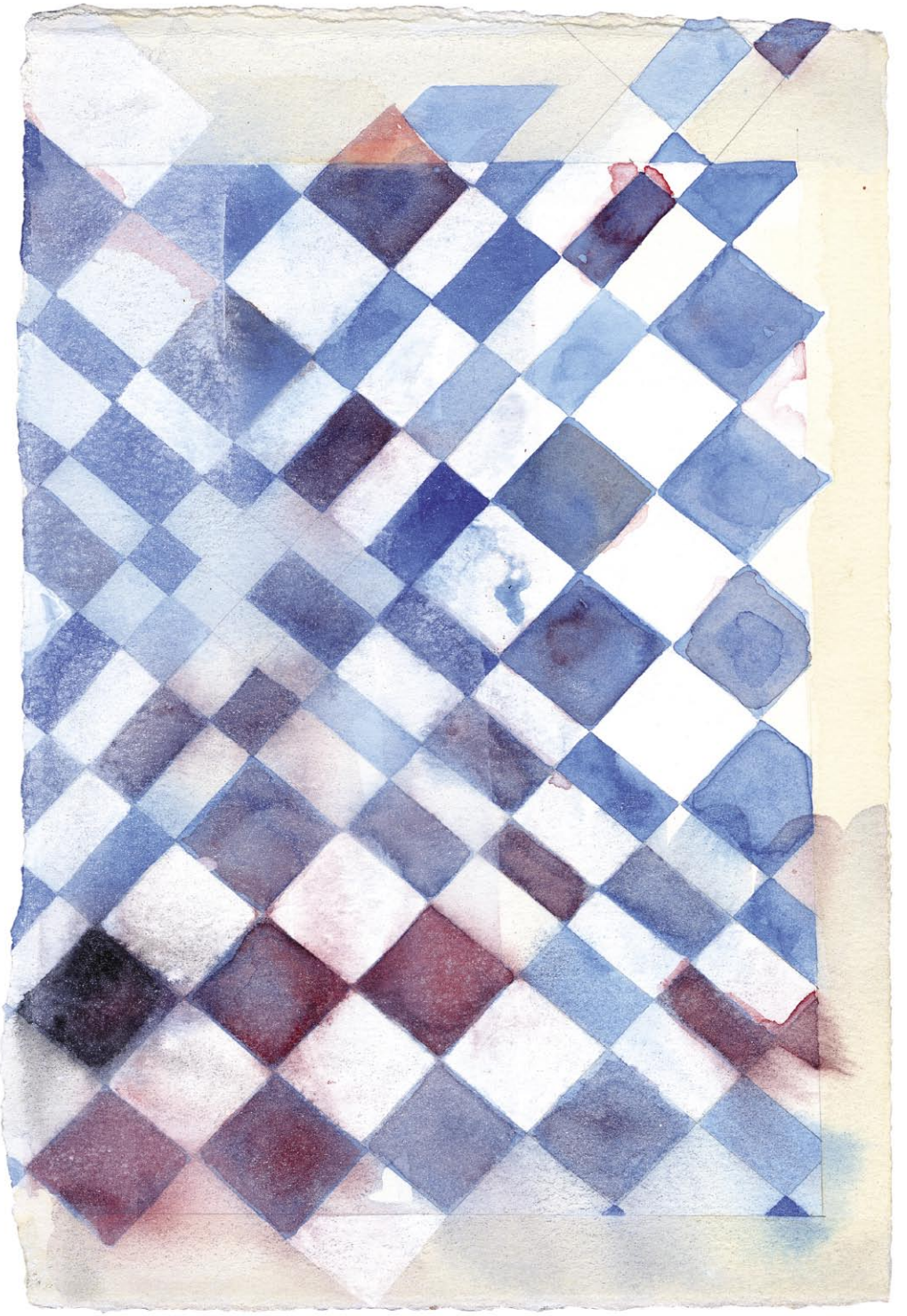
In the 1980's, Kingston painted and exhibited in New York City. She studied at the New York Studio School and was awarded several scholarships for residencies and further studies in the United States. In 1975, Kingston received a Diploma of Fine Art in painting from the East Sydney Technical College (Canberra). In 1995 she completed a Master of Arts (Visual Art) by Research at Monash University and has recently completed her PhD at RMIT University on the roles of intuitive and rational thought in the construction of abstract painting. Kingston is currently lecturing in painting and coordinator for first year painting, abstraction and the New York Study Tour within the School of Art at RMIT University. Kingston has participated in several solo and group exhibitions in Australia and internationally including Where Things Stop and Start, School of Art Gallery. RMIT University, 2008; The Un-Limiting Conditions, School of Art Gallery & Project Space, RMIT University. Melbourne, 2007; Possible Worlds, Switchback Gallery, Monash University, Gippsland, 2007 (with Rhett D'Costa); X Marks the Spot at the School of Art Gallery, RMIT Melbourne, 2006; Drawing RMIT in Seoul, Korea, 2000; and Skowhegan: A Ten Year Retrospective 1975-1985, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, U.S.A. Robin Kingston's work is represented in public and private collections nationally and internationally including the National Gallery of Victoria; Art Bank, Australia; and the Westpac Collection, New York, N.Y.

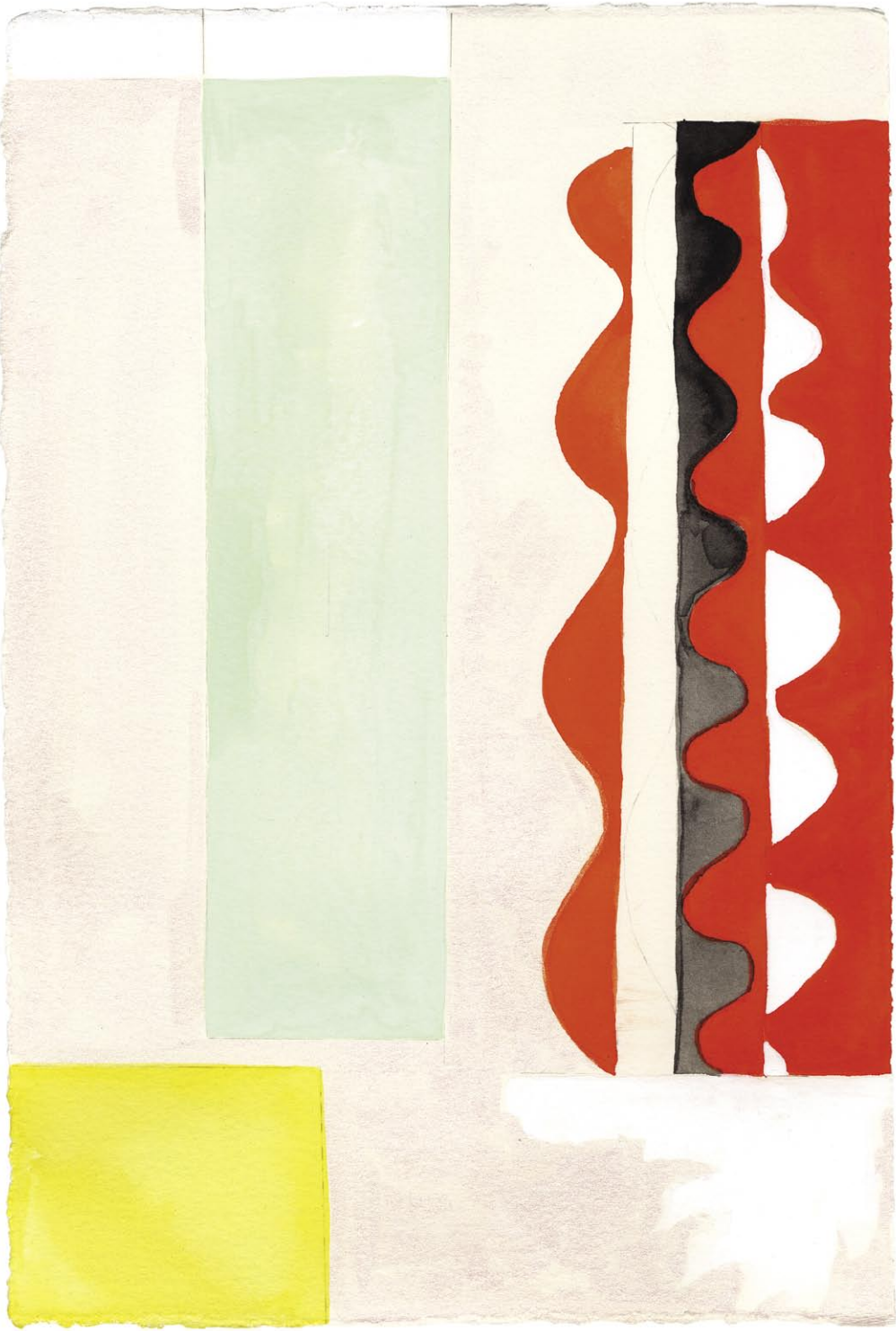












beginning in the middle
artists Rhett D'Costa, Robin Kingston
in conversation with exhibition curator,
Martina Copley.

The creative process is about movement and linkage, and this occurs in many ways – in stillness and leaps, in tentative reaches, by circling back and even by moving in many directions at once. It is an uncertain trajectory. How does the notion of 'not-knowing' figure in your practices?

RK Not knowing is a very important concept in my practice. It lets me maintain an openness to possibilities within the work and, in allowing the work to take its course, culminates in a work I could not have envisaged when I first began. The 'not knowing' allows me to surprise even myself. It gives me a fluid set of visual, spatial and material relationships to analyse as I move toward the completion of the artwork, relationships that have been developed during the process of making.

RD The juggling act of intent and the unknown is something I always am dealing with. However, this phrase 'not-knowing', which we often use, is quite odd. Ultimately this knowing and not knowing becomes the same thing. We seem to talk about the value of this 'not knowing', but really, I try not to privilege one over the other. Both are important in the role of art-making. In my work, I deliberately show my measuring and planning in pencil drawings. I don't attempt to conceal these. In the same way I don't attempt to conceal or correct 'errors'. I like to show this in the work – these decisions and adjustments are important.

Can you talk about your relation to your chosen materials? Is there such a thing as 'thinking painting' or 'drawing-ness'? In what ways does the work let itself be made?

RK A material investigation is a key driver within my practice. I deliberately keep my range of materials quite simple. Whether I am working on walls or on paper, I use graphite, gouache, watercolour and occasionally acrylic. The properties of the materials are stretched, almost to the point of breaking down and in ways they are not traditionally used. It is through this material investigation that the work 'lets itself be made'. There is no hierarchical difference between the word/activity of drawing and painting within my practice. They are the same.

RD I always think about my work in relation to ideas and processes to do with painting and drawing. I don't think about painting as just a medium but rather as state of thinking.

What role does colour play in your work?

RK Personal history, experience and cultural roots play a big part in the work – especially with regard to colour choices. Colour is very important in the work – the combinations, repetition of, the accents and the overall colour the painting emits – a kind of aura that envelopes the viewer. My work also emanates from the history of abstraction – especially American Abstraction which of course has its roots in European Abstraction – much of it from the experience of seeing the works directly. My knowledge does not come from reproductions. I am interested in the experiential. The decorative arts are important too, as the work is fanciful, functional and elevates the everyday to something special. That is inspirational.

RD I think about colour in various ways as it plays an important role in my practice. I think about colour in terms of my ethnicity and mnemonically. I was born in India and having returned on numerous occasions, I am aware of local colour through textiles and garments, festivals and bazaar culture. If I see a pale pink, olive green and a gold thread in the border of a silk Baranasi sari, it just feels right. I think about colour formally; as warm and cool, complimentary, discordant and harmonious. Sometimes I use colours systematically, sometimes pragmatically. For example in a particular work I have used the number coding on the paint tubes 1 - 40 and gridded the work using this code. Sometimes I think about and use colour aesthetically, sometimes emotionally.

Once inside a work, finding the way through might be described as an imaginary and difficult self-devised game. How important are limitations to the flow of your creative process? Is there such a thing as 'right' practice?

RD No there is no such thing as a right practice. I wish there was. Except having said this, works do fail. Decisions are made and criteria put into place, which allow for this decision making. I always believed that if I could remove doubt from the creative process in art making, it would make everything so much easier. Except that doubt is the essential ingredient in the creative process.

Limitations are crucial in my practice, but I ensure that the rules and limitations are not static and predetermined. Every work has its own unique set of problems with its own unique set of solutions. I remind myself of this with each work. I am not attempting to find a formula or an answer. Getting it right in one work does necessarily make it any easier in the next one. It becomes a new set of rules, limitations and expectations.

RK No. There is no such thing as 'right' practice. I may start a work with a simple formal instruction such as 'Make a big orange rectangle' as I can envisage it. Everything that follows is relational to that first move. I can also begin with an activity such as making a grid and then become bored with the activity or the colour or be interrupted and then when I return I see there is 'enough' of that and so change the structure or strategy I am using. The works become a record of decisions which are sometimes still decipherable by the viewer if they take the time.

The 'work' of art is where 'things happen'. In what ways do different kinds of time enter into your work?

RD The 'time it takes' refers to both the process of thinking and making for the artist as well as the viewer's reception of the work. Time is particularly important to me as I think about the relationship between things that are fast and slow. Ideas of 'fast and slow' and 'memory and forgetting' have interested me for a long time in the context of my artistic practice. The time and labour it takes to make is important, I don't look for ways to speed this process up.

RK I think about different kinds of viewing and the time it takes both to construct and to view, and the kinds of experience I want the viewer to have when remembering.

'Plays and Wins' suggests a game and implies the risk of failure. What do you know before you start? How do you know what questions to ask? Or when a work is finished?

RD Yes, it is a game, a riddle, a gamble, a paradox. All good questions. With experience you begin to recognize that you don't need to find answers. Not because you are not thinking about the answers, or seeking them out, but rather that it is more about the questions than the answers and you learn to become more accepting of this situation.

RK I know before I start that I work with a formal visual abstract vocabulary - a structure that has a beginning, but no defined end. I do not ask questions as such, or ones I can define before I begin. I know I work with repetition, seriality and many of the formal aspects of the art vocabulary such as line, colour, form, scale, emphasis...

I work with 'being present' in the art making process which I define as intuition. It is an immersive state that I step out of at times to make aesthetic and contextual decisions about the work.

There is a great risk of failure in the work, especially the performative aspect of painting a temporal work directly on the wall in the few days before an exhibition opens. I will have been to the space in the months leading up to the exhibition; considered many factors and have some strategy on how to begin. Yet I will have no idea how the completed work will look and only have a defined amount of time to paint it. Because of these aspects the process has its own kind of excitement which may be called risk.

List of works

cover
Rhett D'Costa
Pink Bloom (detail), 2006
76.5 x 56.5 cm
Japanese Watercolour, Acrylic Polymer, Graphite, Pencil, Acrylic Baubles, Polycotton Thread, on Stonehenge Paper

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Rhett D'Costa
Auspicious Emblems (detail), 2007
76.5 x 56.5 cm
Japanese Watercolour, Acrylic Polymer, Graphite, Swarovski Crystals, Polycotton Thread, Linen Thread on S. Waterford Paper

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Rhett D'Costa
Satellite (detail), 2007
76.5 x 56.5 cm
Chinese Ink, Japanese Watercolour, Acrylic Polymer, Graphite, Pencil, Cotton Thread, Polycotton Thread, Sequins on Stonehenge Paper

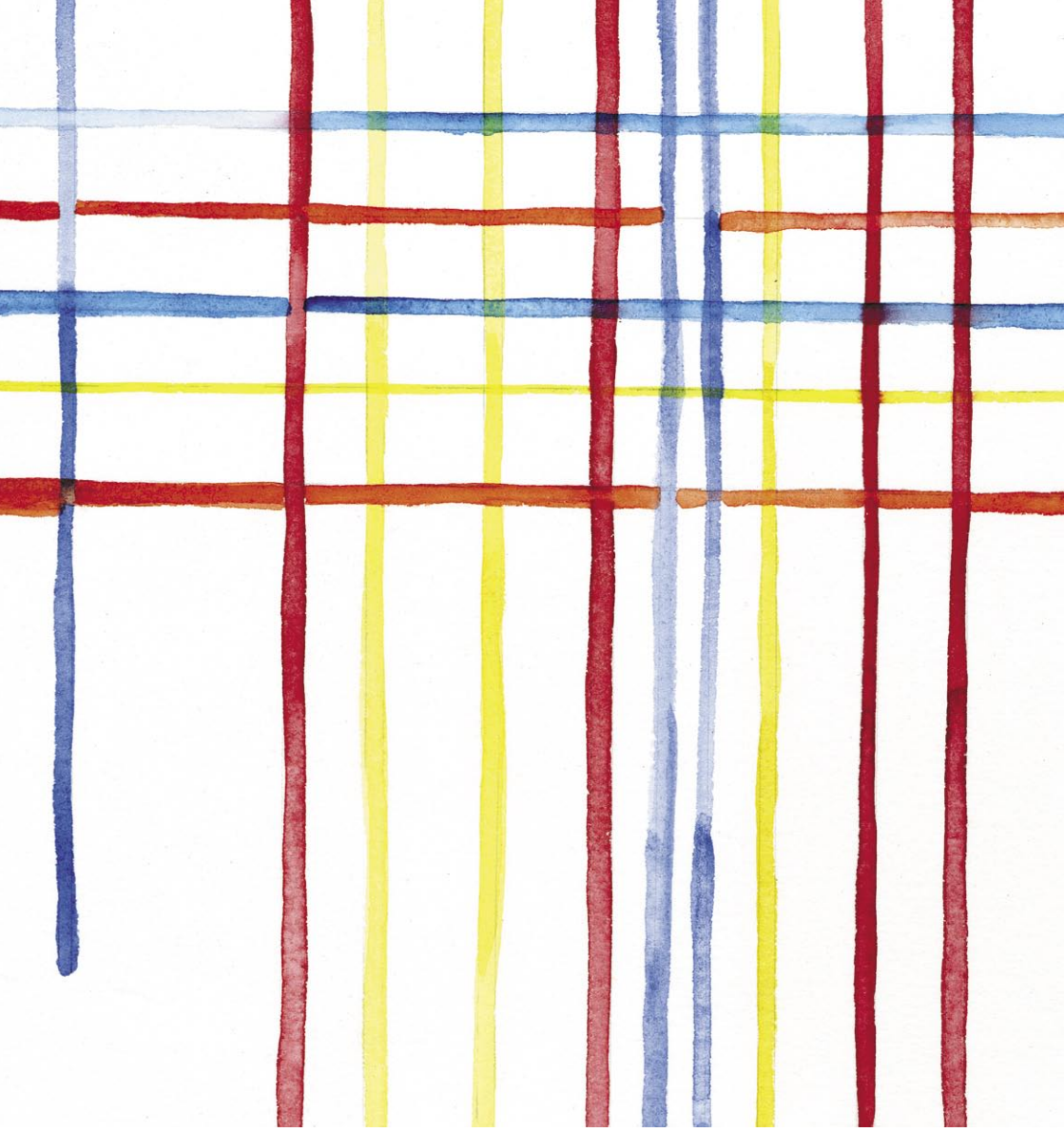
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Rhett D'Costa
Faster Slower (detail), 2008
100 x 110 cm
Acrylic Polymer, Japanese Watercolour, Chinese Ink, Graphite, Texta Marker, Polycotton Thread, Cotton Thread, Swarovski Crystals, Acrylic Baubles on 400gsm Corona Paper

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Robin Kingston
Untitled. Late Buddha, 2007
28 x 19 cm
Graphite, gouache and watercolour on paper

page 8
Robin Kingston
Untitled. Skewed Blue Grid, 2007
28 x 19 cm
Graphite, gouache and watercolour on paper

page 9
Robin Kingston
Untitled. Yellow Square #10, 2007
29.5 x 19.5 cm
irregular dimensions
Graphite, gouache and watercolour on paper

back cover
Robin Kingston
Untitled. Kelly and M (detail), 2007
56 x 76 cm
Graphite, gouache and watercolour on paper



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