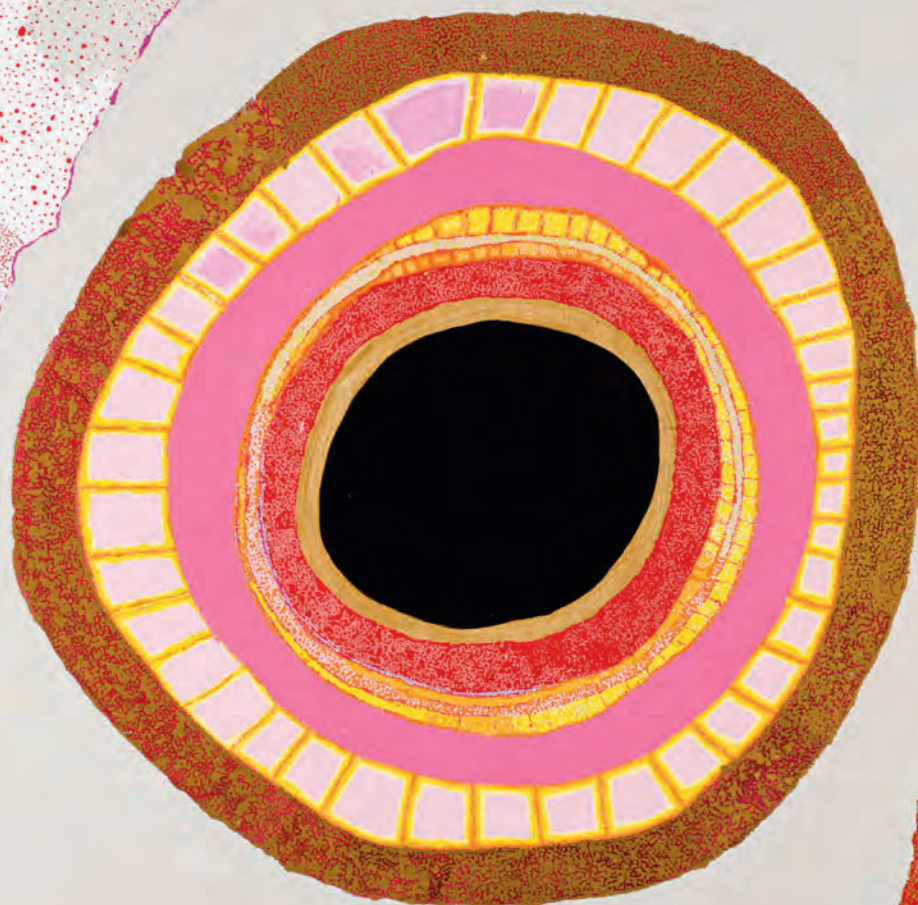


ART COLLECTOR



THE NATSIAA ISSUE

Patricia Piccinnini + Trevor Vickers + Martin King
+ Julia Gutman + Tawhai Rickard + more



HOLDING THE ANTI-ABSTRACTION ARMY AT THE GATE

Trevor Vickers' decades-long commitment to formalist painting is a masterclass in visual subtlety. Now, at 80, the critically acclaimed painter finds himself perfectly positioned for the current theoretical moment known as Metamodernism.

WORDS | **REX BUTLER**

PHOTOGRAPHY | **BIANCA WOOLHOUSE**

The last **Trevor Vickers** painting I saw was *Untitled* (2002), hanging near the entrance of the Charles Nodrum-curated *Aspects of Abstraction* exhibition at the Hawthorn Town Hall Gallery in late 2024. *Untitled* looks like the opened pages of a book set against a black background with a thin dark line running down the centre. But the off-white pages shift subtly against the yellow plane behind them, and at the top is a horizontal white strip that is not quite the colour of the pages below. And the thin dark line, which might appear to correspond to the spine of the book, runs across this white strip above, but stops short of the yellow strip below. The effect is at once to lift the off-white centre plane off the yellow and flatten it against the black.

It's a rarefied, refined exercise, whose old-school formalist discipline seems aptly captured by the rigid straight lines that make

up the work, almost like Vickers is taking a ruler to our usually lazy and unexercised vision. I am reminded of a work by **Edgar Degas** I often show to my modern art class, in which an old male ballet teacher sits with his cane held out above a young ballerina's ankle, ready to lightly tap it if she rests it on the rail halfway up the wall while holding her leg out perpendicular in an exercise en barre. It is we who are being tapped by Vickers the ballet master, told to stand up and remain engaged in front of his work, observing and responding to the smallest of visual subtleties.

It was intriguing to see Vickers' work in an exhibition called *Aspects of Abstraction*, which was a large survey of the various movements or moments of abstract art in Australia from the 1940s to the 1990s, without the curator emphasising any one in particular.





Thus we had Tachisme, Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, abstraction from the landscape and Colour Field, without one being privileged or any necessary historical continuum connecting one to the other. And we see something similar in the wonderful monograph published on Vickers in 2016, *Trevor Vickers: Untitled Painting*, by Art Collective WA. In his introductory essay, *Five Decades of Art*, **Andrew Gaynor** makes the point that, while the “outside world” has moved through “Conceptual Art, Performance, Installation, Post-Object, ‘the death of painting’, Postmodernism and Post-Postmodernism”, Vickers, having throughout “remained true to his original principles regarding formalist abstraction”, now finds himself perfectly positioned for the “current theoretical moment known as Metamodernism”.

Of course, there are all kinds of revealing biographical facts behind Vickers’ practice, from which any commentator can take their pick. For me, we would start with the meeting with English expatriate art student **Mel Ramsden** in Melbourne in 1963, who got Vickers interested in painting after he had first trained as a telecommunications technician. Then there are the artist’s friendships with **Robert Hunter**, **Paul Partos** and **Dale Hickey** that eventually led to him showing at Pinacotheca in Melbourne. Then his being selected for *The Field* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968, and then for all of its subsequent reboots and restagings. Then his leaving for England after receiving a Creative Fellowship award in 1977, where he stayed for almost twenty years. Then his return in 1995 to Western Australia, where he had lived as a young boy and has remained ever since. We might also mention his long relationship with Charles Nodrum, with whom he has been showing since 1990, and maybe the fact that he still has not had a state gallery retrospective, unlike other artists of his generation like **Janet Dawson** and **Lesley Dumbrell**.

Artistically, we might pick two moments from his career that cast a revealing light on his practice today. The first is that in the late 1960s, undoubtedly drawing on the carpentry skills that would later come in good use in England



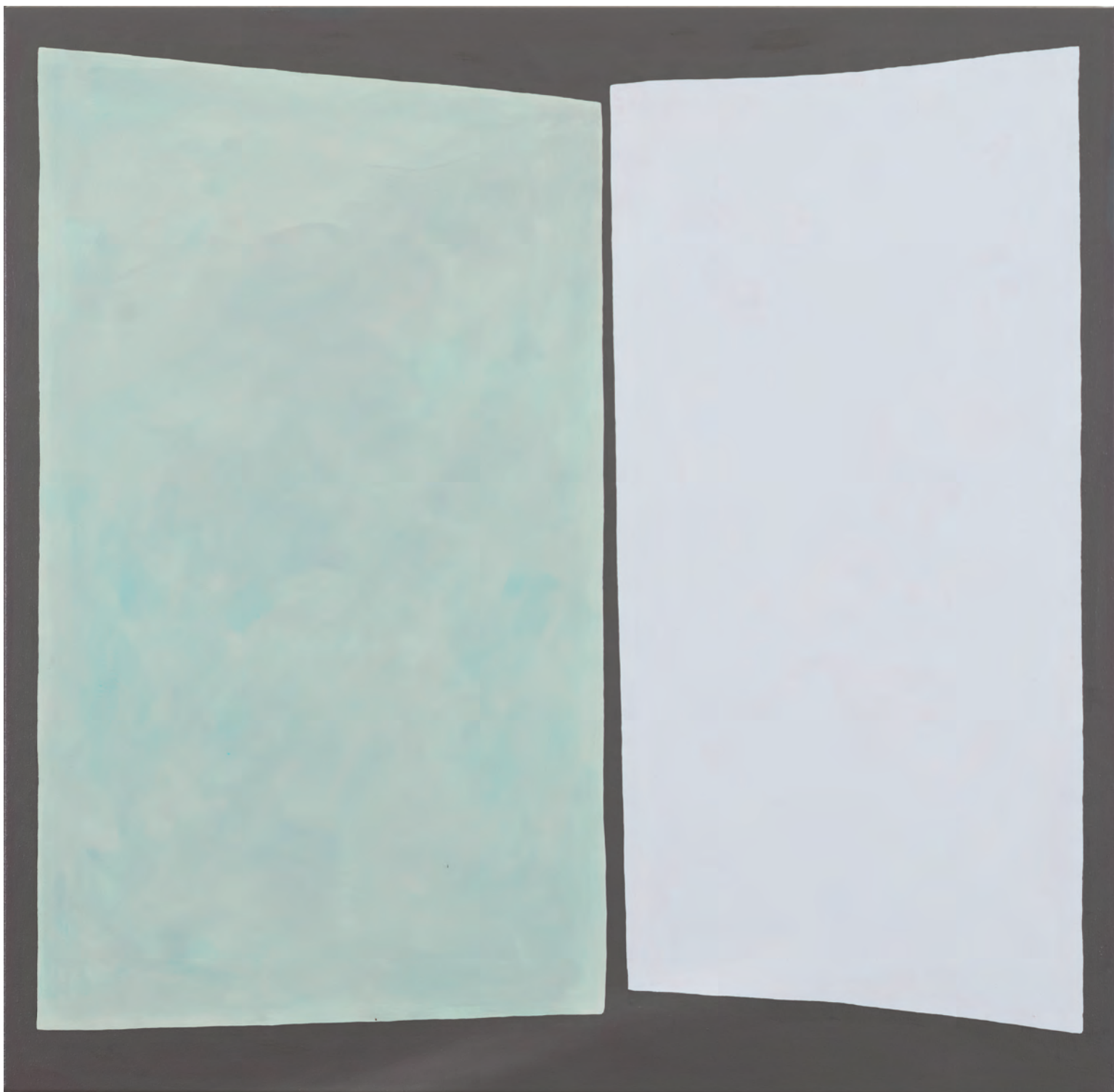
Vickers is like a ballet master gently tapping on our eyes to make them stay above the phone we are holding in our hands.

OPPOSITE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2025.
Acrylic on canvas, 110 x 90cm

ABOVE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2021.
Acrylic on canvas, 101 x 113cm

COURTESY: THE ARTIST, CHARLES NODRUM
GALLERY, NARRM/MELBOURNE AND ART
COLLECTIVE WA, BOORLOO/PERTH.





in the 1970s, Vickers made not geometric paintings, nor even just shaped canvases like **Frank Stella**, **Kenneth Noland** and others, but “paintings” made up of smaller monochromes, put together almost like building blocks.

Here there is a Minimalist “literality” that could be seen to go against the illusory “depiction” of his abstracts. And, along the same lines, for a period of some fifteen years from about 1983 to 1997, Vickers produced his *Catalan* series, which were not geometric, painterly and abstract but textured, sculptural and partly figurative, said to be inspired by the Romanesque churches he came across while staying with his wife in France near the Spanish border.

The reason why both of these series of works are of importance is not simply that they precede the geometric abstraction that has characterised Vickers’ practice since the early 2000s, which marks a return to that abstraction we first saw in the 1960s and ‘70s. Rather, this recent period of abstract painting, unlike the first, must be seen as a conscious rejection of those other possibilities (Minimalism, figuration). Vickers’ recent period of geometric abstraction is not any kind of implicit historical progression nor even any unconscious practice of looking and painting. Rather, it is a kind of holding of the anti-abstraction army at the gate. The paintings Vickers makes and the engagement by the spectator they require are no longer to be taken for granted. It might even be seen as something of a “late” style, in which an artist with a lifetime of skill and practice behind them deliberately tries to make what appears light and effortless.

There is undoubtedly a particular reason for looking at Vickers’ work in a world of attention-deficit disorder and in which we are no longer even able to say what exactly is at stake in looking closely at works of art. Dare we say that it is the pleasure of art altogether, which is rapidly disappearing from our world and our lives? Vickers is like a ballet master gently tapping on our eyes to make them stay above the phone we are holding in our hands. It is an *en barre*, as it were, suspended in poised and temporary balance somewhere above our world.

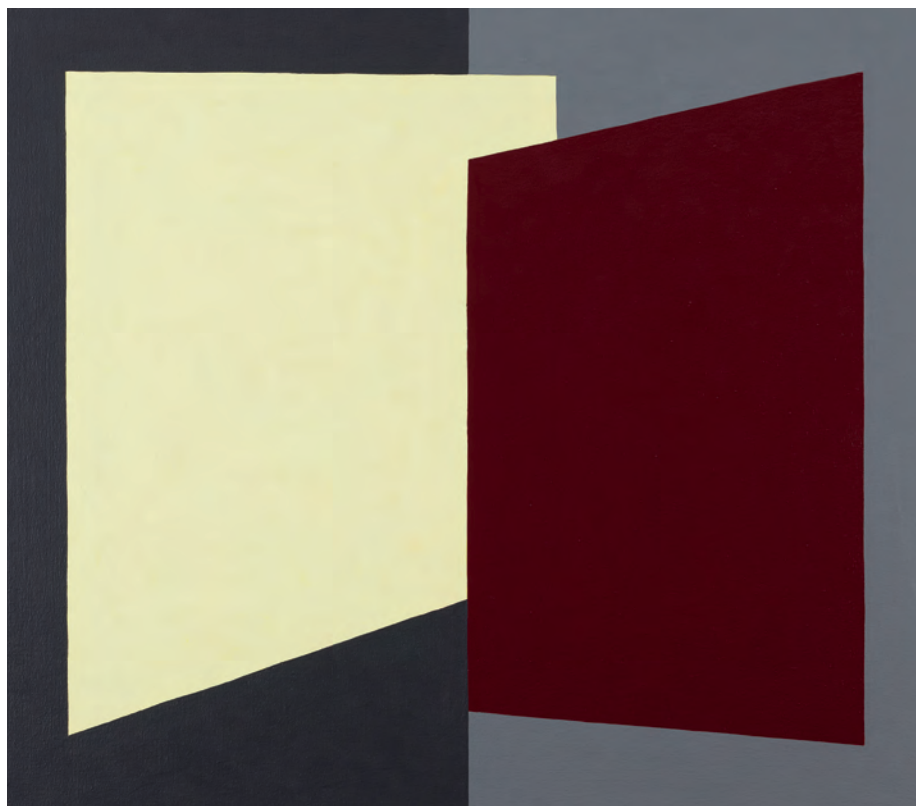


“Any collector who claims to focus on Australian geometric abstraction needs to have a Trevor Vickers.” ~ *Kate Nodrum*

OPPOSITE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2024. Acrylic on canvas, 119 x 122cm

ABOVE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 98 x 101cm

COURTESY: THE ARTIST, CHARLES NODRUM GALLERY, NARRM/MELBOURNE AND ART COLLECTIVE WA, BOORLOO/PERTH.



KATE NODRUM

Director, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Narrm/Melbourne

“Charles has always had a strong interest in geometric abstraction, particularly The Field generation artists. After establishing the gallery in 1984, he had got to know and had exhibitions for **John Peart, Ron Robertson-Swann, Janet Dawson, David Aspden** and others, and so was keen to meet Trevor. The gallery has represented Vickers since 2000, with at least 8 exhibitions since then, the last being a small survey in 2023 of works in the artist’s possession dating back to 1970s, to mark Trevor’s 80th birthday. Any collector

who claims to focus on Australian geometric abstraction needs to have a Trevor Vickers. Whether it’s minimal, geometric, or shaped abstract painting, Trevor has explored - and mastered - it all. Only a handful of works have been sent to auction over the years and another handful have come through the gallery for resale on consignment. For an artist who’s been exhibiting and selling work for over 60 years, it suggests that those who buy them don’t lose interest in them - and nor do their children or beneficiaries.

FELICITY JOHNSTON

*Director, Art Collective WA,
Boorloo/Perth*

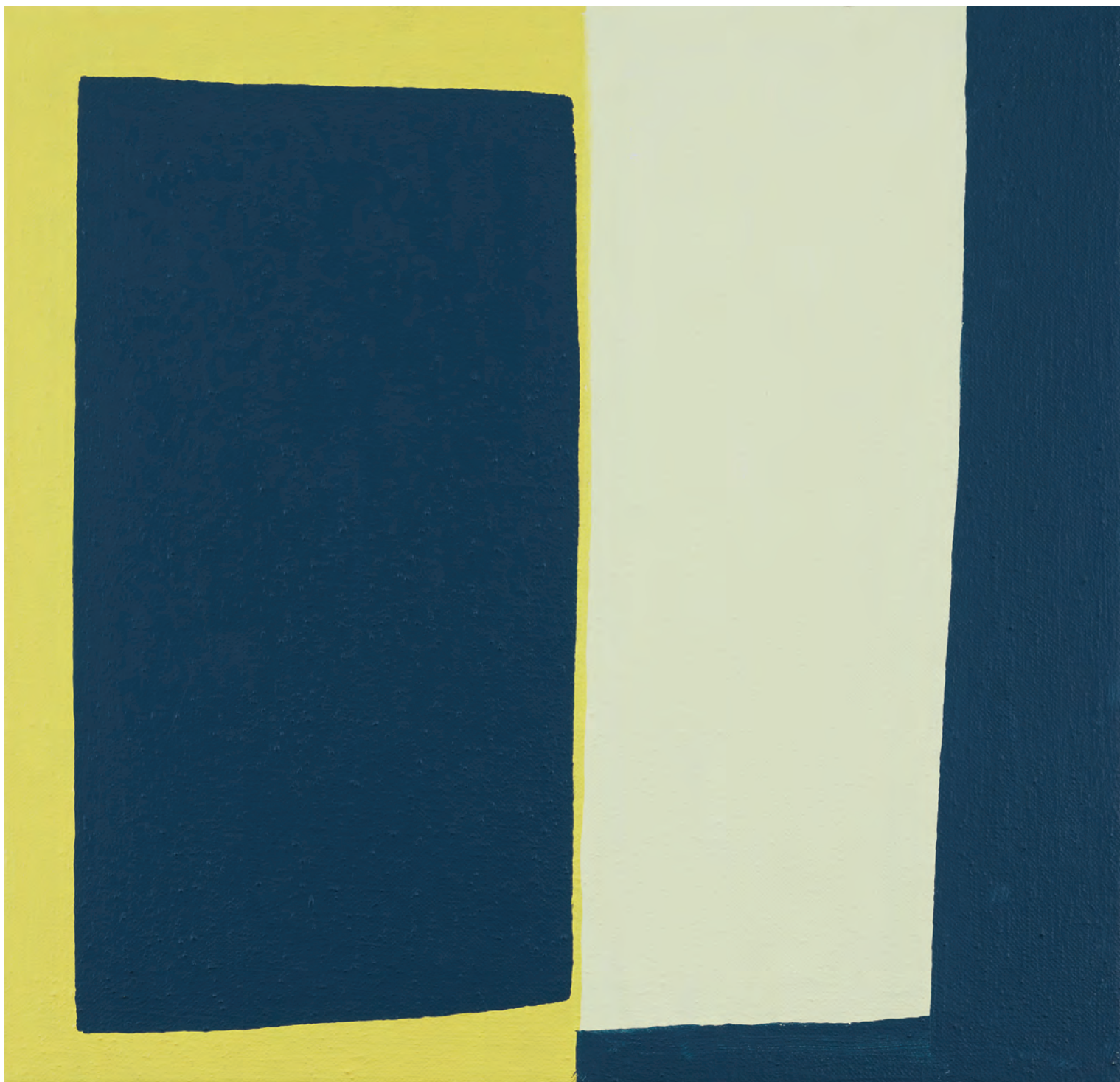
Trevor Vickers is a founding member of Art Collective WA and has served on the board since its inception in 2013. His involvement has helped shape the organisation’s artist-led ethos and its commitment to supporting Western Australian practice. We’ve worked closely with Trevor, including publishing his artist monograph *Trevor Vickers: Untitled Painting* in 2016 — the first in our series of artist publications — and supporting his participation in the Living Artist Estate project, focusing on legacy planning for his work.

Trevor’s work has a quiet insistence that rewards close looking. There’s a rigour to his abstraction — a refusal of gesture, narrative or overt symbolism — that feels both uncompromising and deeply generous. The surfaces are restrained but never cold; they hold time, decision and revision in a way that invites reflection rather than explanation. Trevor’s practice embodies the kind of sustained, thoughtful engagement with form and material that we’re proud to support. His commitment to abstraction over six decades, speaks to the depth and resilience of artistic practice. He is a major part of Australian art history and his work sits within a broader conversation about legacy, place and artistic integrity.

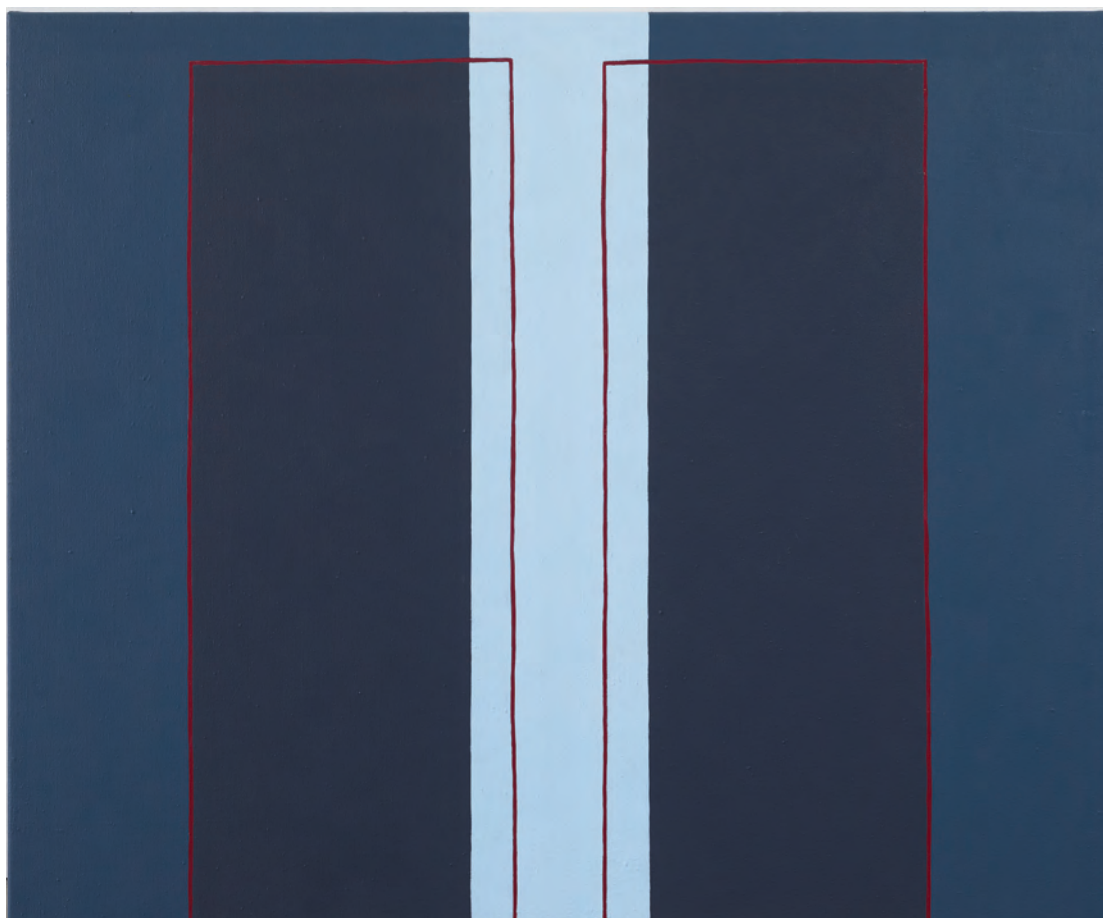
OPPOSITE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2021.
Acrylic on canvas, 51 x 53cm

ABOVE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2021.
Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 80cm

COURTESY: THE ARTIST, CHARLES NODRUM
GALLERY, NARRM/MELBOURNE AND ART
COLLECTIVE WA, BOORLOO/PERTH.







PATRICK MCCAUGHEY

Art historian and academic

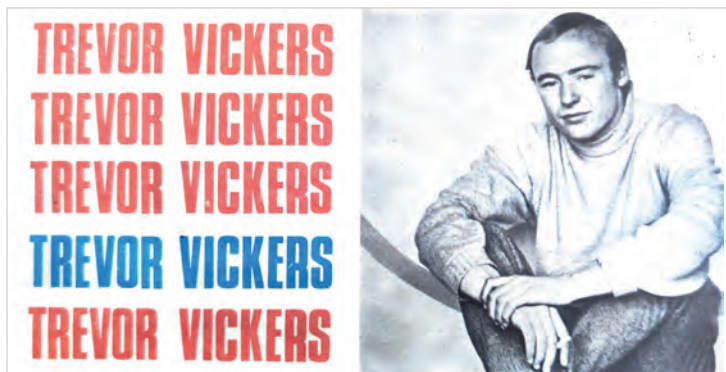
“Vickers’ paintings are the first sign of minimal art in Australian painting. The surfaces of the paintings have been emptied of shape or configuration of any kind and we are left with the bare minimum of the painted, flat surface of canvas. Sometimes, Vickers adds a painted border or a diagonal or straight line across the

surface. But they only serve to emphasise the flat surface. It is painting reduced to its most basic elements. Obviously, it’s senseless to ask what these paintings mean. They don’t mean anything and don’t aspire to. They offer instead a single visual experience and create a total environment for the watcher.”

OPPOSITE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2024.
Acrylic on canvas, 91 x 91cm

ABOVE: Trevor Vickers, *Untitled*, 2024.
Acrylic on canvas, 101 x 122cm

COURTESY: THE ARTIST, CHARLES NODRUM
GALLERY, NARRM/MELBOURNE AND ART
COLLECTIVE WA, BOORLOO/PERTH.



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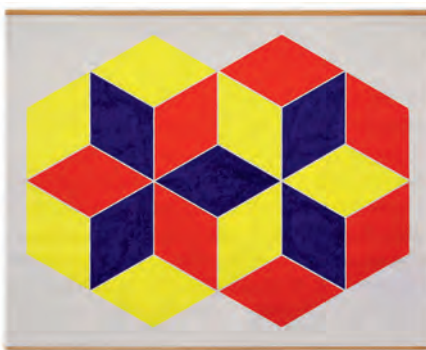
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1960s

- 1964**
Young Minds, MOMAD, Melbourne
- 1965**
New Generation, MOMAD, Melbourne
- 1966**
First solo exhibition at Strines Gallery, Melbourne
- 1967**
Second solo show at Strines Gallery; group exhibition at Gallery A
- 1968**
The Field, National Gallery of Victoria — the landmark exhibition that defined a generation
- 1969**
Shows with Pinacotheca Melbourne and Watters Gallery Sydney; participates in Moomba Balloon Project

1970s

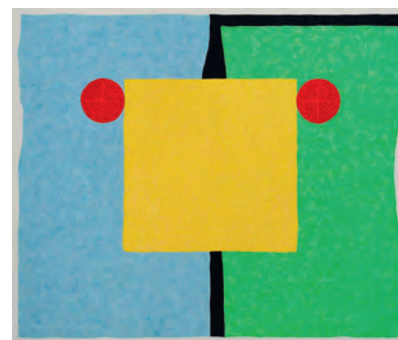
- 1970**
Opening Show, Pinacotheca, Melbourne
- 1971**
The Situation Now, Contemporary Art Society, Sydney
- 1972-74**
Regular exhibitions at Pinacotheca Melbourne
- 1977**
Solo exhibition at University of Western Australia; receives Creative Fellowship award and departs for England



3

1980s-90s

- 1985**
Thirty Years On, Pinacotheca, Melbourne
- 1986**
Catalan Series
solo exhibition, Lennox Street Gallery — textured, sculptural works inspired by Romanesque churches
- 1988-95**
Continued showing in Australia while based in England
- 1992**
Farm Road Studios, Brighton Festival, England
- 1995**
Returns permanently to Western Australia



4

1 | 1966
Trevor Vickers, 1966

2 | 1969
Untitled, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 305cm

3 | 1971-72
Yellow Hexagon & Red Hexagon, 1971-72. Acrylic on cotton duck, 159 x 203cm

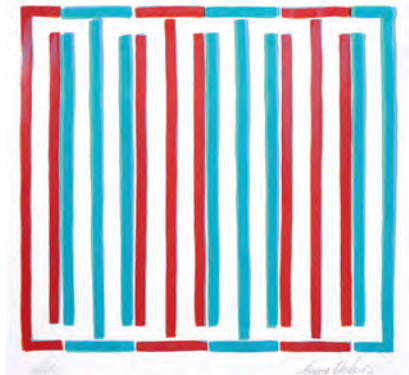
4 | 1981
Farm Road Suite II, 1981. Silkscreen on paper, 114 x 117.5cm. Edition of 40



5



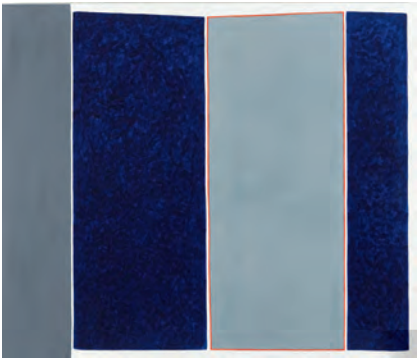
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2000s

- 2000**
Begins regular representation with Charles Nodrum Gallery
- 2002**
Dual solo exhibitions at Perth Galleries and Charles Nodrum Gallery
- 2003-04**
Shows at London art fairs including with Bridget Riley at Curwen Gallery
- 2008**
Minimal Art, National Gallery of Victoria — historical survey



8

2010s

- 2012**
Less is More: Minimal and Post Minimal Art in Australia, Heide Museum
- 2013**
Becomes founding member of Art Collective WA
- 2014**
First solo exhibition with Art Collective WA
- 2016**
Trevor Vickers: Untitled Painting — first comprehensive monograph published by Art Collective WA
- 2018**
The Field Revisited, National Gallery of Victoria — 50th anniversary commemoration; NGV commissions Vickers to remake lost 1968 work.

2020s

- 2020**
Lightworks, Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra (curated by Charles Nodrum)
- 2023**
State of Abstraction, Art Gallery of Western Australia; 80th birthday survey at Charles Nodrum Gallery
- 2024**
State Cultural Treasures Award; featured in *Aspects of Abstraction*, Hawthorn Town Hall Gallery



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5 | 1986
Untitled (Catalan series), 1986.
Acrylic on gesso panel, 77.5 x 106.5cm

6 | 1997
Untitled V (Catalan series), 1997.
Acrylic on gesso panel, 106 x 134cm

7 | 2022
Study, 2022. Silkscreen on paper, 58.5 x 58 cm

8 | 2022
Untitled, 2022. Acrylic on canvas, 154.5 x 180.5cm

9 | 2024
Untitled, 2024. Acrylic on canvas, 51 x 61cm