

Gallery@BCS: Beauty & the Beast.
By Caren Wilford and Antigone Byron. Until November
28. Open Monday to Friday, 9am-4.30pm. Belconnen
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Art review Sasha Grishin

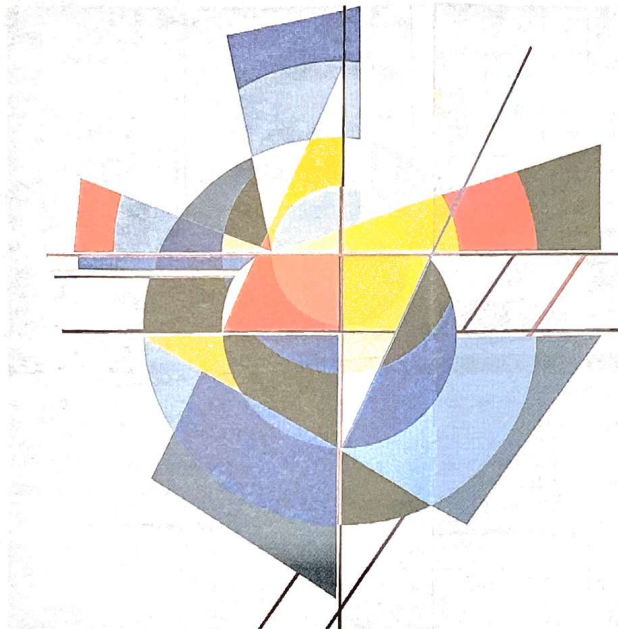
Giants of geometric abstraction

Abstraction x3: Trevor Vickers, George Johnson and Jon Plapp. Nancy Sever Gallery, 4/6 Kennedy Street, Kingston, until November 30.

Trevor Vickers, George Johnson and Jon Plapp are three giants in Australian "geometric abstraction", all with national reputations and all associated with Melbourne's Charles Nodrum Gallery.

In association with this gallery, they have been brought together in a challenging group exhibition at the Nancy Sever Gallery. At 71, Vickers is the youngster in the group, Johnson is the veteran at 88, while Plapp died in 2006 aged in his late 60s. Their vintage is important, not so much because they emerged as artists in the 1960s and 1970s when colour field abstraction was in vogue, but because they also all turned to early 20th-century founders of geometric abstraction, including the Russian Suprematists, European Constructivists and the Dutch De Stijl artists.

All three have their own distinctive artistic language. What they share is the basic commitment to abstraction and to the use of geometric shapes. The New Zealand-born George Johnson studied under the Bauhaus emigre artist, Theo Schoon, and by the time he settled in Melbourne in 1951, was already drawn into abstraction. Conscious of the heritage of Kazimir Malevich, Johnson loves to suspend a form in a void and then allow it to revolve on its axis. His *Dual Circular Theme (Senior)* (2005), is a superb and captivating canvas of great colouristic subtlety. He is also an artist who has progressively improved with time; in his most recent works there is a deceptive simplicity



Deceptive simplicity: *Dual Circular Theme (Senior)* by George Johnson.

All three have their own distinctive artistic language

which masks a great boldness in thought and sophistication in technique.

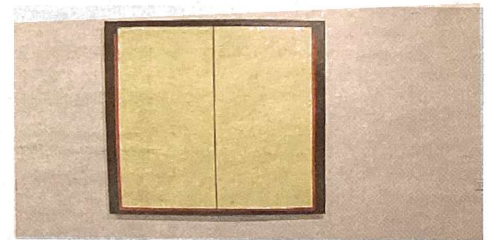
Jon Plapp was born in Melbourne in 1938, but only turned to art while he was studying in North America, in America, where he met the painters Frankenthaler, Poons, Motherwell, Olitski and Dzubas, as well as the sculptor Anthony Caro, and then in Canada, where he established a studio and exhibited his work. In 1977 Plapp and his partner, Richard McMillan, relocated to Sydney, where he started to exhibit with the Watters

Gallery. He embraced what generally has been termed post-painterly abstraction and made quiet, very subtle meditative paintings which progressively moved to starker and more geometric forms. His square canvas *Time* (2001), charts in a very quiet, monochromatic manner the unfolding of the shape of time. It is an outstanding piece in its genre.

Trevor Vickers, who was born in Brisbane, has divided much of his life between Melbourne and Perth as well as living for a long stretch in Brighton, England. He has for many years worked in one of the purest forms of geometric abstraction in Australia. He once explained his basic approach to his compositions. "X marks the spot:



Quiet: *Time* by Jon Plapp.



Pure forms: *Untitled* by Trevor Vickers.

The intersection of two lines on a surface. When such a spot on a map is realised in a place, another kind of cross is produced: a line into the distance, perhaps its extension behind us and a horizon line in front of us. This existential axis is pushed into and across the world by a standing person. It is a measure of how the world is perceived. I explore such a stance and its multiplicities - by overlapping two ways of seeing."

The approach may appear simple, but its application is immensely complex. In one of his finest paintings at this exhibition, *Untitled* (2003), the initially barely perceptible play between the white and the cream colours adds the kinetic element to the composition which then brings the whole

surface to life.

In Australian painting in the early 1970s there was a wholesale revolt against geometric abstraction which appeared in Australian art as basically an American transplant with limited authenticity and created by a band of followers who adopted, rather than fully understood the style. In the past couple of decades there has been a revival of interest in geometric abstraction by a number of younger artists, many of whom live in Melbourne. Johnson, Plapp and Vickers are veterans who have survived the period of unpopularity, stuck to their guns while slowly working through their ideas, and today, once more, they appear as fashionable and in tune with the latest trends.