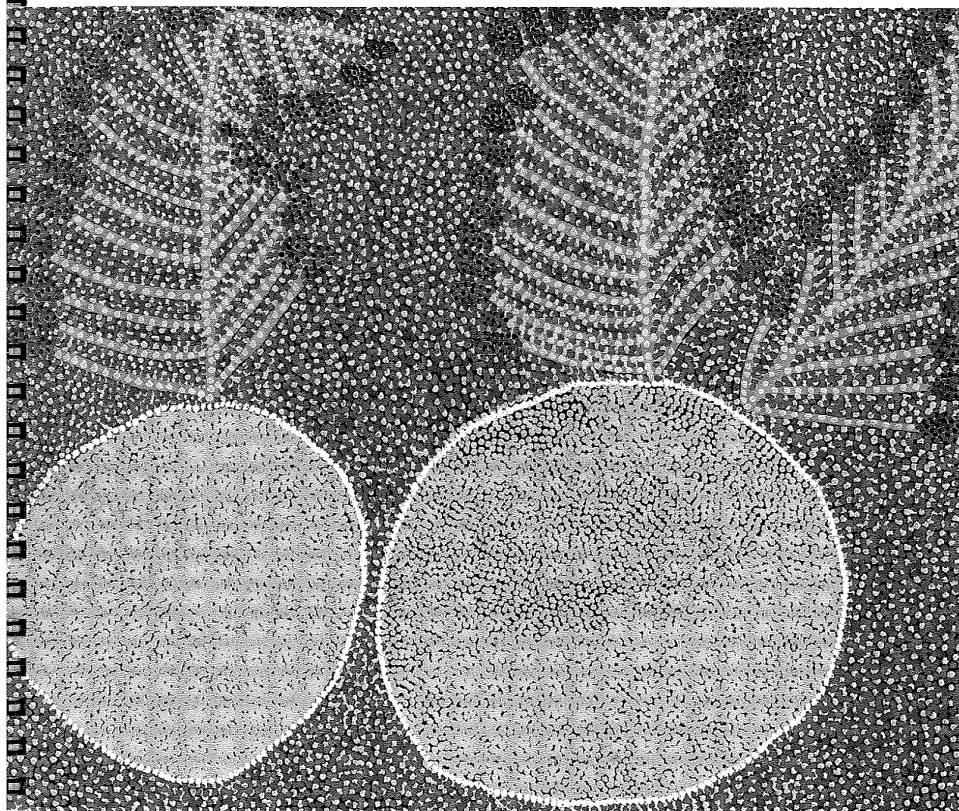


2010 Conference

Adelaide 1-4 December 2010



Ruby Thompson WILLIAMSON, Australia, 4 Pratt, Papantjari people, South Australia, Fred
mayer mountain room, 2009, Acrylic, South Australia, synthetic polymer paint on linen,
121.5x152.1cm, South Australian Government Grant 2009, Art Gallery of South Australia,
Adelaide, © Ruby Thompson Williamson, Courtesy of Tjala Arts



CONVENOR: GEORGINA DOWNEY

1. THE CASE OF A VANISHING MEDIATOR: SEVENTIES ART IN AUSTRALIA

This paper proposes that the art of the seventies in Australia represents a case of 'the vanishing mediator' in that it was a period which facilitated dramatic changes in attitudes and ideals in the art world, and was then forgotten. During the decade, competing alternatives fundamentally challenged the logic of Modernism, and modes once marginalised as 'other'. Feminism and Aboriginal art, in particular—were acknowledged and validated through collective action. Seventies artists questioned the basis of traditional discipline-based approaches to art-making and critique, and caused a shift in the mindset on the Australian art scene toward the new and more inclusive processes of art-making which typify art today. From the perspective of the 21st century, therefore, it will be argued that the seventies era in Australia should be recognized as a crucial and dynamic period which initiated the contemporary era.

Susan Rothnie has completed degrees in art history and visual arts. She is currently undertaking her PhD at the University of Queensland, looking at Australian Art in the 1970s.

EDWARD HANFLING

The New Zealand women's art movement emerged in the 1970s when modernist ideas and styles were increasingly visible. Petar Vuletic had opened the Petar/James Gallery in Auckland in 1972, showing the work of predominantly male abstract painters in pursuit of aesthetic quality. Many women artists, in line with feminist reassessments of art history, believed that this notion of aesthetic quality was too narrow and valorized the work of male modernists to the exclusion of female artists aspiring to an alternative set of values. 'Formalist' criteria seemed irrelevant when the ideas driving an artwork were social and political, especially if that artwork employed media other than paint and canvas, perhaps even existing only momentarily in the form of a performance. Since the 1980s, it has become commonplace for artworks to be evaluated according to a variety of often unspecified criteria, often bound up with social and political interpretations rather than formal or aesthetic analysis. What effect has this erosion of the autonomy of art had on the ongoing status of the more radical feminist works of the 1970s and 1980s? How have the performances of artists like Juliet Batten stood the test of time, as against works in more traditional disciplines such as painting? And how are the abstract paintings shown at Vuletic's gallery evaluated now, when formal values are downplayed? In addressing such questions, this paper hopes to raise the possibility of some sort of rapprochement of the aesthetic and the political, in order to find space for both feminists and formalists in New Zealand art history of the 1970s-80s.

Dr Edward Hanfling teaches at Wintec's School of Media Arts in Hamilton, and writes regularly as the Auckland-based critic for *Art New Zealand*. Recent publications include the first major book on New Zealand abstract painter Milan Mrkusich, *Mrkusich: The Art of Transformation* (Auckland University Press, 2009, co-written with Alan Wright), and the article 'Morris Louis in Australia and New Zealand' in the December 2009 issue of the *Burlington Magazine*.