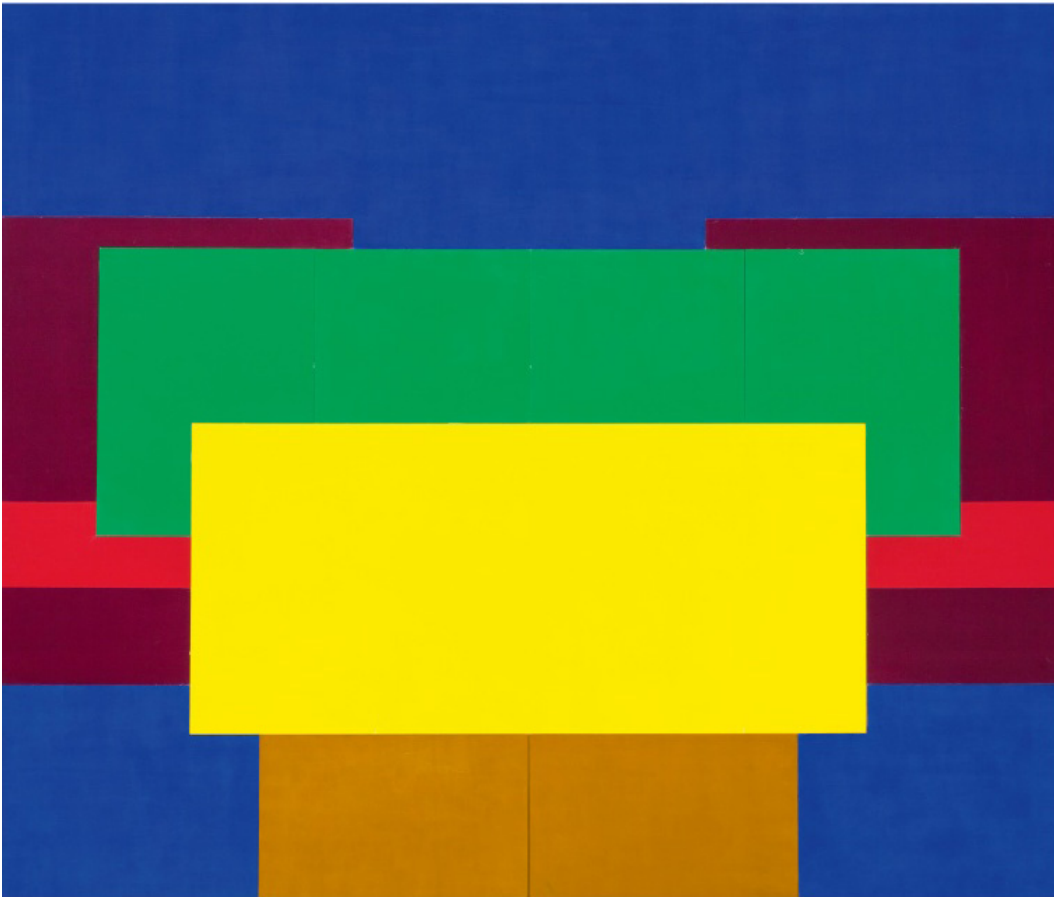


SYDNEY BALL *Banyon Wall*



Born and raised in Adelaide, Sydney Ball (1933–2017) was one of Australia's leading colour abstract artists. He studied at the South Australian School of Art alongside artists Dora Chapman and James Cant. In 1962 he set his sights on New York, where he became acquainted with leading modernists Mark Rothko, Lee Krasner and Willem de Kooning. In 1965 he returned to Australia and later married artist Margaret Worth.

The late 1960s saw Ball gain significant critical success, though hostility remained around his international style of painting. Ball pursued pure form and colour relentlessly. He was not interested in depicting real objects, people or places; rather, he focused on

formal qualities, including materials and art elements. His abstract approach to making works of art was in line with such styles as Minimalism and Hard-Edge painting, where an abrupt transition between colours is present. Ball's oversized or oddly shaped canvases were technically difficult to paint and needed to be custom built. *Banyon Wall* is an example of this, with a variety of shaped canvases joined together to create planes of flat colour with crisp edges between colours.

image detail: Sydney Ball, Australia 1933–2017, *Banyon Wall*, 1967–68, Collinswood, South Australia, synthetic polymer paint on canvas (combination of separate panels), 330.2 x 396.2 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

DID YOU KNOW?

Sydney Ball's *Strata span*, 1968 is also in the Gallery's collection. Here Ball focused on breaking out of the square or rectangular canvas. By joining irregular shaped canvases together Ball incorporated the negative space of the gallery walls into his paintings.

SYDNEY BALL continued



image: Sydney Ball, Australia, 1933, *Strata span*, 1968, Collinswood, South Australia, synthetic polymer paint on cotton duck, 228.0 x 441.0 cm (assembled, 2 piece); Gift of Michael Coventry under tax incentives for the Arts Scheme 1978, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

From the 1950s Colour-Field painters emerged in Britain and the United States. These artists did not depict recognisable subjects, instead painting stripes, targets and simple geometric patterns with colour being the main subject of a work of art. By manipulating a limited number of variables in a painting, abstract painting became a tool for analysing the visual effect of an image.

Sydney Ball designed the poster for *The Field* exhibition, held at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968. Three of Ball's *Persian* paintings were exhibited alongside works by other artists such as Peter Booth, Janet Dawson, Clement Meadmore and John Peart. *The Field* exhibition is regarded as a significant landmark in Australian art history as it caused controversy by daring contemporary works of art by emerging Australian artists.

RESOURCES

WEBSITES

- A brief history of colour in art
<http://bit.ly/2uKI2tq>
- Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection – Sydney Ball
<http://bit.ly/2vEPepU>
- The Australian – Public Works by Sydney Ball
<http://bit.ly/2x6soW2>
- Business Insider – No one could see the colour blue until modern times
<http://bit.ly/2x6CLjw>
- Smithsonian Libraries – Colour in a new Light
<http://s.si.edu/2wRWSMs>
- Sydney Ball website
<http://bit.ly/2w43pGe>
- Windsor & Newton – A spotlight on colour
<http://bit.ly/2vFuazw>

BOOKS

- Finlay, V. *Colour – A Natural History of the Palette*, Random House Inc, United States, 2002
- Maloon, T. 'Painting in an expanded field: a homage to Sydney Ball', *Sydney Ball Modular and Infinex 1967 to now*, Sullivan + Strumpf, 2016
- Sydney Ball: The Colour Paintings 1963–2007*, Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest, Sydney, 2009

KEY LITERACY WORDS

- Abstract
- Colour
- Colour-Field
- Complementary colours
- Conceptual
- Hard-Edge painting
- Light
- Minimalism
- Non-representational
- Pattern
- Pigment
- Prism
- Symmetry

EARLY YEARS

RESPONDING

What type of shapes can you see? How many different shapes can you see?

Ball's painting looks very flat and smooth. Find another work in the Gallery that has a bumpy or rough texture.

Which colours seem to come towards you, which seem farther away? Which colours seem brighter?

Some colours are known as warm colours and some colours are cool. Which colours in *Banyon Wall* make you think of warm colours? Which colours would be cool? What do these colours remind you of?

MAKING

Using different coloured A4 card, cut a variety of rectangular and square shapes to create a similar work of art that is the same on both sides.

Banyon Wall is a great starting point to introduce colour mixing! Which two colours mixed together become green? Which two colours mixed together become orange? What colours are missing from Ball's painting?

image: installation view Gallery 17, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2017



PRIMARY

RESPONDING

Ball wanted some of his paintings to lie flat on the floor so the viewer could look down on the work of art. What other works in the Gallery's collection would look interesting viewed from above?

Which colour in *Banyon Wall* did you notice first? Why do you think this colour stands out the most?

Identify each colour in *Banyon Wall*. Create a list of things you associate with each colour.

Pair *Banyon Wall* with one other work of art in the Gallery. Which would you choose and why?

Imagine your Principal has asked you to select an abstract work of art to be purchased for the school. Identify a work of art in the Gallery and write a short paragraph explaining why you think it is a good choice.

PRIMARY

MAKING

In some abstract paintings brushstrokes or the hand of the artist are not visible. In some ways abstract art can look machine-made. Design a machine that creates an abstract work of art.

HINT Look at the recent work of South Australian artist James Dodd.

During the 1960s traditional shaped canvases gave way to odd shaped ones. During your visit to the Gallery document canvases and sculptures with unusual shapes. Back in the classroom, cut these shapes out of coloured paper to create an abstract collage. Plan your composition so that you have a balanced and harmonious use of colour.

Look closely at *Banyon Wall* and see how each colour is placed next to another. Using the same six colours as Ball, recreate an alternative version of *Banyon Wall* using coloured paper. How many different combinations can you make?

Like science and art, mathematics and art can sometimes be very closely related. While *Banyon Wall* is symmetrical, *Genus I, No. 2*, by Margaret Worth has been inspired by the Möbius Strip. Create a collage with coloured paper that is inspired by mathematics and the Colour-Field painters.

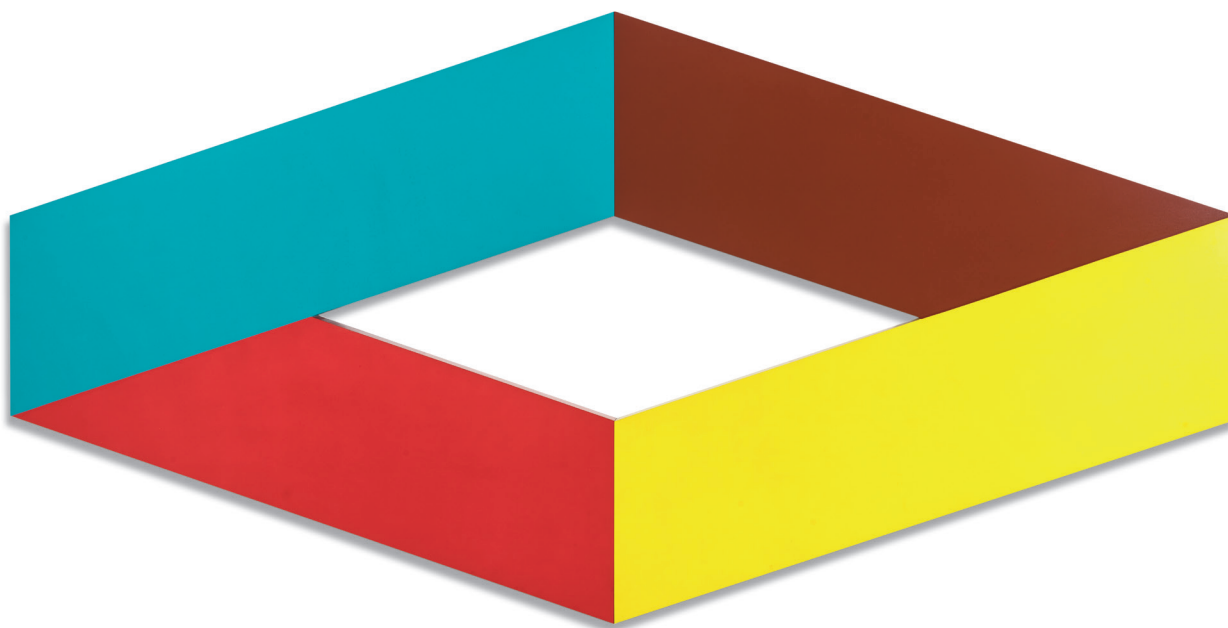


image: Margaret Worth, Australia, 1944, *Genus I, No.2.*, 1968, Adelaide, synthetic polymer paint on plywood, 115.4 x 247.1 cm (trapezoidal irreg.); South Australian Government Grant 1991, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Courtesy of the artist

RESPONDING

Abstract artists create works devoid of social content. What was happening in the world and in Australia in the 1960s to herald such a different style and method to making works of art?

Explain how technological and chemical processes changed the way artists created works of art after the second world war. Locate works of art on display to support your statement. How has technology continued to influence the way artists create works?

Discuss how works on display by Sydney Ball or Margaret Worth could be classified as minimalist.

Today social media has modified the way we communicate and has become a popular platform to share ideas and opinions. Write the perfect Tweet of 140 characters, summarising the works of art on display in this room.

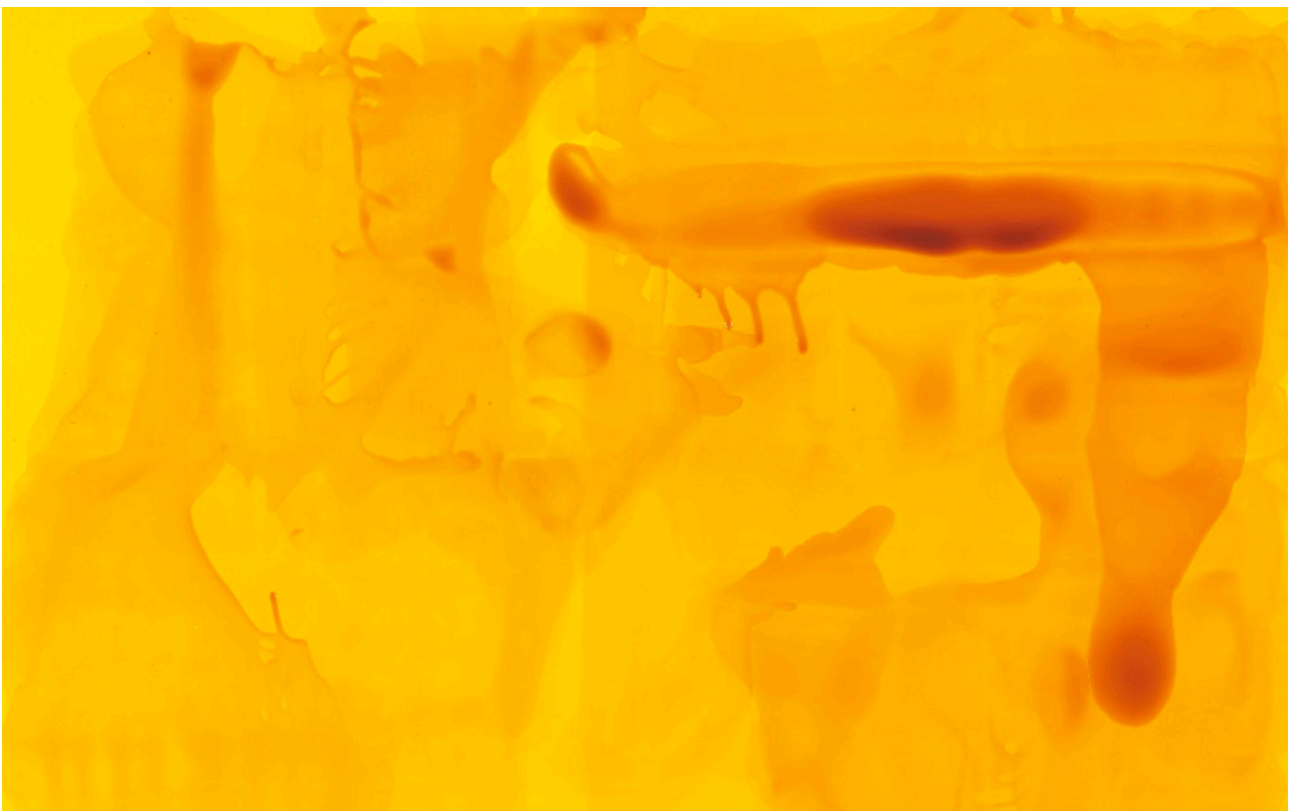
Investigate other contemporary artists working in abstraction. How are these abstract works of art different to Ball's?

TIP Look at works of art by Dale Frank and Angela Brennan.

The Field exhibition in 1968 was regarded as a significant landmark in Australian art history. Research another moment in Australian art history in which contemporary works of art caused controversy.

During the 15th century Indian yellow was a vibrant yellow pigment made from the urine of mango fed cows. The natural dye used to make Tyrian purple was obtained from the mucus of several species of sea snails. These practices have long been replaced by less organic methods. Identify the colours Ball has used in his painting and research their historical origins.

image: Dale Frank, Australia, 1959, *Paler Than Pale Custard Cream Moonlight Off White Old Ivory Irish Linen Cream Neutral Beeswax Cornsilk Falmouth Hawaiian Sunset Paloma Burnous (Pansy!)*, 1999, Bundaberg, Queensland, synthetic polymer paint & varnish on canvas, 220.0 x 360.0 cm; South Australian Government Grant 2000, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. © Dale Frank



SECONDARY

MAKING

Investigate Ball's *Modular* and *Persian* series. Create a Hard-Edge, non-representational painting. Consider how you will create a painting without signs of brushstrokes. Experiment with different methods of applying paint to create flat colour and crisp edges.

Visit your local hardware store and collect a variety of paint swatches. Using Ball as inspiration, create a collage using only six of your colour swatches. Create these colours with acrylic paint, documenting the formulas you used to create each colour.

image: Sydney Ball, Australia, 1933–2017, *Transoxiana*, 1967, Adelaide, colour screenprint on paper, 81.2 x 61.0 cm; Bequest of Father Owen Farrell 1980, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide



AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

SCIENCE FOCUS: SCIENCE UNDERSTANDING – CHEMICAL SCIENCES & PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Artists began using acrylic paint in the first half of the 20th century prompting American artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko to experiment with pouring and dripping techniques. Investigate oil and acrylic paints and determine the chemical properties for both. Identify their key differences looking at works of art in the collection. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using acrylic instead of oil paint? How has making paint changed over time?

A pigment is a finely ground solid particle used in oil and water based paints, printing inks and plastics. Pigments can be a natural material such as ochre, or an inorganic compound, which gives the paint its colour. Using natural pigments, binder and extender, recreate the colours used in Ball's painting.

Physics focuses on light and matter. English philosopher Isaac Newton (1642–1726) explained how rainbows worked and that light was responsible for colour by refracting white light with a prism to create its component colours of red, orange, yellow, green, blue indigo and violet. Newton's theory became useful for artists when he arranged colours around the outside of a circle, allowing primary colours to sit opposite their complementary counterpart. Investigate how we see colour and create your own Newton wheel experiment.

French chemist and colour theorist Michel-Eugene Chevreul (1786–1889) determined that when the eye sees two colours side by side, they appear to be vastly different in colour and strength. Do you think this happening in *Banyon Wall*? Are there other works of art where this occurs?



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