Robert

Hunter

Robert Hunter

N G V

Jane Devery
and contributors

The National Gallery of Victoria is very proud to present this retrospective exhibition of works by Robert Hunter (1947–2014), an artist with whom we have enjoyed a long association. In 1968 Hunter was the youngest artist to exhibit in *The Field*, the inaugural and now legendary exhibition at the new National Gallery of Victoria which announced the arrival of an international-style, late-modernist abstraction in Australia. In the same year, the NGV acquired Hunter's *Untitled*, 1968, from his first solo exhibition at Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne. This exhibition and publication has been planned to coincide with *The Field Revisited*, a restaging of *The Field* at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. Together, *Robert Hunter* and *The Field Revisited* provide new and rich insights into this watershed moment in twentieth-century Australian art history.

Robert Hunter was an artist who maintained an unswerving commitment to a singular aesthetic position, evident from his earliest white-on-white paintings to works made in the final years of his life. Hunter was also one of very few Australian artists to practise at the centre of an international art movement, representing Australia in the Second Indian Triennale, New Delhi, in 1971, and exhibiting in *Eight Contemporary Artists* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1974. He presented solo exhibitions at Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf in 1974, and at Lisson Gallery, London in 1975, and held a series of two-person exhibitions with the American Minimalist Carl Andre in 1978 at Pinacotheca, Melbourne to the Newcastle Region Art Gallery, and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane.

I acknowledge Jane Devery, NGV Curator of Contemporary Art, who has undertaken extensive research and worked closely with Hunter's estate on both the exhibition and publication. I also thank Julia Murphy, Tom Nicholson, Ann Stephen and Jennifer Winkworth for their contributions to this book, which together provide new perspectives on the artist and his work.

We are grateful to the owners of works, private and public, who have loaned to the exhibition, and I particularly acknowledge Art Gallery of Ballarat; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Geelong Art Gallery; Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, Melbourne; Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth; Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Tarrawarra Museum of Art, Healesville; and the Wesfarmers Collection, Perth.

In 2014, when Robert Hunter passed away, preparations were underway for this exhibition. I acknowledge Max Delany, former Senior Curator of Contemporary Art, NGV, and now Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, who was instrumental in the early planning stages. Lastly, I extend special thanks to Janice L. S. Hunter and Josh Milani for their assistance during the development and realisation of this important exhibition that charts the career of one of Australia's pre-eminent abstract artists.

Tony Ellwood
Director, National Gallery of Victoria

Space for the unknown: the art of Robert Hunter 1966–2014

Jane Devery

As I see it, anything that comes out of a painting has to be something that is not known beforehand. Working with knowns is the space for the unknown to occur.

Robert Hunter[1]

A certain enigma surrounds the art of Robert Hunter. This is due, in no small part, to his reluctance to talk about his work. Taciturn by nature, the artist seldom granted interviews or issued statements about his art, and on the rare occasions he did, Hunter did not offer easy explanations. His paintings possess a certain impenetrability and require close observation by an attentive viewer. They are also notoriously difficult to reproduce. So much so that in the publication for *The Field* exhibition that inaugurated the new National Gallery of Victoria in 1968, a page reserved for a photograph of his painting was left blank. Hunter's paintings are equally difficult to hold in one's mind and retain in one's memory, qualities that give them a peculiar necessity to be experienced in real space and actual time.

Hunter's career was singular. His unwavering commitment to painting within a strictly limited set of parameters makes him uncommon among artists. He rarely deviated from the square or grid as an elemental base, nor strayed far from using Dulux Weathershield house paint and masking tape, the materials he put to service in his earliest near-white canvases, the wall paintings that dominated much of his output in the 1970s and the finely nuanced white-on-white compositions of the mature works for which he is now best known. From the mid 1980s to the final years of his life, Hunter finessed a technique using domestic paint rollers on standard plywood sheets to create a remarkably consistent body of work distinguished by seemingly endless geometric variations, pristine facture and ever-so-slight chromatic shifts. From his earliest works to his last, made in 2014, Hunter's paintings traced a fine balance between apparent contradictions: between complexity and simplicity, colour and its absence, excess and reduction, being and nothingness, the everyday and the existential. His materials and method may have been workmanlike, but the result was never purely mechanical.

Beginnings

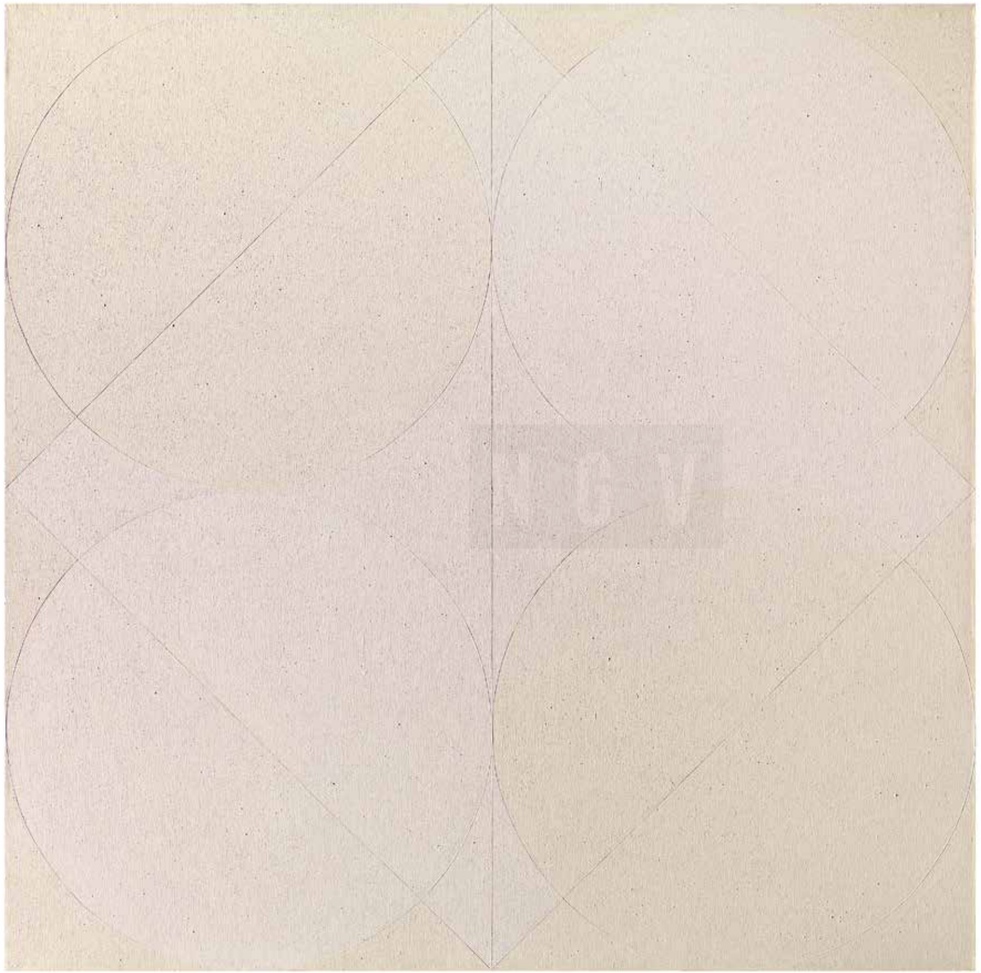
Robert Hunter was born on 16 April 1947 in Melbourne, and grew up in the leafy outer suburb of Eltham as the second of four children in an educated family that was comfortably well–off. His father was a meteorologist who for many years presented the weather on ABC television, and his mother, with whom Robert was very close, was, according to several sources, the young artist's driving force.[2] The family lived close to the artists' colony of Montsalvat which Hunter would visit frequently as a child, coming into contact with the artists there and tending to farm animals on the property. His maternal grandfather who lived with the family, a plumber and bricklayer by trade, was an important early influence who imparted a certain work ethic and encouraged a fascination with structures and systems that would remain with the artist throughout his life.[3]

From 1964 to 1965 Hunter studied at Preston Technical College, a progressive art school in Melbourne's northern suburbs where the staff were mainly painters. They included Dale Hickey, who held the position of Head of Graphics, and who became a close friend.[4] As Hunter later observed, the school 'didn't worry too much about structures … so it was a fairly free time'.[5] A wide range of disciplines were taught at the school, and at this early stage the young artist was most drawn to sculpture, which perhaps influenced his decision in 1966 to study industrial design at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT).[6] After six months, however, Hunter dropped out to study painting, but he rarely attended classes and instead worked independently from home.

Success came early to Hunter. In 1966 he was awarded the Eltham Art Prize, judged by then art critic for *The Age* newspaper, Patrick McCaughey, for a semi–abstract gestural painting that reveals the influence of his teacher Hickey as well as the Sydney artist Dick Watkins (p. 104).[7] However, he soon developed a more reductive aesthetic, creating a series of colourful paintings based on grids and cross formations, such as *Untitled*, 1966 (p. 18). As the art historian Ann Stephen notes in her essay in this publication (pp. 75–81), the colour relationships established in these early works suggest the influence of the theories of Josef Albers, reflecting the teaching philosophies at RMIT at the time.[8] For John Stringer, however, Hunter's choice of palette revealed a more vernacular association, as he reflected several years later:

> The colours all seem to come out of that awful suburban predilection for 'pastel shades' – which [he] used with a forcefulness quite alien to the otherwise timid overtones of the colours themselves.[9]

For Hunter and other young artists in Melbourne during the late 1960s, knowledge of the international art world was largely gained via artists in their orbit who had lived for periods in North America, such as Hickey, Robert Jacks and James Doolin, as well as through art magazines such as *Artforum* and *Studio International*.[10] When, in this context, the exhibition *Two Decades of American Painting*, organised by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, toured Melbourne and Sydney in 1967 it had a significant impact. The exhibition, which mainly featured Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, included Jasper Johns's *White flag*, 1955, and paintings by Joseph Albers and Frank Stella that, in hindsight, one might imagine would have appealed



(opposite)
Untitled no. 8 1968
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

(p. 6)
Untitled 1968
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

(p. 7)
Untitled 1970–76
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

to Hunter. However, it was a group of three untitled, near-monochromatic paintings by Ad Reinhardt, each featuring a Greek cross barely discernible in subtly nuanced shades of black, that made a profound and lasting impression.[11] Hunter regarded them as 'highly aesthetic, beautiful things', and the experience led him to begin making his own white-on-white paintings.[12]

The year 1968 was critical for Hunter. In May he held his first solo exhibition at Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne, where he showed thirteen near-white square canvases. Uniform in size and pristine in their execution, each composition was based on the grid, with subtle geometries achieved through the use of masking tape to create distinct lines. Mathematically derived, each contained a simple system of rotation, comprising squares, circles or arcs and, in one recently rediscovered work, a system of diagonal lines and chevrons (p. 26). The exhibition was a sell-out and received widespread critical attention.[13] Patrick McCaughey, writing in *The Age*, pronounced it 'a dazzling debut', and G. R. Lansell described the paintings as 'diaphanous and haunting' and the exhibition as 'a debut of some talent and poise, a good beginning to an artistic career'.[14]

In August of that year, at the age of twenty-one, Hunter was the youngest artist to participate in *The Field* at the NGV, the landmark exhibition of hard-edge, colourfield painting and Minimalist sculpture which publicly announced the arrival of international-style late-modernist abstraction in Australia. Hunter's contribution, *Untitled*, 1968 (p. 6), a larger variation on the square white-on-white canvases shown several months earlier at Tolarno, exemplified the formal concerns of hard-edge, Minimalist painting. Its configuration of circle, square and diagonal grid forms rendered in built-up layers of white paint were not apparent in *The Field* catalogue which noted that, 'Due to the close tonal relationships between white and off-white in this painting, the camera has been unable to produce an image and reproduction is therefore impossible'.[15]

Reflecting an orientation towards the formalist theories of New York art critic Clement Greenberg, who visited Melbourne in May 1968, Patrick McCaughey singled out Hunter as best representing the 'new abstraction', writing:

> Perhaps the most crucial example in the exhibition of the central role of the onlooker's experience as the key to understanding the force of the new abstraction is Robert Hunter's white painting. Here the spectator must become physically active, moving around the painting simply to see what's going on. He can establish what the painting is only by experiencing it as a participating agent in its workings.[16]

Soon after, Hunter travelled to New York, stopping in Los Angeles where he visited James Doolin and then Toronto where he stayed with Robert Jacks. In New York, where he would stay for a period of approximately three months, Hunter worked as chauffeur for the Australian Mission to the United Nations, making enough money to afford a small room on East 23rd Street, on the corner of 3rd Avenue. Rosemary Hickey, partner of Dale Hickey, herself a teacher and graphic designer, encouraged Hunter to write home with his first impressions.[17] In surviving correspondence, Hunter notes having seen 'the greats'; however, he elsewhere reflected, 'Not much to say about the shows I saw, except the [Al] Held show was a disappointment, not much else on except the "earthworks" show … which was pretty good'.[18] This was likely a reference to *Earthworks* at Gallery Dwan, an important exhibition associated with the beginning of the Land Art movement

that included works by Robert Smithson, Carl Andre, Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt, among others.[19] Elsewhere, Hunter notes having seen exhibitions by Larry Poons, John McCracken and Richard Serra,[20] and meeting Joseph Kosuth through an introduction by the Australian Conceptual artists Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden; however, little is known of what he made of these experiences.[21] By contrast, in an interview conducted in 1969, Hunter remarked pointedly on LeWitt, describing the American Conceptual artist as 'a very obvious example of someone who (was) doing something that clicked very much with what I thought I was doing, but in a much better, much more specific way'.[22]

Upon returning to Australia in 1969, after a brief visit to Europe, Hunter's work changed rapidly and by 1970 it is possible to sense the consequences of his time in New York.[23] Following a short transitional phase during which he produced a small number of paintings in continuing variations on the grid that introduced strong tonal contrasts between black and white (pp. 30–3), Hunter dispensed with canvas altogether, and began to devote himself to painting directly on the wall.[24]

Canvas to wall

The 1970s was a period of great experimentation that saw Hunter synthesise the reductive aesthetic and systems of geometric rotation that governed his earliest paintings with certain ideas that were gaining popularity internationally. A crucial local factor that influenced these developments was the artist's early association with the Melbourne gallery Pinacotheca. Under the uncompromising direction of Bruce Pollard, with whom Hunter established a close and enduring friendship, Pinacotheca was one of the few galleries in Australia committed to showing Minimalist, post-Minimalist, Conceptual and process-based works at the time. Over the following decade, it would become an important space for experimentation and a meeting place for Hunter and his contemporaries who also exhibited there, a close-knit group of artists well informed by current international practices.[25]

In June 1970 Pinacotheca marked the opening of its new Richmond premises, a former factory, with a group exhibition.[26] Along one long wall in a narrow gallery space, Hunter installed a six-part paper wall work (p. 10–11). Extending the ideas of rotation contained in his 1968 paintings and introducing the serial syntax of Miminalism, the work revealed subtle geometric patterns that unfolded across six large near-square sheets. Each sheet was crafted from smaller individual pieces employing masking tape as both a structural and compositional device over which several washes of thin grey paint were applied. Despite its simplicity of construction and somewhat rough manufacture, the work floats ethereally with a softness that appears somewhat at odds with the rigid geometric configurations contained within. Critic Terry Smith drew comparisons between it and the recent work of LeWitt and described it as 'the best work in the exhibition … filling this room with a grey light of great subtlety and beauty'.[27]

When the work was acquired by the NGV seven years later, curator of Australian art Jennifer Phipps wrote in a memorandum to the then NGV director Eric Rowlinson: 'The artist is perfectly happy for us to keep on making replicas of this work if we damage it so much that it is no longer displayable and he has given us the formula for making this'.[28] Although the occasion has never arisen, the notion that a work could be re-made at any given time reflected an interest in ephemerality and dematerialisation, ideas that were prevalent at the time and which informed Hunter's subsequent wall-based works.[29]

Hunter's first wall painting was exhibited in his first solo exhibition at Pinacotheca later that year. Executed using a handmade stencil constructed from masking tape, it comprised eleven latticed grids painted directly onto the longest wall of the main gallery. Reflecting fundamental minimalist strategies, the work's serial nature and cooption of the architecture of the gallery space demanded an active viewer, a quality that was not lost on critics. Writing in *The Age*, Ann Galbally noted a 'white brick surface is visible through the soft, grey squares but the stencils are entities disengaged and float out in front of the wall'.[30] G. R. Lansell noted the 'fleeting', 'gem-like' quality despite its 'apparent dullness and greyness', lauding the work's 'transitoriness' and noting how subtle variations revealed themselves 'as one moves along the gallery.'[31]

Standing apart in his oeuvre, this work has a poetic painterly quality unlike most other wall works he made during the decade that, by comparison, were more LeWittian in their geometric rigidity. Its handmade nature reveals subtle irregularities that connect it to one of the few works on canvas that the artist made during this period. Another apparent anomaly in Hunter's oeuvre, *Untitled*, 1970–76 (p. 7), is a light-grey canvas divided into a grid of horizontal rectangles demarcated by fine cotton threads stretched across its surface. Within each rectangular unit, fine diagonal lines articulate an elongated X form hand-drawn in pencil.[32] The intricacy and sense of fragility conveyed by this work anticipates qualities found in Hunter's later paintings and marks the artist's first use of thread – something he would pick up again eight years later. The delicate wavering lines, use of pencil and subdivision of the grid into rectangular units shares a certain kinship with works by American abstract painter Agnes Martin, although it is unknown whether her works were a conscious point of reference for the Australian artist.[33]

(above)
Robert Hunter installing *Untitled* 1971
at the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi 1971

(p. 10)
Installation view of *Untitled* 1970
Pinacotheca, Melbourne

(p. 11)
Untitled 1970 (detail)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

After recovering from a near-fatal motorbike accident, in 1971 Hunter travelled to India where he represented Australia in the Second Indian Triennale at the Lalit Kala Academy in New Delhi, exhibiting another configuration of the stencilled wall painting he had first shown at Pinacotheca. The work attracted the attention of the American minimalist sculptor Carl Andre, who was also exhibiting there, and the two soon became friends, an experience that led to future collaborations. In an oft-quoted statement for the exhibition that was co-authored during Hunter's convalescence by Bruce Pollard and Dale Hickey and edited by soon-to-be director of the National Gallery of Australia, James Mollison, the artist's ideas were articulated:

> I want to make something alien, alien to myself. I want to produce something neutral – if it is neutral enough it just is. I suppose that these are questions about existence. If something is to exist simply then all symbols and associations have to be eliminated … I was, and still am, concerned with the specifics in as straight a way as possible: that is why the mathematical progressions are obvious. What seemed to have happened recently is a greater acceptance of what is in a material sense. I used paper after canvas because it was there and available. In my last exhibition I accepted what was there in the form of the walls. I am not sure about the meaning, but I do know that what I do is humble.[34]

Between 1970 and 1980 Hunter made seventeen wall paintings. Given the international context in which many of these were made, as well as their affinity with wall works made during the same era by artists such as LeWitt, Mel Bochner or Richard Tuttle in the United States or others further afield in Europe such as Blinky Palermo in Germany or the Support Surface group in France, Hunter's wall paintings can be considered among his most important works.[35] Yet they are also his most elusive. Due to scant documentation and their inherent ephemeral nature, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of this period of Hunter's art. Only two of the known wall works he made in the 1970s have adequate available documentation to enable their reconstruction in this exhibition.[36]

The period 1974 to 1975 saw Hunter's greatest recognition internationally. In 1974 he was invited to participate in *Eight Contemporary Artists* at MoMA, New York, by the associate curator of painting and sculpture Jennifer Licht (now Winkworth), whom he had met in Melbourne earlier in the year. Licht had visited Melbourne for the *Some Recent American Art* exhibition which toured Australia, and was accompanied by a number of the exhibiting artists, including Andre, LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer and Robert Irwin. At MoMA, Hunter was represented by a large wall painting, *Untitled*, 1974 (pp. 84–5), which comprised four large squares, each divided by an internal cross stencilled directly on the gallery walls 'in close-value gray [*sic*] acrylic paint'.[37]

Eight Contemporary Artists was the first contemporary art exhibition to be shown at MoMA for several years and also included the work of Vito Acconci, Alghiero Boetti, Daniel Buren, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Brice Marden and Dorothea Rockburne. The exhibition proved challenging for MoMA's audiences, however, and was mostly reviewed unfavourably, the general response typified by critic Max Kozloff, who wrote in *Artforum*, 'Symbolically, the brittle pattern employed by this squad of artists speaks, not of a clarifying order, but of an imprisoned mentality, capable only of operating in dumb response to its internal logic'.[38] In 1974 Hunter produced a further wall work

for *Painting Exhibition* at the Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh, which also included the work of Buren, Marden, Jo Baer, Robert Mangold and Robert Ryman. Further wall paintings in various simple geometric configurations followed at Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf in 1974 and Lisson Gallery, London in 1975, galleries that were at the forefront of Conceptual and Minimalist art at the time.[39]

In 1978 Hunter returned once again to canvas, creating a series of grey paintings incorporating geometric compositions that, like his wall paintings, maintained a basically reductive palette and a minimalist adherence to seriality and the grid. Subtle chromatic transitions in the form of brightly coloured thread adhered to the surface of the paintings invited close inspection while performing the task of delineating geometric patterns, in much the same way as the raised edges produced by masking tape in the artist's first white-on-white paintings.

The artist persisted with this format for several years, exhibiting paintings in this style in a series of two-person exhibitions with Andre in Australia that year. The works exhibited varied in each location: Hunter produced variations on his large grey paintings on canvas at Pinacotheca, Melbourne and the Newcastle Region Art Gallery, and a long, high-gloss grey painting directly on the wall at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Andre made floor-based installations from square metal plates in Melbourne and Newcastle, and a small assembly of short metal rods in Brisbane. In a review of the Melbourne show in *The Age,* Mary Eagle wrote: 'The excitement of the works of Hunter and Andre is that they demonstrate that the minimal art coin now has two sides: their very objectivity is an invitation to a subjective response'.[40]

Hunter continued making grey paintings in this distinctive elongated format for sev-

(opposite and above)
Installation view of *Carl Andre and Robert Hunter*, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, 1978

eral years, including during his third trip to New York in 1979 and in Paris in 1980 when he participated in the 11th Paris Biennale. Upon returning to Melbourne, he exhibited a group in a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca in 1981. By this time, they would have appeared in some ways anachronistic, being out of step with the emerging return to expressionism, as Robert Rooney noted in *The Age*:

> After the noisy excess of much recent painting, I found it a pleasure to see Robert Hunter's unfashionable minimalist paintings … [they] are uniformly grey and satin smooth, yet they are not deadly dull … neither cold nor impersonal; accusations often levelled at this kind of work.[41]

The question of Hunter's relationship to Minimalism has been the subject of debate by many writers. The term has been persistently applied to his work for more than four decades; however, notwithstanding his reductive aesthetic and association with his American peers, such as Andre and LeWitt, to call Hunter a Minimalist is somewhat misleading. Rooney's perception that Hunter's paintings were not 'cool or impersonal' points to an important mark of difference. In his catalogue essay for Hunter's survey exhibition at Monash University in 1989, former museum director Alan Dodge similarly observed that what distinguished Hunter from the strictly reductive project of Minimalism was his intuitive approach:

> Unlike the metal modules of Carl Andre's sculpture or the black pinstripe configurations of Frank Stella, Hunter's paintings are the record of the artist's intuitive development within a basic structure which is only slowly revealed under the viewer's contemplation.[42]

For artist and art historian Charles Green, Hunter's relationship to Minimalism was 'less a style than a concern for certain values', arguing that the artist's persistence with the style developed into a subjective personal language.[43] Indeed, as art historian Grazia Gunn has suggested, Hunter's adaption of strategies such as seriality and modular geometries 'may have been as much instinctual as conscious',[44] leading him to develop an idiosyncratic visual language that drew upon the logic of Minimalism but extended it into an altogether different realm.

Space for the unknown

From 1983 onwards, Hunter settled on the format and working method that he would continue to refine until the end of his career. Rejecting canvas once more, he began to use 4 by 8–foot sheets of plywood timber, a ready-made building material in the ratio of 1:2 that neatly divides into two squares. Hunter considered the square 'an absolute base' that connected back to his earliest paintings from the 1960s, and it continued to form his basic geometric lexicon until the very last works he made in 2014.[45] Working with the intrinsic dimensions of the support, Hunter methodically divided the space from rectangle to two squares, to four quarters, and so on, creating an orthogonal grid from which he would then develop increasingly complex geometric patterns. For a brief period the compositions in this new format featured blue-grey centralised horizontal bands that recalled his narrow grey canvases of the late seventies and early eighties (pp. 42–5); however, this soon gave way to paintings composed exclusively of finely modulated shades of white.

The characteristic whiteness of the artist's paintings invites comparison to the works of certain artists, such as Ryman, or the early abstractions of Baer. In truth, Hunter's paintings are not purely monochromatic. Like the near-black paintings of Reinhardt, with whom Hunter identified so strongly as a young artist, his paintings in fact contain the primary colours, albeit veiled under layers of white to the point of near-invisibility. Extremely subtle tints of red, yellow and blue made more pronounced by the surrounding paleness sometimes emerge in the paintings, rewarding only the most attentive of viewers.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Hunter's paintings is that the whole is not possible to fully comprehend in a single moment. Up close, the eye is drawn to the intricacies of line, geometric patterns and subtle shifts in tone. Seen from a distance, other features begin to emerge within interstitial spaces. A dominant cross or geometric border, for example, will reveal itself momentarily, only to disappear soon after. Affecting a kind of gentle pulsing that pulls the viewer back and forth, these are the kinds of paintings that must be experienced in the present. They force us to reflect upon the act of viewing itself.

It is possible to discern distinct phases within Hunter's mature period. In the 1980s the geometric patterns contain a relative stillness and contemplative quality. In works such as *Untitled no. 4* 1985 (opposite), a series of opaque squares tilt on their axes in repeated sequences, alternating from diamond to square to diamond and so on in a rhythmic pattern across the surface of the painting. By the early 1990s Hunter's works demonstrated an intensification in complexity and detail – the geometric patterns became more intricate, the surfaces more reflective, creating an increasingly dynamic effect. Works from this period are the most responsive to the ambience of space and shifting effects of light, qualities that have perhaps led some to compare his works to natural phenomena.[46] In later years, Hunter began to more obviously introduce different textures in his compositions, leaving traces of the paint roller and

Untitled no. 4 1985
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

on occasion introducing small elements of over-painted colours, punctuating the composition with starlike formations and small 'keys' of secondary colours at the edges of the paintings, evident in works such as *Untitled no. 4* 2003 (pp. 64–5).

Limiting himself to using Dulux house paint, paint rollers and masking tape – the materials that sustained Hunter's practice from the very beginning of his career and which he also employed working as a house painter on occasion – reflects a certain pragmatism that has always been present in his art. Indeed, Hunter always sought simple means and starting points, using what was at hand because 'it was there and available'.[47] He looked to both everyday materials and experiences, sometimes finding inspiration in unlikely places, such as the geometry of a pool table – an 'absurd' starting point, by his own admission.[48] Others have inferred that Hunter's daily encounters, whether conversations with friends or the activities of a given day, would also inflect his works, suggesting an interpretation of his paintings as being almost diaristic in nature, though without narrative or language.[49]

Hunter's matter-of-fact approach was also reflected in the way he constructed his paintings, which might be understood as non-hierarchical in that he did not privilege one element over another. What was important to the artist was 'an "equivalence of value" between different parts of the painting, so there is no hierarchy, no central point of interest'.[50] 'All I was doing was balancing out colours and forms so that nothing had any precedence', Hunter once explained. 'Just the physical existence of the thing was all that was important.'[51]

In spite of their modest means of production and self-referential materiality, Hunter's paintings are not cool or dispassionate things. Luminous and sensual, delicate and complex, they are, in fact, highly mutable objects. It is perhaps for these reasons that, for many, Hunter's works are meditative in nature and have evoked a wide range of subjective responses. Without associative points of reference, the viewer must contend with their own individual perceptual encounter. They are intimate objects that demand an intimacy from the viewer in return.

The repetitive and ritualised daily practice of painting within strict limitations paradoxically afforded Hunter a kind of freedom through which he was able to generate seemingly infinite aesthetic possibilities. Through an extremely labour-intensive and highly regulated process – each painting taking two to three months to complete – the artist found a rhythm whereby one work would inform the composition of the next, developed in an intuitive manner. 'I *do* not start a painting from scratch, I start from the last one', he explained. 'It is purely sequential when I start a new painting, it has to be absolutely in order, this also negates having to make decisions about a starting point.'[52] The simple materials, workmanlike process and limited set of parameters Hunter set himself enabled him to remove conscious decision-making and effectively take himself out of the equation, as if he were a conduit to an unseen force. 'It's like I'm external to them', he once remarked of his paintings. 'They develop their own assertion and character; their becoming finished is a thing they decide themselves. It's unexplainable.'[53]

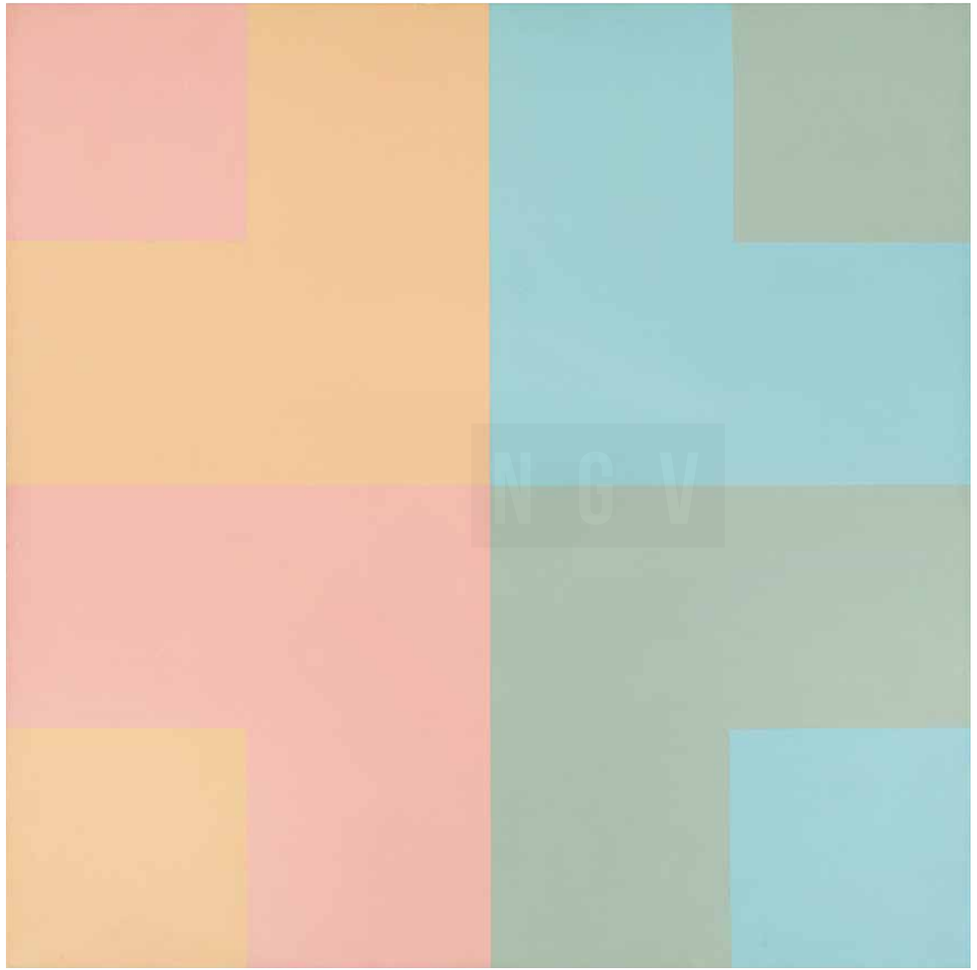
In his final years, after moving to the industrial seaside suburb of Altona in Melbourne's inner west, Hunter made eleven paintings in total.[54] At the time of writing, none of the final paintings has been publically exhibited, and only two have been included in this exhibition. Knowing that Hunter worked on paintings in close succession, making subtle calibrations and shifts from one to the next, it is possible to assume from these an ethereal quality shared by others in the series. These paintings appear suffused with light and are distinguished by a sense of openess and feeling of weightlessness. Having been absent in the artist's oeuvre for more than four decades, remarkably, the motif of the circle reappears in these late works, delicately circumscribing the edges of the composition. While drawing upon the repertoire of forms – the grid, the square, circle, diagonal and orthogonal lines – found in his earliest work, the late works seem to gently assert a new direction.

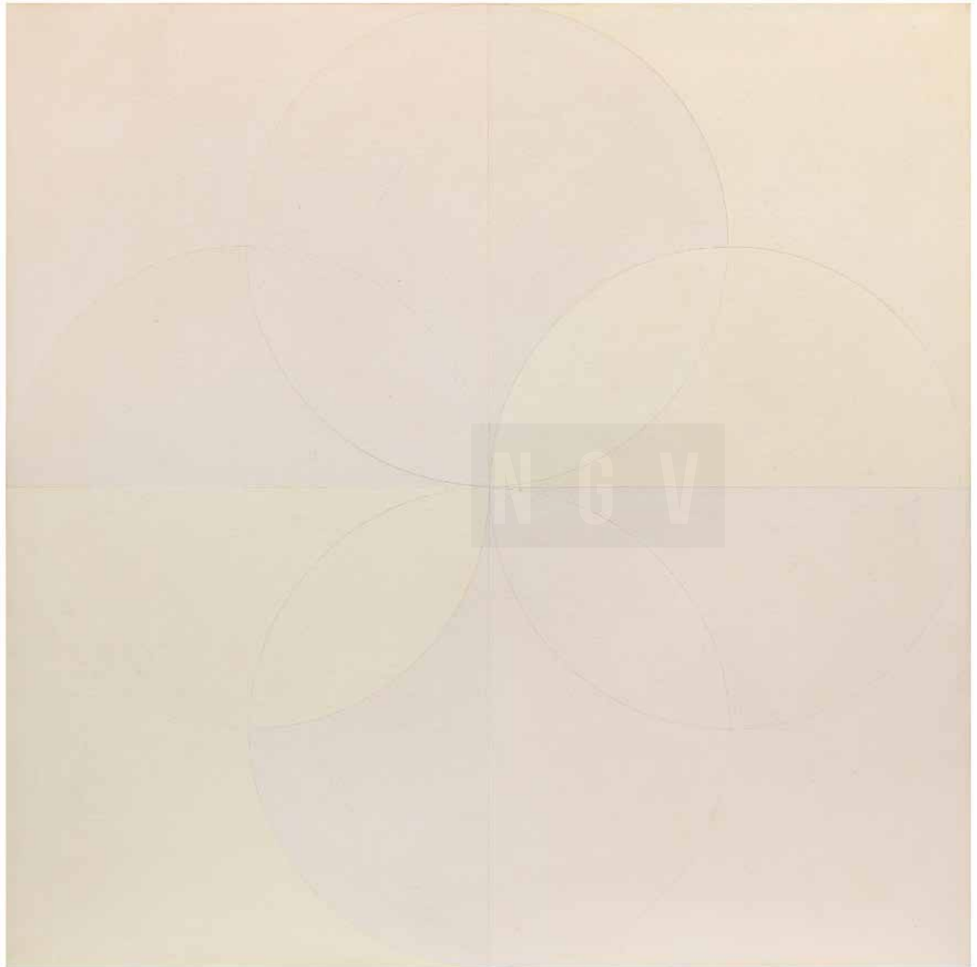
When Hunter died on 23 September 2014, his reputation as one of Australia's most significant artists, whose commitment to a singular aesthetic position from the very beginning of his career, was widely lauded in various tributes. His commitment, as Tom Nicholson eulogised, also 'had a social dimension' that 'underwrote the deep affection and respect with which Hunter is held by artists across many generations'.[55] A common observation of those who knew Hunter well was that his personality was like his work: strong and confident, yet quiet and complex. As Hunter's lifelong friend and former gallerist Bruce Pollard remarked, 'It is important to know about how people felt about Robert and what they felt from him, because looking at his paintings gives a feeling of his presence'.[56]

Robert Hunter made resolutely everyday works whose effects were far from ordinary. Insistently self-referential and modest in their materiality and manufacture, they paradoxically yield to other types of understanding. Based on the primacy of experience and defined by an immediacy of sensation, they quietly open up and reward those who are prepared to look closely with infinite possible spaces for the unknown.

(p.18)
Untitled 1966
Wesfarmers Collection, Perth

(p. 19)
No. 4 untitled painting 1968
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane





(p. 20)
Untitled 1968
Private collection, Melbourne

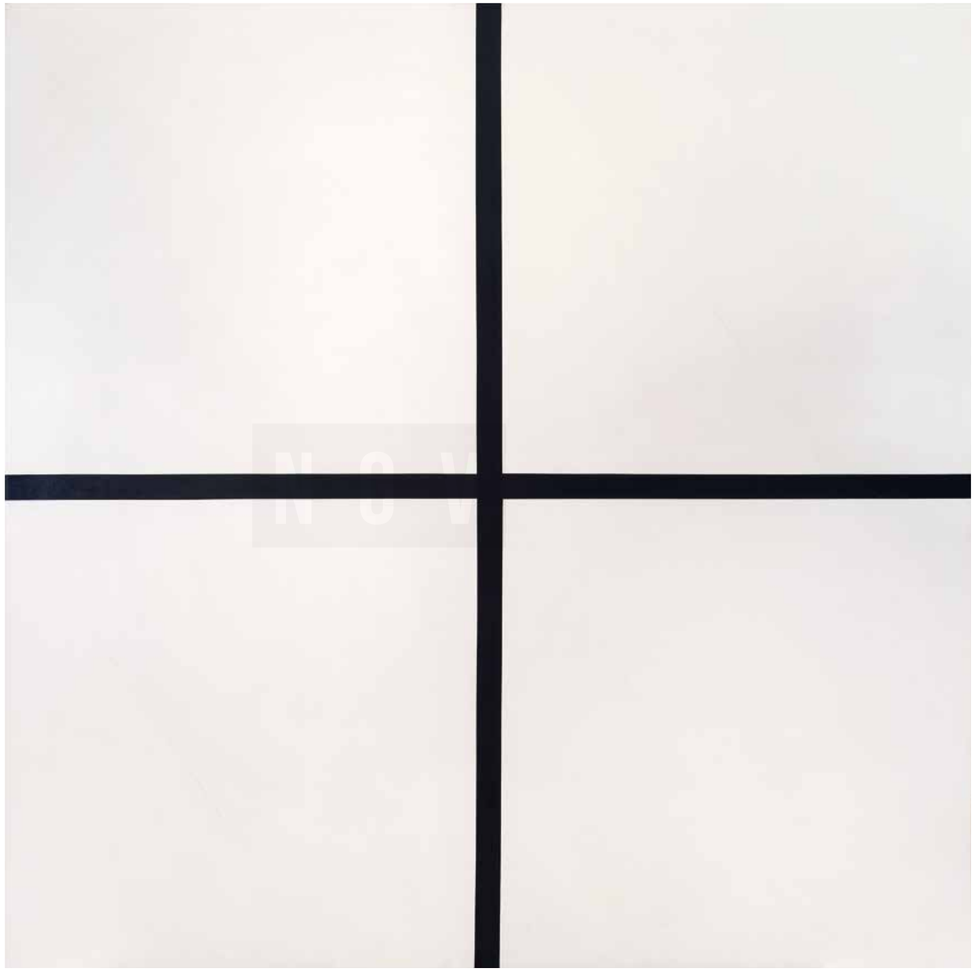
(p. 21)
Untitled 1968
Private Collection, Brisbane

(opposite)
No. 6 untitled painting 1968
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

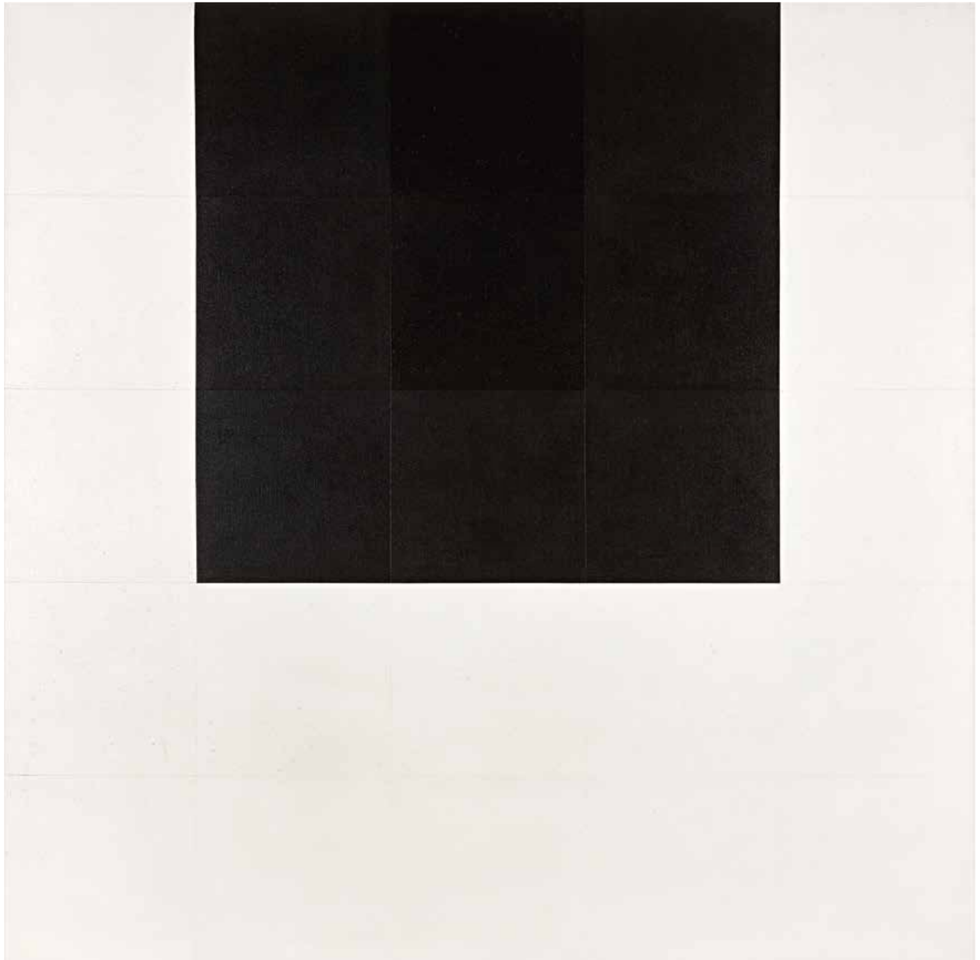
(p. 24)
Untitled no. 10 1968
Private collection, Canberra

(p. 25)
Untitled painting no. 11 1968
Monash University Collection, Melbourne

(opposite)
Untitled 1968
Private collection, Sydney



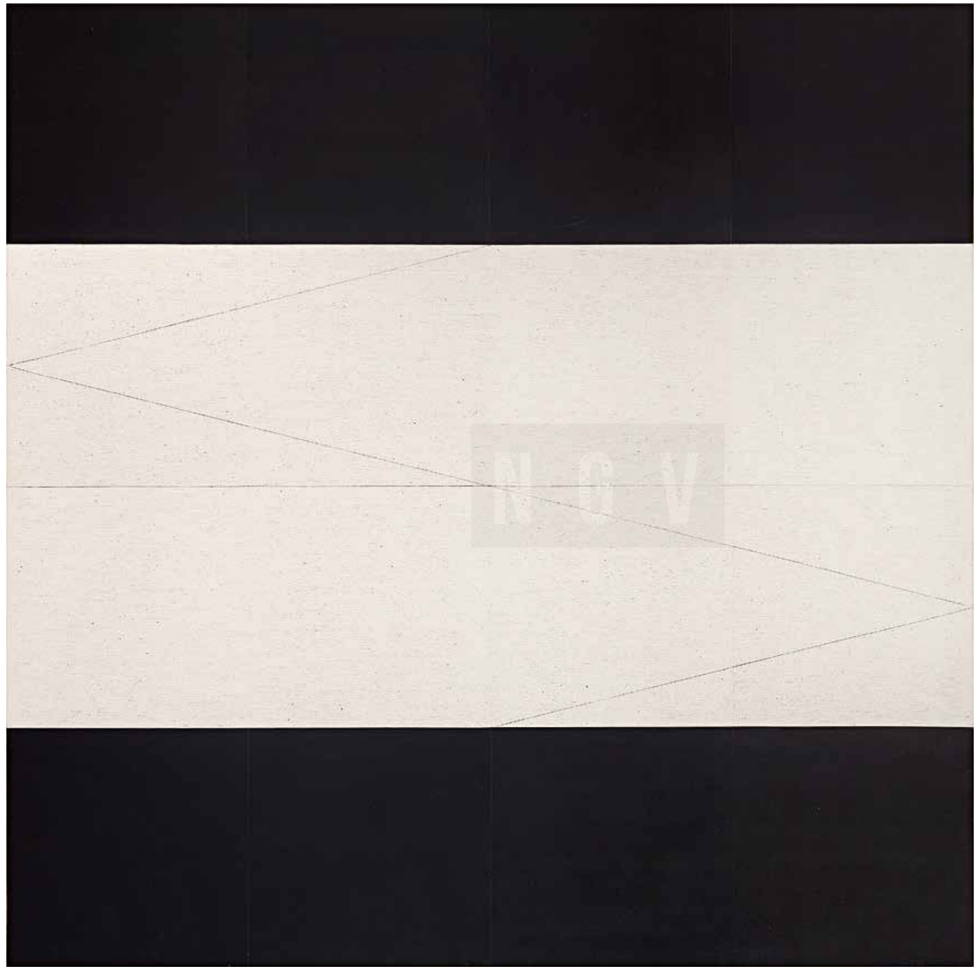
Untitled 1968
Private collection, Brisbane

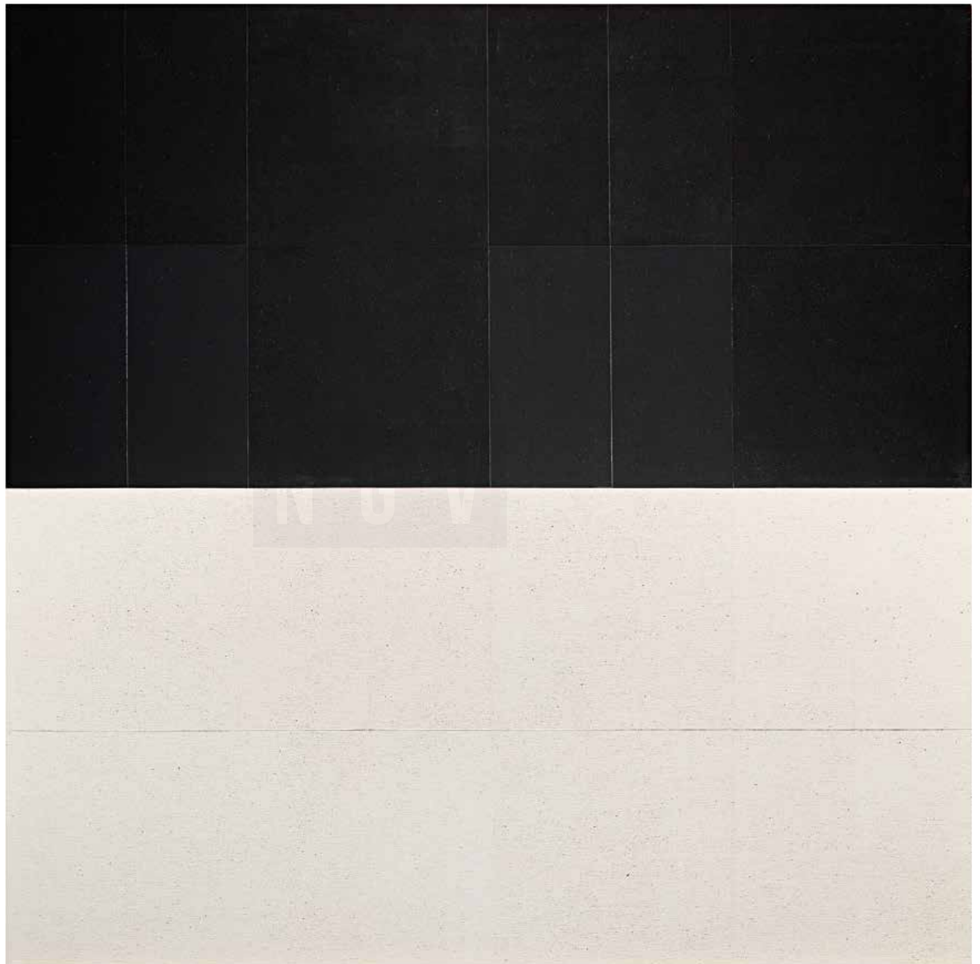


(opposite)
Untitled 1969
Private collection, Sydney

(p. 32)
Untitled painting 1969
Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth

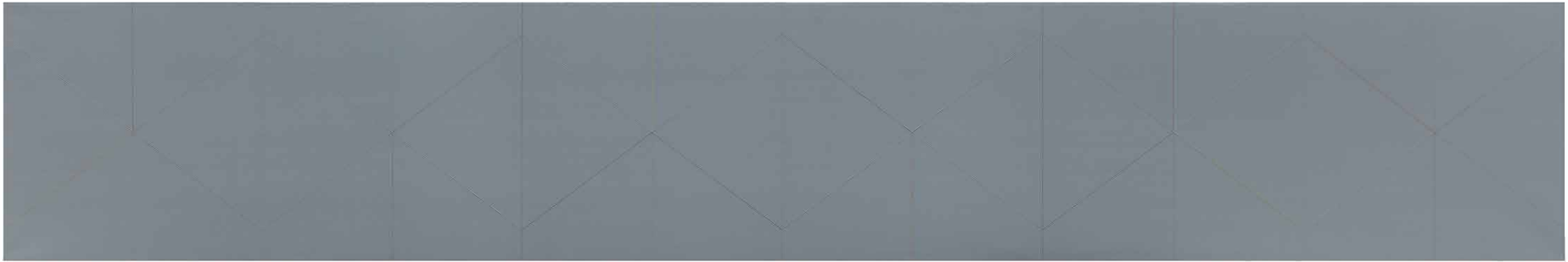
(p. 33)
Untitled painting no. 1 1969
Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth





Untitled 1976
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Untitled 1977
Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria



Untitled 1981
Geelong Gallery, Victoria

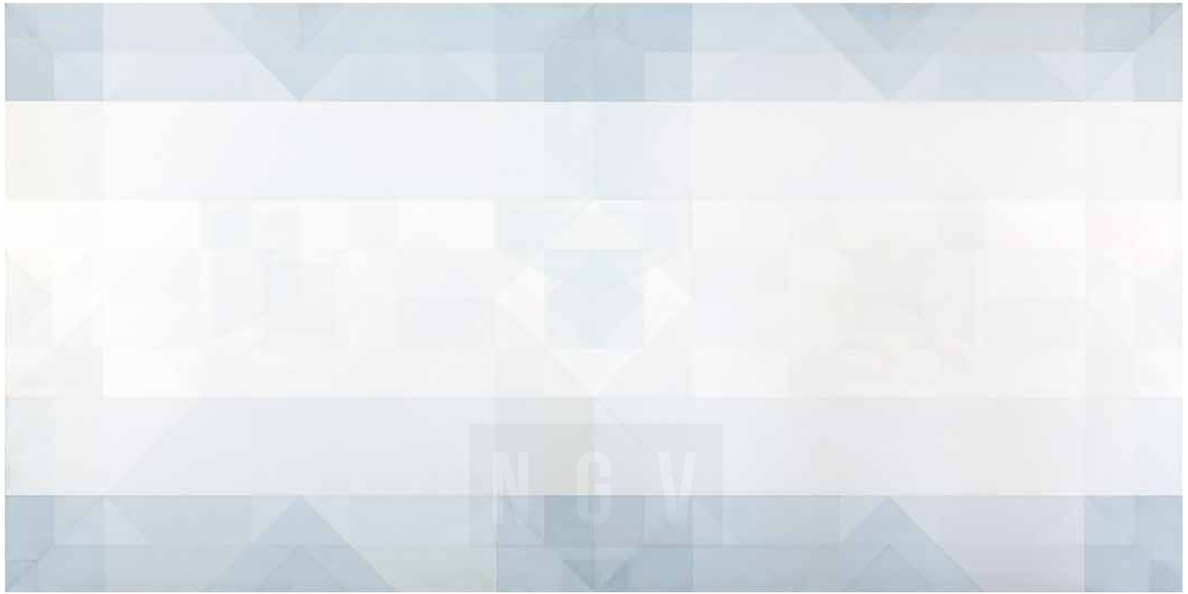
Untitled 1981 (detail)
Geelong Gallery, Victoria

Untitled 1983–84
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

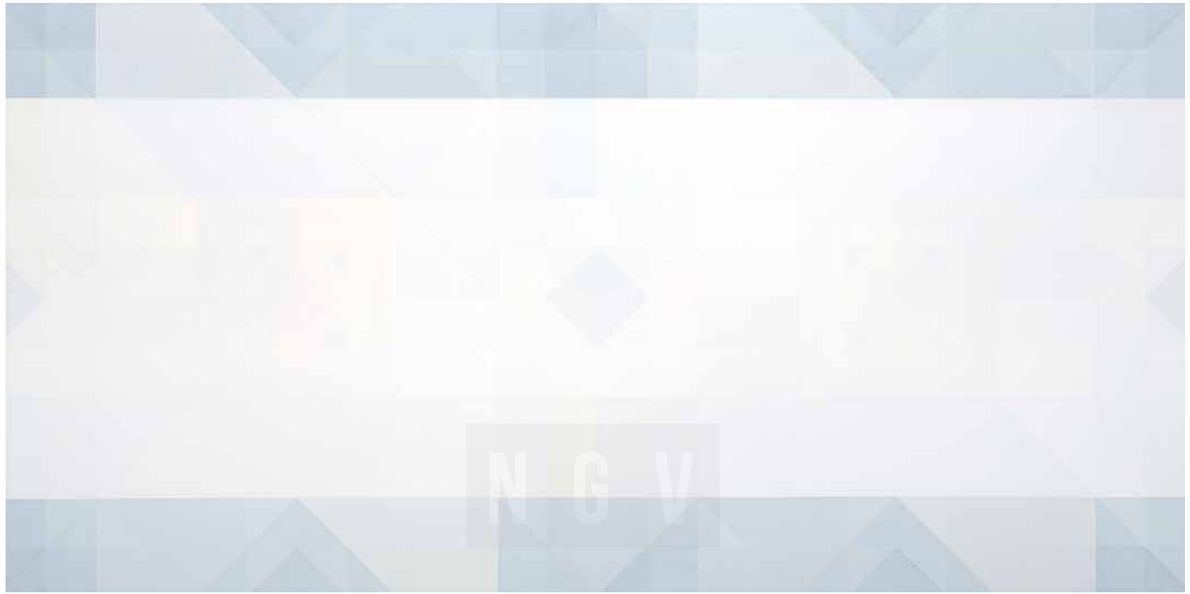
Untitled 1984
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Untitled no. 6 (for Carl) 1985
Private Collection, Brisbane

Untitled no. 3 1986
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne



Untitled no. 1 1987
TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville



Untitled no. 3 1987
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Untitled 1988
The University of Melbourne Art Collection, Melbourne

Untitled no. 4 1991
Collection of Mary and Peter Nicholson, Melbourne

Untitled no. 4 1991–92
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Untitled 1993
Collection of Paul and Wendy Bonnici, Melbourne

Untitled no. 6 1995
Private collection, Melbourne

Untitled no. 7 1996
The Vizard Foundation Art Collection of the 1990s, acquired 1997
On loan to the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne

Untitled no. 6 1998
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Untitled no. 3 2000
Private Collection, Brisbane

Untitled no. 4 2003
Estate of the artist, Melbourne
(opposite, detail)

Untitled no. 2 2005
Collection of James C. Sourris, Brisbane

Untitled 2008
Collection of Alida Milani, Melbourne

Untitled no. 9 2010
Estate of the artist, Melbourne

Untitled no. 2 2012
Estate of the artist, Melbourne,
courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Untitled no. 9 2013
Estate of the artist, Melbourne

Robert Hunter: at the southern edge of the great iceberg of Minimalism

Ann Stephen

Key to *The Field*

Few Australian artists have had such precocious beginnings to their careers as Robert Hunter. He was only twenty-one years old when selected for *The Field* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, and twenty-seven when included in the *Eight Contemporary Artists* survey at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. In 1968, when the inaugural exhibition that launched both Roy Grounds's modern NGV building and a new generation of American-orientated artists opened, the writing was already on the wall for painting. Hunter's single white painting in *The Field* stood out among the predominantly colour field work, seeming to look both backwards and forwards. Its singularity appeared to defy sight, and it was the only work not reproduced in the exhibition publication, in which the curator John Stringer stated: 'Due to the close tonal relationships between white and off-white in this painting the camera has been unable to produce an image and reproduction is therefore impossible'.[1] Melbourne's leading formalist critic Patrick McCaughey claimed a pre-eminent position for the painting:

> Perhaps the most crucial example in the exhibition of the central role of the onlooker's experience as the key to understanding the force of the new abstraction is Robert Hunter's white painting. Here the spectator must become physically active, moving around the painting simply to see what's going on. He can establish what the painting is only by experiencing it as a participating agent in its working. Yet like so much of the new abstraction the work itself is relatively simple in its layout: circles incised by a diamond shape and sub-divided into squares. It is the continuing paradox of a wide spectrum of different imaginative persuasions within the new abstraction that radically simplified means create complex and ambiguous experiences for the spectator.[2]

McCaughey did not mention that Hunter's painting shared certain concerns with the other monochrome in *The Field*, the black painting *No title*, 1966, by Mel Ramsden. It too mobilised the spectator to move along its highly reflective length. Significantly, both works were painted under the spell of American Ad Reinhardt. In the case of Ramsden's work, painted two years earlier, there was already a wry, corrosive intent in the exaggerated length of its plank-like stretcher not evident in Hunter's work, which used the square format artists such as Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich had identified with abstraction half a century earlier.

Three months before *The Field* opened, Hunter had held his first solo exhibition in Melbourne to a rapturous reception. McCaughey heralded it as a 'Dazzling debut by young artist', writing:

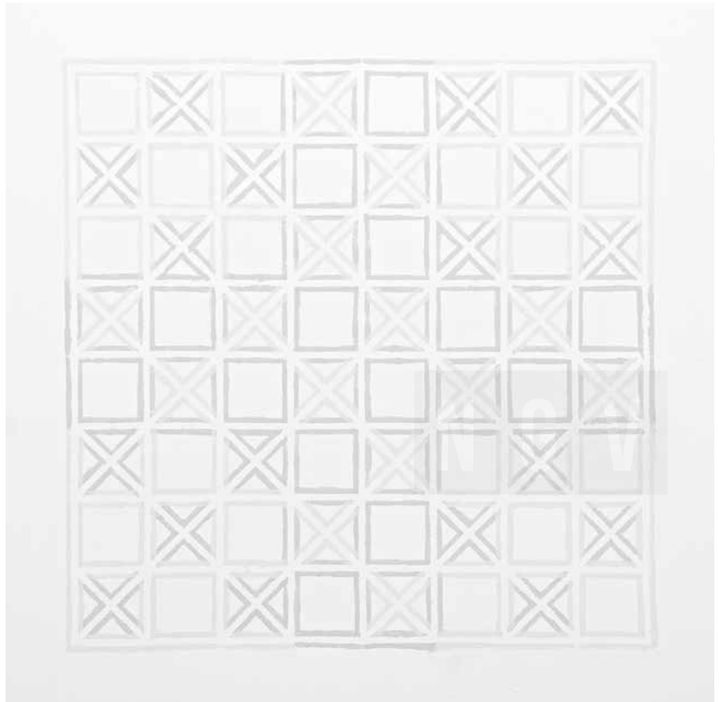
> He has started his career as a painter by asking just what a painter is or can be. He strips painting down to its bare essentials. Colour is all but totally suppressed. Indeed at first glance these 13 paintings seem nothing but 13 white squares. But then the observer becomes aware of different tones and values alive in the white square.
>
> Suddenly we notice that the white square here takes on an orange glow, there a violet timbre, here a nagging pink, there a rich cream and so on. With the discovery of different colours working through the white, distinctive forms begin to emerge from the seemingly blank surface. The forms are simple: circles set against squares; sometimes they overlap the squares, at other times the squares bisect them.[3]

McCaughey, entranced by the 'silent, secretive mystery' of Hunter's works, encouraged the viewer to participate in what was a new kind of phenomenological attentiveness:

> You have to walk up to the painting, away from it, around it and so on to discover all of its ghostly, barely discernible forms. These are paintings where you must look with every ounce of concentration, every fibre of mind, to recognise the presence of the forms. Painting here becomes a total experience. The white tones are graded so subtly that our eyes are no longer sufficient guides for our senses. We have to move at the paintings' bidding to explore their full complexity.[4]

For *The Field*, Hunter almost doubled the size of his square paintings to make a canvas of just more than 2.0 x 2.0 metres, retaining their internal scale but multiplying the parts with nine circles intersected by a diagonal grid (p. 6). Its model, *Untitled no. 8*, 1968 (p. 4), now in the NGV Collection, has a single diamond, itself divided into a symmetrical grid of four squares, enclosing four circles. The luminous quality of its lozenge appears translucent, as if emitting light from the centre as it intersects and is superimposed over the circles and squares. An illusion of space is created despite its flat and systematic construction, suggesting a residue of late Cubism. The larger, museum-scaled work included in *The Field* reads more as a minimal 1960s painting emphasising an allover grid.

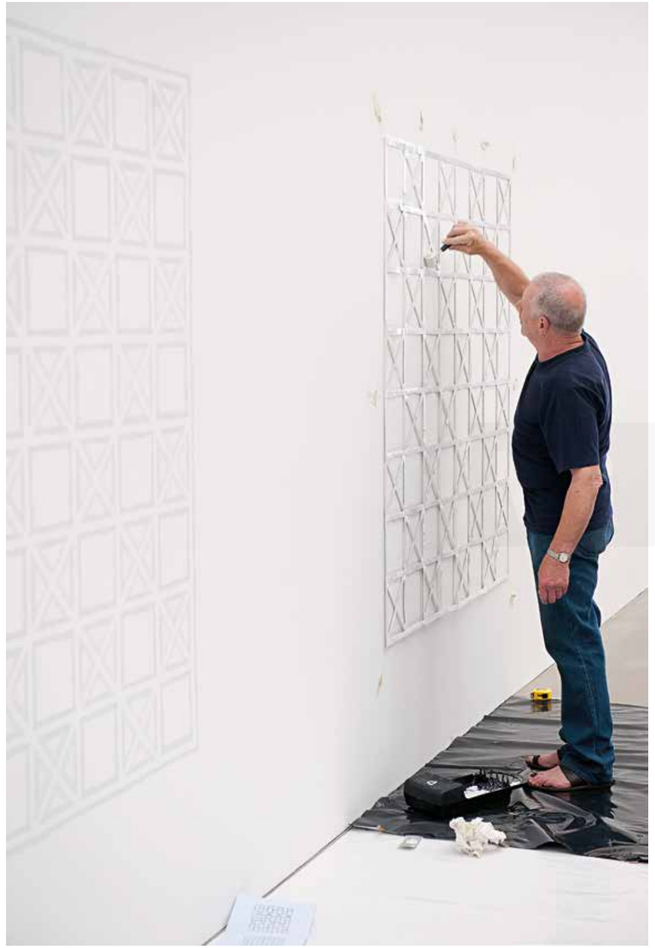
The key to Hunter's dazzling effects is the pearly layering of various white tones of paint that conceal or mask colour. Take *No. 6 untitled painting* 1968 (p. 23), in which at first it seems impossible to discern anything other than a white painted square. Only with slow, concentrated looking can differences be distinguished and the internal complexity of the surface opens up. The residue of the process of making the painting conspires to make it visible. The square has been divided into a grid of nine equal parts, although that symmetry is complicated by each internal square being divided by an arc, which dispenses with any formal centring to imply indeterminacy and extension beyond the frame. The work's scumbled, flatly painted surface is inexpressive, but up close it becomes possible to see how the brushwork follows the lines and arcs. Unlike Mondrian's handpainted and readjusted lines, the geometry of Hunter's 1960s grids was preconceived, and made with masking tape that, once removed, left a slightly raised residue of built-up paint along the lines of its edges. The thin lines that define the structure catch the light and inscribe a formal order, although they tend to drop from sight at certain angles. It is almost a miracle how the eye adjusts to subtle distinctions and, as if witnessing a chemical reaction, perceives the subliminal colour that rises through the white, as certain hues surface. Two grades of white – one a warm, creamy yellow, the other a thinner pink tone – alternately fill each half square and arc, equally distributing the proportions of whitish pink and yellow across the canvas. The original surface of colour is so subdued by overlays of matt white that there is little to stabilise and secure a vision of the work, creating a fundamental level of uncertainty about exactly what is there.



Untitled 1971 (detail)
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Before and after the white paintings

Three decades later, when artist Ian Burn curated *Looking at Seeing and Reading* in 1993, he returned Hunter's *No. 6 untitled painting*, 1968 to its muse, pairing it with a work by Reinhardt, and asking in the exhibition's catalogue essay:



Robert Hunter installing *Untitled* 1971 in November 2011 for *Ten Years of Contemporary Art: The James C. Sourris AM Collection* exhibition, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

> What do I see when red, yellow and blue have been overpainted to secrete their colour under washes of matte black paint (Reinhardt)? I begin to 'see' (or sense) the colour when my eyes tire of looking at 'nothing'. The slow (retinal) adjustment to blackness makes differences visible which hint at colour, and Reinhardt's cruciform becomes discernible almost as an after-image … The colours in Reinhardt's paintings are always in process of *becoming* visible, their visibility endlessly postponed, guaranteeing the *possibility* of seeing an importance equivalent to any *actual* seeing. The temporality of reception 'folds' time back on the viewer: 'what one sees in front of a "black" Reinhardt is the narrativisation of one's gaze' … The luminous white of Hunter's painting, with its barest hint of colour, suggests 'all colour' – whereas the sense of darkness, of blackness, implies being cut off from a world of sensory experience and secures a contemplative experience.[5]

In 1967 the touring MoMA exhibition *Two Decades of American Art* had included three of Reinhardt's late works. For Hunter, seeing them in the flesh rather than on the pages of a magazine was a revelation. In Lucy Lippard's unequivocal avant-garde terms, they represented the only serious direction possible for painting at that time:

> Ad Reinhardt's square, symmetrical, black paintings are the only works by a member of the original New York School which still seem difficult … Not coloured, not composed, not inflected, not meaningful in any directly interpretative way.[6]

Such negation was what Hunter would henceforth aspire to, using the idea of working at the very edge of visibility to create works that demanded a slow contemplation. His immediate context was the Melbourne circle of artists based at Pinacotheca that included his former teacher Dale Hickey, and the gallerist Bruce Pollard, whose brand of puritanical existentialism was combined with an interest in avant-garde projects. Because Hunter rarely spoke about his art in public, Pollard became the spokesperson for him, as well as a number of other Pinacotheca artists. In 1971 Pollard described how Hickey and Hunter were both concerned with 'the semantics of experience, about recognising the reference points in life and working out ways of coping with them. People who don't make art are doing the same thing'.[7] Both artists were seen as confronting the void of everyday existence in different modes, whether through the near blindness of white light or, with Hickey's paintings, through ordinary matter abstracted almost beyond recognition. Later these differences would become pronounced, but in 1968 Hunter's and Hickey's work appeared receptive to existential interpretation.

A year earlier, in 1966, it appears that it was not Reinhardt that caught the young Hunter's attention but the former Bauhaus artist Josef Albers. After studying at Preston Technical College with Hickey, Hunter enrolled in industrial design at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), possibly because the city's art schools were hostile to abstraction. There he would have encountered Albers's influential study *The Interaction of Colour*, published a year earlier. Albers's investigations into the optical effects of colour, demonstrated by an accompanying set of silkscreen plates, was a textbook recommended by the German-born designer Gerard Herbst who lectured in industrial design at RMIT. One of the few surviving paintings from Hunter's student years, *Untitled*, 1966 (p. 18), included in the *Australian Young Contemporaries* group exhibition at the Argus Gallery, Melbourne, in 1967, appears to have been inspired by one of these exercises in colour intervals. As Albers noted:

> Any colour (shade or tint) always has 2 decisive characteristics: colour intensity (brightness) and light intensity (lightness). Therefore, colour intervals also have this double-sideness, this duality … after some training one might easily agree on light relationship, that is, which of 2 colours is lighter and which is darker. To prepare a basic exercise in colour transformation, combine 4 equal squares of different colours to make 1 large square. Within this grouping of 4 squares, the lighter will differentiate from the heavier, darker colour. Therefore, the squares will connect with each other or separate according to contrast and affinity.[8]

In an almost casebook study, Hunter applied this lesson about the relative intensity of colour on a square canvas consisting of four low-keyed, coloured squares: on one side dull pink and orange, on the other blue and olive green, with a smaller square in each alternative colour inserted at the corners of the canvas. Hunter never returned to explicit colour painting; however, he retained from Albers a systematic approach to visual perception, combined with an intuitive understanding about the relativity of colour.

Eighteen months later, in October 1968, Hunter was confronted by the enormous challenges facing painting when he arrived in New York. There, Hunter met Ramsden and Burn, both former Melbourne Gallery School students whose conceptually orientated work in *The Field* had signalled a different future for art. Burn had sent back instructions for

exhibiting two of his *Mirror pieces* in Melbourne, and at the same time was also making his highly reflective *Blue reflex* paintings. Ramsden recalled their circumstances when Hunter arrived in New York:

> Ian was five years older and he had his head on straight – a five-year difference is a lot when you are in your 20s. He knew a few Australian artists and artists from Melbourne. He had a lot of visitors … Roger [Cutforth] and I were working as messenger boys at the UK Mission to the UN, Ian worked as a picture framer in East Harlem … I can remember some talk about the mobility of the work and also some talk – perhaps prevalent at the time – of 'software' … We made use of photographic repetition and documentation – 'schematics and schedules' – which of course might be fragments of another kind of aesthetic. We employed the then fairly new technologies like Xerox copies and cheap photostats (all available at street level in New York). There was nothing particularly out of the ordinary about this. It was a 'look' fairly well on the go at the time … all the works were located somehow within a kind of 'crafted' internal coherence most familiar from modernism, from the medium and the making of paintings. It's just that in 1968–69 it didn't seem like that – a few Xerox copies, some photographs and photostats, didn't seem like 'painting' in the least.[9]

Hunter's New York stay coincided with intense political activity in opposition to the Vietnam War, when many artists in the city became involved with the Art Workers Coalition. It was also the year of several landmark conceptual exhibitions, including those at Finch College, *Language III* at Dwan Gallery, Lucy Lippard's *Numbers Show* and Seth Siegelaub's *March* exhibition. Hunter also saw the work of Sol LeWitt and Carl Andre for the first time, two artists with whom he had a strong affinity. That year LeWitt had made his first wall drawing, at Lippard's invitation, for a benefit exhibition for the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Ramsden, Burn and Cutforth published LeWitt's plan for the wall drawing in their July 1969 issue of *Artpress*, a mimeographed collection of proposals for works of art. Hunter secured a driver's job at the Australian Mission to the United Nations in New York, recommended by Avril Burn, wife of Ian Burn, who worked there.[10]

It was on his return from New York to Melbourne in 1969 that Hunter set about radically reducing his means of production, dispensing altogether with stretched canvas, paintbrush and any trace of colour. The effect was not to dematerialise so much as to simplify his method of painting. For instance, at Pinacotheca in 1970 Hunter taped six sheets of paper together with masking tape to form a rectangular format, on which he made a sequence of six variations. Each composite sheet was painted a standard grey, then certain parts of each grid were twice over-taped, and over-painted in a thinner grey. As the viewer walked the length of the warehouse, the evenly spaced sheets of paper secured to the wall with loops of tape revealed different horizontal and vertical emphases on each ready-made grid. Given its fragility, when the work was acquired by the NGV Hunter gave instructions for it to be replicated if necessary, specifying: 'Paint Dulux, flat plastic, mix of pure black and white acrylic and pigments, mixed in shop to grey'.[11]

Hunter next eliminated the intermediary of paper, making a temporal work with a grid of masking tape and tones of grey paint rolled directly on the wall. Melbourne critic Ross Lansell observed how Hunter's painting process created a form of proto-installation, using:

> apparently one-inch wide masking tape as a kind of negative stencil and wishy-washy grey paint, sometimes dribbled, which is applied on top of the tape before it is removed – thus baring rough-hewn white grid systems etched out of grey paint.
>
> The same stencil, apparently is used, with certain important variations … individual squares and the points of intersection pulsate but always systematically … Despite their apparent dullness and greyness, they become gem-like, if but fleetingly.[12]

In Melbourne the reception was mixed. McCaughey, who presumably missed the painterly aspects of Hunter's earlier work, now damned him as 'provincial … doing what has already been done elsewhere for a local audience'.[13] While the model of LeWitt exerted a powerful impression on Hunter, the Australian's wall painting was distinctive, having evolved from his own practice. Unlike LeWitt, Hunter did not provide instructions for a work but instead made a stencil which formed the basis of any subsequent wall painting, with each iteration subtly different. In fact, for Hunter the reduced means allowed him greater mobility. Over 1970–77 he executed a series of wall paintings in Melbourne at Pinacotheca (1970, 1971, 1974, 1976); in New Delhi at the Second Indian Triennale (1971); in Sydney at Central Street Gallery (1971) and the Art Gallery of New South Wales (1973 and 1976); in New York at MoMA (1974); in Düsseldorf at Galerie Konrad Fischer (1974); in London at Lisson Gallery (1975); and in Melbourne at Gunn Hayball architects (1977). As Hunter said of the wall painting he had made and remade several times: 'Different but the same'.[14] In India Hunter met with several American artists in the Triennale who worked with similarly reduced means, including Robert Ryman and Andre, and the latter became a close friend.

Four decades later Hunter retrieved the original stencil made for New Delhi and remade the work, at the invitation of his Brisbane gallerist Josh Milani, to accompany an exhibition of his 2010 paintings. It was a risky venture in the relatively enclosed upstairs space of Milani Gallery. Hunter painted out the first grid and then repainted it, with the assistance of the young Indigenous artist Dale Harding, for whom the experience proved formative. The space permitted for nine of the ten grids. The art historian Andrew McNamara observed the different responses to Hunter's work:

> While such austerely provisional art had become familiar by 1971, opinions on its status were divided. It could be interpreted in broadly counter-cultural terms as a Zen-like abandonment to a contemplative immateriality or as a defiant act of resistance against relentless commodification. Alternatively, some viewers found such work threatening and alien. It reduced painting to the barest trace, to its most negligible condition of possibility, to a seemingly conceptual level; a testimony to the emptying out of art.[15]

McNamara also noted, as Lansell had before him, how Hunter's minimal means produced quite startling effects:

> Internally divided into cellular divisions of seven horizontal and vertical lines intersected by seven diagonals, this wall painting is exceedingly simple and sparse. Yet, on closer inspection, this regularised format is composed of subtle variations of line and colour that accentuate their hand-painted execution. Their individual lines reveal a wavering, awkward – even slightly equivocal – treatment, which is further distinguished only by the variation offered by lighter and darker dull-grey-coloured contrasts. When installed in a sequence, however, the viewer becomes aware of a visual sparkling that emits from this simple patterned structure. The piece simultaneously emphasises the austerity of the serial, geometric pattern and works against it. Clearly, this is a very reduced and rudimentary minimal work, yet the viewer's eyes quickly become alert to its shimmering optical effects. This unexpectedly captivating visual experience seems incongruous because the means of producing this visual sparkling are so humdrum and lacklustre.[16]

After encountering New York Minimal and Conceptual art, the wall painting returned Hunter to the visual density of his white paintings, but was executed with the simplest of means. Curiously, the shimmer and sparkle of its optical effects are reminiscent of Mondrian's early grey grid *Composition with grid 3, lozenge with grey lines*, of 1918 (Gemeentemuseum Den Haag), a work that Burn had remade back in the late 1960s as he came to terms with late modernism.[17]

For a new generation that had never seen Hunter's series of spare grids made from a single stencil and rolled onto the wall in two different tones of light grey, encountering this work was to confront the southern edge of the great iceberg of minimalism. When I first encountered Hunter's painting in the early 1970s, the shock of his austere work was profound and required new ways of looking. Painting at the very edge of visibility was to step into a precarious zone between the virtual and the literal. It is now clear that Hunter was alone among Australian artists of that time and of a particular age to understand that painting had to be pursued in the face of Minimalism; that painting had to be renewed somehow to refresh and re-problematise its virtuality. Minimalism held fear and promise. In choosing to take the high-risk path forged by Reinhardt, Hunter made a common cause with the great artists of his generation – Ryman, LeWitt and Andre.

Robert Hunter at the Museum of Modern Art

Jennifer Winkworth

Installation view of *Eight Contemporary Artists*
at Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1974

In January 1974 I travelled from New York, in my capacity as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), to Melbourne and Sydney. An exhibition I organised, *Some Recent American Art*, opened at the National Gallery of Victoria in February.[1] While in Melbourne, I looked up Bruce Pollard, whom I had met a couple of years earlier when he visited MoMA.

Pollard took me to Pinacotheca, the gallery he had established in a nineteenth-century brick factory building in Richmond.[2] Disused industrial buildings converted for art purposes were familiar to me from New York but, in contrast to the opulent commercial premises I knew, Pollard had done little by way of transformation. Pinacotheca was, nonetheless, an amazing, haunting place.

In that raw setting I first saw paintings by Robert Hunter. He had applied acrylic paint in pastel hues directly to the wall, in basic rectilinear configurations within square formats. The works were pale, delicate, ephemeral – not in a transitory so much as an ethereal sense. The chromatic range was elusive, the paint handling subtle, the geometric imagery reductive but not formulaic. Hunter's work was captivating and memorable. Much new work I had seen at that time embodied such doctrines as truth to materials, revelation of process, dissolution of the art object, or rejection of illusionism. Hunter's aesthetic preoccupations seemed distinct from other current manifestations of abstract painting and sculpture, though they were broadly familiar conceptually within the Minimalist canon of contemporary art in the United States and Europe.

Pollard subsequently introduced me to the artist. Hunter did not talk a lot, yet he was companionable and seemed comfortable in the company of others. We met on several occasions and he came to look around while I was installing in the galleries with artists who had travelled from the United States.[3] Artists in the exhibition whose work shared kinship with Hunter's included Robert Ryman, with white gestural paintings on canvas or cardboard; Sol LeWitt, with serial geometric imagery in chalk and crayon applied directly to the wall surface; Agnes Martin, working in faint, elementary pencil grids on canvas; and Robert Irwin, with pastel-white painted discs. In some respects, Hunter's work was closest to Irwin's, although they were polar opposites in person: Irwin loquacious and eloquent; Hunter taciturn and detached. There were affinities of palette, as well as in their delicate, complex handling of the paint medium to produce illusory, indefinable visual effects.[4] Both artists were mysterious about techniques and solicitous about lighting, and both refuted titles as extraneous to a work of art.

On returning to New York, I was scheduled to organise the next large exhibition of contemporary art at MoMA, the first for several years, to open in October 1974. It was an international group exhibition, and I purposely chose the loose, descriptive title *Eight Contemporary Artists* to suit times in which, to my mind, national designations were ineffective because they implied cultural and stylistic divisions that no longer held much significance.[5]

Of all the work I had seen in Melbourne and, afterwards, Sydney, Hunter's left the deepest impression. I wrote to him in April 1974, asking him to participate in the exhibition at MoMA. He responded enthusiastically, and in answer to my question about his representation wrote: 'If "what you think you might want to do" apart from come, is a description of the work, then [I'll require] any wall, preferably running into a corner, of solid surface that can be painted, even passage-way wall ... Looking forward to whatever happens'.[6]

Contemporary art was not, in those days, high on the agenda at MoMA, and there was not a large budget allocated for the exhibition. I applied to the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts to aid Hunter's trip to create work on-site, and funds were granted for his passage and living expenses for three weeks.

For catalogue photographs, apart from his local sources Hunter directed me to the Fischer Gallery in Düsseldorf.[7] The artist Carl Andre had earlier made contact with Konrad Fischer on Hunter's behalf, and Hunter had sent off photographs and a piece of film, hoping eventually to exhibit there. Of the space available at MoMA, he wrote: 'The room to work in looks OK, preferably with the 13' section usable, if that's simple, and leaving the walls white unless they happen to be grey that's OK'.[8]

For press purposes, Hunter enclosed a brochure for the Second Indian Triennale, New Delhi, 1971. He described it as 'the closest thing to a formal statement that I have made, in fact it is a good friend saying what he sees me as saying... guess who?', referring almost certainly to Bruce Pollard.[9] Hunter continued:

> I assume that my section of the catalogue would end up desolate, which suits me, but if something credible can be constructed out of material which appears fairly meaningless, congratulations. The work would be fairly similar to the piece in Sydney i.e. stencilled gloss acrylic house paint, grey, real formula stuff ... I attempt to carry all plans and drawings in my head.[10]

By early September, the big temporary exhibition galleries in the museum were being readied for the installation. I wrote to Hunter, still in Melbourne, telling him that his space would be free by 23 September, allowing him a week to prepare. He worked alone, and I do not remember him asking for any particular attention or help. He needed a stepladder and portable work lamp, and he brought his own materials. The eight artists in the exhibition had individual areas of similar proportions, and they all met daily in the galleries throughout the period before the exhibition opened to the press, on the morning of 7 October. During that week, most likely at Hunter's request, I arranged to meet LeWitt a couple of times, once at LeWitt's small downtown loft.[11]

To the best of my recollection, Hunter stencilled in acrylic on all four walls of the room, aligning images of a subdivided square, with changing interior linear elements, along each wall. They were intended to be experienced as one continuous piece. The squares were in pairs, each one probably 1.2 x 1.2 metres.[12] They occupied a peculiarly low wall area. Mean eye-level at MoMA was, at that time, estimated at 1.45 metres from the floor. In photographs of Hunter's piece, the top margins appear to reach no higher than 1.8 metres, the bottom margins around 60 centimetres from the floor, leaving around 1.5–1.8 metres of wall empty to the ceiling. Rather than looking at an image frontally, the viewer was thus placed alongside, to be drawn into the work in a fully corporeal fashion.[13] When his work was completed, Hunter directed the electricians for specific lighting: white spot downlights in a mix of cold blue and warm pink hues.

John Russell, art critic for *The New York Times*, wrote in the introduction to his weekend review of the exhibition: 'Perhaps the general tone of the best work being done now is ruminative, tightly focused, and in the best sense narrow'. He continued:

> Robert Hunter, a young artist never before seen here, sets the tone ... with paintings stenciled on the wall in acrylics. At first these hover on the edge of invisibility and then literally fade away ... Mr Hunter's extreme discretion ... is the more striking for being exercised in the Modern Museum where most young artists would fight to make themselves heard.[14]

Russell correctly points out the deliberate reticence of Hunter's early work. The artist's technical prowess and extraordinary chromatic acuity, which were always difficult to analyse and about which he was dismissive, deflecting questions on his methods, were only to grow more powerful over the decades of his career. The techniques he employed in the iridescent monochromes of his later years, paintings on board in horizontal format, almost defy analysis.[15]

Hunter stayed in New York until late December 1974, spending time socially with many artists – I recall Andre, LeWitt, Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth, among others. He was closest to Andre but admired above all, I believe, LeWitt. When we met again in France many years later, Hunter still questioned me daily about LeWitt.

In 1999 I renewed contact with Hunter through the good offices of Dr Mal Logan, former vice-chancellor of Monash University, Melbourne, who spent summers in the south of France, where I now live. In 2001 Hunter had a show of large, recent paintings with Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre in Paris, where Andre had introduced him. Lefebvre discussed the problem of wall space with me because his premises were small, and I suggested looking for an external alternative space. With fine instinct, he arranged to use a nearby church, L'Eglise de Port-Royal. The walls could not be touched, and the paintings were suspended from above. What the sombre ecclesiastical interior lacked in practical means, such as hardboard walls or brilliant spotlighting, was more than overcome by dramatic architectural ambiance. I was astonished by Hunter's development, by the complex geometry and technical virtuosity of his later paintings. They were breathtaking in that setting, and the exhibition was a rare spiritual art experience.

Among viewers I personally escorted through the exhibition at MoMA in 1974, I treasure the memory of Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, the eminent architectural historian. Pevsner was entranced by Hunter's room, by the marriage of art to wall. It evoked a story of Pablo Picasso visiting his 'set' at Oxford, where the artist had been inspired to draw a composition directly on the wall, subsequently effaced by authorities, Pevsner told me ruefully. Hunter liked that story.

Still flow: Robert Hunter’s paintings 1985–2014

Tom Nicholson

In late December 1995 I spent several hours with Robert Hunter in his studio. It was the front room of the apartment where he lived with his partner Janice, a remarkable Victorian mansion in Toorak that had been subdivided into apartments many years earlier. It was not a large studio, its walls scarcely big enough to accomodate more than one painting: the painting Hunter was working on at any given time. The finished paintings were always wrapped, and neatly stacked, out of view. During a visit earlier that year, Robert had unwrapped a finished painting to show it to me on that working wall, and I remember, as he lifted the painting and swung it around with great laconic ease but also well-rehearsed exactness, how it fitted only very narrowly within the studio's dimensions. It was one of many senses in which the shape of Hunter's painting reflected very precisely the workings of his studio, and also echoed what I remember he once said about the 8 x 4 feet (approximately 2.44 x 1.22 metres) dimensions he worked on exclusively from 1985 until his death in 2014: that they fitted well in the back of his (famous) white van.

It was evening, and we watched the painting Hunter was working on, which was close to completion. There was a beautiful leadlight window to the left of this working wall, and the natural light from this window shifted slowly during the few hours we sat in his studio, drinking red wine, occasionally talking. The painting unfolded in concert with the light. The intricacies of the painting, its myriad geometrical forms painted in white and off-white, absorbed – and *became* – these changes in light. The warm light of the late evening animated the smallest hints of yellows and reds in the painting's centre. The sky's light ran into the strange flow of hallucinating that Hunter's painting generated in my seeing, its whites slowly becoming all the colours that whiteness seemed to contain. During the next hour, the light began to fade and the very gentle blues and greys at the painting's perimeter seemed to breathe this new light. The painting began to move as a different and more brooding presence. What we were watching was a remarkable unfolding, where looking was both sustained – by an extraordinary flow of colours and reflections – and eluded – by a painting that never seemed to stop becoming itself anew. The painting was both the object of our looking and a possible diagram of that looking; a diagram of looking's unfolding, its intricacies and its endlessness.

I was twenty-two, and had spent that year working on my fourth-year art history honours thesis on Hunter's work. I had spent two or three hours in this way before, sitting with one painting, watching it, talking, usually recording what we spoke about. Although I spent many hours with Hunter in the years that followed, up until his death in 2014, this visit in December 1995 was the last time I spent several hours in his studio, in front of one painting. It was a way of being with his paintings that I loved, and a glimpse into their making.

Hunter worked slowly, building up highly elaborate geometries with diluted white house paint. Paint was applied impersonally with a roller, with masking tape used to create the painting's geometry very precisely. The structure of this geometry established itself in 1985, when Hunter began to exclusively use sheets of 8 x 4 feet plywood sheets, which he regarded as surrogate walls.[1] It was, above all, an abstract geometry. But it was also a geometry partly related to a pool table (an object that provided Hunter with many hours of pleasure in inner-Melbourne pubs) and the lines that join its six pockets, as well as the modules of building (the profession which supported him during the 1970s), both in the 8 x 4 feet module of the ply sheet itself and in Hunter's habit of explicitly or tacitly dividing that sheet into a grid at 4-inch intervals.[2] Within those frameworks other intricate geometries unfold, often through interplays of systems of rotation and symmetry, usually involving triangular geometries linked to the three primary colours. The centre of these paintings usually dramatises these interplays in a type of focal junction, with a very small Y shape – the most delicately created geometry of the painting, and the most intimate to glean – which Hunter also spoke about as being a vagina. The way these paintings sustain our attention is not through these figurative suggestions. But the unlikely conjunction of matter-of-factness (the pool table and the mathematics of building) and the libidinal (the diagrammatic suggestion of a vagina) perhaps captures something of their contradictory character, and a relationship to living that skirts the otherworldly readings the works have sometimes provoked.

Hunter's slow application of diluted paint created a distinctive field of visual experience. He used tiny amounts of colour to vary his whites, and these variations, along with very slight shifts in texture produced through the accumulations of the roller, and an array of distinctions in gloss, create a complex interplay between what the painted surface seems to be and the optical spaces it constantly animates. This elusiveness seems the antithesis of the words of American painter Frank Stella, which almost assumed the status of a dictum in relation both to Stella's work and to a 1960s zeitgeist hostile to illusionistic spaces: 'All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without confusion … What you see is what you see'.[3] In Hunter's work, what you see is in flux, endlessly deferred and never stable. And this perceptual instability makes light both the object and the agent of vision. Light, the breathing of vision, to which we are habitually oblivious, as with our breathing, informs the rhythm of looking. The sensation

Untitled no. 1 1996
Private collection, Melbourne

of seeing light, not only seeing because of it, creates the feeling we are seeing ourselves in the act of seeing.

In late December 1995, when Hunter and I spent those hours together watching his painting in his studio, he had already spent ten years unfolding the possibilities of this 8 x 4 feet format. It remained the single focus of his work for the following nineteen years, until his death. Hunter's commitment to the possibilities of his visual language is perhaps unique in Australian art, and its richness as a vein of thinking and making is both idiosyncratic and remarkable. He has been described in relation to Minimalism and colour field painting in Australian art history. Though he was the youngest artist in the landmark 1968 National Gallery of Victoria exhibition *The Field*, his work was cited as its epitome. Australian curator Ron Radford's description of Hunter as one of the 'most consistent of the Australian minimalists' captures the classical place of his work in the canon of twentieth-century Australian art.[4] Yet the work Hunter created with singular focus from 1985 is marked by an elaborate and anti-reductive working process. The visual appearance of these paintings seems ostensibly remote from, for example, the Minimalism of his longstanding friend, the American artist Carl Andre, and is in certain respects closer to the intricacies of a ceiling fresco by the eighteenth-century Venetian artist Giambattista Tiepolo (whose complex compositional interplays of rotations and symmetries in dramatic images of ascent into the sky were sometimes created to receive the shimmering light reflecting off Venice's canals through the windows of the churches they were created for).[5] What is the visual etymology of Hunter's idiosyncratic visual language, with its conjunction of the impersonal surfaces of Minimalism, its attention to ontologies of seeing, and its baroque excess of shapes, its attention to the mobility and elusiveness of light?

The lyrical trajectories of the last twenty-nine years of Hunter's working life can be found at its outset, in his first solo show, which opened on 15 May 1968 at Tolarno Galleries in St Kilda, Melbourne. He was just twenty-one years old. The exhibition included thirteen square canvases, each 62 x 62 inches (approximately 158 x 158 centimetres) exclusively white and off-white, painted with house paint and using masking tape to create simple geometries. These early paintings are based on a structure of circles, grids and diagonals which only emerges through relief, and tinges of colour that almost defy perception. Although the square format might suggest a state of stability and immobility, most of the paintings depend on the evocation of movement, however understated. In *Untitled*, 1968 (p. 25), the movement implied in the work's structure depends on the duration of perception, so that the initial suggestion of an enormous, simplified Futurist arc moving through space becomes a silent image of gentle mental rotation. Whereas subsequent writing about this exhibition has tended to overplay its severity, contemporary reviews perceptively focused on the works' lyrical qualities; critic G. R. Lansell describing them as 'diaphanous, haunting paintings'.[6]

This remarkable first body of work established Hunter's importance, and also led to his inclusion in *The Field*. It also established some of the singular tensions – between reduction and plenitude – that became overt in Hunter's paintings after 1985. Hunter had his own reasons for reduction at the beginning of his career, and his immediate context included influential artists such as Jim Doolin, Dale Hickey, Robert Jacks and Robert Rooney, who were working with the idiom of colour field painting in idiosyncratic and powerful ways.[7] However, the arrival in Melbourne in 1967 of the exhibition *Two Decades of American Art* undoubtedly provided one catalysing of experience: seeing Ad Reinhardt's extraordinary black-on-black cruciform paintings.[8] Notably, Reinhardt was an artist whose work could not be preceded by photographic reproductions (since it was, like Hunter's early work in the late 1960s, impossible to reproduce). Reinhardt's work modelled an idea of reduction that was also a protracted perceptual duration – what the French critic Yves-Alain Bois has called Reinhardt's 'narrativisation of our gaze'.[9] But Hunter also departed from Reinhardt at the same time he assimilated him. Whereas at first Hunter made quite colourful gridded paintings that echo the simple geometry of Reinhardt, these quickly became paler, then whiter. Reinhardt had insisted on the distinction between black as a 'non-colour' and white as 'all colours', and as Hunter moved towards the plenitude of white he also moved away from Reinhardt's contained shapes towards a more expansive geometry.[10] The move anticipated the fullness of the later work which, as Hunter himself remarked, 'isn't very coloured but it's colour*ful* … The smaller the differences in colour, the more crucial they are'.[11]

Hunter's paintings of 1968 were a basis for his later work, as was their context. The artist's long-time friend and gallerist Bruce Pollard summarised this context concisely in an essay published in 1973:

> But there are times when objects, people, bodies, cities are experienced in a heightened way, and the sense of communicating beyond the confines of one's own mental environment is intense … The new sexual object, the moments of seeing nature afresh, the tradition of romance where with love all blossoms and with a loss of love all is stale, mysticism, Zen, the drug literature of the sixties all suggest that perception is not mechanically constant and that this feeling of things is valued and rare.[12]

The influence of Zen in Melbourne was considerable, and it coincided with an interest in drug literature, the major example of which was Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954):

> I continue to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing – but of a breathing without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning.[13]

It is difficult to find a description of perceptual unfolding more evocative of the experience of Hunter's work than this moment in Huxley's writing. Hunter himself did not read Huxley, so there is no question of a direct or illustrative relationship. But the book was influential for Hunter's close friend, the painter Dale Hickey, and seems to have both reflected and informed the zeitgeist of this moment in Melbourne. Huxley's insistence against 'the universe of reduced awareness, expressed and, as it were, petrified by language', perhaps expresses something of the sustaining impulses of Hunter's work, more than the discourses of reduction or Minimalism, with which he has often been associated.[14]

If there is one consistent presence throughout Hunter's oeuvre, it is that emblem of modernism: the grid. In his 1968 work, the grid is an overt and structuring presence. But within that frame a series of formal movements and expansions play themselves out, and in our experience of the work these become a viscous movement of perceiving; a seeing 'without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow'. The basically anti-reductive character of Hunter's 1968 paintings, 'cumulative' as he described it, became clearer in the 1980s, when according to the artist, his work was closest 'in concept and structure' to his exhibition of 1968.[15] From 1985, Hunter's working method became one of continuity, so that at the end of each painting he would start thinking through the next, and each geometry grew out of the last.[16] At this point, the dynamic *within* each painting began to dictate, and become inseparable from, the formal development *between* paintings. The expansive character of Hunter's art also became the narrative of its formal development. His works became more and more intricate, more and more replete with information, more and more like that continuously flowing flower that Huxley describes in *The Doors of Perception*.

* * *

In October 2017 I spent several hours with a Robert Hunter painting. It was the front room of a beautiful Victorian house in inner Melbourne, the house of the art historian Helen McDonald and the late satirist John Clarke, both Hunter's friends. Clarke had been a memorable speaker at Hunter's funeral in 2014, talking with great affection and insight about the artist, his very singular presence as a person, both laconically reserved but gregarious, and about their longstanding friendship. Clarke himself had passed away very suddenly earlier in 2017. It was evening, and those last hours of natural light breathed life into the 8 x 4 feet–format painting. Directly across from the work was a large mirror, above a mantlepiece. Immediately after I arrived, Helen went to make tea. I watched the intricacies of the painting change in the shifting light conditions of the dusk, and – as I moved around the room, seeking and generating the painting's movements – I occasionally turned around to see the work's mirror image, with the slightly startling presence of myself before it. In this unfolding of light, mobility and looking, I realised it was a painting I knew. It was the same painting I had spent several hours with in Hunter's studio, seated alongside Hunter himself, on that evening in late December 1995.

During this second experience of *Untitled no. 1*, 1996 (p. 91), I sat watching the painting for some time alongside Helen, talking occasionally as we drank our tea. Later I moved slowly around the living room by myself, looking at the work for a very long time. I wanted to understand what might have changed in my experience of this work. What were the consequences of this experience? Or what consequences of living impelled or fed those experiences? In the first instance I was struck by the edges of the painting's forms, by its geometric relief. I was reminded of Hunter's seminal wall painting work of 1970, a work created with a latticed stencil made of masking tape, a work first shown as an extraordinary frieze of shifting geometries and tones across the full length of Pinacotheca's cavernous space (before it was partitioned into several rooms). It occurred to me that these later paintings, like *Untitled no. 1*, can be understood as stencil works, too, forms created on a surface exclusively through the edge of another thing (the masking tape) which is then removed from the surface.

This stencilling process is significant.[17] The stencilled form draws attention to an absent body, both to the stencil itself and by extension to the absent (literal) body of the artist. It also directs our looking to the surface to which the stencil was applied, from which it is now absent. When the stencil is removed by the artist – whether it is the hand of a Murri artist on a rocky surface at Carnavon Gorge, or Hunter's 1970 lattice stencil – the surface replaces the stencil, becoming the surrogate through which the stencil is envisaged, the conduit of a former presence. Hunter's stencilling in 1970 imbued those window-less walls at Pinacotheca with a type of pregnancy, amplifying a sense of

interiority in the encounter with the work.[18] As I scanned *Untitled no. 1*, I was struck by a related attention to the painting's surface, these surrogate walls, as Hunter called them. I recalled my first encounter with the painting in Hunter's studio, and the process of the work's coming into being.

The process of painting Hunter established in 1985 would begin mechanically, with the creation of a grid at 4-inch intervals across the 8 x 4 feet ply sheet, followed by the addition of a basic scheme of rotating geometries. Through this pre-established format an intricate configuration would begin to emerge. Gary Catalano perceptively observed that Hunter's geometry excused him from composing his paintings.[19] It was striking that Hunter only ever worked on one painting at any one time. A more strategic or classical compositional process would have multiple paintings visible at once, being developed together, to compare one to the other. But for Hunter everything – his thinking, his looking – was played out on one surface. It was in his Toorak studio that Hunter lucidly described this process to me:

> The simple nature of my original assertion, that stayed with me. It's the easiest way. So in a work situation you go into an automatic state of openness or receptivity or something. It's just about sitting and staring and things suddenly hit you: 'Ah, right'. When you start to process them, it keeps going. One thing suggests another, and so on. It's that thing about my initial assertion: doing something that I knew, which essentially meant something really simple, something real dumb, that generates itself … That's the simple nature of it. If it's mechanical enough, you've got plenty to occupy your head just mechanically. Stuff will come through, despite you or because of you. That's why I say they talk to me, tell me what to do to them.[20]

The method Hunter describes is remarkably similar to a process described by another artist, the American automatist painter Jackson Pollock:

> When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about … The painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.[21]

As Hunter adopted the 8 x 4 feet format, his processes shifted. He became an automatist, a 'subliminal Pollock'.[22]

The idea of Hunter as an automatist may seem absurd. The austerity of a painting such as *Untitled no. 1*, the use of a roller (a kind of tool of impersonality), the strict geometry, the very slowness of his method, relying as it did upon layer upon layer of paint and long drying times, all seem at odds with automatist art. Organic forms and sweeping lines have been the trademarks of automatism, their irregularity expressing something of the anti-rational ethos of the interwar period of which automatism, and Surrealism more broadly, were important offspring. But automatism did not only react against the machine. It also internalised its logic. The idea that consciousness could be translated into an image without the interference of the will, the memory or the craft of the hand was surely an idea indebted to the machine. Indeed, early automatist literature is riddled with references to the machine and mechanical modes of work, André Breton describing automatist drawing as 'not a matter of drawing, *but simply tracing*', and praising artists who reject deliberation and act as 'simple receptacles', 'modest recording instruments'.[23] Clement Greenberg was perhaps thinking of the same mechanisation inherent in automatism when he wrote that Pollock, in fleeing from the 'mannerism' of conventional and 'deliberate' processes, 'went over into something like anonymity and impersonality of execution'.[24] A critical part of Pollock's drip technique was that he did not touch the canvas; air sculpted the paint's form on the work's surface. There is a way to understand Hunter's impersonal use of the roller in a related way, as a method to eliminate the artist's direct touch. Certainly the slow and mechanical character of Hunter's processes takes up an important – and largely unacknowledged – tenet of automatism's logic.

Watching *Untitled no. 1* that evening, on the wall of that inner-city living room, I was struck by the ramifications of Hunter's automatist processes. The intricate traces of these processes slowed my perception. Although this painting seemed to share the shadow-less luminosity of a Quattrocento annunciation, my looking assumed a type of precarity that reminded me of trying to look at something enfolded in extreme darkness. Vision became less certain. Looking implicated memory, an intertwining of sensing and recalling I associate much more strongly with listening than seeing. We only perceive the complexity of a melody through listening's elaborate implication of remembering, a dynamic Marcel Proust eloquently describes in volume 1 of *In Search of Lost Time* (1913):

> An impression of this order, vanishing in an instant, is so to speak sine material. Doubtless the notes that we hear at such moments tend, according to their pitch and volume, to spread out before our eyes over surfaces of varying dimensions, to trace arabesques, to give us the sensation of breadth and tenuity, stability or caprice. But the notes themselves have vanished before these sensations have developed to escape submersion under those which the succeeding or even simultaneous notes have already begun to awaken in us. And this impression would continue to envelop in its liquidity, its ceaseless overlapping, then motifs which from time to time emerge, barely discernible, to plunge again and disappear and drown, recognised only by the particular kind of pleasure which they instil, impossible to describe, to recollect, to name, ineffable – did not our memory, like a labourer who toils at the laying down of firm foundations beneath the tumult of the waves, by fashioning for us facsimiles of those fugitive phrases, enable us to compare and contrast them with those that follow.[25]

Listening entwines sensing and remembering in a distinctive way, and Hunter's work generates a related type of looking. We never see the painting in its totality at any one moment. It seems to endlessly move as we move before it. On the one hand, this seems to echo the duration of Hunter's automatist way of working, where the forms of the painting and patterns of thinking upon it intermingle. On the other, this duration also makes profound demands on the viewer's memory. The accumulative intricacies of Hunter's automatism produced a protracted duration in my encounter with *Untitled no. 1*, and a remarkable mobility in my perception. The painting's movement seemed to share in the continuous unfolding of my own consciousness before it. When I turned around and moved in front of the mirror, the image in that mirror moved too, and that reflected image and my being shared the same unfolding in time. When I turned around again, I was struck that Hunter's painting did the same, responding to my every movement before it, though without the image of myself presenting itself literally on the painting's surface. It seemed to be a mirror of my seeing before it, but a reflection not *of* me but *to* me. The mobility of Hunter's painting was startlingly intimate in its address to my subjectivity.

But *Untitled no. 1* is (self-evidently) literally still. I was deeply struck by this on my second encounter with the work, almost twenty-two years after my first. It is *for* seeing, for a flow of perception where the painting and the time of looking seem thickly coagulated. But it is, of course, physically still. It is *of* a discrete period of time – the duration of Hunter's single-minded attention, in which its form slowly emerged from many weeks of thinking and working upon it. And through that process, it was finished. The painting before me was the trace of those weeks, a geometry of the thinking that produced it. And the stillness of that aftermath – of a stretch of time almost twenty-two years before – was a schism with me. This stillness did not belong to the flow of my being.

Another (art-historically remote) painting provides another way to think about this schism: Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas,* 1656 (Museo del Prado, Madrid). The painting shows us a work in progress – a view of the painting process in the flow of its coming into being. But to approach this painting is not only to apprehend that the stunning illusionism of Velázquez's painting vaporises as we press our looking up against its (mere) globs and flecks of paint, it is also to apprehend that the painting is not in that flow. It is finalised. Velázquez's painting in part persists in our experience – and deeply unsettles it – through this aporia, between the mirage of a process in the midst of its coming into being, and its own finalisation, its own stillness, its apparent separateness from the endless movement of the world.

On that evening in October 2017, I was deeply affected by a related gap. Hunter's painting generated something like Huxley's flow 'with no recurrent ebbs', a flow that seemed to come from looking, and to be the mirror of looking, addressed *to* looking in the most intimate way, into its immense richness, its uncertainties, its fineness and elusiveness. But that painting was also apart from the current of my experience, through its physical stillness. A kind of looking intimately bound into my being also seemed to face up to the implications of that impersonal surface, to non-being. I was scrutinising a surface separate to the flow of my living, as surely as Hunter's roller insisted on his own absence from that same surface. I continued to look. The painting continued to become. And in that conflicted duration, the process of perceiving heightened my attention to the world around me, and shifted my belonging to that world. Looking seemed to bear – and live up to – the consequences of existing only once.

Something out of nothing: an interview with Robert Hunter

Gary Catalano

GC: That painting there's got an internal frame.

Robert Hunter: How do you mean?

GC: Well, there's a five-centimetre-wide strip around each side that's uniformly painted and looks like an internal frame.

RH: Internal as in picture?

GC: Yes. It's a recent innovation, isn't it?

RH: No, it's always been there.

GC: I'm sure the paintings in your last show at Pinacotheca didn't have internal frames. That one over there hasn't.

RH: Well, *almost*.

GC: Those shapes in the corner cut across it.

RH: Well, that hasn't happened in this one yet.

GC: The frame makes them more illusionistic.

RH: Yes. Despite the fact that they're not illusionistic.

GC: Is it true that each of your paintings grows out of the previous one?

RH: Yes.

GC: But there must have been occasions when you've been stumped as to what you'd do next?

RH: I'm always stumped as to what to do next.

GC: So each new painting involves a leap, a sort of creative jump?

RH: (Very hesitantly) Yes.

GC: Do you occasionally change the ground rules when you start a new painting?

RH: No, the rules are absolute. The elements are absolute.

GC: What are the ground rules? Could you state them verbally?

RH: No, I couldn't. That's why I paint.

GC: When did you start painting on these standard-sized plywood sheets?

RH: Like everything else, that dates back to the first idea, the first premise I thought of, which entailed starting from what I knew. The first paintings were 5 foot square and contained two colours and dealt with equivalence.

GC: Did you want those early paintings to image a state in which everything was of equal value?

RH: Yes.

GC: Why was that?

RH: That's something one can know about. It's a knowable thing.

GC: The first paintings were on canvas, weren't they?

RH: Yes. But they were squares. The square is an absolute base. These things are 4 x 8, which is two squares. They connect with all the things I've done.

GC: Do you prepare the boards in any way?

RH: Yes. I begin with an absolute paint surface and obscure any boardness in the board, so in effect it's a wall. The board is a simulation of a wall.

GC: Did you start using a paint roller at the same time as you started painting on board?

RH: I automatically used a brush in the first paintings, and then there was a period when I used both a brush and a roller. Since then it's become pure roller. It's important to be able to know what you're going to get at the end.

GC: So you have more control over a roller?

RH: Yes. It's more dependable.

GC: But is it as capable of the same delicate transitions as a brush?

RH: Well, *more* theoretically, because it's more mechanistic.

GC: When did you start using Dulux Weathershield?

RH: The first paintings I ever did were Dulux. I got given half a dozen cans for a story in *Dulux Times*.

GC: What, you wrote a story?

RH: No, they came and interviewed me.

GC: So you've been using it ever since?

RH: Yes. But it's just an element. The board's an element, the roller's an element ...

GC: Do you have a standing order with them?

RH: No. But I'm waiting to become publicly known enough so that I can do an ad on TV like what's-his-name.

GC: Rolf Harris?

RH: Yes. I've actually rung them and proposed it.

GC: Do you try to spend some time in the studio every day?

RH: I *do* spend some time in the studio every day if there's nothing better to do.

GC: What can tempt you away? Snorkelling?

RH: Yes. And bicycling.

GC: But you don't necessarily paint every day, do you?

RH: Oh, pretty well.

GC: Don't you often just sit and meditate on a painting?

RH: Yes. It takes a bit of time for what's actually there in the painting to sink in.

GC: Are you saying you have to meditate on the paintings in order to see them?

RH: Well, *anyone* has to sit for a while in order for the information to come through.

GC: Do you have music playing when you're sitting before a painting, or does that interfere with your meditations?

RH: I have the radio just on a regular station, at a low volume, a subliminal volume ... similar to the subliminal things I'm working with.

GC: To complement the paintings?

RH: To distract me from the paintings, or to allow that semiconscious state where anything that comes out of a painting ... As I see it, anything that comes out of a painting has to be something that is not known beforehand. Working with the knowns is the space for the unknown to occur.

GC: Do you remember when you first became interested in art?

RH: It must have always been there. I got 100 for art in third form. I was going to be a farmer, but economically art school was a lot easier.

GC: When I came round earlier you said that when you began your first white paintings you realised that you knew absolutely nothing and that you started from that point. I take it you were talking about some of the paintings in your first show in 1968?

RH: Well, the nothing I was talking about relates back to that question about school. Compared with the maths and the science, art was about nothing. Whatever knowledge we have about it is a retrospective fabrication, for art must first of all have occurred.

GC: I understood you were making a statement about ...

RH: Me knowing nothing?

GC: Yes.

RH: No, I don't admit that.

GC: I thought you'd had a kind of Zen-like illumination and was wondering how you'd come to make it.

RH: The basic idea of creation is that something comes out of nothing.

GC: Yes. I was just about to suggest that your paintings are reminiscent of the big bang theory. According to that, something *can* come out of nothing.

RH: Yes, that's absolutely true.

GC: Were you seeing a lot of other artists when you were grappling with these ideas about nothingness?

RH: Well, my friends tend to be artists.

GC: So they were people like Dale [Hickey] and Ian Burn?

RH: And Carl Andre.

GC: Do you remember what you were reading then?

RH: My anti-literacy is something I don't want to go on about.

GC: But you must have read something. You can't go through life without reading anything.

RH: You can't, no.

GC: So you must have read a couple of books that impressed you for one reason or other. I mean, there's a book on the shelf behind you, Charles Bukowski's *Hollywood* (1989). I remember that Bruce [Pollard] used to have quite a few of his books when I worked for him.

RH: That must have been when I was a reader.

GC: There was a Bukowski fashion at one stage.

RH: I'm the real thing.

GC: What do you mean? Do you see yourself as a Bukowski-like person?

RH: Umm ... Yes.

GC: Were your first white paintings meant to express the sort of nothingness that we talked about earlier?

RH: Umm ... It's not *expressing* nothingness; it's using nothingness.

GC: To do what?

RH: (Very hesitantly) To *state* something, something which is about ... The only way I could answer would be to write a very small text with a concentrated use of words.

GC: You'd like to write a poem then?

RH: No, I paint pictures.

GC: I know. But if you wanted to answer that question to your satisfaction ...

RH: That's right.

GC: ... it might be best if you wrote a poem.

RH: (Laughs) What's the next question?

GC: Okay. When I look at your paintings there's always a moment when the thing dematerialises and I feel as if I'm looking into light. Is that one of the experiences you want your paintings to provide?

RH: Well, light's an absolute element in my work. Did I tell you what happened in London? I tried to get the globes I'd become used to and understood I could get there, but I didn't get them; for the whole duration of the show I didn't have the lights that I wanted. But of course that's light reflecting *off*, so it's secondary ...

GC: But your paintings *radiate* light; they seem to be made of it. Do you want your viewers to be conscious of how much time has gone into your paintings?

RH: No.

GC: You don't? When I talked to you at the opening of your 1993 show at Pinacotheca you said they were about time.

RH: Yes, but not the time it takes to do them. It's about the connection with light, I suppose ... and how long it takes to see them. How long they take to *do* is beside the point. The first paintings I did were about absolute simplicity, but they've become ...

GC: Extraordinarily complicated?

RH: ... compounded. They're absolutely about flatness and yet they've become dimensional.

GC: Is that why you like to say they've become more sculptural?

RH: (Hesitantly) Yes. They're mechanical and mechanically made.

GC: And hence sculptural?

RH: Well, they're sculptural in the way that sculpture is made of pieces, that sort of thing.

GC: By that are you saying that there's no illusions in them?

RH: No, no illusion that's put there.

GC: This reminds me of Donald Judd's argument that painting was necessarily illusionistic and that he produced specific objects instead.

RH: That's possibly why I see them as sculptural.

GC: So your paintings are specific objects also?

RH: Yes, I guess that's right.

GC: But how can you maintain that when they each look like a galaxy of minute variations of light?

RH: But that comes from the opposite attitude. That comes about from a purely mechanical, numerical *da da da da da* ...

GC: So all the variations in your paintings have a mathematical basis?

RH: Sure. They all connect back to the first paintings, which were about rotation.

GC: Are you saying there's nothing subjective in them?

RH: *Subjective* ... Meaning?

GC: Well, nothing without a logical or a rational basis.

RH: Yes, they've absolutely got a rational, logical basis. But where they end up is something else.

GC: Are there any sculptors whose works you particularly admire?

RH: Well, there are people that I empathise with, like Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt, both of whom I like. And Richard Serra, whom I met once too often, is a great sculptor.

GC: Had Sol LeWitt done any of his wall drawings when you started painting on walls?

RH: I don't think I knew of his wall works when I began mine.

GC: How do you know when a painting is finished? Is it all plotted out mathematically?

RH: Well, there are mechanisms by which you do a painting, but its becoming finished is a mystical sort of thing.

GC: It's *mystical*? Isn't there a paradox here? If you say that everything in the painting can be reduced to a mathematical progression ...

RH: No, no. That's *how* I do them, but it's like I'm external to them. They develop their own assertion and character; their becoming finished is a thing they decide themselves. It's unexplainable.

GC: Have you ever misjudged it and actually overworked a painting?

RH: No, I wouldn't know that. Given that my involvement is purely mechanical, I *couldn't* know that. Those sorts of decisions are made by themselves.

GC: So at a certain point the work itself takes over and you just do what it tells you to do?

RH: That's right. That's the precondition I've established. The mystical stuff comes out of the triangularity of the colour and the quadrilateral nature of the structure.

GC: I don't understand.

RH: Well, the paintings are two squares, *right*? And colour is triangular.

GC: Is it?

RH: I perceive it as triangular.

GC: But why?

RH: Because it's threes.

GC: So the fact that there are three primary colours makes it triangular?

RH: Uh huh.

GC: If that's the case, wouldn't it be more suitable if your paintings were literally triangular?

RH: Yes, but then you'd be having a colour stated absolutely. Colour is in fact an element. The space between the triangle and the square is kind of where the art is. It's a non-space or a hyper-space.

GC: So you don't want the colour and the format to fit hand-in-glove?

RH: No, they're absolutely separate.

GC: You told me once that you often do drawings in your head just as you're falling asleep.

RH: Well, I don't *do* them; I see the structure and wait for something to follow on.

GC: Are these imaginary drawings always related to the paintings you're doing at the time?

RH: Yes.

GC: So in a sense they're kind of studies, these drawings that never get put on paper?

RH: Oh, I do them occasionally on paper. (Holds up a sketchpad with postage-stamp-sized drawings) This is exactly the same as the structures I see when falling asleep. It's just plotting things out.

GC: You had a show at the Lisson [London] recently. How did it go?

RH: It seemed to go very well, but as I said earlier the lights were not to my satisfaction.

GC: Can you imagine living and working overseas for an extended period of time?

RH: To live anywhere else seems a very complex achievement. I don't really have any aspirations to be anywhere else particularly, but certainly travel is a fantastic stimulus.

GC: I asked that because I was wondering what sort of audience you see for your work here in Australia.

RH: People have said it was time I went overseas and that I've exhausted the local potential, but I think the world's the same essentially.

GC: So you *do* think there's a limited audience for your work here?

RH: Well, judging from London that's true everywhere.

GC: I suspect there may be a much larger audience for your work than your sales would suggest. Not everyone can afford to buy your paintings, that's true; but a lot of people get rhapsodic about them.

RH: Of course art is absurdly expensive in real-people terms, but my good friend Paul has made me more distant from these issues at the moment.

GC: Mr Keating?

RH: Yes. (Laughs.)

GC: Finally, can you imagine yourself radically changing the kind of work you do?

RH: The changes I make within what I'm doing feel more radical all the time, but they end up looking the same. It's the unseen part that makes them worth doing.

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This chronology builds upon two earlier precedents: Jenepher Duncan's biography in the Monash University of Art 1989 exhibition catalogue, *Robert Hunter: Paintings 1966–1988* and Tom Nicholson's chronology in 'The Art of Robert Hunter', Bachelor of Arts Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 1995.

1947

Robert Edward Hunter is born in Melbourne on 16 April. His family lives in Eltham, where he grows up with two brothers and one sister. His father works as a meteorologist. He attends Eltham State School, followed by Eltham High School. As a teenager he spends time at the artists' colony and farm Montsalvat, where he helps look after the animals.

1964

Hunter enrols to study art at Preston Technical College. He studies various disciplines, but his main focus at this point is on sculpture. One of his teachers is Dale Hickey, who later becomes a close friend of Hunter's.

1965

Hunter continues studying art at Preston Technical College, and enters a sculpture in the 1965 Eltham Art Prize.

1966

Hunter enrols in Industrial Design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), which he attends infrequently, and begins painting consistently. Hunter is awarded the 1966 Eltham Art Prize for his painting *Untitled,* 1966 (below) by Patrick McCaughey, then art critic for Melbourne newspaper *The Age*.

Hunter becomes good friends with Dale Hickey, and through him meets artist Robert Jacks and James Doolin, an American artist living in Melbourne.

Untitled 1966, Private collection, Melbourne

1967

Hunter enrols in Painting at RMIT, but drops out at the end of the year after attending class infrequently. He continues to paint and begins using house paint, which will become his primary medium.

Hunter is included in the *Australian Young Contemporaries* exhibition, organised by the Contemporary Art Society for the Festival of Perth, which shows at the Argus Gallery in Melbourne.

In May, Bruce Pollard's gallery Pinacotheca – which would later become Hunter's primary gallery in Melbourne – opens in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. Georges Mora's Tolarno Galleries also opens on the same street, where Hunter would have his first exhibition.

From 6 June until 9 July, the touring exhibition *Two Decades of American Art* from the Museum of Modern Art, New York is on display at the National Gallery of Victoria. The exhibition includes artists Josef Albers, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella and Jasper Johns, among others, and displays the movements of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, hard-edge painting and Minimalism. The exhibition includes three abstract black paintings by Reinhardt of 1960, 1962 and 1963, which have a profound influence on Hunter. Hunter begins painting his distinctive white paintings.

1968

On 15 May Hunter's first solo exhibition opens at Tolarno Galleries. He exhibits thirteen paintings, each painted on a 5-foot square canvas. Each work is almost completely white, and painted with Dulux Weathershield acrylic paint. The exhibition is favourably reviewed by Patrick McCaughey and G. R. Lansell, and every painting is sold.

In May Hunter is included in the group exhibition *The Renting Collection Exhibition* at Pinacotheca, alongside Dale Hickey, Michael Johnson, Alun Leach-Jones, Tony McGillick and Dick Watkins.

In May the New York art critic Clement Greenberg visits Australia on a lecture tour under the auspices of the Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney, giving lectures in Sydney and Melbourne.

In June, Hunter is included in *Directions: A Survey of Recent Trends in Australian Art* at the Power Institute.

On 1 August the NGV's new building on St Kilda Rd, designed by Roy Grounds, opens

Invitation to Robert Hunter's solo exhibition at Tolarno Galleries, 1968

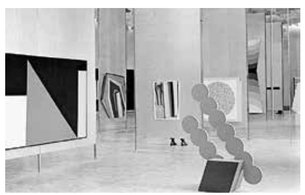
with its inaugural exhibition *The Field*. Featuring forty Australian artists, including Dale Hickey, Robert Jacks, James Doolin, Robert Rooney, Paul Partos, Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and Sydney Ball, the exhibition displays works in the hard-edge, colour field, flat abstraction, Minimalism and Conceptual art styles. Hunter, at twenty-one years of age, is the youngest artist included. He exhibits *Untitled,* 1968 (p. 6), which is similar in style to the paintings shown at Tolarno Galleries, but on a larger scale. The painting is impossible to photograph accurately and cannot be reproduced in the exhibition catalogue. Following

Entry for Robert Hunter in *The Field* exhibition publication, 1968

its Melbourne showing, *The Field* travels to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

In August Hunter travels to Los Angeles, where he stays for a week with James Doolin, who is living there, and Robert Jacks, who lives in Toronto. Hunter then travels to Toronto with Jacks, and stays for several weeks with him and his then partner Kerrie. By October he is in New York, living in a room on East 23rd Street. He works as a chauffeur for the Australian Mission to the United Nations, driving the ambassadors who represent Australia at the UN, and spends times with Australian artists Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, who are living in New York. In a letter home he writes that he is living in 'a vermine [*sic*] infested room (the whole bohemian bit)' and drives 'idiot Ambassadors' around. Although he is

Installation view of *The Field,* National Gallery of Victoria, 1968



employed, Hunter is poor and restricts himself to one meal per day. Hunter leaves New York just before Christmas, and travels to Europe.

In November, Hunter exhibits one painting in the *Transfield Art Prize* at Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney.

1969

Photograph of Robert Hunter taken by Hazel de Berg

In the early part of the year, Hunter travels to London and then through Europe, including Spain and Greece, before returning to Australia.

He produces several paintings with black and white geometric configurations.

On 23 November Hunter is interviewed by Hazel de Berg as part of an ongoing oral history series.

1970

Hunter begins to move away from the conventions of painting, using masking tape and stencils, and moving from the canvas to the gallery wall, creating ephemeral works.

On 8 June Pinacotheca's new premises opens in an abandoned factory in Waltham

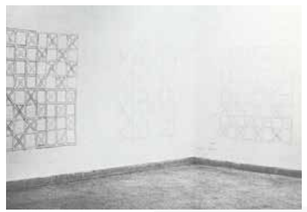
Place, Richmond. The opening exhibition features Peter Booth, Mike Brown, Peter Davidson, Bill Gregory, Dale Hickey, Hunter, Kevin Mortensen, Ti Parks, Robert Rooney, Rollin Schlicht and Trevor Vickers. Hunter exhibits *Untitled*, 1970, consisting of six sheets of loose paper, themselves comprising six pieces of paper joined together with masking tape, painted pale grey and attached to the gallery wall with masking tape at the top. In a review for *Other Voices*, critic Terry Smith describes it as 'the best work in the exhibition'. Although the work is intended to be rolled up and thrown out after the exhibition, it survives, to be acquired by the NGV in 1977.

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, opening on 28 July. The exhibition features an installation of eleven lattices painted directly onto the gallery wall with diluted grey paint, using a stencil made from masking tape. The stencil is roughly 6 x 6 feet in size and is comprised of a grid pattern – eight squares wide and eight squares high, with a line at a 45-degree angle intersecting every second square. A version of the work, using the same stencil, would later be shown in the Second Indian Triennale, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, 1971.

Hunter is selected by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, which includes the artist Sir William Dargie and James Mollison (then Executive Officer for the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board and Exhibitions Officer in the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Department, prior to his appointment as the inaugural Director of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra), to represent Australia at the Second Indian Triennale in New Delhi the following year. According to Hunter, Sir William Dargie believes him to be a Koori artist.

Hunter suffers a serious motorcycle accident, which leaves him in a coma. He makes a remarkable, unexpected recovery. While he convalesces, Dale Hickey and Bruce Pollard write Hunter's artist's statement, and James Mollison edits it, for inclusion in the Second Indian Triennale publication.

1971

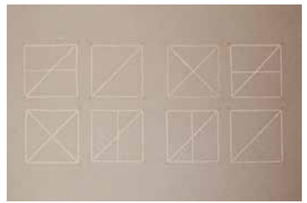


Installation view of *Untitled* 1971 (detail), Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, India

On 2 February the Second Indian Triennale opens in New Delhi. Using the same stencil as the Pinacotheca exhibition, Hunter creates an installation in a different configuration (above). He meets American sculptor Carl Andre, who is also participating in the Triennale, and they become close friends.

From 16 July until 6 August, Hunter exhibits in *The Situation Now: Object and Post-Object Art?*, curated by Tony McGillick and Terry Smith, at the Central Street Gallery in Sydney, followed by Ewing Gallery, University of Melbourne (now George Paton Gallery). The exhibition includes other Pinacotheca artists Dale Hickey, Robert Rooney, Trevor Vickers and Paul Partos, as well as Sydney artists such as Tim Johnson. Hunter's installation consists of masking tape fixed directly to the gallery wall in a grid format, and painted with several layers of grey paint.

In October, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca. The exhibition features a wall installation comprising strips of masking tape in a geometric design – four sets of four squares each with varying intersections of diagonal lines (above). The exhibition is not as well received as his previous ones, with reviews by Terry Smith and Patrick McCaughey critiquing the conventional design of the installation.



Untitled 1971 (detail)

1972

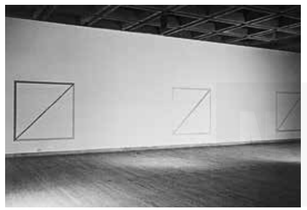
Hunter does not exhibit this year. Bruce Pollard is absent from Pinacotheca for a year, leaving the gallery to be run by a group of artists, including Hunter. Friends of Hunter's at the time recall him sleeping in the gallery. He associates closely with other Pinacotheca artists, including Bill Anderson, Jonas Balsaitis, Peter Booth, Dale Hickey, Simon Klose and Robert Rooney.

1973

From 16 April to 4 May, Hunter is included in a group exhibition entitled *Minimal* at Ewing Gallery at the University of Melbourne. Organised by Bruce Pollard, the exhibition includes artists Peter Booth, Garry Foulkes, Dale Hickey, Michael Johnson, Tony McGillick and Trevor Vickers.

In April Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, which features a wall installation containing groups of three squares, with a diagonal line running through them, painted in three tones of glossy grey paint. Rather than using a stencil, he uses individual strips of tape to form precise lines and edges.

Hunter is included in the exhibition *Recent Australian Art* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, from 16 October to 18 November. His installation, *Sydney wall* (below), continues the geometric explorations of his work included in his solo exhibition in April. *Recent Australian Art* includes forty-nine artists.



Installation view of *Sydney wall* 1973 (detail), Art Gallery of New South Wales.

1974

Some Recent American Art, an exhibition organised under the auspices of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, tours Australia and New Zealand throughout the year, beginning at the NGV before travelling to Perth, Sydney, Adelaide and Auckland. Curated by Jennifer Licht (now Winkworth), Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition includes work by Carl Andre, Eva Hesse, Robert Irwin, Donald Judd, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Ryman and Richard Serra.

While she is in Melbourne, Licht is introduced to Hunter by Bruce Pollard and Carl Andre, who is in Melbourne to install his work in the exhibition. Licht invites Hunter to participate in an exhibition at MoMA later that year.

Carl Andre sends a postcard to German gallerist Konrad Fischer, stating: 'I am so convinced that Robert Hunter is the best painter you have never seen that I will bet you the price of his airline ticket – if you don't like the show he does for you I will pay for it'.

Hunter shares a flat at the rear of a house on Queens Road, opposite Albert Park Lake, Melbourne, with fellow artist Simon Klose. Hunter paints a wall work in one of the central passages of the flat – silvery grey lines in several shades approximately 1 centimetre wide. According to Klose, 'These were at eye level and made up squares with diagonal lines which you never could see all at once unless at a very oblique angle'. Following a small party held by the artists for visiting American artists, including Carl Andre, Yvonne Rainer and Robert Irwin, Andre installs a work in response to Hunter's wall painting. It comprises two identical pieces of steel – about 50 or 60 millimetres square and 5–7 millimetres thick – installed in a small wall recess. There are no known records of either work.

In July, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, again featuring an installation of wall stencils.

Hunter travels to New York again, via Los Angeles. In New York he spends time with Sol LeWitt and Robert Ryman.

From 9 October 1974 to 5 January 1975 *Eight Contemporary Artists*, curated by Jennifer Licht, is held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Hunter appears in the exhibition alongside Vito Acconci, Alighiero E. Boetti, Daniel Buren, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Brice Marden and Dorothea Rockburne. Hunter is given a room to himself, in which he paints geometric configurations on three facing walls. He paints four different squares, all cross-sectioned in varying tones of grey lines (pp. 84–5). The exhibition as a whole is unfavourably reviewed by Max Kozloff in *Artforum*, Robert Hughes in *Time* and Thomas B. Hess in *New York*, and Hunter's work critiqued for its subtlety.

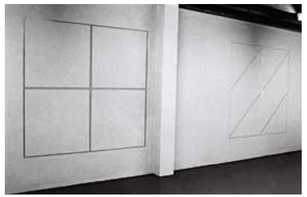
Untitled 1974 (detail) at Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, 1974

Following *Eight Contemporary Artists*, Hunter is included in several international exhibitions at institutions known for their exhibition of Minimalist artists. He is included in *Painting Exhibition* at the Scottish Arts Council Gallery, Edinburgh, which also includes the work of Jo Baer, Daniel Buren, Alan Charlton, Peter Joseph, Edwina Leapman, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden and Robert Ryman. Hunter then creates a five-part wall installation at Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, following Carl Andre's recommendation.

1975

From 7 January until 8 February Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery, London. His installation is painted across three walls

and uses diagonals and subtly varying tones (below). The exhibition is favourably reviewed by Bruce Adams in *Studio International* and Caroline Tisdall in *The Guardian*. Hunter returns to Australia.



Installation view of *Untitled* 1975 (detail), Lisson Gallery, London, 1975

Hunter is mentioned, alongside Sol LeWitt, in Tom Wolfe's 'The Painted Word', a provocative attack on the New York art world published in *Harper*'s magazine in April and later as a book by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The art world hits back with various responses, including one from Rosalind E. Krauss who writes, 'The Painted Word hit the art world like a really bad, MSG-headache-producing, Chinese lunch', in *Partisan Review*. In a chapter in which he admonishes Minimalism, Wolfe writes, 'So artists like Robert Hunter and Sol Lewitt began painting directly on the gallery walls or on walls outside the gallery window ... with the faintest, most unsentimental geometric forms imaginable'.

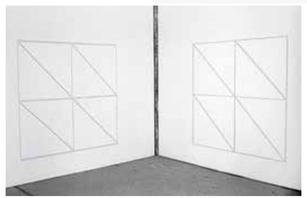
1976

Minimal Art, curated by Jennifer Phipps, is shown at the NGV from 16 February to 8 March. Hunter's contribution is the six-piece paper installation *Untitled*, 1970, which the NGV acquires early in 1977 (pp. 10–11).

Installation view of *Untitled* 1970, National Gallery of Victoria

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, in which he shows a series of wall stencils.

Hunter is commissioned by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, to create a wall stencil installation, intended to be permanent. The initial location in the building is abandoned after the plaster begins crumbling, and Hunter is provided an alternative location in the stairwell. The work is later removed, with Hunter's knowledge, in the renovations undertaken in 1999.



Installation view of *Untitled* 1976 (detail), Pinacotheca

1977

Hunter is commissioned to create a wall painting for the offices of architecture firm Gunn Hayball in Richmond, Melbourne. The installation is later destroyed after the firm moves out of the building.

Hunter begins working on canvas again, using cotton thread and layers of paint to describe the geometric patterns he is working with predominantly.

1978

Hunter collaborates on a series of joint exhibitions with Carl Andre, who is in Australia on a visiting artist grant from the Australia Council, organised by the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Both artists create different works for each exhibition, responding specifically to the site of each installation.

Hunter and Andre's first joint exhibition is held at Pinacotheca from 5 to 26 August. Hunter exhibits several canvases intersected by a geometric pattern created with coloured thread and painted over with grey paint. Andre's installation comprises four flat metal rectangles placed directly onto the floor of the gallery.

In Hunter and Andre's joint exhibition at the Newcastle Region Art Gallery, on show from 12 August to 10 September, Hunter exhibits three coloured thread canvases, while Andre exhibits two metal works, *Steel ∑ 16* and *Steel ∑ 4* (pp. 12–13).

Almost simultaneously, between 22 August and 12 September, Hunter and Andre exhibit at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Hunter creates one large wall installation using cotton thread and grey paint, while Andre exhibits a small work consisting of five metal rods accompanied by a public apology, after being unable to complete his intended work due to logistical difficulties.

1979

Hunter travels to New York for the third time, staying in the Australia Council's Greene Street Studio. He also works in both John Stringer's house in Brooklyn and Carl Andre's studio in Manhattan. He associates with artists including Robert Ryman, William Wegman and Sol LeWitt.

From 1 to 30 December, Hunter exhibits *Five proposals for wall works* at Gallery 321, Brooklyn, a temporary gallery space in John Stringer's house. The works are made of coloured thread on plywood in a long horizontal format, 1 x 6 feet.

Gary Catalano's journal article 'Robert Hunter', the first full-length account of Hunter's career, is published in the September issue of *Art & Australia*.

Robert Hunter working in the studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris 1980

1980

Entrance to the Eleventh Paris Biennale

Hunter travels from New York to Paris where he has a studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts and participates in the Eleventh Paris Biennale, where he shows a wall installation of coloured thread and grey paint.

1981

In September Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, including twelve grey paintings made between 1978 and 1981. Some of the works are those completed in the United States, using taut coloured thread to describe a grid formation, in the long, narrow format of 1 x 6 feet.

1982

Between 24 June and 8 July, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane.

1983

Hunter begins working with standard 4 by 8 feet plywood sheets and a roller instead of a paint brush. He continues with this technique and format until the end of his career.

He holds his first solo exhibition at Yuill/Crowley in Sydney, from 5 February to 2 March. Hunter exhibits three long paintings of acrylic on plywood.

Hunter is included in the exhibition *Australian Perspecta*, 1983 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from May 12 to 26 June. He also participates in *A Melbourne Mood: Cool Contemporary Art* at Melville Hall at the Australian National University in Canberra from 13 July to 14 August. He exhibits two works: *Untitled*, 1968 (p. 6), and *Untitled* 1970–76 (p. 7), both in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

1984

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca between 20 June and 7 July, which features two paintings from 1983 and seven from 1984, all featuring a central grey strip. The exhibition is described in reviews as unfashionable, as his work displays a steadfast preoccupation with the same concerns, yet the majority of the reviews are positive.

Hunter is included in *The Field Now* at Heide Park and Art Gallery, (now Heide Museum of Modern Art), where twenty-four artists from *The Field* exhibit recent work.

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Yuill/Crowley, Sydney, between 13 October and 7 November, showing six paintings.

1985

In July, Hunter moves into a studio at the newly opened 200 Gertrude Street (later Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces) in Fitzroy, Melbourne. He works in this studio

until August 1987. From this period onward, Hunter exclusively produces white paintings with subtle variations of tone.

1986

Between 30 April and 17 May, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, where he shows thirteen paintings all made between 1985 and 1986.

He is included in a series of group exhibitions, including *Fears and Scruples* at the University Gallery, University of Melbourne (now Ian Potter Museum of Art), 28 May to 25 July; *Geometric Abstraction* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 11 September to 12 October; and *Surface for Reflexion Part 1* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 6 December 1986 to 18 January 1987.

1987

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Yuill/Crowley, Sydney, in February.

He is included in *Field to Figuration* at the NGV, curated by Robert Lindsay, from 21 February to 29 March.

From 5 September to 21 October, Hunter exhibits work in the group exhibition *Minimal Art in Australia: A Contemplative Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Brisbane. The exhibition's catalogue essay is written by Bruce Pollard.

Hunter also exhibits in *Painters and Sculptors: Diversity in Contemporary Australian Art* at the Queensland Art Gallery, which later travels to The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Japan. He visits Japan during this time.

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca between 28 October and 14 November in which he shows nine recent paintings.

From 20 November to 12 December he is included in the group exhibition *Ten by Ten* at 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne. He exhibits *Untitled*, 1971, and *Untitled*, 1985: the former a re-installation of the gridded tape installation shown at Pinacotheca, the latter a painting featuring a horizontal dark strip through the centre of the painting.

In November Hunter is invited to be the first artist-in-residence at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, where he stays until February 1988. He produces four paintings during his stay which are acquired by the gallery.

1988

Robert Hunter in his studio at the University of Melbourne

In February, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, marking the culmination of his residency there.

In May Hunter is included in the *Creating Australia: 200 Years of Art 1788–1988* exhibition, sponsored by the Australian Bicentennial Authority. From 18 May to 3 July, he exhibits three 1987 paintings in *The Australian Biennale: View from the Southern Cross*, which are given their own room at Pier 2/3, Walsh Bay. After its exhibition in Sydney, the biennale travels to the NGV between 4 August and 18 September.

On 28 July, Hunter commences a year-long residency at the University of Melbourne, supported by the Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council. He lives at Macgeorge House in Ivanhoe and during this time he meets his life partner Janice L. S. Hunter.

1989

Opening on 2 March and continuing until 8 April, the artist's first survey exhibition *Robert Hunter Paintings 1966–1988*, curated by Jenepher Duncan, is held at the Monash University Gallery, Melbourne. The exhibition travels to the Geelong Art Gallery, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, the Australian National Gallery, Canberra, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane.

Following the completion of his residency at the University of Melbourne, the exhibition *Robert Hunter: Artist-in-Residence* opens on 4 May and continues until 10 June.

Hunter moves in with partner Janice L. S. Hunter into Edzell, a grand Victorian mansion in Toorak that had been divided into apartments. Hunter's studio is a former conservatory with a large window. They live at Edzell for twenty-two years.

1990

From 4 to 28 April, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, including sixteen paintings made between 1987 and 1990.

Between 31 October and 24 November Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Yuill/Crowley, Sydney.

1991

Hunter is included in the group exhibition *Off the Wall/In the Air: A Seventies Selection* at Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, in association with the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne, curated by Jennifer Phipps. It shows at Monash from 3 July to 10 August; and at ACCA from 28 June to 4 August. Hunter's contribution is *Untitled*, 1970, on loan from the NGV.

Hunter begins exhibiting with Bellas Gallery, Brisbane (later Milani Gallery), holding solo exhibitions there regularly until 2011.

1992

Robert Hunter and other recipients of the Australian Artists Creative Fellowship with Prime Minister Keating, Parliament House, Canberra, 1992

Hunter holds a joint exhibition with Ellsworth Kelly at Annandale Galleries, Sydney, between 9 September and 10 October.

On 7 October the 1993 Australian Artists Creative Fellowships are awarded by Prime Minister, Paul Keating, with Hunter receiving a four-year fellowship.

1993

In February Hunter represents Australia at *ARCO International Contemporary Art Fair* in Madrid, along with Judy Watson, Ian Abdulla and Emily Kame Kngwarreye, among others.

He travels throughout Spain and visits Paris, where he meets Carl Andre, and to London where he discusses the possibility of relocating there with Nicholas Logsdail, director of Lisson Gallery. In Paris he commences discussions about future exhibitions with Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre.

From 10 to 27 November, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, in which he shows nine paintings made between 1991 and 1993.

Alongside five other Australian artists, Hunter exhibits in *Six for Singapore: Contemporary Australian Painting*, curated by Daniel Thomas.

One of Hunter's early paintings, *No. 6 untitled painting* (p. 23), is included in *Looking at Seeing and Reading* at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, curated by the artist Ian Burn, from 1 to 31 July.

1994

In July Hunter is included in a group exhibition at Lisson Gallery, London.

From 5 to 29 October, Hunter participates in the group exhibition *Reinventing the Grid* at Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne, curated by Rachel Kent. Hunter's contribution is *Untitled no. 2* of 1992.

1995

From 15 to 23 April Hunter exhibits at the Benalla Easter Arts Festival.

In September Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Bellas Gallery, Brisbane.

Hunter contributes *Untitled no. 3*, 1987 (p. 51), to *NON: Artists Against Nuclear Testing* at Ether Ohnetitel Gallery, Melbourne.

1996

Invitation to the final Robert Hunter solo exhibition at Pinacotheca

Hunter is included in *Systems End: Contemporary Art in Australia*, organised in collaboration with Sherman Galleries, Sydney, which tours Oxy Gallery in Osaka, Japan (19 April – 19 May); Hakone Open-Air Museum, Kanagawa-ken, Japan (31 May – 28 July); and Dong-Ah Gallery, Seoul, Korea (20 September – 16 October).

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca from 16 October until 2 November, which is to be his last at Pinacotheca. Hunter shows twelve paintings, all made between 1994 and 1996.

1997

Hunter exhibits in *Objects and Ideas: Revisiting Minimalism*, curated by Linda Michael, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, from 11 April to 22 June; and in *I Had a Dream: Australian Art in the 1960s*, curated by Jennifer Phipps, at the NGV, from 23 April to 16 June.

1998

Hunter is included in the exhibition *Material Perfection: Minimal Art and Its Aftermath:*

Selected from the Kerry Stokes Collection, curated by John Stringer, held at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, Perth, in conjunction with the Festival of Perth, from 13 February to 12 April. From 18 September to 8 November Hunter is included in the 11th Biennale of Sydney, *Every Day*, curated by Jonathan Watkins.

1999

In February Hunter holds his first solo exhibition at Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, including ten paintings made between 1997 and 1999. Hunter is included in the Clemenger Contemporary Art Award, exhibited at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, in collaboration with the NGV, from 3 April to 9 May. Hunter also holds a solo exhibition from 3 December 1999 to 15 January 2000 at Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, Paris.

2000

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Bellas Gallery, Brisbane.

Robert Hunter in his studio at Edzell, Toorak

2001

Hunter's work is included in *Phenomena: New Painting in Australia 1* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from 23 June to 12 August. From 11 to 14 September Hunter has an exhibition organised by Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre in L'Eglise De Port Royal, Paris. He shows four recent paintings.

2002

From 4 to 27 April, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne. In November Hunter is included in the inaugural exhibition at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, *Fieldwork: Australian Art 1968–2002*, from 28 November 2002 until 16 February 2003. Hunter's contributions include works from the NGV Collection, two early pieces – *Untitled no. 8*, 1968 (p.4), and *Untitled*, 1970 (pp. 10–11) – as well as a later work, *Untitled no. 6*, 1998 (p. 60). At the same time his work is included in the exhibition *Meridian: Focus on Contemporary Art*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, curated by John Stringer.

2003

From 3 August until 12 October, Hunter is included in *See Here Now: Vizard Foundation Art Collection of the 1990s* at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne. From 5 November 2003 until 13 March 2004 he is included in *Three-way Abstraction: Works from the Monash University Collection* at the Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne. He also holds a solo exhibition at Bellas Gallery, Brisbane.

2005

In early 2005, from 29 January until 6 March, Hunter is a finalist in the Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize at Bendigo Art Gallery.

2006

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

2007

In February Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne. From 28 March until 28 April, Hunter is included in a group exhibition at Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, Paris.

2008

Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Milani Gallery, Brisbane, from 6 to 23 March. He also holds a solo exhibition at Greenaway Art Gallery, Kent Town, South Australia, from 18 September until 12 October.

2009

Hunter participates in a group exhibition at Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, Paris, from 14 February until 21 March.

2010

Between 18 May and 26 June, Hunter exhibits in a group show at Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre.

2011

Hunter exhibits work in the exhibition *Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre 1990–2011*, at Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, Paris, from 27 September to 15 October. From 3 to 26 March, Hunter holds a solo exhibition at Milani Gallery, Brisbane, where he recreates *Untitled*, 1971 (pp. 77–8; 106, left), his first stencilled wall work. Later in the year he recreates the work for the exhibition *Ten Years of Contemporary Art: The James C. Sourris AM Collection* at the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, from 12 November 2011 to 19 February 2012. In July he exhibits three paintings in the opening exhibition of Station Gallery, Melbourne.

2014

Between 2012 and 2014, Hunter completes eleven paintings. He begins a twelfth and final board which remains incomplete.

Robert Hunter passes away on 23 September. Prior to his death, discussions are underway for this retrospective exhibition.

Robert Hunter c. 2012

'Space for the unknown: the art of Robert Hunter, 1966–2014' pp. 1–16

1 Robert Hunter quoted in Gary Catalano, 'Something out of nothing: an interview with Robert Hunter', *Art & Australia*, vol. 33, no. 2, Summer 1995, p. 203.
2 Bruce Pollard, conversation with the author, 3 Feb. 2017; Dale Hickey, conversation with the author, 31 Aug. 2017.
3 Bruce Pollard, conversation with the author, 3 Feb. 2017.
4 Other staff included Louis Kuppers, Peter Booth, Ann Stephen and Charles Mereweather.
5 Robert Hunter quoted in Jenepher Duncan, 'Robert Hunter biography', in *Robert Hunter Paintings 1966–1988*, Monash University Gallery, Clayton, 1989, p. 6.
6 Hunter also took some classes in gold and silversmithing while at Preston Technical College. Hickey, conversation with the author.
7 I am grateful to Elena Taylor, Curator of Art, University of New South Wales (formerly Curator of Australian Art, NGV), for her observation regarding the similarities between Hunter's painting and those of Dick Watkins.
8 Ann Stephen, 'at the southern edge of the great iceberg of Minimalism', pp. 75–81. Melbourne art historian David Homewood, in his unpublished doctoral thesis on Robert Hunter, Dale Hickey and Robert Rooney, makes a similar observation.
9 John Stringer, 'Robert Hunter', memorandum to Jennifer Licht, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 27 June 1974.
10 James Doolin, an American artist, lived in Melbourne from 1965 to 1967.
11 Curated by Waldo Rasmussen, Executive Director of Circulating Exhibitions, Museum of Modern Art, New York, the exhibition was held at the NGV, Melbourne, from 6 June to 9 July, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, from 26 July to Aug. 1967. Hunter saw Ad Reinhardt's *Abstract painting*, 1960; *Abstract painting*, 1962; and *Abstract painting*, 1963, all loaned from the artist (illustrated in black and white in the exhibition publication). Other artists included in the exhibition were Josef Albers, Allan D'Arcangelo, Norman Bluhm, Gene Davis, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Al Held, Hans Hofmann, Jasper Johns, Alex Katz, Ellsworth Kelly, Franz Kline, Willem De Kooning, Roy Lichtenstein, Morris Louis, Joan Mitchell, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Jackson Pollock, Larry Poons, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, James Rosenquist, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella, Clyfford Still, Mark Tobey, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Cy Twombly and Andy Warhol.
12 Robert Hunter, in Grazia Gunn, unpublished interview with the artist, 13 Dec. 2006, p. 3.
13 Each painting sold for $200, enabling the young artist to travel to North America and Europe later that year.
14 Patrick McCaughey, 'Dazzling debut by young artist', *The Age*, 15 May 1968, p. 6.; G. R. Lansell, 'Small mercies', *Nation*, 25 May 1968, p. 20.
15 Brian Finemore, 'Robert Hunter', in *The Field*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1968, p. 29.
16 Patrick McCaughey, 'Experience and the new abstraction', in *The Field*, p. 89.
17 Rosemary Hickey, conversation with the author, 23 Aug. 2017.
18 Robert Hunter, letter to Dale and Rosemary Hickey from Toronto, 26 Oct. 1968.
19 The exhibition at Gallery Dwan ran from 5–30 Oct. 1968 and was curated by Virginia Dwan and Robert Smithson as an extension of Smithson's Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport project. Ten artists were included in the exhibition – Carl Andre, Walter De-Maria, Michael Heizer, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson and Herbert Bayer – and their work was, in most cases, documentation of works sited elsewhere. LeWitt's contribution was a book of photographs of a buried sculpture commissioned by Martin Visser in the Netherlands. See Germano Celant, 'Virginia Dwan and the Dwan Gallery', Skira, Milan, 2016, pp. 264–5.
20 Tom Nicholson, 'Appendix 13: a chronology', in 'The art of Robert Hunter', unpublished Bachelor of Arts Honours Thesis, Department of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne, 1995, p. 152.
21 Alan Dodge, 'Robert Hunter and minimal art', in *Robert Hunter Paintings 1966–1988*, p. 23.
22 Hunter, quoted in Duncan, p. 8. Tom Nicholson, in his 1995 thesis, questions whether or not Hunter saw Sol LeWitt's work in New York during this trip. It is conceivable that Hunter saw LeWitt's first wall drawing which was exhibited in the *Benefit for the Student Mobilisation Committee to End the War in Vietnam* at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, from Oct. 22–31. Other artists in the exhibition were Carl Andre, Jo Baer, Robert Barry, Bill Bollinger, Dan Flavin, Robert Hout, Will Insley, Donald Judd, David Lee, Robert Mangold, Robert Murray, Doug Ohlson and Robert Ryman.
23 Hunter visited London, Spain and Greece on his way back to Australia from the United States. In contrast to his time in New York which he found 'incredibly exciting', he described his time in Europe as 'a waste of time'. Duncan, p. 8.
24 These works, three of which are included in this exhibition, are distinctive in Hunter's oeuvre. The only other known example where Hunter employed such stark tonal contrasts is a singular work from 1968 that he had entered in the Transfield Prize that year – a striking large white square canvas divided quadrilaterally by a dark blue-grey cross which is also included in this exhibition (p. 29). Given the timing of the prize, Hunter presumably made this work following *The Field* and before his departure overseas. What is of particular significance in the 1969 paintings, however, is the introduction of a dominant horizontal band, a motif that would reappear in different guises in later works and come to form a basic format of his mature works.
25 Artists who exhibited regularly at the gallery during this time included Peter Booth, Mike Brown, Peter Davidson, Bill Gregory, Dale Hickey, Simon Klose, Kevin Mortensen, Clive Murray-White, Ti Parks, Robert Rooney and Trevor Vickers. In 1972 the gallery operated as an artists' cooperative during a period when Pollard travelled overseas. For a detailed account of Pinacotheca's early years, see Johnathan Sweet, *Pinacotheca 1967–1973*, Prendergast Publishers, South Yarra, 1989.
26 Other artists in the exhibition included Peter Booth, Mike Brown, Peter Davidson, Bill Gregory, Dale Hickey, Kevin Mortensen, Ti Parks, Robert Rooney, Rollin Schlicht and Trevor Vickers.
27 Terry Smith, 'Pinacotheca group exhibition, June, Melbourne', in *Other Voices*, Aug./Sep., vol. 1, no. 2, 1970, pp. 45–6.
28 Jennifer Phipps, memorandum to Director and Conservator, 17 Feb. 1977, National Gallery of Victoria (artist file, NGV library).
29 The term was made popular by Lucy R. Lippard in her seminal text on conceptual or ideas-based art, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Studio Vista, London, 1973.
30 Ann Galbally, 'Is it new ... or updated old?', *The Age*, 29 July 1970, p. 10.
31 G. R. Lansell, 'Paintings for a fortnight', *Nation*, 8 Aug. 1970, p. 16, extract reproduced in Duncan, p. 51.
32 Robert Hunter quoted in Alan Dodge, p. 24.
33 This work bears close resemblance to Martin's paintings of the 1960s including *The tree*, 1964, acquired by MoMA the following year, in 1965. It is conceivable that Hunter viewed the painting, or others by Martin, during his first visit to New York in 1968.
34 Robert Hunter, artist statement, catalogue for Second Indian Triennale at the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, 1971.
35 I acknowledge conversations during the early stage of my research for this exhibition with David Homewood regarding Hunter's relationship to other regional variants of minimalist and post-minimalist practices outside the United States such as the Support Surfaces group, a topic that warrants further research.
36 *Untitled*, 1971 (Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane); and *Untitled*, 1976 (Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney).
37 Museum of Modern Art, *Eight Contemporary Artists on View at Museum* media release, 9 Oct. 1974, pp. 2–3.
38 Max Kozloff, 'Traversing the field ... Eight contemporary artists at MoMA', *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 4, Dec. 1974, pp. 44–9.
39 Hunter's solo exhibition at Galerie Konrad Fischer resulted from a personal recommendation from Carl Andre. While in Melbourne in early 1974, Andre sent a postcard to Fischer, stating: 'I am so convinced that Robert Hunter is the best painter you have never seen that I will bet you the price of his airline ticket – if you don't like the show he does for you I will pay for it'. I am grateful to Professor Andrew McNamara for drawing attention to this correspondence which appeared in the exhibition *Cloud & Crystal: The Dorothee and Konrad Fischer Collection* at the Kunst Sammlung Nordrhein Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 24 Sep. 2016 – 8 Jan. 2017.
40 Mary Eagle, 'Sculptor can keep busy doing nothing', *The Age*, 16 Aug. 1978, p. 18.
41 Robert Rooney, 'Hunter's a quiet contrast', *The Age*, 9 Sep. 1981, p. 10.
42 Dodge continues: 'In Hunter's case, whatever the configurations, the surface, the play of tones, the shifting emphasis from one part of the given structure of a series to another, all result from the making of the work. These decisions are additive to the structure and reflect a set of intuitive, if limited choices, on the part of the artist. Minimal Art is considered to be reductive and that Robert Hunter work is not.' Dodge, p. 27. Although Dodge was referring to Hunter's 1970 paper installation, this statement holds true for the majority of his oeuvre and is particularly instructive to consider in relation to his subsequent works. Dodge also astutely observed, however, that where Hunter did share a common concern with Minimalism was in the 'shift of meaning from the object to the viewer'.
43 Charles Green, 'Persistent subjectivity: revaluing Robert Hunter', *Tension*, no. 16, May 1989, p. 20. Julie Ewington similarly argues that Hunter's affinity with 'American reductionist art is not the final word on the work', but rather 'the starting point for a distinctly personal visual repertoire'. See Julie Ewington, 'Paint, pearls and swine: *Robert Hunter Paintings 1966–1988*', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 24, Sep. 1989, p. 11.
44 Grazia Gunn, 'A nothing point: the paintings of Robert Hunter', Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, 2007.
45 Hunter quoted in Catalano, pp. 200–5.
46 Bruce Pollard has likened the experience of viewing these paintings to watching light play on water. Conversation with the author 3 Feb. 2017. Julie Ewington makes similar analogies; see Ewington, p. 12. Janice L. S. Hunter also notes that the artist took inspiration from the sky and ocean, particularly during road trips along the east coast of Australia and during time spent in the Otways in Victoria where the couple owned a small property. Conversation with the author, 27 November 2017.
47 Hunter, artist statement, 1971, unpaginated.
48 Hunter, quoted in Gunn, 'A nothing point: the paintings of Robert Hunter'. Hunter explained the genesis of the rectangular horizontal format of his mature works: 'I was looking for somewhere to start and I saw a pool table and the points where the pockets would be on the table. I play pool. This became the starting point for my first painting in this new dimension. The pockets on the periphery of the pool table act as six ready-made points where a network of lines joins up absolutely ... An absurd beginning, but if it is nothing complicated then it can only get more interesting'.
49 Janice L. S. Hunter, conversation with the author, 15 Aug. 2017; Jenepher Duncan, conversation with the author, 31 Jan. 2017.
50 Robyn McKenzie, 'Robert Hunter', in *Every Day: The 11th Biennale of Sydney*, Biennale of Sydney Ltd, Sydney, 1998, p. 116
51 Hunter, quoted in Duncan, p. 7.
52 Hunter, transcript of unpublished interview with Gunn, 2006.

53 Hunter, quoted in Gary Catalano, p. 204.
54 A twelfth board was prepared but remained unfinished at the time of the artist's death. Conversation between the author and Janice L. S. Hunter, 15 Aug. 2017.
55 Tom Nicholson, 'Robert Hunter 1947–2014', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 276, Summer 2014–15, p. 80. See also Max Delany, 'Obituary', *Gallery*, November–December 2014, pp. 18–19.
56 Bruce Pollard, letter to the author, 5 April 2017.

'Robert Hunter: at the southern edge of the great iceberg of Minimalism', pp. 75–81

1 John Stringer (ed.), *The Field*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1968, p. 29. I am grateful to Janice L. S. Hunter and Jane Devery who both assisted me in thinking back on Hunter's early work.
2 Patrick McCaughey, 'Experience and the new abstraction', in Stringer, p. 89.
3 Patrick McCaughey, 'Dazzling debut by young artist', *The Age*, 15 May 1968.
4 ibid.
5 Ian Burn, *Looking at Seeing and Reading*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993, n. p.
6 Lucy R. Lippard, 'American painting 1946–1966: cult of the direct and the difficult', *Two Decades of American Painting*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1967, n. p.
7 Bruce Pollard interview with Terry Smith, *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?*, Contemporary Art Society, Central Street Gallery, Sydney, 1971, p. 7.
8 Josef Albers, 'XIV colour intervals and transformation', *Interaction of Color: 50th Anniversary Edition*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2013, pp. 34–5.
9 Mel Ramsden, 'Some more questions: interview with Mel Ramsden', in Ann Stephen, *1969: The Black Box of Conceptual Art*, University of Sydney, Sydney, 2015, pp. 79, 84.
10 Avril Burn, conversation with author, 27 Sep. 2017.
11 Robert Hunter, *Untitled*, 1970, A2. a-f-1977, file notes, 17 Feb. 1977, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
12 G. R. Lansell, 'Painting for a fortnight', *The Nation*, 8 Aug. 1970, p. 16.
13 Patrick McCaughey, 'Violent menagerie where only the pigs are jolly', *The Age*, 13 Oct. 1971.
14 Robert Hunter, 'Artwork description', file notes for *Untitled*, 1971 (Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art). Thanks to both Josh Milani, Milani Gallery and Peter McKay, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art for assistance with understanding the installation.
15 Andrew McNamara, 'Inversions, conversions, aberrations: visual acuity and the erratic chemistry of art-historical transmission in a transcultural situation', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2016, pp. 12, 13.
16 ibid. pp. 13–14.
17 On Ian Burn's reworking of Mondrian's grid see Ian Burn, 'Glimpses on peripheral vision', *Dialogue: Writings in Art History*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1991, pp. 184–7.

'Robert Hunter at the Museum of Modern Art', pp. 83–7

My thanks to Michelle Elligott, Chief of Archives, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Jenepher Duncan, Curator, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth.

1 Circulated under the auspices of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art to: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Western Australian Art Gallery, Perth; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; City of Auckland Art Gallery.
2 Pollard first opened Pinacotheca in 1967 in a Victorian building, later demolished, in St Kilda. He moved the gallery, in 1970, to a former factory building in Waltham Place, Richmond.
3 Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, Robert Irwin and Sol LeWitt created work at the National Gallery of Victoria for the exhibition, and Yvonne Rainer showed a film followed by audience discussion.
4 The late John Stringer, who was familiar with Hunter's work from around 1967, linked his chromatic range to the 'pastel shades' of 'suburban decor', which he interpreted as social commentary. Memorandum from John Stringer to the author, 27 June 1974, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
5 *Eight Contemporary Artists*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 9 Oct. 1974 – 5 Jan. 1975. The artists were: Vito Acconci, Alighiero Boetti, Daniel Buren, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Robert Hunter, Brice Marden and Dorothea Rockburne.
6 Letter from Hunter to the author, 23 April 1974. MoMA Archives, NY.
7 Letter from Erika Fischer to the author, 5 June 1974. MoMA Archives, NY.
8 Undated letter from Hunter to the author in response to hers of 17 May 1974, MoMA Archives, NY.
9 ibid.
10 ibid. The artist Dr Irene Barberis, who accompanied Hunter on the trip to New York, kept a slight plan of the work he intended to create, which Jenepher Duncan, curator, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, brought to my attention.
11 Author's appointment diary, Sep. 1974
12 Hunter's space was perhaps 4 x 3.5 metres, one wall interrupted by an open entrance. I believe he paired squares on at least three walls, but the two installation photographs in the MoMA Archives are partial views, only faintly legible.
13 Compare LeWitt, whose light graphite wall drawings from the late 1960s also presuppose lateral viewing.
14 *The New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1974.
15 Note to the author from Terence Bullen, professional house painter and decorator, 22 July 2017.

'Still flow: Robert Hunter's paintings 1985–2014', pp. 89–95

1 Hunter first began to work with 8 x 4 feet plywood sheets in 1983, though with a different geometrical structure, including a very pronounced dark grey horizontal band. In 1985, he began to work with a different geometry within this 8 x 4 feet format, and this geometry would sustain his work for the following thirty-two years, until his death.
2 Robert Hunter, interview with the author, 9 Aug. 1995, Melbourne.
3 Frank Stella in Bruce Glaser, 'Question to Stella and Judd' (1964), in Lucy R. Lippard & Gregory Battcock (eds), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York, 1968, p. 166.
4 Ron Radford, *Recent Australian Painting: A Survey 1970–1983*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1983, p. 10.
5 Svetlana Alpers & Michael Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p. 84.
6 Lansell wrote: 'one enters into a magical, ethereal realm, soft, tender and dulcet' (G. R. Lansell, 'Small mercies', *Nation*, 25 May 1968, p. 20). Patrick McCaughey, in his review in *The Age*, wrote: 'What exactly is going on in each painting only becomes clear as we participate in it. You have to walk up to the painting, away from it, around it and so on to discover all of its ghostly, barely discernible form' (Patrick McCaughey, 'Dazzling debut by young artist', *The Age*, 15 May 1968, p. 6).
7 Hunter, interview with the author, 14 June 1995, Melbourne; Bruce Pollard, interview with the author, 9 June 1995, Melbourne; Robert Jacks, interview with the author, 8 June 1995, Harcourt; Dale Hickey, telephone interview with the author, 19 June 1995.
8 Hunter still remembered the show as 'the Reinhardt one' many years later (Hunter, interview with the author, 22 April 1995, Melbourne).
9 Yves-Alain Bois, 'The limits of almost', in William Rubin (ed.), *Ad Reinhardt*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1991, p. 28.
10 Ad Reinhardt, 'Twelve rules for a new academy', *Art News*, May 1957, as quoted by Ian Burn, *Looking at Seeing and Reading*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, 1993.
11 Hunter, interview with the author, 22 April 1995.
12 Bruce Pollard (ed.), *Minimal Art*, Ewing Gallery, Melbourne University, Melbourne, 1973, p. 2.
13 Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (1954), Flamingo, London, 1994, p. 8.
14 ibid., p. 12.
15 Hunter, interview with the author, 9 Aug. 1995; and Hunter as reported in Ashley Crawford, 'Robert Hunter draws a blank', *The Herald*, 5 May, 1989, p. 17.
16 Hunter, interview with the author, 22 April 1995.
17 Writing on Hunter's wall paintings focused on its direct use of the wall, with its many international models, most notably Sol LeWitt, rather than the process of stencilling. See Elwyn Lynn, 'In a womb-room', *The Bulletin*, 13 Aug. 1970, pp. 40–1; G. R. Lansell, 'Painting for a fortnight', *Nation*, 8 Aug. 1970, pp. 16–17.
18 Hunter's attention to walls as surfaces of enclosure, and his intensification of a sense of interiority, provide an important link to the work produced by other Pinacotheca artists in the early 1970s, most notably the conceptual photography of Dale Hickey and Robert Rooney. In Hickey's *Ninety white walls*, 1970 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne), ninety different white walls were photographed with an Instamatic camera, using repetition to imbue the emptiness of a blank wall with a strange psychological presence. Pollard remarked at the time that in this work, 'Hickey walks straight into the void, and tries to cope mentally with this' (Pollard in interview with Terry Smith, 'The local ideas context', in Terry Smith & Tony McGillick (eds), *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?*, Contemporary Art Society, Central Street Gallery, Sydney, 1971, p. 6). Emptiness is given a similar psychological presence in Rooney's *The white rug: for S. K., 13 Aug – 27 Sept 1974*, 1974, and more obviously *AM/PM*, 1974 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne). In *Corners*, 1972 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne), the mental connotations of interior space find expression in the empty spaces of Pinacotheca itself, which seems to bear the weight of the implied, though invisible, human presence of the photographer. The sense of enclosure that marks all these works, and is implicit in Hunter's stencil-based works, was characterised by Pollard as particular to Melbourne artists: 'There is a sense in here somewhere of the animosity of life – this is a Melbourne thing, which no Sydney artist would deal with. Sydney colour painting was lyrical, there was a sense that one could escape. In Melbourne there is the feeling that one is locked in' (Pollard in Smith, 'The local ideas context', p. 7).
19 Gary Catalano, 'Robert Hunter', *Art & Australia*, vol. 17, no. 1, p. 77.
20 Hunter, interview with the author, 9 Aug. 1995.
21 Jackson Pollock, 'My painting', *Possibilities*, vol. 1, Winter 1947–48, p. 79, as quoted in Herschel B. Chipp (ed.), *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981, p. 548.
22 The phrase is Hunter's, who, at my suggestion of a link to automatism and the art of Pollock's, remarked self-ironically that he was a 'subliminal Pollock' (Hunter, interview with the author, 9 Aug. 1995). Charles Green has also noted the similarity to automatism in Hunter's processes (Charles Green, 'Persistent subjectivity: revaluing Robert Hunter', in *Robert Hunter: Artist-in-residence 1988–89*, Ian Potter Museum, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1989.
23 André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver & Helen R. Lane, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1972, p. 22 (italics his), pp. 27–8.
24 Clement Greenberg, 'Jackson Pollock: "Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision"' (1969), in John O'Brien (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1993, p. 248.
25 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans C. K. Scott Moncrieff & Terence Kilmartin, vol. 1, London, 1989, p. 228.

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–––, *Less is More: Minimal and Post-Minimal Art in Australia*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, 2012.

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Note to the reader

The list of works is arranged in chronological order and works within the same year are listed alphabetically by title. The capitalisation of titles, provided by the artist, has been retained. All measurements are in centimetres to the first decimal point, height x width for two-dimensional objects. Measurements in parentheses are sight measurements taken from the front of framed or mounted works. Firm dates for works have been established from the artist's inscriptions. Dates supported by documentary evidence are in parentheses. Numbers in brackets at the conclusion of the caption are accession numbers of the National Gallery of Victoria and relevant lending institutions.

Jane Devery, Curator, Contemporary Art

Robert Hunter
Australia 1947–2014

Untitled 1966
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
157.0 x 157.0 cm
Wesfarmers Collection, Perth

No. 4 untitled painting 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.4 x 158.4 cm
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Purchased 1987 (1987.144)

No. 6 untitled painting 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.0 x 158.0 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Gift of Georgina Carnegie 1984 (104.1984)

Untitled no. 8 (1968)
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.4 x 158.4 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of N. R. Seddon, 1968 (1827-5)

Untitled no. 10 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.0 x 158.0 cm
Private collection, Canberra

Untitled painting no. 11 (1968)
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.3 x 158.3 cm
Monash University Collection, Melbourne
Purchased 1968 (1968.4)

Untitled 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.2 x 158.2 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Untitled 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.0 x 158.0 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

Untitled 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.4 x 158.4 cm
Private collection, Sydney

Untitled 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
200.0 x 200.5 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Untitled painting no. 1 1969
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.7 x 158.7 cm
Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth (1993.002)

Untitled painting 1969
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.5 x 158.5 cm
Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth (2002.077)

Untitled 1969
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
158.5 x 158.5 cm
Private collection, Sydney

Untitled 1970–76
synthetic polymer paint, cotton thread and pencil on canvas
158.5 x 158.5 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1976 (76.344)

Untitled (1970)
synthetic polymer paint and masking tape on paper
(a-f) 172.7 x 158.4 cm irreg. (each)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1977 (A2.a-f-1977)

Untitled 1971
synthetic polymer paint on wall
(a-j) 162.0 x 163.0 cm irreg. (each)
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
The James C Sourris, AM, Collection.
Gift of James C Sourris, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2012. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program (2012.467)

Untitled 1976
synthetic polymer paint on wall
(a-c) 350.0 x 825.0 cm (variable) (installation)
(a-c) 152.0 x 152.0 cm (each)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1975 (207.1976)

Untitled (1977)
synthetic polymer paint on canvas, string
121.9 x 244.0 cm
Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria
Purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, 1978 (1978.102)

Untitled 1981
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
61.0 x 366.0 cm
Geelong Gallery, Victoria
Purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board Australia Council and the Caltex - Victoria Government Art Fund, 1985 (1985.11)

Untitled 1983–84
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.4 x 244.1 cm
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Purchased 1991 through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation (1991.12)

Untitled 1984
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.4 x 244.1 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Dr David Rosenthal, Governor, 1999 (1999.258)

Untitled no. 4 1985
synthetic polymer paint on board
122.0 x 244.0 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Gift of Loti Smorgon AO and Victor Smorgon AC, 1995 (1995.178)

Untitled no. 6 (for Carl) 1985
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.4 x 244.1 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Untitled no. 3 1986
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased from Admission Funds, 1987 (AC2-1987)

Untitled no. 1 1987
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.5 cm
TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville
Gift of Eva and Marc Besen 2001 (2002.039)

Untitled no. 3 1987
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.5 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Rudy Komon Memorial Fund 1987 (399.1987)

Untitled 1988
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
The University of Melbourne Art Collection, Melbourne
Purchased from the artist 1988, during the artist's term as artist-in-residence 1988/89 (1988.0019.000.000)

Untitled no. 4 1991
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
Collection of Mary and Peter Nicholson, Melbourne

Untitled no. 4 1991–92
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
123.5 x 244.5 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Gift of anonymous donors, 1993 (1993.287)

Untitled 1993
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
Collection of Paul and Wendy Bonnici, Melbourne

Untitled no. 6 1995
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

Untitled no. 1 1996
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

Untitled no. 7 1996
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
The Vizard Foundation Art Collection of the 1990s, acquired 1997
On loan to the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne (1111.0059.000.000)

Untitled no. 6 1998
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.2 x 224.2 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1999 (1999.51)

Untitled no. 3 2000
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 224.0 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Untitled no. 4 2003
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.2 x 224.2 cm
Estate of the artist, Melbourne

Untitled no. 2 2005
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.2 x 224.2 cm
Collection of James C. Sourris, Brisbane

Untitled 2008
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.2 x 224.2 cm
Collection of Alida Milani, Melbourne

Untitled no. 9 2010
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 244.0 cm
Estate of the artist, Melbourne

Untitled no. 2 2012
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.2 x 224.2 cm
Estate of the artist, courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Untitled no. 9 2013
synthetic polymer paint on plywood
122.0 x 224.0 cm
Estate of the artist, Melbourne

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(vi–vii)
Robert Hunter
Untitled 1988 (detail)
The University of Melbourne Art Collection, Melbourne

(overleaf)
Robert Hunter installing *Untitled* 1976, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

(endpapers)
Robert Hunter
Untitled no. 4 1991 (detail)
Collection of Mary and Peter Nicholson, Melbourne