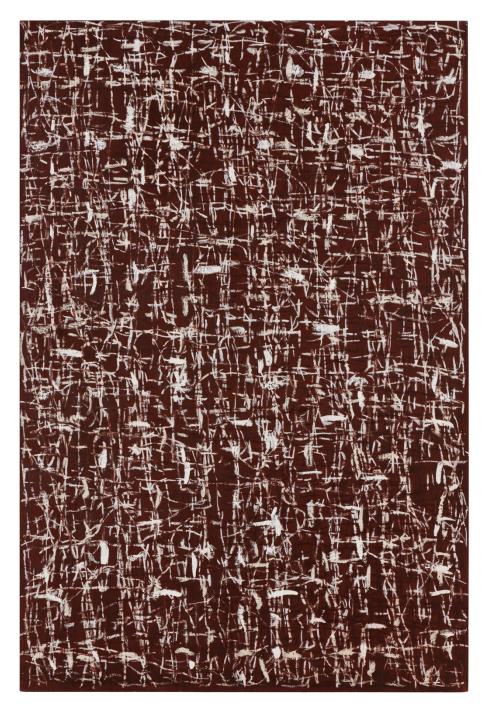




## The Estate of John Peart





## Dharawal, music, and the Big Bang

Nature is the subtle presence in John Peart's mature work moving in rhythm with his long held interests in music, meditation, Indian spiritual life, and philosophy¹. During the late 60s and 70s he rapidly experimented with most modes of abstraction, making three-dimensional shaped works, pouring and staining the canvas, using stencils in colour-fields, and making all over calligraphic patterning. Later some of these works would provide grounds to be painted over or cut up and rearranged into oppositional squares of a grid. In 1990, when Roy Jackson suggested that John should combine all of these processes into one painting, he replied he had already done so.

Spontaneity was the key. Feeling at one in the moment led Peart into an innovatory musical collaboration with the musician and composer Nigel Butterley. Painting live on stage with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra together they aimed to synthesise a 'constant sub-conscious interaction between painting and music'.

Some of his most ambitious large-scale canvases would be completed in the open air immersed in the dappled light of Dharawal, feeling the movement of the breeze, and seeing 'woven spaces between tall trees inscribed with scribbly patterns', while noting 'the effect on colours of the bush after rain'. 'While not working directly from the landscape' he said, 'I found myself assessing each painting in relation to its surroundings, if it had an artificial or alien presence I would rework it until it

seemed to resonate in sympathy'.<sup>2</sup> The freedom to challenge himself involved working in different media like clay and plaster, or weaving angophora branches into sculptural reliefs were all part of his exploratory nature.

Between 1982 and 1984 works such as Jvoti (1982), Blue Kirtan, Red Kirtan (1982), and the sublime Rabir Kirtan (1982), now in the collection of the Art Gallery of NSW were painted entirely outdoors. The Kirtan titles allude to Indian religious music and the call and response from the chanting of the Vedas in the Vaishnavism tradition. The Sanskrit word Kirtan refers to the devotional practice of singing mantras, during which the creative voice circulates during the improvised performance of a Kirtan. As his daughter violinist Mirabai Peart reminds us, her father played the saxophone, studied Vedanta spiritual philosophy and loved Northern Indian classical music and Carnatic music of Southern India.

Untitled 520 and 522 (2000), have a matrix of fluid brushstrokes orchestrated in Peart's organic, inimitable style. Their subtle monochromatic compositions propose a relationship with the meditative movements of weaving, Indigenous bark painting, perhaps Tony Tuckson's paintings and the formative influence of Asian calligraphy and Ian Fairweather.<sup>3</sup> Peart also admired the woven bush fibre installations and 'holy thread' pierced paintings made by Savanhdary Vongpoothorn at Wedderburn in the 1990s.

## Footnotes

- 1. He was 16 when he first read The First and Last Freedom by Jiddu Krishnamurti, later going to hear him lecture in Switzerland and teaching at the Krishnamurti school in the 1970s in Hampshire. Peart cited the Gospel of Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi's Who am I and Nigadatta Maharaj as influential.
- 2. John Peart, 'Things which attract my eye', 1990
- Diane Moon his first wife, was a dyer and weaver, later Curator of Aboriginal fibre art at Queensland Art Gallery



John Peart performing 'Interaction' with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and composer Nigel Butterley at Sydney Town Hall, 1967. Photograph courtesy John Peart Estate.

Dharawal iv (2000) takes a soft focus. Blue and grey orbs are knotted into a delicate, almost invisible net of spidery lines on a creamy ground. Peart had 'tended to see lines as travelling independently in space, and sometimes a sense of weaving, but generally reinforcing a fairly flat or overall plane... there's a kind of indistinct illusion isn't there, in the calligraphy?<sup>4</sup>

In the *Dream formation* (2004) Peart visualises figurations glimpsed but not fully realised, moving in a black dreamlike realm. Dreaming provides us with an involuntary disconnection from the self. Jacques Lascan spoke about the curious vividness of dreams in which the dreamer feels removed from conscious intention and therefore free from 'the language we use to step into objectivity'.<sup>5</sup>

Nature is highly patterned, and the utility of mathematics to represent form in nature, as a way of analogizing or picturing structure, is now well recognized. As an abstract language, mathematics is very apt in describing our physical world, better perhaps than natural languages. Geometries are foundational in biological sequencing, 'as natural structures become more complex, they often consist in patterns built on patterns' something explored by Peart in his grids.<sup>6</sup>

Peart's foresight was to conceive the *phenomena* of the external world of nature as an internalised pattern of abstract consciousness developed from his knowledge of Jungian philosophy with

the Kantian concept of *noumenal* reality. Kant's attempt to make a rapprochement between 'how the world seems - the phenomena, and things beyond our experience- the noumena - things as they are in themselves, was believed too great for us to penetrate. So Jung had advocated for the spaceless and timeless, outside human reason and sensory perception, as described in Kantian epistemology, as a source for synchronicity. For Jung, synchronicity suggested a dynamic structure of time, which includes the past, the present and the future. Perhaps this accords with the 'quantum leaps' Peart was inspired to pursue in painting?

Metaphysical ideas that expand on the age of the universe, and the nature of the time space continuum certainly fired his imagination, but then so did his curiosity about human visions and encounters with flying saucers. On his studio computer is an excerpt on quantum physics, outlining investigations into the fundamental structure of matter, electromagnetic energy, and the age of the material universe.<sup>8</sup>

Imagining a new order of continuous spatial dimension required expanding his format. *Geolu* (1992) is over five metres in length. This painting reveals his long practice of using over-painting to rework the ground as a dynamic process, moving between optical illusion and textural materiality. This preoccupation was a way for him to intensify colour and discover new forms, as he described, 'by painting out certain areas, I'm creating certain shapes and I might

## Footnotes

- 4. John Peart interviewed by James Gleeson 26 October 1979
- Richard Shiff, Writing after art, David Zwirner Books, New York 2023, p. 518
- I am indebted to reading *The frontiers* of knowledge by A C Graying, Penguin Random House UK, 2021, p.123
- 7. Grayling, p.129
- Frank Close, Particle
   Physics A very short
   introduction, Oxford
   University Press first
   edition 2004







Geolu, 1992, oil and acrylic on canvas (diptych), 170x580cm

just be looking at the volume and the weight of that shape or the proportions of the shape in relation to the whole thing'. His association with sculptors dealing with abstract concepts of weightlessness, mass and gravity at St Martin's School of Art, London in the 1970s had been useful. These luminaries included Anthony Caro, the Australian Paul Selwood and David Annesley, all of them introduced to each other by the American Colour Field painter Kenneth Noland. Peart had seen Caro's sculpture in New York in 1969, where he met Noland, Clement Greenberg, and painters Jules Olitski and Larry Poons.

Peart's one experience of being in the remote spaces of Aboriginal Country occurred at the Mornington Wildlife sanctuary in the East Kimberley in 2011. It was a revelation, inspiring some of his finest, metaphorical paintings of saturated colour and spatial complexity in the Kimorn, Taos and Night Clouds series. An invocation to "let the resolutions of my mind always be auspicious" loops through the glowing red forms of Resolutions Hills (2013). As he emailed, 'We saw the distant mountain ranges come to life in the rising sun and then incandescent oranges and golds in the nearby cliffs.' In Taos IV (2013) a radiant orange linear grid overlaps other paler toned brush-marks creating an energy or pulse, like breath -inwards and outwards into the surrounding white spaces, firing off images like the interconnected synapses in our brains.

Flying over the mountains Peart saw marks made on the land by erosion and the meandering courses of rivers staining the red earth with mineral colours and photographed the magnificent pink-tinged Wandjina paintings on a rock shelter high on the escarpment above the plain. He was aware of the resurgence of Aboriginal culture initiated by Gija painters the traditional owners of the east Kimberley, following their brutal suppression. The twentyfour Night Clouds paintings juxtaposing white clouds on black ground creates a sombre beauty rich in cosmic and cultural metaphor. Interwoven strands of colour weave together the past and present, to represent a place of great importance for the future of our shared humanity and the biosphere.

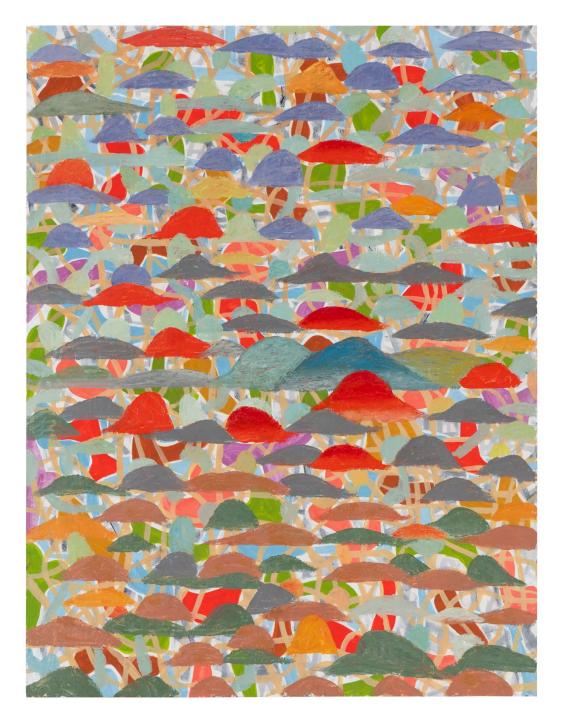
Whatever pleasures we may discern in any one Peart painting, it is important to acknowledge his superior craft and philosophical focus, that was so perceptive in bringing the patterns in, and underlying nature, and human consciousness into art.

Sioux Garside, 2024

Acknowledgements: My heartfelt thanks to John's children, Simon, Gara, Mirabai, Jyoti and Janaki for their insights, and access to the Estate archives. I also relied on Diane Moon for her important recollections, and Meera Anderson for insights into Carl Jung, and John's internet searching on UFO's.

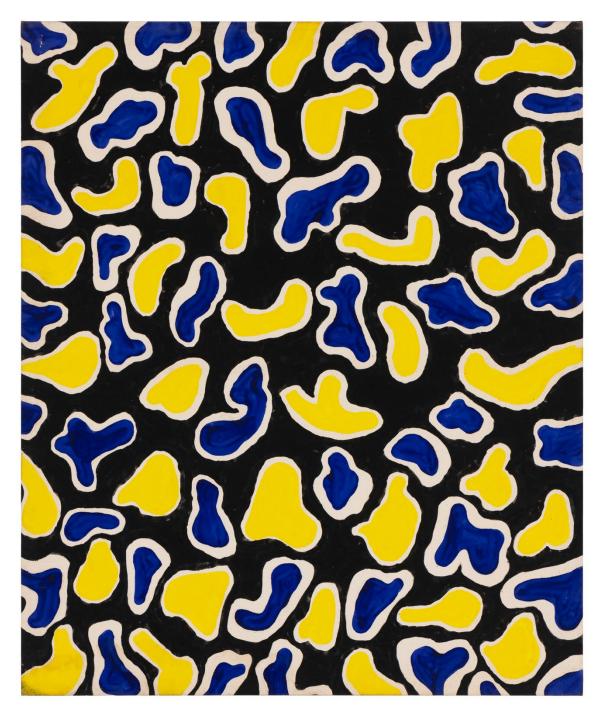








Untitled 89, circa 2000, acrylic and oil on canvas, 170x240.5cm





Untitled 057, circa 1996, acrylic and oil on canvas, 79x59.5cm



Wedderburn Rhythms VI, 1997, oil and acrylic on canvas, 22x28cm



Fragments with Blue and Green, 1989, oil and acrylic on canvas, 137x57.5cm



Figment II, 1999, oil and acrylic on canvas, 31x44.5cm



Figment IX, 1999, oil and acrylic on canvas, 45.5x31cm



Figment VIII, 1999, oil and acrylic on canvas, 45.5x31cm



Reflections, 1989, oil and acrylic on canvas, 36x25cm



Untitled 061, circa 1980, oil and acrylic on canvas, 99x57cm



Janeshwar IX, 1980, oil and acrylic on canvas, 33.5x53.5cm



Untitled 059, circa 1989, oil and acrylic on canvas, 76x72.5cm



Untitled 444, circa 1988, oil and acrylic on canvas, 76x170cm

John Peart		2022	Courage and beauty: the James C Sourris AM collection Gallery of Modern Art,
Select Biography			Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
		2021	Storylines + Songlines Justin Art House Museum, Melbourne
Born	1945, Brisbane, Qld		Art Trail: Electric – Artworks from the
Died	2013, Wedderburn, NSW		Latrobe Regional Gallery Collection
			Latrobe Regional Gallery
Education			Feeling Abstract? Paintings from the UWA Art
1993-1994 Painting, East Sydney Technical College			Collection 1950-1990 Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery
1978-1986 Painting, East Sydney Technical College		2020	The Watters Gift University of Technology
		0010	Sydney Gallery, Sydney
Solo exhibitions [selected]		2019	Hassall Collection: A Masterpiece Collection
2024	John Peart King Street Gallery on William, Sydney	0010	of Australian Art Drill Hall Gallery
2023	Formations and Rhythms [Works on paper]	2018	The Field Revisited National Gallery
0000	King Street Gallery on William		of Victoria, Melbourne
2022	Formations and Rhythms King		RAW Wedderburn Delmar Gallery, Trinity Grammar School, Sydney
0010	Street Gallery on William	2014	Watters Gallery: Five Decades
2019	John Peart: Works from the Studio	2014	S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
0010	Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne		Melbourne Contemporary Art Fair Royal
2018	John Peart: Paintings Watters Gallery, Sydney		Exhibition Building, Melbourne
2017	John Peart: Paintings and Works on Paper selected by Elisabeth Cummings Watters Gallery	2013	Sydney Contemporary Carriageworks, Sydney
2016	John Peart: Homage Newcastle	2012	Melbourne Art Fair 2012
2010	Art Gallery, Newcastle, NSW	2012	Royal Exhibition Building
	Gorge Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney	2011	Salon des Refusés S.H. Ervin Gallery
2014	John Peart: Monochrome and Duochrome		Abstraction Drill Hall Gallery
2014	- Introduction Charles Nodrum Gallery		Frank's Flat Maitland Regional Art
2013	Land and other Scapes II Watters Gallery		Gallery, Maitland, NSW
2011	John Peart: Collages Heiser Gallery, Brisbane	2010	Black is the Colour Shoalhaven
2010	Collages Watters Gallery		City Arts Centre, Nowra, NSW
2008	Tetrads Charles Nodrum Gallery	2009	The Wynne Prize Art Gallery of
2004-2006 John Peart - Paintings 1964 - 2004 Campbelltown			New South Wales, Sydney
2001 2000	Arts Centre Travelling Exhibition; Latrobe Regional		Tackling the Field Art Gallery of New South Wales
	Gallery, Morwell, VIC; Tamworth Regional Gallery,		MONO Uno: Prints from the Charles
	Tamworth, NSW; Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra;		Sturt University Collection Wagga Wagga
	Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western		Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga, NSW
	Australia, Perth; Burnie Regional Art Gallery,	2007	2007: The Year in Art S.H. Ervin Galleryzzz
	Burnie, Tasmania; Campbelltown Arts Centre		Double Visions COFA space, University of
			New South Wales; Orange Regional Art
Group exhibitions [selected]			Gallery, Orange, NSW
2024	Wilder Times: Arthur Boyd and the		Clemenger Award - Triennial Exhibition
	Mid 1980s Landscape Bundanon		of Contemporary Australian Art
	Art Museum, Bundanon, NSW		National Gallery of Victoria

Awards & prizes

2002 Invitation Art Award, Union,

Universities and Schools Club

1997 The Wynne Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Kedumba Drawing Prize, Kedumba Collection, Wentworth Falls, NSW

1996 Festival of Fisher Ghost Art Prize,

Campbelltown, NSW

1976 Visual Arts and Crafts Board Grant

Dalby Art Prize, Western Downs, QLD

1974 Philip Morris Arts Grant
1969 Myer Foundation Grant
1968 Pacesetter Prize

Mirror – Waratah Prize Newcastle Prize Transfield Prize

Collections

Murray Art Museum, Albury, NSW

Allens, Australia A.M.P Ltd

Applecross Evening Technical College, Perth

Artbank, Australia

Art Gallery of New South Wales Art Gallery of South Australia Art Gallery of Western Australia Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand

Australian National University Collection

Baker & McKenzie

Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Victoria

B.H.P. Billiton

Brisbane Civic Art Gallery

Chartwell Collection, New Zealand

City Art Institute, College of Fine Art, UNSW, Sydney

Dalby Arts Centre, Queensland Blake Dawson Waldron, Sydney

Family Law Courts, Canberra

I.C.I. Australia Ltd

Kedumba Drawing Prize Collection

Kerry Stokes Collection, Western Australia

Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Victoria Macquarie University, Australia

Monash University, Sydney

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

National Australia Bank

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

National Gallery of Victoria Newcastle Regional Art Gallery

New England Regional Art Museum

New South Wales Warrnambool Art Gallery, Victoria Orange Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales

Parliament House, Canberra Philip Morris Art Purchase Grant Philip Cox and Partners Pty. Ltd Philip Morris Art Purchase Grant

Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston

Robert Holmes a Court Collection, Perth

Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria

State Bank of New South Wales

Tasmanian College of Advanced Education

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Townsville Teachers College

**UBS Bank** 

University of New South Wales

University of Sydney

University of Western Australia

Western Australian Institute of Technology

Western Mining Corporation

Wollongong City Art Gallery, New South Wales

World Bank



A comprehensive CV for John Peart is available on the King Street Gallery on William website kingstreetgallery.com.au/artists/john-peart/

The Estate of John Peart acknowledges the Dharawal people, the traditional custodians of the land where John lived and worked, and pays their respect to Elders past and present.

Artwork courtesy the Estate of John Peart.



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Cover:

Detail from *Untitled* 89, circa 2000, acrylic and oil on canvas, 170x240.5cm, page 21.



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