

Seeing, looking, perceiving... I read the words, recognise meanings for the words. But how does my reading relate to the processes which the words refer to? How do I make sense of what I am doing when I am not-reading seeing?

**LOOKING
AT SEEING
& READING**

Ivan Dougherty Gallery

The University of New South Wales • College of Fine Arts

LOOKING AT SEEING & READING

Curator: Ian Burn

Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
Monash University Gallery, Melbourne

1 - 31 July, 1993
31 March - 30 April, 1994
19 May - 25 June, 1994

FOREWORD

The idea for this exhibition began at a forum to discuss the Rex Butler curated *Banal Art* exhibition at Artspace in Sydney in 1991. Ian Burn, one of the speakers, gave a paper that commented on the exhibition from an historical viewpoint citing the 1960s as a "a time when the object seemed to theorise itself" as opposed to the 1990s "when the tendency is for theory to be objectified".

He examined the process of looking at Jasper Johns' painting *Zero through nine* of 1961 in front of which "The more you looked (at his work) the more you learned about **your looking** (but not about the picture)." Burn referred to the "engagement with perception" of the 1960s in contrast to there being "in much theory and critical writing today a disregard of perception". He continued, "the contemporary or post-modernist tendency is to **read** pictures rather than to **look at** them... To only read pictures is to rely on a rhetorical vision - vision which treats the picture as nothing but a rhetorical surface."

Burn's conclusion began by looking at a painting in the exhibition by Andrew Donaldson:

"It imposes a particular kind of structural and categorical ambiguity on the viewer's perceptual experience...which underpins its rhetorical manoeuvres, **importantly**. In other words, **something happens when we look at it.**"

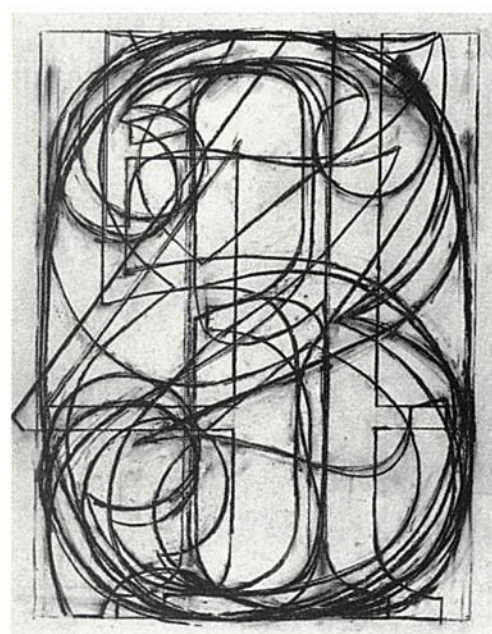
The paper ended with the remark that "this tendency for the art to be read and not looked at...represents a shift in perception - but, in certain ways, also a shift **away** from perception. Away from using our looking as part of the dialogue with a work of art, as a way of questioning the object".

These were observations that others may have at the time felt, but were not readily airing, and yet which seemed to be of fundamental importance. The more so for a generation removed from the direct experience of the crucial moment of Johns' and other related artists' work but part of an era "when the tendency is for theory to be objectified." This was the context in which I put to Ian Burn the possibility of creating an exhibition emerging from these premises. *LOOKING AT SEEING AND READING* is the result. I hope it will raise questions and stimulate thought that will add to the enrichment of the dialogue between artist and audience, object and viewer, practice and theory.

Nick Waterlow
Director

Since these words were written and the exhibition was at Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Ian Burn was tragically drowned off the New South Wales coast on 29 September, 1993. It had been Ian's wish that the exhibition travel to the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane and Monash University Gallery in Melbourne. His absence lends this tour an added purpose, that of remembering and continuing to learn from his presence.

14. Jasper Johns, *Zero through nine*, 1960



LOOKING AT SEEING AND READING

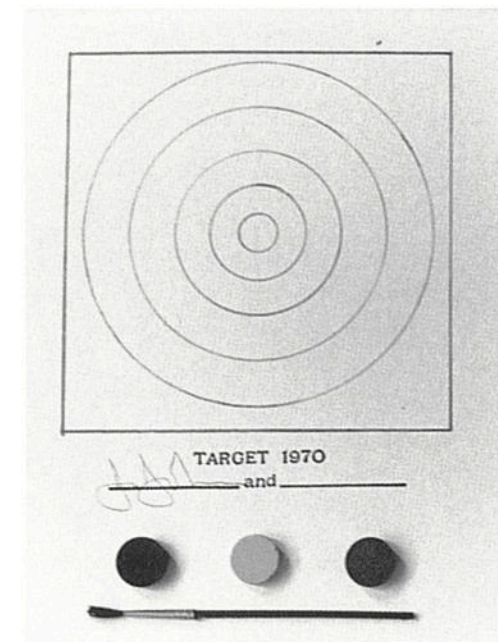
Ian Burn

■ Seeing, looking, perceiving ... I read the words, recognise meanings for the words. But how does my reading and recognition relate to the processes which the words refer to? How do I make sense of what I am doing when I am not-reading seeing?

■ It's easy to take for granted how we see things. But if conditions are placed on my seeing - say, I'm asked to look at an object for one minute without blinking my eyes - then the object shifts out of focus and I become more aware of certain physiological sensations associated with perception. Such an awareness can also be induced by works of art which make unexpected demands on the visual competences of the viewer, or which are simply indifferent to the visual expectations of the viewer. This self-consciousness does not just reference the 'between-ness' of viewer and object; significantly, it also produces a 'space' between what we **see** and what we **know** which is capable of complex (re)working . . . as intersection, tension, contradiction, paradox, discontinuity, etc.

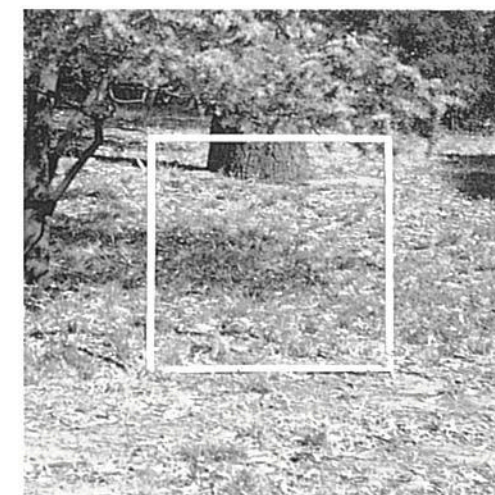
■ I notice reflections in a mirror more readily than I see the surface of the mirror. To 'see' (produce, project) the mirror surface demands concentrated effort, which may be assisted by focusing on imperfections, dust, smears, haze, steam (that is, by the mirror's inability or failure to be a perfect mirror). The extent to which we are able to see the mirror surface irrespective of these incidental factors depends on a self-consciousness of the possibilities of seeing: on being able to look at ourselves seeing, and on being able to interpret our not-seeing of the surface. The instability of perception is encoded within that critical faculty, indexed to the (density of) social and historical constructs underlying how we see, and to the discursive factors which produce our seeing and organise value. Self-criticality glimpses ways in which the political is entailed in particular 'cultures' of seeing.

■ How do I see a line drawing comprised of the superimposition of the numerals nought through nine (Johns)? The individual numerals lie disguised within the merging, separating outlines rendered on the flat surface: no number appears in front of any other. Recognising (retrieving) each number as a discrete entity is both difficult and slow, and the slippage between states of 'reading' (not-seeing) and 'seeing' (not-reading) leaves an impression of 'reading' my seeing and 'seeing' my reading. The signs of language appear to make the image unseeable, while its visuality makes it unreadable. At these moments we experience a 'fragmenting' of vision, a multiplicity of perception which precludes a single, 'true' or essential way of seeing. The object of perception appears to multiply its levels of representation; its references are coded within 'competing' possibilities of seeing, evoking the experience of a multidimensional 'reality' of the object. In other words, the dis-unity of perception produces ontologically different objects.



15. Jasper Johns, *Target*, 1970

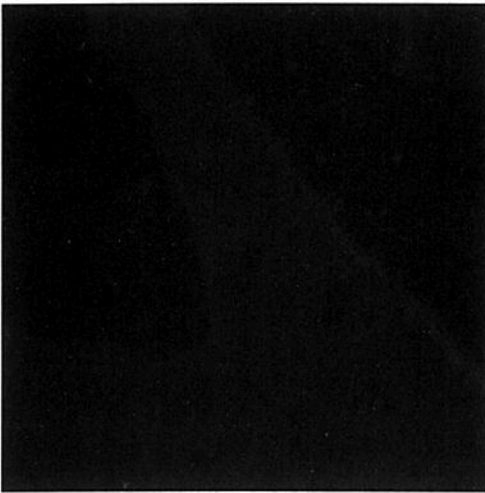
32. Mel Ramsden, *Locations*, 1964





23. Tony McGillick, *Two*, 1965

39. Ad Reinhardt, (untitled serigraph), 1960s



■ When I encounter a letter or number 'out of context', do I read it or see it? What does it mean to say that I **recognise** the letter or number? In reading, we often recognise (and understand) common words rather than really read them, but this experience is framed by the condition of reading. I also recognise certain pictures of things - is this the same as recognising certain common words?

■ Confronted with the numerals nought through nine superimposed, I'm able to find each number because I know what to look for (and the title of Johns' work tells me what to look for). But after proceeding to identify each numeral in turn, I find I haven't really learned any more about the work (and I don't find the work's meaning through reading or recognising the numerals). I've used my seeing merely to recognise the numerals, forcing a realisation that the image makes no special demands on my seeing. The visual skills required are **ordinary**, seemingly no more demanding than everyday seeing. Johns described such works as related to "seeing the way we see and to things in the world which we see".¹ Flavin remarked that art seemed to be moving towards "a neutral pleasure of seeing known to everyone".²

■ The matter-of-fact kind of perception of the superimposed numerals extends to other aspects of the drawing. The character of the line, the smudges etc are recognised for their (self-conscious) reference to a particular kind of drawing, that is, for their non-expressive rather than expressive (or descriptive or mimetic) character. The numerals are just that: they aren't numbering or representing anything. They cannot even be said to be a representation of numerals since a numeral is nothing more than a design or shape. Making a drawing of a numeral is making a 'real' numeral. Similarly, a letter of the alphabet drawn, painted, sculpted or etched **is** the letter - just as a target drawn on a piece of paper **is** a target.

■ Motifs like numbers, letters and targets - motifs whose familiarity deflects attention away from themselves - are "seen and not looked at", as Johns has remarked.³ They are "things the mind already knows" and can serve as **readymade** compositions. This indifference to compositional value makes "room to work on other levels",⁴ inaugurating opportunities for other (conceptual) concerns and sites. Works of art founded on such motifs beg a more (self) reflective viewer and are prefigured in a different kind of knowing or knowledge in relation to art.

■ Non-specialised or everyday perception entails a (conceptually) more abstracted form of art **because** the art appears to exist at one with the everyday world (that is, the art appears more 'real', requiring a strategy of 'separation' to be overt). Historically, works of art looked distinctive enough from ordinary objects not to warrant an argued agenda of difference (and particular conventions of seeing were framed and legitimised by this 'categorical' segregation). In contrast, works making no demands on (art) historical or historicised perception appeal for their legibility (as art) to agencies of institutionalised difference.⁵ Accordingly, the art is inclined to aestheticise its newfound compatibility with the institutional and architectonic forms of the modern art museum.

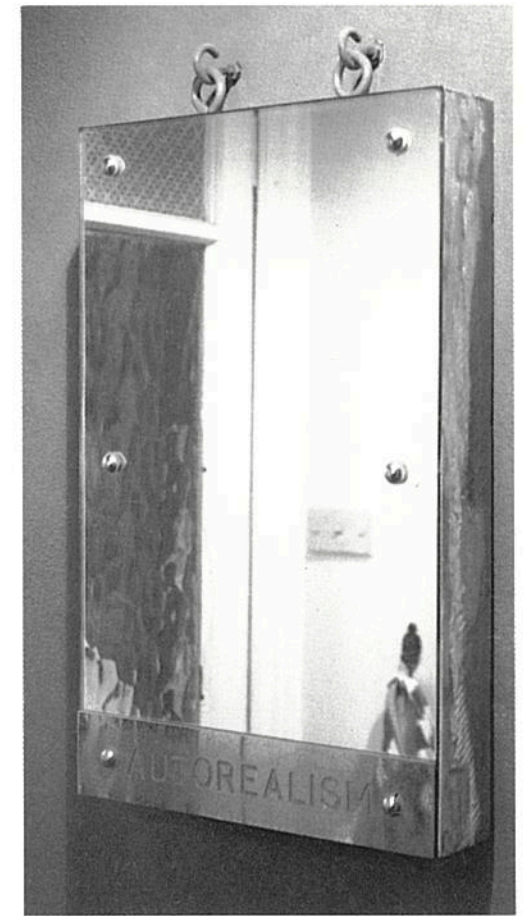
■ If commonplace motifs like letters and numbers provide readymade compositions, then the colours **red, yellow and blue** can provide a **readymade** colour arrangement. In the fine arts, red-yellow-blue is accepted as a single scheme consisting of three (equally valued) colours, a schema which denies the viewer an option to interpret the artist's use of colour. The difference of the colours may be 'absolute', but as schema we remain indifferent to their difference. Modify any one however and the colours instantly fall within the scope of interpretation in terms of expressive, emotive, decorative or descriptive values, producing a different order of judgements.

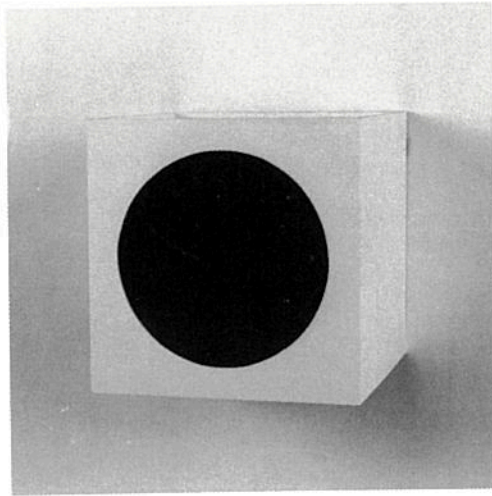
■ To be read **as schema**, all three primary colours must be present. It also entails an indifference to any subjective valuing of colours. Each colour is constituted by its relation to the other two.⁶ Accordingly, a single focus on (say) red acknowledges the non-rednesses of yellow and of blue. Mondrian introduced red-yellow-blue into his compositions for their schematic (read abstract or non-relational) value. Johns' adoption of red-yellow-blue can be equated with his use of numbers or letters: an arrangement of colours we 'see without looking at'. Following Johns, McGillick announces the colours and then interweaves them expressionlessly in an Abstract Expressionist mode. LeWitt's choice of red-yellow-blue presumes the irreducibility of the three terms, which he then elaborates through the exhaustion of permutations of a combination of any two of the terms. Redgate restages that irreducibility by denying combination, each colour rebounding off the interior of its confining white cylinder.

■ Why do we say 'red, yellow and blue' more readily than 'blue, yellow and red' (or any other order)? The familiar ordering registers its schematic status immediately and emphatically. On the other hand, when equivalent samples of the three colours are placed in front of us, we see them simultaneously. Yet in adopting red, yellow and blue as schema, why do we notice a tendency for artists to arrange the colours in the same order (Johns, McGillick)? Is it because that order presents a more pleasing tonal arrangement (mid-light-dark)? Is it because we feel more comfortable with a movement from warm to cool colours (traditionally an order for denoting recession in pictorial space)? Or is it a case of linguistic habit impinging on perception, so that we **see** the colours **as schema** more readily in that order?

■ 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 afterimage. (Johns once produced a flag which appeared in the right colours only as a retinal afterimage.) 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."⁷

8. Aleks Danko, *Auto Realism*, 1971





37. Jacky Redgate, *Untitled*, 1991

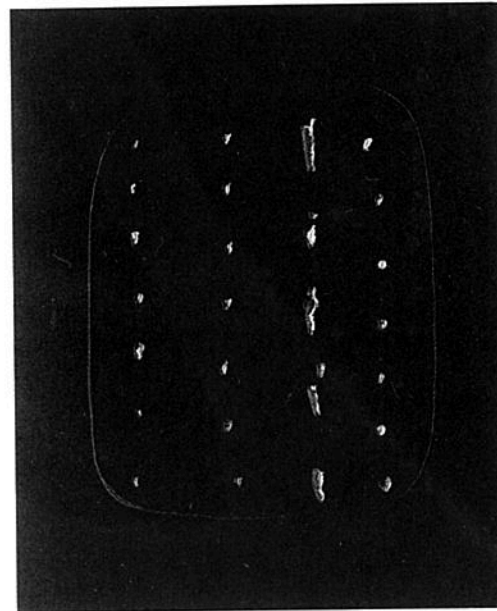
■ From the early fifties, Reinhardt painted only black paintings and for the last seven years of his life repeated the same painting, square, five feet by five feet, with a barely discernible cross form. The last painting which anyone can make, he claimed.⁸ Attracted by 'unoriginality', Reinhardt recycled his own 'ultimate' painting as a **readymade** format, its 'invisibility' extended as each ritual repetition constituted a unique remaking. This "endless repetition of infinite sameness"⁹ means however that I know **in advance** where to look and what to look for, regardless of whether the painting's forms becomes visible to me.

■ The close tonal values and lack of gestural effect conceal both colour and drawing. Colours cannot be completely controlled and should be concealed, according to Reinhardt.¹⁰ A use of black minimised the instability of colour and the uncertainties of mere human vision, with Reinhardt stressing the qualitative difference between the low key and a high pitch. "Black is interesting not as a color but as a non-color and as the absence of color... [whereas] white is a color and all colors..."¹¹ 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 (detaching the viewer from immediate surroundings). Yet - in this darkness, the sense of (corporeal) viewer as visual producer is heightened. The human proportions of Reinhardt's paintings meet a viewer's gaze, 'mirroring' and 'projecting' the viewer 'inside' the frame of the painting.

■ A painting is secured through its possession of a surface whose integrity commands an almost moralistic value. For Newman, this value was reinforced by the 'one-ness' of the imagery. Reinhardt's surface signalled the possibility of an iconic monochrome (rather than the monochrome as an endgame gesture), a new sign rapidly positioned in art history. Johns' deference to the picture plane is 'explained away' (although not quite) by his choice of subjects: the flatness of numbers, letters, targets, maps, flags. McGillick confirms the flatness of the numeral 'two' by modelling it three dimensionally. In contrast, Fontana's physical rupturing of the picture plane is something we both see and feel, as an act of violence. The deliberate puncturing (from behind, unseen) of canvas or paper to allow 'actual space' to pass through the 'illusionistic space' literally propels the flat surface into a three-dimensional space. This mutilation exposes its vulnerability and de-privileges the picture plane, demoralising its value. In the terms in which Piene wrote about Fontana's work, "a painting is nearly nothing and it means nearly nothing to cut into it".¹²

■ How do we experience 'not-seeing' seeing? Habits of Cartesian perspective position us, immobile (as near as possible), at an 'ideal' vantage-point to look at a work of art (Tyndall).¹³ This is a place where we feel so 'comfortable' looking it allows us to ignore the act of positioning ourselves and to forget we are looking. But what happens when there is 'nothing' to see from that position? Or when our eyes refuse to see certain aspects? Or when the work 'resists' our seeing? Attention then shifts to **how** something becomes visible - say, by closer physical scrutiny and allowing our eyes to adjust (Hunter), or by moving about until painted edges catch

12. Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale (Spatial Concept)*, 1968

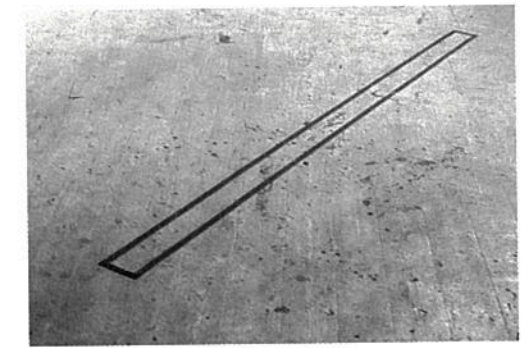


the light (Ramsden), or by redirection by some linguistic framing device. While we may subsequently resume 'seeing' (not-seeing) from our initial vantage-point, we do so with additional knowledge.

■ Perception is never fixed and cannot be understood without taking mobility into account. A work of art which makes no extra-ordinary demands on visual competence is preconditioned by the idea that the (corporeal) viewer is in the same physical space as the work, that the viewer is not separate but co-extensive with the object of perception. Standing in front of a ruptured flat surface (Fontana), I feel an urge to 'go around and look at it from the back'. Twenty-four cement capstones arranged in a row (Andre) or an elongated rectangle marked out with tape on the floor (Dunn) contrive the viewer's mobility by both endorsing and denying the appropriateness of every single viewpoint.

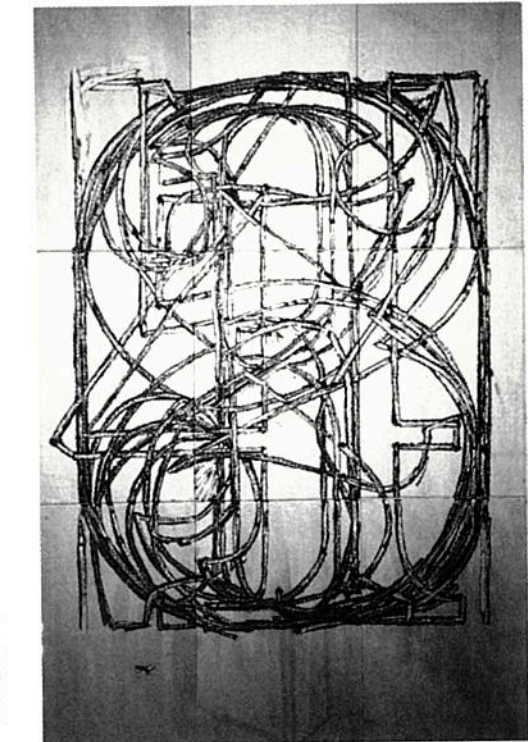
■ A sign which refuses to signify is "ontologically impossible: signs signify, which is why they are called signs, and a 'sign refusing to signify' in fact signifies this very refusal - that is, quite a lot".¹⁴ An artist's decision to produce art which 'refuses to signify' - or withholds or withdraws 'content' - is inevitably an act of resistance to something. Mostly, since the mid century, it has been resistance formed in the context of a burgeoning commercialisation and institutionality of art. In those circumstances, the 'refusal to signify' was often a strategy of aesthetic protest which went hand-in-hand with other forms of protest.¹⁵ The writings ('dogma') and cartoons produced by Reinhardt were a more literal protest complementing the 'protest' of his paintings and, as such, were integral to his art. Perhaps the ironic disclosures of invisible or secret content (Ramsden) could lessen the vulnerability of the art to commodification by the market agencies. Self-irony was to become a 'survival' tactic for art which was 'too serious to be taken seriously'. Bulky wood frames literalise the 'weightiness' of art and its 'heavy aesthetic qualities' (Danko). A painting hanging on a wall presents only an ideogrammatic sign for itself hanging on a wall (Tyndall). A chaotic map concatenates the frustrations, anger and self-deprecating irony of artists realising there is little 'content' available to them other than their 'conversation' (Art & Language).

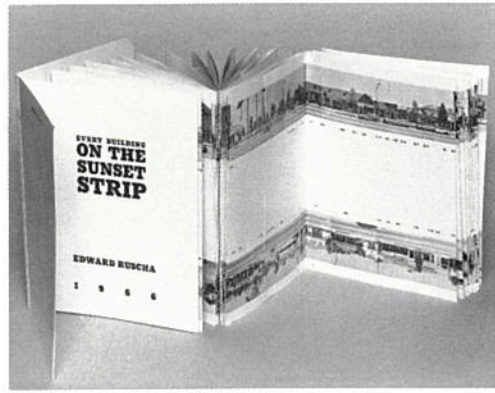
■ If someone doesn't see the Reinhardt cross and is unaware it is there, does this person see the same thing as I see, given I know it is there and expect to see it? Does someone who looks at Tyndall's painting and sees only an abstract, non-referential form see the same thing that I see? Does someone who looks at Jubelin's needlepoint rendering and recognises only the goblet (but not the faces on either side) see the same thing that I see? Does someone who looks at Andre's row of capstones on the floor and assumes the builder has left something behind see the same thing that I see? Does someone who notices Kosuth's bits of the Thesaurus published as advertisements in the newspaper and thinks they are some subversive code see the same thing that I see? Does someone who looks at Tillers' work and thinks it is by the artist appropriated see the same thing that I see? Does a child who looks at Brown's drawing-to-look-like-writing and thinks it is writing see the same thing that I see?



11. Richard Dunn, *Line*, 1969

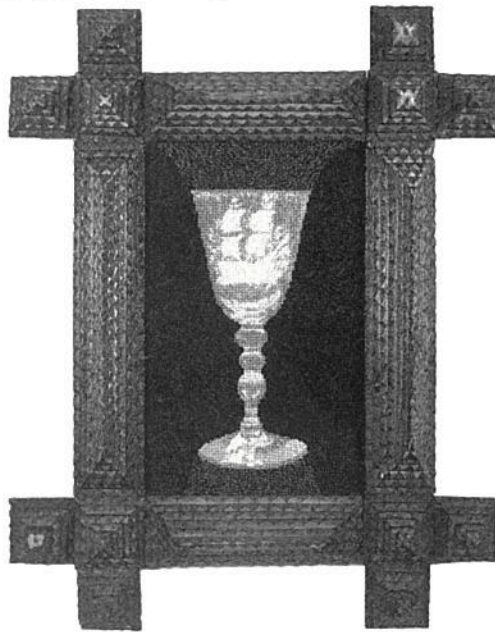
43. Imants Tillers, *Counting (0 through 9) II*, 1987





41. Ed Ruscha, *Every building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966

17. Narelle Jubelin, *Rendition of Dutch Wheel Engraved Goblet of the United East India Company* (collection: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), 1990



■ In a recent article, Krauss referred to the contradiction between the "phenomenological ambitions of Minimalism" and a "culture of seriality, of multiples without originals - a culture, that is, of commodity production".¹⁶ Reinhardt's paintings exploit the phenomenological potential of his black surfaces, while his endless reproduction of the unreproducibility of his paintings creates a paradox of multiples in relation to which the viewer is forced to respond to each as an original. Yet when I see a reproduction in a magazine of one of Reinhardt's black paintings, the first thing I do is look to see whether the cruciform is visible. The unreproducibility of Reinhardt's paintings entails the photographer, printer or someone else making the decision about how visible the form will be. When we can't see it in the reproduction, is it in fact still there? The cross, after all, is always in the painting - so it is there in the photograph which is the basis for a reproduction, even if it is not discernible. At what point can we say that it's no longer there?

■ Self-referentially perhaps, Reinhardt referred to: "words about words about painting about painting".¹⁷ We can notice evidence of the complexity of perceptual experiences in the language we use to talk about the experience. New complexities however are engendered by language itself, often by the very conventions of representation and description which we tend to take for granted. With Sol LeWitt's drawings, the title is a description which generates the drawing, with the (linguistic) description occasionally spilling into the space of the drawing creating a pandemonium of seeing and reading. Atkinson and Baldwin's *Map to not indicate* graphically represents the States of Kentucky and Iowa, while listing places 'not indicated'. But to draw attention to what is not indicated is not to exclude. What is not indicated is not indicated - that is, either graphically or verbally.

■ The way we read is compatible with processes of everyday perception and artworks positioned in relation to 'ordinary' perception find themselves open to language in new ways. However - asking the viewer to read (as well as look) makes different demands on a viewer's competences. Pausing in front of a painting, a viewer may not make sense of it and pass on, still maintaining a disinterested, judgemental attitude. A text however, especially one occupying the 'place' of a painting, volunteers its complicity with the viewer's (framing) discourse. Engaging and confronting on a direct level, it pre-empts interpretive or judgemental attitudes and may provoke a more reflective and speculative response. Yet - confronted simultaneously with image and text, why do we feel impelled to read before we really look? (Cage complained: "Why cannot someone who is looking at something do his own work of looking? Why is language necessary when art so to speak already has it in it?"¹⁸) Is it because we expect an explanation from language (in language)? Or is it because we really are more comfortable seeing art through a textual frame?

■ Ramsden's *Secret Painting* poses the difficulty of separating perception and language. The photostat panel bearing the text makes available (visible) part of the artist's discourse which supports the work. The text doesn't explain but ascribes a condition for the painting, describing in a fashion which confounds our empirical observation. Even though the rhetorical force is transferred from the painted surface

to the text, the text is unable to exhaust the (phenomenal) object. Since the painting sustains the possibility of (something) 'becoming visible', the painting interpreted (by the text) is ontologically different to the painting 'uninterpreted'. As a linguistic frame, the text is not self-conscious or self-referential, nor does it draw attention to itself as text; thus the text pre-empts any interpretive closure. In some respects, the text compensates for qualities 'eliminated' or no longer visible.

■ Andre's line of cement capstones, refusing to relinquish the use for which they were manufactured, imprint their 'ordinariness' into a viewer's perception. Johns' *Target* reminds us that the artist facing the picture becomes a viewer and that the viewer facing the picture becomes an artist, implying that 'ordinary' artistic skills are enough. Ruscha's books frame no useful information (just the media resonance of place) and the photographs have no 'artistic' and only 'ordinary' qualities. The title 'Every building on the Sunset Strip' acts as a closure on visual speculation about the 'content' of the book (yet still we feel compelled to look at the strips of ordinary buildings). Our notions of 'the ordinary' are continually undergoing revision, being reconstructed, and at the end of the twentieth century what can now also be seen as 'ordinary' is the cultural (or institutional) form of visual art itself (Tyndall). A politics of 'the ordinary' is now addressed. Simple perceptual games involving positive and negative spaces become a 'post-colonial' confrontation (Jubelin).

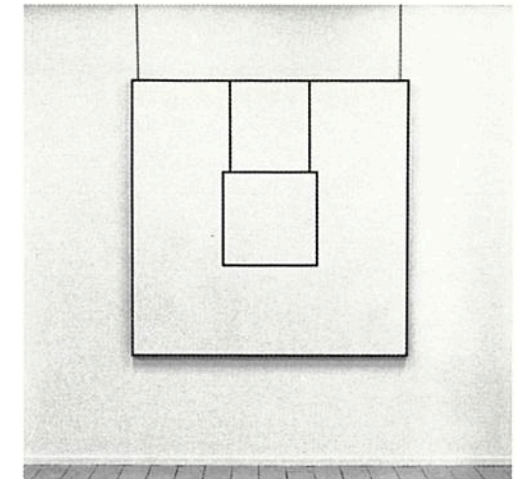
■ When bits of language are claimed as a **readymade**, the artist is positioned by the selection. Kosuth fixed upon intellectual motifs - definitions from a dictionary blown-up in negative form; sections of the synopsis of categories from *Rogee's Thesaurus* reproduced in newspapers. Maddock copied by hand (in reverse) a text on phenomenology by Husserl and combined this with a photographic image, repeated (and dislocated), to give the vague appearance of a newspaper. Subsequently pages of a newspaper were utilised as a ground for drawing: rather than bits of newspapers embedded in the surface of a painting (Johns), the drawing was embedded in the surface of the newspaper. Norrie's richly glazed surface resonates with 'history', only to be interrupted by stylised words insistently greeting viewers (as if asking whether women are heard in patriarchal history): "Hello. Hello. Hello . . .".¹⁹

■ McGillick and Tillers each produced works based on Johns' art, but for quite different reasons: McGillick in order to understand and experience the processes and techniques capable of producing that understanding; and (two decades on) Tillers as a (postmodern) strategy of appropriation, and in order to incorporate a reference to that kind of understanding into the body of his work. Repetition usually implies something is worth reiterating and that it will become more insistent through repetition. Tillers however has remarked: "I don't feel a mission to promote this or that person's work, or even to un-promote it . . . [and] I don't feel strongly enough about what I use to make parodies."²⁰ But recognition of the source often functions to pre-empt or suppress seeing. "I find viewers tend to ignore my competence", Tillers says. "They recognise the reference of the work and don't look at how my works are actually done. They see it all as being the source's competence. That's where it can be instructive to see my work alongside the originals, so viewers deal with both competences."



27. Bea Maddock, *Numeral 1*, 1984

45. Peter Tyndall
detail
*A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something ...*





30. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Lo Specchio (The Mirror)*, 1974

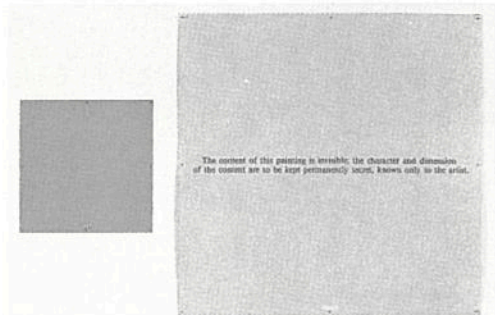
■ Johns said about his compositional form: "... what's interesting to me is the fact that it isn't designed, but taken. It's not mine."²¹ Johns' use of readymade composition becomes part of Tillers' readymade concept, with Tillers extending the chain of borrowing. Reinhardt also wrote of his black paintings: "This painting is my painting if I paint it. This painting is your painting if you paint it."²² Ramsden produced works based on those black paintings, which also 'can't be seen' and which even became secretive about what it is that can't be seen (*Secret Painting*). (In appropriating a work which is secretive about its content, is the secret also copied?) Working from only a black-and-white reproduction of Ramsden's work and unsure of colour, Tillers "made the black square a red ochre, like an Aboriginal colour, to give it a reference in that direction". If he'd been looking at Ramsden's actual work, he explains, "there would have been no point doing it again. It's too specific."

■ Seeing a stick-like square frame placed in a landscape (Ramsden), do I look at the frame structure or at the scene observed through it? Which should I value? Is the frame framing something or simply being a frame? Or is it intentionally doing both? The camera has now familiarised everyone with the viewfinding frame which was once the landscape painter's means of discovering 'readymade' compositions in nature. The viewfinder positions the viewer, 'outside' and looking through (Alberti's window), the viewfinding frame separating the viewer from what is being viewed. The fixed frame in the landscape determines the degree to which the (mobile) viewer can determine what is being framed. (Is the part of the floor framed by Dunn's taped rectangle a particular or random bit of floor?)

■ While mirrors have no fixed appearance, we do try to determine the **readymade** 'composition' of the reflection: we position a mirror on a wall to reflect a particular view of the room, or at portrait height, etc. The reflected forms however can claim no significance as content. Both reflecting and framing, mirrors force a decision about how to position oneself as viewer - and how we position ourselves determines whether or not we are **in** (the frame of) the mirror. A mirror enables us to experience ourselves **in** a world of appearances, and as **part** of that world of appearances. . . with the appearance of being a unified subject. Mirrors however produce reflections, not representations, thus pre-empting the possibility of pictorial interpretation. Danko's mirror expresses a desire for status as a painting: its 'auto-realist' labeling ironically proposes that the reflections are more than reflections and are not to be exempted from interpretation. Its paradox lies between reflection as reflection and reflection framed as art, between that which pre-empts (pictorial) interpretation and that which is contingent on it.

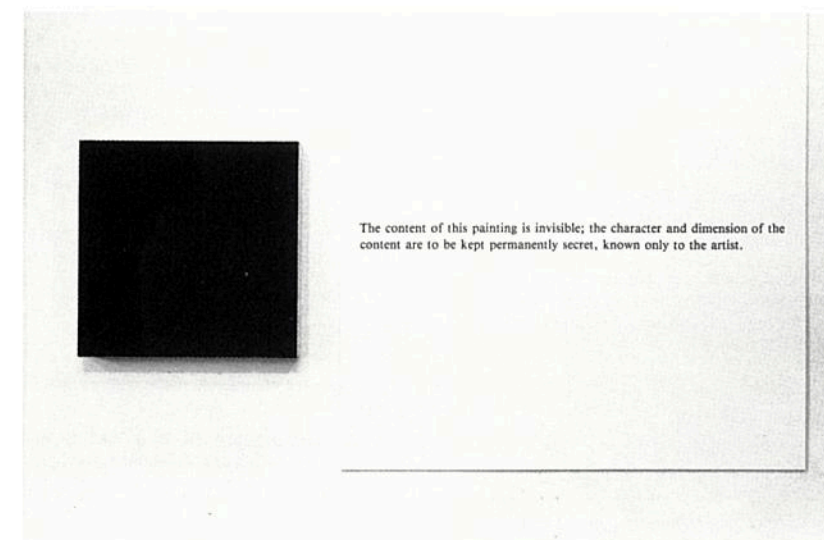
■ Pistoletto both presents and represents a mirror. The mirror represented is supported by an ornate stand, printed on the mirror surface (as picture plane), so that the object invites both fixed and mobile viewing. The representation of the mirror is however less mirror-like than the surface on which it is depicted, but is positioned on the real mirror to encourage viewers to see themselves reflected in the represented mirror. Representation thus merges with reflections: representing reflections at the same time that it is reflecting, framing at the same time that it is being framed. This deceit becomes a device to 'trick' the viewer into seeing the mirror as mirror, not just a surface of reflections.

42. Imants Tillers, *Secret painting / Red square*, 1987



■ That language shapes in some way reality, or at least our experience of the world, had been argued persuasively by Wittgenstein in the early 1950s²³ and was taken up by a range of philosophers and scientists. This idea that language penetrates perception, that observations within particular disciplines are 'theory-laden',²⁴ holds a considerable import for the visual arts. If, in looking at a work of art, the artist-viewer is producing the experience of seeing, then there is no 'pure seeing' and the artist-viewer is located as part of the problematic within the visual space. This implicates a mode of seeing which rejects the notion of an ideal or transcendental subject and insists on the acknowledgement of a socially produced subject, that is, an historically specific viewer (spatially) co-extensive with the object. We need then to ask what kind of viewer may be privileged within the field of vision? When we refer to the ordinariness of cement capstones, we are after all presuming an environment in which such products are in fact commonplace and familiar. Moreover, to what extent does gender (cultural not biological difference) constitute the visual space of seeing or reading, or is gender merely located within the space? These and many other questions are implicated when seeing is no longer taken for granted.

■ These notes discuss just a few ideas and their utilisation, at different moments and in different contexts. The ideas resonate with the visual - not what is seen but seeing itself - and a dramatic momentum was given to them by Johns and Reinhardt in the early sixties. Reinhardt once contended: "You have to choose between Duchamp and Mondrian".²⁵ With art practice today constrained between Duchampian spectacle and (academic) theorisation of postmodernism, it has perhaps been difficult to reflect upon Mondrian as a choice, much less the combined resource of Mondrian and Duchamp. The terror of not-reading seeing finds little redemption in either cloistered texts or spectacle alone. Only the recovery of perception in its **critical** capacity realises the visual density of art-making.



Thanks to Ann Stephen and Geoff Batchen for their critical comments.

- 1 Walter Hopps, 'An interview with Jasper Johns', *Artforum*, March, 1965.
- 2 Dan Flavin, quoted by Lucy Lippard, catalogue introduction, *Minimal Art*, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 1968.
- 3 Hopps, 'An interview with Jasper Johns'.
- 4 Quoted in Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with twentieth century art*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972
- 5 Of course, 'everyday perception' has its own historical specificity and multiplicity (embodied in the terms of class, gender, race, institutional affiliation, technological agency, etc).
- 6 There are of course other schema - for example, that associated with the four-colour printing process, or the colours which 'produce' a colour television picture.
- 7 Yve-Alain Bois, 'The limit of almost', *Ad Reinhardt*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Museum of Modern Art, New York: Rizzoli, 1991. Other comments on Reinhardt's art are also indebted to this essay.
- 8 Bruce Glaser, 'An interview with Ad Reinhardt', *Art International*, Winter 1966-67.
- 9 'Unpublished notes, 1966-67', in Barbara Rose (ed.), *Art as Art: The selected writings of Ad Reinhardt*, New York: Viking Press, 1975.
- 10 'Twelve rules for a new academy', *Art News*, May, 1957.
- 11 'Black as symbol and concept', *artscanada*, October 1967 and 'Twelve rules for a new academy'.
- 12 Otto Piene writing about Fontana's art in *Lucio Fontana: The spatial concept of art*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1966.
- 13 See, for example, Martin Jay, 'Scopic regimes of modernity', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and visibility*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1988. Other essays in this book are also pertinent to these notes.
- 14 Bois, 'The limit of almost'.
- 15 The 'withdrawal of content' which was endemic to certain 1960s art can in some ways be read as a symbolic equivalent of the withdrawal of labour. Generally, the political disposition of artists producing such work supports this reading.
- 16 Rosalind Krauss, 'The cultural logic of the late capitalist museum', in Richard Hertz (ed.) *Theories of Contemporary Art*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993.
- 17 'Unpublished notes, 1966-67'.
- 18 John Cage, 'Jasper Johns: Stories and ideas', *Jasper Johns*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1964.
- 19 See, for example, Virginia Spate, catalogue essay, *Susan Norrie: Peripherique*, Wollongong City Gallery, 1989.
- 20 Interview with the writer, April 1993. The subsequent quotes are also from this source.
- 21 Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns*, exhibition catalogue, New York: Abrams and Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977.
- 22 'Ad Reinhardt: Three statements', *Artforum*, March, 1966.
- 23 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, London: Macmillan, 1953.
- 24 See, for example, N.R.Hanson, *Patterns of discovery*, Cambridge: University Press, 1958. For an account of this development, see Arthur C.Danto, 'Description and the phenomenology of perception', in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly & Keith Moxey (eds.) *Visual theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- 25 Skowhegan lecture (1967), quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Ad Reinhardt*, New York: Abrams, 1981.

(LEFT) 35. Mel Ramsden, *Secret painting*, 1967-68

LIST OF WORKS

Carl Andre (1935-)

American, works in New York

1. *Walking Beam*, 1966 (reconstructed 1970), 24 cement capstones, 5 x 45.7 x 487.9 cm. Private collection, Sydney (unavailable for tour)

Shusaku Arakawa (1936-)

Japanese, works in New York

2. *Critical Mistake*, 1971, screenprint on synthetic polymer sheet, 23.4 x 22.4 cm framed. Coll: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
3. *The Given*, 1973, lithograph, no. 35 of edition of 40, 57 x 76.5 cm. Coll: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Art & Language (New York)

Participants included Ian Burn, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, Andrew Menard, Mel Ramsden, Terry Smith

4. *Concatenations*, 1974, photographic print with hand lettering, 115 x 120 cm. Coll: Ian Burn

Terry Atkinson (1939-) and Michael Baldwin (1945-) (Art & Language)

British, work in Leamington Spa and Banbury, England

5. *Map to not indicate*, 1967, letterpress print, sheet 50 x 63 cm. Coll: Ian Burn

Mike Brown (1938-)

Australian, works in Melbourne

6. *Letter to the Soul*, 1966, pencil on paper, 38.1 cm x 27.9 cm. Private collection, Sydney

Ian Burn (1939 - 1993)

Australian, lived and worked in Sydney

7. *This is not a landscape*, 1992, oil on wood panel and screenprint on acrylic sheet, 83.5 x 83.5 x 12.7 cm. Coll: Monash University Gallery

Aleks Danko (1950-)

Australian, works in Daylesford, Victoria

8. *Auto Realism*, 1971, glass mirror and chromium plate with engraved lettering, 61 x 38 x 9 cm. Coll: Alex and Geoffrey Legge
Replacement work for tour - Private collection, Sydney
9. *Chromium May*, 1971, timber, chromium engraved plates, hooks, 76 x 76 x 9 cm. Coll: Max Watters
10. *Heavy Aesthetic Quality - Mantelpiece edition*, 1971, 21.4 x 15.5 x 4.4 cm. Coll: Frank Watters

Richard Dunn (1944-)

Australian, works in Sydney

11. *Line*, 1969, tape on the floor (reconstructed 1993), 22.8 x 426 cm. Courtesy Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

Lucio Fontana (1899-1968)

Italian, worked in Milan and Argentina

12. *Concetto Spaziale (Spatial Concept)*, 1968, etching and embossing, no. 78 of edition of 210, sheet 63.5 x 47.5 cm. Coll: Ian Burn

Robert Hunter (1947-)

Australian, works in Melbourne

13. *Untitled (White Series No 6)*, 1968, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 158.5 x 158.5 cm. Coll: Art Gallery of New South Wales

Jasper Johns (1930-)

American, works in New York

14. *Zero through nine*, 1960, lithograph, signed, no. 28 of edition of 35, 76.2 x 55.9 cm. Private collection.
15. *Target*, 1970, offset lithograph, paint pans and brush, multiple print (based on a work produced in 1960), 25.8 x 21.5 cm. Coll: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
16. *Alphabet*, 1969, print (embossed paper), no. 42 of edition of 70, sheet 75 x 93.4 cm. Coll: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Narelle Jubelin (1960-)

Australian, works in Sydney

17. *Rendition of Dutch Wheel Engraved Goblet of the United East India Company (collection: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)*, 1990, central element from *Trade delivers people*, 31 x 24 cm, cotton petit point and found Tramp Art frame. Coll: Janice McCulloch
18. *Rendition of Twi cloth with Quotation from Emperor Babur*, 1992, cotton petit point and found Tramp Art frame, 28 x 45 cm. Coll: Peter Fay

Joseph Kosuth (1945-)

American, works in New York

19. *Four titled abstracts*, from SMS, June 1968, No 3, The Letter Edged in Black Press Inc., each sheet 55.1 x 55.1 cm. Coll: Art Gallery of New South Wales
20. *15 locations (Art as idea as idea)*, 1969 [section], advertisements placed in 9 Australian newspapers, each approx. 70 x 54 cm (sponsored by Bruce Pollard, Pinacotheca, Melbourne). Coll: Ian Burn

Sol LeWitt (1928-)

American, works in New York

21. *Grids using three colours*, 1974, 55.9 x 55.9 cm., coloured pencil and ink on paper. Private collection, Sydney
22. *The location of 21 lines with lines from middle points mostly*, 1974, 55.9 x 55.9 cm., coloured pencil and ink on paper. Private collection, Sydney

Tony McGillick (1941-93)

Australian, worked in Sydney

23. *Two*, 1965, oil and wax over fabricated canvas in shape of numeral two, 58 x 39.5 x 8.5 cm. Private collection, Sydney

24. *Primary*, 1965, acrylic and wax on canvas with wood collage, 168.2 x 120 cm. Private collection, Sydney

Bea Maddock (1934-)

Australian, worked in Launceston, Tasmania

25. *Philosophy I*, 1972, photo-etching, 44.9 x 34.8 cm. Coll: the artist
26. *Numeral O*, 1984, pastel on printed newspaper, 60 x 43 cm. Coll: the artist
27. *Numeral 1*, 1984, pastel on printed newspaper, 60 x 43 cm. Coll: the artist

Barnett Newman (1905-70)

American, worked in New York

28. *Untitled No. 2*, 1969, etching & aquatint on British handmade paper, 68 x 37 cm. Private collection, Melbourne

Susan Norrie (1953-)

Australian, works in Sydney

29. *Untitled (Peripherique)*, 1989, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 90.5 cm. Coll: Michael Ball

Michelangelo Pistoletto (1933-)

Italian, works in Turin, Italy

30. *Lo Specchio (The Mirror)*, 1974, screenprint on stainless steel, 100 x 70 cm. Coll: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Mel Ramsden (1944-)

British, worked in Melbourne 1963-64, now works in Banbury, England

31. *Real squares and painted squares*, 1964, acrylic paint & metal letters on card, 20 x 37.5 cm. Coll: Ian Burn
32. *Locations*, 1964, wood and paint, (photographic documentation, Balwyn, Melbourne), 29 x 36 cm. Coll: Ian Burn
33. *Red painting*, oil on canvas, 1965, 153 x 122 cm. Coll: Ian Burn
34. *Three black rectangles*, 1965, oil on canvas, 94 x 125 cm. Coll: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
35. *Secret painting*, 1967-68, oil on canvas & photostat mounted, 46 x 46 and 100 x 100 cm. Coll: Ian Burn
36. *100% abstract*, 1968, oil on canvas, 38 x 38 cm. Coll: Ian Burn

Jacky Redgate (1955-)

Australian, works in Sydney

37. *Untitled*, 1991, paper & cardboard, 27 x 27 x 27 cm, one of edition of 10. Coll: the artist

38. *Untitled - red, yellow and blue*, 1992, cotton & cardboard, 3 parts, each 41 x 32.2 x 32.2 cm, one of edition of 10. Coll: the artist

Ad Reinhardt (1913-67)

American, worked in New York

39. *Untitled*, 1960s, serigraph print, unsigned, image 19 x 19 cm. Coll: Terry Smith
40. *'Break the Artists' Strike'* (leaflet sketch), 1961, photographic reproduction, image 19.3 x 19.3 cm. Coll: Ian Burn

Ed Ruscha (1937-)

American, works in Los Angeles

41. *Every building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966, offset printed book, signed, 18 x 14.5 cm. Coll: Ian Burn

Imants Tillers (1950-)

Australian, works in Sydney

42. *Secret painting / Red square*, 1987, vitreous enamel on steel, two panels, 53.3 x 53.3 and 122 x 122 cm. Courtesy Sherman Goodhope Gallery
43. *Counting (0 through 9) II*, No. 11631-11639, 1987, 153 x 115 cm. Coll: Hongkong Bank, Sydney
44. *Counting (0 through 9) III*, No. 11640-11649, 1987, 153 x 115 cm. Coll: Daniel Thomas

Peter Tyndall (1951-)

Australian

45. *detail*
A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/ someone looks at something...

- 1974 - June 1993 -
A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/ someone looks at something
CULTURAL CONSUMPTION PRODUCTION

Courtesy Anna Schwartz Gallery

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