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The restless cosmopolitan

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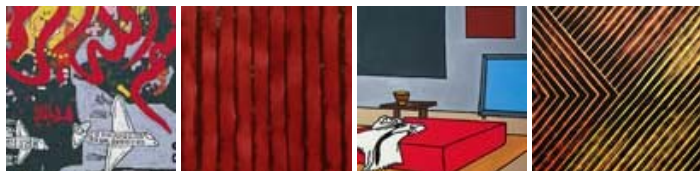


Gordon Bennett

"Gordon Bennett is Australia's most recognised postcolonial Aboriginal painter. While he has always resisted the cult of Aboriginality (to the extent of refusing to identify his art as Aboriginal or himself as an Aboriginal painter), critics generally considered this a deconstructive tactic by which Bennett could further interrogate the politics of Aboriginality and identity..."

(excerpt from Gordon Bennett's abstract art: the aesthetics of commitment and indifference by Ian McLean, 2004)

Works chronology



Essays

· *The restless cosmopolitan*
by Ian McLean, 2008

The restless cosmopolitan by Ian McLean, 2008

· *Who is John Citizen?* by Ian
McLean, 2006

Gordon Bennett always tells a good story, and a major attraction of his work is its narrative structure. Not any more. His recent abstract paintings forsake the discursive qualities upon which he built a very successful career. Bennett has a history of abandoning successful modes for new ones, but nothing in his oeuvre matches the audaciousness of this turn. Be it radical, risky or simply foolish, what other artist in his position would (or could) make such a wild move?

· *Gordon Bennett's abstract
art: the aesthetics of
commitment and indifference*
by Ian McLean, 2004

Bennett's previous work may have shown an intense interest in abstract art (particularly the art of Pollock, Malevich and Mondrian) but it was always discursively referenced in elaborate postcolonial allegories that were implicitly cynical of abstract art's esoteric claims. However his recent paintings, which primarily quote the early work of the American minimalist Frank Stella, have no obvious narrative, postcolonial deconstruction, or even parody. Instead he seemingly pays homage to Stella and, ipso facto, the creed of abstraction. In the context of his earlier work, it is not at all obvious what Bennett is doing or intending.

· *Gordon Bennett's Notes to
Basquiat (911)* by Greg
Dimitriadis & Cameron
McCarthy, 2002

By his own admission Bennett had exhausted his previous Basquiat theme, and was also exhausted by the intensity of his discursive mode. Hence I initially expected the abstract work to be a temporary therapeutic hiatus before some new onslaught. However this has proved to not be the case. Bennett has tackled this new direction in his art with his usual diligence and perseverance. He has been making abstract paintings for five years (as long as the Notes to Basquiat series).

· 911 (with Apologies to
Walter Benjamin), by Ian
McLean, 2002

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In one sense all art is abstract, and Bennett's graphic dexterity (evident since he was a student) reveals his understanding of this. However the abstract series have developed into a real commitment to the purely aesthetic pleasures of art, as well as to that 1960s dictum that less is more. Bennett reduces the graphic and compositional complexities of his previous work to relatively simple arrangements of form and colour. This is not familiar territory for Bennett. Despite his previous works being in a fundamental sense about various lacks, their narrative content was invariably in excess.

However the abstract works do not seem to me to be about returning to a more simple way of doing things or of getting back to some core or essential truth. Bennett's use of Stella's art as a starting point signals this, for Stella jettisoned the metaphysical pursuits of the previous generation (such as Pollock and Rothko) for a more upfront phenomenological world—which is why minimalism developed into an art of surface appearances rather than

BIOGRAPHY

1955	Born Monto, Queensland, lives and works in Brisbane
1986-88	Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts), Queensland College of Art, Brisbane
1991	Winner of the Moët & Chandon Australian Art Fellowship
1993	Artist in Residence, University of Melbourne, MacGeorge Fellowship
1994	Winner of the Contemporary Art Excellence Award, Nudgee College, Brisbane
	Australian Network for Art and Technology Summer School, Brisbane
1995	Winner of the Pine Rivers Art Prize Winner of the Logan City Painting Prize
1996	Anniversary Creative Arts Fellow, Australian National University, Canberra
1997	SCEGGS Redlands/ Westpac Art Award, Sydney
1997	John McCaughey Memorial Art Prize, National Gallery of Victoria
1998	Winner of the Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award, Grafton Regional Gallery



SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 *Gordon Bennett*, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
Gordon Bennett Survey, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
- 2007 *Gordon Bennett*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Gordon Bennett, Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane
The Expiation of Guilt, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom
- 2006 *Gordon Bennett, Prints*, Bellas/Milani Gallery, Brisbane
Gordon Bennett, New Work, Sherman Galleries, Sydney
John Citizen, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
- 2005 *Gordon Bennett, New Work*, Bellas/Milani Gallery, Brisbane
Gordon Bennett, New Work, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
- 2004 *Gordon Bennett, New Work*, Melbourne Art Fair, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Out of Print, Dell Gallery, Queensland College of Art Gallery travelling exhibition, Brisbane
Gordon Bennett, New Work, Bellas/Milani Gallery, Brisbane
- 2003 *Gordon Bennett, New works on paper*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
White Paintings, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Figure/Ground (Zero), Sherman Galleries, Sydney
- 2002 *Notes to Basquiat: 9 11*, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
Notes to Basquiat: 9 11 (Part II), Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Notes to Basquiat: 9 11 (Part III), Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Notes to Basquiat: The Reverb, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Notes to Basquiat: The Reverb, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
- 2001 *Notes to Basquiat: Modern Art*, Sherman Gallery, Sydney
John Citizen: Coloured People, Sherman Gallery, Sydney
Contemporary Australian Art From the Paul Eliadis Collection, University of Queensland Art Museum
- 2000 *Notes to Basquiat (Samo) Another Millennium*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
John Citizen: Coloured People, Sutton Gallery Melbourne
- 1999-2000 *History and Memory in the Art of Gordon Bennett*, Brisbane City Gallery, Brisbane; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK; Arnolfini, Bristol, UK; Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, Norway
Gordon Bennett, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
- 1999 *Notes to Basquiat: One Tense Moment*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Notes to Basquiat: One Tense Moment (episode two), Sherman Galleries, Sydney
Home Decor (Calculus), Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
- 1998 *Gordon Bennett*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Notes to Basquiat, Gramercy International Art Fair, New York, USA
Home Decor (Algebra), Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
- 1997 *John Citizen: Flatland*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Preston + De Stijl = Citizen (Cold Comfort), Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
John Citizen: Sacred Cows, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Mirror Mirror: The Narcissism of Coloniality, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Canberra
- 1996 *Australiana, Art for the Bridge*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
John Citizen: Sacred Cows, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Home Decor (after Margaret Preston), Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
John Citizen: Works on paper, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
- 1995 *BLACK: Fear of Shadows*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Performance with Object for the Expiation of Guilt: Apple Premiere Mix, Noosa Regional Gallery, Noosa
Mirror Mirror (The Inland Sea), Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Surface Veil, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Dismember/Remember, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
- 1994 *How to Cross the Void - works on paper*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Present Wall, installation, Institute Building, Adelaide
Performance with Object for the Expiation of Guilt, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
D.U.H! (Down Under Homi), Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
A Black History, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Painting History, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide
- 1993 *Painting History*, The Drill Hall, Canberra
Mirrorama, Ian Potter Gallery, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
How to Cross the Void, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
- 1992 *The Colour Black and Other Histories*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Relative/Absolute, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
- 1991 *Gordon Bennett*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Dialogues with Self, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
- 1990 *Psycho(d)rama*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
- 1989 *Gordon Bennett*, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 *Biennale of Sydney, Revolutions - Forms that Turn*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
Lines in the Sand: Botany Bay Stories from 1770, Hazelhurst Regional Art Gallery
The Pine Rivers Art Award Winner's Retrospective 1993-2007, Pine Rivers Regional Art Gallery
- 2007 *Artist Makes Video: Art Rage Survey 1994-1998*, Dell Gallery @ QCA, Brisbane
Eye to I, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Ballarat
- Queensland Live! Contemporary Art on Tour*, Queensland Art Gallery Touring Exhibition, Brisbane *Photographic Portrait Prize*, Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney
Bangu Yilbara: Works from the MCA Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- 2006 *A Man's World*, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane
Colonial to Contemporary - Queensland College of Art 125 Years, Dell Gallery, Brisbane
Prism: Contemporary Australian Art, Bridgestone Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, Japan
- International Biennale of Contemporary Art in Prague 2005*, The National Gallery in Prague, Czech Republic
The Plot Thickens: Narratives in Australian Art, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
Future Tense: Security and Human Rights, Dell Gallery and Galleria Space, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane
- 2005 *Cook's Sites*, Museum of Sydney, Sydney
after Van Gogh: Australian artists in homage to Vincent, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Melbourne
ARC Biennial, Brisbane City Hall, Brisbane
Unscripted, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 2004-5 *Three Colours, Gordon Bennett and Peter Robinson*, Heide Museum of Modern Art Touring Exhibition, Melbourne
- 2004 *Likan Mirri - Connections. The AIATSIS Collection of Art*, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra
Place made: Australian Print Workshop, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Heavenly Creatures, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
Terra Alterius: Land of Another, Ivan Dougherty Gallery Touring Exhibition, The University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts, Sydney
- Isle of Refuge*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery Touring Exhibition, The University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts, Sydney
Synergies, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra
- 2003 *Many Happy Returns: Celebrating Heide's 21st Birthday*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
When I was Young - Impressions of Childhood, Global Arts link, Ipswich
War Without Boundaries - Australia and the War Against Terrorism, Australian War Memorial, Canberra