



► PAINTING, MATERIALITY AND CONVICTION

Great painters have always respected the power of their materials. The art lies in their ability to transform these materials with a mixture of skill, daring and intuition, to achieve aesthetic and emotional effects—often not knowing where the materials or their inner

world might take them. Charlie Sheard has approached painting in this way throughout his four-decade career. These new works reveal an artist with the expertise and conviction to again push himself and his materials to unexpected places.

Certain stylistic hallmarks remain: colour harmonies that reflect Charlie's study of art history and daring shapes that emerge from a sustained pursuit of drawing. But there are also departures into new territories. Works like *Black Painting*—with its audaciously pared-back palette and mysterious layers—radically change character when viewed from different perspectives. The evanescent quality of translucent watercolour is enhanced by adjacent, intensely pigmented passages (*Pure Abstraction #101*). And the interference pigments he has employed for many years take on a new role here, allowed to swirl and marble with an alchemical force.

Away from the canvas, Charlie pursues an intense interest in many, seemingly disparate, art forms: Japanese comics, Chinese landscape, poet Ezra Pound, Baroque music, ancient Greek poetry, Titian and Kandinsky. The latter comes as no surprise, for Charlie is an artist deeply committed to the pure abstract painting Kandinsky birthed. And his affinity with Titian is palpable in his spectacular colouristic effects.

Searching for traces of other 'influences' is a dangerous pursuit. Painting, for Charlie, is above all a bodily act, *not* an intellectual one—there is no conscious effort to incorporate ideas from the past. But



the lessons learned from this study of eclectic moments of cultural history are often present on the canvas in subtle ways.

The graphic forms of shape-driven compositions (such as *Pure Abstraction #98*) find equivalence in the bold drawing of the *manga* master Tezuka Osamu. The virile charge of his more primal works (the totemic forms of *Green Painting*, for instance) speaks to his beloved ancient Greek

art and verse. And more minimally coloured canvases recall the sublime emotion of Chinese painting.

Less obvious, perhaps, is the imprint of eighteenth-century French painting—an interest we have in common. Charlie has consciously used a Rococo technique of placing jewel tones over a putty-coloured ground to enhance their luminosity and creaminess, but the sensual spirit



of Rococo painting is more profound than this clever technique. Like Watteau and Boucher before him, Charlie harnesses the energy and sensuality of paint itself and offers up all its pleasures. His is a liberating gift, inviting us to savour the transcendent experience of pure art.

Dr Josephine Touma is an art historian with a specialty in seventeenth and eighteenth century European art. She is manager of public programs at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and lectures and writes across the range of western art history.

Green Painting 2016 – 2018, acrylic and vinyl on linen, 214 x 198cm

Pure Abstraction #99 2016 – 2018, acrylic on polyester, 198 x 214cm

Lyric Poem 2016 – 2018, acrylic mediums and vinyl on polyester, 198 x 214cm

Pure Abstraction #98 2013 – 2018, watercolour + acrylic on handmade paper, 72 x 56cm

Pure Abstraction #101 2014 – 2018, watercolour + acrylic on handmade paper, 72 x 56cm





and corporate collections worldwide, including the Museum of Old and New Art (Tasmania), the World Bank (New York), the University of Cambridge (UK) and Deakin University (Melbourne).

A retrospective, *Charlie Sheard: Ten Years of Pure Abstraction*, curated by Terence Maloon, was exhibited at the Drill Hall Gallery (Australian National University) in 2016. This landmark exhibition reflected his established reputation as a leading abstractionist, whilst also signifying his continuing interest in visually capturing and interpreting gestures, sensations and poetry. His most recent exhibition, *Charlie Sheard and Huquinwu*, opened at the Boding Gallery in Beijing in April 2018.

Sheard ran an acclaimed studio school for 20 years in Sydney and has lectured at the Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts, the University of New South Wales and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Pure Abstraction #103 2017 – 2018, watercolour on handmade paper, 72 x 56cm

Pure Abstraction #102 2016 – 2018, watercolour, acrylic + pastel on handmade paper, 72 x 56cm



Cover: *Pure Abstraction [Eldreyik]* (detail) 2017 – 2018, oil and acrylic on polyester 214 x 198cm

► CHARLIE SHEARD

Charlie Sheard's distinctive, pure abstract paintings harness colour and form in bold combinations. His rhythmic, often energetic visual language is expressed in an array of textures (metallic, matte and luminescent) and colours (pure, vivid pigments of the highest quality and more subtle, expertly mixed hues). Beyond these qualities is Sheard's mastery of composition. His works are built up in a series of organic, overlapping layers of paint of shifting hues, tones or textures—at times allowing the support to shine through and take a leading role.

This ability to harness materiality and movement is founded upon his studies in both painting and performance at art school. His career launched with a solo exhibition in 1982 in Cambridge (UK), where he spent seven years immersed in both the canon of European art history and the vibrant late 20th century painting scene in the UK. Deeply engaged with the history of art, Sheard has also found inspiration in Chinese landscape works from the Song and Yuan dynasties—schools of painting that convey nature's ephemerality and subtle human emotion.

Sheard's abstract compositions have been shown in over fifty solo exhibitions in Australia, Europe, the USA and China. His works have been acquired by many prominent public, private

CHARLIE SHEARD

DIGONOS
MAY SPACE
5 - 22 September 2018

Sydney Contemporary
Carriageworks
13 - 16 September 2018

MAY
SPACE

409b George Street
Waterloo NSW 2017
www.mayspace.com.au
info@mayspace.com.au
t. +61 2 9318 1122
tuesday to saturday 10-5