
KNOW

MY

ABSTRACTION

CUPPAIDGE | STREET | TILLEY | WILSON-ADAMS

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In the lineage of abstraction, women's contributions have long been present but not always visible. *Know My Abstraction* offers a regional counterpoint to the National Gallery of Australia's 2019 *Know My Name* initiative, extending its critical reckoning with gender imbalance into the terrain of local practice shaped by place, process, and perception. While some progress has been made in public institutions, women artists remain underrepresented in major collections and exhibitions.

As Linda Nochlin famously argued, the absence of "great women artists" reflects not a lack of talent but entrenched structural barriers.¹ This exhibition addresses that disparity by amplifying the work of four Newcastle-based women abstractionists; Virginia Cuppidge, Belinda Street, Lezlie Tilley, and Patricia Wilson-Adams, whose practices span decades, continents, and disciplines, yet remain firmly anchored in memory and the landscape.

Abstraction has historically been dominated by a male modernist canon that privileges heroic gesture and formal purity. Figures like Kandinsky, Pollock, and Rothko have long defined the genre, with abstraction framed as a pursuit of transcendence, detached from biography or place. Feminist art historians including Griselda Pollock and Amelia Jones have critiqued this supposed universality as a masculinist myth, one that erases the embodied, affective, and situated dimensions of practice.² The artists in *Know My Abstraction* offer materially grounded and relational approaches to abstraction, transforming it into a site for embodied memory, emotional resonance, and perceptual inquiry.

Virginia Cuppidge's luminous, meditative colour fields draw on her years in New York, Newcastle, and Queensland, interweaving a modernist vernacular with intuition and deeply embedded memory. Her paintings emerge through colour, named only after completion, with titles that reference nature, seasons, and time.

Belinda Street's gestural canvases pulse with the energy of Newcastle Harbour, capturing the collision of industrial motion and elemental force. Her process involves walking, mark-making, responding in layers, which enacts a physical attunement to place. The lighthouse, a recurring motif, becomes both metaphor and emotional register. Influenced by Abstract Expressionism, Street's work has evolved toward a deeply felt psychological terrain, where the rhythms of tide, traffic, and time are rendered in bold, expressive abstraction.

Lezlie Tilley's grid-based works unfold as an "Odyssey of the Grid," a conceptual journey drawn from Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. Using incrementally expanding units, she explores how scale, colour, and rhythm shape optical experience. As the grid enlarges, colour intensity becomes key to sustaining illusion. Borders contain the image while suggesting infinite expansion beyond the frame. Influenced by Mondrian, Tilley treats the grid as both a formal constant and a site of quiet transformation.

Patricia Wilson-Adams's distilled, post-minimalist forms carry the weight of loss. Of people, place, and ecological certainty, yet remain open and provisional. Refusing a singular "signature style," her work embraces paradox, metaphor, and material imperfection. Grounded in what critic Lucy Lippard called "Eccentric Abstraction," Wilson-Adams offers a poetic language of form that resists closure and insists on presence.³

These practices reflect what art historian Jennifer Higgie terms the "quiet radicalism" of women abstractionists – artists who inscribe intimacy and visibility within abstraction rather than use it as escape.⁴ In *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now*, the National Gallery reframes abstraction not as a singular aesthetic but as a pluralistic field shaped by diverse identities.⁵ *Know My Abstraction* continues this reframing, underscoring the role of subjectivity, memory, and method in shaping feminist abstraction in Australia.

As Elizabeth Grosz writes, abstraction can be understood not as a departure from materiality but as a "becoming-form," a process through which sensation and memory coalesce in expression.⁶ The artists in this exhibition approach abstraction not as retreat, but as a way of re-entering the world, with new tools for sensing, resisting, and remembering.

Rather than simply inviting us to "know" these artists' names, *Know My Abstraction* asks us to enter the spaces they create; tactile, temporal, and alive with intention. In doing so, these artists reclaim abstraction not as a domain of detachment, but as a feminist and sensorial practice of presence.

JOEY HESPE

References

1. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 145-178.
2. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 50-51; Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 27-30.
3. Lucy Lippard, *Eccentric Abstraction*, 1966 (New York: Fischbach Gallery), and cited in Wilson-Adams's practice statement.
4. Jennifer Higgie, *The Mirror and the Palette: Rebellion, Revolution, and Resilience: 500 Years of Women's Self-Portraits* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021), 82.
5. *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now*, National Gallery of Australia (Canberra: NGA, 2020), 14-15.
6. Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life and the Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 55.

VIRGINIA CUPPAIDGE

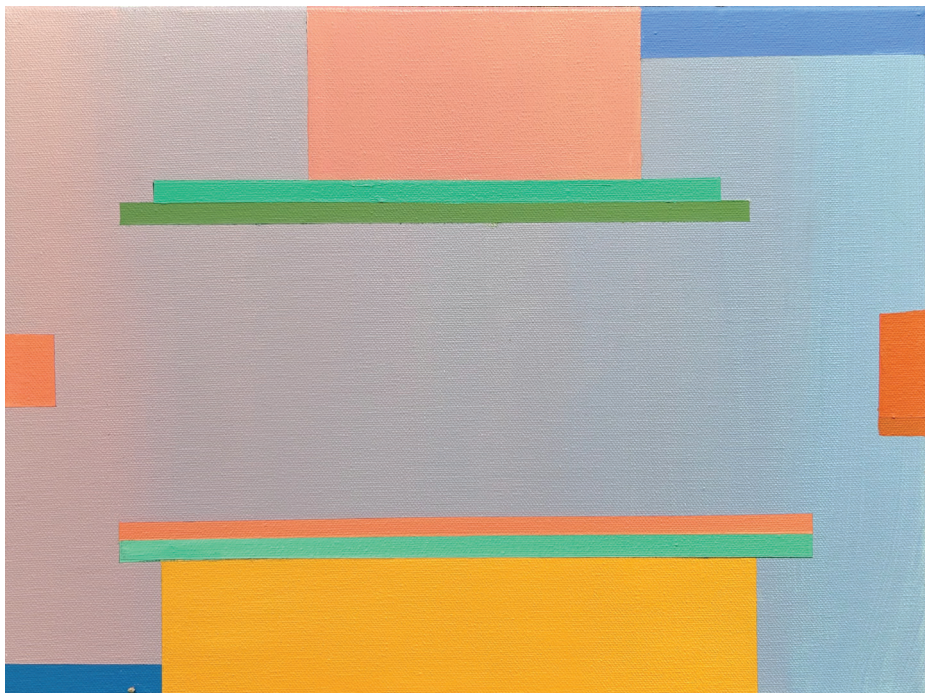


IMAGE: Virginia Cuppaidge *Spring Day*, 2025
acrylic on canvas 30.5cm x 40.6 cm

My inspiration is nature and I feel it is deeply embedded in my memory and surfaces through my painting. I begin my work with colour, and colour combinations spring from that place within me. I name my paintings when they are finished.

BELINDA STREET



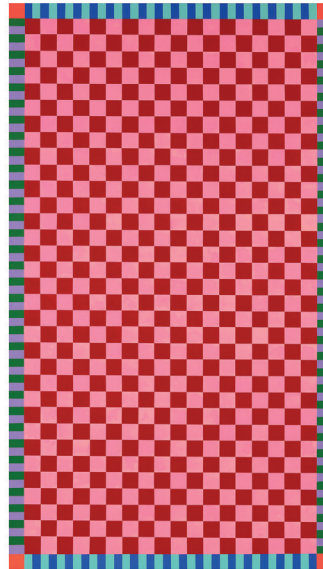
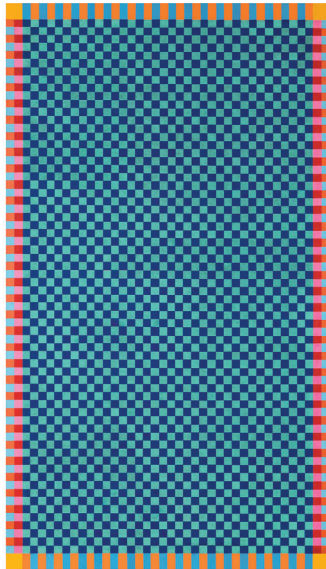
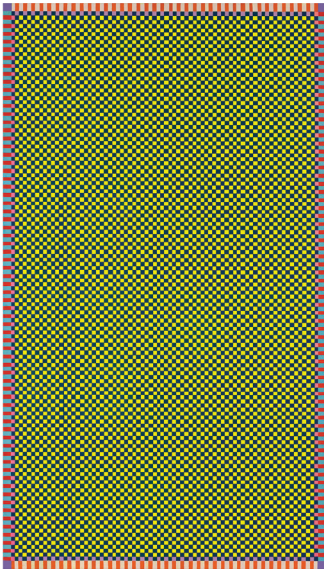
IMAGE: Belinda Street, *Newcastle Harbour*, 2025
acrylic on canvas, 170 x 300 cm (diptych)

For me, the act of abstract painting feels like a rebellion or resistance—a defiance of rigid representation and the reclamation of painting as a deeply human, emotional act. A way of truly creating something new.

“Lighthouse” series

Belinda Street’s latest abstract series draws on a transformative residency at Nobby’s Whibayganba Lighthouse in Newcastle, NSW. Surrounded by sweeping views of ocean, harbour, and industry, the artist developed a dynamic visual language shaped by movement, memory, and place. Her large-scale canvases reflect the constant motion of Newcastle Harbour—where tides, traffic, and nature collide with industrial force. Through bold mark-making, layered textures, and intuitive colour choices, Street captures the tension between chaos and control. Rather than depicting a scene, her works evoke an emotional response—inviting viewers to feel their way through each painted environment. These are not static landscapes but living, breathing systems that echo the rhythms of the world around us and within us. They invite the viewer to navigate rather than simply observe.

LEZLIE TILLEY



IMAGES: Lezlie Tilley

My eyes ached at the sight of me, 2023/25
acrylic and pigment ink on canvas, 140.5 x 80.5 cm

I got to know you in passing, 2023/25
acrylic and pigment ink on canvas, 140.5 x 80.5 cm

I live in hope of a warm welcome, 2025
acrylic on canvas, 140.5 x 80.5 cm

Photography courtesy Ben Adams

Odyssey of a Grid makes reference to the heroic tale of an ancient world. Here the modernist grid takes a journey from small to large as each panel, beginning with 1cm squares, doubles in size from panel to panel. The idea was to keep visual intensity throughout. As the grids became larger I relied on colour to maintain the energy. The vivid borders are there to hold the grid on the picture plane – to stop it from flowing out into the universe. The names for each panel are quotes from Homer's epic poem.

PATRICIA WILSON-ADAMS



IMAGE: Patricia Wilson-Adams *broken stones*, 2025
cast plaster, reclaimed marble on granite
size variable

For man, as for flower and beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive.
D. H. Lawrence

Although many works in this exhibition refer to loss; loss of place, loss of many close to me, loss of my country and more generally the loss of environments, I also regard the work as being celebratory – a testament to having come through.

The work has many personal narratives and relates strongly to my background, however I am intent on making a body of work that does not pertain to “the self”. I like to set the work at a distance so that broader interpretations can seep in slowly. Alternatively I suggest an immersion, as Heidegger proffered, of “being in and of the world” therefore becoming alive to all that is around us.

These works investigate contemporary approaches towards abstraction and are polyvalent in that there is no “signature” style – each undertaking is approached differently often with paradox or literary associations in mind and often resulting in the works being provisional, at times ephemeral and more often than not, imperfect. My work is grounded in the reductive and the restrained or what Lucy Lippard, critic and champion of women’s work, calls “eccentric abstraction.” The works elicit a poetic response that is found in metaphor, form and the sensuality of materials and media.

Know My Abstraction

VIRGINIA CUPPAIDGE | BELINDA STREET | LEZLIE TILLEY | PATRICIA WILSON-ADAMS

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Virginia Cuppaidge is represented
by Nicholas Thompson Gallery

STRAITJACKET

Lezlie Tilley is represented
by Straitjacket.



CURATORIAL+CO.

Belinda Street is represented
by Curatorial + Co.