

THE SYDNEY BALL GIFT

This brochure is published to accompany the launch of The Sydney Ball Gift displayed at the Sir Eric Neal Library, Mawson Lakes campus, University of South Australia, February 2015.

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Samstag Museum of Art acknowledgements

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We wish to express our appreciation to Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney, who facilitated the gift and for all their support and care for Sydney Ball.

The Museum is indebted to the University Library Services staff for their enthusiastic support to display the gift in its entirety in the Sir Eric Neal Library at the Mawson Lakes campus, particularly Stephen Parnell, Christine Cother and Jane Whiteside, as well as Trudi Clarke from the Facilities Management Unit.

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The skilled management of The Sydney Ball Gift installation has been undertaken by Samstag Museum of Art staff: Susan Jenkins, Senior Curator, and Ashleigh Whatling, Curatorial Assistant, along with all the Museum Installation Assistants.

Finally, the Samstag Museum of Art acknowledges the valuable contributions illuminating Sydney Ball's life and work made by Anne Loxley, Wendy Walker and Patrick McCaughey, in the publications *Sydney Ball: The Colour Paintings 1963-2007*, Penrith Regional Gallery & The Levers Bequest, Sydney, 2008, and *Sydney Ball: The Stain Paintings 1971-1980*, Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney, 2013.

Further information about Sydney Ball and The Sydney Ball Gift
www.unisa.edu.au



Sydney BALL, *Infinex Lumina #6*, 2010, synthetic polymer paint on cotton duck, 165.0 x 258.0 cm, Infinex series
University of South Australia Art Collection: The Sydney Ball Gift. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Sydney Ball. Image courtesy Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney

CATALOGUE OF WORKS

Sydney BALL, born Adelaide 1933

Reach, 1969
enamel on wood, acrylic on canvas
diptych, 180.0 x 230.0 cm each
Adelaide, South Australia
Modular series

Carthage, 1970-71
synthetic polymer paint on linen
219.0 x 145.0 cm
New York, USA
Link series

Apache Blue, 1971
synthetic polymer paint on linen
229.0 x 145.0 cm
New York, USA
Link series

Shokan, 1972
synthetic polymer paint on
cotton duck
198.5 x 290.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Stain series

*Polkas and Gavottes at Sesachacha
Crossing*, 1972
synthetic polymer paint and enamel
on canvas
198.0 x 241.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Stain series

Pale Stream, 1976
synthetic polymer paint and enamel
on canvas
244.0 x 426.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Stain series

Magellan Blue, 1978
oil and enamel on cotton duck
228.5 x 518.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Stain series

Sericho Green, 1981
screen print on paper, edition 4/25
120.0 x 80.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Changes at the Edge of the Pool,
1981-82
oil on cotton duck
150.0 x 209.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Kelting Spring, 1982
oil on cotton duck
151.0 x 210.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Land Totems III, 1982
screen print on paper, edition 3/25
55.5 x 77.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Land Totems I, 1982
lithograph on paper, edition 4/25
76.0 x 57.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

*Path to the Waterfall
(Variation No II)*, 1983
mixed media on paper
56.5 x 76.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

*Path to the Waterfall with
Figure & Totem*, c.1983-84
oil and enamel on paper
57.0 x 75.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Figure & the Cattai Venus, 1984
oil on cotton
153.0 x 213.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Thru into the Sorcerers World, 1985-86
oil on cotton duck
199.0 x 243.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

To a Dark and Secret Place, 1988-89
oil on cotton duck
149.5 x 207.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

*The Passing of Mirrored Time
- Eulogy*, 1993-94
enamel and oil on linen
244.5 x 305.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

*As The Light Falls
"the Shadow Men"*, 1995
oil on paper on linen
79.0 x 96.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Butterfly Men with Totem, 1996
oil on cotton duck
150.0 x 209.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

The Prophet Bird, 1997
oil and wax medium on linen
121.5 x 183.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

*Aspects of Landscape - Tree of
Dreams and Fantasies*, 2000-01*
oil and wax medium on linen
244.0 x 290.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Aspects of Landscape - Waterfall, 2002
oil on linen
119.0 x 152.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Expressionist series

Turquoise Cliff, 2003
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
43.5 x 91.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Structures series

Yerba Buena, 2004
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
183.0 x 193.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Structures series

Spanish Towers, 2004
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
153.5 x 139.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Structures series

Zarfan, 2007
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
118.0 x 137.5 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Structures series

Aximexis, 2007
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
150.5 x 210.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Structures series

Zianexis, 2009
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
152.0 x 168.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Structures series

Infinex Lumina #6, 2010
synthetic polymer paint on cotton duck
165.0 x 258.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Infinex series

Infinex Lumina #7, 2010
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
147.0 x 163.0 cm
Sydney, New South Wales
Infinex series

The Sydney Ball Gift was donated
through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Sydney Ball

*Donated directly to the University
of South Australia by Sydney Ball



THE SYDNEY BALL GIFT

Cover image: Sydney BALL, *Magellan Blue* (detail), 1978, oil and enamel on cotton duck, 228.5 x 518.0 cm, University of South Australia Art Collection: The Sydney Ball Gift. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Sydney Ball, Charles Nodrum and anonymous donors. Image courtesy Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney



Sydney Ball in his Glenorie studio with work from his Structures 2 series, 2007. Image courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney

THE SYDNEY BALL GIFT

In 2013 the University of South Australia accepted a major gift from the acclaimed Australian artist Sydney Ball. This prestigious gift, comprising over thirty important works and worth more than one million dollars, is by far the most valuable gift of Australian art ever made to the University. The installation of The Sydney Ball Gift in the Sir Eric Neal Library celebrates the artist's long and impressive career and considerable impact on Australian art, and recognises this wonderful act of generosity to the University.

Sydney Ball's artistic practice is a critical link between Australian painting and one of the great art movements of the twentieth century — American abstraction. Display of The Sydney Ball Gift creates the most extensive and exemplary permanent exhibition of Sydney Ball's work, providing an unparalleled opportunity to view the trajectory, concerns and achievements of his extraordinary fifty-year career.

The University is especially pleased to receive and display the gift due to the artist's longstanding connections to Adelaide and the University. Sydney Ball was born in Adelaide in 1933, and is an alumni and former lecturer of what is now the School of Art, Architecture and Design, part of the University of South Australia.

As a young man in the 1950s, Ball studied architecture and then art, working in a variety of jobs to support his studies. By the late 1950s Ball was an exhibiting artist, when, impatient with his progress and local teaching methods, he took the unconventional and crucial decision to study in New York. At the time of his enrolment at the Art Students League in 1963, Ball was painting landscapes with somewhat abstracted elements; but there, under the influence of his teacher the abstract expressionist Theodore Stamos and associating with artists such as Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell and Lee Krasner, he turned completely to abstraction and the exploration of colour.¹ He first developed a series of paintings featuring vertical bands of colour (Band series, 1963–64), which he exhibited with success in New York. This breakthrough series announced the hallmarks of Ball's oeuvre — the primacy of colour and his method of working in series.

In 1965 Ball returned to Adelaide where he drew on his New York experiences and architectural background to create some of the seminal works of Australian abstract painting and 'swing the momentum of the entire [Australian] art scene'.² Among these early works is the Modular series, 1968–69, in which Ball abandoned conventional painting formats to create works comprising geometric forms articulated in fields of contrasting colour. This series is represented in the gift by *Reach*, 1969, in which two stepped shapes of deep maroon are completed by slivers of Prussian blue, then mounted to mirror each other in a T-like formation.

In 1969 Ball returned once more to New York, absorbing and contributing to the new developments in painting. To support his practice, he worked for the estate of Mark Rothko, whose influence can be seen in the hue, forms and emotion of the meditative paintings of the Link series, 1969–71, including *Apache Blue*, 1971, and *Carthage*, 1970–71, which Ball painted on hessian after observing Helen Frankenthaler's experiments painting on the reverse of her canvas.³

In this way, Ball developed the Stain series, 1971–80, an extensive foray into lyrical abstraction, commenced in New York and continued on his return to Australia in 1971. Ball painted works such as *Magellan Blue*, 1978, and *Pale Stream*, 1976, on the floor like Helen Frankenthaler and Jackson Pollock, yet in a distinctive gestural language of his own.

From 1981 to 2002, Ball substantially abandoned abstraction in favour of expressionist painting, creating ten series in a sustained engagement with the land. Even during this period, however, New York influences may be discerned, for example, that of Rothko in the

numinous black squares that dominate *The Passing of Mirrored Time – Eulogy*, 1993–94, and *As The Light Falls "the Shadow Men"*, 1995.

The new millennium has seen Ball reinvigorated his interest in flat colour abstraction and the possibilities of form. The four Structures series, 2002–10, investigate pictorial and architectural concepts, with works including *Turquoise Cliff*, 2003, and *Zianexis*, 2009, characterised by a dynamic charge generated by the artist's adroit combinations of saturated colour and ragged or jagged forms. More formal again is the Infinex series, 2010–11, in which the artist revisited the approach of his Modular series to create assemblages of several individual but related colours and shapes, such as *Infinex Lumina #6* and *#7*, 2010, where crisply chromatic and rigid geometric forms seem poised mid-motion.

Sydney Ball continues to work and exhibit as he energetically tests the bounds of his practice. In 2013 the artist celebrated his 80th birthday and was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of South Australia in recognition of his services to education and the arts. Altogether Ball has been awarded more than twenty prizes and commissions. His rich body of work has to date been the subject of over eighty solo exhibitions and his works are represented in the collections of over seventy national and international institutions.

¹ Anne Loxley, 'Sydney Ball, interviewed by Anne Loxley, 28 July 2008', Anne Loxley and Wendy Walker, in *Sydney Ball: The Colour Paintings 1963–2007*, Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest, Sydney, 2008, p13

² Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution*, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1995, p188, as quoted by Wendy Walker in 'Sydney Ball: Prophet of Abstraction', in Anne Loxley and Wendy Walker, op. cit., p17

³ Anne Loxley, op. cit., p14



Sydney BALL, *Magellan Blue*, 1978, oil and enamel on cotton duck, 228.5 x 518.0 cm
University of South Australia Art Collection: The Sydney Ball Gift. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Sydney Ball, Charles Nodrum and anonymous donors. Image courtesy Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney