

David Aspden was thirty years old when he had his first solo exhibition in 1965. By late 1966, with two more solo shows under his belt, Aspden found himself in the vanguard of Australia's formal colour abstractionists, the movement surveyed in the National Gallery of Victoria's important 1968 exhibition "The Field". In his paintings of the middle 1960s, the edges of his shapes ranged from gentle to scimitar-sharp. He explored colour interactions; his palette encompassed relationships that were measured and muted, and also relationships that were fiercely clamorous and pulsating.

The command of colour that Aspden displayed in the 1960s has become the hallmark of his painting of the last four decades. As early as 1970, in an essay on Aspden in *Art International*, Terry Smith described him as "Australia's leading colour-painter".

Yet Aspden has been no less inventive with form. He has conjured with all-over patterns comprised of interlocking soft-edged fragments, and with fields of dovetailing shapes that dock together with the biting precision of a jigsaw. His works range from the suavely calculated and formal, to the painterly and informal. While Aspden's work stands securely on its abstract values, his titles acknowledge associations with nature and a sense of place: the evocative mysteries of impenetrable bushland; the nervy and reckless unpredictability of a jazz solo; the flow and glisten of a stream; the colours of tarnishing splendor associated with autumn.

David Aspden has had his share of laurels, but has never rested on them. His paintings continue to be fresh, exploratory and ambitious.

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