

# **NONOBJECTIVE**

**-present**

**IRENE BARBERIS**

**ANDREW CHRISTOFIDES**

**TRACEY COUTTS**

**CHRISTOPHER HEATHCOTE**

**SARA LINDSAY**

**LIS MCDONALD**

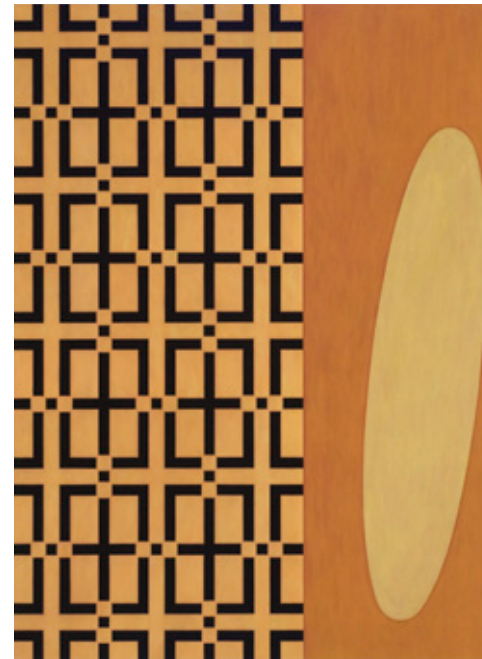
**JON PLAPP**

**CAT POLJSKI**

**PAUL SNELL**

**WILMA TABACCO**

**STEPHEN WICKHAM**



## Crossing the Present

Alongside so-called “hybrid” work in which recognizable traces of representations of identifiable objects are perceivable, non-objective art which is grounded in the exploration and deployment of colour, geometric form, structure, optical and spatial concerns continues to be an absorbing form of practice for many artists.

It is true that the term non-objective is now sometimes regarded as outmoded. It may be associated with a roll call of artists considered avant-garde in their own time but now viewed as historic place markers. Malevich, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Albers, Rothko – artists with shared or overlapping concerns with the suprasensible are invoked within the pantheon, but a distaste for their theoretical positions is often seen as foreclosing the possibilities of engagement with the work.

A further complication is the tendency to use “non objective” as interchangeable with “abstract”, a term also susceptible to being used with a perplexing range of meanings. Certainly the understanding – or misunderstanding – of abstraction as involving a reduction of forms derived from appearances is antipathetic to the ideas of Malevich, whose book titled “Die gegenstandslose

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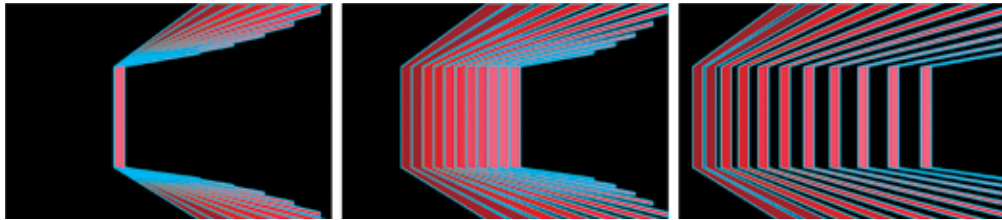
### IRENE BARBERIS

Detail from *Square Arcs/Rectangle Series*, 2012  
300 cm x 250 cm  
*Square Arcs/Pink: 2011 Quadrant Series*  
Hand painted, acrylic polymer on canvas  
107 cm x 107 cm

Above

### ANDREW CHRISTOFIDES

*Agnostic*, 2010  
Acrylic on canvas  
183 cm x 137 cm  
Courtesy Charles Nodrum Gallery



Welt”, published in Munich in 1927, is usually rendered in English “The Non-Objective World”. When around the same time Hilla von Rebay introduced Solomon Guggenheim to the works of contemporary European artists it was to those she considered shared her interest in “Art” rather than “copying nature”: the latter for her encompassed abstract art which she deemed impurely material. Nevertheless, when Guggenheim began to display his collection in 1939 with an exhibition titled “The Art of Tomorrow – The Museum of Non-Objective Art” it featured Rudolph Bauer, whose work von Rebay extravagantly admired, along with Klee, Kandinsky, and Moholy-Nagy. As Arthur Danto has pointed out, non-objective art is certainly not “about nothing”; “The (nonobjective) paintings present a reality, albeit an inner reality, or if an outer reality, then one which has the same spiritual identity as inner reality.”<sup>1</sup>

Top Left

## TRACEY COUTTS

*Untitled series 2*, 2012  
Archival inkjet print  
18 cm x 127 cm

Above

## CHRISTOPHER HEATHCOTE

*Dark City*, 2008  
Oil on linen  
111 cm x 66 cm

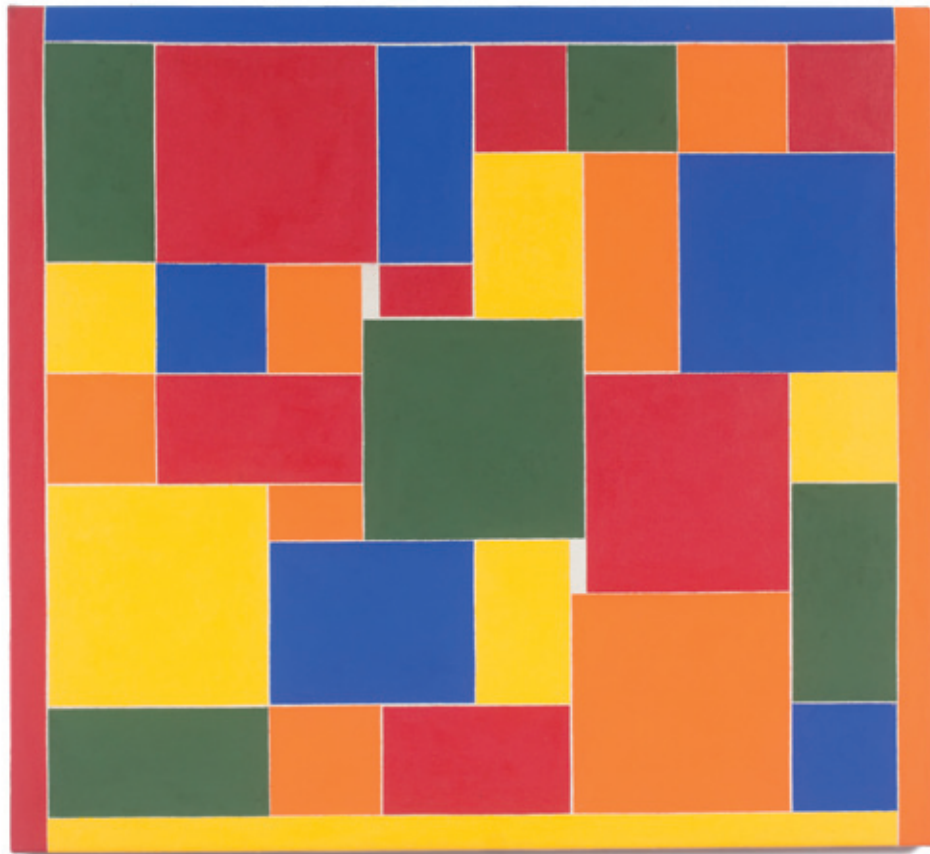
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## SARA LINDSAY

*Cargo: china tea cinnamon ticking (detail)*, 2009  
Mixed media - cinnamon, silk, rayon, cotton, wool, paper  
11 parts - overall approx 120 cm x 360 cm

For some, “non-objective” has come to be associated with the cold clarity, the ascetic rigour of a geometric proposition or theorem, divorced from the empathetic resonances of our attachments to objects. How strange, then, that “non-objective” can also bear the meaning of subjective! In the shift of emphasis from the intentions of the artists to the responses of the viewers which has characterized the last half-century





Above

**LIS MCDONALD**

*Construction #2*, 2012  
Laser cut acrylic  
75 cm x 50 cm

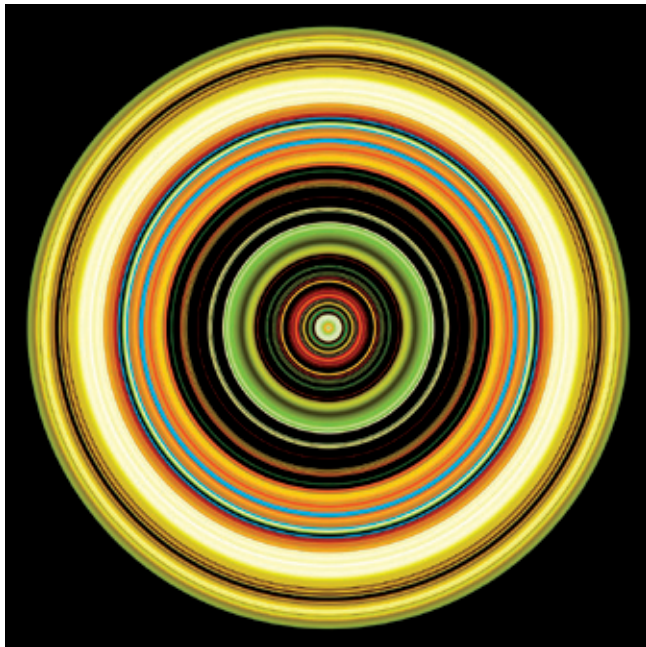
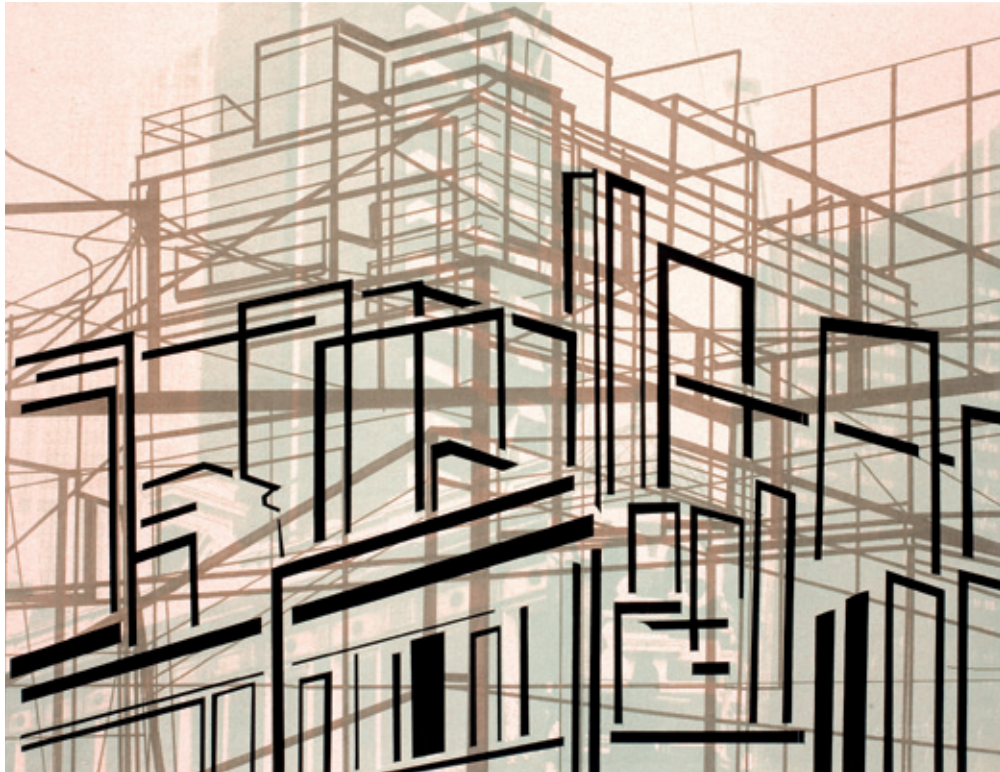
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**JON PLAPP**

*Being Wishless*, 1995  
Acrylic on canvas  
77 cm x 83 cm

of criticism, perhaps we have lost contact with the kinds of responses predicated on a willingness, or an ability, to abandon ourselves to the nuances of colour and shape. Doubtless also the saturation of reproductions which have come to dominate the visual territory of exposure to art has not been kind to an understanding of, or engagement with, non-objective works. Such works in reproduction are particularly compromised, since on the one hand knowledge of objects allows us to automatically supply the information distorted or suppressed in reproductions, and, on the other hand, the subtle relationships that often characterize abstraction are translated by reproduction into graphic formulae. The differences visible between viewing, for example, a work by Mondrian and seeing even the most sophisticated of its multitudinously reproduced images are profound.

As Nickas suggests in the introduction to his 2009 survey of recent abstract painting<sup>2</sup> the weight of earlier abstraction, the fictionalized trajectory which artists and critics strove to erect in a modernist milieu wedded to the idea of progress can now, thankfully, be left behind, leaving us free to evaluate current work from a viewpoint enriched by an understanding of historical contexts but uncoupled from the



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## CAT POLJSKI

*Intersecting Planes*, 2011  
Lithograph with relief stencil  
57 cm x 76 cm  
Printed by the artist and Lancaster Press 2011  
Courtesy Jenny Port Gallery

Top Left

## PAUL SNELL

*Pulse # 201021*, 2010  
Lambda print  
120 cm x 120 cm  
Courtesy Colville Gallery

polemics of a convergence of impulses which, while seeming to be triumphant critically at mid century, was overtaken with surprise by the re-emergence of figuration.

From the standpoint of the early 21st century, at a time in which the flurries of movements linked to modernism and high modernism seem to have collapsed, and the conflict of studio and “post-studio” practice has achieved an exhausted stalemate, we are in a better position to appreciate, without pigeonholing, the diversity of current art practice. Moreover, the driving search for meaning in which art, as part of a range of creative practices, became swept up, has begun to encounter a resistance almost unthinkable thirty years ago in the critical arena. Ad Reinhardt’s statement in 1943 “Content is in the actual painting activity”<sup>3</sup> or Noland’s declaration that “the representation I’m interested in is of those things only the eye can touch”<sup>4</sup> now appears less like gnomic obfuscation which the critic can choose to ignore than factual guidelines for encountering the work. Recently a number of writers have turned again to the roots of 20th century art in the 19th century. In the catalogue accompanying the 2011/2012 exhibition “The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900” Lynn Federle Orr has noted that Fry and Bell, the apostles





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## WILMA TABACCO

*Traversing Campania*, 2009  
Oil on linen  
122 cm x 152 cm  
Courtesy Niagara Galleries

Left

## STEPHEN WICKHAM

*Dark Mantra*, 2011  
Oil on linen  
54 cm x 46 cm

of modernism, and later, Clement Greenberg adopted the vocabulary of Aesthetic criticism, but were blind to the formalism of Aesthetic practice and Elizabeth Prettejohn discusses the strategies of painters to achieve “pointers to kinds of meanings which go beyond the mind’s effort to encompass them.”<sup>5</sup>

For the established artists in this exhibition the challenges of the constantly renewed tensions between repetition and reinvention, the interrogation of the acts of artmaking in a milieu clamorous with images and texts, have become entwined into strands forming a bridge flung over an abyss, a bridge along which they guide themselves, and the viewer, looking neither behind nor down.

### Sophia Errey

March 2012

1 Danto, Arthur “Art and Meaning” in *Theories of Art Today*, 2000, ed. Noël Carroll. University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, p.132.

2 Nickas, Bob. 2009. *Painting Abstraction: New Elements in Abstract Painting*. Phaidon Press Limited, London and New York, p.8.

3 Reinhardt, Ad (ed. Barbara Rose) 1975. *Art-as-Art: the selected writings of Ad Reinhardt*. University of California Press. Berkeley and Los Angeles, p.47.

4 Widely cited, but unsourced.

5 Calloway, Stephen and Federle Ort, Lynn (eds) 2011 *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900*. V&A Publishing Victoria and Albert Museum, London. pp.37 and 76.

**SATURDAY 12 MAY TO SUNDAY 10 JUNE, 2012**

**OPENING**

**SATURDAY 12 MAY, 2-5 PM**

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**GALLERY DIRECTORS**

**DR IRENE BARBERIS & DR WILMA TABACCO**

**WEDNESDAY TO SATURDAY 11AM - 5PM**

**AND SUNDAY 12 NOON - 5PM**



CATALOGUE DESIGN  
GRACIA HABY & LOUISE JENNISON