

## Paul Moncrieff's Amazing Bunbury Paintings

Posted on [December 29, 2013](#) by [David Bromfield](#)



This is the first time that I have seen the upstairs chapel at Bunbury working in a perfect relationship to an exhibition. Its gothic floor plan and the many irregularities left over from the original conversion often combine to ruin the plans of even the wildest curator.

Paul Moncrieff planned his exhibition of new work at the Bunbury gallery well in advance.

In fact it is arguable that the challenge of this unique space was in part responsible for the artist's major change of direction. Moncrieff began as a painter of semi-abstract landscapes; then came several shows of small-scale highly coloured abstractions, some with two of more units.

The new stuff is large, almost American-type large, but not for the same reasons. For the most part the scale of New York School canvases was metaphoric not absolute. They were originally expected to fill modest apartment and gallery walls, almost to the corners, with references to painterly, gestural pioneering across the infinite spaces of America.

Moncrieff's work, on the other hand, is designed to resonate with its container at a specific scale. Each piece is made of a sequence of shaped, thin, plywood panels painted in flat, carefully balanced and uninflected industrial colours, almost straight off a Pantone chart. This, perhaps paradoxically, leads to work with an emphasis on form, not colour.

Take the most 'difficult' in the show, the ten oblong panels made into a rectangle of two rows of five and hung in the apsidal end of the space, between and below its rather weak gothic windows. They clearly form a colour chord, yellow above bright green to the left descending to deep rose madder above dark purple. It is, however, the 'cutting' of the corners of various panels at 45 degrees that makes possible the diversity and resonance which characterise this piece, Moncrieff has applied a simple formula from left to right. The first two panels are intact, then one, two, three and finally, on the right four corners have been removed and replaced with a lighter reveal colour.



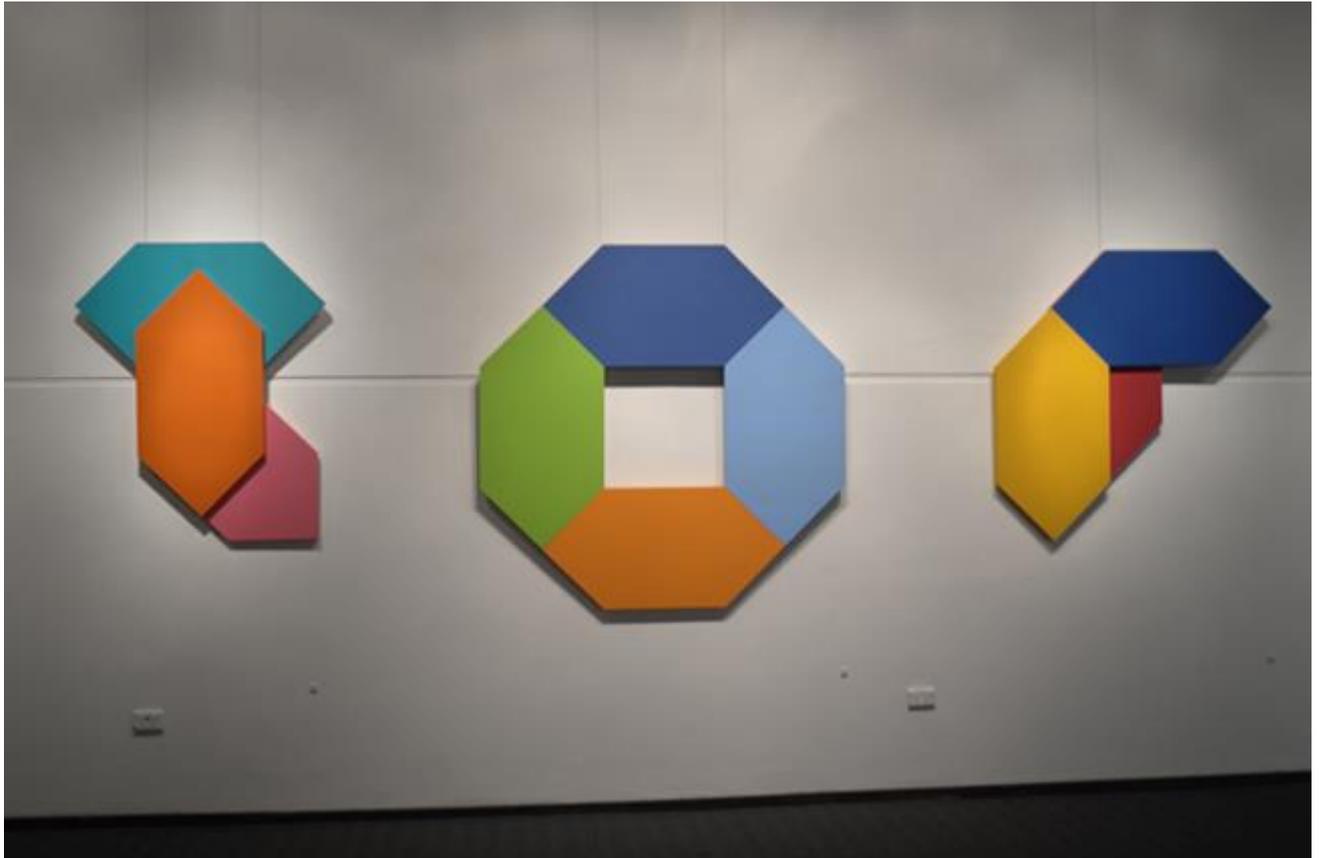
This systematic shapeshifting characterises every piece in the show, but it is particularly effective in the apse with its subtle, perhaps unintended, references to the similar thinking to be found in Gothic architecture. Other works, hung along the wall opposite the gallery entrance present a series of geometric twists and turns arranged symmetrically around a large four piece doughnut form.



The uniform depth of each panel is indispensable to the role of form in Moncrieff's work. Depth always equals presence, especially in monochrome panels. The 1.5 or so centimeters that separate each panel from the wall surface subtly forces the eye to allot each panel a distinct space, an event that enlivens the space of the whole gallery. The overlaps that feature in most works double down on these spaces, so that every unique presence becomes part of a negotiation of presences for artist and viewer.



As a whole the exhibition operates as a visual equivalent of the Venetian music of Vivaldi and Monteverdi, music tied to the dynamic spaces and places of architecture. Each work helps to weave a dramatic set of spatial relationships across the open spaces of the gallery.



Moncrieff's work has been compared to Frank Stella. This could only refer to the later Stella of the 3D constructions. The Black Paintings were above all an attempt to constrain the space of the painting entirely within the picture plane, an attempt to avoid the metaphorical consequences and conundrums (and the politics) of Pollock or Rothko. With Stella what you see is all you are supposed to get. This not true of Moncrieff. His work is an invitation to play games, to rework the intensity of the gallery experience for your own desires.

So far as I can tell, this is by far the most interesting exhibition in Western Australia at the moment. It's a shame Perth has to put up with a State Gallery shorn of the greatest project ever conceived for it, a piece of pretentious nonsense at Pica and a series of commercial spaces whose artistic and cultural ambition, with only one exception, is lower than a snake's belly.

Perhaps PICA should offer Moncrieff a gig, and soon.

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