

ARTIS

G A L L E R Y

MERVYN WILLIAMS

Biography

Although best known as a painter, throughout his distinguished career Mervyn Williams' artistic practice has also encompassed design, printmaking and sculpture. Born in Whakatane, in 1940, Williams now lives and works in Auckland. After studying at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland from 1957 - 1958, he went into commercial screenprinting and became involved in the printing of limited editions for painters such as Gordon Walters. He has exhibited regularly in New Zealand since 1966 and is represented in major public and private collections in New Zealand, the USA, Canada, Europe, the UK, Japan and Australia.

Williams' paintings are concerned with perception. The intrigue of the illusion in the works cannot be deciphered in reproduction. One must stand in front of the artworks themselves to understand the mastery of paintwork and chiaroscuro that trick the eye into seeing flat surfaces as low relief. When confronted with his painting, the initial assumption is of a textured surface, thick paint built up to form ridges, bubbles, buttons, creases. On closer inspection, the three dimensional qualities are revealed as intricacies of paintwork which belie the flat surface of the canvas. The moment of uncertainty prompts a distinct desire to touch the painting to affirm its true nature.

Luminosity abounds in Williams' works. A subtle variation of tone within the monochrome paintings creates the illusion of an ethereal light stemming from an indeterminate source. Some appear to be glowing from within, while others seem to be lit from behind, like silk held up to the sun. Though purely abstract, the textural qualities of these works evoke allusions to the world around us; patterns on sand left by the receding tide, peeling, blistered paint on a derelict building, undulating folds of fabric or a cracked concrete footpath. In his works, light, illusion and allusion unite, offering a tantalising visual exploration of the painted surface.

Early in his career, a fascination with Impressionism and Post-Impressionism led Williams to explore the mechanics of visual perception, investigating the illusionary techniques of the Pointillist artists and studying the properties of halftones and direct exposure onto photographic film. The 1981 exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art, *A New Spirit in Painting* celebrated a renewal of interest in painting after the predominance of performance and installation art of the late 1960s and 1970s. Neo-Expressionism was the dominating movement in this exhibition, but another direction associating painting with photography was exemplified in the works of Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke.

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When Williams saw this exhibition and others like it in London and New York, a renewed interest ensued in the ability of the painted surface to convey a sense of reality even more convincing than photography can often achieve, and he revisited experiments with light, colour and texture.

Williams began to investigate through painting the immutable nature of photographs, the ability of the image to remain intact through many degrees of enlargement. Using this property as a starting point the artist employs a complex painting process involving many layers of translucent colour to build up a surface so convincing in its rendering of low relief that a perplexed audience is left uncertain of its surface properties to the point at which only the tactile experience of touch will lay the problem to rest. It is an enigmatic quality that dissipates when the artwork itself is photographed and reproduced.

In 2014 a survey exhibition was held at the Gus Fisher Gallery in Auckland. The exhibition titled *'50 years of Mervyn Williams'*, was curated by Dr Edward Hanfling and included work of remarkable variety and originality, covering a period of more than fifty years. It was at this survey show that Ron Sang Publications launched the book *'MERVYN WILLIAMS : from modernism to the digital age'* by Dr Edward Hanfling.

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MERVYN WILLIAMS CV

ACADEMIC HISTORY

1957-58 Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

PRIZES, AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

1988 Artist in Residence, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui
1981 First Prize, Tokoroa Painting Award
1969 NZ Print Council Samarkand Award
1966 First Prize (Prints), Hay's Art Award

COLLECTIONS AND COMMISSIONS

New Zealand Embassy, Washington DC
New Zealand Embassy, Consulate General New York
Private Collections USA, Canada, Europe, UK, Japan and Australia
All major public collections and many private collections in New Zealand

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2015 *Façade*, ARTIS Gallery, Auckland
2013 *Colour Corrected*, ARTIS Gallery, Auckland
2010 *Mervyn Williams: 20 Years of Painted Illusion*, ARTIS Gallery, Auckland
2008 *Round and Round*, ARTIS Gallery, Auckland
2007 *In the Round*, Janne Land Art Gallery, Wellington
2006 *Recent Paintings*, Judith Anderson Gallery, Hawke's Bay
2005 *Selected Works*, Judith Anderson Gallery, Hawkes Bay
2004 *Selected Paintings*, Janne Land Art Gallery, Wellington
2003 *Southern Oscillation*, Milford Galleries, Dunedin
2002 *Quintessence*, Michael Carr, Sydney
Quatrains, Janne Land Art Gallery, Wellington
2001 *Quintessence*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
1999 *In the Nature of Things*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
In the Nature of Things, @ SPAN Gallery, Melbourne
1997 *In the Round: Recent Paintings*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

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- 1995 *Exposures: New Paintings*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
1993 *New Work*, Brooker Gallery, Wellington
Recent Painting, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
1991 *Between Darkness and Light*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
1989 *Wood Works*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
In Different Light, Portfolio Gallery, Auckland
Works on Paper, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North
Recent Paintings, Brooker Gallery, Wellington
Points of Departure, Sargeant Gallery, Wanganui
1988 *Works in Progress*, Sargeant Gallery, Wanganui
1987 *Recent Paintings*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
Recent Gouaches, Portfolio Gallery, Auckland
1986 *Recent Paintings*, Louise Beale Gallery, Wellington
1984 *Recent Paintings*, Louise Beale Gallery, Wellington
Recent Paintings, New Vision Gallery, Auckland
1983 *Twelve Gouaches*, New Vision Gallery, Auckland
1982 *Recent Paintings*, Louise Beale Gallery, Wellington
1981 *Recent Painting*, RKS Art, Auckland
1980 *Recent Paintings*, Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington
Recent Paintings, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
Recent Paintings, New Vision Gallery, Auckland
1979 *Recent Paintings*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
1975 *Paintings and Drawings*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *The Abstraction Practice* ARTIS Gallery Auckland
2011 *Summer Exhibition* ARTIS Gallery Auckland
2010 *Sleight of Hand: Port Nelson Suter Biennale*, The Suter Gallery, Nelson
2008 *Summer Exhibition*, Milford Galleries Queenstown
2006 *Masterworks*, Milford Galleries, Auckland
Winter Light, Janne Land Art Gallery, Wellington
2005 *Frieze*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
2004 *Transit of Venus*, Milford Galleries, Auckland
2002 *Selected Artists*, Milford Galleries, Dunedin
2000 *Opposites Attract with Paul Dibble*, Michael Carr, Sydney
1997 *Ross Blackner, Mark Francis, Leigh Martin and Mervyn Williams*,
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
Current Abstractions, Milford Galleries, Dunedin

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- 1996 *Visa Gold Award*, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland
- 1994 *Parallel Lines, Gordon Walters in Context*, Auckland Art Gallery
- 1992 *Surface Tension*, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland
- 1990 *Out of the Woods*, Sargeant Gallery, Wanganui
- 1988 *Faith and Works*, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North
- 1984 *Gordon Walters and Mervyn Williams*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch
- 1983 *Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art – The Grid*, Auckland Art Gallery
- 1982 *Seven Painters/ The Eighties*, Touring Exhibition
- 1981 *Tokoroa Painting Award Exhibition*
- 1980 *Benson and Hedges Art Award Exhibition*
- 1979 *NZ Drawing Exhibition*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch
- 1978 *Auckland Painters Exhibition*, Auckland Art Gallery
- 1977 *NZ Prints Exhibition*, Auckland Art Gallery
- 1972 *Biennale of Graphic Art*, Paris
- 1970 *NZ Pavilion 'Expo 70'*, Japan
- 1969 *Biennale of Graphic Art*, Yugoslavia
- 1967 *Pat Hanly and Mervyn Williams*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch
- 1966 *Biennale of Graphic Art*, Tokyo

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Edward Hanfling, *MERVYN WILLIAMS: From modernism to the digital age*, Ron Sang Publications 2014
- Dunn, Michael, '*Looking Back: Mervyn at 70*', Art New Zealand #136 2010
- Chin, David '*Shades of Meaning*', Gow Langsford Gallery 1999
- Dunn, Michael '*Contemporary Painting in New Zealand*', Craftsman House 1996
- Brown, Warwick, '*One Hundred New Zealand Paintings*' Godwit Press 1995
- Barton, Christine, '*Surface Tension*', Auckland Art Gallery 1992
- Williams, M, '*Between Darkness and Light*', Catalogue Essay 1992
- Dunn, Michael '*A Concise History of New Zealand Painting*', Bateman, 1991
- Panaho, Rangi '*Points of Departure*', Sarjeant Gallery 1989
- Wedde, Ian '*Mervyn Williams: Paintings With His Feet in Wanganui*', Art New Zealand #51 1989
- Bett, Elva *New Zealand Art: A Modern Perspective* Reed Methuen, 1986
- Dunn, Michael '*Mervyn Williams: A Vision of Light*', Art New Zealand 36 1985

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Parr, Chris *'The Grid, Lattice and Network'* Art New Zealand 28 1983

Curnow, Wynston *'Seven Painters/The Eighties: The Politics of Abstraction'* Art New Zealand #28 1983

Bogle, Andrew *'Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art: The Grid'*, Auckland Art Gallery, 1983

Schulz, Derek *'Differences of Intention'*, The Listener, 9 October 1982

Schulz, Derek *'Seven Painters/The Eighties'*, Sargeant Gallery, Wanganui 1982

'New Zealand Prints 1977', Auckland Art Gallery

'New Zealand Prints 1976' Auckland Art Gallery

Cape, Peter *'Prints and Print Makers in New Zealand'* Collins 1974

'Mervyn Williams', *Arts and Community*, July 1969