

paul hinchliffe

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...to catch a herring

and then what? (and then what?)

A few years ago Paul Hinchliffe and I sat in a Leederville coffee shop talking about the weather. It was raining. We were clear about that. Which was good, because I was far from clear about a definition of Paul's "art practice". That's what we were really there to discuss, for a newspaper article I was trying to write. Paul told me he'd made sculptures on the beach at Quinns Rock. That he left them there. Didn't even take photos. Maybe people stumbled upon them. Maybe they were puzzled. Maybe they weren't. He told me how he sat down with an international atlas, found a street name and sent a package off to an unknown addressee. It was a gift. He talked about the Heimatlos (homeless) project. Performances in carparks. Subterfuge in art galleries. Conceptualism and hobo-ism uniting. Just like Jack Kerouac and Richard Long said it would.

We shook hands and I ran to my car. I got soaked to the skin. I shivered, went over my notes in the office. The rain got harder as I typed them out, drowning out my keyboard plucking. My editor didn't like the result. There was no hook. He'd as soon can the story, if I didn't mind. And I didn't. Not really. For me, the interview was just another chance to piece together a puzzle I'd been trying to figure out for a decade or so, since experiencing Paul as a lecturer at art school.

To me, dopey and callow to the marrow, Paul was the unexpected incarnate. I'd arrived there, you know, just wanting to make stuff. Paul never made stuff. Or the stuff he made was more like anti-stuff - blank books, verbal images of Pythagorean formulae. Paul was the guy we first heard about Lacan and Derrida from. But, unlike so many of us who later delighted in what riot grrrl band *Le Tigre* call Fake French [1], he wasn't name-dropping. And he wasn't "applying theory" either. He was inside it, tied up and twisted. To be honest, it was kinda painful to see. Yet, from remote Lacanian lacunae he made us ask ourselves what we were looking to art school for. He made us realise that art is fundamentally about the transference. Art is about the questions we ask of it, the responses we want back from it. So, when identity politics were all the rage, when lines were being drawn in the sand, Paul was ontological man. Yes, it was unsettling. He frustrated us enough to make us think for ourselves.

At the same time he teased us. Thinking for ourselves, properly, was a discursive impossibility. With Paul there were no platitudes to settle upon.

So you'll forgive me if I admit I'm suspicious of his new work. Work in a gallery no less. Work that seems sumptuous, even. I don't trust my reaction, my pleasure. Mostly I don't trust him. I've been burnt enough times to know that any claim to sensory pleasure is deeply rooted in a critique of such phenomena.

Okay, critique is the wrong word. Utopia doesn't await. Desire rules that out. Like Ramsay Street, art is a cul de sac to which we return again and again searching for something, finding that content, context, perception, and plain old longing are bound into the one infuriatingly dumb object - a thing on the wall. Or Harold Bishop.

So, sure, Paul is putting things on the wall these days. And then what?

We can puzzle them out, but will they have stopped functioning, will we be complete when we're done sleuthing? This mirrors Yeats queries in his poem "What Then?":

'The work is done', grown old he thought,
'According to my boyish plan;
Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
Something to perfection brought';
But louder sang the ghost, "What then?" [2]

Despite our best intentions, nothing will be resolved. The work, (all work), remains fugitive, a series of offerings, openings and refusals, doors slammed in the face, heads turned abruptly.

Like Lacan, Paul refuses to play the good daddy, to be our friend, to console. I find no comfort in this.

And yet, I'm invigorated. Though I want the work to love me back, to let me love it, there's something tragically beautiful about the dilemma. The new work toys with this, makes us think it will, maybe, in the future, when the time is right and the moon is high. It's something old Gatsby would understand, and my guess is Paul and Jay would have been soul mates, knowing that everything is out of reach, even themselves, even as they dream it otherwise.

This too is a projection. Narrative, poetry, all that. Another self-made consolation.

It's annoying. Paul reminds me how much I need these things, how weak I am.

Again, I find no comfort in this. And can find no graceful way to exit this text.

There is always another "what then?"

And maybe I still don't really get it anyway.

It's raining today. Did I mention that?

Robert Cook

Notes

[1] *Le Tigre*. (2001). "Fake French", on *Feminist Sweepstakes*, Tilt Records: Sydney. They sing: "I've got - the new sincerity. I've got - a secret vocabulary. I've got - dialectical sprecstime. I've got - a conceptual stunt double. I've got - site specificity. I've got - flow disruption. I've got - wildlife metaphors. I've got - post-binary gender chores....My Fake French is hot. You can't make me stop".

[2] W.B. Yeats. "What Then?", in Seamus Heaney, (2002). *Finder's Keepers: selected prose, 1971-2001*. faber and faber: London. p.109.

hinchliffe's paradoxes

notes towards a speculative history of the reversed canvas

Lets start with *Blue Paper* (p.9) first of the grey series. Like all these works, it oscillates between a series of flat canvases, two of them back-to-front on this occasion, and an illusion of a simple, 3D shape: in this case an empty box with its lid held mysteriously open on a plane exactly parallel with the topmost plane of the opening whose interior it exposes. Like every other work in this show, the illusion is both punctured and sustained by the reversed canvas or canvases: here a pair of triangular stretchers forming the apex of the irregular five-sided plane, shaded in three tones of grey, each a separate canvas - one of Hinchliffe's perplexing rules. The reversed canvases puncture the illusion by exposing part of its inner structure. But that inner structure also sustains the illusion because the braces correspond to the inner edges and side of the box if it were a box and not a series of flat canvases thus revealed. The flat and solid geometry flip into each other very starkly in this example. Illusionistically there is no greater space depicted in the work than between the right-hand edge of the brightly illuminated lid and the bottom of the darkly shadowed left-hand side of the box, but because the brightly illuminated lid seems to be the same diamond shape as the right-hand side of the box (whose shade is between the other two), this serves to flatten the illusion, yet the difference in shade puts them at 90 degrees to each other, which reinforces the illusion again. The artist observes that it would have been perfectly possible for him to paint the illusion of the inside of the box that the two reversed canvases with all their signs of workmanship constitute so imperfectly, but this would not have been to 'catch the herring' in the same way or to the same degree. The audacity of showing the artifice behind the illusion seems to expose an exchange or slippage between two worlds of meaning that reinforce or cancel each other out to different degrees in different works. What are these worlds and what are their relations with each other?

I doubt if I will provide an adequate answer, but the preoccupation with the artifice behind the illusion as part of the illusion has a long and distinguished history that may at least deepen the question, if only by a process of elimination. I shall structure this essay by moving from a work in the present exhibition to some argument about past paintings that depict reversed canvases, then back to another work by Paul, flip-flopping in and out of time like Paul's works do in space.

On the face of it, I cannot think of a greater distance in worlds from Hinchliffe's geometrical traps and trips than Henry James' literary dramatization of human fronts and backs in *The Europeans* (1878), set in the sternly Protestant atmosphere of nineteenth-century New England. As the church bell tolls its Sunday summons, Gertrude is joined by her sternly reproachful elder sister, Charlotte, who is oddly attired in 'a long red India scarf, which, on the front of her dress, reached to her feet.' An equally odd conversation ensues about this. Charlotte feels uncomfortable that so much of her scarf hangs down at the front, and Gertrude tastefully loosens and rearranges it so that it should

'look differently behind.' Charlotte is alarmed by the implications of this sartorial makeover and sharply corrects it by observing that

'Indeed, I don't think it matters. ... how one looks behind.'

'I should say it mattered more,' said Gertrude.

'Then you don't know who may be observing you. You are not on your guard. You can't try to look pretty.'

Charlotte received this declaration with extreme gravity. 'I don't think one should ever try to look pretty,' she rejoined earnestly.

Amusing in itself, this passage reveals a series of exquisitely ridiculous substitutions when read in the context of debates of the time about the conflicting claims of aestheticism (art for art's sake) and the morality of art. The chief representative of the moral camp in England was the great Victorian sage and *uomo universalis* John Ruskin, who in the 1850s described himself mounting a sacristan's ladder in the Venetian Church of San Giovanni e Paolo to observe the effigy of the recumbent Doge Andrea Vendramin by the Renaissance sculptor Tullio Lombardo. On reaching the top of the ladder he is seized with indignation. 'At first I thought it had been broken off, but on clearing away the dust, I saw the wretched effigy had only *one* hand, and was a mere block on the inner side. The face, heavy and disagreeable in its features, is made monstrous by its semi-sculpture... it having been supposed throughout the work that the effigy was only to be seen from below, and from one side.' Ruskin's verdict on the heartless expediency of the Italian sculptor of this Catholic tomb opened an important chapter in the history of British taste, for as a consequence vigorous Anglican divines flocked to Italy to derive the 'idolatry' and Mariolatry' to be found in the churches, to make sure that sculptors had not neglected their duty by completing only those parts of their work that were visible to the public.' By transforming the issue of the sculptor's moral duty to complete the invisible flank of the dead Doge's recumbent effigy into the rather different issue of whether a young woman very much alive should draw attention to her posterior in church by the way her scarf was hanging introduces a wonderfully absurd sexual factor into what today might seem an equally absurd question of aesthetic morality, though it also introduces an aesthetic question into a novelistic interlude, a slice of life.

The only value of such a comparison might be to illustrate how utterly remote Hinchliffe's preoccupations are from the living or the literary, for there is nothing circumstantial about the pure cube of *Blue Paper* except the human signs of labour on the reversed canvas. But if we turn from this work to *The Last Leaf* (p.15), then perhaps a spectrum opens up in this respect. If the box with the lid was in the league of a Platonic form, Paul points out that *The Last Leaf*, an empty rectangular pillar hinged in the middle and opened out at ninety degrees, is of human scale. He jokingly called it a lady cut in half, alluding to the magic trick which depends on a flash of sexual tension as

much as theatrical deception for its effect. Yet if there is a tension between those geometrically Platonic and the humanly desirable forms, its humour is deepened by remoteness, the distance of the workshop from the bedroom. The titles put a similar distance between their meaning and what the works look like.

From *The Last Leaf* lets plunge a little deeper into history by considering these issues from the angle of the impulse to show the back, as well as the front, of a canvas. One theory might be that to show the back of the canvas on the front of the work of art projects an idea of total visibility in which the entire realm of the visual comes within the artist's reach, a form of total possession, total mastery, in whatever sense. Such an impulse might serve powerful propaganda needs when the patron enters the picture. Take what is perhaps the most famous example of representation of the back of the canvas on the front of the painting, Velazquez's *Las Meninas*. So much ink has been spilt on so many interpretations of this painting that one trembles at the hubris of attempting another, but, as far as the canvas is concerned, can one not say some simple things that have not been said before? The artist stands proudly in front of his canvas eyeing up his subjects on our side of the picture surface. Some say that we see that subject, the royal couple, reflected in a mirror at the back of the hall. Measuring angles, however, mathematical scholars have traced the image in the mirror to the image on Velazquez's canvas in the painting, whose surface we cannot see, except in the mirror. What we see instead is the whole drafty right-hand side of the back of the canvas, from our point of view. Of course this isn't the whole of the back of the canvas, but it promises a fullness that the front of the real canvas, the one that still exists, seems to give us. For not only do we see the back of the canvas, we see the handmaidens waiting on the royal Infanta, her dog, a court dwarf and other officials, including one who pauses with his foot on the doorway to the further world beyond. From the point of view of court propaganda we are being shown the loving and affectionate family circumstances within which the stiff royal portrait is created. The back of the painting is a pledge of the love that is passed off as the natural setting behind the monarchs' public image. Who knows whether this was true or not? It is what the raw back of the canvas leads us to suppose. But perhaps there's more. From our point of view the artist is in front of his depicted canvas and we are behind it, but from his point of view is he not in some sense behind the real canvas that we see? To paint it he must have been. One scholar has suggested that in this respect Velazquez might have been alluding to an ancient tradition about the backs of canvases. As Alberti, the Renaissance architect and theorist, reminded his reader: 'They say that Apelles hid behind a painting so that he could hear their honest opinions. Thus he heard how each one blamed or praised his work. Hence, I wish our painter openly to demand to hear each one who judges him. To the painter, all his merits were always known, and the things which he has painted well are testimonies to his fame.'

Velazquez was very proud of this painting for he painted an emblem of his rise to higher rank as a red cross on his chest after its completion. With Paul the reversal of the picture has as much of the comic as the magician about it, for he talks of his memories of the comic magician Tommy Cooper reversing his illusion, accidentally on purpose, 'Just like that!' to show how it was done. Here historical slippage takes one from Velazquez's court of seventeenth-century Spain to the artisan's gallery of seventeenth-century Holland. I take Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts' *Reverse side of a painting* (1670) to be the ground zero of the comic rather than the magical mode of reversed canvases. It is a painting that represents nothing other than the complete back of a painting, and was designed to fool the eye. An entry on this picture from Norbert Schneider's *Still Life* is worth quoting entire:

Gijsbrechts' *betriskertje* is meant to lead the viewer astray by thinking that he ought to turn the picture the right way round. The scrap of paper with the number 36 on it gives the impression that this deceptive illusionist painting is actually meant for sale. It is therefore likely that the painting was originally put up at a sales exhibition as a practical joke. The saleability which is associated with the picture probably also explains why it appears so abstract. At first sight, the painting certainly seems modern to today's viewer. However, it is not an abstract painting like Malevich's two-dimensional Suprematist colour configurations. The accurate rendering of the stretching frame and its borders, as well as the canvas, show that the basic intention is totally different: it is meant to emphasise plasticity, thus functioning as a substitute for a real object.

This opens a giddy perspective on Paul's works, because his paintings are not of the backs, but simply *are* the backs of paintings, manufactured, so he tells me, with as much, or as little, necessary care, as the backs of the paintings whose fronts we see. A moot point with them though, is the *sides* of the canvases whose backs are reversed. These sides, he has decided after long deliberation, belong to the fronts rather than the backs of the paintings, and so are painted.

If we think about the comic revelations of Gijsbrechts, Cooper and Hinchliffe - in no particular order - we might consider that their impulse is opposite to Velazquez's. They expose the emptiness of artifice rather than its fullness. It is the ethos of the workshop rather than the court, and Paul speaks with shy pride of the way in which first one group of workmen, then a second larger group, then a third larger still came to glimpse works like these when he was mounting them in a high-rise office that they too were helping to fit out. It was their attention to the skill and the deflationary joke about the skill that tickled him. In returning to the question of which world(s) these works exist in, it is

not the world of geometrical abstraction, or even, quite, of painting itself, considered as a unitary, self-sufficient world. Paul tells me that a geometrical abstractionist painter tried to appropriate *The Loving Calm* (p.17) to his own world of imaging. One of the red series, it is perhaps my favourite in the whole show. Observed through the spectacles of geometrical abstraction, it seems the 'very picture' of suave proportionality. The reversed square on the left is the same size as the pure red square on the right, while the darker red section that divides them is a rectangle precisely three times the area of each. This is not how one experiences it though. The reversed section on the left screams at you as entry point for the semi-section of a tube that is abruptly terminated in the closed left-hand panel on the right. It starts out as far less construable than any of the more cubic forms in the grey series, but its illusion strikes you with a disproportionate force once you 'get it'. Then it is like administering a left hook to one's right ear, and the reversed panel can only be an entry point, never an exit. Suave proportions end up being violently lop-sided and kinetic, and here the indirection of the title is particularly deceptive. One is far too thoroughly involved to save much time for contemplation, but the associated meanings are both various and indeterminate. If you work with slide carousels all the time as I do, then *The Loving Calm* is the magnified section of a slide carousel. If you install air-conditioning in factories for a living, then it is, or has the scale of, a ventilation duct. But the projection of such meanings is almost wholly arbitrary, and hence the clever scale of Paul's works as repositories of meaning. They are general enough to contain almost any meaning, but they are always also physical, if in a hollow, empty, unpretentious sense of having been constructed or contrived, like one of Tommy Cooper's skilfully botched magic tricks. Which is why they're not just painting. Paul mused on how he might like to think of himself as a 'scopic engineer' (with the same sort of euphemism as a sanitary engineer?) and how he builds (not just paints) paintings. And this is how they ride boundaries and join different worlds together, but in dynamically reversible ways rather than as the result of stable combination or irrevocable fusion. One could get quite mystical about it, and follow the path of Malevich rather than Gijsbrechts, for confronted with the choice of mounting one of his iconic arrows (which aren't in this show) to point upwards or downwards, he chose to point it upwards, but only because he didn't like the wilful depression of pointing it downwards, not, particularly, because he thinks there's a God.

Which takes me back to Gijsbrechts and the possibility that there are some old forces at play in Paul's clean, new, physical mind traps. How, one might consider, did the backs of paintings ever come to be shown in paintings? Not until paintings had backs, one might conjecture. Episodically, there may often have been easel paintings, but the mass migration of imagery from murals and mosaics into framed and exchangeable commodities must have taken place during the fifteenth and sixteenth-century. In Rome, for example, one visits some palaces of this period where the walls are covered with frescoes

depicting bucolic or other scenes designed to be lived with forever and others where the permanent fresco has definitively given way to pictures hanging all the way up the walls, paintings that could be changed or sold at the whim of their owners. The competition between the fresco and framed painting perhaps reaches a climax in the Carracci brothers' vault of the Galleria in the Palazzo Farnese, begun in 1597. Since the ceiling was to embellish the finest collection of antique sculptures in Rome in the gallery below, the Carraccis' conceit was to extend the gallery to include framed paintings (*quadri riportati*) exhibited in this invented architectural and sculpted framework to celebrate the loves of the gods. Though there are no backs of paintings to be seen, there is everywhere the illusion of framed paintings heaving forward or pressed back onto the wall by nude figures when really there is nothing but the surface of the mural.

Let us go back and consider some of the viewing conditions that prevailed before paintings of the backs of paintings could be envisaged. At their most remote in prehistoric cave paintings, those viewing conditions were peculiarly close to those in which we watch cinema and television today. Nigel Tredell remarks at the beginning of *Cinemas of the Mind: a Critical History of Film Theory* (2002) that: One of the founding images of Western philosophy has also provided film theory with a key metaphor for the cinema. In Book 7 of *The Republic*, Plato projects a kind of moving picture of the relationship of human beings to reality. We are chained in a cave, watching the shadows that are cast against a wall by a fire. We may take the shadows for substance; but the reality of which they are phantoms lies beyond our vision. This image seems to anticipate and correspond to key aspects of the classic cinematic experience: sitting in the dark with others, with a light throwing shadows on a screen. While cinema viewing today, in the age of the video and DVD player, can and often does take other forms, the reference back to this kind of cinematic experience remains... How often do people try to recreate, at their domestic hearth, an experience akin to that of being in a cinema – the lights turned down, the images unrolling on a home screen that is now expanding to cinematic proportions?. These are also the viewing conditions that prevail inside temples and churches. The procession winding up the Acropolis to the Parthenon in blinding sunlight would have been shocked into hypnagogic trance by the killing of the light and slow adjustment of the eyes to the cool form of the sculpted goddess Athena as the cortege passes into her presence. In cave, temple, church, rock concerts or cinema visible forms arise out of an enveloping darkness.

What could be more different from the condition in which we examine the intractable raw canvasses of Paul's *No Answer* (p.19) or *A Round Mirror* (p.13)? That the reversed canvas can be seen at all elucidates a fundamental condition of painting. They're largely intended to be seen in daylight. The appeal of the reversed canvas is that it exposes the side that is usually turned

to the darkness of the wall. What meanings cling to that hidden side? Well of course it changes. If one walks around the Rijkmuseum in Amsterdam one encounters perhaps a dozen paintings of the eighteenth or nineteenth century in which the featuring of backs of paintings in salons and so forth is clearly to highlight the social act of evaluating their front surfaces. Their backs are turned to us only so that we can see and identify with the enthusiastic connoisseurship of the onlookers. The pleasure of viewing is generalised and abstracted into a social credential in this way. The masterpiece of this genre is Watteau's *Gersaint's Shopsign* (1720), the finest of all signboards, showing customers in a fashionable art dealer's shop examining mirrors as much as paintings. The equation makes the simple point that paintings are mirrors of their owners' good taste.

By 1885 with Cézanne's self-portrait *Cézanne à la Palette*, something different is happening. Like Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, the whole of one side of this canvas is taken up with the reverse side of part of the canvas we are looking at, but the social dimension of spectatorship has disappeared. Standing behind his canvas with his palette confronting the viewer like a shield, Cézanne - who could not be sure he would ever have spectators for his paintings - shows himself dividing his attention between the canvas he is painting and the scene we witness as a result. He is not building a relationship with us but with a closed world reflected in a mirror. There is an increasing rectangularity from the floating, random hues on the wall behind his head, to the rounded cranium itself, to the palette, to the reversed canvas, to the complete rectangle of the real canvas. The increase of definition emulates self-expression as the hand, guided by mind and eye, reaches the canvas whose face is turned away from us. The eyes squint because the expression represents a frozen shuttling between the canvas and the scene it represents. If the purpose was to reproduce exactly what he saw, the subjectivity of the artist is also captured in the arrested action of painting himself. The reversed canvas seems to let us into his thoughts, which are nothing but the process of capturing the scene he has painted.

Meyer Schapiro has pointed out how the 'rigorous and forced cohesion' of such a painting 'is what the Cubists admired, amongst other things, in Cézanne.' But if we follow the reversal of canvases into Analytic Cubism then clearly it is Cézanne's flawlessly mimetic world that it abandons. Take Picasso's famous late analytic work *Ma Jolie* (1911-12). Cannot every iridescent plane of which the woman and her zither are composed also be read as a canvas and its edge? The mutual definition of the real canvas and its reversed appearance in *Cézanne à la Palette* depended on the torque between the flat plane of the former and the inclined plane of the latter. In *Ma Jolie* that torque has snapped, so that every edge might be a canvas twisting or tipping into a mentalised relativity of space in which points of view are multiplied. Paul's work has surely turned the corner into modernism, so can

we follow it into these Cubist effects? I think not, for his diagrammatic designs have nothing to do with a multiplied point of view that swing the spectator round kinetically and subjectively as if s/he were part of a mobile. There's something more absolute, less relativistic, about the paradoxes of his fictive world. Here the hidden side in architecture might help us.

For the Italian architectural critic Manfredo Tafuri in the opening chapter of *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (1990), Giovanni Battista Piranesi's altar of San Basilio (1765) in Santa Maria del Priorato, Rome, represents a fundamental starting point for modernist architecture. Facing the community of the faithful in one direction, the globe with the statuary group of the saint's flight inserted in the pyramidal altar ensures symbolic plenitude within a subjective experience of space, but in drawing attention to its hidden side, consisting of a bare sphere and a solid figure embracing it, the two sides conspire to 'nothing more than a mechanism that flaunts its duplicity':

As the hidden face of the altar, as a concealed aspect *to be discovered*, in contrast with the triumphal exhibition of the recto, the verso of the altar of the Priorato reveals completely the internal dialectic of Piranesi's 'virtuous wickedness.' What is given as evident, as an immediate visual stimulus from a *common* point of view, reappears purified, rendered pure intellectual structure, on the reverse side, on the *hidden* side. But this structural essentiality, this revelation of the laws that govern the rhetorical emphasis of the "machine" that faces the nave of the church, can be achieved only by a deliberate act, performed by one who refuses to be deceived by the 'evident' aspect of things.

No other work of Piranesi's succeeds, as well as the altar of the church of the Knights of Malta, in rendering so violently explicit the ultimate essence of his research. What the two faces, *together*, of the altar of San Basilio make brutally clear is the discovery of the *principle of contradiction*.

It is Piranesi's deliberate contradictions that heralds for Tafuri 'the dialectical becoming of avant-garde art: of that art which... "can only destroy itself" and which "only by destroying itself can constantly renew itself.'

Paul would insist that his own work depends more on paradox than contradiction, since the exposure of his artifice also contributes to the illusion. The work that is shown 'behind the scenes' on the reversed canvas reinforces the illusion of solidity when we would expect it to destroy it, and yet is a world apart from the perspectival relativity of Cubism and that is closer

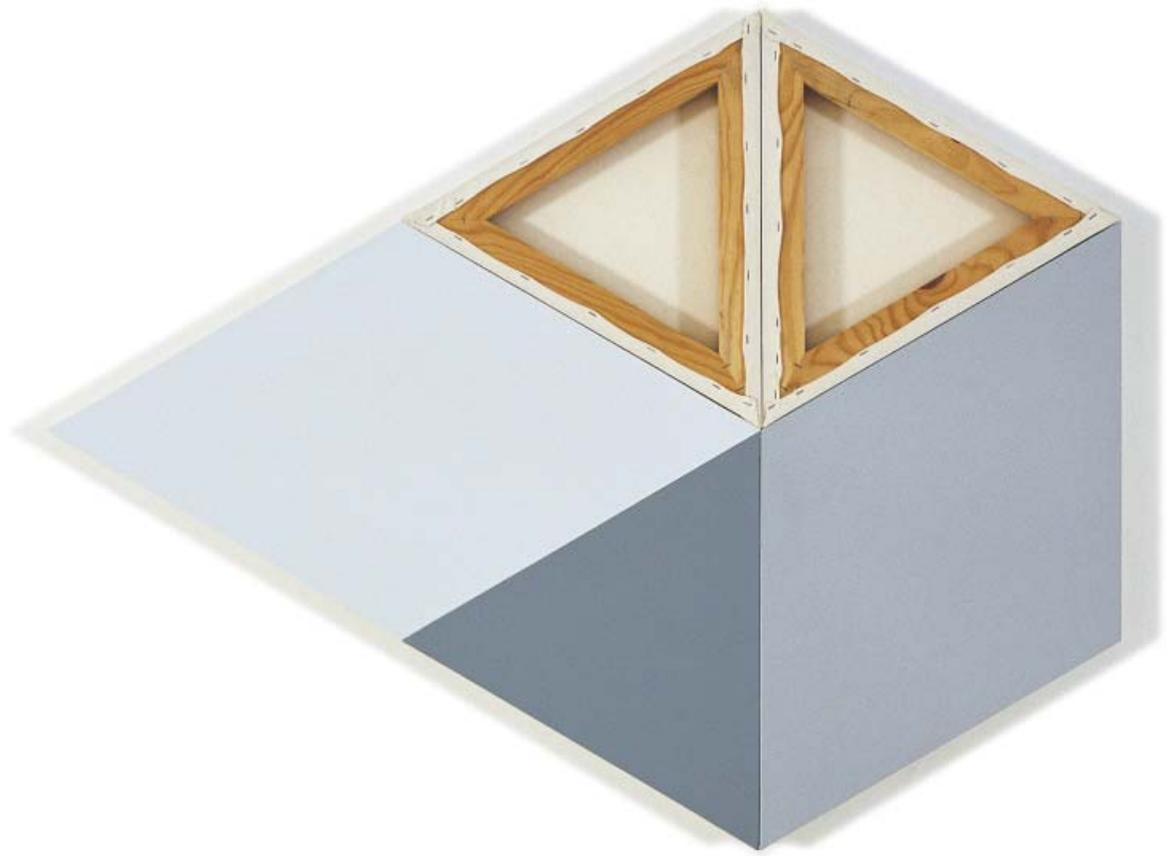
to the stark duality of Piranesi's abstract geometrical structures. The almost exaggerated clarity of his forms is the result of orthogonal projections whose lines of sight, according to *The Australian Engineering Drawing Handbook* Paul uses, 'are parallel to each other (station point at an infinite distance from the projection plane), and perpendicular to the projection plane. The object must be oriented such that a principal axis is perpendicular to the projection plane.' Through such a method Paul avoids the convergence of sight lines upon the eye of the viewer that gives even the multiplied perspectives of Cubism the sense of a world set up to coincide with our own unique position in space. *A Round Mirror* (p.13), for example, is devised so as to give what the manual would call 'the best overall description of the object', especially since its 'top' has been removed to hang by its side so as to show both its interior and how its form might be completed. Within a diagrammatic space our eyes are constantly invited to place the 'lid' on the form and take it off again, but the reversed canvas also ensures that these objects are perceived as real objects hanging on the wall. It is their orthogonal projection that puts Paul's forms into 'a world of their own' which sharpens the paradox of them hanging so substantially in our world of real space.

If all the works in the show possess a family resemblance, it is because they share a common light source at top right. This, Paul points out, showing more of his mild optimism, is where the sun rises. The engineering mode also reflects structural package designs, but not in any garrulous Pop Art sense. There is a functionality in the remote suggestion of a periscope in *A Large Window* (p.11), of a geodesic dome in *A Round Mirror* and in the 'S-bend' of *No Answer*, but they are machines whose real efficiency is the generation of artistic paradox. The clarity, rationality, and functionality of the engineering mode sharpens the duality of playful comedy that liberates it into art. Without the industrial rigour the paradoxical mystery would not be so keenly felt.

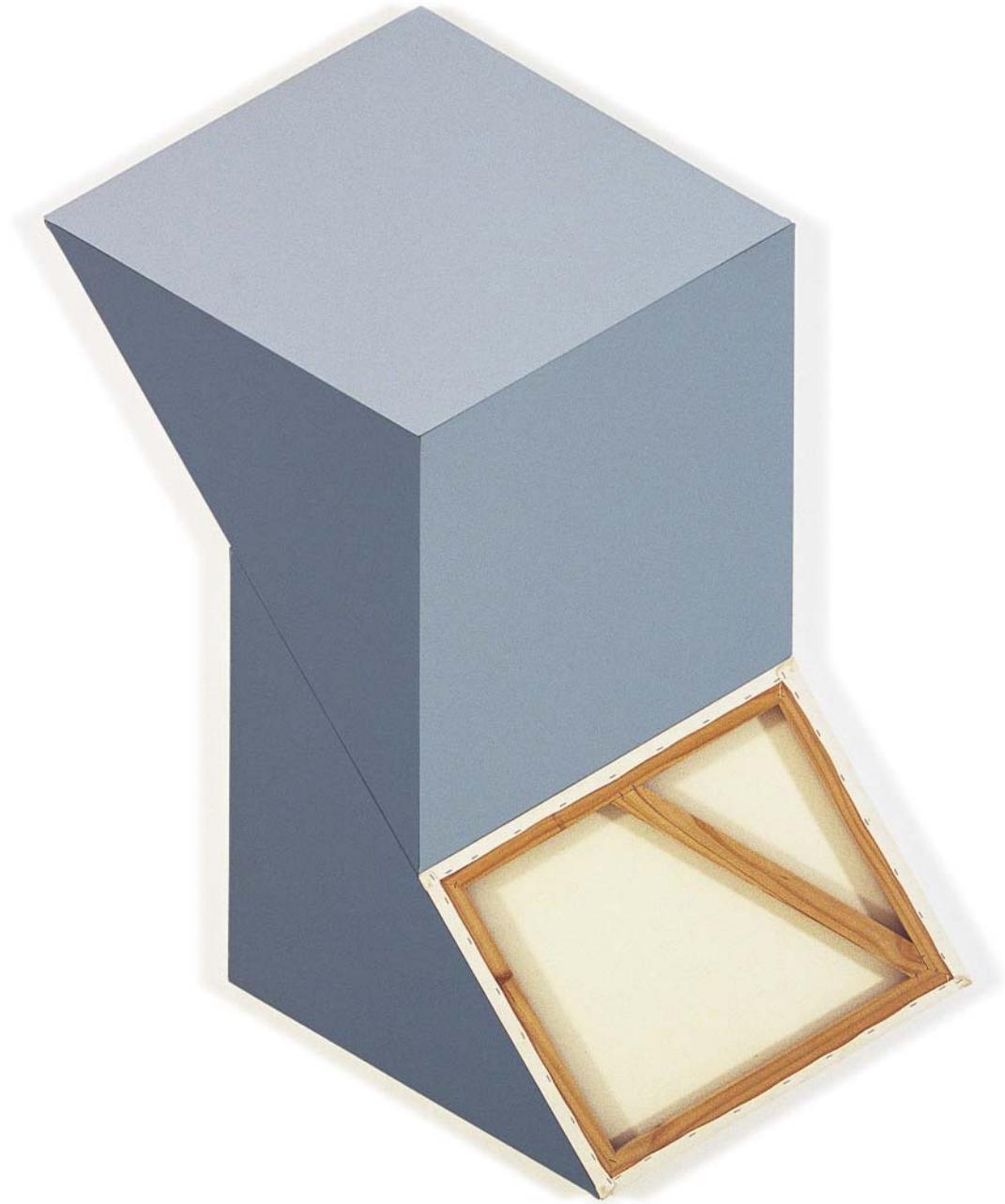
The herring in the series called '*... to catch a herring*' (p.21-27) is clearly a red one, whatever the actual colour. The grey and the red series flipped resolutely into and out of illusion. These hover much more tensely between contradictory volumes, open at the bottom, closed at the top. The artifice shows all along the length of the illusions because, unlike the other series, there are no 'cover straps' to hold the canvas above the staples that here press through it. You're *supposed* to see the staples pressing through the canvas. If they eschew functionality, such effects also shaft the ideology of pure art, while the discordant colours set up a clash between ordered and random principles of composition. Hence the depth of the diagonal strips from the perpendicular is calculated by a regular ratio while their length is determined by throws of a dice. Taken from an Atelier colour chart, the closed upper ends are tints, the tops of the strips are pure colour and the sides are shades. Their colours blare like the upper and lower register of truck horns, though they also stream like taillights in a photograph. The titles are paradoxical again, for the works

do not lay in wait like traps, but come out at you in double directions like flat and hollow fingers constructing a mathematical space our bodies don't quite share. *The White Owl* (p.29), the last work in the show, appeals to our memory as a dog-eared page whose colour recalls the buried passions obliquely signified by the red series. It's the only work that purports to show, not the interior but the back of its own structure, folded over as a casual, fallible crease upon a utilitarian logic. Through the writing of this essay the history of reversed canvases has helped me to define Paul's works by contrast rather than analogy, yet what Paul calls these 'constructed canvases' do seem to offer a fundamental questioning of the nature of painting by stepping aside from it and exposing its infrastructure.

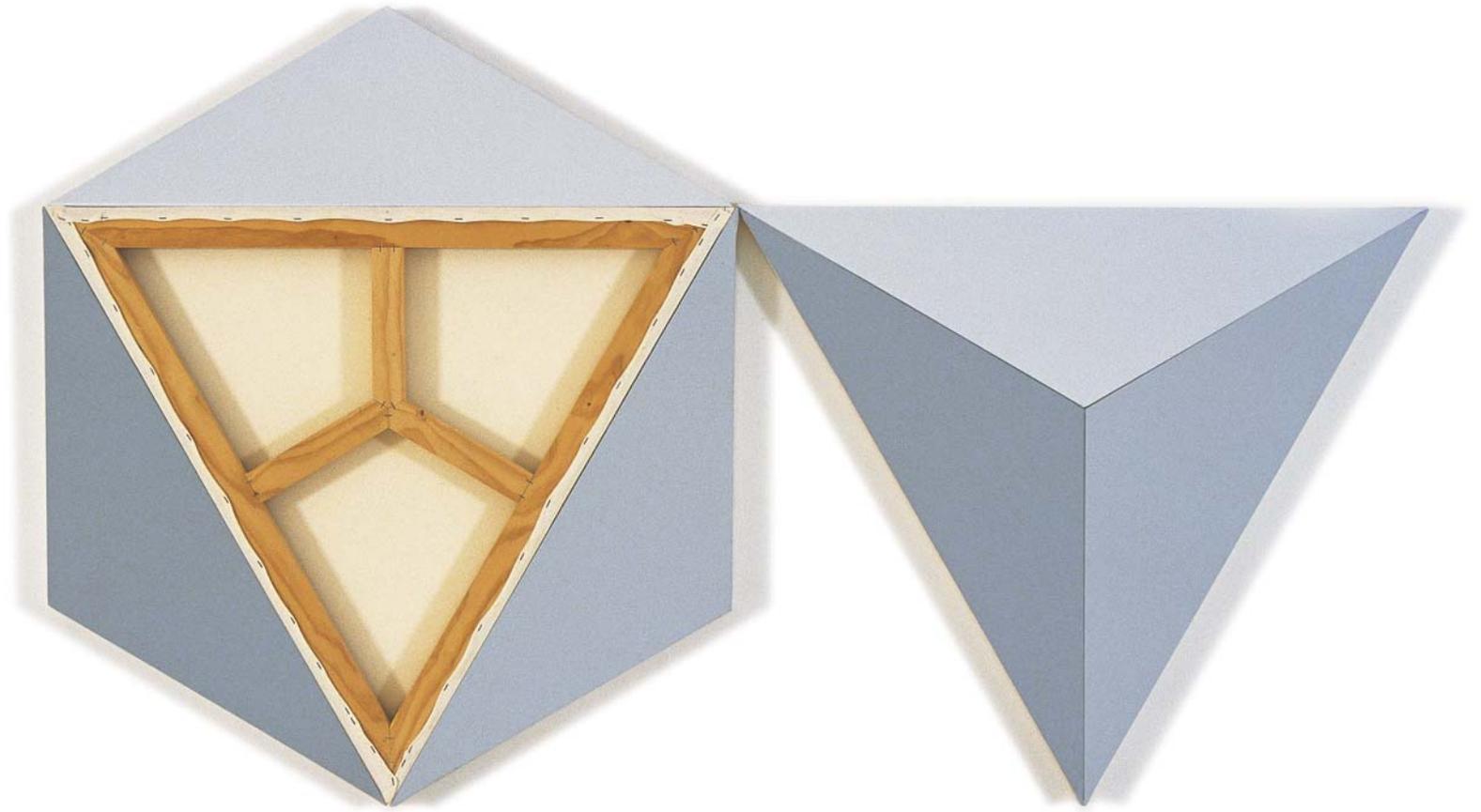
Richard Read



10 **a large window** / acrylic, canvas, pine / 158 x 132cm / 2002



12 **a round mirror** / acrylic, canvas, pine / 104 x 90 + 78 x 90cm / 2002



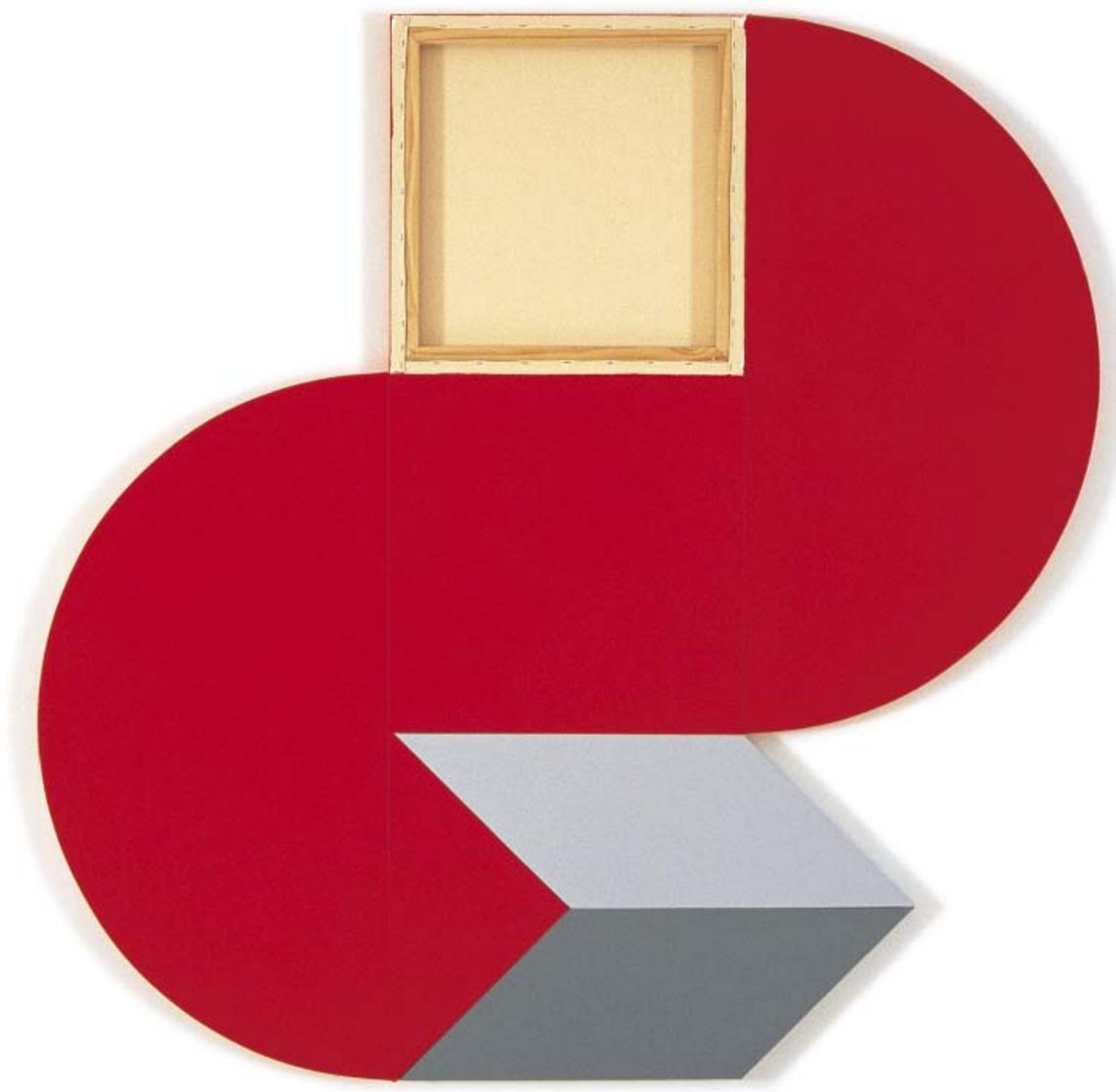
14 **the last leaf** / acrylic, canvas, pine / 203 x 126cm / 2003



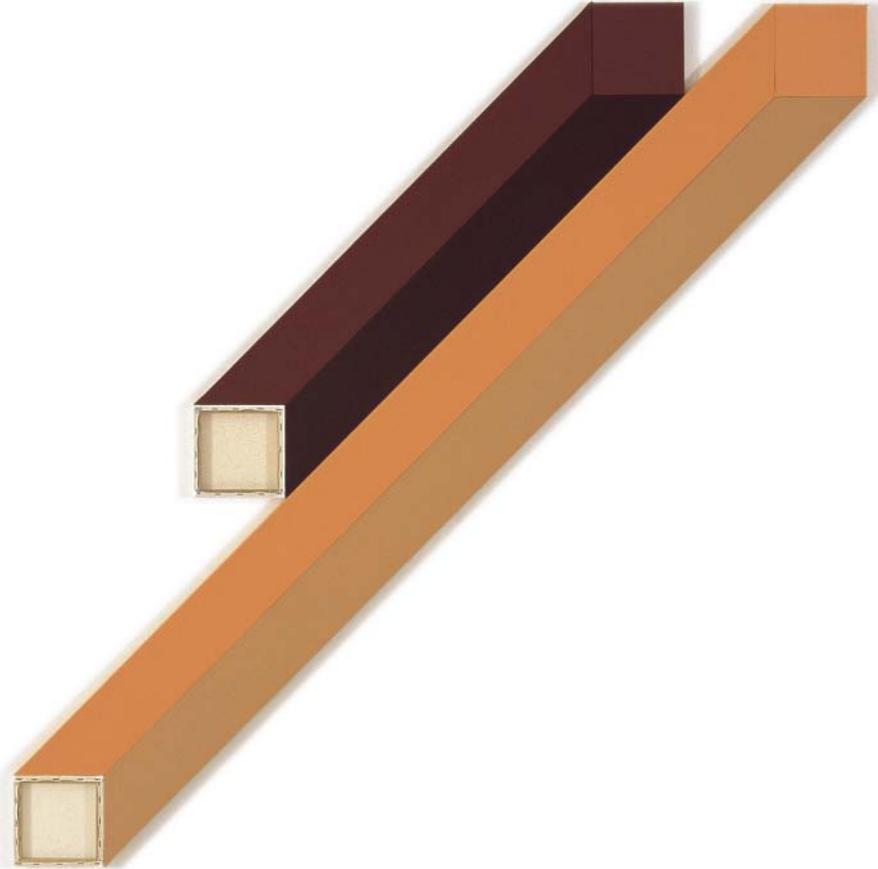
16 **the loving calm** / acrylic, canvas, pine / 41 x 203cm / 2003



18 **no answer** / acrylic, canvas, pine / 181 x 181cm / 2003

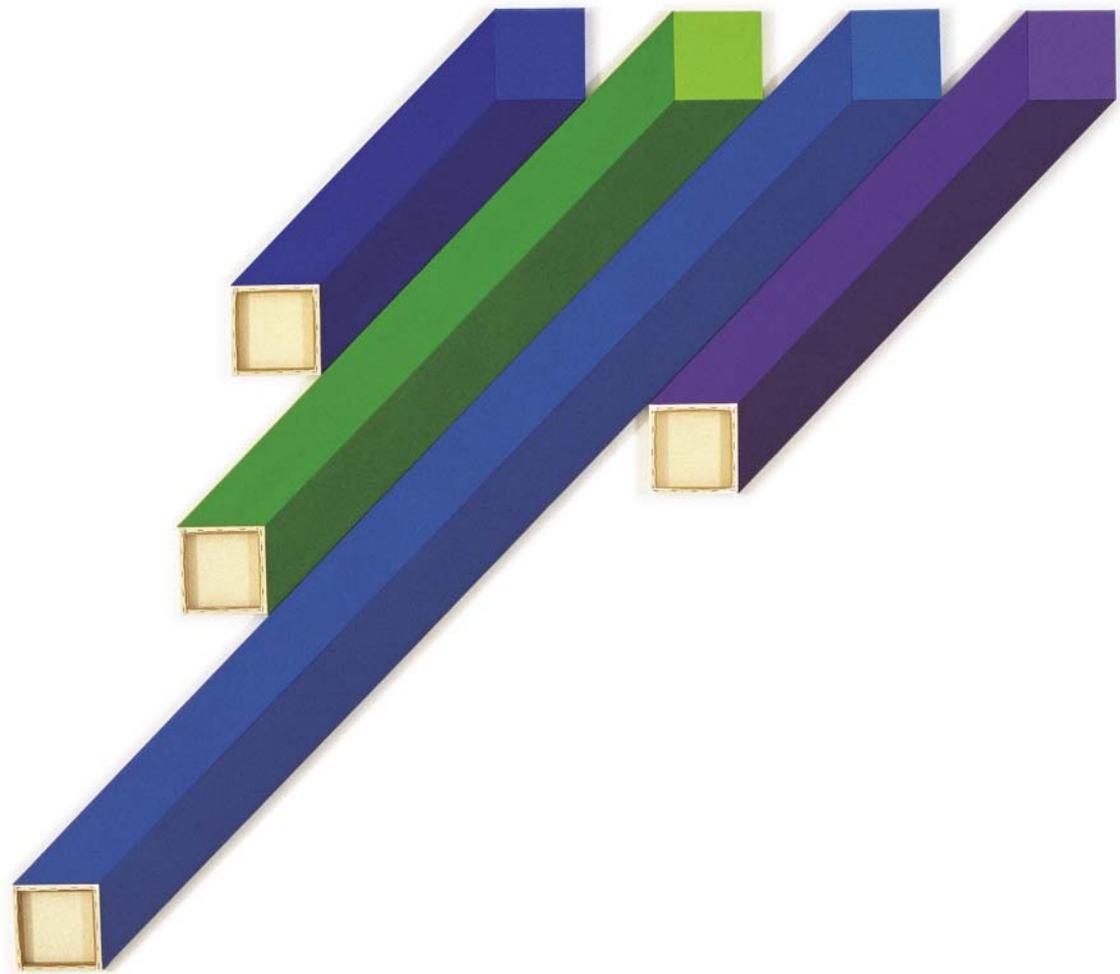


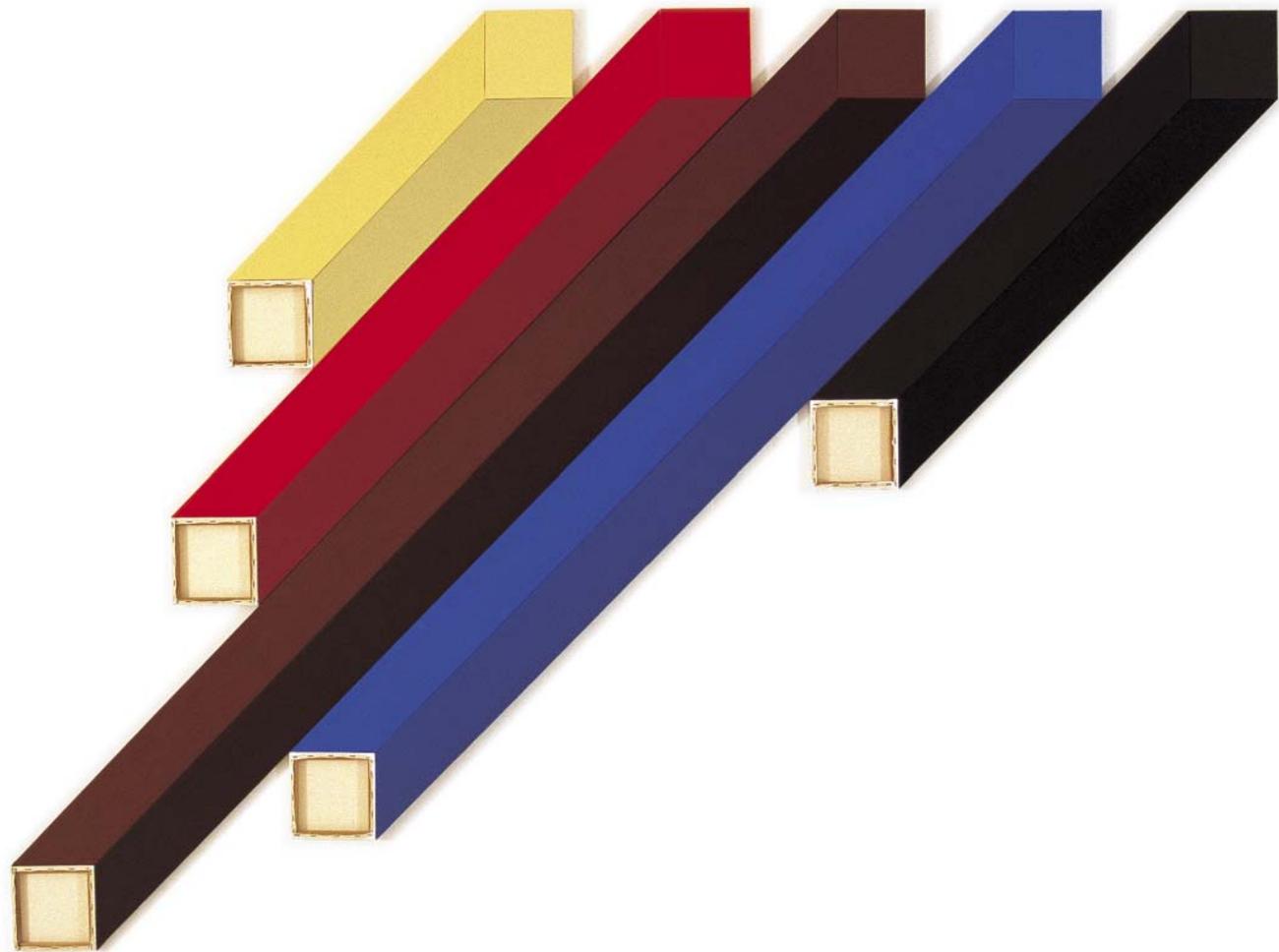
... to catch a herring #2 / acrylic, calico, tasmanian oak / 140 x 140cm / 2003





... to catch a herring #4 / acrylic, calico, tasmanian oak / 160 x 190cm / 2003





28 **the white owl** / acrylic, masonite, pine / 31 x 21.5cm / 2003



paul hinchliffe

- 1952** born in Derbyshire, England
- 1955** started 'colouring in' with books from Mrs. C.
- 1957** went to Cresswell Primary School
- 1960** went out on site with Dad
- 1961** moved to Australia / learned to swim
- 1963** returned to England
- 1965** schooldays / art with Alan Shaw / drawing with 'Chunky'
- 1967** failed English Language 'O' level / fell in love with h.
- 1970** studied at Newton Abbot College of Art
- 1973** returned to Australia
- 1976** stood on top of Rakshi Peak, Nepal
- 1978** left travel journals in New Delhi, Lahore, Teheran and Istanbul
- 1980** married L.
- 1981** Robin born on November 16
- 1983** Rachel born on September 26
- 1986** completed etchings - 'Artemis, Apollo and me'
- 1988** field trip to the Pilbara with L. B.
- 1990** started working on 'smoking heads'
- 1992** Dad died September 16
- 1993** separated from L.
- 1995** built cameras for 'sixty second self'
- 1997** first 'red herring' paintings
- 1999** founded Gallery Heimatlos with Ernst Ellemunter
- 2001** 'did it' with Diller + Scofidio
- 2003** ... to catch a herring. Span Galleries, Melbourne / found h. again

acknowledgements



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PAUL HINCHLIFFE ...to catch a herring

SPAN Galleries Melbourne 5 - 13 August 2003

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'Many thanks to Guy and Margaret Vinciguerra for their friendship and support, Allison Archer for her ruthless efficiency and very special thanks to Helen Morgan for her generosity, energy and encouragement.'

paul hinchliffe

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