

LOST IN SPACE

Alexandra Kennedy



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

HOLES IN SPACE

The 1960s science fiction TV series *Lost in Space* tells the story of the space adventures of an astronaut family and their robot stranded on an alien world. The group, shipwrecked on their way to Alpha Centuri, the 'first port of call' in interstellar travel, find themselves in a sort of 'no place'. Further adventures in their quest for intelligent life see them trying to find their way back through space. Their experience is that of being lost in a void, an empty space. The story can be read as a cipher for the virtual space of television itself. That is, those 'holes in space' created with the developments of the industrial revolution during the early modern era and the advent of telemachines – telegraphy, radios and, eventually, television and cyberspace. These all create infinite, limitless spaces in which there is much activity but which at the same time are an experience of emptiness. Such spaces are a mirror of the infinite void of the cosmos.

AESTHETIC OF THE VOID

Since early modernity an emptying out of space has been occurring in painting. Represented by an aesthetic programme of absence and of the void, the denial of the image in space is an iconoclastic gesture with a long history in Western art. Revived again in painting during the late 19th and early 20th century, it was acted out in a range of 'last paintings' and 'zero' gestures by artists such as Malevich and Rodchenko; Mondrian's ideas concerning the dissolution of all art forms including painting into art as environment;¹ art's abandonment in the early part of the twentieth century by Marcel Duchamp who saw the readymade as a negation of painting; Ad Reinhardt's 'last painting'; and, other such 'zero' gestures. By the 1960s a subversion of this programme of negation, which in

a Greenburgian sense had painting going *somewhere*, was underway. By many artists and critics the zero gesture and other acts of negation were seen to be going nowhere and “condemned to an increasingly conservative rehearsal of strategies and gestures that had lost their original significance.”²

PROJECTS OF INFINITY

Out of this impasse – beginning in the 1960s and continuing to the present day – practices have emerged which reassert the possibilities for painting as a site for criticality. Many of these practices self-consciously engage with painting’s own position, genealogy and historical status.

Among the range of practices addressing the ‘end of subject matter’ in painting are ‘projects of infinity’. In 1967 Oliver Mosset painted a series of identical paintings of a black circle in the centre of a white square canvas, with the intention at the time of repeating this act indefinitely; and Daniel Buren, in the 1970s, began painting endless stripes in a sort of parody of the painted gesture. The conceptual artist On Kawara’s project, his *Today Series* begun in 1966, goes on – or at least has the potential to go on – ‘forever’. This project, in which a monochrome surface is inscribed with the date of the day on which the painting is made, in the language and calendrical conventions of the country in which it is being executed, is engaged with existential concerns, dealing as it does with notions of space and temporality.

My new work begins a project of infinity, an endless project of recording the universe, beginning with those groups of stars long recognised as constellations which, while understood by some as having a mythological dimension, for others merely define imaginary regions of the sky. The groupings of stars drawn into constellations represent a heterogeneous description of space – they do not map time or space in a consistent or homogeneous manner – pointing merely to groupings which lie in approximately the same direction.

SPACE AND REPRESENTATION

These paintings describe in-between spaces, spaces which are between the conceived and the lived or

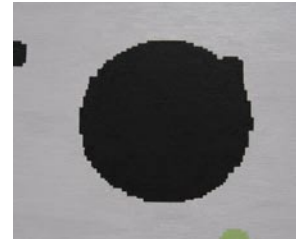


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

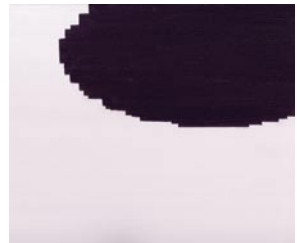


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

experienced. That is, they are between 'representations of space' and 'representational space' as defined by Henri Lefebvre.³ Representations of space are the conceptual spaces of the architect, map maker or cartographer. They are abstract, conceptual spaces. Constellations are not representations of space in this sense, yet they have become a map of sorts. Existing in the consciousness of humanity since 5000 BCE, they have achieved the status of a fixed thing, of an organising principle, an abstract concept.

Representational space is the lived space of experience, "spaces which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate."⁴ Suggestive of the imaginary

and the symbolic in the visual motifs employed – holes, passages, empty space – and of existing outside of notions of the temporal, these works attempt to evoke displacements which are fluidic, and at times, dreamlike. Established themes in painting such as consistency of visual formulae also begin to become displaced by a programme which favours a breaking down of a sense of consistency or visual cohesiveness and is rather directional, situational, relational or qualitative. As such, the work, in a show and accompanied by this text, moves between the idea of a space and the experience of a space.

- 1 Piet Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence" (1920) quoted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory, 1900 -2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). "The future of the New Plastic and its true realization in painting lies in chromoplastic in architecture..." (290) and: "The new sculpture and architecture must destroy the work of art as an object or thing" (291).
- 2 John Gaiger, "Post Conceptual Painting: Gerhard Richter's extended leave taking", in Gill Perry and Paul Wood (eds), *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press and The Open University, 2004), 89.
- 3 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 38-39.
- 4 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 39.

Figure 1: Alexandra Kennedy, *Lyra and Vega*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 2: Alexandra Kennedy, *Delphinus and Aquila*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 3: Alexandra Kennedy, *Somewhere near Deneb*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 4: Alexandra Kennedy, *Black Hole (2)*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 5: Alexandra Kennedy, *Black Hole (1)*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 6: Alexandra Kennedy, *Deep Space*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 7: Alexandra Kennedy, *Lost in Space*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Alexandra Kennedy is a painter and Lecturer in Art Theory & History in the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand, where she is completing a Master of Fine Arts.