



emma  
coulter

### Spatial deconstructions

Emma Coulter's art practice is an exploration of the expanded field of painting. With an eye for colour harmonies and working with a reductive palette, the artist creates site-specific works, which she terms 'spatial deconstructions'. The impulse of harmonising architectural space through colour and form has its roots in modernist abstraction, for example in the experimental application of painting to architectural interiors in the projects associated with De Stijl. Coulter applies these serial approaches to colour and form in site-specific artworks that respond to urban spaces, such as *spatial deconstruction #24 (christmas wrapper)* 2020 at Richmond City Hall, where printed banners wrapped around the four columns of the building; or the work *spatial deconstruction #25 (perceptual vortex)* 2021 at the Footscray Community Arts Centre, consisting of twelve rectangular bands painted on the brick façade of the building. The artist explores the decorative function of colour, reframing its pejorative associations through an application that favours colour as a panacea, and as a way of creating optimistic and exuberant experiences in social spaces.

In gallery-based works, such as *spatial deconstruction #21 (portals)* 2019 at the Museum of Brisbane, Coulter utilises the existing architectural frames as supports to create site-bound paintings. The artist describes this process as responding to the space and to the specific painterly intervention that unfolds in terms of logic, 'where decisions need to be rationalised in relation to the architectural space' (Coulter, 2017). In this museum intervention, hard-edge triangular and quadrilateral geometric forms articulated in red, orange, yellow, green, light blue, dark blue, pink and purple, wrap around the surfaces of the gallery walls and into the voids created by multiple entry/exit points.

These spatialised paintings expand on Coulter's ongoing practice of producing modest sized abstract works, seen in the series *ornamental symmetrie* 2018 with three variations in green, blue and magenta. These works were developed as part of her 2018 exhibition, *Composites*, which considered decorative and domestic approaches to abstraction, and combined a series of bespoke framed works with patterned wall painting. These works maintain the logic of Coulter's practice, utilising a distinctive colour palette and simple variations of geometric form to create visual vibrations and optical effects. This focus on perception and colour optics is affirmed in the titling of artworks, with references to rainbows and prisms, and her practice's clear references to the legacies of Op Art. An important





PREVIOUS PAGE: Emma Coulter, *spatial deconstruction #26 (window intervention)* 2021, ink pigment on vinyl adhesive polymer, aluminium composite panels, wood, existing window boxes. Photo: Louis Lim.

HEADSHOT: Emma Coulter with *spatial deconstruction #25* 2021, Footscray Community Arts Centre. Photo: Laura Du Ve.

ABOVE: Emma Coulter, *ADAPTABLE CONSTRUCTION #2* 2015, gloss enamel on steel, installation view at Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne. Photo: Emma Coulter.

RIGHT: Emma Coulter, *ornamental symmetrie grün green* 2018, synthetic polymer paint on archival gesso board with artist hand painted green frame.

All images courtesy of Emma Coulter.

artist in this context is Bridget Riley whose abstract painting practice established over 60 years exemplifies an explorative and refined approach to colour harmony and optical play.

Other artistic precedents include Anne Truitt, whose minimalist objects combined painting and sculpture, monochromatic colour and geometric form, and who established a serial logic to art making by hand. This influence is evident in Coulter's works such as *ADAPTABLE CONSTRUCTION #2* 2015, which aligns seven rectangular steel frames, coated in gloss enamel in a spectrum of green, light blue, dark blue, magenta, red, orange and yellow. These frames function like a series of windows through which to look, and construct a playful intervention between colour, form and space. For this exhibition, Coulter has created a new work titled *spatial deconstruction #26 (window intervention)* 2021, which further explores abstraction through the intersections of painting and sculpture. These objects are situated in the glass window boxes of the art museum, occupying a transitional space between the interior and exterior of the building. In this way, the work relates to *spatial deconstruction #25* and the artist's desire to create a 'metaphorical window' between the art space and the wider community. Across her expanded painting practice, Coulter sets about working within limited bounds to demonstrate potentially unlimited permutations of selective colours and geometric forms across surfaces, spaces and contexts. The practice presents a provocation about the role that colour plays in contemporary everyday life, following a trajectory of modernist abstraction and the quest to integrate art into public and private spheres.

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