



Denise Green: An Artist's Odyssey

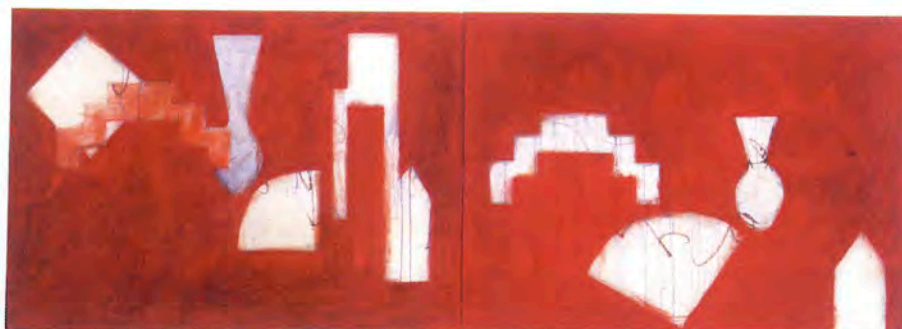
## *Denise Green: An Artist's Odyssey*

Macmillan Art Publishing, Australia;  
University of Minnesota Press, USA  
ISBN: 9781921394591  
208pp  
RRP: \$39.95



Above: Denise Green, *Blue Orient*, 1988, oil on canvas, 198 x 203cm. Private Collection.

Below: Denise Green, *Deposition*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 112 x 315cm. Collection of Kathie Sutherland.



**H**ow do you forge and sustain an international career as a painter (develop a personal language, survive economic ups and downs, secure exhibitions, attract collectors) and — here's the tricky bit — do it alone, outside the gallery system? Welcome to the world of Denise Green, Australian abstract artist-in-America.

Her latest book covers just such a life. Part autobiography, part multiauthored biography, it reviews forty years of evolution in the career of the artist. Green is candid about family tensions, artistic struggles and decisions, and the need to reshape her career as her vision evolved and circumstances changed. She discusses the mentors, the networking and friends won and lost.

There are chapters by prominent critics and curators giving an insight into her work and creating a historical perspective. Green's interview with Kerry Stokes, who owns several of her paintings, is included and there is reference to the curator John Stringer's influence on both the artist and Stokes as collector.

In 1965, fleeing the confines of Queensland and the stultifying life of an office worker, the then nineteen-year-old sailed on RMS *Oransay* to London with no clear thought of what the future held or any idea of becoming an artist. An intended 'pause in Paris' led to study at l'École des Beaux Arts, the Sorbonne and finally New York in the 1970s — a time when that city was the epicentre of the art world and abstraction was ascendant. Here she studied at the progressive Hunter College, under such luminaries as Mark Rothko, Tony Smith and Robert Motherwell, who were challenging the prevailing philosophies of

the day, arguing against the 'painting is dead' tenet of faculty member Robert Morris and powerful critic Clement Greenberg's 'don't-mention-the-war' philosophy (no reference to anything outside the frame; serious artists don't discuss their work). Green is an abstract artist who defies the narrow description/proscription of the tradition, who imbues her mark-making, ciphers and symbols with multiple implications.

The first major exhibition of her work was in the Whitney Museum's *New Image Painting* of 1978, when that gallery's policy was to show only American artists. But throughout, Green always considered herself an Australian artist, continually exhibiting here and coming home year after year, while actively pursuing shows in USA and Europe.

*Denise Green: An Artist's Odyssey* is aptly named. More than a journey, an odyssey is an adventurous voyage in search of enlightenment. Green's odyssey has seen her come to appreciate non-western traditions, with trips to China, India, Sri Lanka, and a synchronicity with Aboriginal Art.

She is candid in revealing the prerequisites in going it alone: the need to be actively and intellectually involved in dealing with European curators, to publish writings and to engage face to face with collectors and museum directors. The call to become more entrepreneurial in the 1990s saw a major shift in her approach, when having to secure some part of the funding for exhibitions had her turn collectors into sponsors. No mean feat.

"Vitality, I learned how to structure a different kind of career, bypassing the power structure of the gallery system in which the dealer acts as a representative on behalf of the artist who is discouraged from developing direct contacts with collectors."

In all, an enthralling read and highly instructive for any aspiring artist.

*Betsy Brennan*