

ABSTRACTI♀N

By Emma Langridge

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In 1968, the National Gallery of Victoria opened its doors on its inaugural exhibition, *The Field*. This was a landmark event: a comprehensive survey of abstraction in Australia.

The work of forty artists was presented, including hard-edge, geometric, colour and flat abstraction. The intention was to underscore a vastly underappreciated genre which favoured form, line and colour, whilst eschewing representation and figuration.

In 2018, *The Field* was recreated. All attempts were made to replicate the original exhibition, down to the silver walls of the gallery space.

However, by recontextualising the exhibition in the 21st century, the curators also reiterated the gender imbalance, underscoring it, emphasising it. Of the forty artists, thirty-seven were men - and three were women. Normana Wight, Janet Dawson, Wendy Paramor were the only females whose work was included.

This was less than five years ago.

We live in a time where we collectively look to the past and turn over rocks, attempting to rediscover what was there all along, We reinterpret, rewrite and rediscover what was lost, redressing past inequalities in order to provide a fairer assessment of what really happened, and to move forward with the intent to be fairer. We are aware that so much has been omitted from the history books.

In the year 2023, an exhibition highlighting the work of women abstract artists in Australia should not be needed. These artists work daily at their practice, which is also to say that it is an *everyday* activity.

So, though it should not be needed, for now it is absolutely necessary.

We need to keep saying it, with the ultimate goal of not needing to say it.