

## MEDIA RELEASE

14 December 2020



# BLUE OVER TIME: ROBERT OWEN—A SURVEY

27 February - 23 May 2021

*Heide Museum of Modern Art presents the first major Melbourne survey in twenty years of acclaimed Australian artist Robert Owen*



**Melbourne, Australia:** The first survey in Melbourne for twenty years of eminent Australian artist **Robert Owen** will be presented by Heide Museum of Modern Art from 27 February to 23 May 2021. *Blue Over Time* will explore Owen's 60-year career, encompassing his work from the 1960s and 1970s living in Greece and London, as well as featuring new and more recent paintings and sculptural installations.

Situated in Heide's main galleries, the exhibition will present over thirty key works including a new iteration of the large-scale wall work *Afterglow*, made especially for the Heide space.

Robert Owen has been at the forefront of contemporary art practice since emerging in the 1960s. Owen's diverse practice traverses an ambitious and far-reaching range of mediums and contexts, from painting, sculpture, photography and installation, to public art and architectural commissions. He represented Australia at the 38th Venice Biennale in 1978 and has received several of Australia's highest honours in the visual arts including an Australian Council Emeritus Award for lifelong service to the visual arts in 2003.

Grounded in geometry and abstraction, Owen's striking works are inspired by his wide-ranging interests—encompassing philosophy and psychology, science and mathematics, music and literature—and reflect his life-long curiosity about the world. Underpinning his practice is a poetic and intuitive exploration of the expressive potential of light, colour and space.

**Heide Museum of Modern Art Director Lesley Harding said,** "*Heide is delighted to present this landmark survey of Robert Owen's wide-ranging and influential practice. The exhibition reveals many of the central preoccupations of his artistic*

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*career and the breadth of his work, from luminous constructed reliefs to perceptually dazzling multi-hued paintings, to mathematically elaborated open-form sculptures, in a display that is materially rich and profoundly beautiful.”*

Through key works and a rich archival display, the exhibition *Blue Over Time* presents major themes, such as the intersection of art and science in Owen’s work, and his long engagement with colour as a tool to express the inexpressible. This includes his signature use of Ultramarine Blue, as seen his use of bright blue pigment powder in the installation *Hammer on Rock #1* (1982).

Owen’s use of blue is inspired by his early experience as a young man of Italian master Giotto’s Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Speaking on the colour blue, **artist Robert Owen said**, *“Blue is the colour of infinite presence. It has a realm of oneness that is accompanied by an elevated feeling of grace acting directly on the nervous system - beyond representation.”*

Works such as the constructed relief *Fresh Morning (d’Aix-en-Provence)* (1972–75) and sculptures *Receptors and Transmitters, from the series Persephone’s Towers* (c. 1985) highlight the beginnings of his perennial experimentation with prismatic light and technological materials developed in London with the British Constructionists. In London Owen continued his explorations of colour and light inspired by the effects of a rare lunar eclipse, which he witnessed while living in the Greek island Hydra in the 1960s. Here he was part of an expat community that included Australian writers George Johnston and Charmian Clift, Canadian poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen and American poet Jack Hirschman.

Throughout his life, music has been one of Robert Owen’s great passions, leading to his inquiry into the relationship of colour to sound, and ideas of synesthesia, as explored by Russian abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky, among others. The exhibition features several geometrically conceived abstract paintings drawn from Owen’s ongoing series *Music for the Eyes*. Some were made in direct response to the patterns, structures and emotional textures of particular musical pieces—by composers such as Estonian Arvo Pärt, known for his music of ‘little bells’, and Armenian-born Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, a mystic and spiritual teacher from the early twentieth-century. Reflecting Owen’s enduring love of jazz music, the syncopated rhythms in *Blue Note #2* (2016) are also partly a homage to modernist Dutch artist Piet Mondrian and his famous jazz-inspired painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–43).

*Blue Over Time* will present a new iteration of *Afterglow*, a large-scale wall work that combines the gallery’s architectural surfaces, geometry and paint to create an immersive experience that aims to heighten the viewer’s sensory and emotional reactions through colour. The largescale painting *Cadence #1 (a short span of time)* is being shown in Melbourne for the first time. In making this remarkable work, Owen sought to record his feelings over an eighty-day period, intuitively matching colours with moods to create a perceptually transfixing inventory of his inner experience.

**Heide Museum of Modern Art Senior Curator Sue Cramer said**, *“I am deeply honoured to be working alongside such a distinguished artist as Robert Owen to create this exhibition. Owen’s remarkable and highly influential career has been sustained over several decade and marked by a spirit of openness and generosity. I am constantly in awe of the ceaseless rigour and energy that Owen brings each day to his work, and of the sheer visual and conceptual beauty of his art, qualities which will be celebrated throughout our display.”*

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Heide Museum of Modern Art is implementing the physical distancing, capacity limits and increased hygiene measures outlined by the Victorian Government.

## **ENDS**

**MEDIA CONTACT:** For further information or interview requests please contact Megan Bentley, [megan@articulatepr.com.au](mailto:megan@articulatepr.com.au), 0452 214 611 or Claire Martin, [claire@articulatepr.com.au](mailto:claire@articulatepr.com.au), 044 437 588

**IMAGES:** <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/u38udhvd8xrnol3/AABu4M9h19pJu07V4VYMMxzaa?dl=0>

## **Image Caption:**

Robert Owen

*Cadence #1 (a short span of time)* 2003

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

5 panels each 259 x 167.5 cm; 259 x 838 cm overall

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Purchased 2000

## **EXHIBITION DETAILS**

*Blue Over Time: Robert Owen—A Survey*

27 February 2021 - 23 May 2021

Heide Museum of Modern Art, 7 Templestowe Road, Bulleen, VIC 3105

Open Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays, 10am to 5pm. Timed entry tickets can be booked [here](#)  
[heide.com.au](http://heide.com.au)

## **ABOUT HEIDE**

Set on sixteen acres of parkland with Yarra River frontage, Heide Museum of Modern Art, or Heide as it is affectionately known, is one of Australia's most important cultural institutions. Once a significant Wurundjeri gathering place, the property was later a dairy farm before becoming known as a hub for Australian modernist art and writing after it was purchased by art patrons John and Sunday Reed in 1934.

The Reeds opened their home to the most progressive artists of their era, including Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, John Perceval, Charles Blackman and Danila Vassilieff. Nolan's famous Ned Kelly series (1946–47) was painted in the dining room of the Heide farmhouse.

Continuing this spirited legacy, today Heide works to inspire creative talent, collaborating with emerging and mid-career artists as well as celebrating those who have made major contributions to Australian and international art.

## **ABOUT ROBERT OWEN**

Robert Owen studied sculpture under Lyndon Dadswell at the National Art School, Sydney, graduating with honours in 1962. He lived in Greece (1963–66) and London until 1975, when he returned to Sydney. In 1988, he moved to Melbourne, where he held the position of Associate Professor and Head of Sculpture at RMIT University until 2001. Owen's practice includes sculpture, installation, painting, photography and major public commissions. He was awarded a John Moore's Liverpool Exhibition 7 UK prize (1969) and represented Australia along with John Davis and Ken Unsworth at the 38th Biennale of Venice (1978). Owen has received major design awards for public commissions including Webb Bridge, Melbourne in collaboration with architects Denton Corker Marshall, and is represented in numerous public and private collections worldwide. His art practice is characterised by diverse interests, linked through a poetic and intuitive sensitivity to the expressive potential of space, light, colour, context and materials. In 2003, he received the Australian Council Visual Arts/Crafts Emeritus Award for a lifelong service to the visual arts.