

From the collection

Gretchen Albrecht's breakthrough into complete abstraction coincided with a move to bushy Titirangi in the 1972-73.

As the sun went down over the Waitakere Ranges, she watched intense oranges and pinks brewing up in the sky from her kitchen window, and was inspired to work on a sunsetascope scale.

A gutsy chorus of bright acrylic tints floats on raw, unprimed canvas in *Atmospheric Painting* 1973, the demarcation of horizon between sky and land lost in the waves of heady colour. Horizontal bands of heliotrope, emerald green, topaz and cerulean blue saturate the canvas, referring obliquely to local landscape rather than literally representing it.

Suffused colour used in this way has a sensual appeal, but also projects a spatial ambiguity. Instead of her painting being a window onto the world, ordered by linear perspective, Albrecht makes it impossible to attach a specific depth of field or distance to the painted shapes. Rather than concealing the two-dimensionality of her canvas by building up layers of paint on top of it, she emphasises the flatness of its surface plane, staining the canvas with paint so that the texture of the tabby weave is left visible.

Albrecht pioneered this type of lyrical abstraction in New Zealand, where the predominant focus is on process and repetitive compositional strategies. Pursuing the forms and concepts of abstraction ultimately led her away from the rectangular pictorial format into geometrically shaped canvases – ovals and hemispheres.

A 1963 DipFA (Hons) graduate of the Elam School of Fine Arts, Albrecht became a Distinguished Alumna of The University of Auckland in 1999, and was made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to painting the following year.

Atmospheric Painting is currently on show in the foyer of the Gus Fisher Gallery with eight other works by Gretchen Albrecht from The University of Auckland Art Collection. This display has been organised to coincide with the launch of the Holloway Press publication *Journey to Portugal, Poems by Michele Leggott, Images by Gretchen Albrecht* on Wednesday 21 February at 5.30pm.

Linda Tyler



GRETCHEN ALBRECHT, *Atmospheric Painting*, 1973, Acrylic tints on canvas, The University of Auckland Art Collection