



Milan Mrkusich (born 1925) *Painting (Ochre) 1974, acrylic on canvas, 1725 x 1725mm*

In June 1949, the School of Architecture hosted Milan Mrkusich's first-ever public showing of paintings and drawings.

Sixty years later The University of Auckland is again the venue for a new milestone in Mrkusich's career. The exhibition *Trans-Form: the abstract art of Milan Mrkusich* has been curated for the Gus Fisher Gallery by Ed Hanfling and Alan Wright, research

associates of the Art History Department, to mark the publication of their Auckland University Press book, *Mrkusich: The Art of Transformation*.

Astutely, the University acquired one of Mrkusich's masterpieces for its collection shortly after it was made. One of the iconic Corner paintings, *Painting (Ochre) 1974* is a large field of the colour named in the title, worked in acrylic paint with a small brush to

create variations in texture known as scumbling. Four small black triangles reminiscent of the devices used to anchor old snaps in albums appear in the corners.

The works have other associations for viewers. At the private view when the first of this series of works was shown at Barry Lett Galleries in 1969, one of the works was found placed face-up on the desk of the director, right where a blotting pad might belong.

These misreadings of Mrkusich's work are based on an idea of the work of art as a representation of something. Rather than illustrating his world, as an abstract artist Mrkusich was interested in the experience a painting could provide for its viewers. He insisted that his works "[had] meaning other than [being] just formal aesthetic exercises" and pointed to the possibility of a meditational or transcendental experience through the contemplation of art. It seems his intention was to lead viewers to psychic wholeness through considering imagery which conjured completeness and unity.

Mrkusich has described his Corner paintings, usually square and symmetrical in form, as "Jungian and symbolic of the Four". His reference is to Jung's four, symbolic of the earth and the four states of consciousness. The square format relates to Rudolph Koch's *Book of Signs*, where the square is "the emblem of the world and nature" and the "Christian emblem of worldliness symbolised by the number four: the four elements, the four corners of the heavens, the four Evangelists, the four rivers of Paradise".

Twenty works laden with just such symbolic content can be seen in the Gus Fisher Gallery exhibition *Trans-Form*, which is part of the University's contribution to the Auckland Festival on show until 2 May. It is the largest exhibition devoted to the artist's work in a public gallery for 24 years.

Similarly, the accompanying Auckland University Press book authored by Ed Hanfling and Alan Wright is the first major monograph to be published on Mrkusich and is on sale at the Gus Fisher Gallery for \$70.