



ROBERT OWEN
FLICKERING LIGHT



- 1 *Flickering Light #3* 2003, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 1980 x 1980 cm
- 2 *Symmetria* 2003 fibreglass and M1 acrylic, 140 x 130 x 160 cm
- 3 *Re-Vision (Melancolia)* 1987, acrylic, mica and tape on 81 canvas boards, 274 x 274 cm, wood, sand and formica, 48 x 48 x 200 cm
- 4 *Vessel #7 (Memory & logic units)* 1996, painted steel, 150 x 130 x 125 cm
- 5 *Flickering Light #1*, 2004, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 1980 x 1980 cm





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Jumping Dimensions

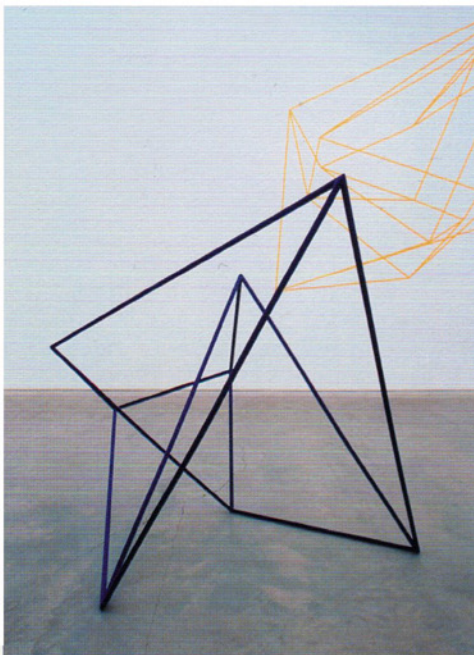
Put six squares together edge to edge in space and a cube appears. Two dimensions fold up into three. The magic of this shift is palpable and has led to many speculations concerning the jump from three dimensions to four and beyond. Most illustrations of this jump confirm its ineffable quality and thereby expose the limits of conventional language. The Necker cube (or figures like those added to section 249 of Wittgenstein's book *Zettel*) revert to the conventions of drawing on a flat plane to suggest three and four dimensional effects.

In 1987, Robert Owen gave this self-reversing loop a summary image. *Re-vision (Melancholia)* consists of eighty-one square canvas boards on a wall, giving a mosaic background to four reversible line drawings. Two black solids rest on the floor in front of them. In this work, a 2D tessellation carries 2D representations of the 4D properties of 3D objects. A combination of painting and sculpture, *Re-vision (Melancholia)* suggests that by relying on conventions, all we can do, like Durer's angel, is to frown at the inadequate representations of the world littering the space before us.

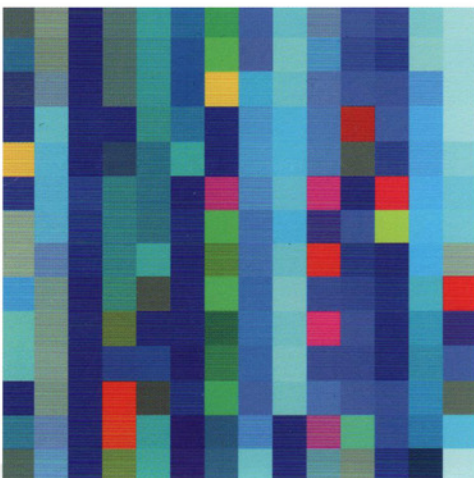
Since then, Owen has broken out of that loop by separating his sculpture from his painting. In his *Vessel (Memory & Logic Units)* series, begun in the early 1990s and continuing, lengths of wire or pipe are fixed at acute angles in an apparently random but closed ensemble. The sculptures are visually unstable but instead of going backwards and forwards like Necker cubes between two similar states, they appear to be in flux. There is never a stabilizing triangle in their make-up: gravity and eye move in search of stasis, always to be led on. Their effectiveness as time-binding objects belies their origins, which re-write the jumps represented in *Re-vision (Melancholia)*. For his *Vessels*, the artist first draws lines on paper and the lines are then interpreted as spatial figures in 3D before they are launched as 4D percepts.

In Owen's paintings, the ineffable appears through pure colour, that is, colour which has no representational intent. In front of a painting like *Flickering Light 1* (2003) and its ongoing series, we see the vibration of light through the dispersal of wavelengths. Despite appearances, the situation is not simple. Light is present in our daily life through its ability to make shadows, which renders it dualistic, also through its ability to split into many colours which renders it manifold. It is present as radiation, which points to its monadic source. The metaphorical use of light still illuminates (!) us. In an artwork, light can be both fact and idea, both matter and energy.

But Owen's separation of sculpture and painting is only an apparent one: instead, the artist has taken qualities of one into the other. The line sculptures are at their best against the flat surface of a floor or wall. They are paintings (drawings, really) we can walk around as they continually spring out of their flatland origins. The spectrum-like paintings are at their best when they cover an entire wall and radiate colour into the room's space. Owen's sculptures and paintings both use the repetition of similar elements to enable us to combine, dissolve and recombine their composition, jumping gravity and light and time and space over each other.



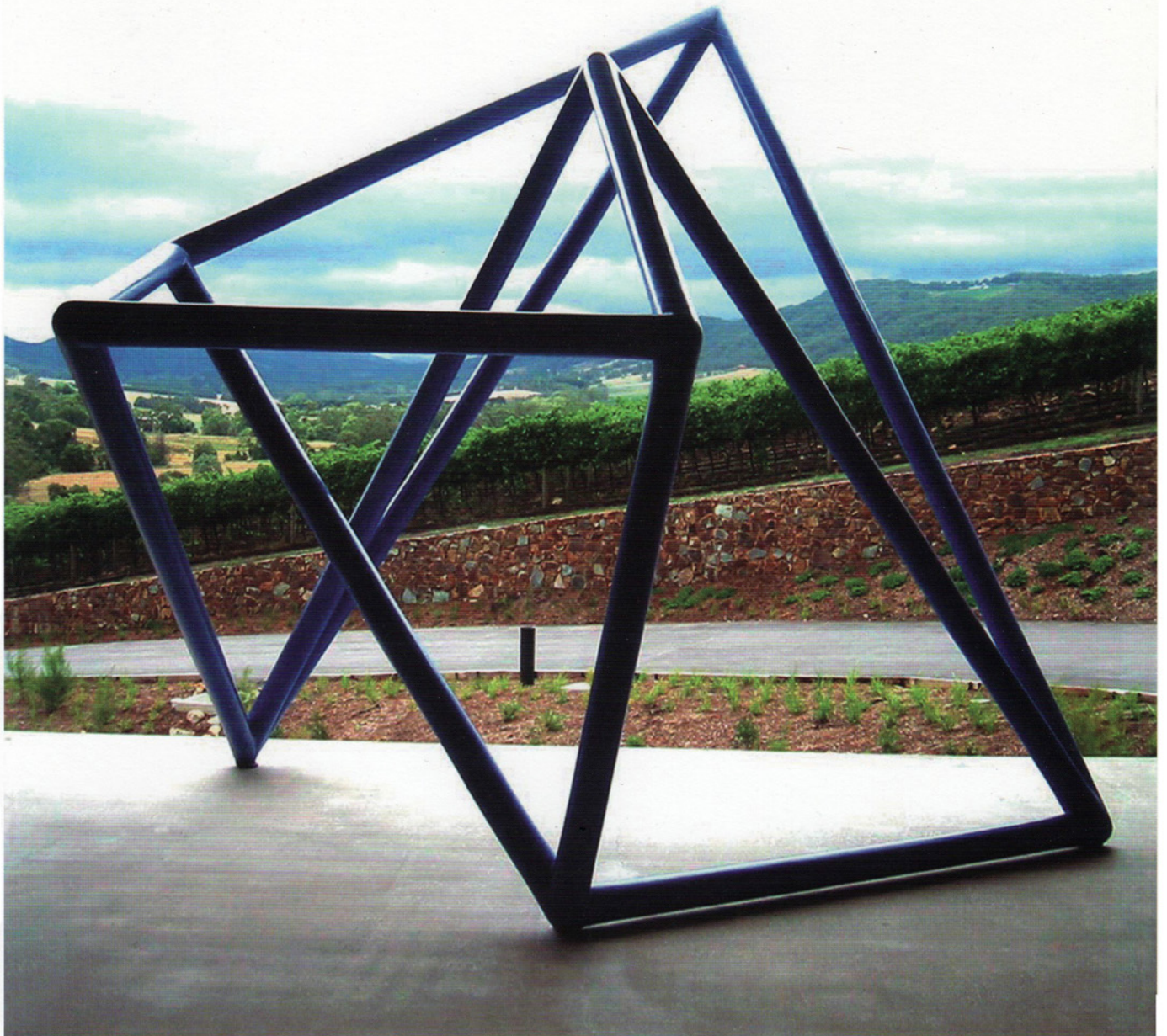
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Alex Selenitsch

Alex Selenitsch is a Melbourne-based poet and architect, and a senior lecturer in architecture at the University of Melbourne



Above *Vessel #2 (Blue)* 1997 - 2003, fibreglass and M1 acrylic, 400 x 300 x 300 cm (approx.) TarraWarra Museum of Art. Photograph: David Thomas
 Cover *Flickering Light #2* 2003, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 1980 x 1980 cm

Robert Owen

Born in Sydney and raised in Wagga Wagga, the Australia Council awarded Robert Owen the Emeritus Award in 2003. He has had over 24 solo and 50 group exhibitions both in Australia and overseas. He represented Australia in the 38th Venice Biennale in 1978 and was exhibited in *Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, *Geometric Abstraction in Australia 1941-1997*, University Art Museum, University of Queensland, and *The text of light*, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Yarra Glen, Victoria in 2004. A survey exhibition *Between Shadow and Light - London Works 1966-1975* was held at Monash University Gallery, Melbourne in 1999.

Owen has been the recipient of numerous public commissions including *Axiom* in 1999 for the new Commonwealth Law Courts in Melbourne, *Discobolus* for the Hellenic Tribute, Sydney Olympics 2000, *Memory Pond*, fountain, light & text installation for Grattan Gardens Plaza, Prahran, Melbourne, 2002 and *Webb Bridge*, a project in collaboration with architects Denton Corker Marshall for The Docklands Authority, Melbourne. He is represented in public and private collections throughout Australia as well as in the British Museum, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Olympic Sculpture Park, Seoul, Korea and the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Japan.

Major references are Margaret Plant & Carolyn Barnes: *Between Shadow & Light; London Works 1966 - 1975*, published by Monash University Gallery in 1999 and George Alexander: Robert Owen, *Transits*, published by Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery in 1988.