

Jon Plapp was born in the western bayside suburb of Williamstown, Victoria, in 1938; received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne in 1959; and in 1966 moved to St Louis, Missouri, USA, where he completed a doctorate in psychology at the Washington University in 1967. There, Plapp took advantage of the Washington University's fine art department to take some instruction in painting and life drawing. This was the extent of his formal art training .

In 1968 Jon Plapp relocated to Toronto, Canada, where he entered the social scene surrounding the David Mirvish gallery and met colour-field and geometric abstractionists such as Jules Olisky, Frank Stella, Larry Poons, and Canadian abstractionist Jack Bush. Their work profoundly influenced Plapp, both for its aesthetic qualities, and for its balance and serenity, that resonated with his own temperament and philosophical outlook. He was drawn to try this style of painting as it seemed an art he could make, might love, and possibly would excel in. In a spirit of admiration and emulation, he became a committed artist. By 1976 he was sufficiently confident in his work to invest in a studio space, to be shared with like-minded artists David Bolduc and Paul Slogett.

For Plapp, being an artist was not just about painting, it was a way of life. Throwing himself into the art world, he engaged in its activities, enjoyed its attitudes, and made friends with other artists and art world personalities. Richard McMillan, his life partner, whom he met in the late 1960s in Toronto, was both a sculptor and an academic. The couple were to be familiar faces in the Canadian and Australian art scenes, frequenting exhibition openings and other arts events.

In 1977 the two artists moved back to Australia where they settled in the Sydney suburb of Surry Hills. Here Plapp continued to explore colour-field painting. His works from this period are characterised by subtle variations in colour aided by a play of texture, with impasto used to build swollen ridges of acrylic paint. In 1979 he had his first solo exhibition at Watters Gallery, which continued to represent him in Sydney. In Melbourne, since the 1990s he was represented by the Charles Nodrum Gallery; in Toronto he was represented by the Klonaridis Gallery; and in New York by the Rosenberg Gallery. Between 1979 and 2005 Plapp showed regularly in Sydney, Melbourne, Tasmania, Brisbane and Toronto. A thoughtful survey of his work, *Elusive Meanings*, was held at the Tasmanian Devonport Gallery and Arts Centre in 1995. The curator, Fiona Christie, had first met Plapp in 1990 on one of Plapp's regular visits to the northwest coast of Tasmania, where his family had settled in the 1850s. The survey focused on Plapp's geometric abstractionist works from a critical ten-year period between 1984 and 1994.

Plapp started to explore geometric abstraction in the 1980s, creating from it works whose ambiguous mixture of freedom and discipline represented his response to life. In the burgeoning age of the computer, Plapp's art was systematic without being mechanical or straightforward. His methodology embraced the geometry of the hand-worker as opposed to that of the scientist. He would tear his canvases into the desired length and use the loosened strands to plot right-angular arrangements of threads across the surface, securing them with tacks. When his hands started to shake — a symptom of the Parkinson's disease from which he suffered for many

years — Plapp took a leaf from Pollock's book and laid his canvases on the ground, steadying his arm by leaning on the floor. He worked in series, diligently experimenting with each variation of a theme until he had exhausted its creative possibilities. The works produced at the end of his career, when the shaking was at its most extreme, ambitiously involved complex and fine lineal systems. The monochromatic lines, some dead-straight, some with a slight waver, express Plapp's human persistence and strict dedication to his art.

If recognition for Plapp's art was quiet, he achieved a solid position in the estimation of critics, curators, dealers and collectors. In 2000 he and Richard McMillan were granted a residency at the Art Gallery of New South Wales' studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. His work is held by public, corporate and private collections in Australia and North America, including the National Gallery of Australia, MOCA, the collection of Ann Lewis, the University of Toronto, the University of Sydney, New England Regional Art Museum, the AMP collection, and Artbank.

As well as being notably dedicated to his art, Plapp was equally committed to his work as a psychologist in the Rivendell Child and Adolescent Unit at Concord Hospital. Terence Maloon, in the essay for the catalogue of a posthumous survey of Plapp's work at Watters Gallery in 2009, noted that Plapp's art expressed many of the intuitive responses of the psychologist: an alertness to tone, energy of expression, alternations of emphasis, meaningful silences — and the implications behind them — are the key to the paintings as to the psychologist's work of diagnosis. More practically, Plapp's career in psychology gave him the freedom to hold onto his ideal of art for art's sake with no fiscal requirements riding on his art practice.

In the December of 2006, after failing to answer phone calls from his friends and his dealer, Jon Plapp was found dead in the apartment he had shared with Richard McMillan. McMillan, Plapp's primary carer as his battle with Parkinson's wore on, had died suddenly of a brain tumor five months before, in June 2006. Mourning, and battling his own fast-declining health, Plapp continued to work until the end, producing a new series of works on paper, which Watters Gallery exhibited in 2007, the year following the artist's death.