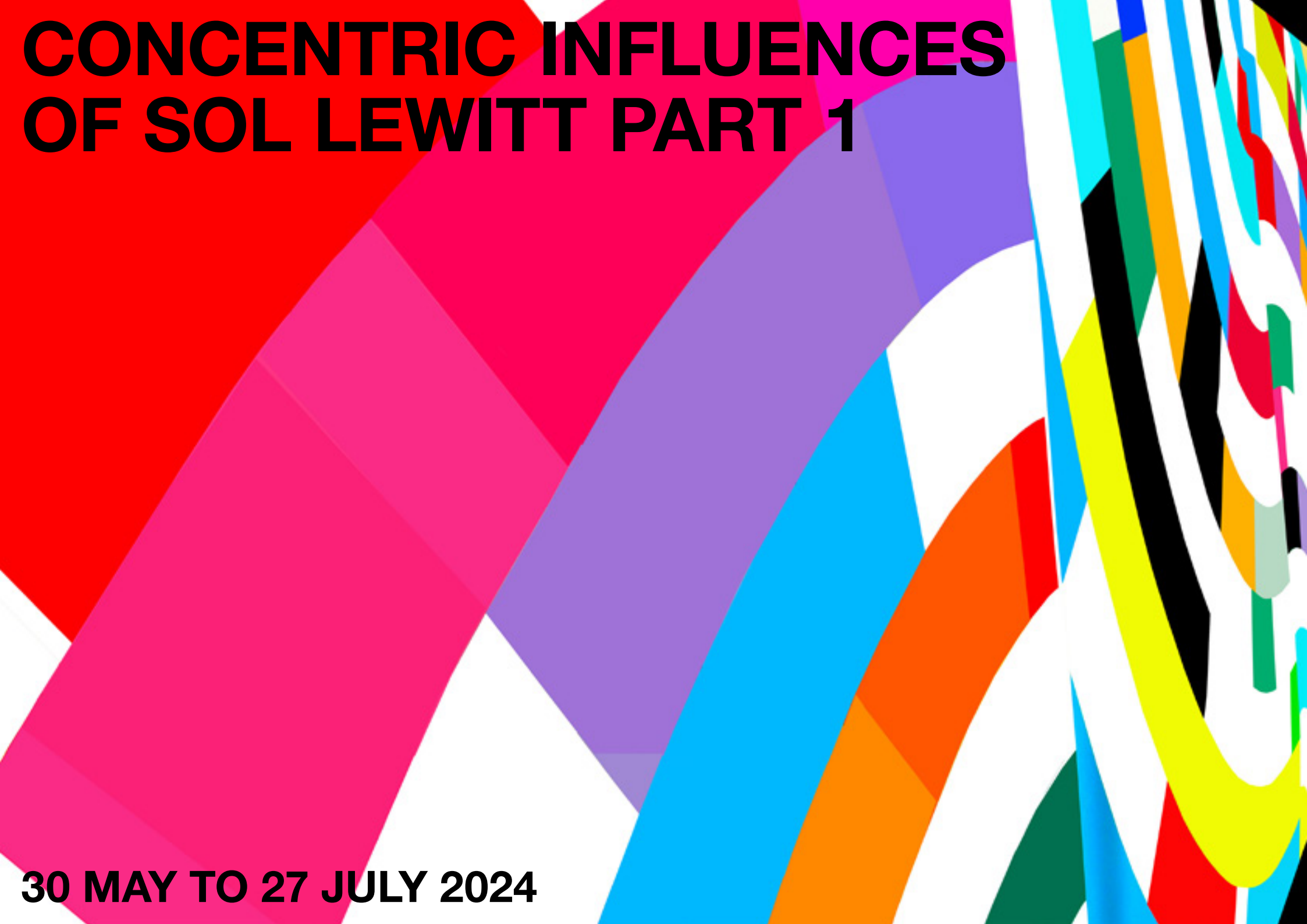




CONCENTRIC INFLUENCES OF SOL LEWITT PART 1

30 MAY TO 27 JULY 2024



Installation view, *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.



Installation view, Fransje Killaars, *Full Colour 2023 (for Sol)* 2023 (detail), in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.

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FOREWORD

by Helen Rayment

The studio of an artist is incredibly special – even evocative – the racks of work, the plan press draws, the smells of production. The studio of a great artist might become a museum, but it is less usual for it to continue as a place of art making and research. This exhibition is an important step in acknowledging the studio space as a legacy that can enable research and the insights of academics, as well fostering the new work of contemporary artists.

RMIT Culture is delighted to present *The Concentric Influences of Sol Lewitt, Part 1: Irene Barberis, Fransje Killaars, Janet Passehl, Wilma Tabacco* at RMIT Gallery. It's not often an opportunity such as this presents itself, and RMIT Culture is pleased to be able to take an active part in this multi-country research project. Academic, artist and curator Dr Irene Barberis' important and formative project into the practice of Sol LeWitt shares important cultural stories that

may not otherwise be available to us and highlights her ongoing research outcomes into the world of Sol LeWitt through the lens of his studio.

RMIT Culture would like to thank most warmly, Dr Irene Barberis – curator, academic, researcher and artist – for working with us to share her project at RMIT Gallery, the first Australian iteration of this extensive 10 country exhibition. We would also like to thank the contributing core artists who are central to this research project, Fransje Killaars, Janet Passehl and Wilma Tabacco. As ever the RMIT Culture team have worked assiduously to develop this project, both the exhibition and catalogue – notably Exhibition Coordinator Julia Powles, Engagement Coordinator Lisa Linton, Senior Production Coordinator Erik North with Simon Maisch and filmmaker Pat Mooney alongside the unwavering and patient support of Exhibition Assistants Michaela Bear,

Jemima Penny and Celine Saoud. Finally, we thank Saskia Loer Hansen, Deputy Vice Chancellor International and Engagement, and Amy Harrington, Director, Philanthropy & Public Engagement, whose ongoing support of our programming is deeply appreciated.



Installation view, Janet Passehl, *Number Fourteen 2024*, in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.

INTRODUCTION

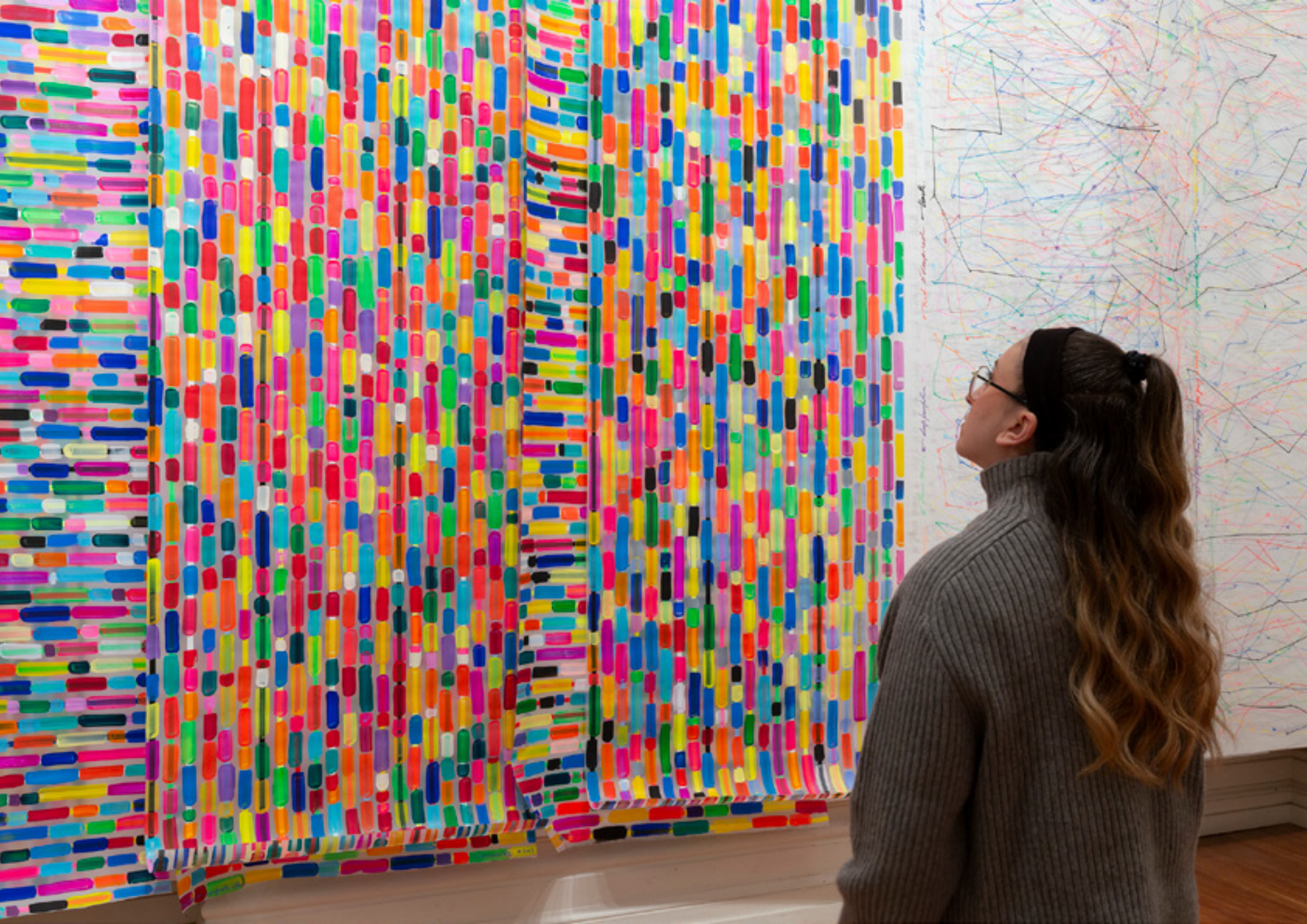
Kit Wise

This exhibition presents an aspect of the extensive creative and curatorial research by Dr Irene Barberis, artist and Senior Lecturer in the School of Art, for her ongoing *LeWitt Project: Ten Countries*. This research and exhibition program builds on her first-hand experience of knowing Sol LeWitt (1928-2007) and the unique opportunity to be the first artist-in-residence at the LeWitt studio in Chester, Connecticut, USA. Her significant monograph, *SOL LEWITT Exploring the Chester Studio A VISUAL DOCUMENTATION*, records Le Witt's studio as he left it from the perspective of an artist with direct knowledge of his working practice. This is important, 'eye-witness' research relating to one of the seminal figures of Western twentieth-century art history.

This project develops the ambitious, multi-site exhibition project, *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt: Foundations, Pivots, and Place: Ten*

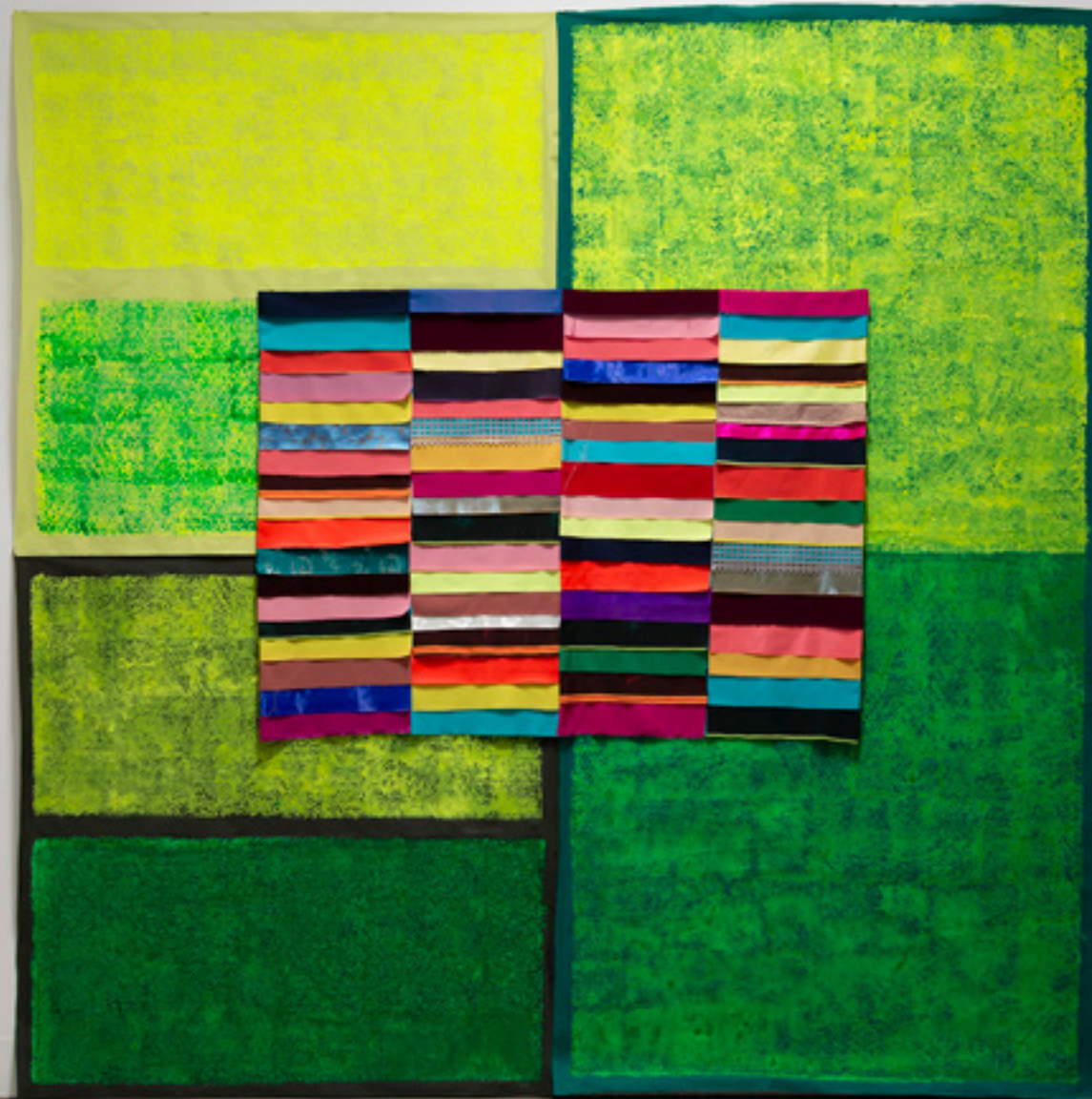
Countries. Barberis has been given the privilege by the LeWitt family to use a unique LeWitt Wall Drawing for each of the ten countries, to be installed by students and artists for each of the final exhibitions. The exhibition at RMIT Gallery is the first statement in Australia, establishing an international and cross-cultural dialogue to explore the influences of LeWitt. Four artists – Fransje Killaars, Janet Passehl, Wilma Tabacco and Irene Barberis herself – form the core of the inaugural exhibitions in each country, taking on global dimensions as the research expands over time to include ten artists from each region. This project provokes others to explore the influence of LeWitt on contemporary practitioners across the world.

Installation view, Irene Barberis, *Part 1. Choreographing Color #12: as long and as wide as Sol's table; Chester Studio, USA 2024* and *Part 2. Choreology Notation #12 2024*, in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.





Installation view, Wilma Tabacco, *Entry/Exit 2012*, in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.



Installation view, Fransje Killaars, *Full Colour 2023 (for Sol)* 2023, in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.

INTERVIEW – HELEN RAYMENT IN CONVERSATION WITH IRENE BARBERIS

As an established Australian artist what is so special / important to you about the process of cultural and creative exchange? Could you please discuss your time in Sol LeWitt's studios as an example?

Art, in all forms, is a sensory and conceptual transmission of ideas, a cultural conduit for articulating the transformation of meanings and experience through time. It is a cultural lens through which to view potentialities and complexities of human existence and endeavour in every respect. Freedom of thought in cross-cultural dialogue, I believe, is essential in our ever-shrinking global world. All artists share their ideas, many taking great risks in doing so. I have and continue to honour the preciousness of these spaces of dialogue around the world. *The Concentric Influences of Sol Le Witt Project: Ten Countries* does this.

Carol LeWitt has said in her wonderful support letter of this project that

Sol's work has been exhibited on six continents for more than six decades, ongoing. He travelled widely engaging with artists and curators at individual studios, small independent galleries, and major institutions. His curiosity and profoundly ethical nature allowed no room for discrimination. He believed in a non-hierarchical international community among artists and acted on those principles...

Sitting at Sol's small architectural desk in his Chester studio, which I had the immense privilege to be the first artist outside of family to make artwork in, I thought about 'pivots of place' and of how, in this place where I sat, his wall drawings of global reach and their instructions were drawn up. The painting wall in front of me and the huge studio

table beside me, where all his gouaches were made, reiterated the notion of the studio space as a centre of concentricity; thus began the idea of using the concentric circle (I had also been drawing with one of Sol's compasses) as a catalyst for envisioning a multi-country project on the influence that Sol LeWitt, his ideas and artworks have had in the world and for navigating a unifying and deeply creative and mutual understanding of art and ideas across cultures through a series of exhibitions and dialogues.

You bring a wealth of experience to the curatorial process as an artist, academic, writer and gallerist. Specifically, how does being an artist influence your curatorial vision for this project?

Artists in Leadership, an international symposium that I developed with the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Arts London Professor Chris Wainwright in 2009, asked among



Installation view, *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.

other questions, 'do artists in leadership positions negotiate the space of leadership differently to a non-artist?'. As an artist who operates in a variety of roles at different times, my answer was/is yes: an artist has learnt through their practice to think quickly, creatively and widely, and at the same time to focus tightly – every decision put into action. We are confident in 'risk', and, one may say, exist a lot of the time in LeWitt's idea of 'the space of the leap'.

This project developed in the 'studio/space' of an artist, by an artist not a curator; I am merely facilitating my artistic idea. Directing a multi-country project is the same for me as putting together a complex multifaceted artwork. My curatorial visions come from an artist's vision and impulse – perhaps they are too big and at times seemingly impossible, but I think all things are possible, and the risk to establish 'vision' very worthwhile. Sol LeWitt's influence on art globally is most definitely

a project worth traversing ten countries; the depth of inquiry and thinking in ten artists work from each country, the wealth of knowledge from one hundred artists across the global landscape, is phenomenal.

This exhibition highlights four core artists. Can you extrapolate on the idea behind the core artists and their distinct contribution to this project?

The 'concentric' idea of the project draws on histories and vocabularies of forms that I have worked with in my practice since the eighties. The illuminated concentric 'wheels' in the Psalter of Robert de Lisle inspired my early concentric circle paintings of numerical systems of place and symbolic colours – metaphysical and mathematical meanings of concentric circles are embedded within the iconography of many cultures; Congregation Beth Shalom Rodfe Zedek in Chester, developed architecturally with

LeWitt in 1998, has at its heart a fabulous LeWitt concentric circle wall drawing on the doors of its Ark. *The LeWitt Project: Ten Countries* (my working title) is based on the principles of concentric circles: at its core is Sol LeWitt, his work, and his ideas; and emanating from this central point are artists who have worked closely with him, his ideas, and his legacy in differing ways. This was my organisational visual, how I thought of this project. The kinetics of concentric circles not only radiate from the central point (ripples across a liquid surface) they can also operate conversely, where there is an impact on the central point by things in the outer rings; all artists are influenced in different ways.

Janet Passehl is an artist who worked closely with Sol as his assistant and Curator of the LeWitt Collection and Archive for thirty years. Her knowledge and insights including the influences by LeWitt are pivotal to this research, and her artwork's 'radical plainness' sits near the centre of



Installation view, Irene Barberis, *Part 2. Choreology Notation #12 2024* (detail), in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.

this exhibition. Fransje Killaars, a well-known artist from the Netherlands and friend of Sol's, worked with her husband on many of his European wall drawings. Her fabulous, large-scale and complex textured works resonate deeply with 'LeWittian' spatial and colour dynamics. Wilma Tabacco is an Australian artist who has worked consistently and intensely over 45 years with geometric abstraction. She has been aware of LeWitt over that time and her use of repetitive motifs, serialisation and strident colour amongst many other elements of her practice which I am familiar with, demonstrates to me a pervading transmission of LeWitt's ideas.

I met Sol in 1974 in New York as a 21-year-old art student with my then partner, Australian artist Robert Hunter, who had been included into an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Sol and I remained friends from that time, and he became my mentor till his passing in 2007. Over 2019/22/24 I embarked on seven

residencies in Sol's three studios working mainly in his Chester studio in the USA, and in his Italian spaces at the *Mahler LeWitt Studios* in Spoleto, and his studio in Praiano on the Amalfi coast. I worked on average 10–14 hours a day making over 1,800 artworks. Out of these residencies I published the first full documentation of his Chester studio in 2022 that has become a core research tool for scholars; *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt Project: Ten Countries* which is now developing across the selected countries; and I am embarking on a new nanoparticle phosphorescent tapestry project, *The LeWitt Tapestry Suite: The Chester and Italian Studios*, based at DJCAD, University of Dundee, where I am an Honorary Fellow.

We are very excited that this project is ongoing and will travel widely. What have we got to look forward to in Part 2?

The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt: Core Artists, Part 1 exhibition, commences

the research in each of the ten countries. Part 2 presents the research: the ten selected artists, the core artists and, through the wonderful generosity of the LeWitt family, a unique Sol LeWitt wall drawing for each country, which will be installed by local artists, students and others. For the RMIT Gallery we are already in the process of selecting the ten artists from Australia, and the selection of the LeWitt wall drawing with Janet Passehl and John Hogan, the former Mary Jo and Ted Shen Installation Director of Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings at Yale University Gallery, USA. Our major international text will be from esteemed LeWitt Scholar and Historian, Professor David P. Areford of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, who has generously donated aspects of his contribution. This is fabulous research and the most rewarding of intercultural projects in all respects.



Installation view, Janet Passehl, *Number Fourteen 2024*, in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024. Photo by Christian Capurro.





Stills from film of Irene Barberis installing her works
at RMIT Gallery, 2024. Videography by Pat Mooney.

BIOGRAPHIES

Irene Barberis

Irene Barberis is an Australian/British artist, director of projects and galleries, curator and academic, who has presented over 100 solo exhibitions and international creative projects. She holds a PhD on the Apocalypse. In 2006 she established the inter-university International Research Centre, *Metasenta®*, *The Global Centre for Drawing*; the virtual gallery, *Metaspace* and *Metasenta Publishing*. She is a Senior Lecturer at RMIT University's School of Art and was the inaugural female academic who taught into the RMIT partnership at Hong Kong Art School for 17 years. Barberis is also an Honorary Fellow of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee, Scotland.

Barberis' other notable accomplishments include a twenty-year project, *The Tapestry of Light*, a 36 x 3.2 metre tapestry, a full cycle of the Apocalypse, the first by a female artist, with newly invented nano-

particle phosphorescent threads. This was exhibited at the Brussels Cathedral, Belgium, Canterbury Cathedral, United Kingdom, and The Museum of the Bible, Washington, DC. Parallel to this project is her current global research, *The Sol LeWitt Project* and *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt; Foundations, Pivots, and Place; Ten Countries*. Her 30-year friendship with Sol LeWitt and the LeWitt family has enabled her to conduct research into the foundations and synergies of their practices and his studios, leading to exhibitions and the publication of the first major book on Sol LeWitt's Chester studio in 2022.

Installation view, Wilma Tabacco, *Entry/Exit* 2012
and Fransje Killaars, *Full Colour 2023 (for Sol)* 2023,
in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery,
Melbourne, 2024 Photo by Christian Capurro.



Wilma Tabacco

Wilma Tabacco is an Italian/Australian artist, who works primarily in abstraction. Across her career, Wilma Tabacco has presented 46 solo exhibitions and participated in over 250 group exhibitions, both in Australia and internationally. These exhibitions include *Contemporary Australian Drawing 3*, New York Studio School; *Crossing the Line: Drawing in the Middle East*, Tashkeel Gallery, Dubai; *Contemporary Australian Drawing 2*, Wimbledon SPACE, London; *Drawing of the World/World of Drawing*, Museum of Art, Seoul National University, Korea; *Regards Croises: Australie – France*, Espace Beaurepaire, Paris, France; *Good Vibrations*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne; and *Painted Spaces*, Rice-Talbert Museum, Edinburgh, Scotland. Tabacco has also lectured in painting, drawing and printmaking in several universities including RMIT & Hong Kong Art School. Her works are

included in national and state collections including the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Artbank, and private collections in Australia, USA and Europe.

Fransje Killaars

Fransje Killaars is a Dutch artist based in Amsterdam whose practice is centered around the power and effect of colour. In 1984, the same year that she finished art school, she became a studio assistant for Sol LeWitt, an artist whose work has had a lasting impression. Having originally trained as a painter, in the 1990s her work developed into site-specific installations with textiles that often feature associations to blankets, room dividers, curtains, carpets and tablecloths. She has worked on many public installations in the Netherlands, including in the entrance hall of the Mondriaan Fund, Amsterdam, the so-called Men's Room of the Catshuis, Den Haag and the entrance hall of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague. In 2004 Killaars realised several installations in Japan at the invitation of Issey Miyake and in 2013 she toured her work in the USA. Killaars' work is held in museums and private collections internationally.

Janet Passehl

Janet Passehl is an artist and curator based in Connecticut, USA, where she has been the curator of the Sol LeWitt Collection since 1991. As well as a visual artist Passehl is also a writer, with collections of her poetry published internationally. Passehl's minimal fabric works have been exhibited globally at galleries in New York City including the Drawing Center, Zürcher Gallery, ODETTA, and 57W57Arts. Additionally, her work has been shown at the Ian Potter Museum of Art and Langford 120 in Melbourne; the Tang Museum and Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMocA) in USA; Tegnerforbundet in Oslo, Thomas Rehbein Gallery in Cologne, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, and Stalke Gallery in Copenhagen. In 2019, her visual art and poetry were featured together for the first time in the exhibition *States and Senses* in Sydney, Australia. In 2021, her poetry was featured as an audio

installation in *The Feuilleton: I Will Bear Witness*, in an abandoned news stand in Spoleto, Italy. Passehl's work is in private collections and museums nationally and internationally.



LIST OF WORKS

Irene Barberis

Part 1. *Choreographing Color #12: as long and as wide as Sol's table;*

Chester Studio, USA, 2024

Italian tempera, gouache, polyester film, tape.

Part 2. *Choreology Notation #12, 2024*
acrylic, acetate

Part 3. *Architectonics #15: Structure + Response Series, 2024*
tape

Courtesy of the artist

Fransje Killaars

Full Colour 2023 (for Sol), 2023

Fabric, thread

Courtesy of the artist

Janet Passehl

Number Fourteen, 2024

Handwoven cotton, aluminium, string

Courtesy of the artist

Wilma Tabacco

Entry/Exit, 2012

Oil on canvas

Courtesy Gallerysmith and the artist

Installation view, Irene Barberis, *Part 3. Architectonics #15: Structure + Response Series 2024* (detail), in *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2024.

Photo by Christian Capurro.

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The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt Part 1
Curated by Irene Barberis
RMIT Gallery, Melbourne/Narrm
30 May to 27 July 2024

The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt Part 1
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Curator's acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude and thank you to the LeWitt family and Estate for their wonderful and generous support of this project which originated in Sol's Chester studio. To RMIT Gallery and staff for their fabulous engagement with this project, and to all those in countries outside Australia who are involved in the developing research and exhibitions. My deepest thank you on all levels to Janet Passehl, Fransje Killaars and Wilma Tabacco, Core artists of *The Concentric Influences of Sol LeWitt: Ten Countries Project*, and a sincere thank you to Prof. David. P. Areford for his generosity and forthcoming major text in Part 2. of this project.

Design: Zennie McLoughlin
Exhibition photography: Christian Capurro

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