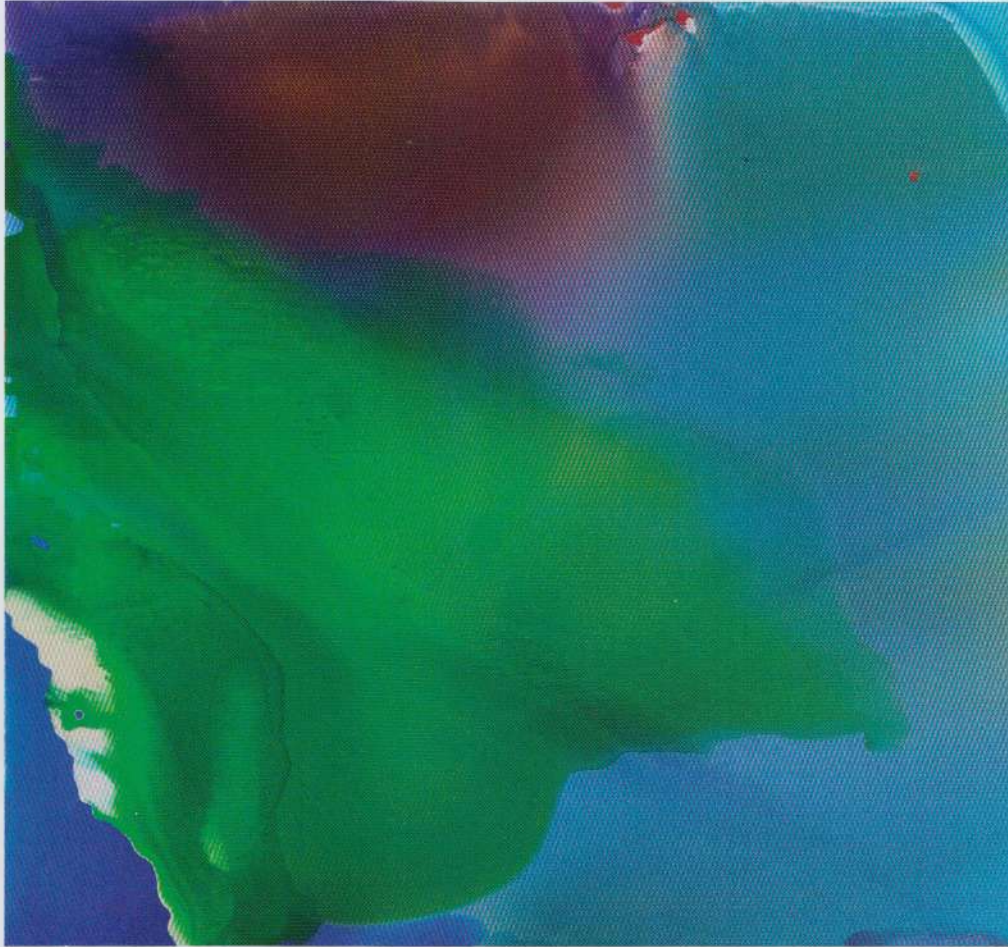


# PURE ABSTRACTION

Charlie Sheard has spent three solid years on the works exhibiting at this year's Sydney Contemporary, carefully constructing layer upon layer of bleeding, spilling, flowing paint.

WORDS: ANNABELLE CAGE



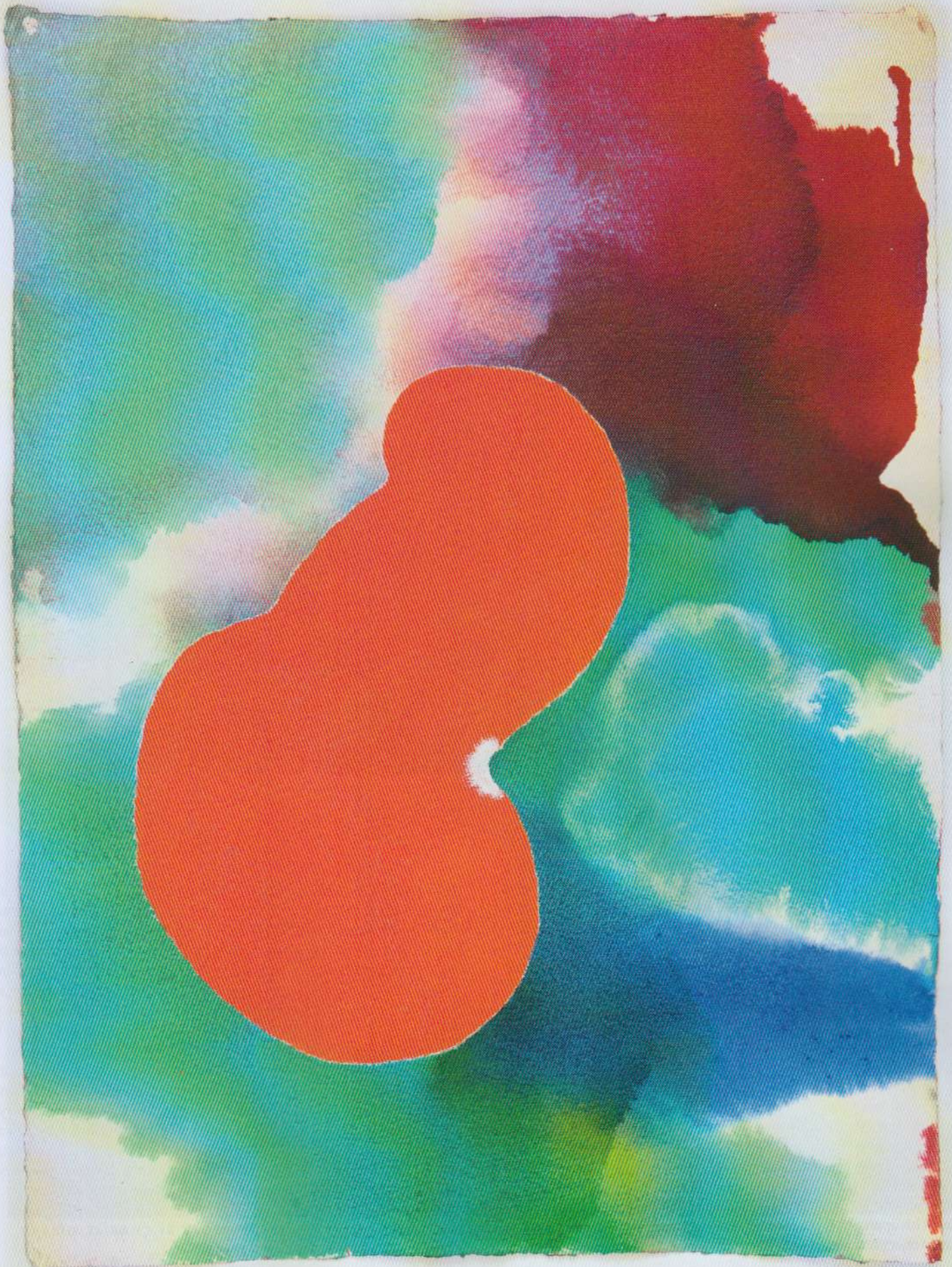
ABOVE: Charlie Sheard, *Pure Abstraction #99*, 2017–18. Acrylic on polyester, 198 x 214cm.

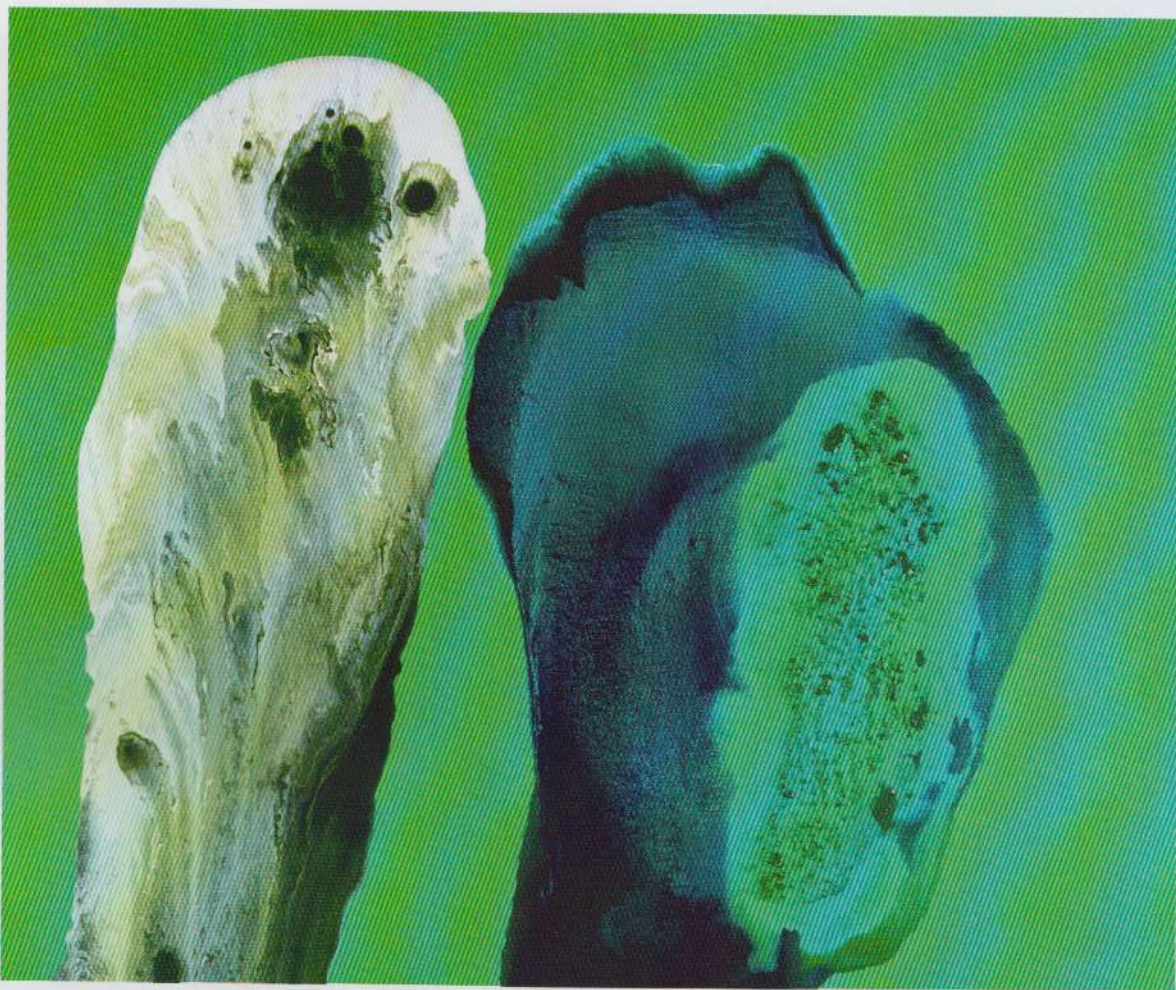
OPPOSITE: Charlie Sheard, *Pure Abstraction #98*, 2013–18. Watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper, 72 x 56cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND MAY SPACE, SYDNEY.

WITH A CAREER approaching 35 years, Charlie Sheard is widely considered one of Sydney's most well-known abstract painters. The artist has exhibited widely both at home and abroad, with more than 50 solo exhibitions under his belt. Sheard also ran his own private art school from the mid 1990s to the mid naughties, dedicated to the in-depth study of the techniques and practices of the Old Masters. But despite using materials and techniques that have been used for thousands of years, and running the Charlie Sheard Studio School for nearly two decades, Sheard insists he has no interest in nostalgia.

Certainly, Sheard's textured, vibrant, non-figurative paintings bear no immediate resemblance to the representational portraits and still lifes of the Masters he so reveres. With a background in performance art studies,





Charlie Sheard, *Green Painting*, 2016–18. Acrylic and vinyl on linen, 198 x 214cm.

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Sheard's work has a bodily – or embodied – sensibility, without reproducing the form itself. "Drawing is the transmission of bodily energy into the work of art," he exclaims, referencing the interconnectedness of rhythm in poetry and music, before continuing, "painting is ancient and original. Primal."

Indeed, drawing heavily on the heritage of abstract expressionism, there is a primal emotionality to the unhindered shapes and forms on his canvases. "The Symbolistes were right", he says. "*Stimmung* [moods or emotions] is the most important thing of all in art." For Sheard, becoming adept at employing historical painting techniques has expanded his technical means, which has in turn allowed his practice to become increasingly intuitive.

It is perhaps this instinctive approach to movement, form and temporality that is most discernible in his work. Sheard has spent three years on the paintings to be presented at Sydney Contemporary 2018 by Sydney's MAY SPACE, the resulting works imbued with an embodied perception of linear time. The artist has carefully constructed layer upon layer of paint with bleed, spill and flow, making this temporality almost perceptible. Sheard tells me that "painting is an old, slow technology". What remains decidedly traditional in his approach is the method itself: to "stand in silence and paint".

He may reject nostalgia, but at the very least he cannot escape the histo-

rian's romanticism. Sheard has a keen interest in philosophy – which sees him calling on Dionysis and Bacchylides through to turn-of-the-century thinkers like **Wassily Kandinsky** and **Ezra Pound** in his writings, the latter perhaps due of the move toward abstraction toward the end of the 19th century. He also expresses a regard for the Chinese Song and Yuan dynasties, mentioning that his interest in the history of Chinese painting and poetry has persisted since childhood. "Chinese art and philosophy are the shadow and the foil to Western art and philosophy," Sheard muses. His enduring exhibition history in China is testament to this passion.

The term *Pure Abstraction* is included in the title of several of Sheard's large-scale works to be shown at Sydney Contemporary, in addition to a survey exhibition of his held at the University of Newcastle Gallery in 2014. Sheard considers abstraction a resistance to the irony, cynicism and "extreme self-consciousness" that he believes permeates the contemporary art world. "I don't believe that the work of art is something to be consumed," he says. "Brands and products are for consumption." ■

MAY SPACE, SYDNEY, PRESENTS WORK BY CHARLIE SHEARD AT SYDNEY CONTEMPORARY 2018.