

## Ordered Chaos

By Margaret Vickers

Well known award winning, abstract artist Peter Griffen was the guest demonstrator for the September (2019) meeting of the Lane Cove Art Society. Spontaneity, vibrancy of colour and a diverse range of marks characterized Peter's artwork. Abstract expressionism was demonstrated at close quarters as Peter created his abstract art.

The abstract expressionist art movement arose in New York in the 1940's and 1950's. Paris was no longer the centre of the art world. Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Lee Krasner were some of the leading proponents of this art movement in America. The world was coming out of a traumatized era after experiencing a second world war and depression in the 1930's. Against this backdrop, the marks that artists began making were far more gestural, free flowing and often vibrant in colour hence the term "action paintings." Giving vent to one's feelings and tapping into the intuitive response was paramount to the abstract expressionist movement. As Peter's demonstration unfolded it became apparent that the work of Willem de Kooning was a strong influence on his mark making style. He mentioned that Vermeer was also an influence.

Setting out several pieces of acid free cartridge paper ( gsm 125) on a drop sheet on the floor Peter set to work. With no reference material such as an object or a photo, what occurred showed abstraction at its most spontaneous. Long brushes were dipped in Derivan acrylic paint and "lines were taken for a walk." Action painting was on show as full body movements directed the haphazard brush strokes. Several works were being created at the same time dancing from one paper to the next. The brush was encouraged to wander freely. Peter encouraged it to go " where it wanted to go."

Following in the footsteps of Jackson Pollock, Peter directed drips of paint to flow across sections of his work which then served to exert an impact on other sections of the artwork. At other times he repeated a pattern that was in the marks but it was done using another colour. Adding collage elements also enriched areas of the abstraction. Often these pieces of collage were bedded down by throwing other marks over the top creating another layer. A product called Polymer Gloss Varnish was used to glue the collage to the work. It also can be used to prepare the paper or as the name implies to varnish the finished work.

What marks Peter made came from an instinctive response. Chaos sometimes resulted. "Chaos is important to creativity," remarked Peter. "Order can be brought to chaos," he added. As the demonstration progressed each abstract painting developed a sense of foreground, middleground and background. Depth and harmony emerged within each work. Order replaced the chaos of the initial layers.

Perhaps the main lessons from Peter's demonstration are to approach your canvas in an intuitive way using big gestural marks and do not be afraid of using vibrant colour. Peter provided a fascinating insight into how he creates his abstract marks. It was an inspiring evening of abstract art.