Robert Jacks  
Art in Focus

Born in 1943, Robert Jacks first exhibited his work in 1966 at Gallery A in Melbourne. A prolific artist whose practice spans almost five decades, Jacks has since produced paintings, drawings, prints, artist's books, ceramics and sculpture.

Robert Jacks studied sculpture at Prahran Technical College from 1958 to 1960 prior to studying painting at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology until 1962. American and European modernism was a source of inspiration for those artists, like Jacks, who were interested to look beyond local shores. In particular Jacks was attracted to the work of Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth. Jacks's deceptively simple compositions of 1959 that explore the complexities of form in space show the influence of these two pioneers of British modernism.

In 1968, Robert Jacks was included in the canonical exhibition *The field* at the National Gallery of Victoria. The exhibition heralded a new set of conventions for Australian painting that were aligned with the modernist (and importantly internationalist) tradition. The pictorial tradition that dominated Australian art at the time, exemplified by the work of Charles Blackman, Robert Dickerson and others of the Antipodean group, did not interest Jacks. With peers, Robert Hunter, Dale Hickey, James Doolin and Guy Stuart amongst others, Jacks was instrumental in establishing a style of abstraction in Australia in the 1960s that engaged with modernist principles. In 1967, at the age of twenty-five, Jacks left Melbourne to live and work in Toronto, New York, Texas and Mexico for the next decade, exhibiting in a number of exhibitions and associating with art world heavy-weights Sol LeWitt, Robert Rauschenberg, Brice Marden and Carl Andre to name a few.

Robert Jacks has had a long association with the University of Melbourne since undertaking a term as artist-in-residence at the university in 1978. Jacks was the subject of a major publication, *Robert Jacks: past unfolded*, in 2001 and a survey exhibition, *Reasons to be cheerful*, at the Bendigo Art Gallery in 2002.