

# Dot Paintings

With writing by Peter Dornauf, 2023



JAMES R FORD

# Is That a Camel?

Peter Dornauf, 2023

Was the dot the first mark ever made by the first artist who daubed some pigment on a cave wall or a piece of bark? Just a cursory glance at your standard Australian aboriginal painting might suggest that that was the case, although apparently the ubiquitous 'landscape' dots were a very late addition to the indigenous repertoire.

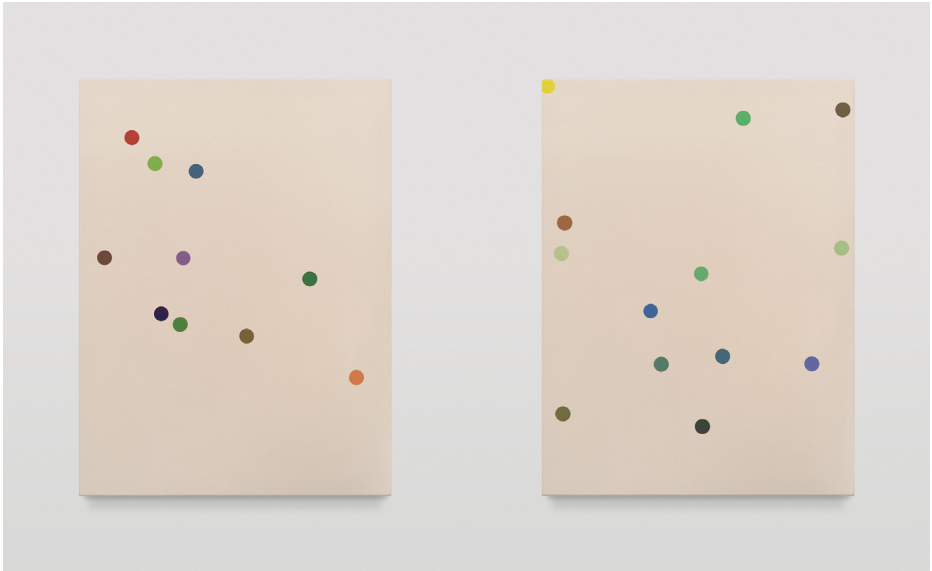
Yet the primordial spot, smudge and impression does have something of origins about it. Some suggest that it reaches right back into the mists of time when God first wrote the universe into existence with the primaevial particle. It is circular and so are the planets, moons, suns, and even the trajectory of their orbits through space, or were until some astronomer spoilt the notion of circular perfection.

Nevertheless, some curvature is always involved. Even black holes, one assumes, are of the circular or oval circumference. Thus, beginning and endings partake in the form of the dot.

The narrative of human artistic creation involving the spherical point begins proper at the launch of modern art practice with the pointillists celebrating chromo-luminarism. Further along that history, we find Damien Hirst's grid spot paintings, evenly spaced, no two colours alike, playing happy paintings, though they come with a touch of unease. John Latham did beat him to it, though, in 1961 with his spray painted, *Full Stop*, albeit it, black in colour.

So, James R Ford, neo conceptualist, is in illustrious company with his plethora of dot works. But if you are looking for Hirstian joy, look elsewhere. After Aboriginal sacredness? You won't find it here. And Seurat, that man of scientific inclination, would not be particularly impressed. Here is no order, logic, shimmer of delight, religious intonation or reference to cosmic perfection.

What we do have is randomness. The placement of the painted circular colours are accidental, aimless, fortuitous. There is seemingly no ultimate purpose to their configuration. If you join them, you'd discover no recognizable shape because that is not what the artist intended.



*Offeret*  
James R Ford, 2022  
Acrylic paint on canvas  
750 x 1000 mm

*Halentecks*  
James R Ford, 2022  
Acrylic paint on canvas  
750 x 1000 mm

---

However, if you find, for example, the face of Jesus, as some people do when they slice a tomato, then for the artist that is part of the beauty of the exercise. But as they stand, they mean nothing, intrinsically, and that is their meaning. Each work sees a similar haphazard and jumbled constitution and any attempt to impose patterns or significance on them will ultimately not come up with some final definitive denotation.

As such, they could be seen as a metaphor for life itself – “spots of joy” (as Wordsworth once said), seen in the simple perfection of circular colours that jostle and float about – greens, blues, reds etc, but no overall comprehensive design or import. Unease in spades, perhaps, or openness to possibilities. On the downside, the discomfort is compounded with enigmatic titles like *Provideate*, or obscure tags such as *Offeret*, which in Old Norse means something to do with a sacrifice or victim, a word the artist simply invented, which ironically turned out to possess a meaning.

That the dots for the most part seem to be in freefall or dancing about in unsystematic formation, like wandering atoms, can add to the dis-ease as the viewer searches in vain for what is not there, placed and hidden by the artist. On the other hand, the upside is the viewer can simply enjoy the capricious, erratic deployment, or become, if they wish, co-creator, involved in a kind of Rorschach exercise. Is that a camel, a weasel, a whale?



*Belusen*  
James R Ford, 2022  
Acrylic paint on linen  
406 x 508 mm