

ART COLLECTOR

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GLIMPSSES OF THE MARVELLOUS

After more than two decades behind the scenes as a curator at the Art Gallery of NSW, **Hendrik Kolenberg** has emerged as an artist in his own right.

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Hendrik Kolenberg has always been an artist, but during the 23 years he spent as Senior Curator of Prints, Drawings and Watercolours at the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW), his private work took second place. He faced a similar dilemma to his illustrious forebear, **Tony Tuckson**, who had declined to exhibit his paintings while serving as Deputy Director of the AGNSW. Kolenberg experienced the same difficulties in reconciling his professional commitments with the typical artist's need for an audience. A few tentative attempts to interest dealers went nowhere, until finally another artist-curator-dealer, **Tony Palmer**, hosted three exhibitions in the late 1990s.

This arrangement worked well for a while, providing some discreet exposure, but Kolenberg would remain under the radar long after he had given up his curatorial duties in 2012. The breakthrough came when **Bradley Hammond** offered him an exhibition at Orange Regional Gallery in 2022. It came as a surprise and made Kolenberg feel as if he was getting somewhere at last. The following year, he was approached by **Jinyoung Lee**, who had

taken up ownership of Gallery LNL in the Sydney suburb of Newtown.

Kolenberg turns 80 this year, but he seems ageless and feels he is in his prime as an artist. He is full of praise for Jinyoung, a smart, ambitious dealer who is finding ways to grow her client base at a time when many commercial galleries are struggling. Gallery LNL works with a small, select stable, and Kolenberg is one of her lynchpins.

The exhibition, *Shaped by Light*, his second solo outing with the gallery, will feature paintings, prints and drawings. His subjects are urban scenes observed in Sydney, where he lives, and Rotterdam, the place of his birth. Kolenberg's paintings are modestly scaled and subdued in tonality. He favours interrupted views and strong geometric shapes. Although the motifs in his work are solid and recognisable, he says he dislikes "factual realism" and pays the most scrupulous attention to the abstract elements in a composition. He has no interest in fine detail, preferring to work with simplified elements.

The light that gives the exhibition its title is

OPPOSITE: Hendrik Kolenberg in his Sydney studio. PHOTO: NICK DELORENZO.



ABOVE: Hendrik Kolenberg, *Chippendale slate*, 2024. Oil on gesso on linen on plywood, 55.5 x 77cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALLERY LNL.

clear and bright, but Kolenberg's colours are muted. These pictures testify to a distinctive artistic temperament—unassuming but insistent, rejecting spectacle while inviting the viewer to examine the play of planes, tones and textures. Looking at one of Kolenberg's suburban rooftops is like discovering a still life made up of chimneys, air conditioning ducts, tiles and gutters. In many pieces the artist is happy to leave the trace of a pencil grid visible on the canvas, letting us see how carefully these scenes have been plotted.

In his paintings of Rotterdam, Kolenberg was attracted to the industrial vistas surrounding the port. "One of these places is just like a town made up of gas cylinders," he says. "I've fallen in love with these shapes." Looking at those imposing structures he admits he hasn't

got a clue about what some large machines might do, or what a warehouse might contain, but he is completely seduced by their forms. That sense of mystery remains intact when we look at these pictures.

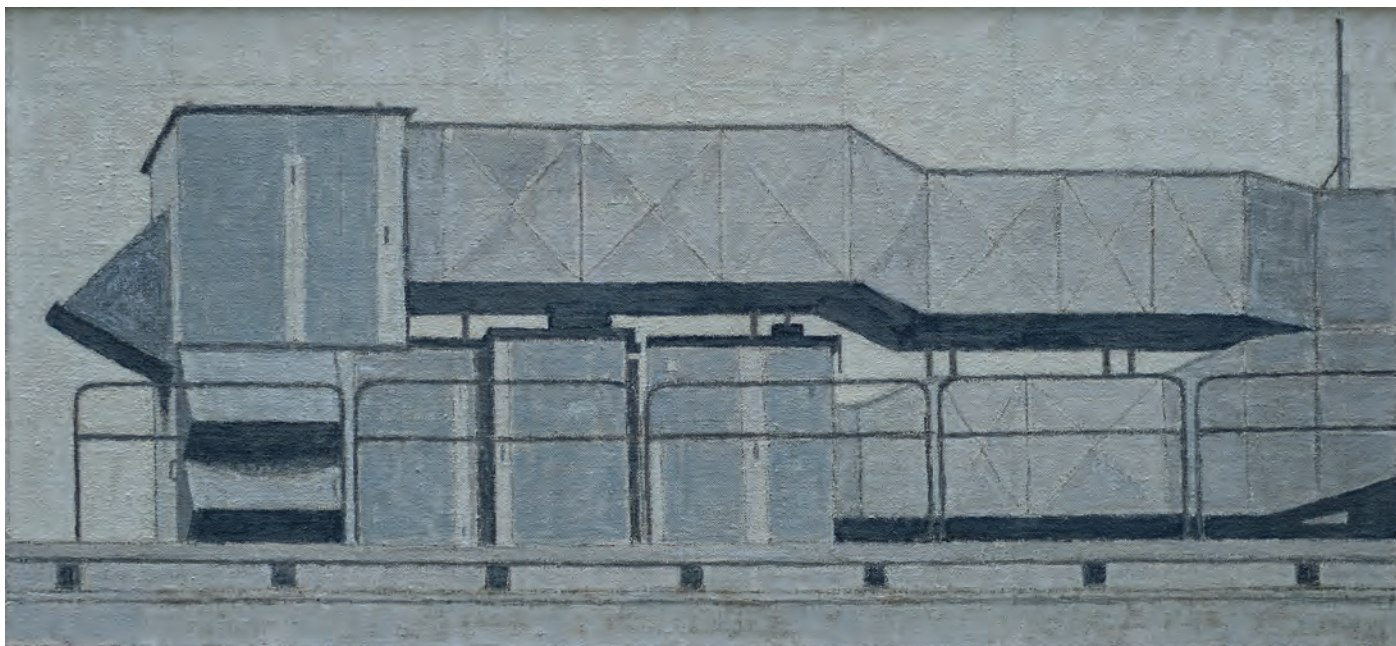
Industrial and urban subjects hold the same fascination for Kolenberg that a landscape painter might find in a view of fields and forests. In their orderly, geometric configurations his works have a classical dimension, but their tactile, light-filled surfaces tell a different story. We see an artist who habitually scans the world around him to catch glimpses of the marvellous.

Hendrik Kolenberg: Shaped by Light is showing from 24 July–22 August at Gallery LNL, Warrane/Sydney.

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RIGHT: Hendrik Kolenberg, *Rebuild, city centre, Rotterdam*, 2025. Oil on gesso on linen on plywood, 102.5 x 53.5cm.
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALLERY LNL.



ABOVE: Hendrik Kolenberg, *Double-dekker, Rotterdam*, 2024. Oil on gesso on linen on plywood, 53.5 x 117cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALLERY LNL.

JINYOUNG LEE

Director, Gallery LNL

I first encountered Hendrik's work in 2017, after being invited to visit his studio. Coming from a ceramic background myself, working with three-dimensional objects, I was immediately drawn to what he chooses to paint: the architectural object, rendered in light. There's a natural kinship there. Ceramics are rooted in the utilitarian and everyday — the things we handle without a second thought and so often underestimate. Hendrik begins in the same way: by walking, not thinking. His subjects are the ordinary surfaces of the city, encountered on foot. What keeps me with the work is the way he handles a difficult kind of seeing. It mirrors the experience of actually walking through a city — in the moment you don't register how much is layered around you, yet it's all there. Angular roofscapes, buildings meeting at odd pitches, streets and facades that fold into one another, all seen from unexpected angles. Yet Hendrik renders these scenes with a naturalness that, at first glance, mirrors our own immediate understanding when navigating a city.

Hendrik is at a remarkable point in a long career. From 1976 to 2012 he worked as a

curator at the state galleries of Western Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales — for over two decades as Senior Curator of Australian Prints, Drawings and Watercolours at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Throughout those years he kept his own practice deliberately private, long holding the view that an artist should keep their best works back from exhibition, a conviction he has since relaxed. Exhibitions like *Shaped by Light* now bring his strongest work to collectors as he makes it. The work has also recently found a new audience in Korea, following its presentation at Art Busan in May 2026.

Hendrik's collectors have tended to show a deep interest in the movements of Australian painting, from the modern masters through to the contemporary. His collectors tend to live with the work rather than part with it, and very little has ever come back into circulation. That scarcity is partly a matter of how closely the work is held, and partly a reflection of the depth of feeling it inspires — collectors keep it because they want to keep looking at it. For the significant works, particularly the oils, the gallery remains effectively the only source.



ABOVE: Hendrik Kolenberg, *Roof rigging*, 2025. Oil on gesso on linen on plywood, 73 x 48.5cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALLERY LNL.



ABOVE: Hendrik Kolenberg, *Foster Street chimneys*, 2025. Oil on gesso on linen on plywood, 54.5 x 72cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALLERY LNL.



ABOVE: Hendrik Kolenberg, *Fenced off, Rotterdam*, 2024. Oil on gesso on linen on plywood, 65.5 x 56.5cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALLERY LNL.

BRADLEY HAMMOND

Director, Orange Regional Gallery

I had the pleasure of curating an exhibition of Hendrik's work for Orange Regional Gallery in 2022 after being drawn to a few pieces I had seen along the way. That is when I had the opportunity to spend time with him and his work. Seeing his paintings and drawings come together in the one space made it clear what an impressive artist he is. To my mind he is one of our most underrated artists and I have long admired his work for its understated and compelling presence. He chooses everyday subjects and depicts them with great restraint.

While there is a reductive element in his work, he also pays careful attention to the

particularity of architectural or industrial structures, so that his images open up an intriguing space between real-world observations and minimal compositions. Describing himself as 'from a working class background' and 'essentially interested in working class subjects', Kolenberg is drawn to ugliness, grime and industrial areas. So his paintings naturally don't depict sentimental or pretty subjects, rather they convey his fascination with the overlooked, discarded or functional aspects of the city.

Hendrik's works are unsentimental, yet deeply personal, as he distils his acute

observations and experiences to their essence. Perhaps most compelling for me is that his pictures seem to be uninterested in their own critical importance. Like many migrant artists, Kolenberg uses art as a means of navigating between different worlds, of mapping his life here in Australia while maintaining and deepening his connection to the Netherlands. Depictions of everyday urban street scenes, factories and working harbours, are part of an ongoing project to situate himself and make sense of where he is. His work is infused with a fascination with cities and an innate desire to understand how things work.