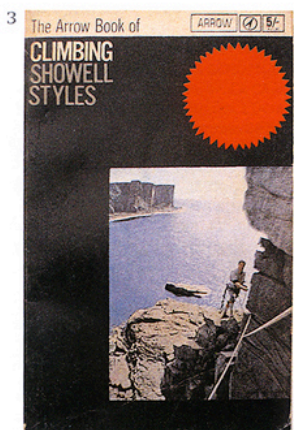
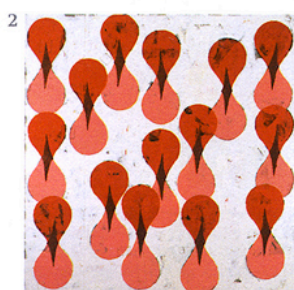


Peter Atkins

"It's the alchemy involved in turning nothing into something that I find endlessly fascinating"



- 1 **Katab (Flower and Spot Pattern)** (1993)
enamel and oil on tarpaulin
215 x 205cm
- 2 **Cooper's Diablo Pattern** (1995)
enamel and oil on tarpaulin
215 x 205cm
- 3 **The Arrow Book of Climbing**
reference object for Atkins' painting
Climbing (2007) on facing page

PETER ATKINS brings an enduringly witty sensibility and vitality to his bold abstract paintings. His works are scaled-up versions of randomly encountered and often overlooked elements of the everyday world around him. His smaller journal works are like visual diaries constructed from discarded material collected from his immediate environment, including confetti, old books, condom wrappers, children's drawings, video and music cassettes, bottle tops and shopping lists. As Atkins explains: "My interest lies in the human connectedness of discarded material. I try to reveal the commonality of shared histories through these two distinct aspects of my practice." **INTERVIEW: Wendy Walker**

Is Atkins an English surname?

It's an Irish/English name. In Australia our family can be traced back to the Second Fleet that came from England in 1790. I was born in Murrumbidgee in the upper Hunter Valley of New South Wales. I moved to Sydney in 1985 to go to art school and now, after many years of travelling, we live in Melbourne.

Where did the inspiration come from for this new work?

My current show is titled *Pre-formed* and it follows on from my *Readymade Abstraction* exhibition at Greenaway Art Gallery in Adelaide last year. Both shows explore the concept of readymade abstract elements in the environment, particularly the immediate locale around my studio in Brunswick, Melbourne. Street and shop signage, commercial packaging, patterns on trucks, buses and caravans, book jackets, record covers, architectural elements – my entire practice revolves around remnant product.

Why have you returned to painting on used tarpaulins?

What appeals to me most about these used tarpaulins is the encoded narrative embedded in the surface. Stains, creases, repaired tears and seams are reminders of its history. The evidence remains in the imperfect surfaces of the painting. There is also a shift in my work towards a less painterly approach, where the untouched tarpaulin is left as the ground for the painted floating forms.

You have a substantial and diverse collection of textiles. How has this influenced your work?

There are parallels with my practice in the ordering, placement and patterning of form found in many textiles but it's the alchemy involved in turning nothing into something that I find endlessly fascinating. Like the way the Amish cut up their old work clothes and turn them into quilts. I once saw a

nineteenth-century Amish quilt that was made up of different shaped blocks of various shades of grey material – probably old work shirts – with a thin strip of bright yellow fabric in the corner. It was the most sublime and exquisite object, pragmatic and unpretentious, but one of the most perfect pieces of abstraction I've ever seen.

Your son Cato collected the pieces of gold confetti – showered on the audience during a Coldplay concert – that you used in a Brunswick Journal monochrome. Do other people give you objects that they think could be used in your artwork?

Actually, yes. There was a woman who had a collection of over 80 odd socks and thought I could "do something with them." And someone else who had a box full of their children's baby teeth! All fascinating, but unfortunately it has no relevance to me. The collected material in my work comes from my personal interaction with it. Cato and my partner Dana often bring things home to me, but I see this as an extension of my practice.

Which artists inspire you?

There have been many through the years whose work I have great affection for, such as Tony Tuckson, Ian Fairweather, John Coburn, Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson, the sculptor Clement Meadmore and the British ceramicist Susie Cooper. But the three main constants I return to again and again are the writers Raymond Carver and Paul Theroux, and the Irish-born artist William Scott, who has been a major influence on my practice. His spatial qualities and simple use of objects like bowls, plates, cups and the humble frying pan had an enormous impact on me when I first saw them at the National Gallery of Ireland in the early 1990s. It was his particular way of looking at and giving importance to the ordinary, commonplace objects in his domestic environment that resonated so strongly with me.

You included two writers. Why?

Raymond Carver's words are impeccably placed with a particular economy. There's no surplus and it's often what's left out or not described that I find most appealing – the hint or suggestion. His writing is like a painting; methodically structured, carefully considered, but with an ease that suggests it has fallen fully formed from heaven. Paul Theroux has been my travelling companion for over two decades. His books are a great insight into other cultures and his wit and sarcasm add an extra hilarious dimension.

You were invited to speak at the artist Clement Meadmore's memorial. What was your connection to him?

I was writing to him in the year before he died in April 2005. We had recently bought two of his sculptures and I wanted him to know that they'd gone to a good home. I told him that I felt as though the works had come home. He wasn't well by this stage and died a few months later. His estate contacted me and asked if I would speak at his memorial. I did so out of respect. I thought it was important for an artist from a younger generation to speak about Meadmore's vision and influence and the fearless conviction he showed towards his practice.

Do you listen to music while you work?

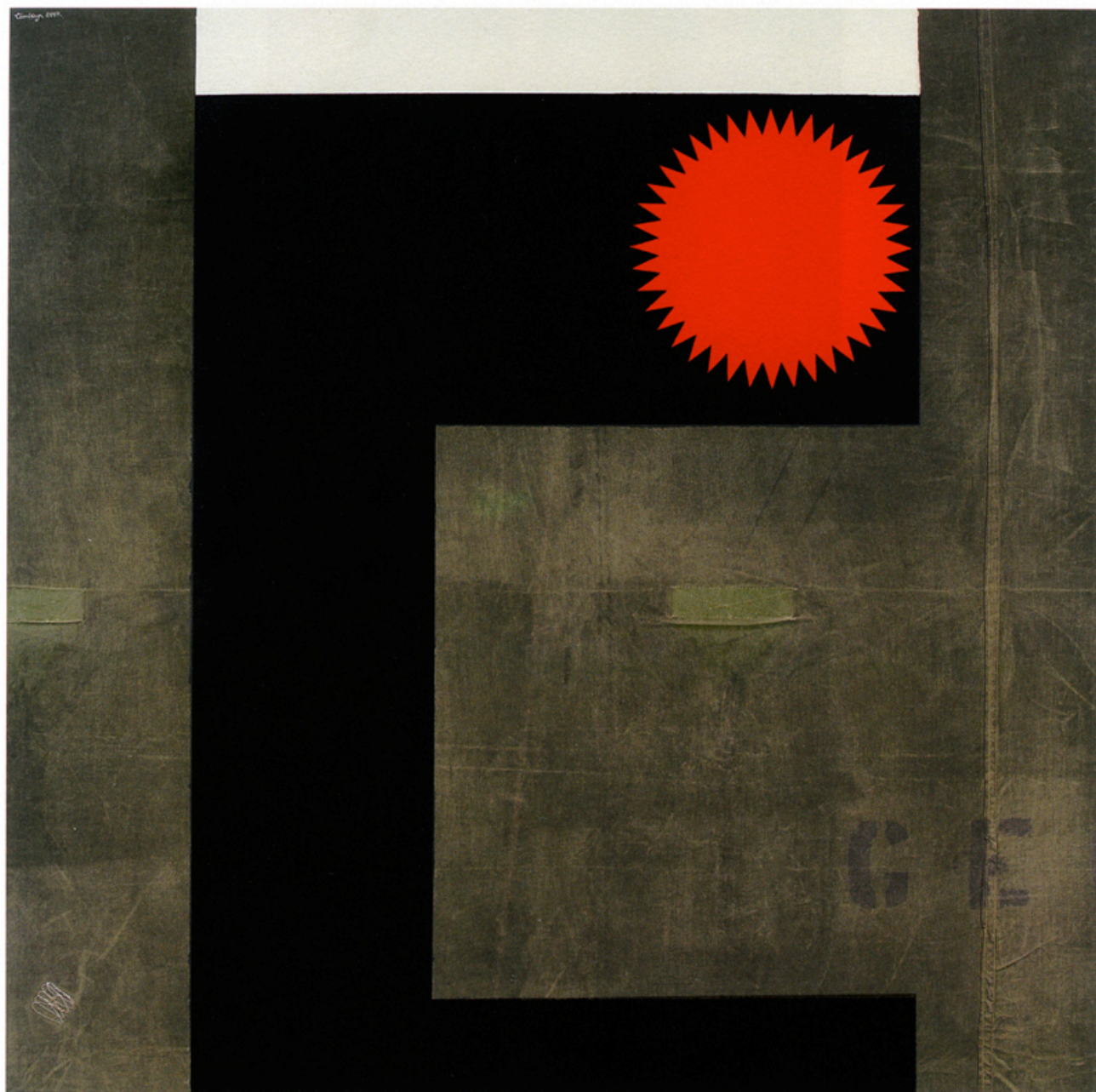
Always! I like the routine and physical interaction of playing LPs. I have a large eclectic collection of records, mainly thanks to the bargain bin at the local Brotherhood of St Laurence. It's amazing what people discard. Nina Simone is my favourite.

Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?

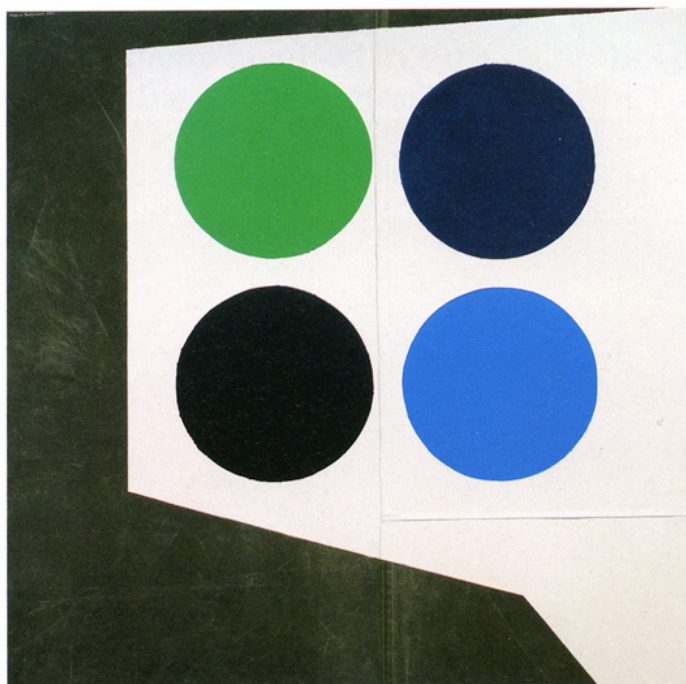
Anything by William Scott, particularly his paintings of frying pans and his still lifes from 1969–73. ⁽⁴⁾

Exhibition: Pre-formed, Martin Browne Fine Art, Sydney, 6 Feb – 2 Mar

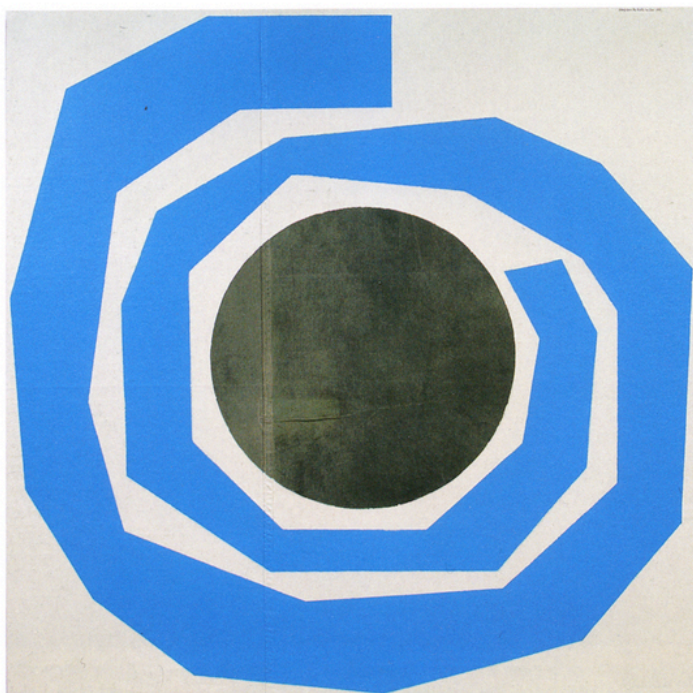
CV Born: 1963, Murrumbidgee, New South Wales Studied: National Art School, Sydney Lives and works: Melbourne, Victoria Represented: Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne; Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide; Martin Browne Fine Art, Sydney



Climbing (2007), acrylic on tarpaulin, 180 x 180cm



Made in Switzerland (2007), acrylic on tarpaulin, 180 x 180cm



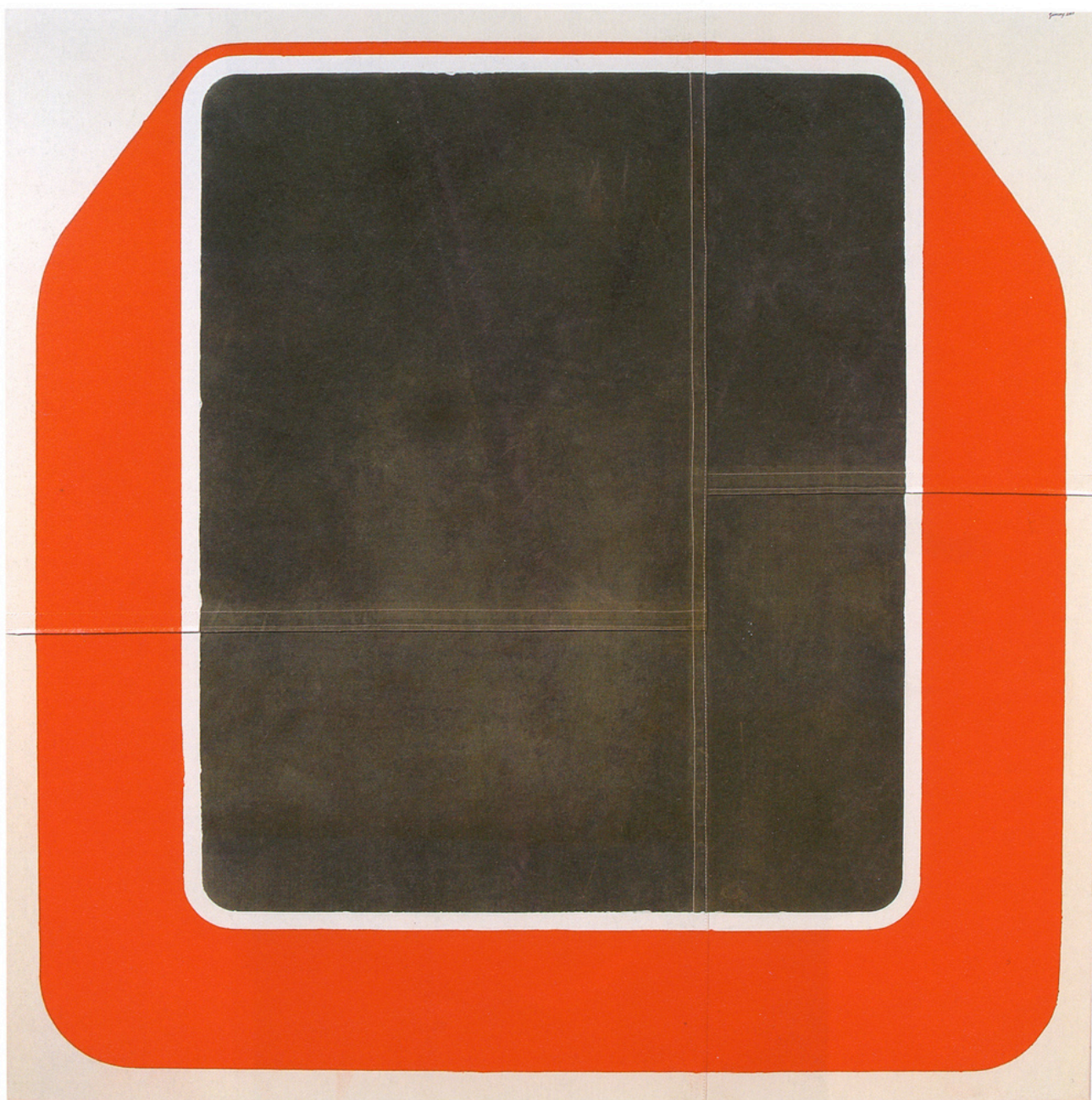
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen (2007), acrylic on tarpaulin, 180 x 180cm



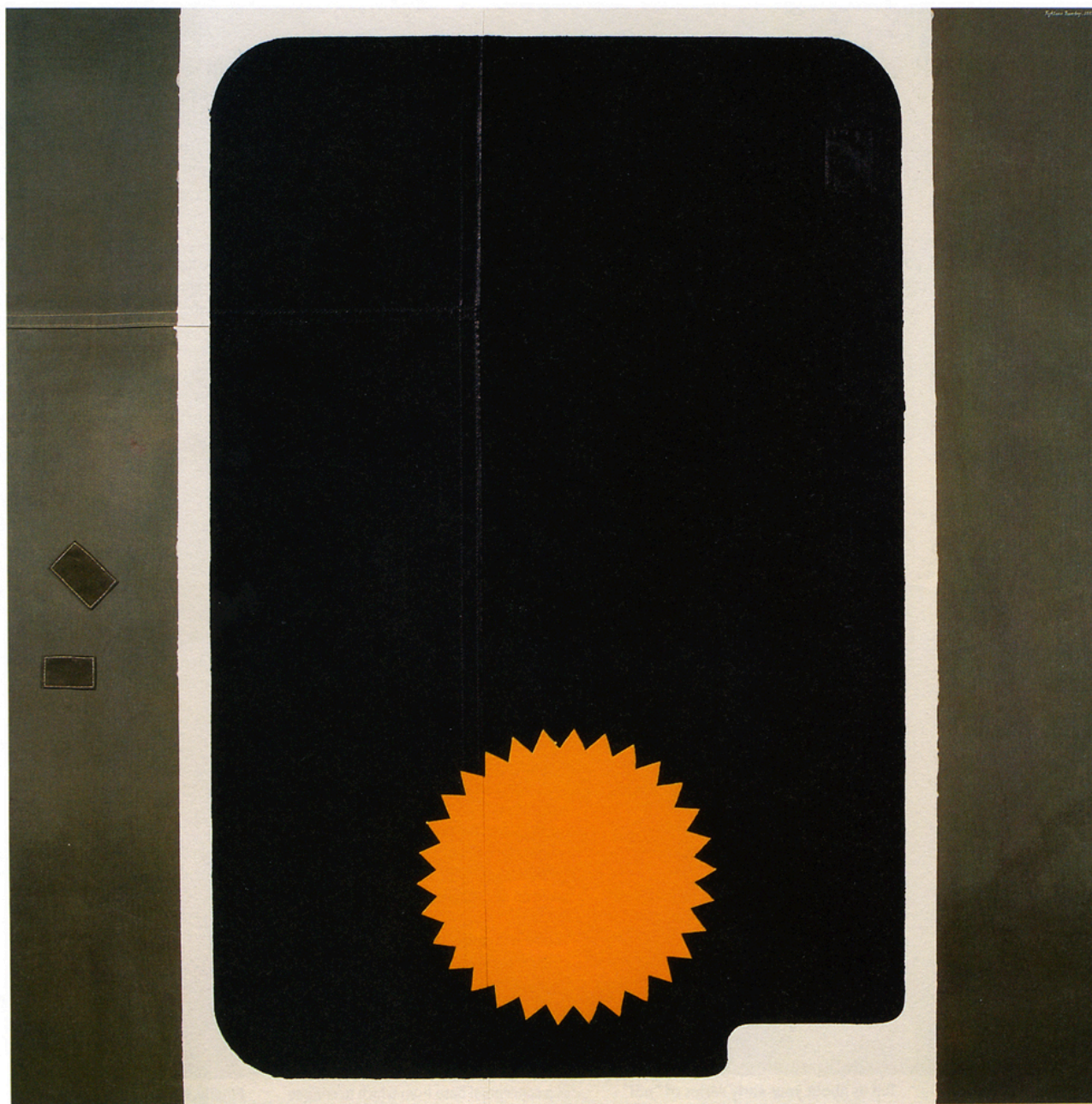
Andy Stewart (2007), acrylic on tarpaulin, 180 x 180cm



May '68 (2007), acrylic on tarpaulin, 180 x 180cm



Germany (2007), acrylic on tarpaulin, 180 x 180cm



Tightass Tuesday (2007), acrylic on tarpaulin, 180 x 180cm