

Media release

Marlee McMahon

Here the Door Ends

Date

23 May – 20 June 2026

Sutton Gallery is delighted to announce *Here the Door Ends*, Marlee McMahon's second solo presentation with the gallery. For this body of work, McMahon has created seven abstract propositions that go beyond architectural consideration, testing the impenetrable and expansive qualities of space.

In her new work McMahon invokes the stage in two ways: as a diagrammatic tool to loosely guide the pictorial framework, and as a metaphor for seeing abstraction as a site of performance. Akin to theatre's ability to build worlds through intimate encounters, the artist produces buoyant, non-hierarchical arrangements in which entire universes take shape through fragmentary groupings. These spaces are deliberate yet unpredictable, assembled yet unoperated.

In the development of this series McMahon has referenced the experimental stage designs of early twentieth century pioneers of abstraction Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962) and Alexandra Exter (1882-1949). Goncharova and Exter each synthesised folk imagery with a futurist vernacular to develop decorative backdrops for various theatrical productions, including Sergei Diaghilev's avant-garde ballet company Ballets Russes. These experimental sketches inform the musical and spatially ambitious quality of McMahon's new work. Colours shift subtly then intensely, and shapes reverberate with one another until a labyrinthine field of speculative ladders and coinciding circuits emerge.

As alluded to in her titles, McMahon's abstractions wrangle with the less cogent aspects of human relations. Her use of language is often prepositional and filled with potential; here are modes in which things, feelings, ideas can operate through, in, around, over, and between spaces. By peeking through McMahon's stage curtains, windows, screens, portals, and doorways, we are guided by authorial devices into a chartered void.

As Adorno puts it in a famous passage of *Aesthetic Theory*, this body of work seeks to "make things of which we do not know what they are". In an approach that hovers between naming and obscuring, between sensation and understanding, McMahon's abstractions savour the incomprehensibility of space, and give rise to embodied processes of looking, feeling and thinking about its permutations.

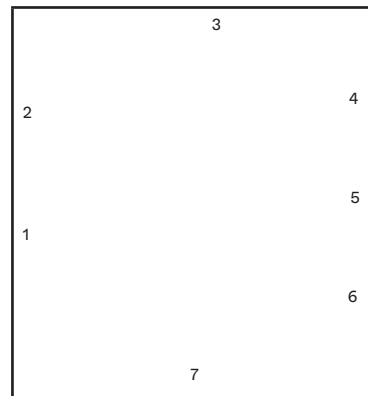
Biography

Led by an intuitive studio process that draws attention to the spatial boundaries of the work, McMahon investigates the dynamic relationship between chromatic interaction and surface tension through abstract painting. Her practice emphasises the human presence found within abstraction, employing deceptive shapes and redolent tones to unsettle the vocabularies of hard-edge abstraction and constructivism. Born in 1996 in Sale, VIC, McMahon received a Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne in 2017. During her undergraduate degree, McMahon was awarded the prestigious Cranbourne Fellowship in Visual Art in 2019, undertaking a residency at the British School at Rome, IT. Following her BFA, McMahon received the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship in 2020, through which she completed a Master of Fine Art (MFA) at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam, NL in 2023.

McMahon has exhibited frequently throughout Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Europe. She has presented work within institutions such as MaMA, Rotterdam, NL; European Cultural Centre in Venice, IT; British School at Rome, Rome, IT and the Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, AU, among others. Examples of McMahon's work can be found in public collections including the Australian National University (ANU) Art Collection, Canberra; Artbank, Sydney; Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, and numerous private collections in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Exhibition checklist

Marlee McMahon
Here the Door Ends
23 May – 20 May 2026



1. *Golden from Head to Tail*, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
87 x 97cm

2. *Fog in my Eyes, Ice in my Hair*, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
102 x 122cm

3. *Twittering Machine*, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
87 x 97cm

4. *To Glitter (Stars over Trains)*, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
102 x 122cm

5. *Forest of Us and Them*, 2026
Oil and acrylic on canvas
102 x 122cm

6. *The Rooster Cried Out*, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
102 x 122cm

7. *The City at Night*, 2026
Oil and acrylic on canvas
85 x 99cm