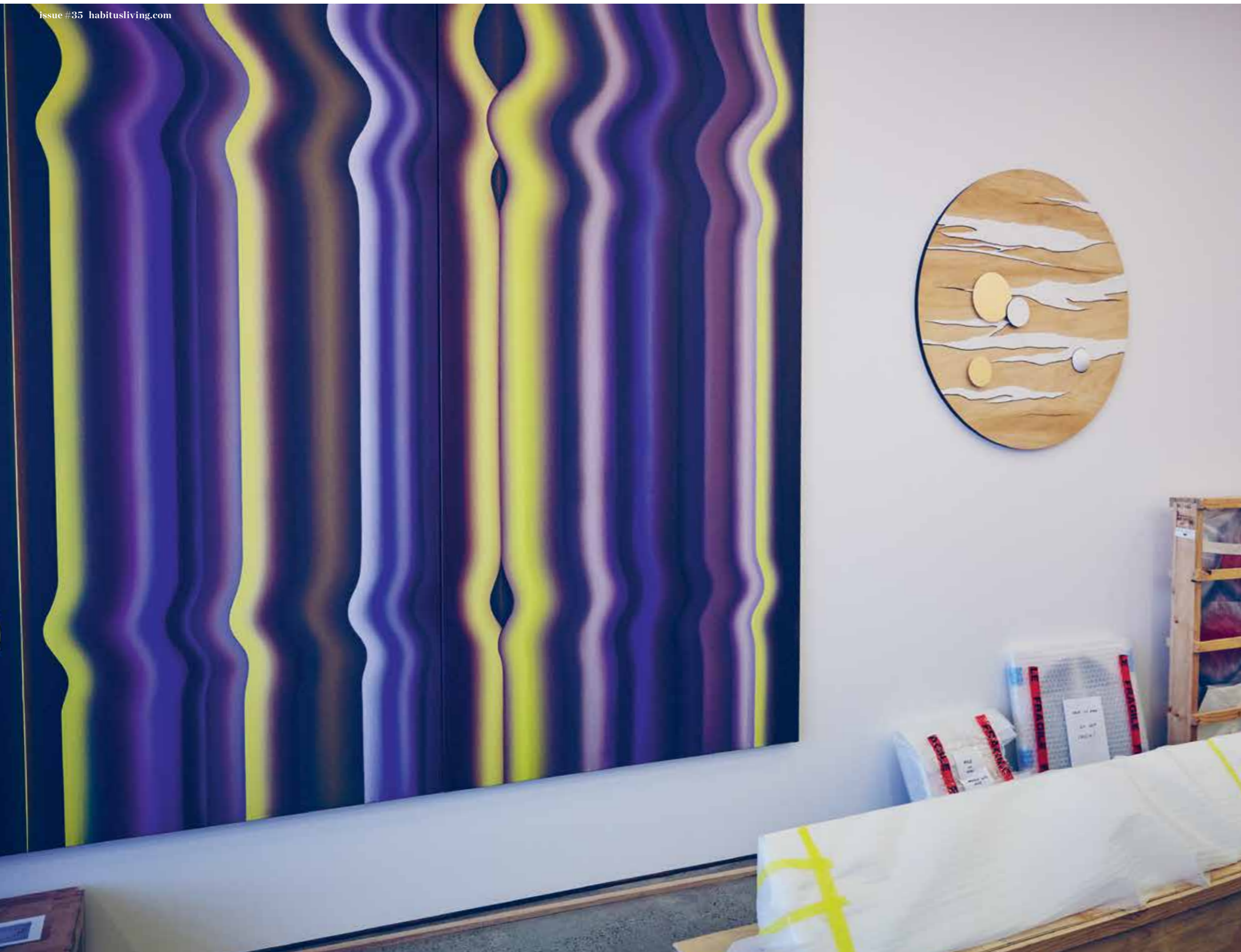


High *Definition*

TEXT BELINDA AUCOTT | PHOTOGRAPHY CHARLES DENNINGTON

More than 40 years ago **MARION BORGELT** left country Victoria to study art in New York and Paris. Forging her career at a time when being a female artist was still considered radical, we tune into her inimitable worldview.





Behind an industrial façade in Waterloo, NSW sits Marion Borgelt's studio. It is a vast, immaculate space, resembling something from Kubrick's *2001 Space Odyssey*. A quick look around reveals an elemental suite of materials; eggshell, glass, marble, gold leaf and pinewood. Part science laboratory, part gallery, Marion's studio reflects the work she makes. Though she trained as a painter, over her 40-year career, she has branched into working with many media, including temporal works and large outdoor sculpture.

The lower floor of her studio looks like an industrial woodwork shop, with bottles of varnish, trays of tape and little spheres of sandpaper neatly arranged. Several oversized circular artworks lie on their backs awaiting completion. Upstairs, it is more manicured. Floor plates are arranged with circular installations on plinths and large canvases line the walls. An office at the far end overlooks the street through a large window. The antithesis of a messy studio, the daily habits of this artist are clearly precise and measured.

"The safest place for my art work is on the walls," says Marion, as she marches around her studio, part schoolteacher, part zany scientist. She has several projects "on the go".

Here in the building she purchased in 2011, she makes art inspired by universal themes. She is interested in life cycles, cosmology, optics and natural phenomena. On her desk I find diagrams about Einstein's theories on gravitational pull, ripped from a newspaper.

"I need a workspace that is large and spacious, because the work is often quite minimal and carefully executed. And if the work is using colour, then I like to be able to sit them apart from each other so they resonate singly and don't clash with each other," she says.

"I don't like disorder. Disorder in my workspace drives me a little insane," she says to explain her studio, which is so clean you could eat your dinner off the floor.

"I don't really believe that you have to abide by the 'grunge' thing to be an artist - that is a *passé* concept," she says.

Still, she assures me previous studios were less glamorous. A hay loft, a converted shop, a fourth floor garret in Paris and a freezing cold studio in New York where "sometimes in winter snow flakes filtered in".

As her career has progressed Marion has moved from highly visceral and sensual oil paintings in blood reds and earthy blacks, to far more soothing, calm works with precise angles and high gloss finishes. There are connecting threads to early work, but the execution has become high end, almost luxurious.

Marion is like many minimalist artists for whom the work of the artist and the technician has become fused.

Her latest piece; *Liquid Light Sule Triptych*, commissioned by the Sule Shangri La Hotel in Myanmar, was based on the Sule pagoda. The elegant, horizontal artwork which stretches 4.5 metres, references the flickering light on the gold surface of the pagoda. It is very modernist, certainly minimal and possesses a timeless quality, as if riffing off nature.

"Growing up on a farm influenced me, but conceptually as much as with materials. More than anything just seeing the life cycles of all living things has influenced me. Everything that is alive will die. So I am interested in cycles and memory and time," says Marion.



AD



“I am fascinated by change and by the fact that nothing ever stops still. Every nanosecond the world is different.”

Despite myself, my eyes are continually drawn back to the walls where some of her artworks are boxed in Perspex, and hung like insects in a natural history museum. Every one of her works looks like an organic process studied under a microscope, a moment stopped in time for just a second.

“I am fascinated by change and by the fact that nothing ever stops still. Every nanosecond the world is different.”

Marion has a precise, almost pedantic, manner of speaking that is intermingled with inventive word play and child-like wonder. Words like magic, cosmic and serendipitous are never far from her tongue, as she describes the life she has so conscientiously created.

“Nature is endless,” she says taking off her horn-rimmed glasses and narrowing her eyes into blue rectangles. “Whether is it big; like an elephant with its newborn calf or whether it is minuscule, such as a little bacteria or chrysalis - nature is mind bogglingly extraordinary,” she says.

At her beach house near the Boudi Boudi National Park, Marion likes to collect things. A little nest found in her sister’s garden, a ghostly python skin, urchin shells, mottled driftwood and tiny cocoons sit arranged on the nature table.

But her studio in Waterloo is sacred, with all her neon work utterly confined to it. At home in her apartment or inside her beach house, there are no signs of her practice.

Nowadays Marion works with a small team of craftspeople and assistants to render her wild ideas, which she keeps mainly to herself for fear others will say they’re not possible.

“Ideas are a dime a dozen,” she says with an insistent glare.

“But what can you really make? Making things takes time and that’s the commitment - the time involved in materialising an idea.”

Aside from her precision and dedication, Marion is also notorious for pushing craftspeople and artisans “out of their comfort zone”. Often she asks them to bend wood, fire glass, wax surfaces or apply finishes to





sculptures in ways they have never done before. For one of her next projects she will be working with bronze.

“To find someone on your wavelength is rare. Rarer than rare,” she says almost laughing. “To find someone that you can work with and can interpret your ideas is...is like a gift.”

The other gift in her life is her husband Leo Christie OAM, a retired solicitor and philanthropist with whom she lives in Potts Point.

“Leo is an incredible anchor for my very flighty ideas and that can be so irritating and boring at times, but in the end, it’s probably a necessary balance to have. However, if my ideas resonate for him, he is extremely supportive” says Marion.

Together they share a very minimalist home in Potts Point. Marble and stone predominate in the kitchen and dining rooms, while hundreds of books and framed art works are the softening force.

“I like that there is a lot of space and that it has the sense of a bit of a New York loft. It is not industrial, but when I first saw it I just stood there and thought “I love this.”



AD



Spacious, ordered and flanked with floor-to-ceiling windows, the large rooms pull together classic Danish furniture and monochrome set of art works. Nothing is out of place.

Marion's pursuit of order and perfection can be seen as strongly in her working space as in her home.

"There is a pursuit of perfection, but I never get there so let's be realistic about that," she says smiling.

"I never get there and I never think the light is good enough because I believe there was always imperfections that I can never see. So I am really my own worst enemy."

Marion's steely focus does not slip. With her artworks occupying a space between spirituality and science, her latest pieces show the closest possible marriage of concept and technical expression. The all-white studio glows like an all-knowing backdrop. It merely sets the stage for her tireless practice. And as Aristotle once observed; "Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work."

Marion Borgelt is represented by Dominik Mersch in Sydney, Karen Woodbury Fine Art in Melbourne and Turner Galleries in Perth.

AD