



Room at the top: de Goede's studio in a former schoolhouse in Stepney Green, east London BROADBENT GALLERY

# JULES DE GOEDE

## Abstract artist and teacher

**T**he Dutch abstract painter and teacher Jules de Goede was a quiet but abiding and popular presence in the London art scene from the mid 1960s onwards; he introduced a continental purism and uncompromising abstraction to avant-garde British art. In spite of the modern English school's relish for landscape and a residual romanticism there remained on these shores a small but determined core of advanced abstract artists who, by experimenting with architectonic and geometric form, continued the tradition of the pre-war "Circle", post-war "Constructionist" and 1960s "Systems" groups.

Jules de Goede arrived in England, a raw and untested yet cosmopolitan 28-year-old artist, via a circuitous route. Born in Rotterdam to parents who were part Dutch, French and German, de Goede, his two brothers and four sisters were raised in Nijmegen and lived through the Nazi occupation and subsequent liberation of Holland.

Early memories of the flat Dutch landscape were as influential as the pressing example of the indigenous de Stijl "school" on de Goede's future artistic development. A Dutch resourcefulness came increasingly to play in the reductive and logical geometric language that de Goede later fashioned in London. Architecture also inspired early copies painted from postcards of Old Master Dutch landscapes.

A precocious talent was nurtured at the art academies in Arnhem and later Eindhoven. These studies were compromised by day jobs as a silkscreen printer or packaging designer and, after the early death of his mother and the family's subsequent emigration to Australia, in the Australian News and Information Bureau and the National

Capital Development Commission in Canberra.

As in Holland, de Goede's irrepressible urge to make art saw him attend part-time courses at the Julian Ashton and Desiderius Orban art schools. He met Brett Whiteley and other local artists and enjoyed three solo exhibitions, the products of which revealed the transition from figurative to informal or abstract-expressionist painting.

Having moved back to Europe in 1965, establishing himself in a Holborn flat in central London, de Goede set off on the uncompromising mission of becoming a full-time artist intent on exploring the fundamental spatial dynamics of pure form on the flat surface of pictorial art. The inherent tension between concrete flatness and illusory space gave modern painting its cutting edge and de Goede tackled the problem in the most direct and novel way: by introducing insertions and elliptical cavities which opened up the canvas surface to real recessive depth.

As the critic Corinna Lotz later wrote, de Goede was "deconstructing the notion of a canvas as a flat screen on which an illusion is to be projected". De Goede's use of the neutral square format, straight or curved hard edge shapes, and a severely reduced palette of black, white and grey, expunged extraneous associations with the natural world.

At times appearing overly clinical, akin perhaps to mathematical diagrams, de Goede's work nonetheless pursued its self-contained language in a manner that, through the introduction of manifold variations on themes, allowed a lyrical, even musical, playfulness to emerge. *Trompe-l'oeil*, visual tricks with perspective and the interplay between painted dimensional forms like cylinders or cubes and real spatial voids rendered unpredictable effects that coun-

tered measured, laboured and mechanical means of expression.

By natural extension, and in marked contrast to the revered Mondrian, de Goede later made sculpture. The curved, painted sheets of thin metal stemmed from the long "Zz" painting series of the late 1990s. The later free-standing painted wood columns, on the other hand, used black, white and grey planes to reflect light and radiate like the minimalist sculptor Dan Flavin's fluorescent light tubes.

De Goede's reputation in London was established through three biennial solo exhibitions with Grabowski Gallery between 1967 and 1971, and two at Jenny Stein's House Gallery during the late 1970s. He also projected himself through teaching and organising open-studio events. After losing a communal studio space in St Katharine's Dock in the late 1960s, de Goede and several other artists – among them the sculptor Michael Kenny and painter Bert Irvin – set up in an old red-brick Jewish schoolhouse in Stepney Green, east London. Here he occupied the large, unrivalled, top-floor studio formerly used by the sculptor Hubert Dalwood, a space in which he was able to realise his often ambitiously scaled wall-bound or free-standing paintings.

In 1972 Dalwood invited de Goede to teach at Middlesex University (formerly Hornsey College of Art) where his strong views, interdisciplinary interests and shop-floor empathy with younger artists ensured a long teaching career and promotion to senior lecturer. Teaching helped him survive commercially uncertain times, but by the time he retired from teaching in 2003 his work had finally taken off. A Jerwood Prize finalist in 1996, de Goede went on to claim success after the millennium through his west London dealer Angus Broadbent. A book with texts by Mel Gooding and Corinna Lotz, published by Broadbent in 2006, reflected this late and fully deserved success.

**Peter Davies**

*Jules de Goede, painter and teacher: born Rotterdam, The Netherlands 20 May 1937; Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer, Middlesex University 1972-2003; died London 19 September 2007.*