



**Imants Tillers' imposing paintings are a patchwork of smaller works. They reflect his mathematical mind, but also his interest in Aboriginal culture. By ALICIA BRIDGES**

Imants Tillers with his work at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.  
 Picture: Stewart Allen

**T**HE ENORMOUS WORKS OF IMANTS TILLERS are a rare example of art and mathematics joining in harmony. Each painting is a grid of smaller canvas paintings, which can number more than 200.

They are complex to install, with each piece needing to be arranged by number and hung individually.

Tillers has painted 85,000 small canvases in a career spanning more than 20 years.

As part of the Perth International Arts Festival, the Lawrence Wilson Gallery has couriered about 2500 of them to Perth for the exhibition The Long Poem. It will be the first time Perth has hosted a

solo show by the celebrated artist. In his eyes, the pieces on show are more samples than individual works.

"What you get in a show is a sample of different series of works," he says. "The concerns and the imagery have changed over the years."

Tillers grew up in Sydney, where his Latvian parents moved to escape Soviet communism.

He began painting in 1981, using small canvas boards as an economic way to create big, easily transportable works. He has also completed an architecture degree and the method reflects his mathematical mind.

The subject matter of Tillers' work has changed



over the years. In the early 1980s he was inspired by the renaissance of painting in contemporary art.

"In the '70s the dominant forms were conceptual art and painting was definitely not so highly thought of," he says. "In the early '80s you got a number of artists from America and Germany and Italy who brought a new approach to painting with neo-expressionism.

"But there was another stream as well, which had a critical edge to it. It was work which was using appropriation and quotations."

Tillers' paintings from that era reinterpret works from the likes of New Zealand's Colin McCahon and Aboriginal artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye. He was criticised at the time for replicating the works without permission. But he later collaborated with Michael Jagamara Nelson, another Aboriginal artist whose work he had appropriated.

The Long Poem shows the progression of Tillers' work, from that of his first international show in 1981 to more recent pieces inspired by the landscape around his Snowy Mountains home.

His interest in Aboriginal culture still shows in his most recent works, one of which maps the lost languages and tribes across Australia.

Tillers sees his catalogue as a work in itself; one that will be complete only when his last painting dries.

"I have numbered all [the paintings] consecutively so I have kind of exhibited a work in progress," he says.

"I guess it is really a journey. One thing leads to another."

**Imants Tillers: The Long Poem. Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, UWA, Crawley, until April 21.**