

the
order
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Daniel Robert Hunziker *Patch*, 2014
Framed knitted bedspread
Courtesy Galerie von Bartha, Basel, and Hales Gallery, London

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This publication documents the exhibition and seminar at The Wilson, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, 28 January to 5 March, curated by Andrew Bick, Jonathan Parsons and Katie Pratt. The project was organised in partnership with The Cheltenham Trust and Practice as Research at The University of Gloucestershire, supported by the Being Human Research Priority Area and Arts Council England.

The seminar lectures are transcribed as directly as possible into print format, and an additional performance by A K Dolven of her vinyl record *JA as long as I can* marked the end of the event.

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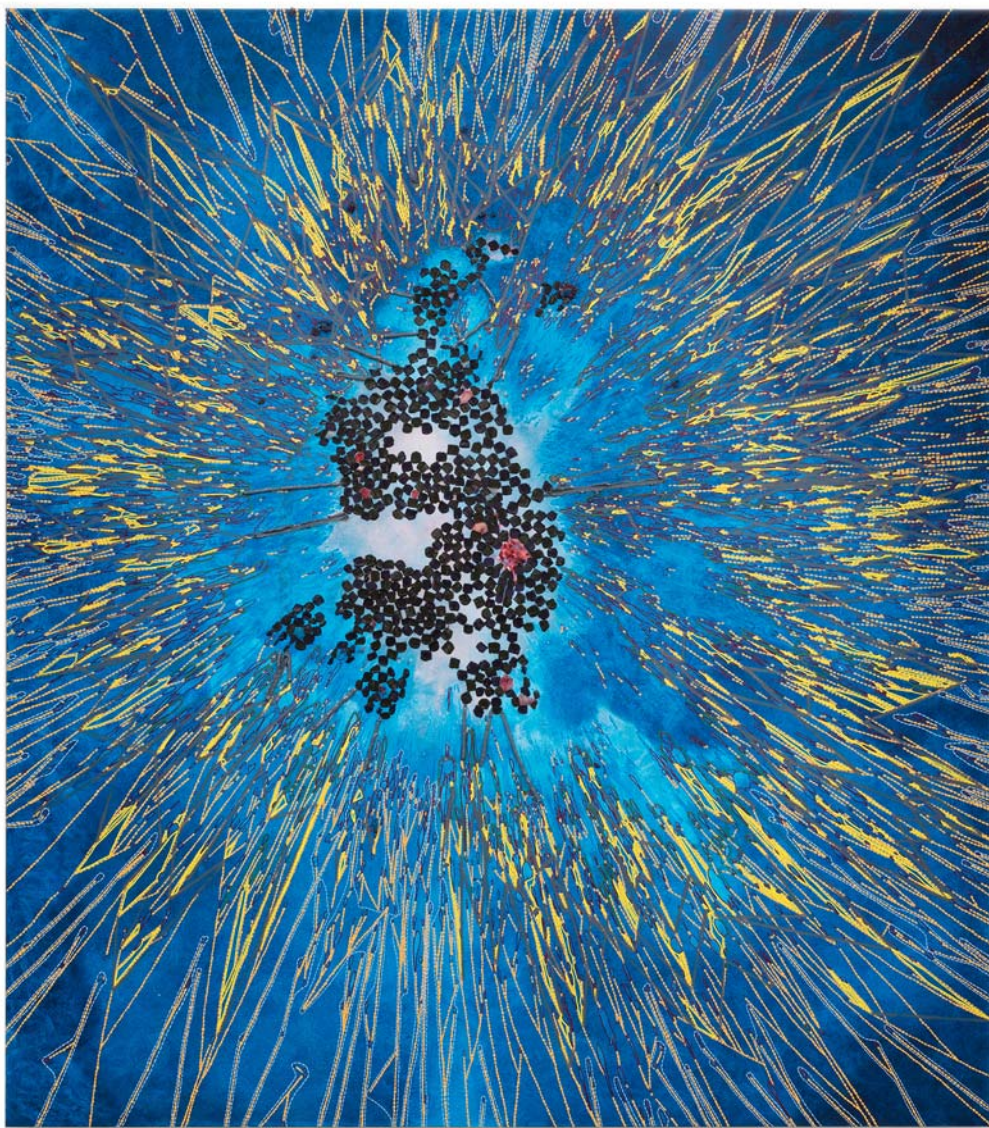
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Katie Pratt *Sisicily*, 2017 Oil and encaustic on canvas

THE ORDER OF THINGS: SELECTED WRITINGS

Exploring grids and improvisation through an ongoing series of my drawings and paintings in relation to legacies of British Constructionism has, since 2008, underpinned my approach to art practice. As an extended project, this has paid particular attention to the artist Gillian Wise's approach to the grid. A series of exhibitions and seminar papers I have presented since 2010 further explore a set of principles out of which this approach to practice is formed. The exhibitions considered here were: *Conversations around Marlow Moss*, (co-curated with Katrina Blannin) at &Model 2014¹; *The Human Abstract*, at Gallery No.4a 2015²; *Andrew Bick: Conversation* at The Cornerstone Gallery, Liverpool Hope University, 2015³; *original/ghost/variety/shifted/double/echo* at Museum Haus Konstruktiv 2017⁴; and finally, *The Order of Things* (co-curated with Jonathan Parsons and Katie Pratt) at The Wilson, 2017⁵. The seminars in question were: *Abstract Connections*, Tate Modern, 12–13 April 2010; *Parallel Lives, Claude Cahun & Marlow Moss*, Leeds Art Gallery, 16 June 2014; and, *Staging Painting*, ICA, 21 July 2015. The following excerpts document the development of my studio production and critical thinking. Here they are collated for my paper given at the seminar for *The Order of Things* at The Wilson, Cheltenham⁶.

From the paper for *THE HUMAN ABSTRACT*, 3 June 2015:

These drawings are based on a standardised grid which I have worked with since 2008: an amalgamation of my own paintings and a grid taken from Gillian Wise's pages in the catalogue for the Whitechapel Art Gallery's 1972 exhibition, *Systems* (Wise, 1973, p.58). There were two components in all these listed recent installations of my work (except Museum Haus Konstruktiv). Drawings were exhibited in parallel with archive material from my own collection of books, posters and ephemera relating to the British Constructionist and Systems artists,⁷ covering projects from the 1950s through to the early 1980s. As an approach to art practice, this is a proposal for the present and the future based on a reappraisal of the past. Questions are therefore prompted on the meaning of redundancy, on obsolescence and a corresponding rhetoric of youth, on the urgency of the new, the cutting edge and the technological. These investigations should be marked out as integral to even approaching the issue as to how to make truly contemporary art. (Osborne, 2013)

The dominant idea proposed here is that the humanity in visual art resides in the critical and political abstraction of our forebears and those comprehensive histories that (we assume) gives them proper placement. Too frequently, however, we undervalue the detail of this heritage. The gradual collapse, since the 1960s, of collective ideas and a common view of the social contract, is the context for this social change. My own generation, in our formative years, witnessed the growth of market-based individualism shaped by Thatcherism. Against this, henceforth, all things are measured: art included. The artists I refer to perceive visual art as necessarily part of a social and political context, not as an exercise of individualistic free will. (Blannin, 2012, p.16)

¹ &Model, Leeds, 12 June –18 July 2014

² Curated by Katie Pratt at Gallery No.4a, Malvern 23 May–13 June 2015

³ The Cornerstone Gallery, Liverpool, 16 November–18 December 2015, as part of the 2015 Creative Festival

⁴ Curated by Sabine Schaschl at Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, 9 February–7 May 2017

⁵ The Wilson, Cheltenham 28 January–5 March 2017

⁶ On 2 March 2017

⁷ Included in this archive are: *Broadsheet no.1* (March 1951), *Systems*, Whitechapel Art Gallery (1972), *DATA: Directions in Art Theory and Aesthetics: An Anthology*, Anthony Hill, Faber and Faber (1968), all key texts defining the thinking of British artists such as Anthony Hill, Jeffrey Steele and Gillian Wise.

‘these are ideas about society, in fact a social economic order, that can’t come about under a capitalist order. There is no way of telling what kind of architecture socialism would produce – in terms of a utopia...

‘This was the great fault of the Bauhaus of course. You can’t expect to build a little bit of beautiful socialist architecture for it to then become the opposite; solely the province of a sub-fraction of the capitalist class and this alongside a lot of decaying crumbling tower blocks which just give modernism a bad reputation. The cosmeticising process of Constructivism is then deeply, deeply ugly in terms of its social aspirations. That is not to say that it hasn’t produced some beautiful art.’⁸ (Jeffrey Steele, 2015)

From the paper *RESTAGING PAINTING AS A CONVERSATION*, ICA, 21 July 2015:

Why... should the process of looking at non-representational art be a crucial part of the contemporary encounter? I believe abstraction has an elusive relationship to language and narrative such that it embodies non-compliance: something at a premium in our marketised world! Specific forms of the non-representational, particularly those based in the principles of Concrete and Constructive art, have an excellent propensity for being disruptive. These determinate forms emphasise how we highlight the *materiality* of things as a means of defining their place in the world. They drive an imperative to subvert that material index by proposing strategies and formulae in place of physicality and intuition. The British users of Concrete, Geometric and Constructive principles have been marginalized and overlooked in their own country, yet offer immense potential for continued discourse within an international perspective.

From the paper *CONSTRUCTION AND ITS SHADOW, DOUBLE AGENTS AND SPLIT IDENTITIES IN THE WORLD OF ABSTRACTION*. TATE Modern Theo van Doesburg conference, *Abstract Connections*, 12–13 April 2010:

Theo Van Doesburg / I K Bonset was the archetypal artist and thinker, prescient in his restless search for a synthesis of his own [contradictory] artistic impulses and those of his contemporaries: other artists and avant-garde groups of the time. His work can now be seen as extending beyond the closed histories of modernism. In Van Doesburg’s/Bonset’s world, the contradiction embodied in an artist’s output becomes the paradigm for a complex practice. It is the way to operate simultaneously within *art as art*⁹ and art as socio-political exchange. I see this as a viable model by which art can address the contemporary situation. It is also a clarion call for the reconsideration of movements and artists whose lack of a straight punch line, narrative content or a good PR position has left them neglected by the established historical cannon. The British Constructionist and Systems artists fall into this category; often disregarded on account of their reputation for being difficult people. More profoundly, they were ignored because of their inherently complex practices, and the inability for most critical commentators (so far) to define their place in accounts of the development of radical modernism in the UK. A further reason for giving serious consideration to these artists is that, in part, looking back has become a necessary aspect of looking

⁸ Jeffrey Steele, as quoted on wall panel for his painting *Third Syntagmatic (Tsunami)* (Sg VIII I), 1965, in, *Adventures of the Black Square*, Whitechapel Gallery, 15 January–6 April 2015

⁹ Ad Reinhardt, *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, (1975)

forward. A correction in respect of the overlooked is therefore needed in order to realize new modes of art-making and art discourse.¹⁰ (Taylor, 2015)

From the paper *WHY I WISH MARLOW MOSS HAD CONFRONTED BEN NICHOLSON; ARGUMENTS ACROSS ART HISTORY AS A MEANS OF REARRANGING CONTEMPORARY POSITIONS*, Leeds Art Gallery Conference, *Parallel Lives: Claude Cahun and Marlow Moss*, 16 June 2014:

Revisiting Marlow Moss’ unanswered letters to Ben Nicholson and her subsequent dismissal, in a letter to Paule Vézelay (Howarth, 2008), of Nicholson’s hegemonic position as the face of abstraction in the UK, configures the argument between artistic positions and generations. Additionally, I propose that Marlow Moss, as a person and an artist, offers continued vitality after modernism because of how she represents the contradictory traits at the roots of the modernist project. She was never articulate or polemical in the way that Theo Van Doesburg was so brilliantly. Equally, she did not proselytize in the manner of her friend Piet Mondrian. Yet her relative silence, linguistically speaking, is a rebuke to the watered down modernism of post-war St Ives art. Lawrence Alloway mischievously observed:

‘In St Ives they combine non-figurative theory with the practice of abstraction because the landscape is so nice nobody can quite bring themselves to leave it out of their art.’ (Alloway, 2005, p.12)

Alloway was writing in 1954 about the newly formed group of Constructionist artists including Robert Adams, Anthony Hill, Kenneth and Mary Martin and Victor Pasmore. This description accurately sums up the difference between Marlow Moss, working in Lamorna, and Hepworth, Nicholson and their followers, working in St Ives, just a few miles away.

The post-war British Constructionist and Systems artists were not themselves that kind to Moss when she approached them in the 1950s. Victor Pasmore was particularly culpable in these terms. The accounts of Moss’ attempt to form a British branch of Groupe Espace with Paule Vézelay put these senior British artists in a bad light. (Howarth, 2008) Similar behaviour was echoed over the organisation of exhibition *PIER+OCEAN* thirty years later.¹¹

‘Yes! It certainly is not very much fun to get English abstract painters to join together. It would be easier to arrange the pieces of a torn letter neatly together while they are being tossed about in a stormy sea and perhaps artists are rather like such pieces in these times.’ (Howarth, 2008)¹²

With Katrina Blannin, I co-curated the exhibition, *Conversations around Marlow Moss* in 2014 for &Model, the artist-run project space in Leeds. Invited artists, including Blannin and Adam Gillam, presented contemporary practice in relation to the idea of a dialogue triggered by Moss’ work. Moss, who died in 1958, is of course absent from the conversation, yet the concept of dialogue extended across history and expanded across media and dimensions to encompass online forums.

‘The discourse here, and at events such as the conference at Leeds Art Gallery... in June [2014], and Andrew Bick and Katrina Blannin’s fascinating exhibition at

¹⁰ n.b. <https://drawingroom.org.uk/events/book-launch-after-constructivism-by-brandon-taylor> – Taylor, Brandon. Taylor gave a paper at the TATE conference which, like my own, made considerable reference to Constructionist artist Anthony Hill. His survey book *After Constructivism*, Yale University Press (2015) makes considerable scholarship available to a wider readership along with proposals as to how this might be informing contemporary art.

¹¹ *PIER+OCEAN: Construction in the Art of the Seventies*, selected by Gerhard von Graevenitz, assisted by Norman Dilworth, texts compiled by Barry Barker, Arts Council, 1980

¹² from Lucy Howarth’s unpublished PhD thesis, Marlow Moss, 2008 <http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.503801> See also Marlow Moss: *A Forgotten Maverick*, Sabine Schaschl (Ed), Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich, Stiftung für konstruktive, konkrete und konzeptuelle Kunst, text(s) by Lucy Howarth, Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen, Sabine Schaschl, graphic design by Harald Pridgar German, English 2017. ISBN 978-3-7757-4300-6

Model, open up another potential danger in the reappraisal of Moss: that her work could be entirely co-opted by academic debate to illustrate theoretical positions. Some artist women feel that courting a feminist approach is a compromise, a relinquishing of something (what? integrity? authenticity?) in exchange for critical attention. The same transaction could be being made between Moss's body of work and the post-modern critical lens presented at Model. I however favour the view that the more angles Moss and her work are approached from, and the more voices that contribute to the discussion, the more undeniable she becomes, until eventually she won't be left out of accounts of international Constructivism or British modernism.' (Howarth, 2014)

This comment from Marlow Moss expert Lucy Howarth, ended up being the last word of a lengthy exchange on the now-defunct *Abstract Critical* website pertaining to *Conversations around Marlow Moss*. In the interim, an interplay transpired, revealing the various vested interests of those who engaged with the project. The *Abstract Critical* editorial defaulted, as it always did, to privileging intuitive and poetic self-expression in painting and sculpture, manifest through gesture and choice of colour/material, but somehow mired in sub-Greenbergian rhetoric that manages to be deeply ungenerous to those outside its fragile credo.¹³ Clearly our initial statement for the website touched a nerve by suggesting that Britain had/has a somewhat muddled relationship with the tenets of modernism. With Blannin I also posted in the comments section as follows:

It would also be a mistake to think that this exhibition and its relationship to the work of Marlow Moss is not about finding ways of 'seeing past the muddle'. Making things visible, with all of the divergence this involves, is a vital first step in having a visual exchange about what happens next; an inevitable part of including current work is that doubt, hesitancy and a certain amount of playfulness has to be incorporated into its making and therefore affects the ways we end up looking at and discussing the earlier art that has been placed in the same context. Too much is at stake not to acknowledge that doubt and scepticism, inherent in the lack of attention given to most visual art by the world at large, must become part of addressing this art to the present and its own past simultaneously; for Concrete art, of course, it is an undervalued past. In these terms Alan Fowler's points are valid, but don't help deal with the question as to why Marlow Moss is still so under known in the UK. Max Bill and Vantongerloo can't help her with a British public any more than they can help the same public appreciate a Jean Spencer or a Jeffrey Steele and for this reason, what we are doing is not art history, but another form of engagement.

This engagement, for want of a better name, (interviews we have both made with Jeffrey Steele and David Saunders, conversations with Gillian Wise, Anthony Hill, Peter Lowe, curated exhibitions of their work and so on) we see as part of a critical and social responsibility. But it is not pedantic or academic, includes plenty of cheerful disagreement as well as the patient need to point out the contradictions between the various protagonists stated intentions; not as a flaw, but as an ongoing aspect of their vitality. If everyone got out more (and saw more exhibitions) perhaps the level of real attention to the artworks in question would

generate a stronger debate. A major Sophie Taeuber Arp retrospective has just opened at Aargauer Kunsthaus,¹⁴ we should all go and see it and then work collectively towards getting Marlow Moss, Gillian Wise and Jean Spencer treated in the same way. Perhaps *Abstract Critical* could pay for the flights? (Bick & Blannin, 2014)

Postscript:

Returning to Foucault (from whom the title of the exhibition and this publication is borrowed), writing on Velsquez' *Las Meninas* as a paradigm through which to write on words and things in general and the impact of the visual on our understanding in particular:

'But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax. And the proper name, in this particular context, is merely an artifice: it gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents. But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to say as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task. It is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language, always over meticulous and repetitive because too broad, that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations.' (Foucault, 2002, p.10)

With this exhibition and seminar we wanted to emphasise both the essential humanity within non-representational contemporary art practice – and at the same time, distinguish its presence, concreteness or actuality from the language surrounding it. Materials exist in parallel to language. Ideas are how we make conversation occur between the two and also how visual art, across history, time and space, triggers new forms of dialogue and builds generative forms of discourse. Accordingly, my central proposition is based on a need to lift the amnesia that surrounds forgotten and overlooked contributions to the development of modernism. Thus the essence of contemporary practice can best be grasped.

Andrew Bick June 2017

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¹³ <https://twitter.com/AbstractCrit/status/502177905729077248>, 20 August 2014, "My worry is that @Andrew Bick enjoys the muddle & if he began to solve it wouldn't have anything to make art about"

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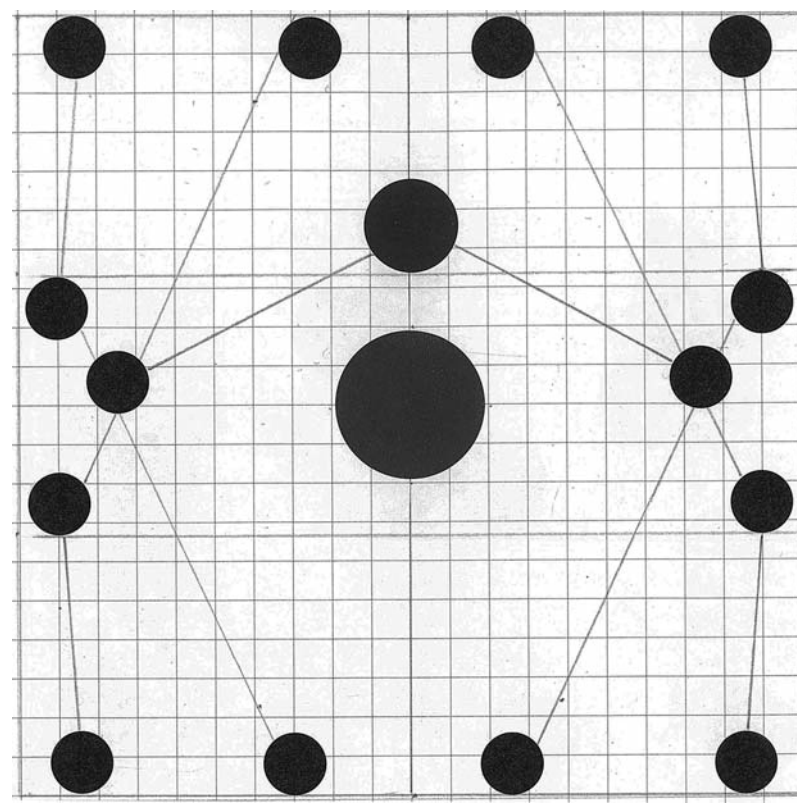
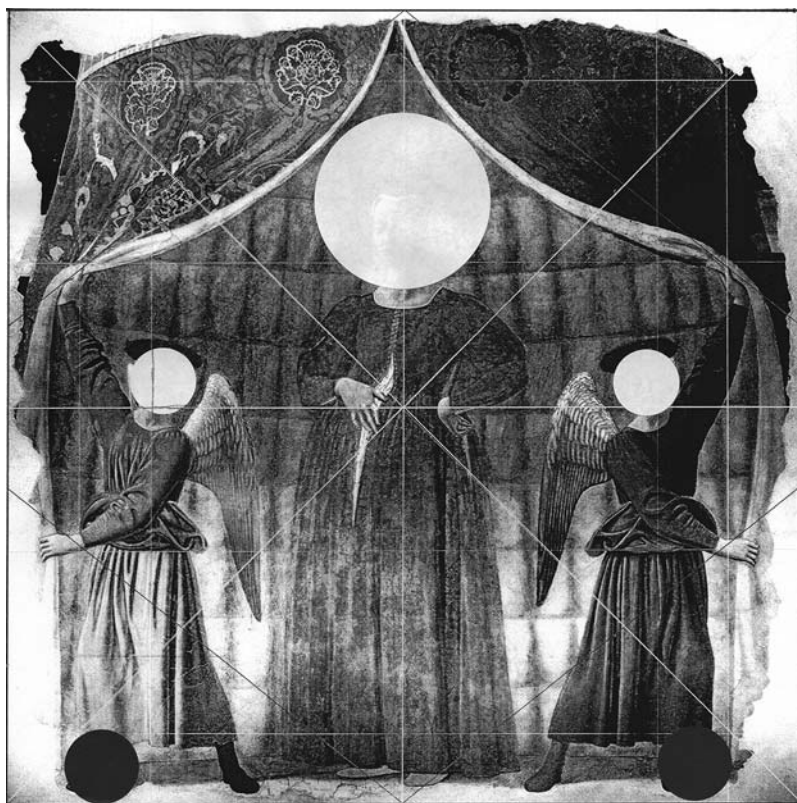
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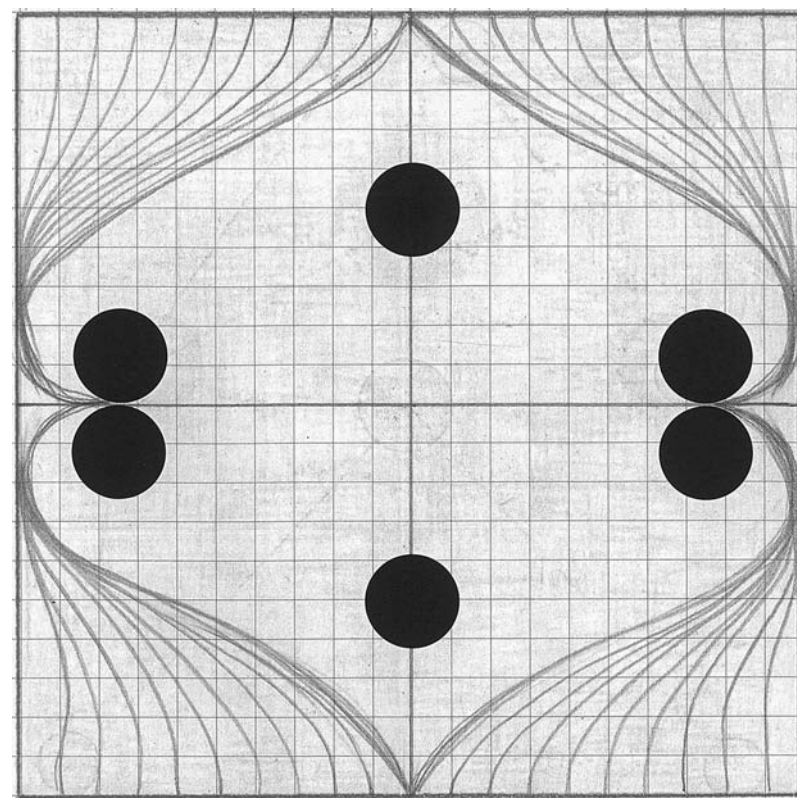
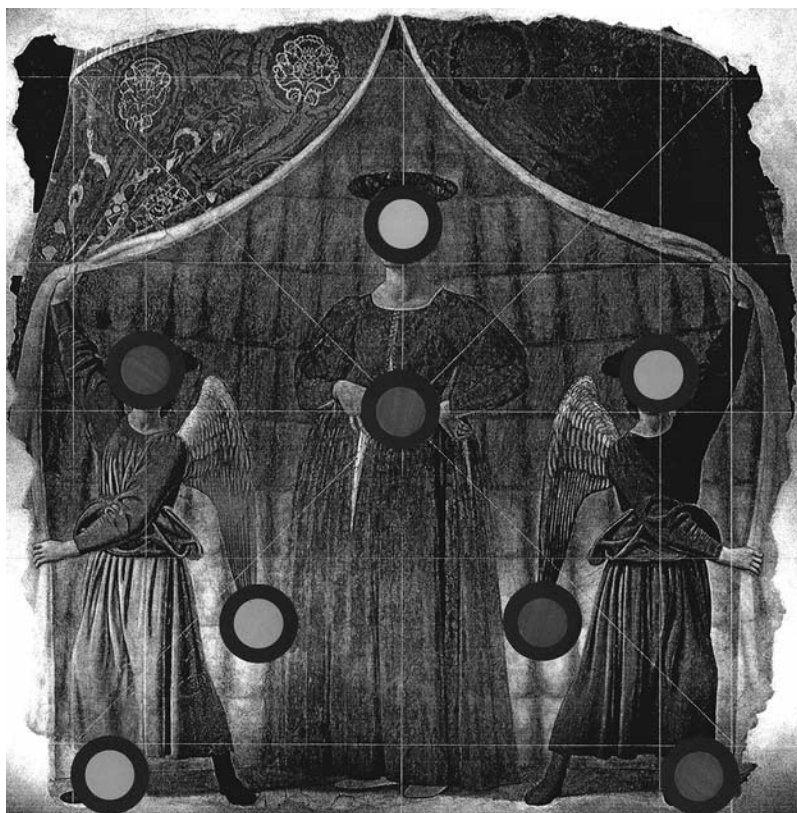
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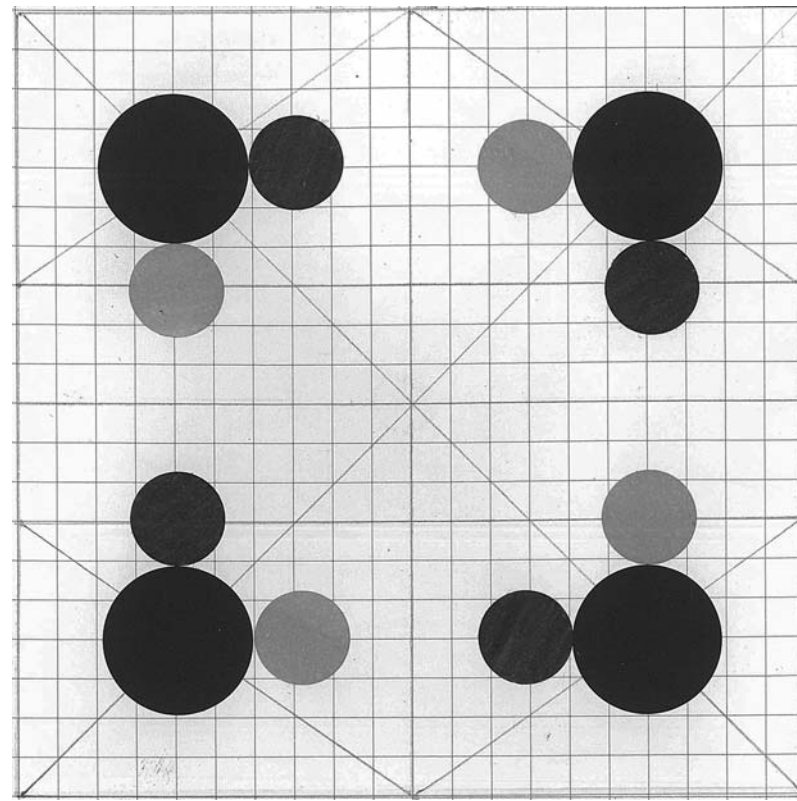
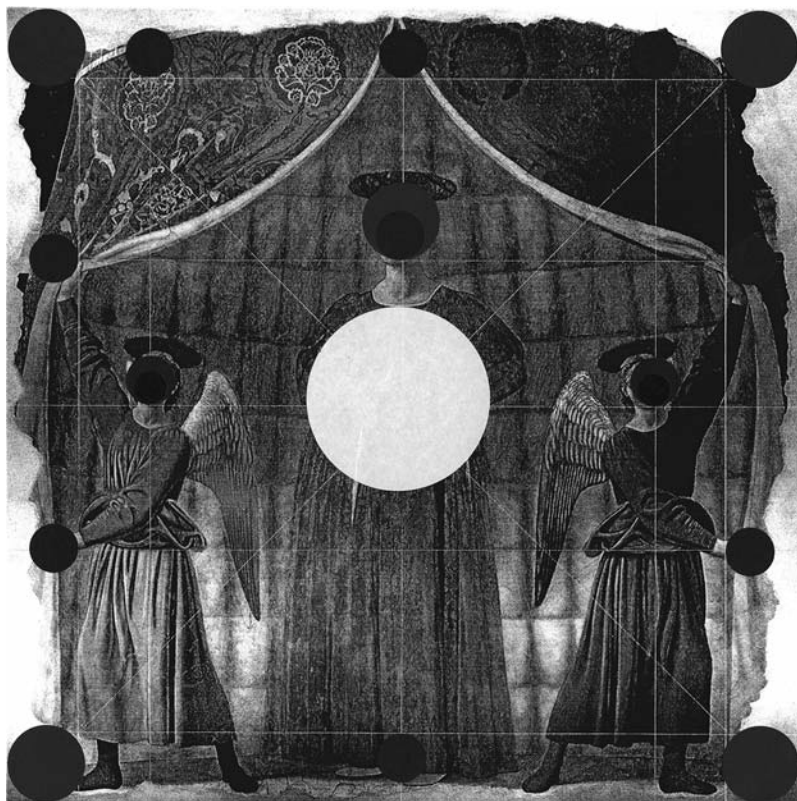
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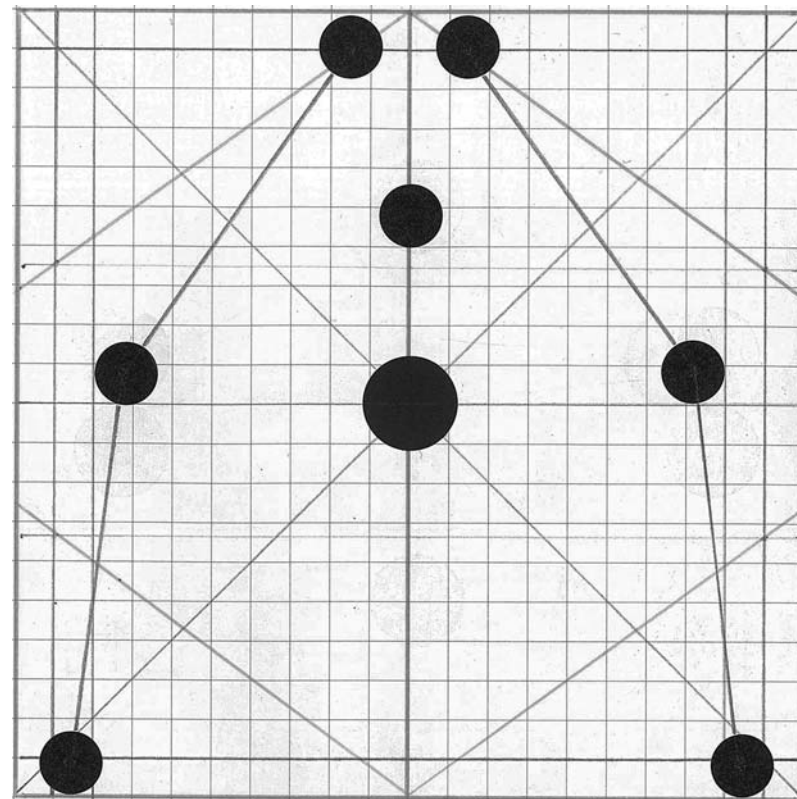
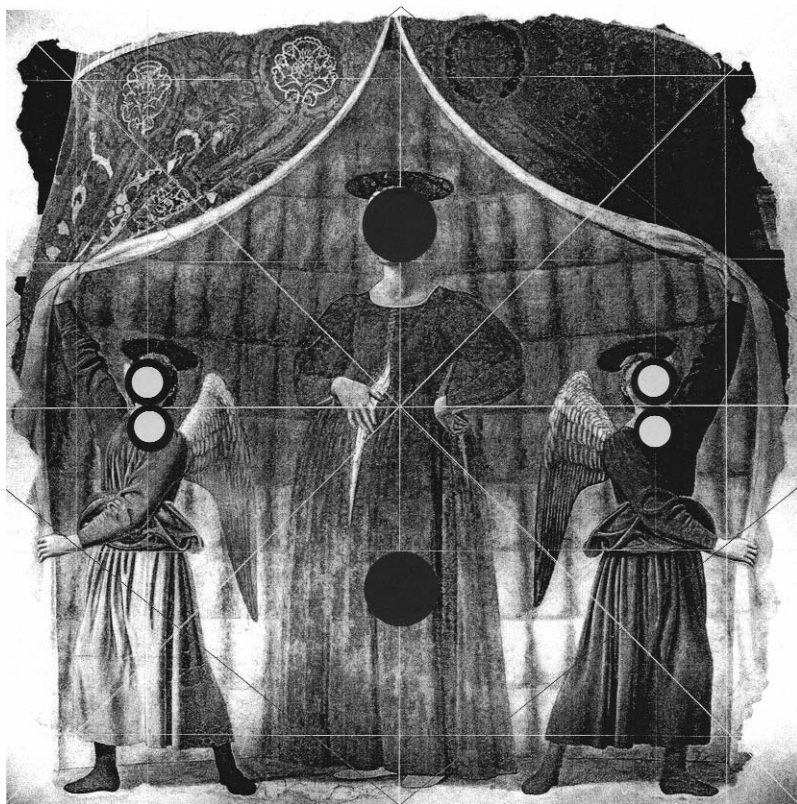
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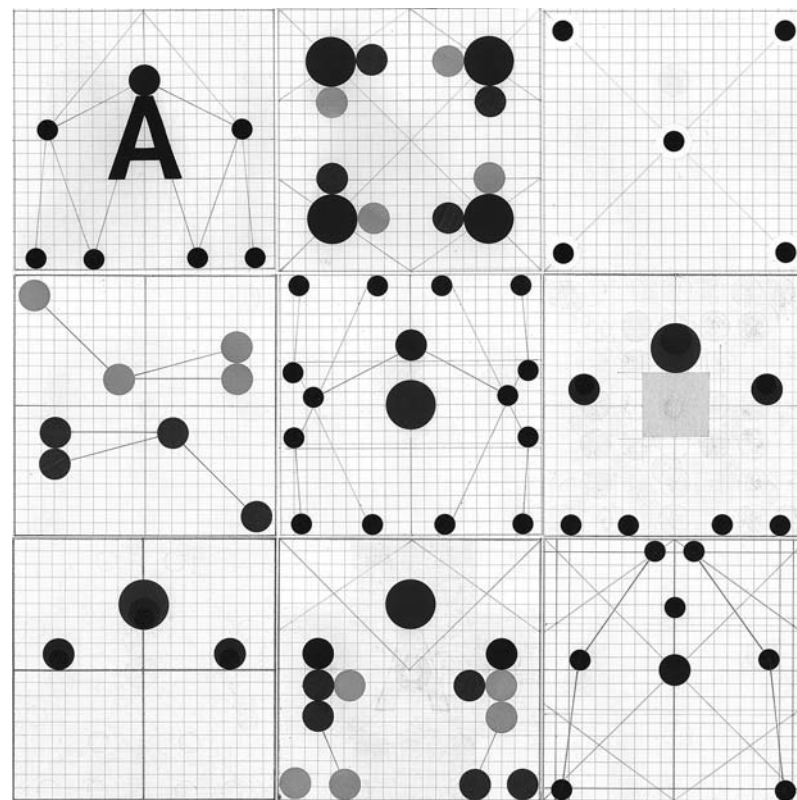
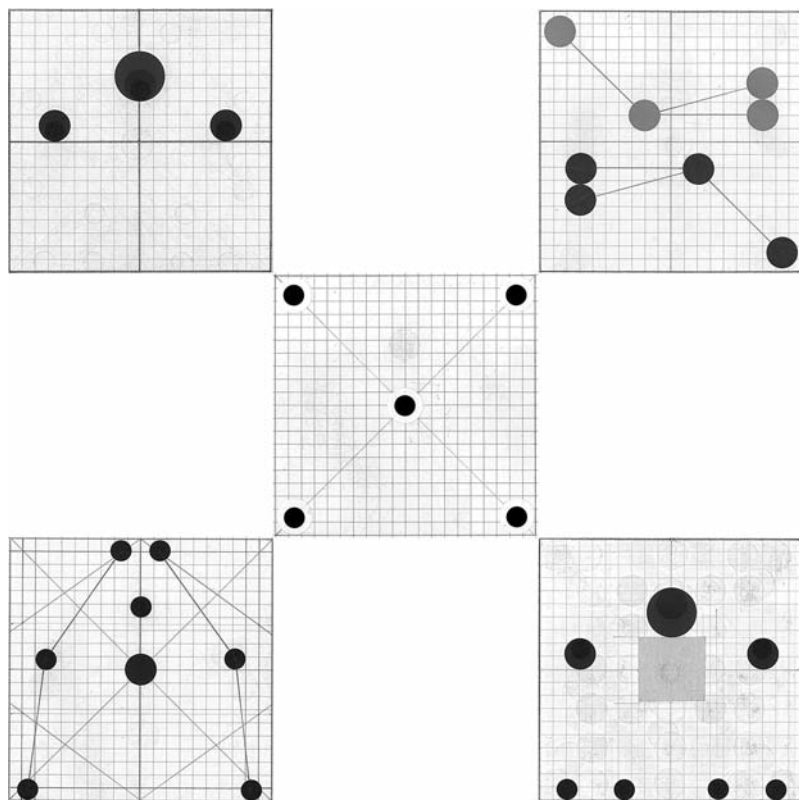
Digital slides from collaged, drawn and Xeroxed studies delivered as a lecture, 2 March 2017

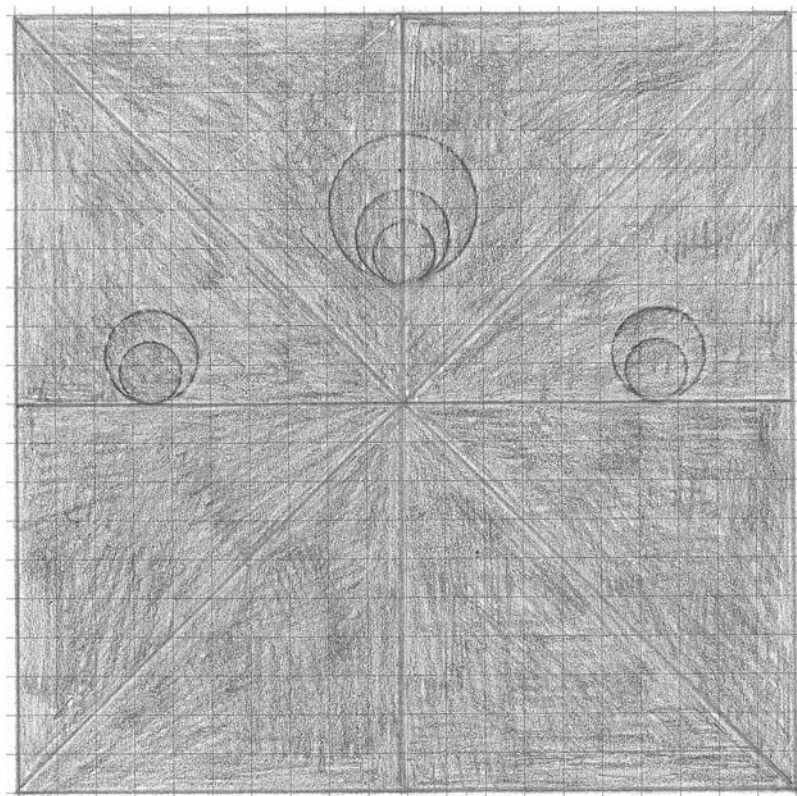












THE ORDER OF THINGS: CHELTENHAM ART GALLERY & MUSEUM, 2 MARCH 2017

Installation paradigms: Constructivism and light,
current and recent projects and the ethical question¹

The first four paragraphs of this lecture transcript are reconstructed by the author.

I begin with an installation view of two early works by Barry Flanagan [FIG.1-3]. I do not include titles or dates on the slide, because I do not want to prejudice or prefigure the experience of looking at these works. The photographs record the first occasion *one ton corner piece*, 1967, was re-situated since 1968 when Flanagan installed the work at his solo exhibition in the Rowan Gallery, London.²

Here a photograph shows one ton of builder's sand delivered in a jumbo one-ton bag outside the artists' collaboration, Cullinan Richards' studio in London in January 2015. This is followed by a photograph recording the 1968 London install from Flanagan's archive. There is a total of five black and white photographs documenting this work: two are from the Rowan Gallery and three from the Paris Biennale in 1967. The installation of each iteration is slightly different. One of the photographs of the Rowan version was included in an article by Charles Harrison on recent sculpture in Britain published in *Studio International*, January 1969.³

The image in *Studio International* was my first encounter with *one ton corner piece*. [FIG.4] Many years later I discussed the sand sculptures with Flanagan. I wanted to establish what his position was on the possibilities of showing them. We spoke in detail about the terms and conditions of exhibiting sand sculptures and also other works made with light. We agreed to maintain instructions for the sand in oral form; whereas for the light pieces, Flanagan kept written specifications from the time they were made. The photographic references provided another source of information and Flanagan's exhibition record files contain further information about the type and grain of sand, and in some cases the builder's merchants and the various quarries they had used as suppliers.

Editions of *Studio International* from the 1960s and 1970s act as more than simply a historical reference of the numerous exhibitions occurring during this time. *Studio International* traces conversations and exchanges between artists, writers and readers whereby the magazine becomes a forum for investigative discussion. I made a film to explain my decision-making processes for the making of the exhibition, *Five Issues of Studio International* at Raven Row, London in 2015.⁴ [FIG.5] I wanted to use real time to capture the experience of reading and looking through the magazines, interwoven with stories from the archive, like turning pages of those particular issues.

This one, *Air Art*,⁵ was the title of an exhibition curated by Willoughby Sharp, the American performance artist. [FIG.6] In *Air Art*, Sharp showed work made using air in different forms, including steam, air and inflatables. The catalogue opened with two words of Naum Gabo, 'Art Acts'. The catalogue essay was published in *Studio International* in May 1968.⁶ The idea of art acts determined my choices of

¹ I framed the 'ethical question' obliquely through the lecture by discussing remaking the artist Barry Flanagan's sculptural installations from the 1960s and 1970s. My deliberations address the role of a deceased artist's representative in repositioning work within the critical discourse of the cultural domain. This entails specific consideration of how and why certain art practices are particularly relevant to contemporary concerns in making art. There are conundrums of ethical issues. These necessarily involve questions of inhabitation and of decision making through the production of work, its authenticity as well as its authorship.

² Barry Flanagan: *Recent Sculpture*, 5–25 April 1968 Rowan Gallery, London. The photographs are in the Barry Flanagan Archive, London.

³ Charles Harrison 'Recent Sculpture in Britain', *Studio International* Vol.177, January 1969, (pp.26–33)

⁴ *Five Issues of Studio International* took place from 26 February to 3 May 2015. 'Five Issues of Studio International', Jo Melvin and Oliver Beatty (camera) film looped, shown in the exhibition on two monitors, one in the entrance and the other on the third floor with the intention that viewer could dip in and out as they wish.

⁵ + ⁶ See overleaf

5 The exhibition, *Air Art*, toured in USA and Canada during 1968–9: Arts Council, YM/ YWHA, Philadelphia, PA (13–31 March 1968); Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH (25 April–19 May 1968); Lakeview Center for the Arts and Sciences, Peoria, Illinois (7–28 June 1968); University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, CA (13 January–16 February 1969); Lamont Gallery, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, NH (25 February–18 March 1969); Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta (4 September–26 October 1969)

6 Willoughby Sharp, 'Air Art', *Studio International*, Vol. 171, May (1968) reprinted in *Five Issues of Studio International*, (Jo Melvin, Ed), 2015, Raven Row, London, pp.60–63

7 William Tucker, *Karnak* 1965, painted fiberglass, 54.5 x 136.5 x 132cm, copy No. 2 from an edition of 4, plus 3 artist proofs

8 William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 1977)

9 William Tucker, *Studio International*: An essay on sculpture,' Vol.177, January 1969; 'Four Sculptors (part 1): Brancusi,' Vol.179, April, 1970; 'Four Sculptors, (part 2): Picasso Cubist Constructions,' Vol.197, May 1970; 'Four Sculptors (part 3): Matisse,' Vol.180, September 1970; 'Four Sculptors (part 4) David Smith,' Vol.181, January 1971; 'Notes on Sculpture,' Vol.183, January 1972; 'Sculpture and architecture: an introduction to my recent work,' Vol.183, June 1972; 'Brancusi at

conversations between artists: the performative, gestural and invitational exchange of art activity. I focused on Gabo through Constructivism, political and ideological aesthetic responsibility and Kineticism: how he transformed and transmuted these vital ideas across generations which precipitate different forms and ways of interacting with those essential ideas.

I was talking about Flanagan's exhibition at the Rowan Gallery, 1968, that you saw the archival photograph of [*one ton corner piece*] and my intention was to show the informality of editorial decision making. Because at the time that this magazine was happening – and the editorial office was in central London – it was possible for artists and writers to meet on a regular basis, either in the office or in the nearby pubs. Artists would come along with photographs of recent works and talk to somebody who would be writing about their work, and they would say, 'no, well actually, this photo works better than that one...', and substitute what had been already laid out. This was the norm in the Sixties. Firstly they would glue the images and text on paper. From this, they would print page-pulls (a draft of the magazine page). And so you could see this complete process; a literal exchange of the actual material, and how important that actual exchange is in the production of meaning – the actual idea itself, the layout and the concept.

This is another install shot from *Five Issues of Studio International* and shows part of that dialogue around Constructivism. [FIG.7] There was a constant to-ing and fro-ing of ideas generated by William Tucker, who you see in the foreground with the work called *Karnak*.⁷ William Tucker wrote a book, which was very important at the time, called *The Language of Sculpture*.⁸ It was first published as a series of essays in *Studio International*.⁹ To the left is *Karnak* and on the right, *Structurist Relief, Red Wing No. 20*, 1954–65, by the American artist, Charles Biederman. [FIG.8] Biederman authored a series of self-published books. One was on Cézanne,¹⁰ and another entitled *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge*.¹¹ These books circulated between artists who hadn't had access to what his work looked like in the flesh. They had only seen black and white reproductions in magazines. A vast swathe of artists, including British Constructivist artists, responded to Biederman through print circulation and made works that were predominantly black and white. Then the revelation of colour introduced a completely new dynamic into this way of thinking. For many artists who visited Charles Biederman, who lived in a remote place outside Minneapolis called Red Wing in Minnesota, the experience of having conversations with him was central to their evolving thinking. A range of artists from across Europe, America and the UK went on pilgrimages and you can see traces of these exchanges in the magazine itself.

On the right-hand side, you see two multiples in Perspex boxes by Robyn Denny.¹² Denny organized the Biederman exhibition in the Hayward Gallery in 1969.¹³ There was a magazine issue dedicated to Biederman in which artists who were affected by him or in exchange with him wrote about his work. Among these were Denny and Anthony Hill.¹⁴ There is also a statement by Gabo. I am pointing this out because it is about a remaking of *Kinetic Construction (Standing Wave)*, 1919–20.¹⁵ [FIG.9] This remaking is important and it occurred because he was included in the

exhibition, *The Machine: As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* at The Museum of Modern Art, in New York in 1968–9.¹⁶ This work had been acquired by the Tate Gallery in 1966. The Tate Gallery – as it was then known – didn't want to loan it because it was too fragile. So Gabo, who was very interested in technology and materials, jumped at the opportunity to work with Experimental Art and Technology. E.A.T. were a group of scientists and engineers based out of MIT, who collaborated with artists to enable technological innovations. Gabo worked with them to find a new way to remake this piece. In his statement, he described how when he made the work in 1920, looking for the technology to make it possible was like looking for a gold plate on the moon. When he worked with E.A.T. he said it was like he had found the gold plate on the moon!¹⁷

I wanted to show the direct transfer of editorial responsibility to another editor – or a curator – for the production of the summer 1970 issue of *Studio International*.¹⁸ [FIG.10] The activist, curator, art exhibition organiser, Seth Siegelau approached Peter Townsend, the editor, with the idea of running an insert in the magazine which would be simply art. Siegelau contacted Townsend eighteen months before the magazine came out. Townsend was so interested in the idea of handing the whole magazine over to artists that he said, okay, you do the guest edit – run it as you choose. Siegelau invited a selection of critics involved in new art practices and Conceptual Art, to select artists to make work directly for the page. The critics – as they were referred to in those days – were David Antin, Germano Celant, Michel Claura, Charles Harrison, Lucy Lippard, Hans Strelow, Harald Szeemann and Yusuke Nakahara who, in 1970, represented as broadly as possible an international context. Due to pre-existing commitments Szeemann and Nakahara couldn't take part. The only guiding principles Siegelau gave was that the critics shouldn't write a piece about their selection and that any text produced by the artists should be published in English, French and German.

These are a couple of installation shots from the exhibition, *Five Issues of Studio International*. [FIG.11–12] I enjoyed the possibility of serendipitous connections that get revealed by the opportunity to put work in certain situations. On the right, you see a work by William Turnbull called *Angle* (steel, painted yellow)¹⁹ and in the distance you can see Gillian Wise, and a small work by Mary Martin.²⁰ On the other side of the wall there is a homage for Townsend written by Lawrence Weiner, after Townsend died, for an event I organised to celebrate his work. Weiner wrote about Peter as an editor and core of the art world without whom we are all impoverished. This is another serendipitous encounter: on the right, one of the sequences of pages from Siegelau's exhibition – the yellow stripes are by Daniel Buren,²¹ in Michel Claura's section. Claura, exceptionally, selected one artist.

I am returning again to Flanagan and to an exhibition project he organised in 1968, when he was very irritated that the American press was making a nationalistic claim on the instigation of Conceptual Art practices. He spoke to British artists making work of that nature. These included Bruce McLean, Richard Long, Roelof Louw, Event Structure Research Group, John Latham and himself. He told them to come to his house with photographs and a short text, to make

Turgu Jui,' 184, October 1972; 'Rodin: the language of sculpture II,' Vol.185, January 1973, 'The object,' Vol.185, February 1973; 'What Sculpture is, Part 1 and 2,' Vol.188, December 1974; 'What Sculpture is Part 3 and 4,' Vol.189, January/ February 1975; 'What Sculpture is Part 5 and 6,' Vol.189, March/April 1975

10 Biederman, *The New Cezanne*, (Red Wing, Minneapolis, 1958, self-published)

11 *ibid.*, *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge*, (Red Wing, Minneapolis, 1952, self-published)

12 Robyn Denny, *Colour Box V*, 1969. Screenprint, printed in orange and scarlet, boxed in Perspex with aluminum frame and backing. *Colour Box IV*, 1969. Screenprint, printed in lime green and orange, boxed in Perspex with aluminum frame and backing. Collection Dominic Denny

13 Charles Biederman, Hayward Gallery, London. The exhibition took place from 18 September to 23 October 1969

14 Anthony Hill, 'The Climate of Charles Biederman,' *Studio International*, Vol.178, (September 1969), pp. 68–9; Robyn Denny, 'Charles Biederman: from the actual to the sublime,' *Studio International*, Vol.178, (September 1969), (pp. 65–8). Reprinted in (2015) *Five Issues of Studio International*, London, Raven Row. Denny (pp.77–79), Hill (pp.80–82)

15–21 See overleaf

15 Naum Gabo Kinetic Construction (*Standing Wave*), 1919–20, replica 1985. Metal, wood and electric motor. Tate: presented by the artist through the American Federation of Arts 1966 (616 x 241 x 190 mm). Tate loaned the second remaking of the sculpture to the exhibition, the first remaking is the 1968 one referred to in the text. This, like the original 1919–20, is too fragile to loan.

16 *The Machine: As Seen at the end of the Mechanical Mechanical Age* was curated by Pontus Hultén at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 25 November 1968–9 February 1969

17 Naum Gabo, 'The kinetic construction of 1920,' *Studio International*, 178, (September 1969), (p.89). Republished in *Five Issues of Studio International*, London Raven Row, (2015), (p.83)

18 Seth Siegelau, (Ed.), *Studio International*, Vol.180, (July/August 1970)

19 William Turnbull *Angle*, 1967–68, galvanised painted steel, edition No.1 of 5 (Yorkshire Sculpture Park)

20 Gillian Wise, *Two-Part Construction on Three Planes*, 1965, ink, Perspex, plastic and aluminum, Alan Andrews, De Parma, London; and Mary Martin, *Rotation MM1*, 1968, Multiple, (unknown edition), injected moulded polystyrene, published by Unlimited of Bath, England, Townsend Collection, given by Kenneth Martin to Peter Townsend

21 Daniel Buren, *Studio International*, Vol.180, (July/August 1970), pp.17–24

a series of panels which he then took to New York where he was having an exhibition. He showed them in the Fischbach Gallery,²² and also in Lucy Lippard's loft. Lippard worked closely alongside this generation of artists. She invited a number of people, including Carl Andre and Richard Artschwager, to come to the event. I think it is important to keep in mind the generosity of artists who do this for each other. The collaborative exchange and support mechanisms: support for each other in presenting and situating work that enables work to be seen – in ways that it otherwise wouldn't be seen and may have continued to be overlooked.

I want to move on to a project I am working on currently. This is an exhibition to situate light pieces: pieces that use light as the medium of production by Flanagan, in &Model in Leeds,²³ a gallery where Andrew Bick and Katrina Blannin organised an exhibition.²⁴ It opens in May 2017. There are various sources of information for construction of these light pieces and it includes documentation as here. I should point out that this is an exhibition that took place in the Fischbach Gallery where Flanagan showed those panels. I don't have a photo of them *in situ*, but I heard about it from Flanagan and Lippard. You see from the top, on the left-hand side, the projector is shining on the pile of sacks, and that is *light on light on sacks on flax*. Flanagan spent two weeks making and installing; sourcing local materials to make it on the spot. This is a practice that we accept now, more or less as a norm – to go a place and make an exhibition *in situ*. But in the Sixties this wasn't the norm: it was the beginning of a new way of generating exhibitions. So this is another way of generating an exhibition.

Another source for the process of making these light pieces are Flanagan's notebooks. He called them *logbooks*. [FIG.13] These valuable documents record the specification for *daylight light piece*; the details of the distance, measurements and the types and use of projectors. He had a series of logbooks which include a photograph of every work he made, documented by title, date, measurement and where it had been exhibited and any sales records. He kept up this practice until the end of the 1970s when he was successful enough to be able to get someone else to do it. I think it is important to point out the attention to detail and the attention to the organisation or cataloguing of detailing of things. Even though as an artist he was working very quickly to make things, he was keeping careful records of what he was making. This is common to quite a few artists in their systems of documentation of their work. It shows an archival mentality of keeping records.

This is what I am doing in the studio. These try-outs are the working processes of those light pieces. You can see there the corner piece, *daylight light piece 2*. [FIG.14] It is also called *daylight corner piece*, which is a strip of light in the corner – and it is made by cutting a line in a slide with a Stanley knife, sticking that into a slide and then projecting it at a distance of 15 feet. It is very simple and very effective and very quick to do. It is so neat and sharp and to the point. This one I am most happy with and you can see in process. [FIG.15] This is *daylight light piece 1*; so the medium is daylight as well as projected light from two projections and so with those two projections you can see the cut off corners.

I would like to draw attention to the exhibition *Seeing Round Corners* at Turner Contemporary, Margate, that Jonathan Parsons curated last year with David Ward.²⁵ The title for the exhibition came from Flanagan and specifically a drawing of the same title.²⁶ [FIG.16] For Flanagan the concept of 'round corners' was a vital premise underlying his work. He was affected by 'pataphysics: the term given to a way of thinking, coined by Alfred Jarry, the symbolist poet and playwright. Jarry defined 'pataphysics as 'the science of imaginary solutions'.²⁷ And for Flanagan, the possibility of imaginary solutions enables projects and prospects to be realised as a system; but isn't predetermined by what may be already recognised as being a system. It is entirely paradoxical. The other thing about 'pataphysics that I should mention is that the form of the spiral is a focal point: it represents energy. It represents alternatives, inside and outside. It proposes the idea of the round corner. Seeing round corners! Of course, a corner can't be seen around! The premise suggests the possibility of the roundness of a corner, and what that might mean, for Flanagan, became a very exciting prospect. He did a whole series of drawings about how we look at things, and how our vision sees straight on. If we look obliquely, if we close one eye, we start to see around corners. *Seeing round corners* has not just two meanings but also many layers of meaning. In his work, there is some play on the round corners. The play on modernist principles and formalist iconography was something that Flanagan was refuting and pulling away from by the use of material and the playfulness of the situation.

This one is much more straightforward, more like the corner piece. This is *daylight light piece 3*, and the colour of the hessian is predetermined. Luckily the same suppliers exist, Russell and Chapple, that Flanagan used in those days. Although I have to say when I got the canvas off the roll, it was far too indigo, and I thought, 'how am I going to get it to be the right colour? Oh of course, light!' So I just spread it out on the floor and after a short period of time, 4 or 5 weeks, it was the right colour, simple and neat, literally done. And here you see the *daylight light piece 4*, which was a piece of hessian pinned to the wall with the projected light around it. Again this is a much simpler one to make than *daylight light piece 1*, which has the rounded corners.

Since we are in Gloucestershire, the home county of Concrete poets Ken Cox and dom sylvester houedard, I thought might be interesting to look at some of Concrete poetry work that Flanagan was doing. In the Sixties, when he was a student at St Martins, he set up a magazine, called *Silâns*, after the phonetic sound of the French for silence, in homage to Alfred Jarry. He produced this magazine every fortnight at St Martins and collaborated with a range of contributors: fellow students and artists, for instance John Latham, David Bainbridge and Phillip King, who wrote an essay on sculpture. There was a lot of Concrete poetry: Flanagan's own, and works by Henry Chopin and Stefan Themerson. A manifesto by George Vantongerloo and some statements by Hans Arp were published in English for the first time.

The magazine was produced on a cyclostyle machine every fortnight. Hard work: fifty copies, distributed free and placed in Better Books opposite St Martins School

22 Barry Flanagan – *New Work*, 27 September–16 October, 1969

23 Barry Flanagan: *Light Pieces and other Works*, &Model, Leeds 25 May–17 June 2017

24 *Conversations around Marlow Moss*, &Model, Leeds, 12 June–18 July 2014

25 *Seeing Round Corners*, Turner Contemporary, Margate, 21 May–25 September 2016

26 *seeing round corners*, 1967, pen and felt pen on paper, 26 cm x 19.7 cm, private collection, London

27 Alfred Jarry, 'Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, 'Pataphysician', (Barney Rosset, Ed.) *Evergreen Review*, Vol.4, No.13, May/June 1960, Grove Press, New York, (pp.128–138), p.130

in Charing Cross Road, which was a very important venue for experimental art. On the left-hand side we have *NB The Visual Poem as Pre-Language Mark of Meaning*, and on the right there is the notation of *O for orange U for you : poem for the lips*. [FIG.17] At this point I would like to almost conclude with an anecdote.

When I was talking with Barry Flanagan in 2008, we were having a fairly intense conversation about how this magazine had effectively dropped off the radar; no-one knew about it. All that is known is his angry riposte to Anthony Caro about Flanagan's refutation of formalist dogma. This letter has been quoted in essays about sculpture, but other aspects about this magazine have been forgotten. I had discovered in the papers of the American art critic, Barbara Reise, the announcement of the 2nd International Concrete Poetry Event that was held in St Catherine's College, Oxford in 1965. It had a list of all the people who were included in it and it included Barry Flanagan, Henri Chopin and dom sylvester houedard. It also included the sheet of this work *O for orange U for you : poem for the lips*. And I came out with this, and Flanagan was pretty astonished because he hadn't thought about it, as you would imagine. One doesn't think about things one has done 40 years previously, and he was silent. I was uncertain whether his silence was a kind of regret, reflection, irritation? It lasted quite a long time. He was given to periods of silence but this was almost uncomfortably long. After this period of silence, he put his chair back and he went...

[Silence, JM performs *O for orange U for you : poem for the lips*]

The whole restaurant was stunned; it was an extraordinary moment.

I conclude with a work by dom sylvester houedard – who I am sure many of you are very familiar with – who was a monk and scholar and poet who lived in Prinknash Abbey. He was friends with many artists, and from 1967 was included in exhibitions at the Lisson Gallery. He was unable to come to Barry Flanagan's first exhibition and he sent him this poem. [FIG.18] It says: 'best thoughts would love to have come' and his name, Sylvester. Sylvester is in the line, and I think you can make out, in the rounded form, a circle of S's. This piece was one of Flanagan's most treasured possessions. You see how he had kept it. He put it in a Perspex frame, people, and it is on paper which is definitely not acid free. And one of my difficulties is, what do I do with this work? Because if I take this apart to preserve it, the leaf will be destroyed.

On that note, I would like to end.

Jo Melvin March 2017

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FIG.1 *one ton corner piece '67* (1967) and *heap 3 '67* (1967) installed in Cullinan Richards, Vyner Street, 2015 © The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd



FIG.2 *heap 3 '67* (1967) installed in Cullinan Richards, Vyner Street, 2015 © The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd



FIG.3 *one ton corner piece '67* (1967) installed at the 5e Biennale des Jeunes, Paris (1967)
© The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd



FIG.4 *one ton corner piece '67* (1967) illustrated in Charles Harrison's 'Some recent sculpture in Britain' *Studio International*, Vol. 177, January 1969, p. 28



FIG.5 'A reading of five issues of *Studio International* magazine by Jo Melvin', film, looped.
Camera by Oliver Beatty, produced for *Five Issues of Studio International*, Raven Row, London, 2015



FIG.6 Willoughby Sharp, 'Air Art', *Studio International*, Vol. 175, May 1969, described in 'A reading of five issues of *Studio International* magazine by Jo Melvin'



FIG.7 Installation view Raven Row 2015, William Tucker *Karnak*, 1965, Charles Biederman *Structurist Relief*, *Red Wing No. 20*, 1954–65, (1965) and Robyn Denny: *Colour Box V*, 1969 Screenprint, printed in orange and scarlet, boxed in Perspex with aluminum frame and backing; *Colour Box IV*, 1969 Screenprint, printed in lime green and orange, boxed in Perspex with aluminum frame and backing. Collection Dominic Denny



FIG.8 Charles Biederman, *Structurist work no. 35* 1959–64, *Red Wing* (1964) illustrated on the cover of *Studio International*, Vol.178, September 1969 described in 'A reading of five issues of *Studio International* magazine by Jo Melvin', 2015

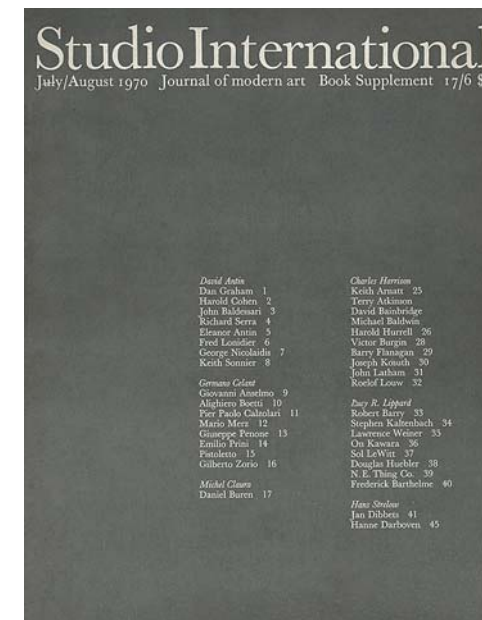


FIG.10 Seth Siegelaub, (Ed.) *Studio International*, Vol.180, (July/August 1970)



FIG.9 Naum Gabo, 'The kinetic construction of 1920', *Studio International*, Vol.178, September 1969, described in 'A reading of five issues of *Studio International* magazine by Jo Melvin', 2015



FIG.11 Installation view, William Turnbull *Angle 1967–1968*, (1968), Gillian Wise, *Two-Part Construction on Three Planes*, 1965, Mary Martin, *Rotation MM1*, 1968, *Five Issues of Studio International*, Raven Row, 2015



FIG.12 Installation view *Barry Flanagan – New Work*, Fischbach Gallery, New York, 27 September – 16 October 1969

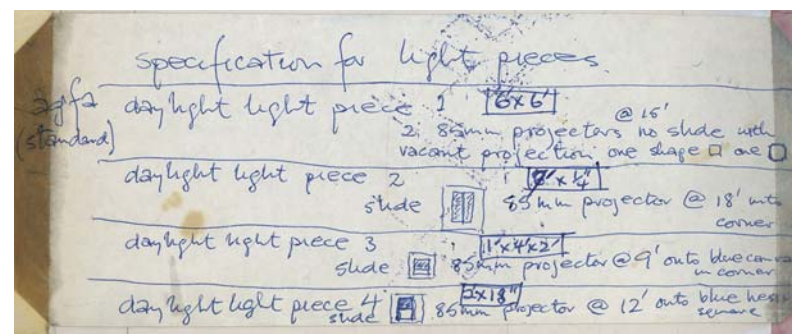


FIG.13 Stock book record, specification for light pieces, (1969), Records of Sculpture (1964–1969), The Estate of Barry Flanagan Archive, © The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd



FIG.14 Studio tests of *daylight light piece 2* '69 (1969), in 2017, © The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd



FIG.15 Studio tests of *daylight light piece 1* '69 (1969), in 2017 © The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd

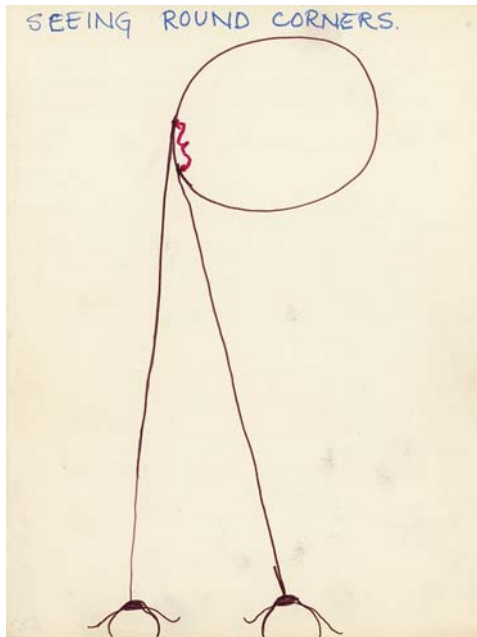


FIG.16 *seeing round corners*, (1969), pen and felt pen on paper, 26 cm x 19.7 cm. Private collection, London

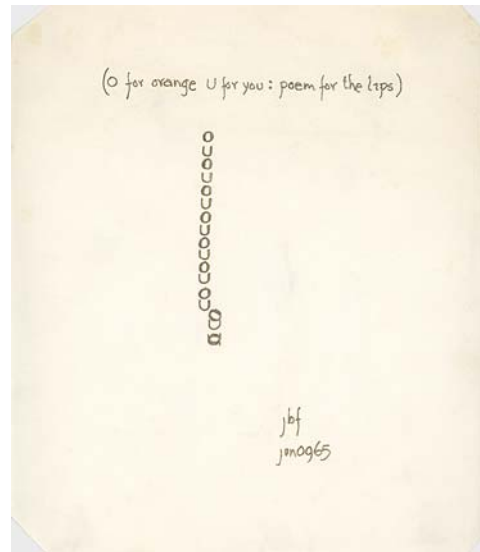


FIG.17 *O for orange U for you : poem for the lips*, (1965)
© The Estate of Barry Flanagan, courtesy Plubronze Ltd



FIG.18 dom sylvester houedard, *best thoughts wld luv to have come*, c.1966

'WORDS' AND 'THINGS'

Artist-initiated projects often reveal preoccupations, relationships and insights that reflect concerns arising out of the practice of art-making: issues that might not otherwise be the subject of an exhibition produced solely by a curator. This project was conceived and co-curated through a discursive process: an exchange of ideas and information between artists. The selected artworks are connected to investigations into the viability and reappraisal of painting as the core of a studio practice engaged with the wider application and social role of its extended modes and variants.

I consider the practising artist to be a researcher defining the terms of their own field of inquiry and, in my case, the studio as a research laboratory into perceptual phenomena. I use the term 'artist-researcher', by which I mean an artist actively engaged in the analysis and interpretation of their own or others' production, or a combination of both.

The position of the independent artist working outside of an institution is necessarily one of practice-based research: there has to be something being practised. For example, if an artist works in a way where ideas precede production, concepts have to be worked through and, most importantly, they need to be realized in some way. If an artist works with a process from which objects emerge, that process and all of its subsequent ramifications have to be fully addressed. Whatever is produced – and however it is realized – needs to be shown and *seen*: the act of engagement that constitutes the 'art event' (Parsons *et al*, 2003, p.34), where 'seeing' is interlinked with 'understanding'.

Ontological positions

Claims and assumptions are made about the nature of reality: claims about what exists; claims about 'what is possible' in a particular view of the world. These are termed 'ontological claims' and they establish an 'ontological position' in relation to reality (Grix, 2010, p.60). 'Art' is a process of using objects, actions and signs to establish relationships between the varying ontological positions of individual human beings. The contemporary artist undertakes this activity by inventing and navigating trajectories between signs and manipulating them as a producer. 'The most common denominator shared by all artists is that they show something.' (Bourriaud, 2002, pp.107–8, p.113). By engaging socially through showing, artists make propositions about the nature of reality and what they show will accord or discord with the ontological position of others. Artworks can therefore provoke strong intellectual and emotional responses: they confirm or refute deeply held views and beliefs about reality.

My ontological position is rooted in the primacy of the experiential and perceptual: specifically, that of 'autopsy' in the original sense of the act of 'seeing with one's own eyes' (Onions, 1973, 1990, p.135). I consider this to be the primary source of visual evidence and information. Art practice is my attempt to externalize an autoptic encounter with reality. As a practitioner, the key issue for me is one of

how most appropriately to externalize observations, speculations, insights and imagined forms. These are phenomena arising from the interior world of the mind and they cannot be captured and distributed mechanically. Access to such phenomena is reliant upon physically manifesting and reporting the experiential in some way. Physical artworks that are voluntarily produced under their makers' control can be considered as *reliable* reports of interior psychological worlds. They anticipate social engagement and are fixed as an enduring assemblage of materials that can be subjected to repeated scrutiny. This is why it is so important to consider the artist as someone who *shows you something*.

Exhibitions

Exhibition production allows artist-researchers to define and determine the conditions under which precise selections of specific artefacts are encountered. It is chiefly concerned with the emergence of a variety of contingent meanings and how institutional and other contexts of presentation enable the distribution and reception of art, its content and significance (Harrison & Wood, 1998, p.1088). An exhibition is a 'system of relations' of heterogeneous elements (Foucault, 1977) and functions as an intertextual discursive practice in the form of a group of interrelated verbal, visual and spatial statements and events. These are eventually dispersed and exceed the duration of their original display (Kelly, 1981). Today, the viewer is active as a reader and decoder of messages, rather than a passive consumer of spectacle. The contemporary artist adopts a strategy of manipulating a multiplicity of signs more often than actively producing art objects, which is not a new phenomenon. However, a strategy of recapitulation and quotation remains important for the artist-researcher/producer/curator, because few people 'are able to accept the status of art as a social sign entangled with other signs in systems productive of value, power and prestige' (Foster, 1982).

Very broadly, what we wanted to achieve with this exhibition was to reflect on the inherent humanity in how artists conceptualize, structure and externalize their creativity. Each exhibited artist considers the diverse ways in which we encounter the world – visual, spatial, intellectual, emotional, physical, etc – and makes ordered and systematic responses to these realities from the point of view of their own ontological position. They each have a practice that, in some way, is related to the international development and social role of what we can term 'non-iconic abstraction' (Osborne, 1998, p.2). There is also, of course, a strong and varied connection to traditions of painting, in terms of process, object, visual effect and practice type.

Abstraction and depiction

Non-iconic abstraction embodies a rejection of depictions based on iconic semblance or the transcription of apprehended form-contours. I suspect that this is connected to the idea that visually perceived appearances are superficial in the sense that they are subject to significant variation and are not necessarily adequate to represent the totality of structures underlying reality. All experience, of whatever kind, is 'real' experience for the percipient and it is not restricted to the

apprehension of still images in isolation from the entire corporeal sensorium. I am personally wary of imaging the semblance of three-dimensional objects in the visual field for these reasons. In this exhibition, it is possible to track the development from 'pictures of things' to 'pictures as things' to 'pictures of *pictures*'.

The original French title of Foucault's (1970) book was *Les mots et les choses*. This literally translates into English as *Words and Things*. The given title in the English translation is *The Order of Things*, after which the exhibition is named. As a phrase, this can be read and understood in several ways. It immediately implies to me two approaches that a practising artist might consider:

- ☐ A specific sequence of events
- ☐ The internal structuring of an artwork

The latter is of great relevance to me as my current doctoral research is concerned with how pictorial elements are arranged within bounded rectangular formats.

Internal structuring

In the exhibition, we see multiple examples of pictorial structure. The exhibited artists employ various strategies for structuring configurations within a boundary, although few are 'relational compositions' in the conventional sense (Stella, 1960). What are the structures of depiction in an exhibited work? Is a scheme imposed upon the work from without, or is it an emergent phenomenon arising out of a particular process? I would argue that all of the exhibited works constitute modes of representation. Some of these modes are:

- ☐ constructed geometrical abstractions (Begum, Bick, Hunziker)
- ☐ displaying the work's material concrete nature (Dolven, Zakiewicz)
- ☐ the explicit production of shifting optical sensations (Begum, Bigland, Dolven, Gillam, Parsons, Pratt, Zakiewicz)
- ☐ intentional representations of external forms (Dekyndt, Parsons, Wood & Harrison)
- ☐ explicit indexical traces (Dolven, Lalić, Pratt)
- ☐ 'material abstraction' – the signifying properties of physical substance (Lalić, Pratt)
- ☐ systems generated configurations (Bick, Bigland)
- ☐ found configuration patterns presented 'as is' (Hunziker, Parsons)
- ☐ emptying out of conventional symbolism (Dekyndt)
- ☐ pattern finding in chance configurations (Bigland, Pratt)
- ☐ connecting object, image and textual reading (Bigland, Gillam, Parsons)
- ☐ the recording of physical action (Bick, Dolven, Parsons, Pratt, Wood & Harrison, Zakiewicz)

This is a subjective sample of a narrow set of categories, but it indicates some of

the entry points for the analysis of an exhibition of this nature. As curators, we want to produce an encounter that interconnects poetical resonances between the various discrete elements of the exhibition, where echoes of structures and significations loop back and project forward in time and space. These can reinforce past encounters with the exhibited works and anticipate future ones within the site of display and elsewhere. By 'poetical' I mean gaps between the particular constructed meanings emerging from each of the works; either something that is actually *wordless*, or at least evades precise verbal definition: something that cannot adequately be explained.

Sequences of events

A simple way to characterize this would be that in order for an exhibition project to exist, a substantial series of interconnected happenstances have occurred. These include circumstances such as: the specific knowledge of the co-curators; exhibitions or works they have seen; whether invited artists have certain works available; particular loan agreements from galleries or studios; artists making works especially for the exhibition; the processes and procedures they have used to make their work; the personal situations of the contributing artists. My research is not concerned with causality and I am not proposing any definitive chain of causation. It is important to remember when appraising art exhibitions that form-similarity, or any other correlation, does not equate to causality (Grix, 2010, xiii).

For many artists – perhaps the majority – practice precedes theory. For them, 'things' come before 'words', often in an intuitive way. In academic research terms this can be aligned with empiricism, where knowledge is derived from sense-experience as opposed to learning through rational thinking. From an *interpretivist* point of view, reality is something we make up as we go along.

Personally, I am interested in challenging received wisdom; in artists retuning terminology to their own purpose; 'words' for 'things' that artists have discovered for themselves; artist-generated theory. I am especially interested in revising confusing art-historical terms and resisting labels imposed upon artists from the outside. This is my artist-researcher position. In my view, the theoretical should not preclude, or take precedence over, the experiential or perceptual. My ontological position is grounded in autoptic experience as a primary phenomenon, and seeing as though it were 'a new direct insight into the very Nature of Things' (Huxley, 1968, p.15). Hopefully, this exhibition has made some small contribution towards sharing such perceptual visual experiences.

Jonathan Parsons June 2017

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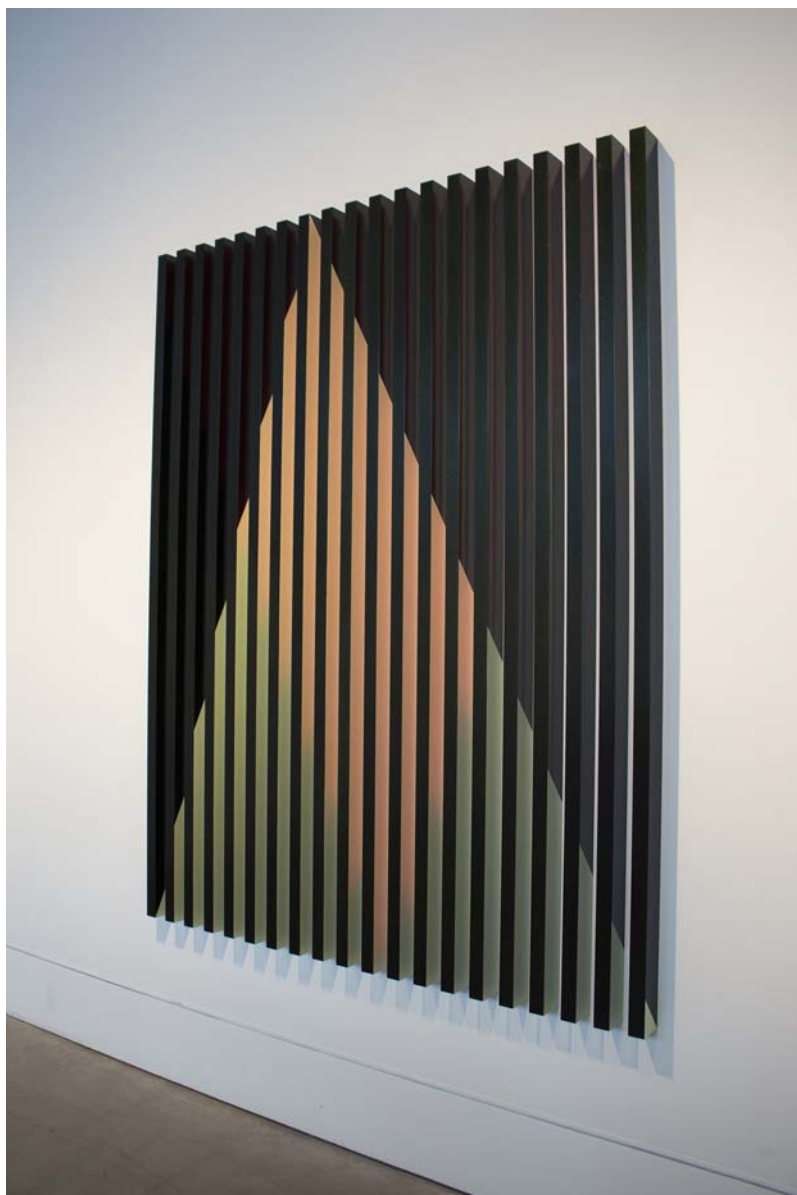
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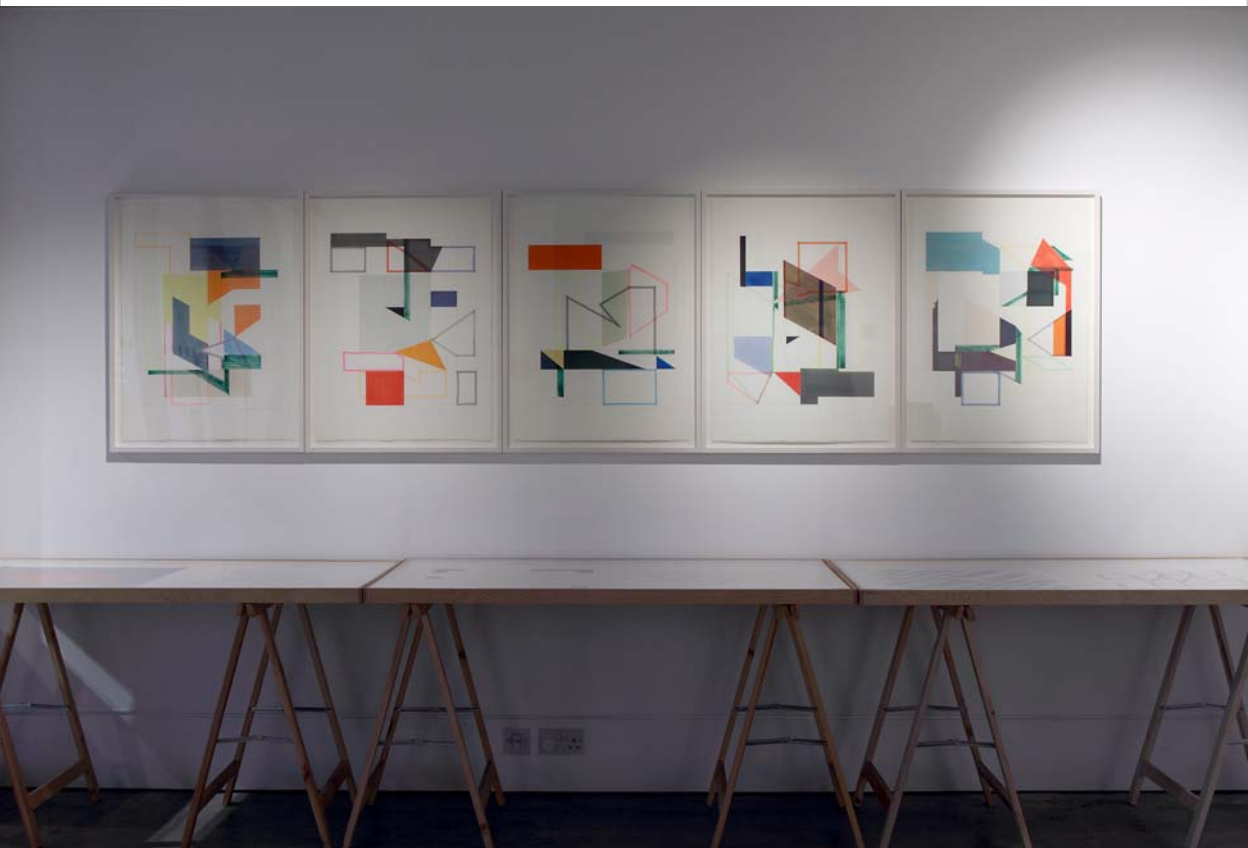
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Rana Begum *No. 480*, 2013
Paint on powder-coated aluminium. Courtesy the artist and Jhaveri Contemporary



Andrew Bick
OGVDS/GW/SB #3, 2015
Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper
OGVDS/GW/SB #7, 2015
Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper
OGVDS/GW/SB #9, 2015
Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper
Courtesy Galerie von Bartha, Basel, and Hales Gallery, London



Andrew Bick

OGVDS/GW/SB #6, 2015

Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper

OGVDS/GW/SB #1, 2015

Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper

OGVDS/GW/SB #7, 2015

Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper

OGVDS/GW/SB #9, 2015

Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper

OGVDS/GW/SB #3, 2015

Pencil, marker pen and watercolour on paper

Courtesy Galerie von Bartha, Basel, and Hales Gallery, London



Guy Bigland clockwise from left:

Right, 2014 Acrylic on paper

By, 2014 Acrylic on acrylic

Louder, 2014 Acrylic on cardboard

Rules, 2014 Acrylic on cardboard

King, 2014 Acrylic on hardwood panel

Blade, 2014 Acrylic on laminated panel

Jonathan Parsons

One Forty, 2004

Oil on linen



Edith Dekyndt *One Second of Silence*, 2008
Video projection. Courtesy Carl Freedman Gallery, London

COMPLEXITY: THE SOCIAL AND THE ABSTRACT

An imperative is frequently levied on abstractionists – especially abstract painters – to demonstrate the connection between their practice and empirical actuality: to offer a translation; a lexicon; some verbal meaning; as if the visual replication of objects in the world were an absent-minded omission. Painting is unquestionably a representational medium, a window on reality. But the reality depicted does not have to be a reflected image: a transcription of an observed scene. This has been acknowledged for over a century. Painting, with its alchemical aura, seemingly asserts its status as representation to separate itself from regular existence through obscure materials, precious pigments and bespoke supports.

The shared interest that we three curators of this exhibition¹ entertain is the structural core that underpins abstract thought and that makes it concrete. We do not seek to apply our studio practices to our environment so much as to use the organisation of our social framework to systematize our artistic projects. In my own painting practice, it is precisely those organisational strategies that I intend to transmit to the viewer: the recognition of an administrative configuration. The studio becomes an arena for contemplation and investigation that furthers our understanding of our socio-political culture.

Over time, histories accumulate as past instances and statements initiate responding cultural events. Like a physical stack, the incremental weight of the historical load generates a *vertical* compression with a low centre of gravity: of time and references, buried and forgotten. Layers of successive testimonials obscure the provenance of any one narrative. Chronologies are essentially linear, but vulnerable to the subjectivity of both memory and documentation, and subsequent insertion or addendum is not possible. Yet historical accounts are constantly revisited, reinterpreted and re-contextualised. How is this potential for a *lateral* expansion accommodated? Perhaps conceptualisation generates discursive space. The solution I engage with through abstract painting is both responsive and revisionist. An account can be either developed further, or reworked and reconstructed. Thus complexity emerges despite itself, as a network of simultaneous and successive iterations, interactive but nonetheless autonomous. Successive generations of systematic interventions build into complex systems, through time and space.

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault discusses how we identify, categorise and name the objects and effects we experience. He describes how a category can have ‘a precise meaning and demonstrable content’,² but that an initial nomination can be a very arbitrarily acquired label; an identification that sticks. An instance I frequently invoke is the names of the constellations: the ancients could discern the form of a plough – such as was in use at the time – amid seven stars they grouped in a random silo; similarly, a great bear, a little bear, a pair of (archaic) scales... After time, repeated use and reference, the name of an object becomes embedded in both language and in culture. The original name of an item or idea branches and produces tributaries of meanings, images, associations and antonyms, eventually arising in a complex network of connections and ways of describing or depicting something. The first origins of a name or how two things became

¹ Andrew Bick, Jonathan Parsons and Katie Pratt curated *The Order of Things* at The Wilson, Cheltenham 28 January–5 March 2017

² Foucault, M. (1970) *The Order of Things*, London: Tavistock Publications (Routledge Classics, 2002, preface, vi)

3 Bourdieu, P. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

4 Foster, H. *The Expressive Fallacy in Re-Codings Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987) (originally published in *Art in America* in January 1983)

associated dissolve in time and the complex network of subsequent encounters. Soon enough, the initial connection between words, ideas and things is lost. The current vernacular seems inevitable with the impossibility of imagining an alternative or parallel context. We cannot see how far a system of identification has become acculturated and are unable to imagine an alternative means of grouping, naming and organising our hierarchies and institutions. Anthropologists consistently emphasise how localised social structures can be. Communities unquestioningly adhere to social codes, unaware how particular their customs and behaviours are to their own social network.³

Using abstract painting to inspect the problematics of categorisation, to consider my experiential, theoretical and ethical concerns, I was drawn to Foucault's text. Since the mid-1990s, I have fostered a process of examining and critiquing the provenance of expression and its relation to gesture. The paintings are instigated in a hasty or careless manner. Hal Foster wrote in 1983 of *The Expressive Fallacy*,⁴ in which he disconnected gesture from self-identity. During the 1990s, my paintings challenged the viewer to equate chucked buckets of paint with raw emotion. My repost critiques any such assumption with the incompatible process in which the surface of the canvas is forensically surveyed and annotated with isobars, which systematically link similar characteristics in the material of paint and canvas. One conundrum this generates is that a broad example of a 'characteristic' is readily defined, yet the closer it approaches the margins of the definition or rule, the more obfuscated it becomes. Then a dilemma is triggered as to where the boundaries between categories lie and how to methodically and consistently adjudicate between them. This choice can be casual and even arbitrary, yet it can have a radical impact on the resulting imagery.

Applying the template provided by Foucault, I infer that there is a particular culture and language established within each work and across series that arises from an incidental option, which determines a distinct pathway and itinerary. Initially simplistic, the associations and meaning I attribute to this process have exponentially accrued significance to me over the years.

Throughout *The Order of Things*, Foucault attempts historical reconstructions to analyse the current status of various societal details; how they arrived at their present form and condition. In the chapter *Exchanging*, Foucault describes how our current monetary system has evolved. He cites Adam Smith's analysis of the division of labour in a pin factory as one of many significant moments in the evolution of the transactional economy as he saw it at the time of writing in 1966. With each seminal invention, attainment, philosophical hypothesis or advance in understanding, there isn't so much a whitewash of all that came before as a dilution. Successive approaches, attitudes or perceived facts are layered upon and enmesh with all that came before, but memory and vestiges of previous belief systems endure and are never totally superseded.

Perhaps that is also true of our individual knowledge systems. I visualise the progression of my own studio practice from work to work and from series to series as contributing to the context through which I understand the world. With each

book, film, conversation or new experience, I don't wipe the hard drive, but input my own – very subjective – interpretation, through which I interpret the phenomena of my practice in relation to the world as I understand it. The ambition is to file neatly, organise logically and categorise new data in an orderly encyclopedia of the mind. Yet as neurones frantically forge new connections between diverse facts and concepts, a more accurate metaphor might be a thick felt mat: a complex accumulation of structurally dependent elements, so densely intermeshed as to make it impossible to extract a single fibre.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault tracks backwards to establish the source of his historical and cultural observations. He traces the lineage of something, which – but for a slight twist of fate; an alternative sequence of events – may have transpired altogether differently. Artists, like all citizens, accumulate ideas and nuances to understanding over the course of a life. The complexity of one's knowledge increases with every additional nano-bit of information. With time, comprehension is aggregated in a web of historical and cultural underpinning as well as ideational contextualisation, and becomes ever more intense.

Contrasted with the downwards compacting weight of time and history is the lateral expansion of potential. Each microdecision is a determined assertion, precluding a plethora of alternatives.

We are constantly presented with an array of abstract concepts and invited to interpret and apply them, such as with the law or the implementation of mathematical rules. Sometimes we are prescribed to manufacture something, as with a cake recipe, or to visualise them, as with architectural plans or strategic instructions. By employing this tactic in painting – giving oneself directives to fulfil – decisions are ostensibly pre-determined, but implementation and moderation are diminished to localised detail. Systems expand exponentially, each offering another dimension; another plateau to inhabit. Conflicting and sequential decisions generate ever more complexity.

Systems subdivide the painting process and apportion the work entailed. Choices are delegated. The craft of painting is reduced to its constituent components, like a production line.

The abstract painting practice I engage in is a friction between my visualisation and conceptualisation strategies. It is an attempt to rationalise intuition and to subdivide impulse into discrete tasks. I use a series of strategies that generate imagery, apportion tasks and moderate the flow of creativity, storing surges of ideas. The paintings track the complexity arising from the sequential progression of ideas and of superimposed processes. The imagery feels cybernetic because it fuses unquestioned intuition with systems and data management.

Most importantly to me, it offers a forum for my contemplation of socio-political structures through generating time to consider intensely and through the activity of diagrammatic mimicry.

Katie Pratt 2017



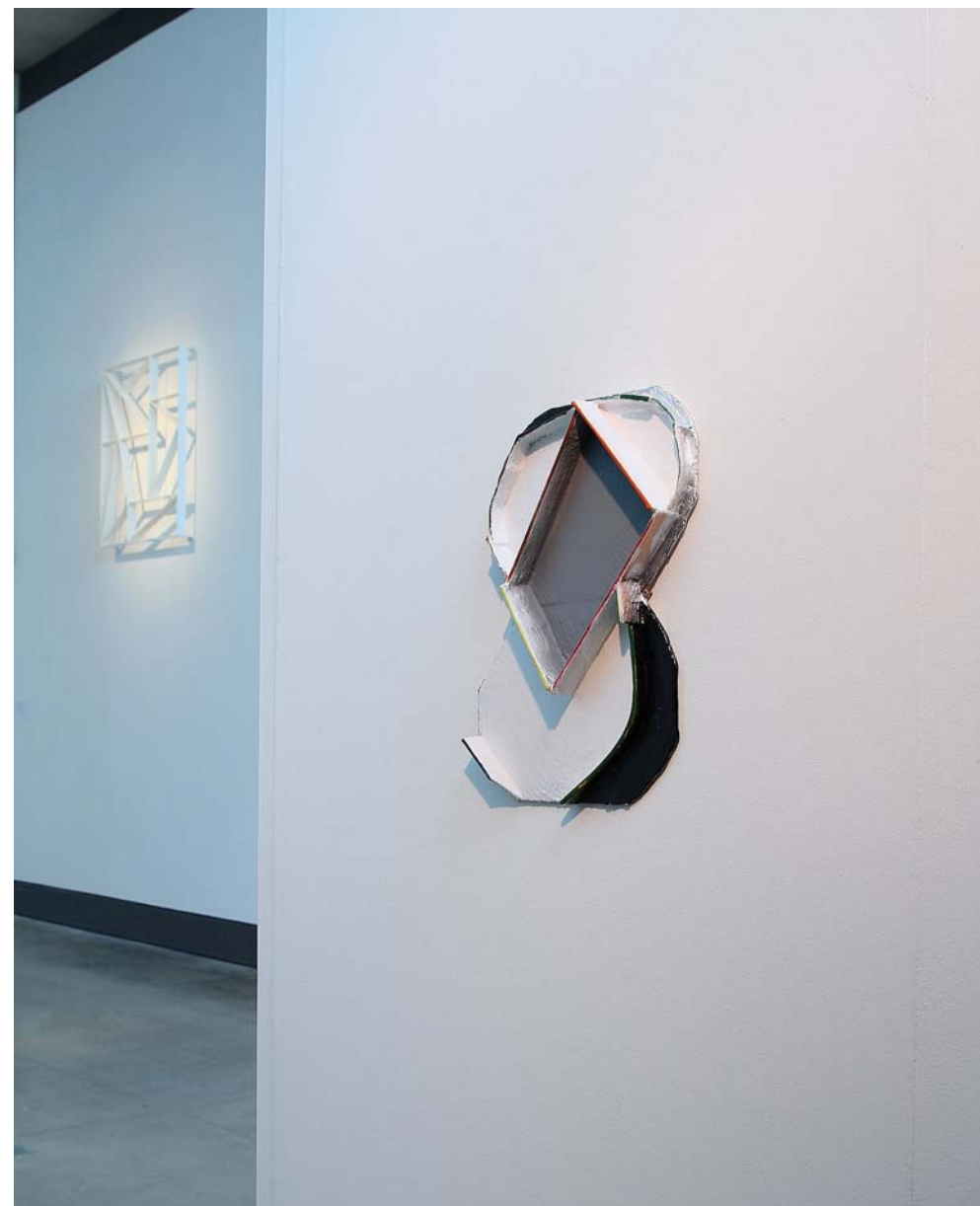
A K Dolven *Teenagers lifting the sky*, 2014
Oil on aluminum. Courtesy Wilkinson Gallery, London, and OSL Contemporary, Oslo



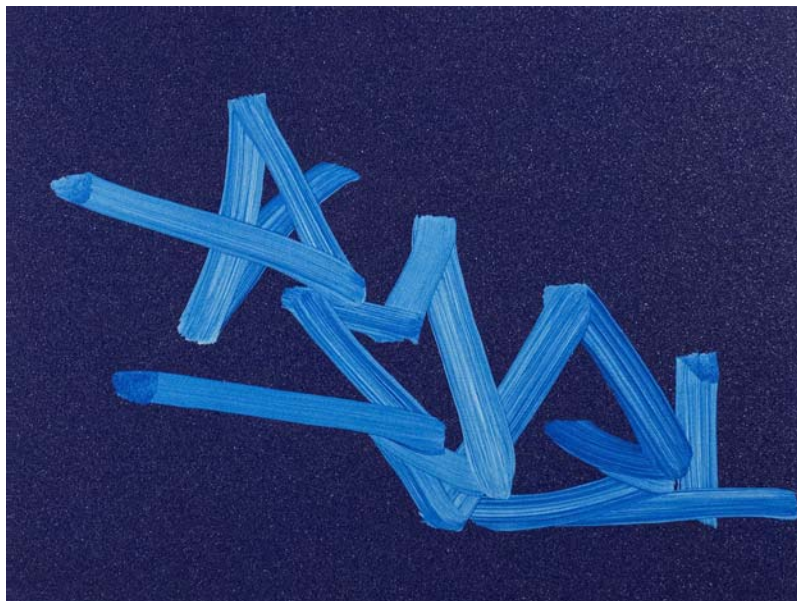
Adam Gillam *Oh Ok Then*, 2017
Wood, plaster, spray paint, Jesmonite, string, moulding wax, foam, cardboard, shoe blakey, gloss paint, perspex, wooden beads, paint. Courtesy Tintype, London



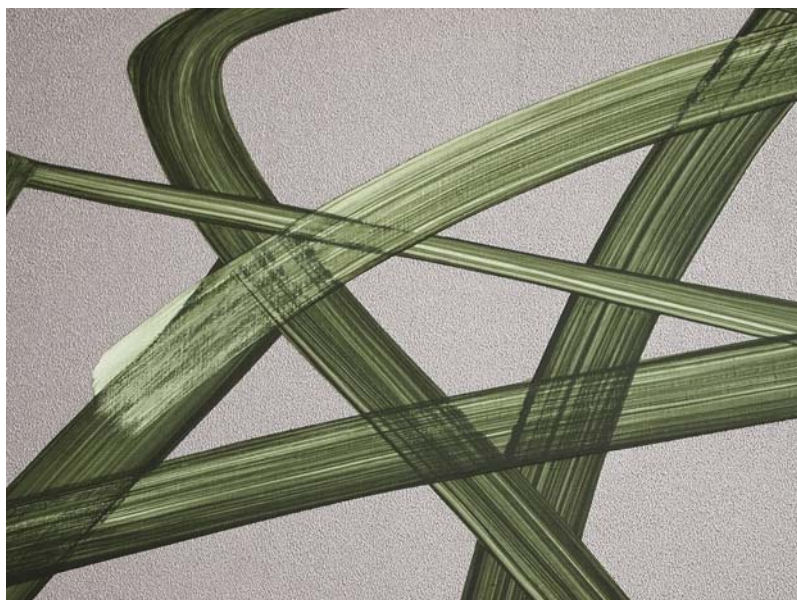
Daniel Robert Hunziker *KALK_16/I*, 2016
Powder-coated steel. Courtesy Galerie von Bartha, Basel, and Hales Gallery, London



Adam Gillam *Oh Ok Then*, 2017
Wood, plaster, spray paint, Jesmonite, string, moulding wax, foam, cardboard, shoe Blakey, gloss paint, perspex, wooden beads, paint. Courtesy Tintype, London



Jonathan Parsons *Bluestar (TERS inverted)*, 2017
Oil on linen. Below: *One Forty* (detail), 2004 Oil on linen



Katie Pratt *Moscrack*, 2000–2016 Oil on canvas



Maria Lalić left to right:

English Green Landscape Painting, 2007
(Flatford Mill. Constable. 1816–17) Oil on canvas

Dutch Brown Landscape Painting, 2016
(A Country House on the Vliet near Delft. Heyden. 1660) Oil on canvas

French Red Vermilion Landscape Painting, 2016
(View of Vétheuil. Monet. 1880) Oil on canvas



Guy Bigland

AA to ZZ, 2014 Digital print, MDF, acrylic sheet and trestles

All the Paintings in the Museum, 2014

Bright Lights, 2015

Dancing About Architecture, 2014

Disbelief System, 2014

*All The Four-Letter Words That Are Sometimes Used With
Another Four-Letter Word (That I Can Think Of)*, 2015

KN NK, 2014

Lineman, 2014

Forty-Three Square Circle Painting Photographs, 2015

Things You Have Done, 2014

Un Certainty, 2015

Various Versions, 2016



John Wood & Paul Harrison *Board*, 1993
 S-VHS, 3:02 min. Video projection with sound, dimensions variable. Courtesy Carroll/Fletcher, London







Neil Zakiewicz left to right:
Onefold, 2016 Paint on wood *Ok Finger*, 2016 Paint on wood

Rana Begum

Begum's work arrives at a position that has synthesised a specific set of influences from European Constructivism to American Minimalism to her own childhood recollections of Islamic Art and Architecture. Her work is therefore concerned with light, pattern, space and repetition, but also crucially, with the viewer's movement around it. The structure of *No.480* (2013) is deceptively simple. Lengths of square box section aluminium are arrayed in a sequence of evenly spaced dark verticals. The physical form of the work is tight and regimented and hints at the industrial processes of its manufacture. However, it creates a diffuse, shifting optical effect that grounds its content in visual perception. The artist has painted the sides of each vertical element in a particular sequence, which produces the illusion of two differently coloured intersecting triangles. The visual effect of the work alters as it is seen from changing angles of view. The brightly coated sides of the vertical bars reflect ambient light and project a wash of colour onto the gallery wall. This colour is really there – and can be perceived – but it has escaped the physical constraints of the work's material construction.

Andrew Bick

The group of drawings from the series OGVDS-GW, are a response to the work of artist Gillian Wise, one of the key members of both the Constructionist and Systems groups in the UK, fused with a grid Bick has been repeating in his paintings since 2008. Alongside this are exhibited a selection of prints from Bick's archive of British Constructionist and Systems art. More drawings from the OGVDS-GW series are being shown concurrently at Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich. Bick's approach is centred on engaging with overlooked legacies of abstraction in ways that include dialogue with the living artists still practising within these traditions. In his research and art making, conversation is used to bring alive concrete ways of working which might otherwise get regarded as redundant, and often this is based on argument with the original proponents, rather than shared admiration. As a further layer of exchange, the grids in these drawings have been set out by artist assistants, whose initials also form the last part of the title, they are therefore inter-generational in a way that gently cuts across the ideas of pioneering modernism, or its apparent redundancy.

Guy Bigland

Bigland deliberately situates his practice in the awkward void between language and image. His paintings are composed using formulae taken from the grids of sudoku puzzles and his artist's books

use abstract formulae to generate text. Chance plays as much a part in these found instructions for artworks as in the association and memory operations he also employs – for example, in *All the four-letter words that are sometimes used with another four-letter word (that I can think of)*. Other regular tactics in Bigland's work involve changing meaning through reformatting words, inserting superfluous spacing, playing with asymmetry and creating new meanings through juxtaposition. Humour gives us the hint that we should look below the surface for more meanings and interpretations. Bigland's reticence to commit himself to describing his art with words, is demonstrated in this representation of his artistic endeavour on his website:

Information about Guy Bigland

he is a visual artist
 he lives and works in Bath, UK
 he is not a Conceptual Artist
 he likes language
 he makes up rules
 he uses systems
 he looks for ways to understand things
 he hopes people will get what he is on about
 he feels uneasy writing about himself in the third person

Katrina Blannin

Katrina Blannin is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Worcester, research title *Correspondences: refiguring pictorial surfaces as a method for apprehending historical paintings*. She teaches at UAL Camberwell and UCA Canterbury and is on the editorial board for *Turps Banana Magazine*. She has co-directed artist run project spaces, curated exhibitions and written about contemporary painting. She graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1997 and has since then shown her work extensively in the UK and abroad.

Edith Dekyndt

One Second of Silence (2008) is a video piece showing a transparent flag fluttering in the breeze. It ripples across the sky almost invisibly; the physical presence of the flag is subtly revealed by the play of light and shadow passing over its slightly reflective surface. The artist describes this as 'a kind of void, a flag without images' and the only thing to be seen is the sky behind it: 'a contemplative view'. It is important to the artist that two elements from classical painting are present in this work: the view of the sky itself and the drapery of fabric. The title comes from reflections about the meaning of a flag, the idea of commemoration and the trajectory of sound in the air. It is a tribute to John Cage's *4'33"* (1952) and Raymond Depardon's *10 minutes de silence pour John Lennon* (1980). A moment of silence is the expression of a period of silent contemplation,



A K Dolven *JA as long as I can*, 2013 Sound installation
Voices: John Giorno and A K Dolven
Vinyl LP, record player, amplifier, two loud speakers, cables
Duration 22 min, dimensions variable

prayer, reflection, or meditation. Similar to flying a flag at half mast, a moment of silence is often a gesture of respect, particularly as an act of mourning or as part of a commemoration ceremony of a tragic historical event.

A K Dolven

In A K Dolven's series of oil paintings of varying formats, which includes the large-scale painting exhibited here, *Teenagers Lifting the Sky* (2014, oil paint on aluminium) she immerses her viewers into a matte, shimmering, multi-layered darkness, speckled with the odd dot or flash of light, and in this instance punctuated by flecks of paint made up of finger prints and smears. A K Dolven makes great play with the tactile aspect of looking, suggesting the idea of the mark as traces of jumping, leaping and touching the painting, which is always installed above head height. In this way something as static and apparently abstract as a black, white and grey painting, meets the eye with a sense of human physicality that is close to dance, the physical sensation it invokes managing to be both gentle and assertive. As with her 2013 vinyl record collaboration with John Giorno, *JA as long as I can*, which A K Dolven will perform at the end of the seminar on 2 March, the overarching impression in her work is of a focus on what it means to be a person, to live, breathe and pay attention to things in the world.

Adam Gillam

Gillam's delicate structures have an impromptu quality, akin to a makeshift moment given form. His work is balanced and nuanced; scraps of material, like scraps of time, are assembled in an inventive, bricolage fashion. Often one piece is bolted on to another, or reconfigured with elements from his studio surroundings. New, wall-based works resemble linguistic forms, generated through intuitive expression, as elements in an evolving lexicon. Gillam improvises with different materials, and the quality of those materials and the act of working with them determines a particularly lucid end result. Typically, Gillam's materials are low status, not precious and often found or co-opted from household use or DIY. Works emerge from a day-to-day engagement with utilitarian materials and what Gillam calls his 'scatty pragmatics' approach. 'We are given a work that has been made step by step, of which we see all the steps at once.' (Melissa Gronlund, exhibition text, Keith Talent Gallery, 2011). The process of making is both a method and an interpretive tool.

Daniel Robert Hunziker

The Zurich-based Swiss artist exhibits two works, *Patch*, (2014, found object), a crochet quilt that mimics the seminal modernist work of Sophie Taeuber Arp in the 1930s and *KALK_16 II*, (2016, powder-coated steel), from a series of minimal, white, wall-mounted grids which Hunziker says imitate the patterns used in the UK for cutting paving slabs to make wheelchair and buggy ramps on street corners. Hunziker's work skilfully reprises the grand tradition of Concrete Art, unavoidable in the museums of his native city, whilst making gentle poetic reference to the everyday. The playful use of a found object, a crocheted quilt bought in a flea market, suggests not just a relaxed attitude to how art might be made, but a way of seeing beauty in the ordinary. Similarly, the curiosity with which Hunziker looks at how British street furnishing works, enables him to produce a series of elegant and spare wall-mounted grids, made more beautiful and enigmatic when one understands the ordinary source of the geometry that inspires them.

Maria Lalić

In these four two-part panel works Lalić is exploring the possibilities of contemporary landscape painting. The top panels are painted in artists' oil colour named after a country, and so associated with local traditions of painting the landscape. The lower panels on each use earth she has collected from the relevant site to make a direct and unrefined colour, bound with oil medium. Together they pay homage to a familiar, extant landscape painting. In one work here, for example, earth collected from Véttheuil is painted on the lower panel whilst the upper panel is painted with French Ochre oil colour. The dimensions of the painting derive from Monet's *The Petit Bras of the Seine at Argenteuil*, 1872 in the collection of the National Gallery, London. This immersion in the historical and environmental context in which artworks were produced is both academic and deeply sensuous. These are highly visceral works requiring the viewer simultaneously to experience the physicality whilst conjuring a scene in the imagination, as one does when reading. Consequently, Lalić's work is experienced in two ways: direct communion with the painting's insistent presence and materiality contrasts with the subliminal projection of a pastoral painting. And yet the precision in the successive layering of colours reveals that there is also creative dialogue with the timbre and nuance in the atmosphere of each painting.

Jo Melvin

Jo Melvin is Reader in Fine Art, Archives and Special Collections, CCW Graduate School, UAL. Jo Melvin's research interests begin in the relationships and slippages between the archive, documentation and performativity in recent histories. Goethe's statement guides her approach: everything in history remains uncertain: the largest events as well as the smallest occurrence.

Jonathan Parsons

The processes that produced *One Forty* (2004) occurred in a specific order. The configurations in this painting are not a composition in the conventional sense. They are a direct transcription of a fragment from a found and photographically recorded graffiti tag. The gestural forms of the photographic source were transferred as a line drawing onto a primed linen canvas. The drawing was then masked using finely shaped sections of pressure sensitive tape that had been carefully cut out with a scalpel. What appears to be the background colour of the painting was applied as one unified rolled texture – metallic lilac aluminium flake. The masking was then removed to create a graffiti-tag-shaped aperture that cuts through the impasto texture.

This was then painstakingly and thinly painted in using green earth pigments. It presents the illusion of gestural abstraction, but it is, in fact, a recreated portrait of the original found mark and is, strictly defined, an instance of hyperrealism. This is a reverse painting that accurately depicts the source material, but it has been made in an opposite way to the original. It is not gestural at all and questions the relationship between figure and ground.

Katie Pratt

Siscialy (2016) exploits the homogeneity of the painted ground, taking cues from slight irregularities hidden within the interface of primed canvas with oil paint and encaustic (the technique of mixing wax with paint or pigment, either heated or dissolved in turpentine). Successive formulae are devised, such as drawing around the shadows of splashed wax in Helios purple oil paint. As surface blemishes are amplified, patterns emerge. The systematic procedures invented in this painting rely upon the specifics of colour from a modernist painterly convention. Formal colour balancing is used to generate the painting's imagery from out of the disorder of the ground, whilst underplaying the most strident event. Organisational techniques underpin the subject matter and refer to the

taxonomic and classification strategies which govern our social and political structures. This work is accompanied by small, diagrammatic oil paintings which elucidate details of process.

John Wood & Paul Harrison

Wood & Harrison exhibit *Board*, their 1993 VHS video in which they perform a carefully orchestrated series of manoeuvres, balancing, tilting and pivoting an 8' x 4' sheet of plywood around their own bodies. This three-minute video works both as a test of physical endurance and a playful allusion to the standardisation of materials, which came about with modernism and has also become the staple of studio screen divisions in art schools across the country. Wood and Harrison's deadpan performance turns the ideas of sequence and repetition of Conceptual Art into something more human and quirky, in which the heavy thump of the plywood sheet as it hits the floor and echoes around the studio where it was filmed, acts as a reminder of the weight and heft of materials. Twenty-four years after this video was made its combination of the time span of a hit record, grainy black and white throwback to film-based Conceptualism of the 1970s, and deadpan humour not only still seems relevant but also hints at the developments in some of the more recent works on display, particularly those of Neil Zakiewicz.

Neil Zakiewicz

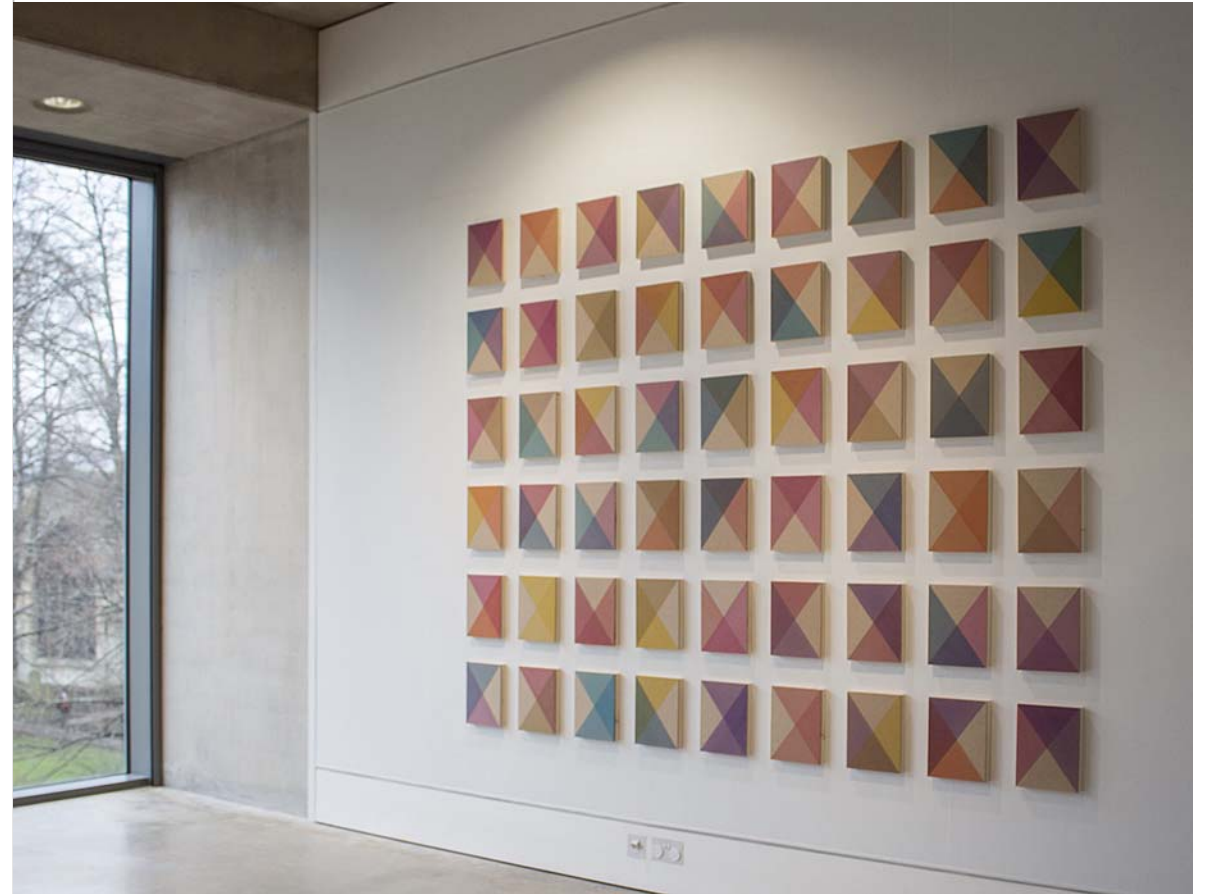
At first glance *Onefold* (2016) appears to present an image, perhaps a view of the earth and sky. However, it does not depict any view or indicate any object other than itself. It owes its visual appearance entirely to the way in which it was made. The artist has created a shaped MDF panel, which suggests two squares that are joining together or breaking apart. Ranged across the surface of the entire panel are a series of evenly spaced vertical ridges. The whole construction has been spray-painted with a primer and then completely coated with a sky-blue colour. The panel was then sprayed in a pale olive green, but only from the left-hand side. The shapes of the panel structure dictate the spread and coverage of the sprayed colour. The elements are pared down and yet the visual results are not completely predictable or simple.

The spraying technique is detached and evenly mechanical, but it produces an atmospheric optical effect. The painting shows the method of its own production and simultaneously acts as the device and the index of the paint markings that coat it.

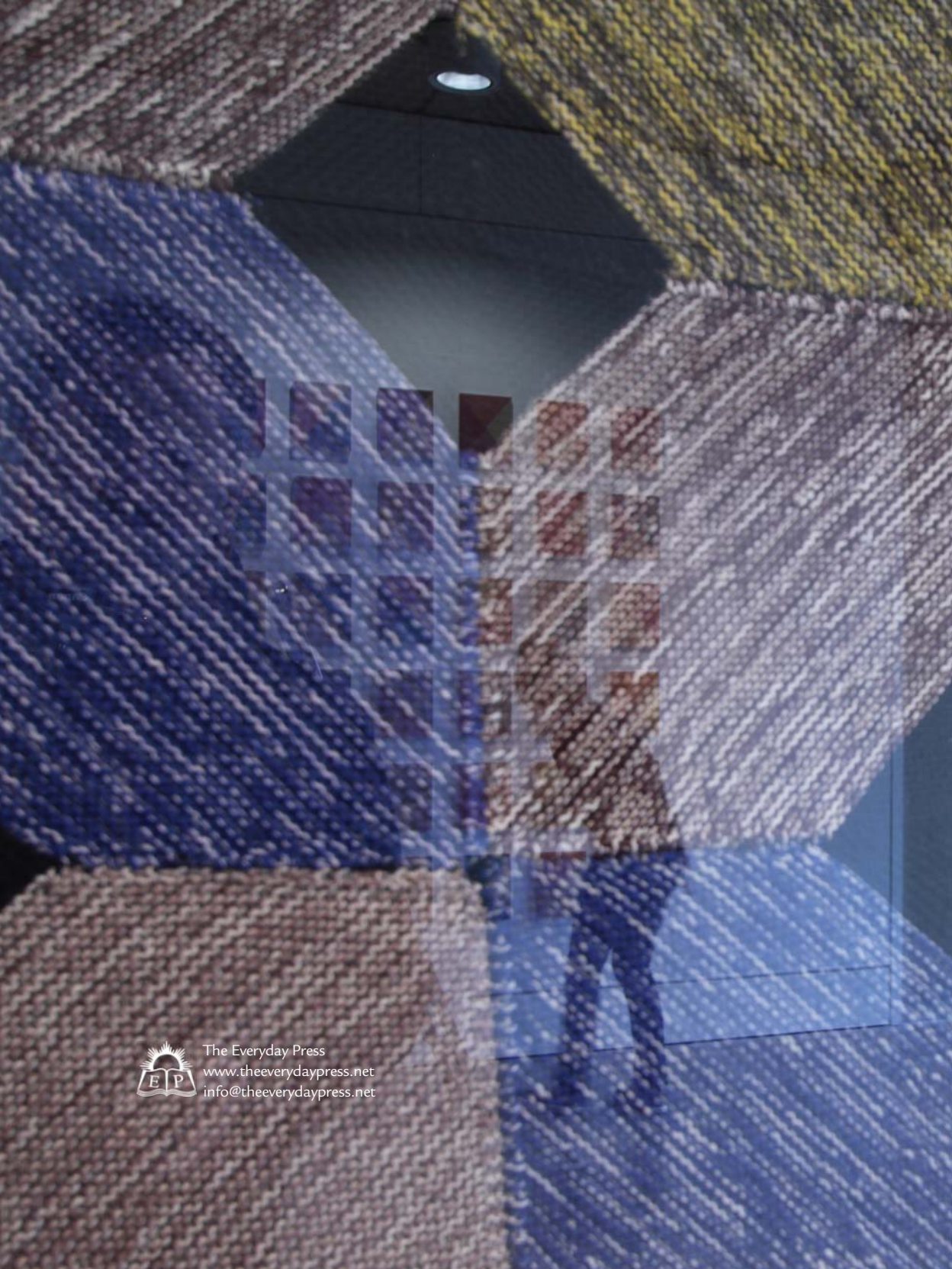
Guy Bigland *About is like about*, 31 July–13 August 2017
Nine posters displayed at nine bus stops in Cheltenham ▷



the
order
of
things



Rana Begum *No.703*, 2017
Acrylic paint on MDF
Courtesy the artist and Jhaveri Contemporary



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