



OUT THERE
Jane Harris



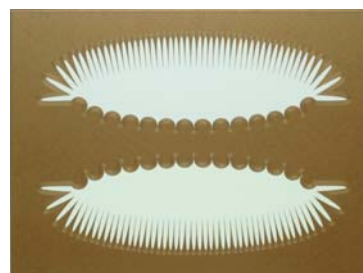
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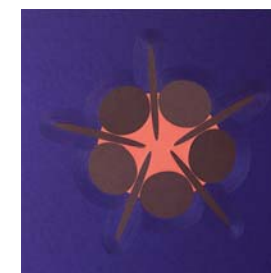
Turning : Charles Darwent

To most of the world, Josef Albers is a painter of squares. And with good reason. For the last quarter-century of his long life, starting at the age of sixty-two, Albers worked on the series that would come to define him: the *Homages to the Square*, of which more than two thousand paintings and many more prints survive. And yet Albers himself did not agree with the popular view of him as high priest of the quadrilateral. "I am not paying 'homage to the square!"; he spluttered, exasperated, twenty years into the series. "It's only the dish I serve my craziness about colour in."¹

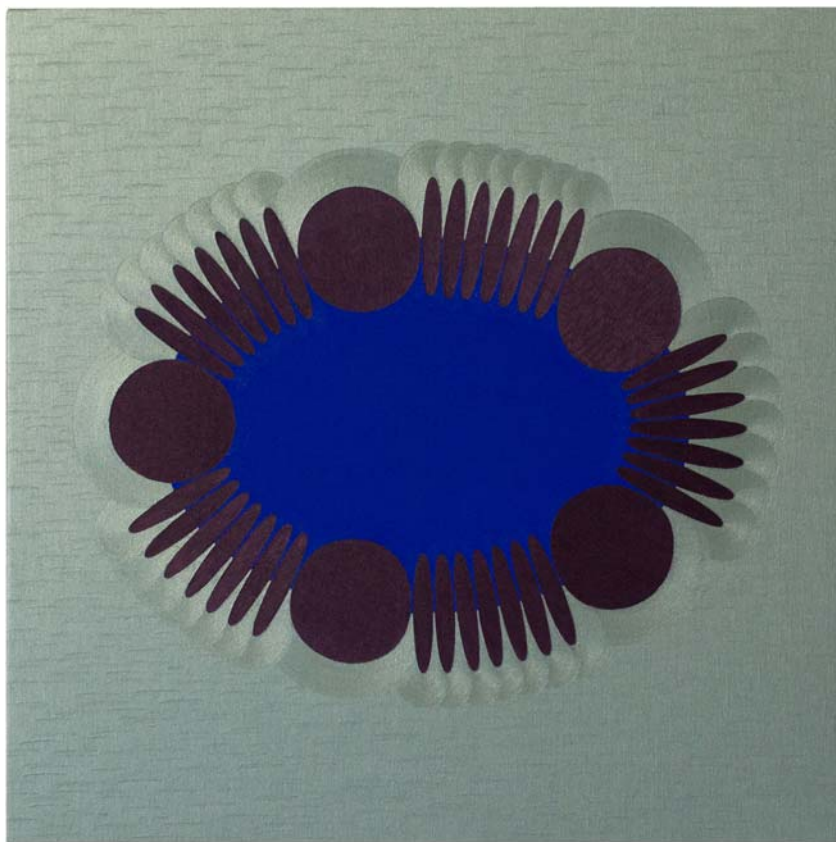
I recount this in part because Jane Harris claims Albers as one of the chief influences in her own art, and because she, too, has become closely associated with a single geometric form: the ellipse.² For nearly thirty years now – longer than Albers and his squares – Harris has paid homage to the ellipse, or at least has seemed to. Works as disparate in time and appearance as *Thrill* (2006) and *Night Ride* (2017) are linked in their use of the form. As with Albers, though, this does not reflect a quixotic fondness on Harris's part for a random shape. For her, too, geometric form is only a means to an end; a control by which she can measure her own process, and expand on it.



Thrill 2006
oil on canvas, 112 x 153 cm



Night Ride 2017
oil on wood, 50 x 50 cm



I do not mean to labour the Harris–Albers analogy, for they are very different artists as well, sometimes, as rather similar ones. But it is, perhaps, worth comparing the paths by which they arrived at their respective geometries. For Albers, the square represented anti-nature. He believed, when he started to work with them, that squares did not occur naturally. When he discovered, too late, that they did – in salt crystals, for example – he took typical delight in having proved himself wrong. Albers was the foe of abstraction, reasoning that if an image was abstract, there had to have been a *primum movens* from which it was abstracted. This opened any subsequent artwork to a historical reading, which he disliked. Harris, quite differently, arrived at the ellipse by a clear process of history and refinement. Yet she, too, abjures the word “abstract” as applied to her work, and rightly so. Whatever the process that led her to the ellipse, it became, long ago, its own first principle. All her work since that time has been ahistorical, a distillation only of itself.

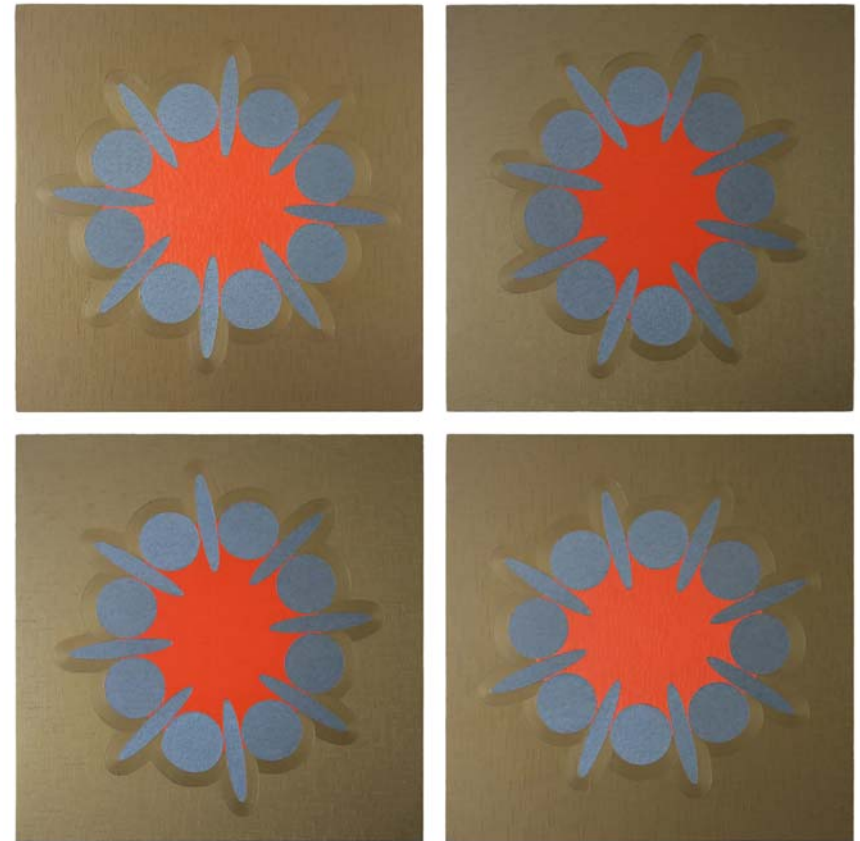
Ellipses, unlike squares, lend themselves readily to allusion. A square is, always and irrevocably, a square; an ellipse may be long and etiolated, like a finger, or flat and globular like a bun. The descriptors for its various possible states, like the states themselves, tend to the diurnal and organic. Squares look like squares; ellipses look like *things* – heads, wine-glasses, grapes, genitals. Often, the form of Harris’s ellipses is dictated by the proportion of the paintings in which they appear: the long narrowness of a series of canvases she made in in 2015–16 shaped them as petals, for example. How we apprehend these allusive forms – I think “read” would be the wrong word – is not solely reliant on their shape, however. In these same works, Harris’s use of an apparently Giottesque palette lent her ellipses the feel of human heads engaged in a *sacra conversazione*. And yet the dialogue between form and colour in these works was rather more complex than that. Seen out of context, Harris’s colours were not those of the quattrocento at all. It was the form of her ellipses that had made them so.

Turning Points 2017
oil on wood, 40 × 40 cm

Which is to say that Harris is arguably a history painter, although the history she paints is not of emperors and states but of the evolution of her own eye. In the 2007 works, the long, unbroken, brush-marked line with which she edged her forms played multiple roles. It held the composition together; its fluctuations of direction and light created a figure-ground ambiguity that at times pushed the surrounded image forward and then, at the next turn, pushed it back again. As well as these, though, the line suggested the movement of Harris's own hand, the process of the painting's making and the time taken to make it. If there is a past in Harris's work, there is always a concomitant future: the possibility of change, of what-comes-next. Seen *en masse*, her images often have the look of primitive life forms edged with pseudopods, Harris's ambiguous line making them hover over the painted grounds below. Visually and historically, the images feel motile, anxious to get on, to evolve.

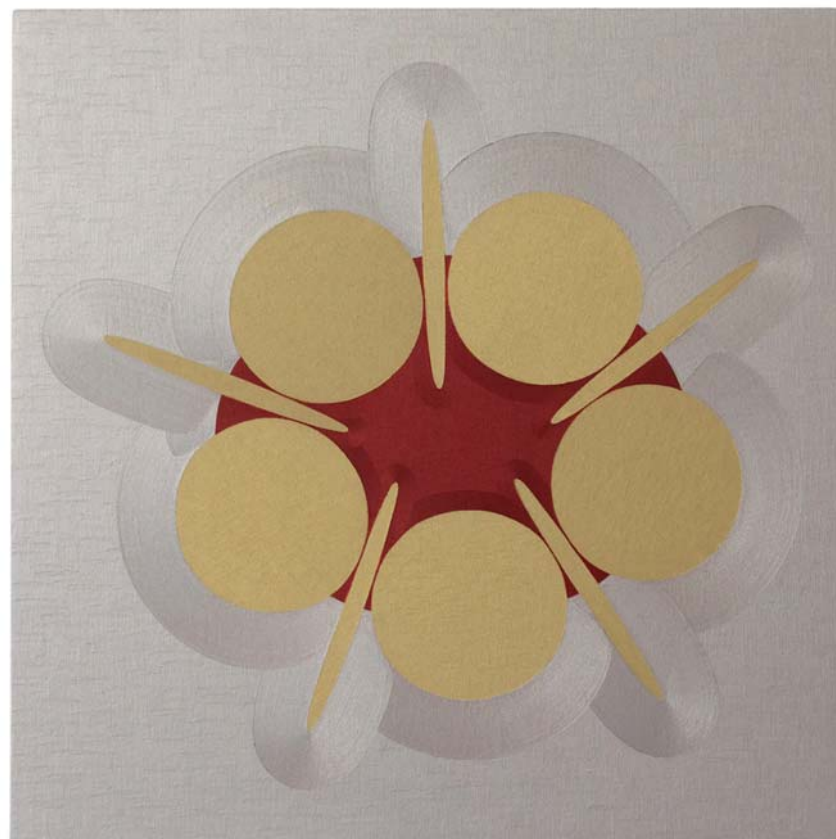
And so they have. At first glance, her latest series of work has little to do with the last. Where those paintings felt somehow classical, new ones such as *Turning Points* (2017) feel almost cartoonish. The central figure in the painting seems to float in shallow water, casting a shadow on the surface below. *Letting Slip (Four Small Blasts)* (2017) calls Lichtenstein's *Whaam!* inevitably to mind, although the four-part work is less Pop-ish than a clever study in mutability. Harris is, preeminently, a colourist. Her gentle rotation, across the quadriptych, of the central ellipse of her paintings turns the figures minimally to left and right. The fringe of ellipses around the edges of these become explosion marks, like a cartoon. But it is the pulse of the red centres of the works, two muted and two vibrant, that animates them, sets them in motion. Our eyes read colour as movement; an alchemy Josef Albers would have understood only too well.

- 1 Neil Welliver, 'Albers on Albers', *Art News* 64, no. 9, January 1966, p. 69
- 2 For Harris on Albers, see, for example, Interview between Ben Gooding and Jane Harris for *Saturation Point*, May 2017

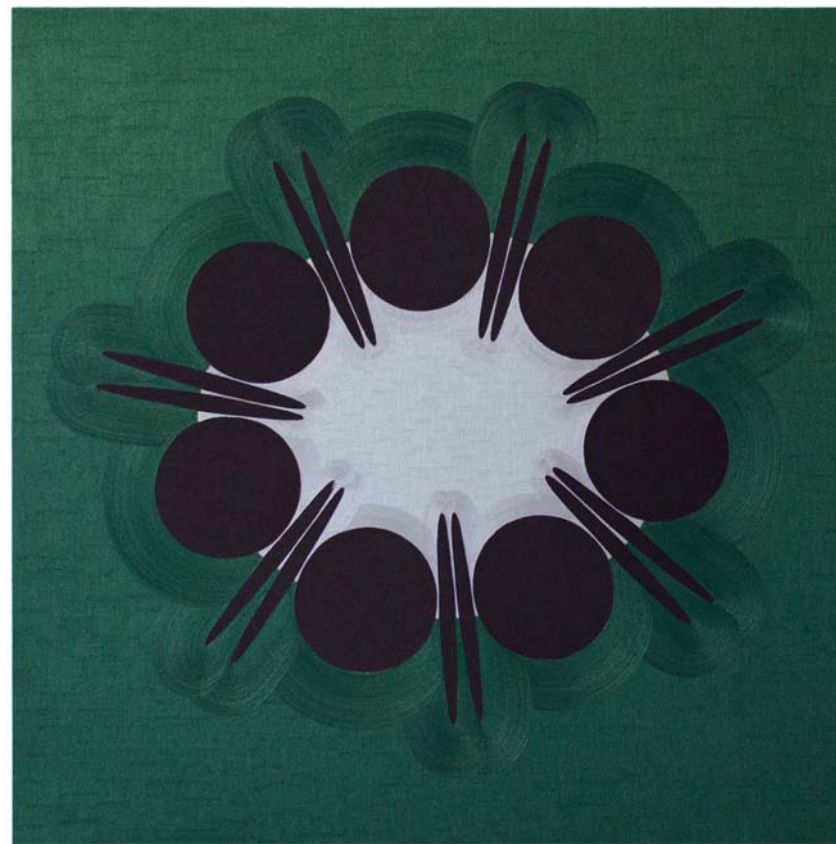


Letting Slip (Four Small Blasts) (Quadriptych) 2017
oil on wood, 80 × 80 cm

Light Spin 2017
oil on wood, 40 × 40 cm



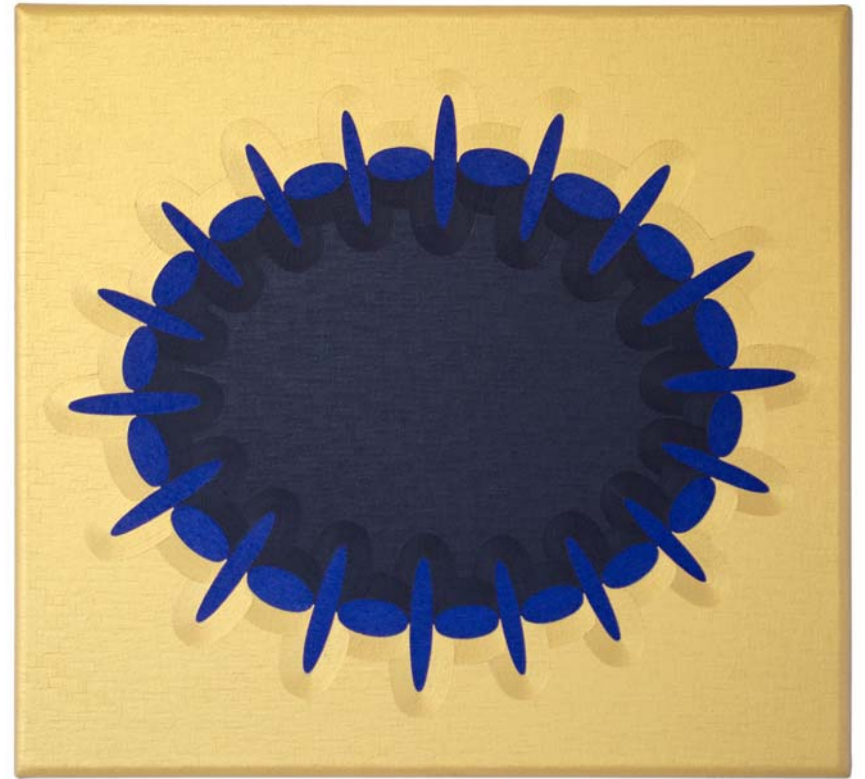
Out of Bounds 2018
oil on wood, 40 × 40 cm



Either Way (diptych) 2014–17
oil on wood, 40 × 80 cm



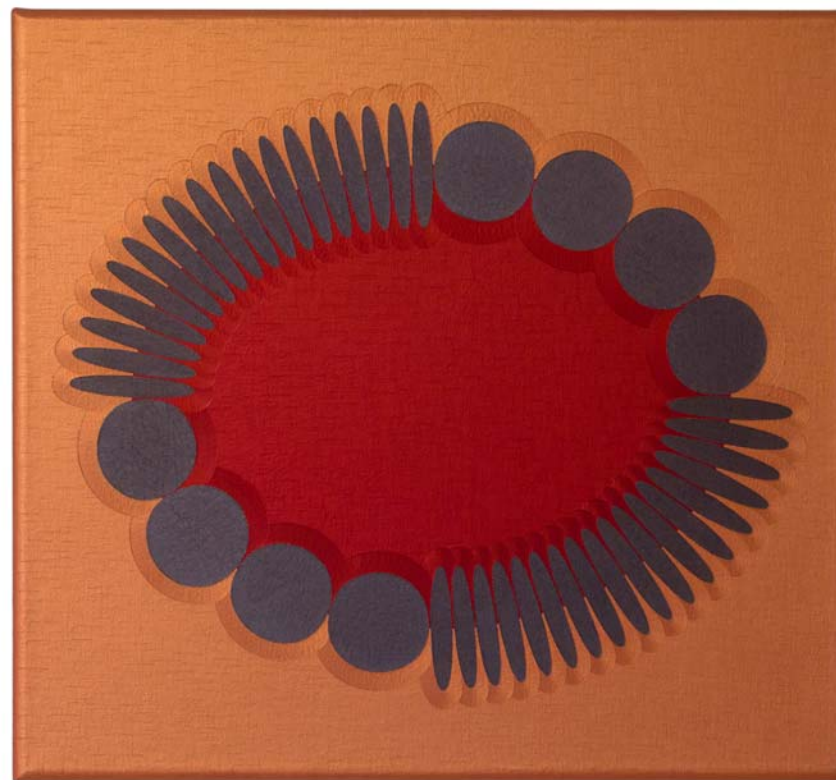
Strike Out 2017
oil on linen, 58 × 64 cm



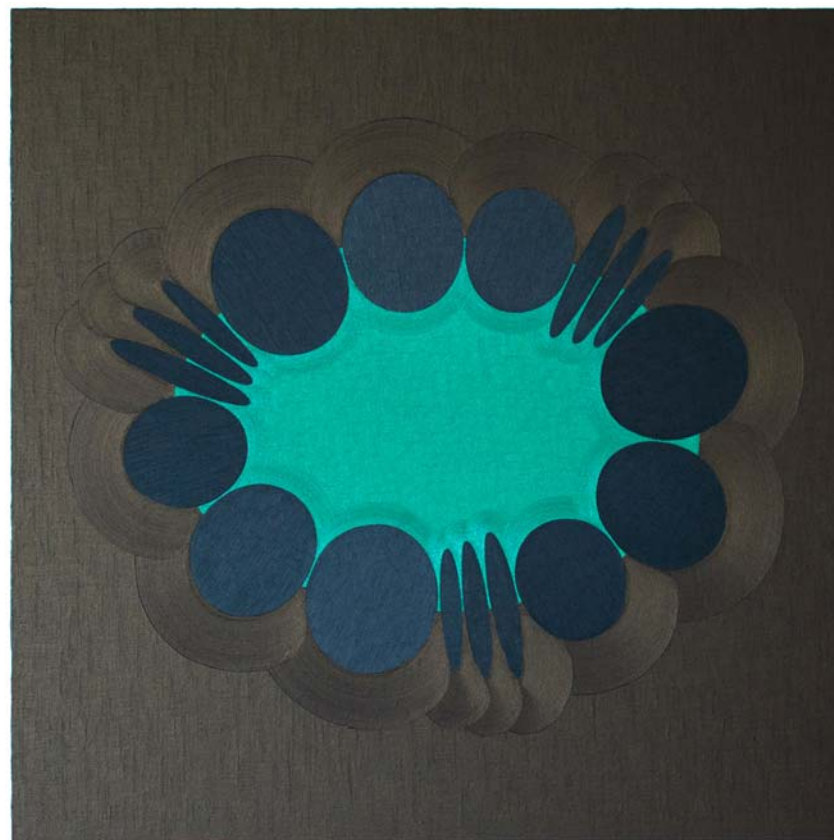
Restless Dreaming 2017
oil on wood, 40 × 40 cm



Holding Back 2017
oil on linen, 58 × 64 cm



Distant Sounds 2018
oil on wood, 40 × 40 cm



Wild Thing 2018
oil on wood, 80 × 80 cm



JANE HARRIS

- 1956 Born in Dorset, United Kingdom
1991 MA Fine Art, Goldsmiths College
1981 Higher Diploma Fine Art, Slade School of Art
1979 BA Fine Art, Brighton Polytechnic

Solo Exhibitions

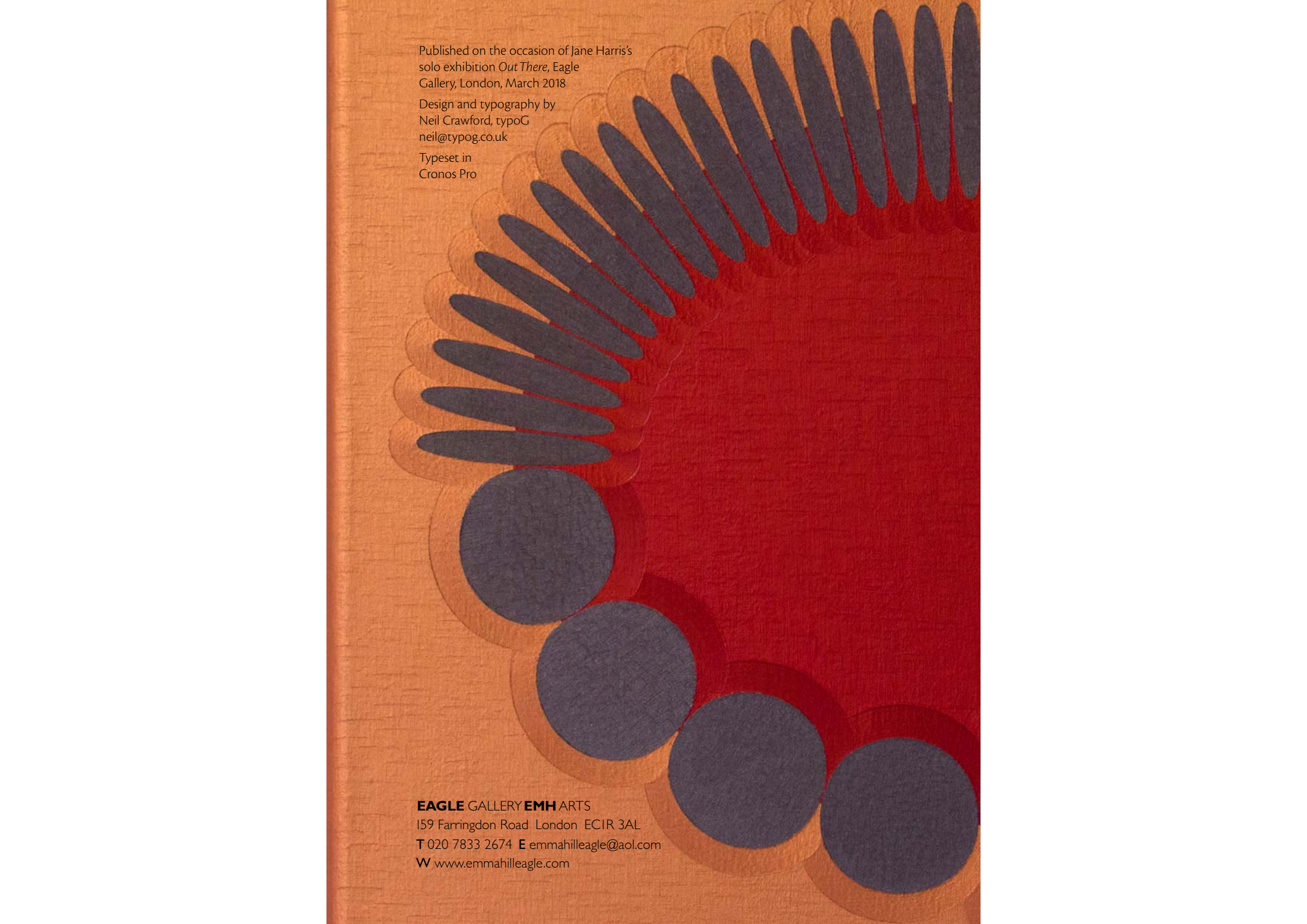
- 2018 *Out There*, Eagle Gallery / EMH Arts, London
2017 *Collection en mouvement : Jane Harris : ellipses et cercles d'affinité* – from the collection of the FRAC–Artothèque Limousin, Médiathèque, Panazol
New works on paper, Two Rooms Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
2016 *Separate Arrangements*, Rabley Contemporary, Marlborough, UK
2015 *Surface, Edge, Depth*, Espace culturel François Mitterrand, Périgueux
Jane Harris: New Works, Galerie Hollenbach, Stuttgart
Collection en mouvement : œuvres de Jane Harris – from the collection of the FRAC–Artothèque Limousin, Médiathèque, Argentat
2014 *Jusqu'au bout de l'ellipse*, Musée des Beaux Arts–Chapelle du Carmel, Libourne
the devil is in the details (with Jiri Kratochvil), Horatio Jr., London
2013 *Jane Harris*, Pollen, Monflanquin
2011 *Leitmotif*, Galerie Hollenbach, Stuttgart
2010 Galerie ACDC, Bordeaux
2009 Galerie d'Ecole des Beaux Arts, Valence
2008 *Space Opera*, Hales Gallery, London
2006 *Jane Harris: Paintings and Drawings*, Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham
Patricia Sweetow Gallery, San Francisco
2005 *Jane Harris: New Painting*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Connecticut
Divine, Hales Gallery, London
2004 Kontainer Gallery, Los Angeles
2001 *Jane Harris, Paintings and Drawings*, Southampton City Art Gallery
Jane Harris: Drawings, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
Galerie Hollenbach, Stuttgart
1999 Salle Attane, St-Yrieix-la-Perche, France
Galerie Hollenbach, Stuttgart
1996 Galerie Hollenbach, Stuttgart
Work in Progress, Project Space, Camden Arts Centre, London
1994 Anderson O'Day, London
1992 Anderson O'Day, London

Collections

- Artothèque Limoges
Artothèque Pessac
Arthur Andersen Art Collection
Arts Council of England
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
The Boise Collection, University of London
Brighton University
British Airways
Children's Hospital of Los Angeles
Cité de la Tapisserie, Aubusson
Clarins
Colorado University Art Museum
Department of Trade & Industry
Doris Lockhart Saatchi
Ernst & Young, London
Eversheds, London
Fidelity Worldwide Investment
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
FDAC Dordogne
FRAC Aquitaine
FRAC Limousin
FRAC Poitou-Charentes
GlaxoWellcome
Goldsmiths MA Collection
Government Art Collection
Lieu d'Art et d'Action Contemporain (LAAC) de Dunkerque
Marsh, London
Pallant House, Chichester
(The Golder-Thompson Gift)
Pictet & Cie, London
Rhode Island School of Design Museum, CT
Sacker & Partners, London
SAKS, Fifth Avenue New York
Southampton City Art Gallery
The Hon R B Loder

Awards and Residencies

- 2016 Joint commission by FRAC Aquitaine, FRAC-Artothèque Limousin, FRAC Poitou Charentes
2015 Artist in Residence, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, USA, funded by Commission Permanente, Région Aquitaine
2012 Artist in Residence, Clermont Communauté, France
The Sunny Dupree Family Award, Royal Academy Summer Exhibition
2011 Artist in Residence, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, USA, funded by Centre Nationale des Arts Plastiques
2010 Royal Academy of Arts, Summer Exhibition, The Wollaston Prize – finalist
2005 Rootstein Hopkins Sabbatical Award
Arts & Humanities Research Council Grant
2002 Jerwood Drawing Prize, Third Prizewinner
2000 Research Award, Goldsmiths College
Cheltenham Drawing Exhibition, Prizewinner
1999 London Arts Board Individual Artist Award
1998 Research Award, Goldsmiths College
1997 Jerwood Foundation, Jerwood Painting Prize – finalist
1996 Artist in Residence, Camden Arts Centre
1995 The Arts Foundation Painting Fellowship
John Moores Liverpool, Prizewinner
1993 London Arts Board Individual Artist Award
1991 Erasmus Exchange, Rijksakademie Amsterdam
1985 French Government Scholarship, Paris
1981 Boise Travelling Scholarship, Japan



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Neil Crawford, typog
neil@typog.co.uk

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EAGLE GALLERY EMH ARTS
159 Farringdon Road London EC1R 3AL
T 020 7833 2674 E emmahilleagle@aol.com
W www.emmahilleagle.com