

Two Rooms Media Release

Jane Harris

Works on paper

10 February – 11 March 2017

Two Rooms is very pleased to invite British artist, Jane Harris to New Zealand to exhibit new works on paper. Harris first exhibited at Two Rooms in 2007 alongside other international artists in *Painting One*. Her meticulous paintings are based on the deceptively simple geometry of the elliptical form yet defy easy categorization. Both highly controlled and optically unstable, Harris revels in entertaining opposites: abstract/figurative, flat/spatial, cerebral/decorative, and contrived/playful. These dichotomies, however, do not engender any uncertainty, but instead manifest themselves in paintings that are rigorously intellectual, physically commanding, and potently spiritual.

Drawing is an important feature of her work, which is employed in two distinct ways. In the process of making her paintings, the drawn shape is always the starting point. She has also always produced drawings for exhibition. Using the same process as in her painting, she combines variations on the elliptical form, B mechanical pencils, cold-pressed heavy watercolor paper and architectural templates. She describes her methodology:

By utilising the surface properties of the paper, I seek to draw attention to the physicality of the drawing and its illusory and optical qualities simultaneously. My approach is calculated, exact and rigorous, but by the detailed adjustments made to the proportions, the edging and the relative positioning of the shapes, an unexpected individuality, visual rhythm and sensual playfulness to each drawing occurs.

The works in this exhibition combine graphite and watercolour. Watercolour is another medium Harris has employed since her student days and has played an equally important part in her practice however they are rarely exhibited. Harris was awarded two prestigious residencies at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Bethany, Connecticut in 2011 and 2015 during which she decided to concentrate solely on producing works on paper. During this time of investigation, although still utilising the elliptical form as her primary motif, she hit upon the idea of coupling her pencil drawing techniques with her watercolour techniques. It is a result of this combining of two different processes and mediums that these new works have emerged. With this body of work, Harris has mixed pools of colour and applied them in such a manner that they fuse and separate within the same painted area, creating ambiguous depths and distinctive surfaces. They have a metallic, lustrous quality combined with a luminosity only achievable in watercolour. Harris clarifies this further:

What intrigues and excites me is what happens at the junctures where the watercolour shapes meet the graphite shapes and the white shapes of the paper. Different spatial events occur, on the surface and above or in front of the surface and shapes flip from figures to grounds within each work.

The *Orbiter* pure pencil drawings are punchier yet softer; the velvety sheen of the pencil, whose reflective quality has something in common with the metallic pigments Harris favours, settles into the grain of the paper. The smaller watercolour/graphite works in the exhibition are part of a series of studies for a commission to design a flag for the three FRACs (Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain) of the new region of La Nouvelle Aquitaine in SW France to celebrate their new partnership. Each share the paradox that while they insistently call attention to their material facticity on the surface, their animation to the eye gives them life in the imagination.

Biographical Notes

Born in Dorset, Jane Harris now lives in France. She studied for her MA at Goldsmiths from 1989-91. Previously she obtained a BA in Fine Art at Brighton Polytechnic in 1979, and a Higher Diploma in Fine Art at the Slade School of Fine Art in 1981.

She has exhibited extensively internationally. Solo exhibitions include: *Jane Harris: New Works*, Galerie Hollenbach, Stuttgart 2015, *Jusqu'au bout de l'ellipse*, Musée des Beaux Arts - Chapelle du Carmel, Libourne 2014, Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham; Patricia Sweetow Gallery, San Francisco 2006, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Connecticut; Hales Gallery London (both 2005), Kontainer Gallery, Los Angeles 2004; Southampton City Art Gallery; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York 2001

Her work is in major public collections throughout Europe and she has received a number of awards including: the 2015 Commission Permanente, Région Aquitaine – Bourse de la recherche à l'étranger, 2010 Royal Academy of Arts, Summer Exhibition The Wollaston Prize – finalist, Rootstein Hopkins Sabbatical Award in 2004 and the Arts and Humanities Research Council Small Grants award in 2005. She received the Arts Foundation Painting Fellowship in 1995, was Artist in Residence at Camden Arts Centre in 1996 and was an award winner at the John Moores Painting Exhibition of 1995.