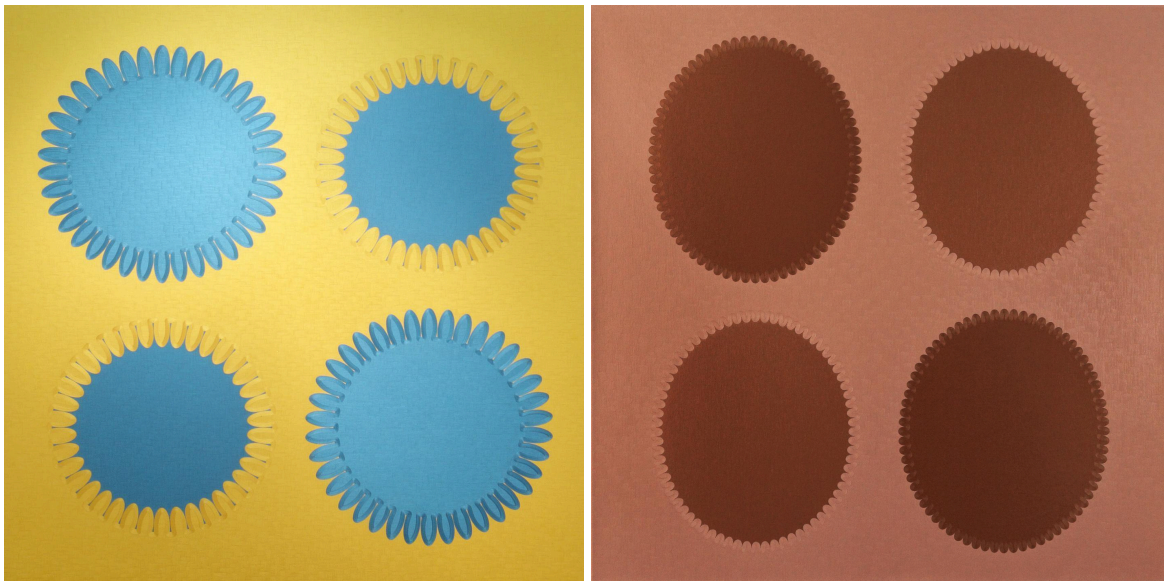


Press Release  
10 January 2024

Jane Harris | *Ellipse*

16 February – 3 March 2024 / 5 April – 30 June 2024  
Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA, Bordeaux



Jane Harris, *Captivators*, 2014, oil on canvas; Jane Harris, *Buff and Tan*, 2005, oil on canvas, Collection Frac Nouvelle Aquitaine MÉCA.

Frac MÉCA, Bordeaux, will stage an exhibition of paintings and watercolours by British artist Jane Harris (1956–2022), opening on Friday 16 February 2024. *Ellipse*, curated by Freeny Yianni, is an intimate survey of works made between 2005 – 2020.

Jane Harris was a keen observer of the natural world and the phenomena that exist within it. Drawing inspiration from the movement of wind on water, the granular quality of dusk or a cloud backlit by the sun, Harris' works can be perceived as flat shapes that simultaneously carry a sense of recessional depth. Like Albers, whom she greatly admired, Harris worked within a set of self-imposed rules. In her case it was the ellipse, an elastic shape that lends itself to allusion and can take on multiple identities. From these simple parameters she created images that remind us of how the basic effects of all painting lie in the movement of light passing across a surface, which carries the substance of 'formed and transformed' matter.

Through her masterful handling of paint, Harris consistently proposed various possibilities to the viewer. Approaching one of her canvases from the front there is an undeniable temptation to move in towards the painted surface, and then to shift from left to right, and back and forth. The play of the light reveals the exquisite deftness of the brush strokes and brings with it changes to colour and form. In the early 2000s, Harris started using metallic paints which reflect more light and increase the range of possibilities. This can be seen in *The Fugitives*, 2008 where the silvered double ellipses

appear to hover in space. They push and pull in the reflected light, contained by their precise edges that recall the human endeavour of Japanese raked gardens – an early influence and area of research. A space between unfolds echoing Duccio's Annunciation, housed at London's National Gallery, and to which the artist frequently referred. It is this space that captivated Harris.

Harris had a unique colour palette gathered from memories of the world around her rather than a colour system. Her playful approach in her later works contrasts with her previous adherence to using only two colours. Her decision to break from this self-imposed rule gradually developed from 2011, following a residency at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. A further residency there, in 2015, unleashed an energy which was even more powerful – as seen in *Aloof*, 2020. This increased colour range ushered in a new freedom and sense of mischief, moderated only by her commitment to the ellipse.

Harris' journey from restrained poetry to exuberance can be examined in two works made almost ten years apart. Both *Buff and Tan*, 2005 (collection Frac MÈCA), and *Captivators*, 2014 are square in format and, superficially, seem similar in composition, but they are not. Shapes are placed simply and appear to float in the pared down, meditative *Buff and Tan*, which is in contrast with the playfulness and joy of *Captivators*. The exhilaration of *Captivators* is felt throughout her complex later works. A pulsating dynamic between the shapes and the surfaces on which they lie is achieved by an intensity of colour and the increased intricacy of the ellipse edges. The viewer steps back and forth, in and out, from side to side, seduced by Harris's handling of paint, colour and form.

The extent to which Harris challenged the boundaries of the ellipse is also evident in her works on paper; a more intimate medium which frequently spearheaded developments in her painting. *Ellipse* will include vitrines displaying a selection of drawings, rendered in graphite to superb effect, and often done in series, which rely entirely on her mark making and the white of the paper to conjure the sort of depths that are so characteristic of her paintings. The presence of the artist's hand is felt in her luminous watercolours that appear to flow effortlessly from her brush in a physical action quite distinct from the painstaking precision of the mark making in her canvases. The care and discipline that Harris brought to her practice throughout her career is an enduring legacy of this remarkable artist.

## **Notes to Editors**

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## **Jane Harris**

Jane Harris (1956 – 2022), spent her formative years in Dorset where she was born in 1956 and began her art studies at Bournemouth College of Art. She then went on to the Slade School, London and some 10 years later renewed her studies, graduating with an MA Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, London as part of the Frieze generation. Harris lectured at Goldsmiths for more than a decade and eventually became an MA course leader in Fine Art. She moved permanently to the Dordogne in 2006 with her husband the sculptor Jiri Kratochvil, and their son George.

Throughout her career Harris was the recipient of numerous awards, research grants and prizes some of which include the Arts Foundation Painting Fellowship (1995) prize winner at the John Moores Liverpool (1995) Jerwood Drawing Open (1996) and the Sunny Dupree Family Award for a woman artist at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (2012). She exhibited internationally and is

represented in significant public collections including Arts Council England; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; Centre Nationale des Arts Plastiques, Cnap; Colorado University Art Museum; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Frac Nouvelle Aquitaine MÉCA, Frac-Artothèque Limousin, Frac Poitou-Charente; Pallant House, Chichester(Golder-Thompson Gift); Rhode Island School of Design Museum; Southampton City Art Gallery; UK Government Art Collection as well as corporate and private collections. The Jane Harris estate is represented by Freeny Yianni, CEO of CLOSE Ltd and Prue O'Day on behalf of Jiri Kratochvil and George Kratochvil. CLOSE Ltd and Prue O'Day are delighted to be collaborating with Frac MÉCA on this exhibition of Harris' work.

### **Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA**

Supporting contemporary creation by building a collection of art and bringing it to the attention of as many people as possible is the founding commitment that formed the DNA of the Frac Aquitaine in 1982. In February 2019, the institution was renamed Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA. Combining its missions of dissemination and education and collection building and production – all in proximity to the artists – the Frac develops a year-round artistic programme with its local partners, initiating inventive actions and shared moments around works of art. The Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA is financed by the Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine and the State (Ministry of Culture – Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine).

FRAC NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE MÉCA

5, Parvis Corto Maltese

33 800 Bordeaux – France

Wednesday to Sunday from 1 to 6 pm.

closed on bank holidays

Temporary closed during install days, from 5<sup>th</sup> March to 5<sup>th</sup> April 2024

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