

Daniel Sturgis

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Obituary

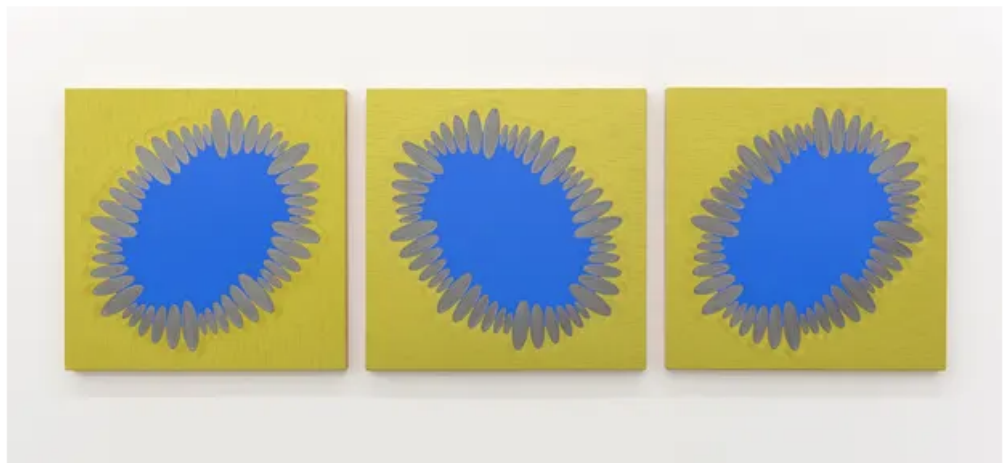
Jane Harris obituary



📷 Jane Harris's paintings hold multiple and shifting identities

Jane Harris, who has died after a short illness aged 65, was one of Britain's most significant abstract painters. For 30 years she explored, through a set of self-imposed rules, the perceptual qualities of the ellipse. It was a shape that, in her hands, could be both ornate and Spartan, and that, through her beautiful handling of paint, could be visually mischievous. Carefully painted in oils, each of the meticulous brushstrokes that mark out her curvilinear shapes describes both a form, themselves, and a texture, which captures and reflects light.

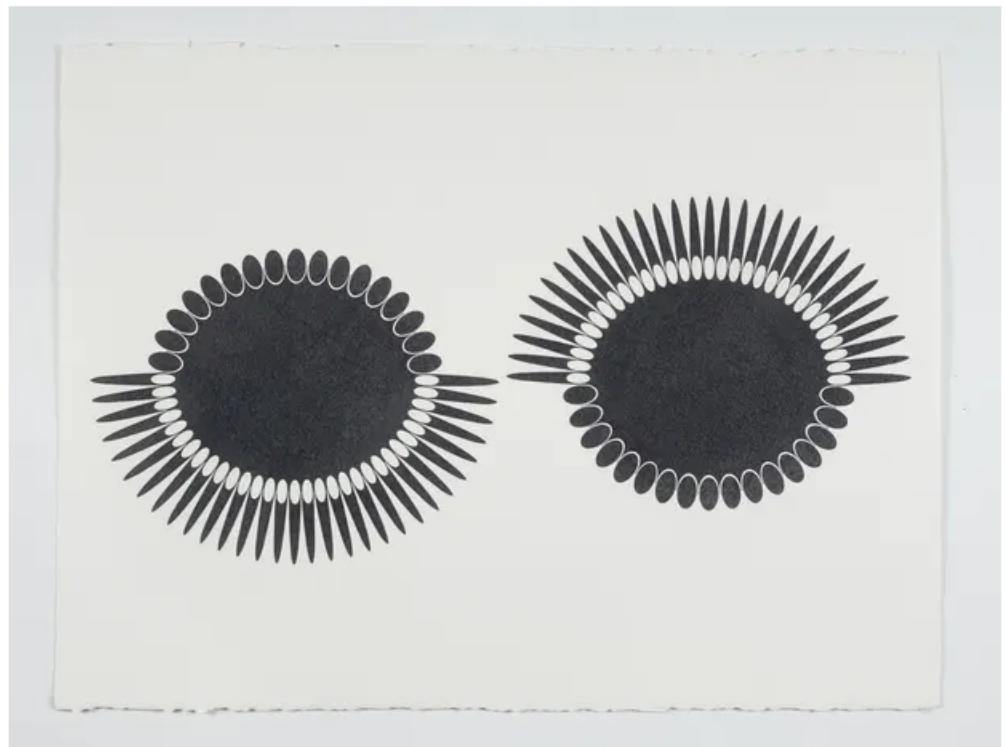
I met Jane at Goldsmiths College, University of London (now Goldsmiths University of London) in the 1990s, when I was a student on the MA course in fine art. She had just graduated. Jane first studied art in Bournemouth, Dorset, the county in which she spent her childhood. She was born in Swanage, one of four children of George Harris, who was in the navy, and his wife, Eva (nee Armstrong).



📷 Restless Sublime, a 2016 triptych by Jane Harris

After leaving Bournemouth College of [Art](#) (now Arts University Bournemouth), she then went, via Camberwell School of Art and Crafts (now Camberwell College of Arts) and Brighton Polytechnic (now University), to the Slade in London. She spent 10 years practising as an artist, during which time she was awarded scholarships to study classical gardens in Paris and Zen gardens in Japan, before she sought out the intellectual debate at Goldsmiths, which was then in its heyday, to challenge herself yet further. It was there that she began working with ellipses, creating a language that was uniquely her own, and that enabled her paintings to hold multiple and shifting identities. For a decade from 1996 she taught on the MA course herself.

In 2006 she moved, with her husband, the sculptor Jiří Kratochvíl, and son, to rural Périgord, in France, where she created a studio and home, to be able to concentrate on her work more fully. From this position of relative isolation, her paintings became first more complex, and then more colourful. She described to me how inspirational she found the quality of changing light on the surface of the quiet landscape she could view from her window.



Orbiters 5, 2015, by Jane Harris

Another source of inspiration was the artists Josef and Anni Albers, and she spent two productive residencies as a visiting artist at the Albers Foundation in Connecticut. It was there that she expanded her drawing practice, making beautiful works on paper in dark graphite pencil, and pencil and watercolour.

Jane's work is held in significant British, French and American collections, including those of the Arts Council England, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Pallant House, Chichester, and Southampton City Art Gallery; and some of the most respected writers on contemporary painting, such as Martin Hentschel and Barry Schwabsky, have written about her. Her presence, humour, and friendship will be deeply missed by her many artist friends.

A survey of her work is scheduled to open at FRAC MÈCA Bordeaux in 2023.

She is survived by Jiří and their son, George, and two of her brothers, Tim and Nick.
