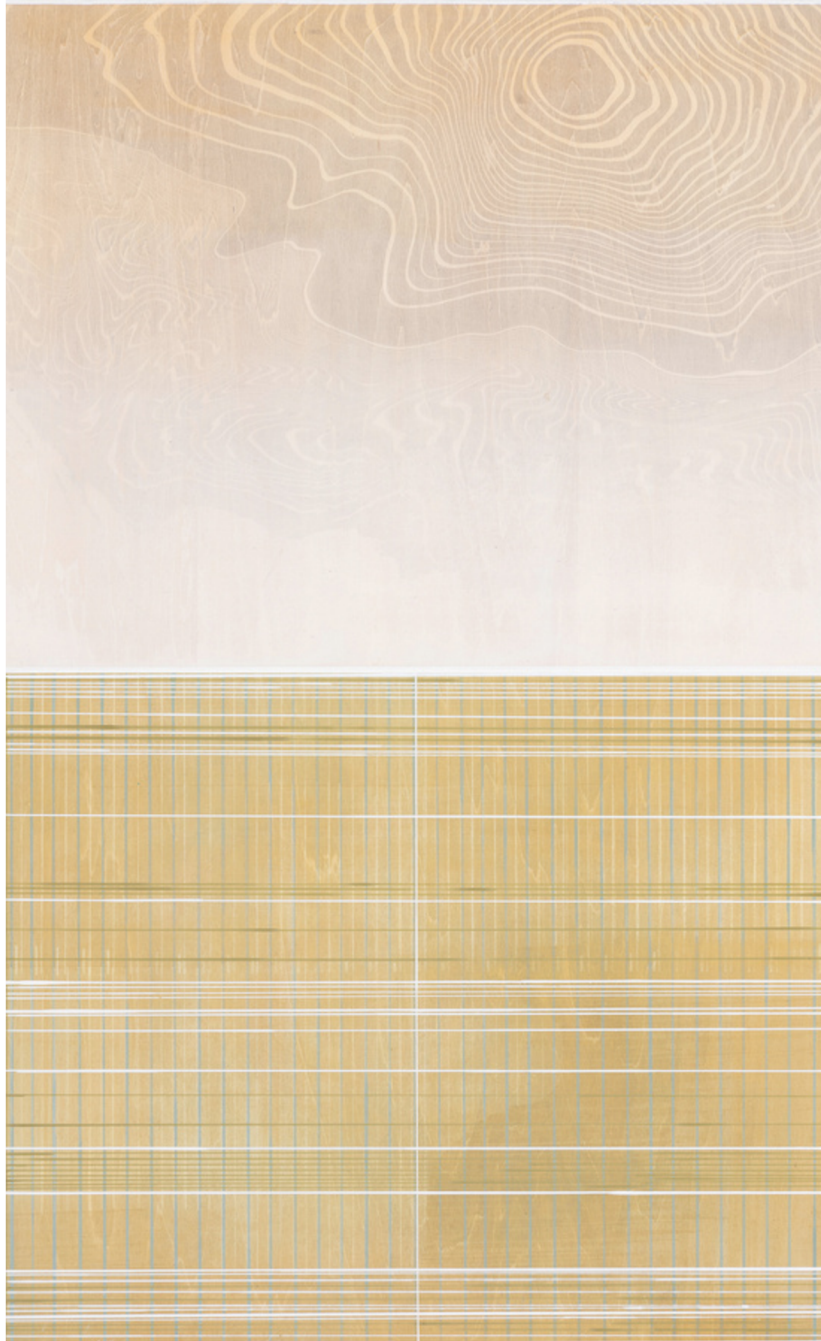


MAPPING SPACES

HELEN IRELAND



155A GALLERY

MAPPING SPACES

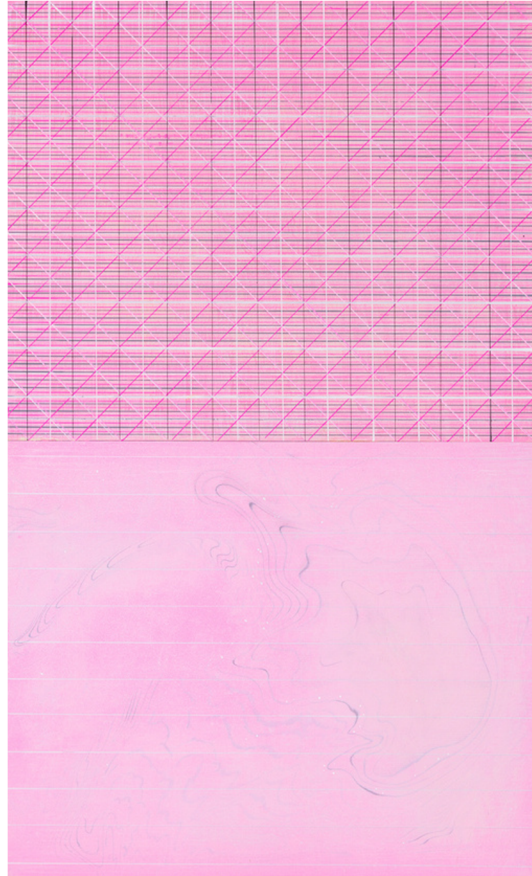
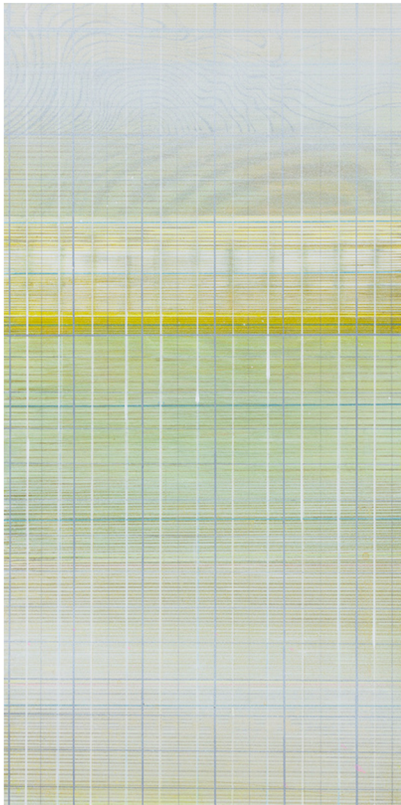
HELEN IRELAND

'I work on two levels. I occupy my conscious mind with things to do, lines to draw, movements to organise, rhythms to invent. In fact, I keep myself occupied. But that allows other things to happen which I'm not controlling... the more I exercise my conscious mind, the more open the other things may find that they can come through' Bridget Riley

In this writing by Bridget Riley we recognize the importance of her conscious mind and the practicality and physicality in the process of making which enables new forms and ideas to emerge. This method is at the centre of Helen Ireland's work and yet the real subject of her work is ambiguous, maybe not even possible to describe in words. In Helen's working process we witness the endless build up of lines and colours, then the revisions and re-workings until finally something new emerges. Her work has always had a sense of climate, weather and atmosphere but it is also intrinsically linked to the process and plastic qualities of painting. Her use of mapping, using grids, overlaying colour, staining, obliterating, working and reworking a painting whether on paper, canvas or wood has remained constant since she started painting thirty years ago. Her work is constructed and edited as it is made. Through the process of making and the use of materials something occurs that distils the initial starting point. Whether the point of departure is recognisable or non-recognisable; ultimately it is the structure, the balance, the edit, the unexplained, the chance and order of finding and discovering visual information that is the work. She draws with colour and practices endlessly like a musician might rehearse or an actor might learn their lines. She enjoys order but it is the chance elements of marbling with Indian Ink and water that creates the individuality of these works, each painting is unique and ideas never repeat exactly.

As Helen says herself, *'in reworking the paintings inevitably change will occur and marks fade in and out; some stay and others become lost'*. Ireland is interested in the chance ideas of John Cage; he stated, *'Some people think I have given up making choices, but my choices consist of choosing which questions to ask, how many lines, long or short, which tool to use, which colour, how to locate the marks on the plate or the plates on the page'* these ideas seem to suggest a living, breathing artwork that comes about making decisions, applying rules, then solving problems and reworking until there is some visual correctness, balance and discord.

Artistic influences are essential and keep her in dialogue with the greatness of contemporary women artists. Bridget Riley, Prunella Clough, Eva Hesse, Tess Jaray, Agnes Martin are artists that she shares a deep affinity with. It is apparent that the influence of these artists that she has admired, read and taken in is real, heart felt and internalised. We are made from our experiences and influences. In a more tangible and real way her work is influenced by what she sees with her own eyes. These shapes of colour and light have been witnessed and are often the remembered qualities of fleeting moments where she has looked at through grids, networks, structures that are both man made and organic. An idea: The particular coolness of a pink London sky, the visual shift between light and dark or a warm pink to a grey green.

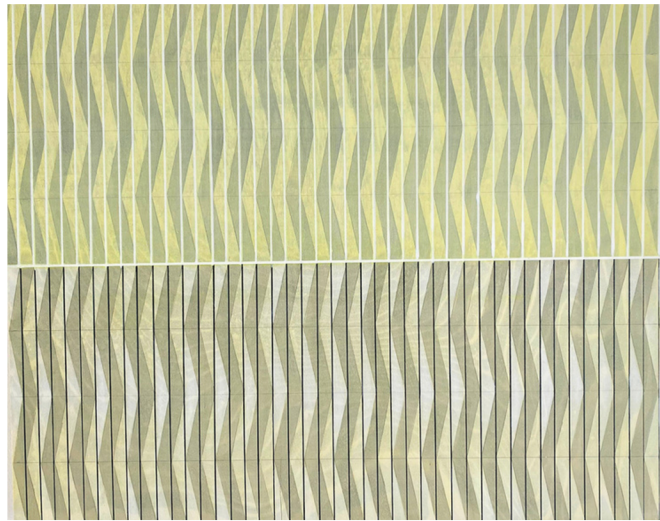


She uses geometry, and ruling pens loaded with diluted acrylic; this started from spending many years in a graphic design studio using a parallel motion board. There is an interesting accuracy and specificity to a ruler drawn line in opposition to a stain or wash of colour. It appears to be these opposites in constant dialogue with one another that creates the rhythm, pattern, tension and ultimate quietness to these paintings that is appealing. By using opposite colours, considering the saturation and dilution of colour Helen can play with the space and flatness within a work. The grid seems to link and unify the surface whilst the colour, tonality and painterly application in parts, breaks the conformity and makes each painting unique. Helen has worked with water based medium for many years and enjoys the opacity and transparency of colour on paper. Helen's paintings are made on heavy weight watercolour paper or on Japanese plywood. The beautiful, fine surface of the plywood allows her to play with the pattern of the wood grain in dialogue with her implied water patterns and marbled surfaces. It is particularly beautiful to see how these subtle marbled and painted layers work in counterpoint with each other. Helen's work needs to be seen as these images are hand-made; the surface quality and tactility of colour and can only be witnessed through direct observation.

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Andrew Carter is an Artist and Printmaker

Image Credits [L-R]:

Mimosa (Detail) Acrylic, ink and pencil on Japanese Plywood, 58.5 x 30cm
Spaces of Rhythm Series (Opera Pink) (Detail) Acrylic, ink and pencil on Japanese Plywood, 72 x 45cm
 Front cover: *Rhythm of Memory (Detail)* Ink and acrylic on Japanese Plywood, 72 x 45.4cm
 Back cover: *Sounds and Spaces - Ripple* Ink and acrylic on Japanese Plywood, 36 x 45cm



Helen Ireland studied for a BA in Fine Art Painting at Central/St Martins and an MA at Chelsea School of Art, she was the Drawing Fellow at Winchester School of Art. Helen taught drawing on the foundation course at Hertfordshire University for eight years. She has participated in Artists' workshops in Namibia, Georgia and The Netherlands. Helen was one of the artist's involved with the Rivers of the world programme funded by the British Council for five years. Rivers of the World is the Thames Festival Trust's flagship art and education project. The project links schools from around the world through common river themes. She worked on 'Remember this' a Southwark education project designed to help children read through an arts programme. Helen has worked for many years in different schools including Corelli College. She worked on the City Year project at The National Gallery in 2017/2018. Helen was the founder member of Gasworks Artists' studios and Cubitt Artists' Studios. (Film by Morgan Quaintance) 'Cubitt 25 Years: An Artist Led History'

Her work is in the following collections; British Land, FORTE, Arthur Andersen, New Hall Cambridge University, UNESCO, British Airways.

'These artworks with their elaborate surfaces start life by being carefully mapped out by Helen using a series of precise geometric grids. Through the painstaking process of gridding and measuring, of working and reworking, nature is mapped into something precise and often geometric. Helen speaks of trying to create a 'logo of a memory', turning an impression into a formal composition. Through her work, the wildness and unpredictability of the natural world is tamed. The external influences fade away and the painting becomes a stand-alone piece with a life of its own. Here is 'colour through nature.'

Atmosphere is important to her. Climate, weather, and light – open space, sunsets. Through a process of magic (as well as industry), these works become patchwork quilts of squares or tiles, based on the green fields of the countryside, but blazing with a life of their own. They may be inspired by nature but by weaving them into something non-figurative, almost ephemeral, they become nature rendered abstract, like Agnes Martin's stripes or Prunella Clough's biomorphic shapes'

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Alice Chasey is a writer and editor, specialising in contemporary art

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155A Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London SE22 8HX

**For all sales enquiries, please contact Karen Smith:
info@155agallery.com +44 (0)7930 340092**

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