



Painting for Beginners

PART ONE & TWO

Geoff Catlow



Black Spot

91cm x 50.8cm

Acrylic, oil & conté on paper, 1998-2000

Painting for Beginners

PART ONE



Two
122cm x 122cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2001

Stack
122cm x 122cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2003





Vertical Lines
61cm x 61cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2003

Blue Stack
61cm x 61cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2002





Tome
61cm x 61cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2008



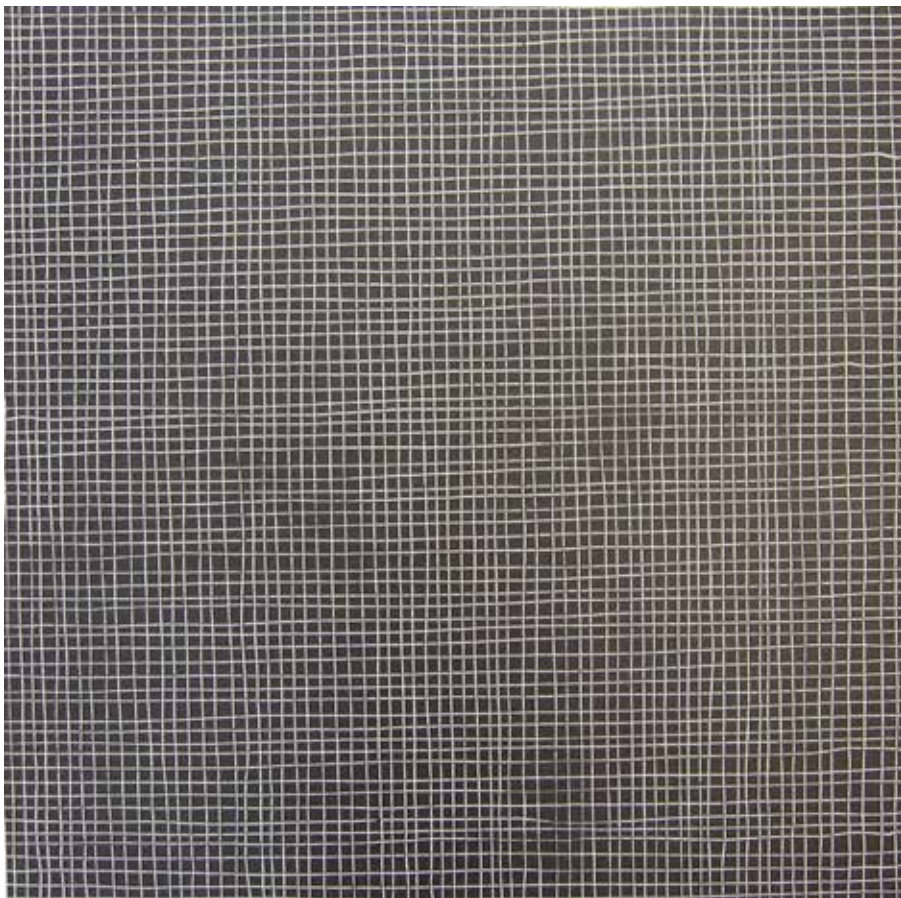
Scatter
61cm x 61cm
Acrylic & graphite on MDF, 2008



Code

61cm x 61cm

Acrylic & graphite on MDF, 2008



Mesh
91cm x 91cm
Acrylic on card, 2003

Spine
120cm x 120cm
Acrylic & oil on MDF, 2008





Conversation
122cm x 120cm
Acrylic & oil on MDF, 2008-9

Phantom
122cm x 114cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2009





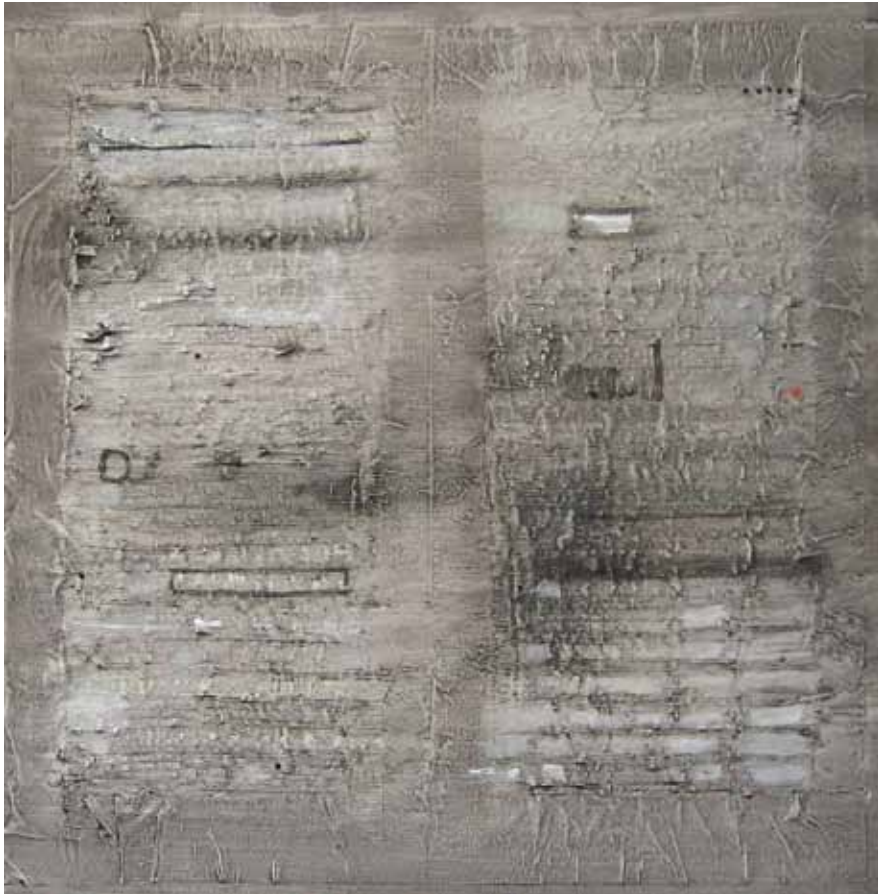
Quest

122cm x 122cm

Acrylic, oil & emulsion filler on MDF
2009-11



The Mysteries
40.6cm x 40.6cm
Acrylic & graphite on MDF, 2004



Grey Matter
61cm x 61cm
*Paper, acrylic, conté &
conservation glue on card*
2009

Painting for Beginners, part one: A fresh start

Let's take a date, or two, to be precise: 1998 to 2000. A period of a great upheaval in my work, culminating in a set of black and white paintings and graphite drawings, unlike anything I had done before.

How did this happen? From a figurative based artist, to complete abstraction, not a slow evolution, but suddenly. I remember that morning in my studio. I remember the piece, a drawing, one of a group I had been working on for a couple of days. It has always been a habit of mine to draw in intense sessions, around one image, pushed and pulled about obsessively. On this day, out came the folder, materials, pastel, graphite, water, ink and then, to my consternation ... nothing. Of course days such as this one had happened before, a time for reassessing, a bit of down time and then onwards and maybe upwards. On this day, however, I had never felt so empty, this work was dead to me, and there seemed nowhere to go... shit! This particularly hollow echoing void in my head stayed with me for several weeks.

Was that to be it? Well in one sense it would be, in that anything I started after that day would look and feel so different.

It wasn't painting or drawing, or making art in general that was the issue. It was the very essence of it, how it came about, what it could be about, how it could be done and how it may look.

From that morning of looking at something vacant and empty, I began, eventually, over the days, weeks and months that followed, to feel a growing sense of liberation from the past. I emerged from what I soon understood to be a creative trench which I had been studiously digging over the years. In this trench I was in my comfort zone, and I came to see that I was subject to a fear of the very things I had in my past embraced; such as trying something new (to me), experimenting for its own sake, without fear of failure. Now I could sense a wider, distant, but enticing creative horizon and fresh creative air to breathe. For the first time

in an age I felt that it was OK to play around for no other reason than to see what might happen.

The one creative, even personal tick I did not shake off, was the need for some solid ground on which I could gain purchase, push against, to move in a forward direction. There was no plan, just questions. How was I to make new work? Be it drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, or any other kind of work: and if it was to be painting, what could it look like, what was painting to be about?

So, back to those black and white pieces: I started with a shape, the square, to my mind a stable and particularly human invention. Next, colour, well no colour, black and white, then the paint: oil or acrylic, and to what am I to apply it to, and how? The answer to these latter issues was acrylic for the paint, board or mdf for the surface, and to apply the paint in as nondescript a way as I could devise. Into that paint, while still wet, I would draw freehand, straight, vertical or horizontal lines, through to a white ground, starting in the middle of the edge of the painting, or the centre. All subsequent divisions were dividing areas in half, thus developed stripes or grids and all without mechanical aids, all would be done by eye. The work that ensued can be summed up by the pieces 'Two', a black acrylic square, with a drawn white vertical line down the centre, and 'Stack', a series of horizontal lines, drawn from the centre outwards. This is my break with the past; nothing will be, as before, I

would begin painting afresh. These are the first two works in the show.

To pursue my play analogy, all toys were out of the box and general mayhem did sometimes ensue and rules were broken and redefined. My work encompassed paper, graphite, paint, photo images, some sculpture, each thing for its own sake, no recourse to what I call external references. I was concerned to rid myself of what I thought of as narrative drag. Not to tell a story, but to make work about... nothing in particular. I wished to say that my work was about nothing, other than what you could see on the surface. These were philosophical challenges to myself and they formed a conversation I was constantly having in my head and sometimes out loud into the studio space. The truth is that a narrative of some sort is present in all human activity. But I persisted in these explorations. Out of which and in tandem with the black and white paintings another group of painted works developed. They were unpredictable, tentative, slow to develop. They did not follow a rigorous set of rules and were more nuanced, hesitant, more to do with developing a visual language.

In my head it was as if I was opening a book, maybe a sketchbook, full of ideas, odd markings, rubbish, things incomplete, accidents and the implicit sense of time passing and all on the surface of the painting.

By 2004 I felt that the black and white paintings were becoming repetitive. Having escaped one creative trench, I was in danger of digging another. The act of making them and following the rules I had set had ensured my break with the past. They were, or acted as a medicine that had passed through my creative system. I was out on the other side of my painting crisis. This didn't make painting or any other kind of work any easier, or straightforward. Why would it? I had, after all, decided to move away from a systematic way of working that offered an almost decision lite solution to making paintings, to a comparatively open approach which introduced fresh complexity. From using only black and white to looking to introduce colour, and a visual vocabulary of marks that seemed fuzzy rather than distinct. The marks I made were interventions on the surface of the paintings, reactions to the accidents to the application of the paint, as can be seen in the piece 'Scatter'. This painting developed as I picked out dried bits of acrylic from the surface, whilst applying thick impasto white, leaving the surface disturbance as the subject of the piece.

So now how to talk about the developments in my work from the end of my 'black and white period' roughly 2005 until the end of 2010-11? The surface of the work became key. Like the wafer thin atmosphere of our planet, the surface of paintings are fragile and no more than the thickness of a couple of coats of paint, and the implications of even small interventions of colour or texture can at once change our

view of the world. In fact we can be taken to another part of our world by such modest means. These are the kind of paintings I describe as containers, into which we look and thence sometimes inhabit in our imaginations. For myself this self same fragile surface was to be finite, space less. My paintings were not containers, but things to be looked at, not into.

From monochrome to full colour: I suppose to most an easy concept, but to me, rightly or wrongly, a mighty incline to be overcome. The ascent began, slowly and imperceptibly, as though I was scattering a pinch of salt here and there over the surface. I was leaving clues of some sort across the painting, or in the layers of paint. Sometimes I saw these paintings as geographic maps or archaeological sites, where subtle changes of tone or hue caused by previous layers added to the developing narrative of the painting. Each piece was its own story, the surface itself being the narrator. At the same time there was an accretion of shapes, grabbed from here and there, sketch books, landscapes, observed or remembered. The surface is scratched, drilled into, abused and caressed, and the layers built. These processes can be seen, at work, in the three pieces 'Tome', 'Scatter' and 'Code', through 'Spine', 'Conversation', 'Phantom' and finally 'Quest'. I think this group of works sets out my painting manifesto at this time, at the end of 2010-2011.



Black Square
41.5cm x 41.5cm
Acrylic & graphite on card, 2009



Signs & Symbols
(re-set)
74.9cm x 63.8cm
Acrylic & paper on card
2011



When
81cm x 76cm
Acrylic on paper, 2008-9

A Kind of History
61cm x 61cm
Acrylic on paper, 2009





7 Days
90cm x 90cm
Acrylic on paper, 2012

Painting for Beginners

PART TWO



Whoooo!
147cm x 112cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2012

Painting for Beginners, part two: What just happened and is it true?

The winter of 2011-12 was awful, cold, wet and dark and there was this painting, 'Quest' well that was the title it finished with. At the time it was 'Bastard 1'. This piece had been plaguing my waking hours for nearly two years, layer after layer, and restart after restart and still it would just be there, unresolved. During the winter I ceased and desisted and let it stand so I could see and survey my inadequacy. Of course I should have turned it to the wall, but no! There it sat eating away at my self-esteem. Eventually, I interpreted this impasse as a message, like so much alphabet confetti, out of which letters I was making the words 'give up'.

'Give up painting' I said to myself. Maybe that was it, at last I was receiving loud and clear, give up painting! So I turned the bastard piece to the wall. 'Calm down dear, try something different', so off I went and played a week-long game with red paint and a thinned down pot full of zinc white. I painted a piece of paper red and on it drew with a largish brush a circle, freehand, about 30" across and left it to dry overnight, and because the watery paint dried slowly the following day revealed a drippy circle, repeat seven times, each one covering the previous and... well something new to me, if not to the world and with one bound, as they say, I was free. I returned to the 'bastard', gave it a name, reinterpreted the message as, not give up, but move on.

From drippy circles to drippy squares and from subdued colour to all out high pitched opposites; cadmium red, cobalt blue, magenta and lemon yellow. Damn it, let's use colour without hesitation, as it comes, as it occurs, in my head. The accidents and chance of drips fed into a similar approach to colour and in turn to making paintings. Gravity and time were fascinating aids to the development of work. Was this how it was to be Le Fauve? There was certainly a sense of abandon and of joy dare I say. Each time I mixed a colour I accepted it without question. I loaded my brush, moved to the canvas and made the mark I wished to make. I stepped back and did something similar again, painting was that simple. Surely not! The question, the decision, the thought, the change of mind, the painting over, the constant worry, the niggle, oh! The niggle; well niggle no more, well not yet anyway.

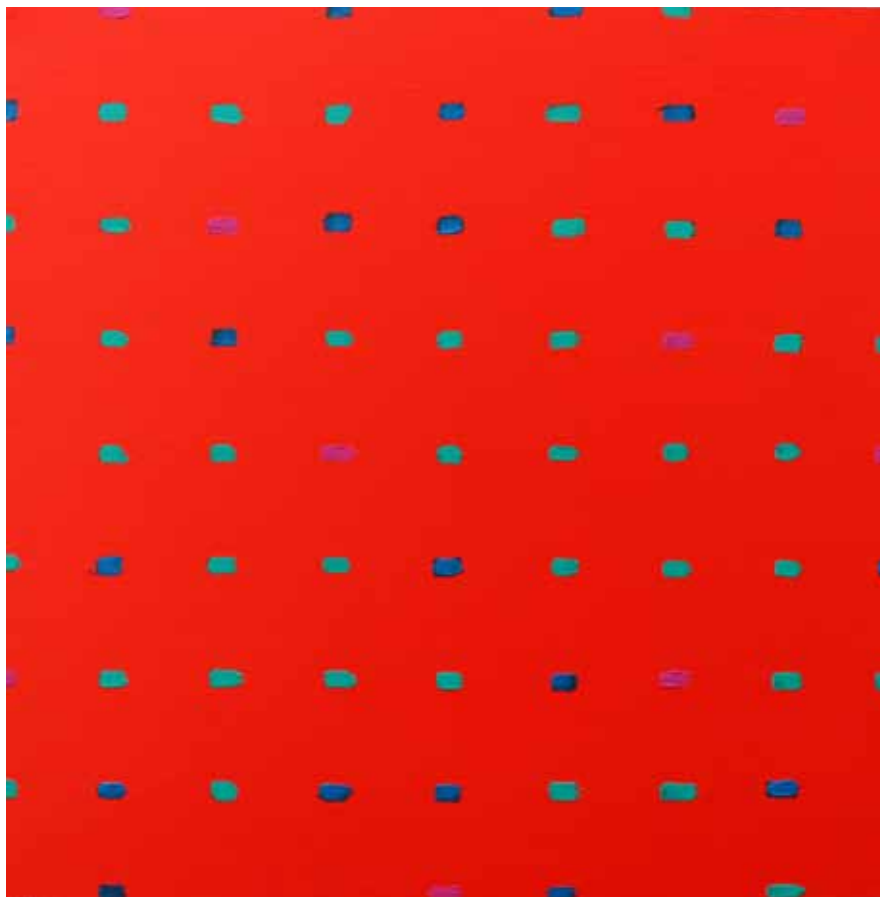
So when colour was not at the top of my agenda, colour suddenly became the agenda. Is it possible to out think yourself? It would seem to me, that, as of now, it is. Painting is now, as it happens - and I hope you agree with me - that the work in painting for beginners part 2 is on the whole joyous and life affirming. Whoooha!



Whoooooha!
147cm x 112cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2012

Random Elements
157cm x 95.9cm
Acrylic on paper, 2012

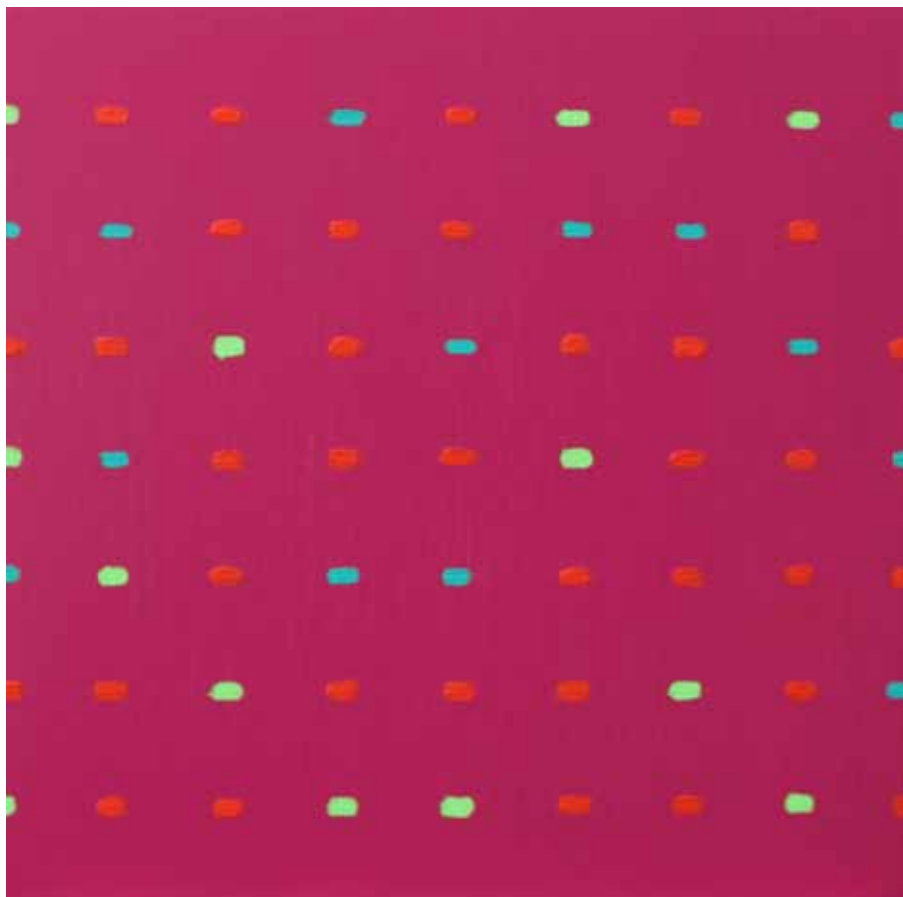




Colourworks 1
41cm x 41cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2013

Colourworks 2
41cm x 41cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2013





Colourworks 3
41cm x 41cm
Acrylic on MDF, 2013

Colourworks 5
41cm x 41cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2013





Colourworks 11
41cm x 41cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2013

Dancing
122cm x 122cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2013

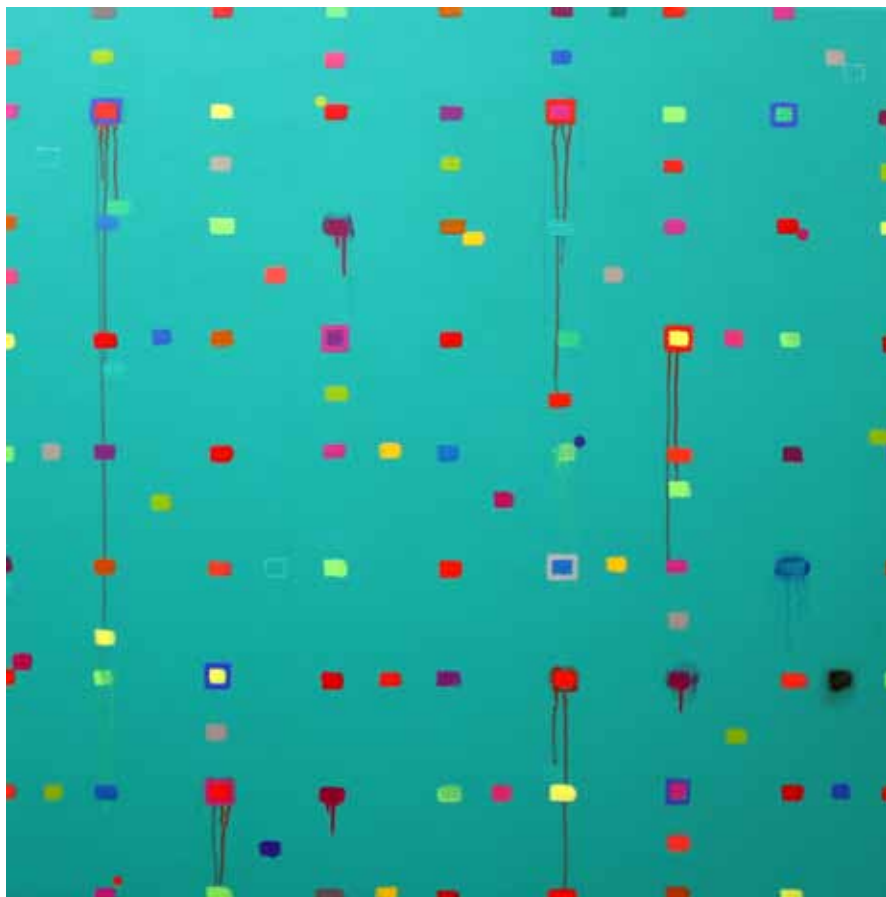




Cascade
150cm x 75.5cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2013

Tintinnabulation
122cm x 122cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2013





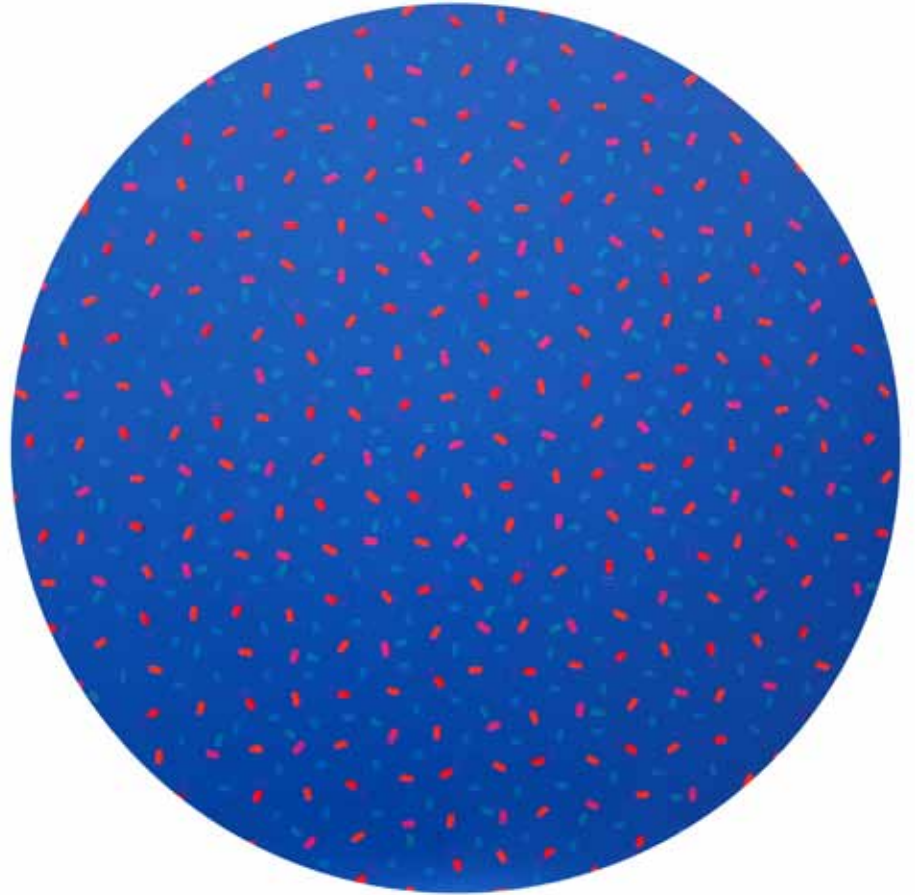
Madison
122cm x 122cm
Acrylic on canvas, 2013-4

Hot & Cold
68.5cm x 66cm
Acrylic on paper, 2012

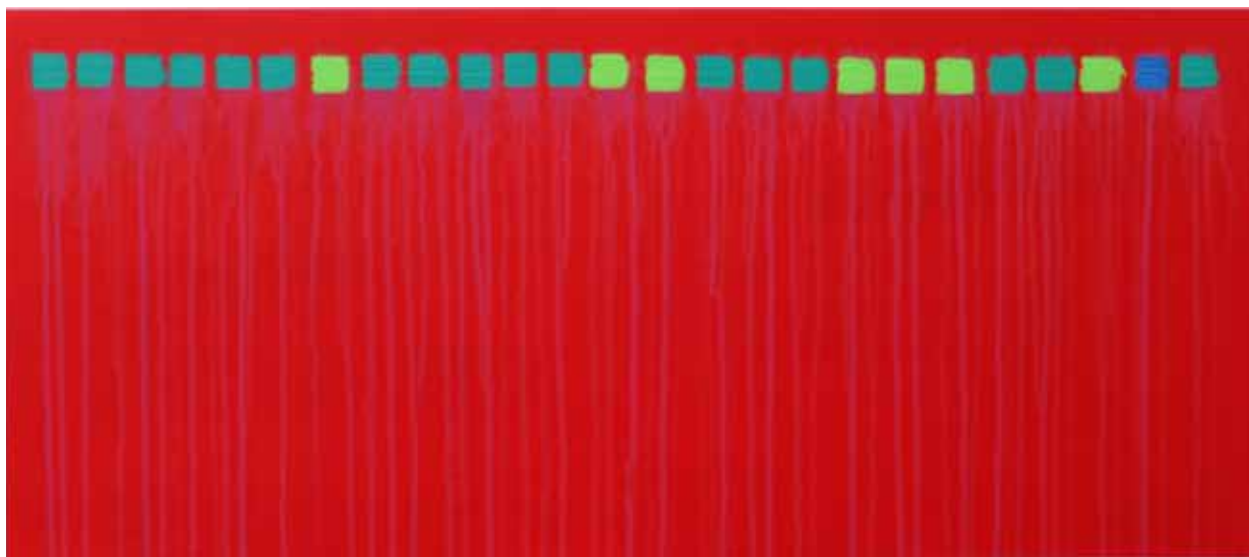




Grey Day
100cm x 87cm
Acrylic on card, 2012



Tilt
100cm diameter
Acrylic on MDF, 2014



1, 2, 3-1
85cm x 37cm
Acrylic on paper, 2013

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