

## Between Lines: Peter Gouge and Zoë Rapley

11 August – 7 October 2012

Sometimes a repetitive act has a way of taking over. When repeated, the smallest gesture can become endowed with new strength and meaning, each iteration building on that which came before. *Between Lines* features Peter Gouge and Zoë Rapley – two artists whose practices explore acts of linear reiteration. The works in this exhibition are to some extent exercises in the art of making; they are about measurement, materials, and time; they are about drawing one line and then another, and about that which emerges in the space between those lines.

Peter Gouge's paintings radiate a particular sense of control. The artist produces working drawings in coloured pencil prior to painting, their lines immaculately laid out in the pages of a notebook. Equally evocative of 1980s Soviet puzzle game Tetris or the intricate parquet floor of some ancient European palace, these small paintings are made up of a network of individually painted gridded squares.<sup>1</sup> Working within the limitations of the grid, Gouge exploits the qualities of this ordering structure; exploring a seemingly endless but ultimately finite number of possibilities in variation of patterning, colour, and density of paint application. There is an obscure kind of language operating here: while each work has its own unique schematic it remains part of a wider framework, each repetition and divergence of pattern and colour building on the previous one.

Various narrative possibilities hover behind Gouge's abstract paintings. The titles of each work consist of a run of individual letters separated by full-stops. The true nature of these titles remains undetermined, leaving one to consider various possible acronyms to accompany each work or a potentially complex system of colour or pattern codification, where each letter in some way corresponds with the composition of the painting itself.

At times Gouge's paintings playfully teeter on the verge of Op art in his use of patterning and positive and negative space.<sup>2</sup> Yet both the colour and surfaces of these paintings work against the potential illusory qualities of their composition; the delicately coloured squares disrupted by the rough texture upon which they are painted. Gouge has his canvasses especially made – a thick hessian of natural fibre wrapped around a wooden frame – and loose fibrous strands regularly intervene in the paint, rogues that must be dealt with carefully and patiently. And so it seems the artist is intentionally complicating things for himself by choosing to paint upon this particular material; purposefully relinquishing some element of control. These paintings assert their objectness – this is paint on canvas – and despite the seeming rigidity of composition the works emphasise a certain humanity, with small flaws revealing traces of the artist's hand. For Gouge it seems the process of painting is as much part of the work as the final result; paint is applied directly from the tube, layer by layer, the artist building up the surface slowly, over time.

For this exhibition Zoë Rapley has produced a wayward work on paper. Hanging off the wall and spilling onto the floor of the gallery, *Tract II* (2012) asserts itself as something between drawing, performance, and sculpture. Rapley began her work with three known elements: a gallery space, a roll of brown paper, and 99 sticks of white chalk. Those were the points of departure from which the artist began. The rest was to emerge later, in the making of the work.

*Tract II* responds to the specific architecture of the space: the length of the roll of brown paper equals the sum of the dimensions of the gallery (24213mm). White chalk covers the paper's surface, echoing the artist's own movement across the space, marking her progress as she goes. It

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<sup>1</sup> The grid has long been established as an ordering structure through which artists have explored the pictorial frame, and it occupies its own place in New Zealand's art history. In 1983 the Auckland City Art Gallery presented *The Grid: Lattice & Network*, which included artists such as Mervyn Williams, Ian Scott and Geoff Thornley, and a more recent example can be seen in the intricate drawings of Wellington artist Martin Thompson.

<sup>2</sup> Op art or Optical Art makes use of optical illusions and became popularised in the 1960s with the work of artists such as Bridget Riley.

is as if the artist has created a kind of abstract rubbing of the physical space; the work a landscape in the strictest sense.

This is the second rendition of this project. *Tract I* was made earlier in 2012 but never shown in the context of a gallery, and due to the fragile nature of the materials its life was short-lived. Interestingly, the title of this new work asserts that this is most definitively the second in a series, despite the fact that *Tract I* has left no real trace of itself; existing predominantly in the artist's own memory. *Tract II* then contains the ghost of this earlier version, and like the earlier work will be destroyed when it leaves this space. But despite its ultimately ephemeral nature the work is remarkably bold; demanding and defining the gallery space.

Rapley cites the influence of American artist Eva Hesse (1936-1970). Hesse's drawings and sculptural works displayed a proclivity toward the power and absurdity found in repetition. 'If something is absurd it's much more greatly exaggerated if it's repeated. Repetition does enlarge or increase or exaggerate an idea or purpose,' said Hesse.<sup>3</sup> Rapley's work actively engages in this transformative potential of repetition. This work is about making; the application of marks upon a surface, and the time, energy, and materials spent. But while on one hand Rapley's work might be viewed as a celebration of the act of making, there is potential to experience a slight sense of discomfort in viewing *Tract II*; the obsessive nature of this work perhaps revealing something about the psychology of creation; a manifestation of some internal artistic struggle that is amplified by the artist and played out here on a stage for all to see. Here there is no chance to erase or rework any flaws or accidents, no opportunity to go back and begin again.

Artist Agnes Martin (1912-2004) once wrote that 'the central feature of adventure is that it is going forward into unknown territory. The joy of adventure is unaccountable. This is the attractiveness of art work. It is adventurous, strenuous and joyful.'<sup>4</sup> The artists in this exhibition serve as a reminder of this artistic exploration; each embarking from a particular place without necessarily knowing where they will end up or what they might encounter along the way.

**Peter Gouge** (1984) is based in Wellington. He has a Bachelor of Design from Unitec, Auckland (2008) and has most recently been included in the exhibitions *Five Years*, Tim Melville Gallery (2012), and *Too Little Too Late*, Snake Pit Gallery (2012).

**Zoë Rapley** (1989) recently relocated to Auckland from Wellington. She has a Post Graduate Diploma in Fine Arts, Massey University Wellington (2010) and her work was most recently included in the *The Weight of Jupiter*, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington (2011).

**Lily Hacking**  
**Hirschfeld Gallery Curator**

Artist talk:  
Saturday 11 August. 1pm

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<sup>3</sup> Eva Hesse in Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, New York: New York University Press, 1976, p.209.

<sup>4</sup> Agnes Martin in Dieter Schwarz (ed.), *Writings*, Winterthur: Ostfildern, Cantz Verlag, 1991, p.19.