

## RPM

In RPM, Phillip Kelly paints in concert with a turntable, composing 'sound paintings', synesthetic works on paper and canvas that mine connections between sound and image, trace the visual dimensions of audio production and probe analog and digital recursions.

Turntables were always already more than they appeared to be—you just had to listen closely enough. For the past half century successive generations of DJs, dancers, divas, designers, producers, party promoters, MCs, and visual artists did just that, tuning into frequencies, possibilities, distortions, and oscillations hidden in plain sight. The DJ's instrument of choice—two turntables paired with a mixer—could do more than play back recordings, they could also produce real-time compositions and shape new cultures of non-stop dancing. This constellation of technologies (alongside sound systems, samplers, synthesizers and other technologies) gave birth to multiple genres and subgenres of music, pop cultural scenes and fashions, and became the unlikely harbinger of digital remix culture. In the underground house and techno scenes Kelly immersed himself in for the better part of three decades, the turntable was telepathic and capable of time travel, taking us back, way back, and repeatedly reanimating the sounds found on vinyl, while anchoring us firmly in the collective nowness and opening us up to the future. The turntable today continues to be an object of reverie and ritual, an altar for solitary devotion and communal ecstasy, an analog technology that persists and is valued in the internet era despite its supposed obsolescence (or maybe because of it.)

In Kelly's work, the turntable is infrastructural, both technology and idea, fading into the background (as infrastructures do), underpinning his explorations of sound and image. Kelly's elegant watercolors in RPM are the latest iterations of a technique developed during 'lockdown', when the dancefloors fell silent and the pandemic put social life on pause. Kelly developed this technique as a daily discipline, a ritual that kept the turntable in motion even though he was cut off from his community. This ritualistic approach merges the meditative with the automatic, at once reminiscent of generative art, automatic poetry and Japanese Sumi-e ink drawing. Though composed in concert with a turntable's direct-drive, these works are as formal as they are generative, images emerging from a deep engagement with materials, media and their possibilities. Once again the turntable grounds the artist in the present, making space for listening and time for seeing.

Visual art and music work in tandem in Kelly's creative practice, a dance that has long nurtured and fed his understanding of the world and inspired his actions. In Kelly's 2020 essay "Muted: Between Sound, Image and Silence" he recounts how as a teenager this approach

came into his life as a package, printed on a 12" record cover and etched onto the vinyl inside. Record covers would introduce him to avant-garde ideas and art history, offering up a multisensory approach to art and design that captured his imagination and informed him about new ways of making and thinking and living. The future would be synesthetic.

Perhaps synesthesia, perceiving one sense through another, continues to captivate our imaginations not only because it is a relatively uncommon form of neurodiversity—who isn't fascinated by the Kandinskys of the world, people who can hear colors, see sound, and taste textures—but also because in the age of ubiquitous networked digital representations, synesthesia is what we expect of our digital devices. "Siri, perceive electricity as sound." "Alexa, find the math that produces a picture of my mother." In digital systems where music, image and text seem to be dematerialized, they are in fact rendered materially equivalent; in tandem with digital infrastructures we reimagine and reanimate these mathematical representations by perceiving one medium through another. The Graphical User Interface, one of the key innovations that made personal computers easier to use, offered a way to navigate this electric landscape of mathematical equations, by putting visual images and metaphors into the service of legibility. This approach to virtualization enables us to begin to see things or patterns that were previously invisible and hear what was once mute. We would find sound through vision. We would use and reuse our histories to animate our futures.

The shift from analog to digital formats and technologies may seem to dematerialize sound recordings and sever ties with visual design—as is so often lamented there would be no record cover to reach the teenager in their 21st century bedroom. But simultaneously digital studios rendered music composition a more deeply visual process and in the *Flanger* paintings, representations of digital sound emerge from the analog ground. In these acrylic on canvas paintings we see bars of color reminiscent of the pixelated representations of audio in Logic, a digital production software Kelly uses to make music, overlaid on circular fields that emanate from an underpainting made with the turntable. Kelly also composes music on his laptop and releases it on vinyl—a common enough strategy in underground dance music—and paintings like these bear witness to these recursions between analog and digital and draw attention to the long history and power of format shifting and hybridity as a practice of discovery and liberation.

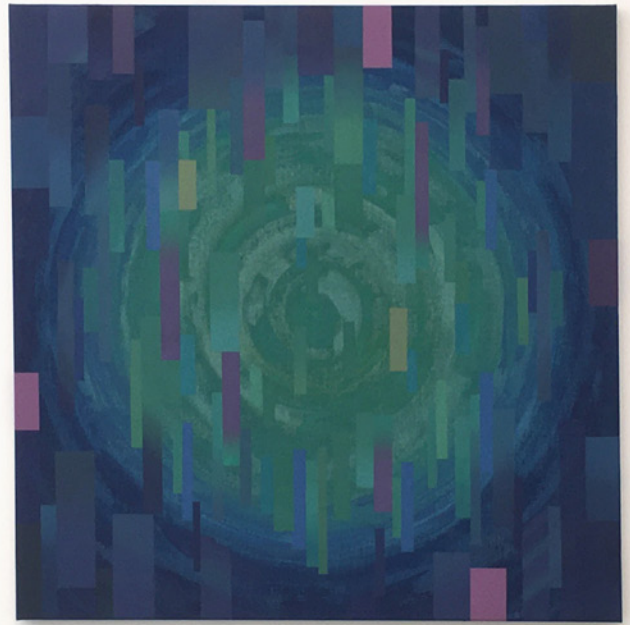
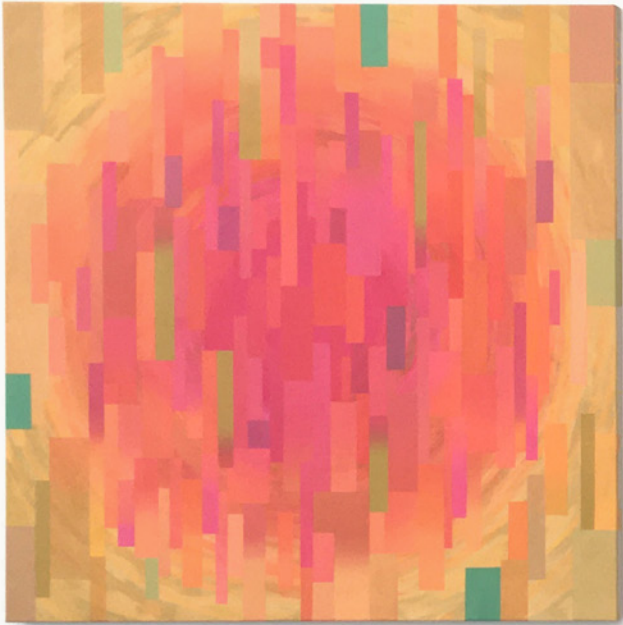
Margie Borschke, Author of *This is not a Remix* (Bloomsbury 2017) and Senior Lecturer, Macquarie University, Sydney Australia  
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*RPM I-VIII 2021*  
watercolour, 420×597mm



*Lathe Cuts 2021*  
watercolour, 420×597mm



*Flanger I & II* 2022  
acrylic on linen, 1000×1000mm



*Lathe Cut Blue 2021*  
watercolour, 420×597mm



*Lathe Cut Yellow 2021*  
watercolour, 420×597mm



*Lathe Cut Red 2021*  
watercolour, 420×597mm