

In Light of the Monochrome

Exhibition Catalogue

Curated by Heather Boxall

Exhibiting artists:

David Batchelor · Clare Booker

Heather Boxall · Pip Dickens · Manya Doñaque

Jane Harris · John Hilliard · Estelle Thompson

In Light of the Monochrome: introduction

Malevich's 'Black Square' painting is often associated with the beginnings of abstract art and notably the monochrome. He completed four versions, the first around 1913. Now over one hundred years later artists are still working within the minimalist framework of the monochrome. Born out of modernism and regarded as the most reductive form of expression, the monochrome continues to engage many artists (including myself). Artists continue to work through ideas exploring a single colour, qualities of material and a reductive methodology.

The monochrome is often described as the most reductive form of painting. It is one of the most challenging styles to contemplate. According to Angeline Morrison in her essay '*Autobiography of an (EX) Coloured Surface: Monochrome and Liminality*' the monochrome space, as abstract art, could be regarded as the most abstract, for it is the least legible and most non-representational space of them all'. (Mercer, 2006: 135)

Colour distinguishes the monochrome from other forms of art. Monochrome means one colour and this reference to pure colour is referred to in many artists' work. Often regarded as being in and of itself, the monochrome can essentially have colour as its subject. Joseph Marioni has said that his monochromes are 'portraits of colour'¹ and Yves Klein believed that pure colour represented 'something' in itself. He wrote '*I believe that in the future, people will start painting pictures in one single colour, and nothing else but colour...*'².

Interpretations of the monochrome often fall into a set of standard categories. A universally accepted norm is that the monochrome is deemed mystical, spiritual, transcendental. Virtually the binary opposite view of the this, is that the monochrome is defined by its material quality. It is what it is. It is material, shape, 'objecthood'. However, according to Morrison, these 'stock' interpretations, limit the way the monochrome can be read. Morrison concludes that a handful of meanings attached to the monochrome, '*the end of painting advocated by Rodchenko's 'Red, Yellow and Blue'; 'Minimalism' (Ad Reinhardt); 'Objecthood' (Donald Judd); 'the Sublime' (Barnett Newman); 'Colour' (Marcia Hafif); 'Pure Painting' (Clement Greenberg) and the 'Elimination of Composition/Rejection of Academic Painting', are assumed out of a need to find order out of chaos. This chaos is caused by the 'solid ground' of painting being dismantled by the abandonment of figure/ground relationships. This sense of chaos is increased by the lack of any pictographic icon. Monochromes instead appear to represent *nothing*. The fear of nothing or meaninglessness thus forces the monochrome into this handful of 'categories within which it is usually discussed'. Morrison regards all these 'guises' as 'disguises' (Mercer, 2006: 136).*

¹ Marioni portrait of colour reference can be found at www.wadewilsonart.com 2007/2008

² Kline entered this statement in his journal dated 27th Dec 1954, cited in Weitemeier, 2001: 9

Morrison then is arguing that with the absence of anything tangible to see in the monochrome, we invent a whole host of meanings and interpretations. However, I would not agree that they are 'disguises'. I think these meanings are individual and the monochrome carries many stories. These stories can be cultural and the meanings located within different traditions and open to many interpretations.

The monochrome, however, is not without its critics. Thomas McEvelley, in an essay *'The Monochrome Icon'* concluded twenty years ago in 1995 that the monochrome *'as an element of sheer design it may live another couple of decades....but as a major conquest....it lies in the past, exhausted and wrung dry of meaning. It is the banner on the grave of the mad ambition of Modernist abstraction.'* (McEvelley, 1995: 56)

In her essay *'There's Nothing to See Here: Erasing the Monochrome'*, author Amelia Groom, questions whether the monochrome has been one big mistake. She concludes, *'Could the entire history of the avant-garde's authored monochromes – starting with a forgotten joke and ending with some cracks that are starting to show - be one big mistake that we might be able to cover over with something else?'*³

That many contemporary artists are continuing to push and explore the possibilities of the monochrome is testament to its continuing validity in the twenty-first century. The artists in this exhibition, although not working exclusively within the monochrome genre, have each turned to the monochrome in their own unique way. David Bachelor's 'Found Monochromes' are photographic works of billboards, old advertisements, flyers and notice boards. Bleached by the sun or left to fade, the white monochromes are moments in contemporary urban city life. John Hilliard's photographic monochromes subvert the inherent *raison d'être* of the photographic image with an awareness of the presence of the medium itself becoming a form of intertextuality (Hilliard, 2014: 6-7).

Estelle Thompson, Jane Harris and Pip Dickens continue to explore the possibilities of colour, surface and light in their paintings. Jane Harris with her *'particular sensitivity to colour and surface, combined with such methodical paint handling, ... has sought to reinvigorate the issue of the sublime in art, by creating a curiously twenty-first century version of it.'* (See full text in catalogue). Pip Dicken's paintings are built up using layers of colours which create a transparency and opaqueness *'each layer of paint obscures the previous one*

³ Groom, 2012 www.e-flux.com. The forgotten joke is a reference to Alphonse Allais' text pieces based on a critique of the reductive work of the Impressionists. These text works were first published in 1880s. The cracks starting to show references Malevich's Black Square paintings that are starting to deteriorate.

but the building of transparent layer upon layer creates an internal luminosity to the canvas? (Jessica Morgan, Screen, 2013). Estelle Thompson too builds her surfaces with layers of colour. They are worked, reworked, scratched away and built up again. With references to architectural spaces, *'Thompson is drawn to the physicality and ordering of built space and to constructed modernist architectures.....if we desire to read Thompson's works as images then we find them to be resistant. Instead we may see them as situations formed and reforming until held or balanced in compositional or chromatic tension.* (Charles Danby, White Lies, 2014).

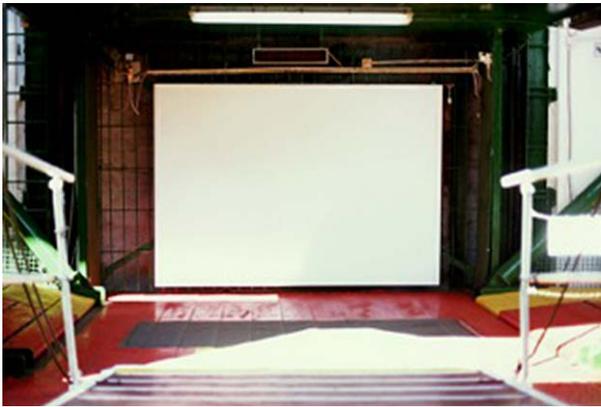
Clare Booker also explores human spaces and structures. Investigating airport spaces, Clare's work looks at how we navigate through environments. For this exhibition, using digital and painted processes, Clare has created monochromatic interpretations of these physical environments. Manya Donaque's work questions what we are seeing. In 'Waiting' her film raises questions about what is happening, or about to happen? What is the seated figure waiting for? There is a reference here to Beckett's play, *'Waiting for Godot,'* where the viewer is being asked to question what is happening, what are they looking at, waiting for?

Heather Boxall 2015

References

- Dickens, P., Morgan, J. (2013) Screen, catalogue forward, Rugby Art Gallery and Museum
Danby, C. (2014) White Lies, Oriol Sycharth Gallery, Gladwr University
Groom, A. (2012) *'There's Nothing to See Here: Erasing the Monochrome'* <<http://www.e-flux.com>>
Hilliard, J. (2014) *Not Black and White*, Ridinghouse
McEvelley, T. (1995) *The Exile's Return*, Cambridge University Press
Mercer, K. (2006) *Discrepant Abstraction*, Institute of International Visual Arts and The MIT Press

David Batchelor



Star Ferry
Hong Kong, 10.11.08
Lambda print, 100cm x 65cm

David Batchelor is an artist and writer based in London. He was born in Dundee, Scotland in 1955. He studied Fine Art at Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham (1975-78), and Cultural Theory at Birmingham University (1978-80). Batchelor's work comprises three-dimensional structures, photographs and drawings, and mostly relate to a long term interest in colour and urbanism.

He has exhibited widely in the UK, continental Europe, the Americas and, more recently, Asia. Recent exhibitions include *Flatlands*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh and Spike Island, Bristol (2013-14); *Chromophilia: 1995-2010*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro (2010); *Slugfest*, Galeria Leme, São Paulo, (2010); *Color Chart*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2008) and Tate Liverpool (2009); *Extreme Abstraction*, Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2005); the Biennial de Santiago, Chile (2005); *Shiny Dirty*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2004); the 26th Bienal De São Paulo (2004); *Sodium and Asphalt*, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2003); and *Days Like These: Tate Britain Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Tate Britain, London (2003).

Chromophobia, Batchelor's book on colour and the fear of colour in the West, was published by Reaktion Books, London (2000), and is now available in eight languages. His new book, *The Luminous and the Grey* (2014) is also published by Reaktion. *Colour* (2008), an anthology of writings on colour from 1850 to the present, edited by Batchelor, is published by Whitechapel, London and MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. His book of photographs, *Found Monochromes: vol. 1, nos. 1-250* (2010), is published by Ridinghouse, London; and his suite of drawings, *The October Colouring-In Book* (2015) is published by Common-Editions, London.

Found Monochromes is a collection of photographs taken by David Batchelor over a 20 year period, of single square and rectangular white planes and panels encountered on walks through cities from London to São Paulo. The found monochrome can be the back of a sign, a blank screen, an empty billboard, or a faded message. Tracking how abstraction is embedded in the urban fabric, Batchelor's images have also become a psycho-geographical map of each city he visits. To date there are over 500 works in the series, all of which are shot on 35mm slide film. The *Found Monochromes* have been exhibited as framed prints, as a slide projection and as a multi-screen digital projection. *The Monochrome Archive 1997-2015*, a four screen installation of 500 images from the series, is on display at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, until May 2015.

David Batchelor is represented by Galeria Leme, São Paulo and Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh.

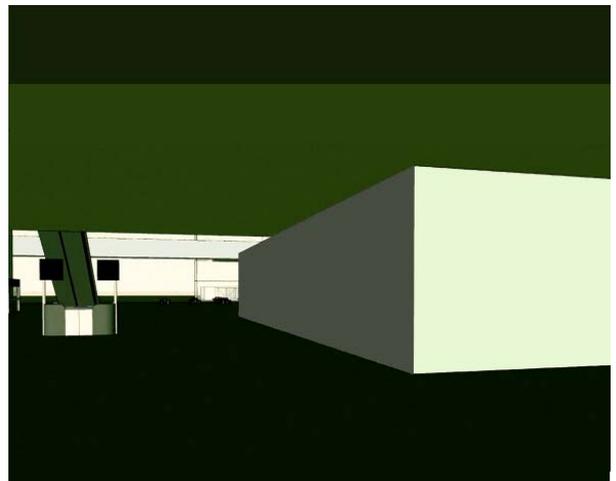
Clare Booker

Clare Booker is an artist and Fine Art Lecturer at Bradford School of Arts and Media. Her work explores the relationship between people and places using a combination of digital and painting processes and surfaces as a way of making comparisons and connections between our experience of navigating through digital and physical spaces.

She is currently undertaking a practice based PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London, in the department of Social and Cultural Geography. The project combines art and geographical methods as a way of re-imagining Airport Space and Systems, through digital and physical perspectives.

Clare has a BA in Fine Art from Manchester and a Masters in Creative Technology from the University of Salford. She has taken part in many exhibitions. More details and images of her work can be found at:

www.artandairport.wordpress.com



Passenger to Gate
2015
Acrylic on wood, 120cm x 95cm



Open Sky
2012
Acrylic on canvas, 180cm x 98cm

Heather Boxall



A Secret Never to be Told
2013,
Oil on canvas, 46cm x 46cm



Into the Yellow
2015
Oil on gesso and board, 20cm x 15cm

Heather Boxall (b. 1960) is a painter and printmaker and employed as a senior lecturer at Bradford School of Arts & Media. She studied Fine Art at Winchester School of Art and an MA in Printmaking at Bradford School of Arts & Media.

Heather is currently studying for a PhD at Northumbria University. Her research is concerned with colour and in particular the monochrome. Colour can provide a sense of place, a liminal experience, a memory. Recent works have included a response to the natural world where observations of wildlife have prompted works that aim to draw attention to colours not seen at first glance. The iridescent colours of a crow or magpie for example.

Other works use colour in response to texts or poems. The works for this exhibition are responses to Joseph Conrad's book, *The Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1899. Conrad uses descriptive colour throughout the text and Boxall's works seeks to visualize this. Conrad's writing draws attention to aspects of the African continent, its people, landscape, and pervading feelings at that time as part of Europe's colonial past.

Recent group exhibitions include 'MA21', Dean Clough Galleries, Halifax, (2014); 'Ludlow Open' Ludlow, (2013); 'Paint Club' Beaconsfield, London, (2013); 'Colour as Material' Galleria Fafa, Helsinki, Finland, (2013); 'War' Yorkshire Craft Centre Gallery, Bradford, (2013) 'Sense of Place' 123 Gallery, Halifax, (2012); 'Centenary Art Exhibition' Yorkshire Craft Centre Gallery, Bradford (2011); 'Workers Playtime' Yorkshire Craft Centre Gallery, Bradford (2010); 'An Exhibition of Paintings' Joint show with Mike Walker, Alexandra Gallery, Lancaster (2008); 'Broken Pieces' Farfieldmill, Sedburgh, (2008); 'Outside the Glass' Words by the Water Literature Festival. Keswick (2008).

Pip Dickens

Pip Dickens (b. 1962) is a painter concerned with visual perception, in particular, examining and challenging theories and methodologies of colour reception, light and movement within the second dimension.

She has a Masters in Fine Art from The Slade School of Art (UCL, London) graduating in 2000. She is currently Lecturer in Fine Art (Painting) at Lancaster University and has been a visiting lecturer and part-time lecturer on numerous Fine Art degree courses. She also promoted visual and performance art whilst Marketing Officer at Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery & Theatre prior to embarking on her Masters.

In 2010-2011 Dickens was the recipient of the prestigious Leverhulme Trust Award Artist in Residence collaborating with Professor Monty Adkins at the University of Huddersfield, Department of Music on synergy between music and painting through research of Japanese aesthetics. This project included research in Kyoto and culminated in a co-authored book '*Shibusa - Extracting Beauty*' with Adkins.

In 2013 a substantial solo exhibition '*PIP DICKENS - SCREEN*' showcased paintings influenced by Japanese aesthetics and photochemical cinematic references at Rugby Art Gallery & Museum and was supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.



The Offing
2011
Oil on canvas, 41cm x 46cm



Artificial Intelligence
2013
Oil on canvas, 115cm x 120cm

Manya Donaque

Manya Doñaque was born in 1975 in (Caracas) Venezuela. She is a multimedia artist and full-time lecturer at Bradford School of Arts & Media. Manya is currently studying for a PhD, Doctor Europeus, at the University of the Basque Country UPV-EHU (Bilbao) Spain. In 2013 she had an Internship at Leeds City Art Gallery's Archive and Collection and Henry Moore Institute's Archive, Leeds, UK, gathering research for her PhD studies.

Manya Donaque's research to date has examined the relationship between ephemeral art, live art and archives. Making analogies with life, death, and the cycle of nature by looking closely at the archival of the creative processes (ideas, diagrams, recordings etc...), and the deterioration, decay process and loss of artefacts, works of art, thinking and making processes. This has made her question how New Digital Media imaging technologies can be usefully employed in the representation of and resolution of the complexities inherent in ephemeral art and the aesthetics of time.

Manya's recent and forthcoming projects include 'Memoria' exhibition in response to Armley Mills Industrial Museum Textile Archive, August 2015 Leeds, UK. 'The Imaginary Museum: Art Library as Archive' part of Leeds College of Art Library Interventions programme. 'The 18th International Contemporary Artist's Books Fair', exhibition of Artist's Books and Multiples, The Tetley Contemporary Art Space, Leeds, UK. 'Mixer' an event of experimental electronic music and poetry performances combined with live visuals and video art, The Arden Road Club, Halifax, UK. 'Bradford Pick & Mix' exhibition in response to Bradford College Textile Archive, funded by the Arts Council Grant for the Arts.



In Habit Us
2014
Performance at Delius Art Centre, Bradford



Waiting
2013
(Still) 18 mins 14 sec

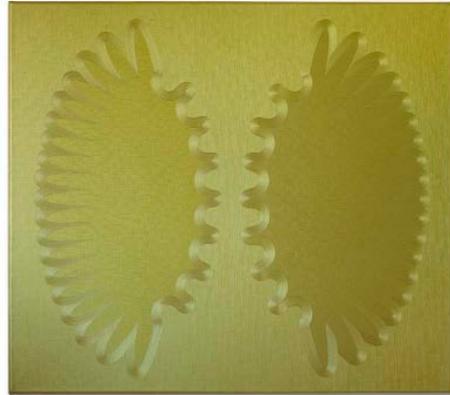
Jane Harris

Jane Harris' paintings simultaneously reveal and conceal themselves. Based on the deceptively simple geometry of the elliptical form, they defy easy categorisation. They operate in an arena somewhere between the abstract and representation.

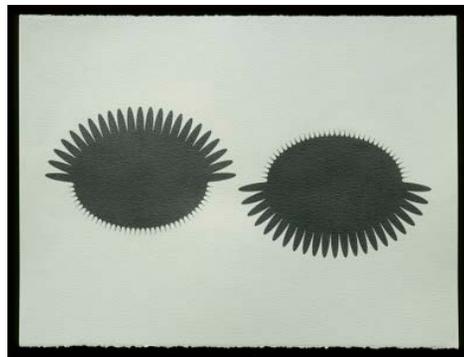
As with elliptical forms of communication they are both concise and obtuse. At once highly controlled and wildly disorientating, Harris revels in entertaining opposites by hovering between them. By the employment in the same painting of so many opposites such as abstract / figurative, flat / spatial, light / dark, internal / external, cerebral / decorative, contrived / playful, preconceived / intuitive, she paradoxically avoids a polar situation. Furthermore these dichotomies do not engender any uncertainty of purpose, but instead manifest themselves in paintings that are simultaneously rigorously intellectual, physically commanding and potently spiritual.

Utilising iridescent, metallic pigments that are mixed with traditional oil paints, Jane Harris has heightened her control of surface reflectivity, creating paintings in which perception of colour, tone and space change dramatically, depending on the viewer's position and the type of light which falls on them. With this particular sensitivity to colour and surface, combined with such methodical paint handling, Harris has sought to reinvigorate the issue of the sublime in art, by creating a curiously twenty-first century version of it. Conceptually these strategies keep the work in an ever-shifting state of flux, tantalising, open and elusive. Due to their unique optical and physical effects, Harris's paintings can only be appreciated by direct observation. They demand the actual presence of the viewer. Nothing can replicate the first hand experience of the way in which light shifts across their luscious surfaces. They are a powerful argument for not only the continuing importance of painting, but by extension, the importance of the museum or gallery experience.

Drawing is also an important feature of Harris' work in the process of making her paintings. The drawn shape is always the starting point. The chosen small diagrammatic drawing is scaled up to a real-size cartoon made for each painting, which is then transferred, by tracing and architectural templates, on to the canvas. Her approach is calculated, exact and rigorous, but by the detailed adjustments made to the proportions, the edging and the relative positioning of the shapes, an unexpected individuality, distinctive character and sensual playfulness to each painting occurs.



Flirt
2009
Oil on canvas, 107cm x 123cm



22.38
2000
Pencil on paper, 57cm x 76cm

John Hilliard

John Hilliard was born in Lancaster in 1945. He studied in the sculpture department at St Martin's School of Art, London, 1964-7. Awarded a three-month travel scholarship to the USA in 1965, and, influenced by the landscapes of the Mid-West and the architecture of New York and Chicago, he began making site-specific installations in 1966.

These were documented photographically, with the photographs gradually displacing the installations as a means of presentation and forming the basis of a first solo exhibition at Camden Arts Centre, London in 1969. Since the late 1960s this work has evolved by continually raising questions about the nature of photography as a representational medium, subjecting it to a critical interrogation while also celebrating its material specificity. The results of this practice have been the subject of numerous solo shows in galleries and museums in the UK, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, Spain, the USA, Canada and Japan, and included in group exhibitions such as the São Paulo Bienal, the Paris Biennale and Documenta. John was appointed as Northern Arts Fellow In Visual Art (1976-8) and received the David Octavius Hill Memorial Award from the Gesellschaft Deutscher Lichtbildner in 1986. From 1968 to 2010 he taught in various art departments, including the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam and the Slade School of Fine Art, and is Emeritus Professor in Fine Art at University College London.



Fit No.1, (large Study, 1 / 3)
2010
Pigment print on Hahnemule
paper, 62cm x 80cm



Division of Labour No.1
(large study, 1 / 2)
2004
C-type photograph on museum
board, 73cm x 77.5cm

Estelle Thompson

Estelle Thompson (b. 1960) Studied at the Royal College of Art, London 1983–1986. Thompson has exhibited nationally and internationally. Recent exhibitions include solo exhibitions at Oriol Sycharth Gallery, Wrexham (2014) and Purdy Hicks, London, (1989 - 2009).

Selected group exhibitions include; *Drawn Together: Artist as Selector*, Jerwood Gallery, Hastings (2014), *Head to Head*, Standpoint Gallery, London (2014); Usher Gallery, Lincoln (2015); Transition Gallery, London (2014), H-Gallery, Bangkok (2014), *Colour as Material*, Kuvataideakatemia, Helsinki (2013), *Do You Believe in Angels?* Mo Space, Manila (2014), Equator Art Projects, Singapore (2014), *Small is Beautiful XXXI Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?*, Flowers Gallery, London (2013), *The Theory and Practice of the Small Painting*, Equator Art Projects (2013), *Back and Forth*, B55, Budapest (2012), *Maquettes*, Furnished space, London (2011), *Calligrams*, Eagle Gallery, London (2010), Collections include; Arts Council of Great Britain, British Council, British Museum, New York Public Library, Contemporary Arts Society, Towner Art Gallery, Ferens Art Gallery, Abbott Hall Art Gallery, Oldham Art Gallery, The New Art Gallery Walsall and Deutsche Bank.

From 1986 to present Thompson has been a Lecturer at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, St Martins School of Art, Winchester School of Art and is currently Professor and Head of the Division of Media, Arts & Design at Glyndwr University.

A recent exhibition *White Lies* at the Oriol Sycharth Gallery, Wrexham curated by Charles Danby was a partial survey of works produced over the last 17 years. It brought together works on linen, aluminium, panel and paper drawing together central strands of her practice and recurrent obsessions within it – chromatic monochromes, spatial block paintings, vertical stripe fuse paintings, geometrically divided and subdivided paintings and cut paper collages.

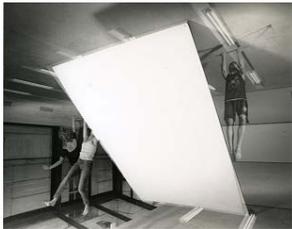
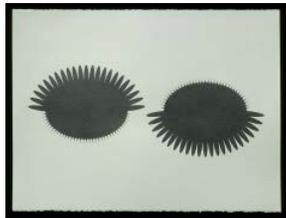
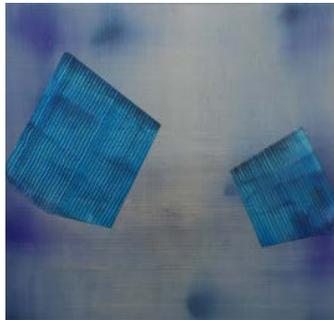
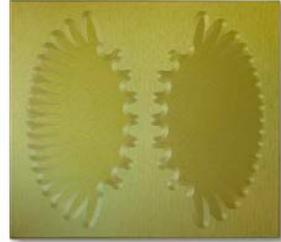
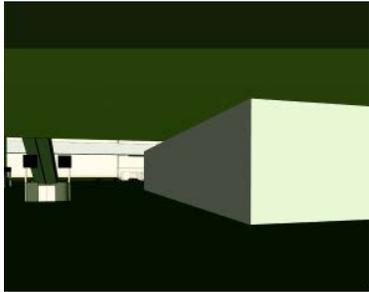
'Thompson works meticulously and towards ends that are rarely finite. Pieces are worked onto or worked away, and paint as material, colour, veil, and image assumes through this new edges, new forms new mediations, new divisions and new imaginings. They are visual architectures, at once functions of space and mechanical order, and at once of a lightness and touch that is weightless, transient, and alive. Thompson's paintings fail to stand still or to stand quietly. They are instead lasting and durational statements towards an end, not of painting in and of itself, but more profoundly of its intersections with the world.' Charles Danby November 2014.



What You Don't See
2003,
Oil on panel, 42cm x 30cm



Cover
2004-5
Oil on board, 43cm x 30cm



With thanks to

Northumbria University

Bradford School of Arts & Media

Bradford College

and all the staff who contributed to this project.

And all the artists:

David Batchelor

Clare Booker

Heather Boxall

Pip Dickens

Manya Doñaque

Jane Harris

John Hilliard

Estelle Thompson

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events/inlightofmonochrome](http://www.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/about/arts-culture/news-events/inlightofmonochrome)

'Cover' 2004/5 (detail) by Estelle Thompson

