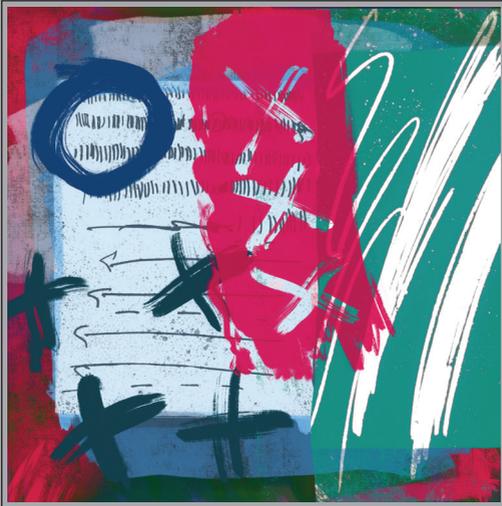


James Atkins
un voyage numérique



Notes
on the
images

Exposition

du 9 juin au 27 juillet 2017

Jeudi à dimanche de 16h à 20h

Galerie l'Impénitente

40 rue des Pénitents-Blancs

09500 Mirepoix

Written by the artist to accompany the exhibition.

Text is rarely unaccompanied by pictures. Adverts usually have copy, newspapers have photographs. Conversely pictures rarely exist without a meta-text, titling, explanation, commentary or catalogue.

Art writing tends to be painfully obscure, designed to massage the ego of the aesthete or the educated and can alienate the majority of readers.

If a viewer brings their own interpretation, or simply enjoys an image for the purely visual, then, for me, that's fine. Sometimes misinterpretation can be interesting and better than nothing. When I look at art I tend to ignore the texts, maybe taking in the title/date (never the price!), I might read about a particular piece later, but in general that's somebody else's writing, and rarely records the artist's intention and can even be distracting.

In the design business, clear and direct communication is paramount. We talk a lot about the 'messaging' and 'distilling down' in order to get to uniqueness. Generally there's no room for misinterpretation. Texts are shortened for a dumbed-down, low-attention span, digital world. A world in which pictures are demoted, used as glitter or decoration and simplified to basic symbols or fashionable cultural references.

I've always straddled both the design and art worlds. In the past I've written and edited down highly-finished advertising copy. I've 'raw coded' HTML/CSS where one missed semi-colon or mistyped quote mark - and a webpage dies. So I'm pretty comfortable with writing in various forms, and it seems natural for me to put down some thoughts and ideas to go with the images in this show.

Just so it's clear.

James Atkins
June 2017

A digital journey

I've always painted and drawn images in various forms. After art school, I continued to do so, but my interest in design and typography began to take over. ("I can paint when I'm 50!" I told myself). At that time, the design world was changing and desktop technologies were transforming whole industries. I was lucky to be part of the first wave of the electronic publishing revolution and a second, more significant wave, with the advent of web-based communications.

As a painter focusing on making artworks again, going back to materials and methods that emerged during the Renaissance proved to be unsatisfying – restricting even. Being covered in paint again was fun, and I occasionally still do that, but it doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense to me, right here, right now, here in the 21st Century.

Even in the last 10 years, the way we use, interact with, share, buy, store and reproduce images has changed vastly. In creating new ones, it seems reasonable to me to acknowledge this.

In returning to 'Fine Art', I found the popular perception, idea and role of art and artists to be incredibly dated, perhaps stuck in the mid to late 20th Century at best. Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg adopted print technology in the early 60s – well before my lifetime.

And yet people still feel that something 'is lost' if it's not painted, etched or sculpted. Even with some contemporary non-digital art that is 'manufactured' by a third-party specialist, there can be a sense of something missing – usually a record of a human touch, a recognisable signature mark or a story of an artistic struggle.

Electronic music can have texture and atmosphere; computer games and virtual experiences can often seem more real and engrossing than life itself. By definition there's an 'object quality' that's missing with digital art, inevitably this 'object gap' and lack of apparent human touch is what leads to the misconception that it's cold and characterless. These gaps and misconceptions, along with new technologies interest me greatly.

Whenever I travel, I take a camera. Sometimes I use the camera on a smartphone. I might draw on the spot, using an electronic tablet or a pencil and paper. I might draw from memory on a tablet or computer, perhaps 'live' from an image on a second screen. I research images or places online and use places from Google 'street view' images as subjects – taking actual digital journeys.

The nature of digital allows you to remix, revisit ideas, edit, store, duplicate and reuse. Sometimes an old, discarded image or idea gets transformed into a successful one through the use of a different technology or a new app. Digital processes can also use up and wear out an idea very quickly. On the other hand it can help realise a new one very quickly – sometimes too quickly. The LCD screen can be incredibly flattering to any image.

Work in progress or ideas might 'live online' for a time, on Instagram and other social media. I may later change a colour or significantly edit an image – the digital equivalent of 'painting out' a whole section

of a canvas. My images go through a 'digital journey' over time. Some are left completely virtual, left as files in my archives to be revisited months, or even years later when a particular theme or idea becomes relevant again. This, for me, is the digital equivalent of 'painterly process'.

In putting these works together over the last few years I simply made a lot of work and repeated what I felt was successful without trying to analyse it too much. I started out with some of the themes and interests from 30 years ago, when I left Camberwell: Zen buddhism, the asian 'Mono-ha' school, the drawings of Pierre Bonnard, pop art, architecture, printing and photo reproduction, reduction, repetition, symbols, writing systems and semiotics.

What has emerged is pictures that fall into three distinct groups with a logical progression – one group or idea, relating and informing the next in various ways. Where possible I've tried to display the work that reflects these progressions rather than a date order.

I included this small oil sketch piece made around 1988 from my personal archive as it relates to almost every other picture in this exhibition. It could be regarded as the starting point, a keystone or 'key' to understanding all the others.

At the time I was particularly interested in handwriting, calligraphy, icon systems, semiotics, repeated marks, minimalism and a lot of my work was scratched into the surface of black or white paint.



LEXICON PAINTING. (FURZE)

(1988)

Oil and photograph on panel

41.5cmx21.5cm

Collection the artist

01. Places. digital drawings

I'd had a bad/busy/boring day. Looking across East London and watching the cranes building the Olympic Park and decided to just enjoy myself and draw.

Using an early ipad and a simplistic drawing app, I was struck at how it resembled my older drawings on paper.

I'd been painting again but this simple little sketch seemed to make a lot of sense.

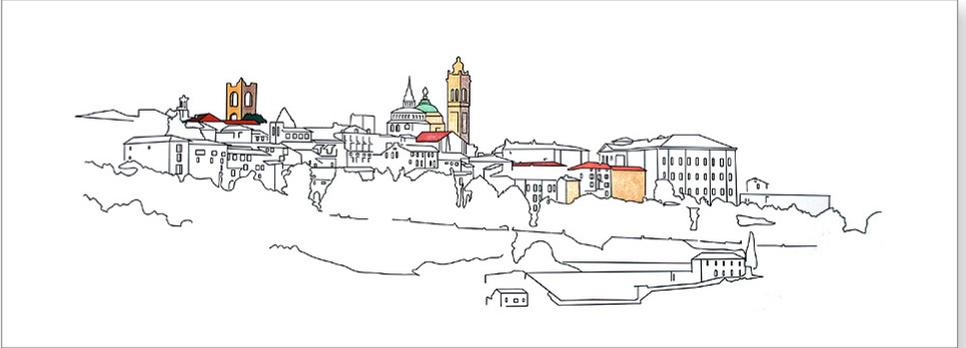


LONDON FIELDS
Giclée on hahnemühle

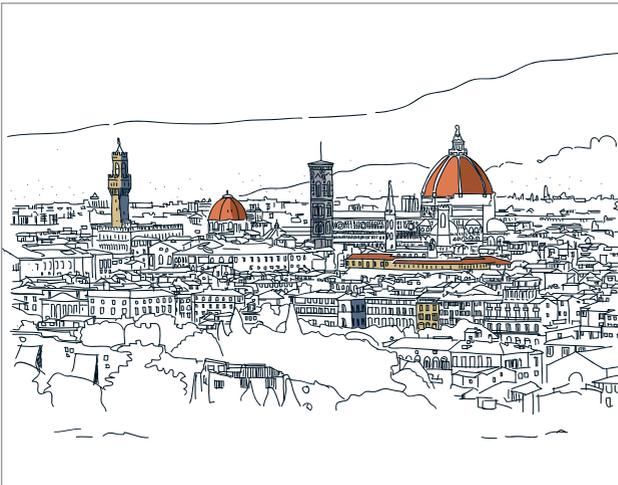
The 'classic view' of a place and what makes a particular image popular or iconic is a preoccupation.

Val Sibley, an art teacher at school, once said that she could pick out one of my drawings from a pile. This was apparently due to a particular line or mark that I made.

Being interested in calligraphy, I deconstructed that line through art school and more recently wondered if it would still be evident in a digital medium – even while drawing with a mouse – which is like drawing with a brick on a string.



BERGAMO, CITT'ALTA
Polymer emulsion / Giclée on canvas



WITHOUT A VIEW, FLORENCE
Giclée on hahnemühle

As tablet technology gets faster and more powerful, pressure-sensitive styluses come onto the market, digital drawing is becoming closer and closer to pen and ink or pencil on paper. With the added advantage that you can keep or delete mistakes.

These are square or 4:3 format reflecting Instagram or the proportion of an ipad screen rather than ISO-A print sizes.



MIREPOIX 09
Giclée on hahnemühle

BERGAMO II (CITT'ALTA)

Giclée on hahnemühle



CORNIGLIA, CINQUE TERRE

Giclée on hahnemühle

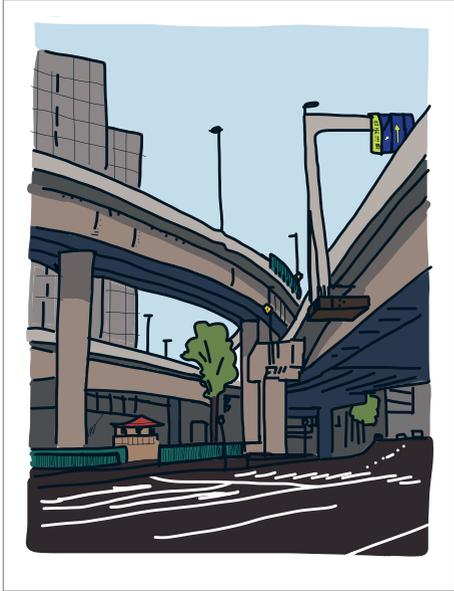
I finally made it to Japan. Tokyo was everything I expected it to be, contrasts, modern meets tradition, inexplicable and visually intriguing.

Akihabara is 'electric town' where you pick up USB peripherals on the street market for a few Yen and there's whole department stores devoted to video games.

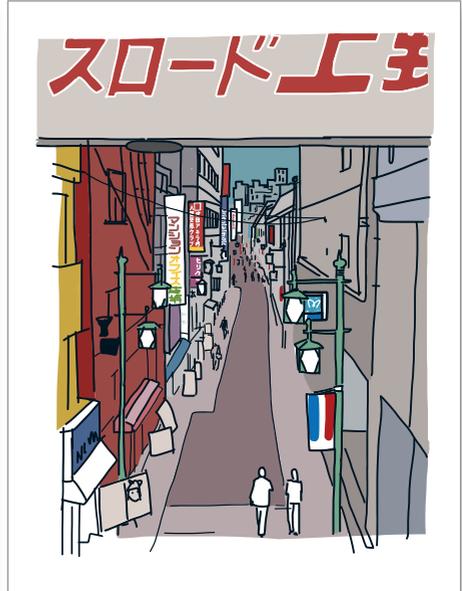
And in the afternoon I visited a Shinto shrine.



AKIHABARA, TOKYO
Giclée on hahnemühle



TOKYO FLYOVERS
Giclée on hahnemühle



STREETVIEW, TOKYO
Giclée on hahnemühle

In the town where I grew up is former psychiatric hospital – St Crispin's. (St Crispin is the patron saint of shoemakers and Northampton is a shoe town). The clock tower is a cleverly disguised water tower and can be seen from many locations on the west side of the town.

I'd been looking at Hokusai's woodblock prints '36 views of Mount Fuji' of which his famous 'Great Wave' is one. (Mt Fuji is in the background). I noted how modern and flat and bright the prints were for something printed in the 1830s.

The derelict clocktower was becoming something of an obsession – I even climbed it at one point and subsequently started making my own '36 views' of it.



NEW BRIDGE
(36 views of
St Crispin's tower)
Giclée on hahnemühle



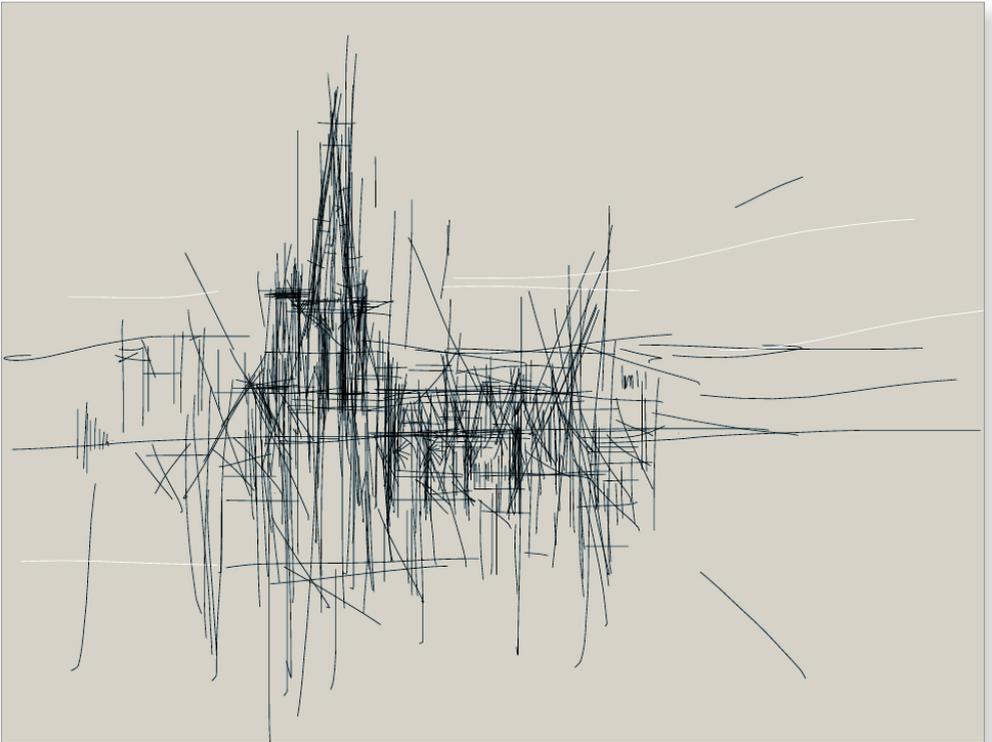
PARK, AFTER COROT
(36 views of
St Crispin's tower)
Giclée on hahnemühle

02. Scratching the surface

Intaglio is a process where cross-hatches are scratched into a printing plate. It's highly laborious process to reproduce the lights and darks in an image.

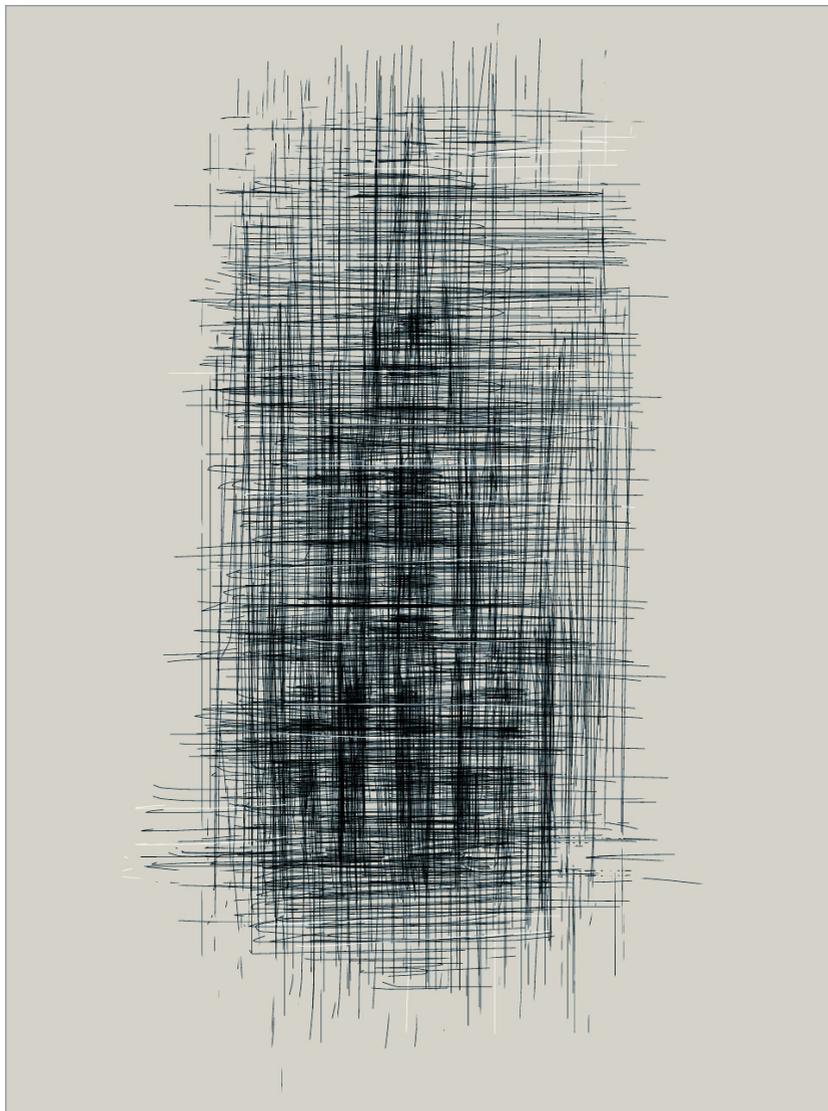
Repetitive beats and rhythms are part of electronic music, so I made an image of the Haçienda nightclub in Manchester using a reduced set of marks. I followed this up with these images of Cathedrals and Churches.

MIREPOIX CATHEDRAL
Giclée on hahnemühle



HAWKSMOOR CHURCH, SPITALFIELDS

Giclée on hahnemühle



When drawing onscreen, you are using a light-emitting technology. There's a glow from the lines you draw – particularly if you are working at night and the image is in reverse. I wanted to reproduce this effect by using a photographic film on an advertising lightbox.

Architectural ruins are sometimes lit up at night transforming them into something completely different. Bringing something to life that is long dead.



CHÂTEAU DE MONTSEGUR
Giclée on hahnemühle



CHÂTEAU DE ROQUEFIXADE
Giclée on hahnemühle

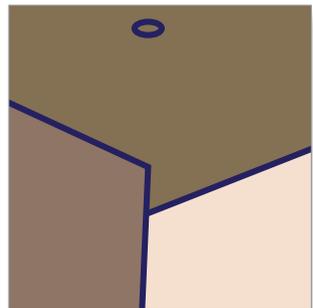
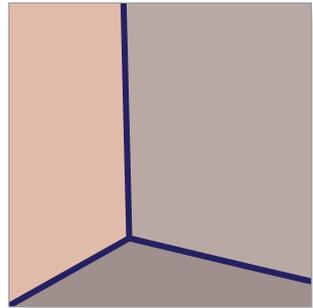
CHÂTEAU DE QUERIBUS
Duratrans lightbox



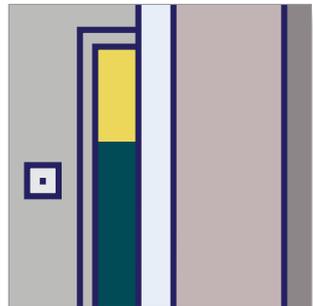
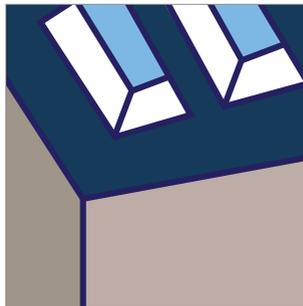
03. Towards digital painting

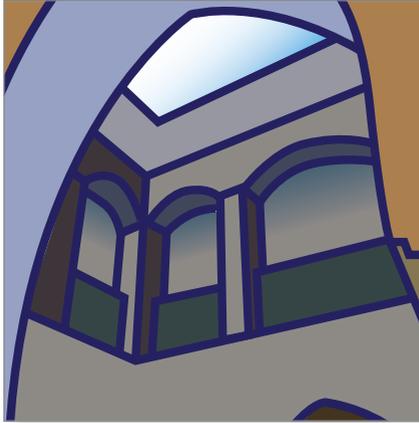
At a very early age I wanted to be an architect. But quickly got more interested in painting and less interested in calculating sheer stresses or space-planning shopping centres. I still notice architecture, good and bad.

This series started off as a variation on geometric abstraction, with minimal details to indicate space – they soon became more and more complex.



Clockwise from top
(Not in exhibition)
CORNERS, NEW BUILD
CORNERS, DATED
HOTEL - AUSTRIA
CORNERS, STUDIO
CORNERS, STUDIO
LIGHTS
Dibond panels

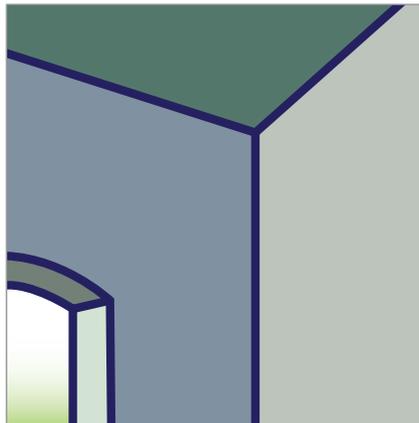




CORNERS, RIYADH KNIZA
MARRAKESH
Dibond panel



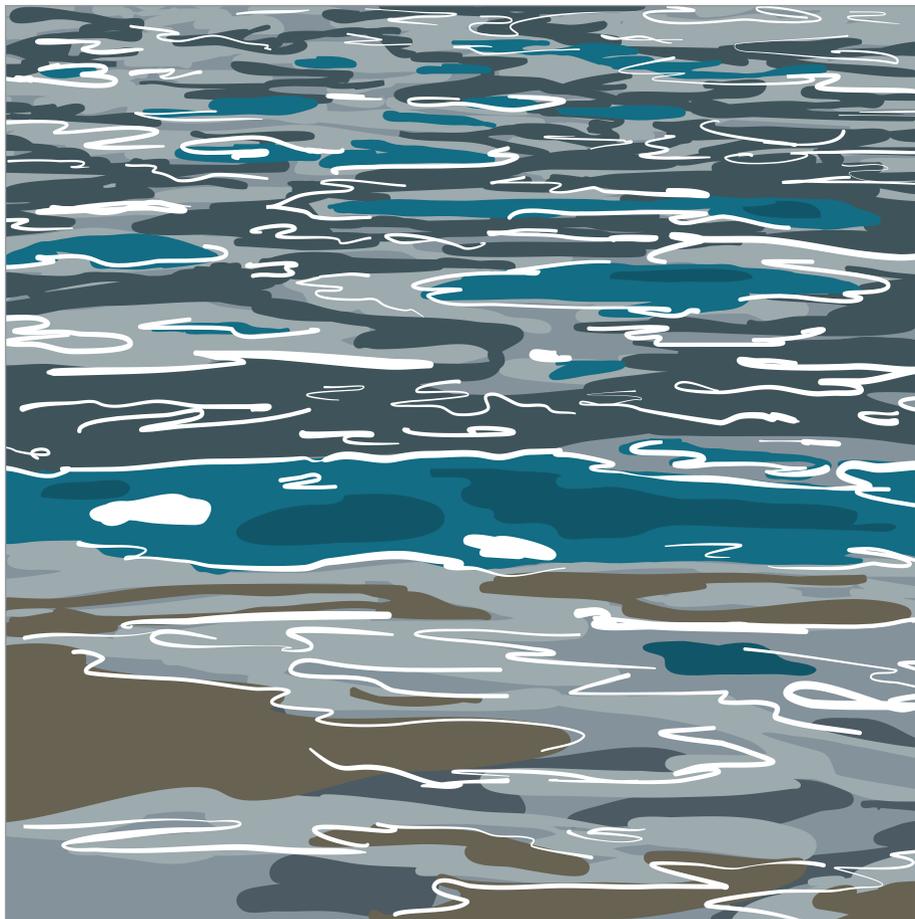
CORNERS,
SOMERSET HOUSE
Dibond panel



CORNERS,
FRENCH HOUSE
Dibond panel

I strive for surface flatness. It must be something to do with my experience in the print world. Even before that experience, I remember trying to get paintings as flat as possible. This process gives me the flatness that I want.

I saw the surface of this lake and couldn't tell how deep it was. There were signs to not swim in Spanish. I dived in anyway.

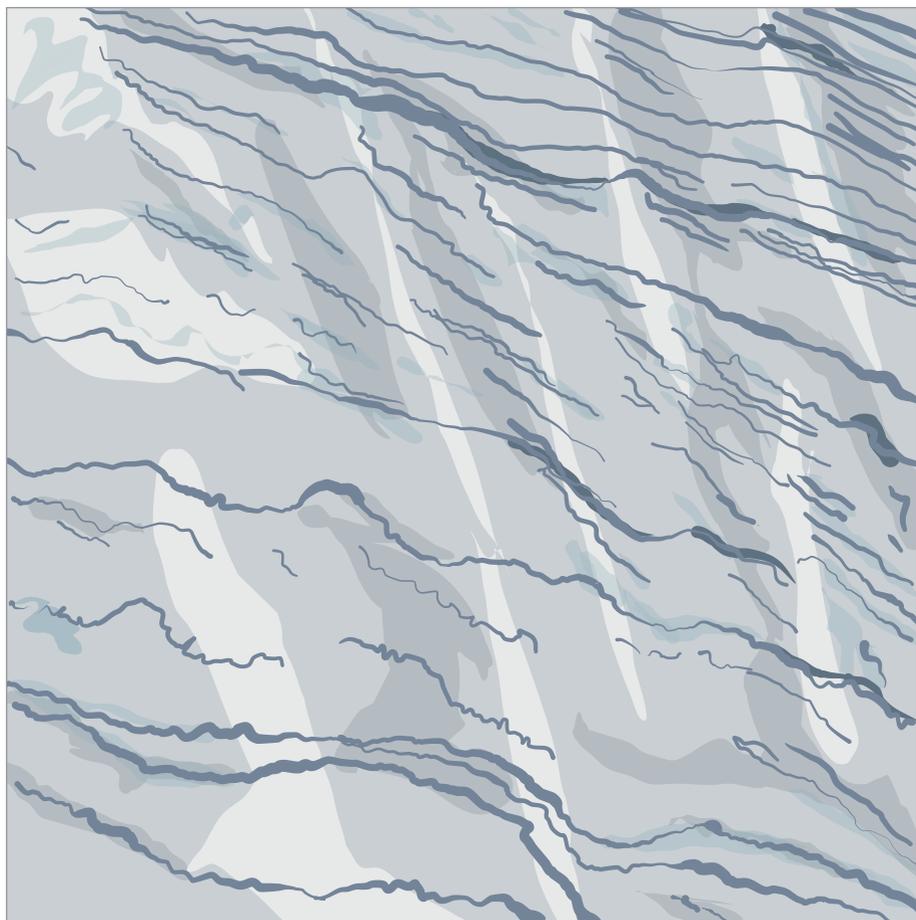


RIPPLES (LLEIDA)
Dibond panel

ЗАСТРУГИ is 'zastrugi' (russian). These are mesmerising patterns and shapes sculpted in the snow by wind.

I don't know why I love these contours. Perhaps its become a symbol of possible avalanche danger just over a ridge - something that I've become accustomed to looking out for.

But if I think about it closely, it's scratched marks in a white medium.

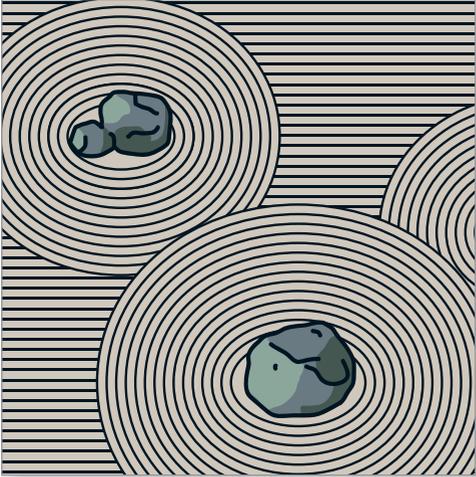


ЗАСТРУГИ. ISCHGL, AUSTRIA
Dibond panel

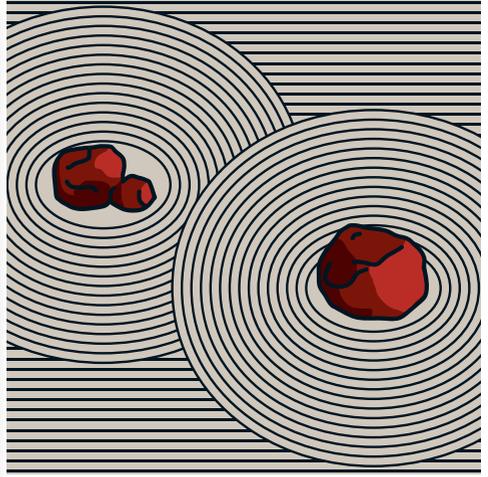
These zen gardens are everything and nothing to do with Japan.

I was in Vietnam and the hotel where I was staying had a sculpted zen garden with rocks and faux-sand on an atrium wall by the lifts. For a few days I laughed at it and dismissed it, but after a while it struck that it was a visual shortcut. An icon made physical.

Despite being fake, completely modern, decorative, westernised, idealised, presented vertically and maybe plain wrong, I found it surprising calming. The idea that an aesthetic idea or emotion could still be communicated despite the medium is what remained.



ZEN GARDEN, GREEN
Dibond panel



ZEN GARDEN, RED
Dibond panel

PHOTO-GRAPH (detail)
Photographic print on Japanese paper
(not in exhibition) 1988



I used to make images by blackening a piece of glass, drawing on the reverse and then contact printing it in the darkroom, either on photo paper or paper painted with a light sensitive emulsion. I made this process up, but years later found out that Corot used a similar process and it was called 'Cliché-verre'.

Of course drawing on glass is exactly what you are doing when you draw on an iPad.



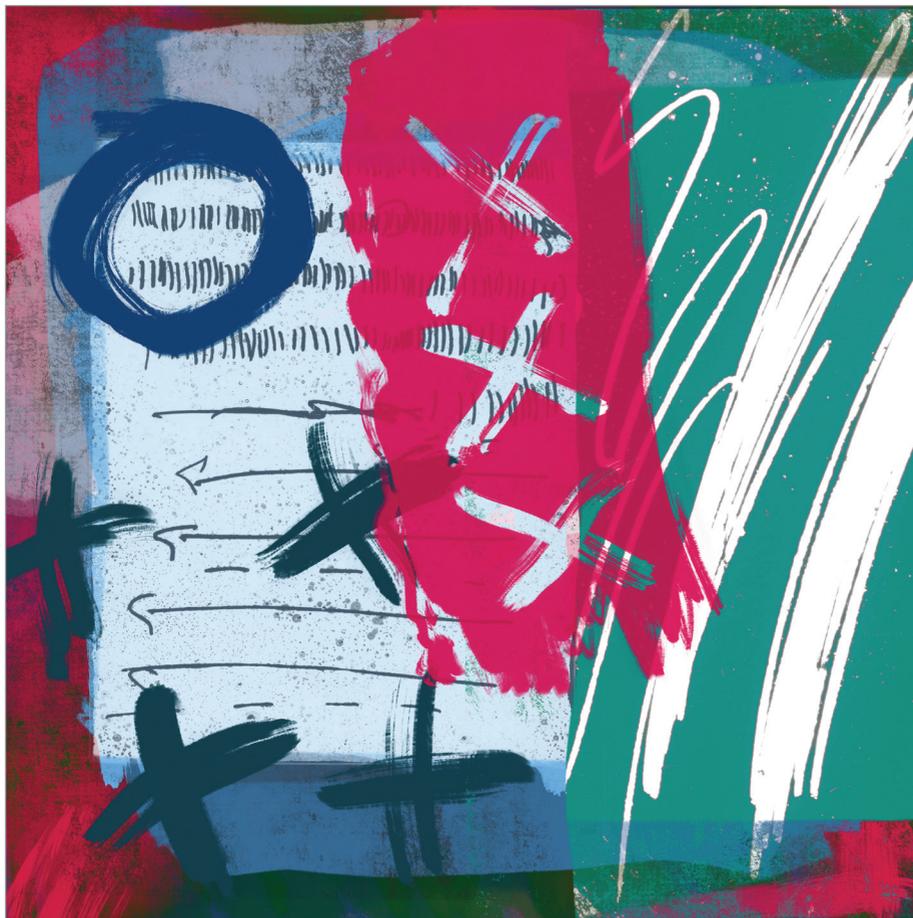
CLICHÉVERRE
(ART HISTORY BRUSH)
Dibond panel
1m x 1m (not in exhibition)
2017



CLICHÉVERRE
(CLEAR HISTORY)
Dibond panel
1m x 1m (not in exhibition)
201
6



CLICHÉVERRE
(SHARED)
Dibond panel
1m x 1m (not in exhibition)
2016



CLICHÉVERRE (CACHE)
Dibond panel

Whenever you go on a journey, you tend to remain the same person, you end up in a different place with a perhaps slightly different perspective and some new experiences.

I really wanted to bring this digital journey full circle. This one from early 2017 seems to do that.



CLICHÉVERRE (ORCHARD)
Dibond panel

With many thanks to the Galerie l'Impénitente team – Genevieve, Constance and Matt for help and support in putting on this exhibition.

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