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Louise Hopkins

Press Selection

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Black, Catriona, "I'm trying to find subversions", *MAP*, Issue 4, (Winter 2005)

STUDIO: LOUISE HOPKINS

Catriona Black visits the Glasgow studio of artist Louise Hopkins. They speak about her latest work, her studio, and her attraction for patterned fabric

Before visiting her, I try to imagine what Louise Hopkins's studio might look like. I think of her meticulous paintings, with their multitude of tiny, precise brushstrokes. I think of the sly way in which she takes the most ordered surfaces, like maps and graph paper, and bends them to her will. If her studio is anything like her art, it will be neat and rigorously arranged.

I'm spot on. As the artist ushers me into the front room of a flat in Glasgow's leafy Southside, I'm confronted with bright, bare floorboards and bright bare walls. Two ink pots – black and white – balance on two empty plastic containers, and small selections of sketches and studies huddle in neat clusters around the room. The only sign of disruption is a grid of nails and nail-holes creeping up the largest wall.

I ask Hopkins if the studio is always this neat. 'Not at all,' she insists. 'Sometimes it's really messy. When I'm trying to work out what I want to paint, there are lots of different things around; there might be a piece of graph paper, a piece of furnishing fabric and whatever. That mess is part of what helps it to happen.'

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Almost all the pictures in the room tell the story of Hopkins's newest painting, 'Relief (739)', a major work on furnishing fabric, part of her exhibition at Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery. Although she has used many other surfaces such as maps and sheet music, Hopkins always returns to patterned fabric. What attracts her to these things? 'They've all got their own rules,' she tells me, 'their own social patterns or formal patterns. They're all things that have got their own particular codes.'

I ask Hopkins if she has a stash somewhere of interesting materials, waiting their turn. She says she does, but she won't show me. She won't even tell me where it is. 'For me,' she explains, 'it would make the process impossible, to show people things before I work on them.'

This is not the only time during my visit that Hopkins says no. She's very careful about the answers she gives, often choosing to stop short of a complete explanation. She's just like her paintings, hiding as much as she gives away.

Hopkins is happy, however, to talk me through the creation of her latest painting. First, she tried painting on the back of the fabric, where the pattern just showed through. Then she tried the front, producing three more studies. 'What's happening here,' she explains, pointing them out, 'is I'm trying to understand what I'm looking at, and also trying to find different kinds of marks that begin to work with what's already there, but perhaps, as well, work against what's already there.'

In the first of the studies, Hopkins has painted tiny, horizontal, black marks in the spaces between the fabric's leafy pattern. In the next, the lines have become more

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sophisticated, flowing from one leaf to the next in billowing curves, and shaping the empty space between the leaves.

'There's this repeated pattern in this fabric,' Hopkins explains, 'and what I'm trying to do is change the structure of it completely. If you saw the fabric before I painted on it, you'd see a certain kind of repetition, and what I'm trying to do is completely disrupt that.'

She takes me across the room to the fireplace. Hanging above it are little sketches on paper, fixed modestly to the wall with slivers of masking tape. They map out the structure of the final painting, plotting the direction of the brushmarks. I notice that one is an exact replica of another, but drawn with a vigorous intensity which borders on the obsessive.

I ask if she made this sketch so labour-intensive to get a feel for what the final piece was going to be like. She breaks into a big, warm smile. 'You never get the full feeling of what it's going to be like! Absolutely not at all! This is just a tiny bit of information about where I'm trying to go.'

Just beneath the sketches, a row of postcards is propped against the wall. A cubist painting sits next to an expressive wad of clay by the arte povera artist Lucio Fontana. Ian Hamilton Finlay follows, accompanied by Jackson Pollock. A Mondrian rests on the mantelpiece, and completing the perplexing mix is an early Renaissance painting by Paolo Uccello.

Trying to make sense of this combination, I realise that Hopkins allows herself the

expressive freedom of Pollock and Fontana within strict parameters worthy of Hamilton Finlay and Mondrian. Hopkins confirms my theory. 'It's that dynamic that makes the work possible,' she says. 'It's trying to find some rules and then trying to find some subversions.'

We move back across the room to the wall full of nails. This was where, after all that preparation, Hopkins was finally able to make her painting. The rows of nails allowed her to move the enormous work up and down as she worked. 'It was so big that it was actually quite a challenge to make it in this studio. It's three metres wide, and so I had to look at it with [back to front] binoculars to see what it was like from a long way off.'

That wasn't the only problem. The work was so big that Hopkins had to paint it while sitting on a chair, balanced precariously on a table. 'It was the only way of reaching it,' she says. When I think of Hopkins now, I don't just see a neat and tidy person in a neat and tidy studio. I see a heroic painter, scaling the heights in pursuit of the perfect subversion.

Catriona Black is an animator and art critic for the Sunday Herald

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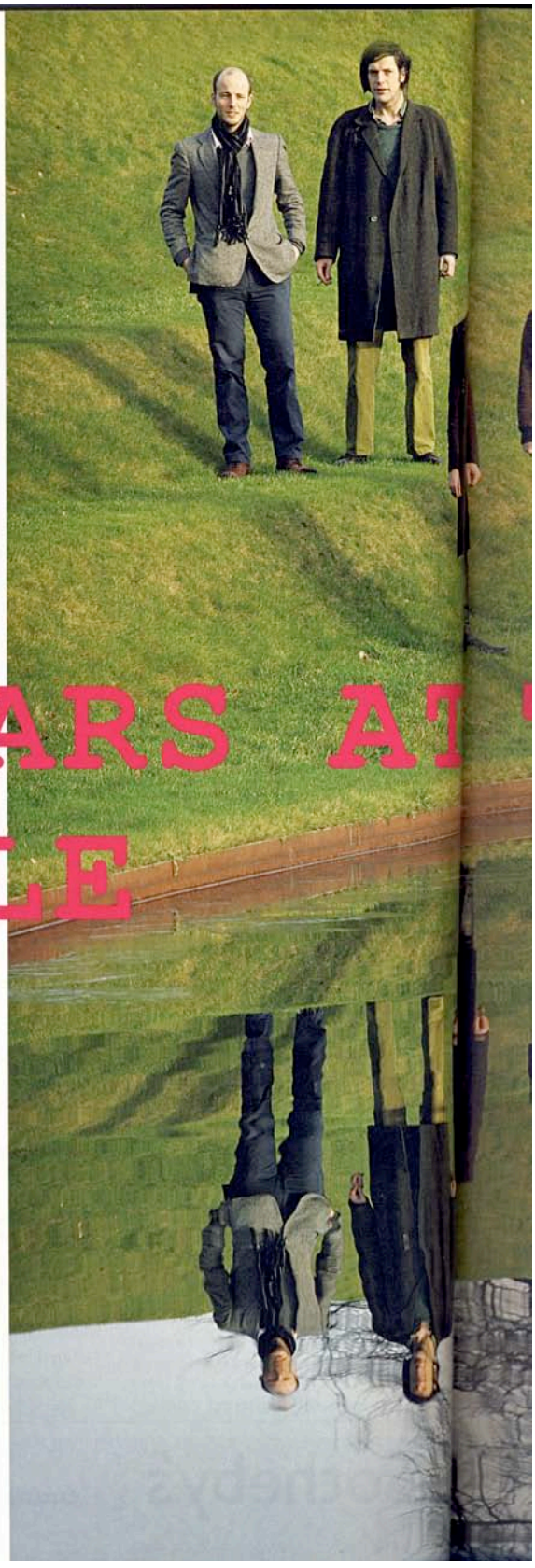
Long, Philip, "100 Years at the Venice Biennale" in *Scottish Art News* (Autumn 2007)



Philip Long, Senior Curator at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and curator of this year's Scottish presentation at the Venice Biennale, relates Scotland's involvement with the Venice Biennale and introduces this year's artists.

100 YEARS AT BIENNALE

Art and Venice are inextricably intertwined. One has depended on the other throughout the city's history; for artists Venice has been a source of inspiration and a centre of patronage and production for many hundreds of years; for Venice, art has formed its image and drawn countless people to it. Against this background, the Venice Biennale was conceived and from its outset intended as a forum for international art which would contribute to the redevelopment of the city both economically and culturally. The Biennale continues to adapt, expand and shift according to the countries, political events, personalities and controversies which shape it each year, and it is partly because of the consequent debates these matters generate that it continues to be recognised as the foremost contemporary art event in the world.

During its first years the Venice Biennale comprised of one exhibition, where artists from

'The Biennale continues to adapt, expand and shift according to the countries, political events, personalities and controversies which shape it each year, and it is partly because of the consequent debates these matters generate that it continues to be recognised as the foremost contemporary art event in the world.'

THE VENICE

different countries exhibited together under one roof and under the patronage of an international committee. From the earliest days this included representation from throughout the British Isles. In 1897 (the Biennale's second staging), thirty-three artists were distinctly classified as of Scotland (alongside nineteen of their English contemporaries), establishing a pattern of large group exhibitions which continued up until the Second World War. Numerous Scots participated throughout these years, including James Guthrie in 1897, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his close group in 1899 (in a section devoted to Scottish decorative art) and E.A. Walton in 1903.

Individual countries were soon encouraged to construct their own pavilions in the surrounding Giardini (Venice's public gardens in the Castello area), allowing them to promote their own artists more directly and giving them a vested interest in the promotion of the Biennale overall. Britain's first Pavilion was opened in 1909, with interior designs by Frank Brangwyn and a large exhibition of around 100 artists, including the work of the Scots D.Y. Cameron, J.D. Fergusson, George Henry, William McTaggart,

(PREVIOUS PAGE)
Five of this year's six artists
Rosalind Nashashibi (not picured)
From left to right:
Henry Coombes
Tony Swain
Louise Hopkins
Lucy Skaer
Charles Avery

(ABOVE)
Henry Coombes
Laddy and the Lady, 2005
Film still
Courtesy Sorcha Dallas, Glasgow
Photography: Alan Dimmick

'Their work is of the most vital and stimulating kind, art made by highly gifted individuals who, happily for Scotland, can count their involvement with that country as a formative part of their careers'

S.J. Peploe and others. By the 1930s this large group approach had become stagnant and in 1948 (the first Biennale to be held after the Second World War), the British Pavilion was entirely given over to Turner and Henry Moore. Further shows followed of perhaps two or three artists (in 1954, for example, the memorable grouping of Bacon, Freud and Nicholson) and in recent years the Pavilion has been devoted to one contemporary artist. Of Scots, this included William Turnbull and Eduardo Paolozzi in 1952, Paolozzi again in 1960, and in 1978 Mark Boyle.

In the same period new opportunities have presented themselves to artists beyond their national pavilions and Scottish artists have featured prominently in this way. Of note was an exhibition devoted to the three sculptors David Mach, Arthur Watson and Kate Whiteford in 1990. An exciting, comparatively recent development has been the Biennale's colonisation of the Arsenale, the former Venetian military dockyard, whose vast buildings have

been host to internationally curated (as opposed to nationally selected exhibitions), bringing together contemporary artists from across the continents. Scottish artists, such as Christine Borland, Douglas Gordon and Roderick Buchanan, have been regularly included.

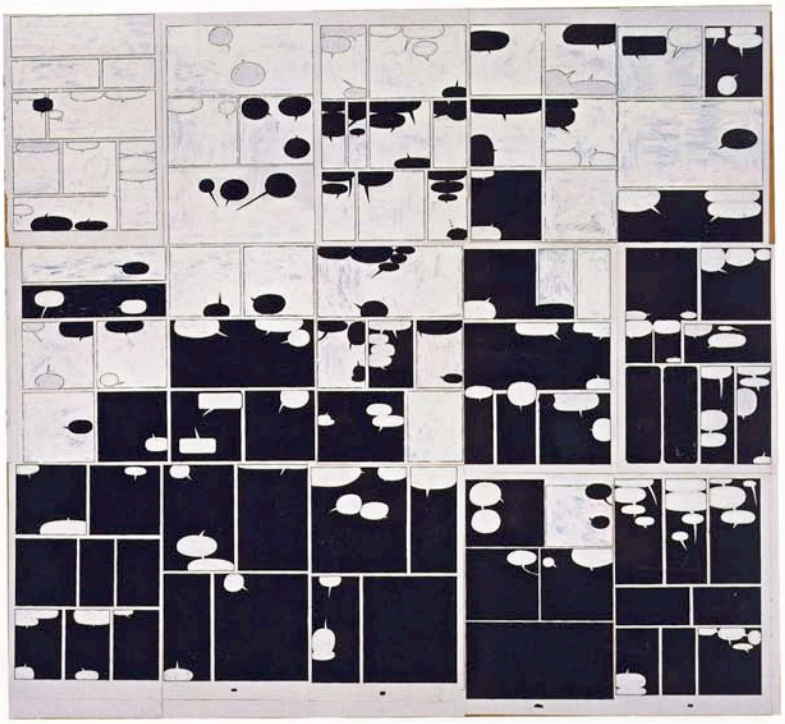
Since 2003, constituent parts of Britain (Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland) have developed separate exhibitions as a compliment to the British Pavilion, broadening the range of the UK's representation at the Biennale. In that year, Scotland presented Zenomap, an exhibition of the work of Claire Barclay, Jim Lambie and Simon Starling, as well as other artists associated with Scotland. In 2005 the work of Alex Pollard, Cathy Wilkes and Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan was exhibited under the title *Selective Memory*. Both these exhibitions set a trend for Scotland's participation where, at the point of being chosen, the artists were recognised as being at a particular moment reasonably early on in their careers when exposure at the Biennale would bring the wider international attention they deserved.

For the 52nd Biennale, Scotland will occupy part of the grand baroque Palazzo Zenobio, home to the Armenian Cultural Institute in Venice, where exhibitions from several other countries (including Australia, Latin America and Armenia itself) will provide an appropriate international context for the six artists chosen to represent Scotland this year. They are Charles Avery, Henry Coombes, Louise Hopkins, Rosalind Nashashibi, Lucy Skaer and Tony Swain. Their work is of the most vital and stimulating kind, art made by highly gifted individuals who, happily for Scotland, can count their involvement with that country as a formative part of their careers. Each maintains an interest in Scotland, although their developing careers have already taken them beyond Britain. The organisers - the Scottish Arts Council, British Council Scotland and National Galleries of Scotland - hope that the event encourages the selected artists and others to think of Scotland as a place which can provide great artistic opportunities, not only at home but also abroad.

For Venice, each artist is producing new work. Charles Avery, from Oban (whose 2002 drawing in The Fleming Collection features on this magazine's cover), is based in London and has recently exhibited there, in Edinburgh and in Italy. For the Biennale he has developed his ongoing *Islanders* project, in which for over ten years now he has described in

'Each maintains an interest in Scotland, although their developing careers have already taken them beyond Britain. The organisers hope that the event encourages the selected artists and others to think of Scotland as a place which can provide great artistic opportunities, not only at home but also abroad'

(BELOW)
Louise Hopkins
Black white white black, 2005
Acrylic ink on comic pages on wood panel
Courtesy of the artist and doggerfisher, Edinburgh and Andrew Mummery, London
Photography: Hyjdla Kosaniuk Innes



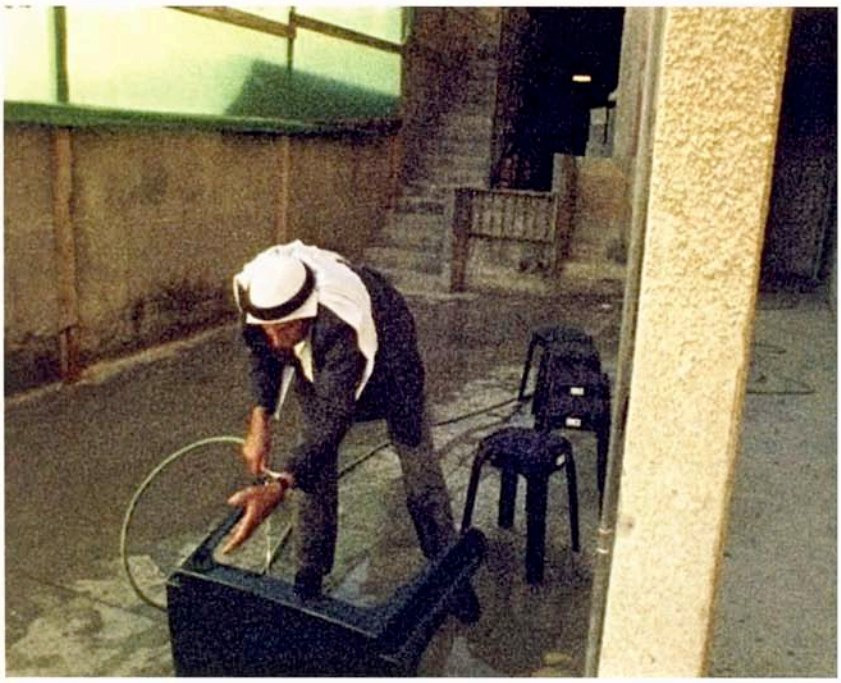
drawing, painting and sculpture the topology, population and cosmology of an imaginary island inspired by his childhood living on the west coast of Scotland. Henry Coombes, the youngest of this group, came dramatically to our attention in 2006 with his extraordinary film, *Laddy and the Lady*. For Venice he is developing an installation comprising of sculpture, paintings and a film-work, which together mark the beginnings of his investigation into nineteenth-century painter Landseer, whose life was darker and more remarkable than his art might immediately suggest.

Louise Hopkins, from Hertfordshire, has remained based in Glasgow since studying there, producing painting and graphic work, both profound and international in concern. The latter is particularly the case in her map pieces, where her modification of boundaries and landscape changes our world perspective. Tony Swain, from Northern Ireland, also came to Glasgow to study and also remains based there. A sheet or cut section of newsprint provides the basis for his meticulously executed paintings, which provide a glimpse into a complex and surreal private world.

Observation of group interaction and social rituals are the starting point for Rosalind Nashashibi, who uses primarily 16mm film. In Venice she will show her mesmerising new film, *Bachelor Machines Part 1*, made on a cargo ship travelling between Italy and Scandinavia. Lucy Skaer has a base in Scotland, but also works internationally. Different locations, such as New York and Amsterdam, have inspired her to make surprising and beautiful work using sometimes traditional, sometimes very surprising means indeed.

Scottish art is at one of its most progressive moments and these artists represent this position in the form of six very considerable talents. As with the heterogeneous character of the Biennale, the work of Avery, Coombes, Hopkins, Nashashibi, Skaer and Swain is diverse, exciting and unpredictable. Each artist, however, could be said to share as part of their concern an interest in cultural similarities and differences, and the issues such differences present. Some on occasion use invented worlds to investigate their concerns; others make use of comparisons, real situations or look back into history. What is clear is that each artist works with such ability and often with such surprising and new means that they have the power to alter perceptions. Their work goes on show this summer in Venice from 10 June, at what remains one of the world's most unmissable art events.

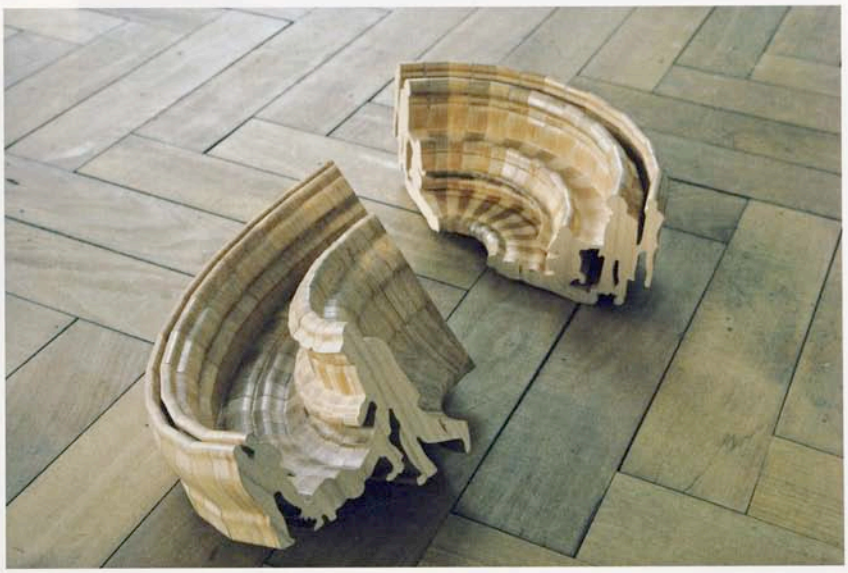
Scotland and Venice 2007
10 June – 2 November
Palazzo Zenobio, Fondamenta del Soccorso,
Dorsoduro, 2596 – 30123 Venezia
www.scotlandandvenicebiennale.com



(LEFT)
Rosalind Nashashibi
Hreash House, 2004
Still from 16mm film
transferred to dvd
Courtesy of the artist and doggerfisher, Edinburgh and Harris Liebermann, New York
Photography: the artist

'Scottish art is at one of its most progressive moments and these artists represent this position in the form of six very considerable talents. As with the heterogeneous character of the Biennale, the work of Avery, Coombes, Hopkins, Nashashibi, Skaer and Swain is diverse, exciting and unpredictable'

(RIGHT)
Charles Avery
Untitled (The August Snakes), 2006
Jesmonite, Oil paint, human hair
Installation view Cubitt Gallery, London
Courtesy of the artist and doggerfisher, Edinburgh, S.A.L.E.S., Rome and Sonia Rosso, Turin



(RIGHT)
Lucy Skaer
The Wheel, 2006
2 parts waxed cherry-wood
Courtesy of the artist, doggerfisher, Edinburgh and Elisabeth Kaufmann, Zurich
Photography by Ruth Clark

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Paterson, Dominic, "Louise Hopkins", *The LIST*, (17 November – 1 December 2005)

THE LIST
GLASGOW AND EDINBURGH EVENTS GUIDE

17 NOV–1 DEC 2005

PAINTING AND WORK ON PAPER

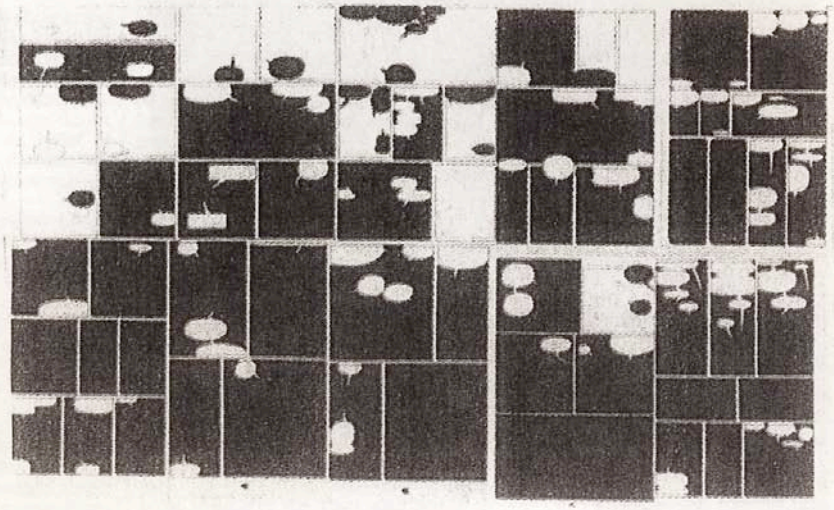
LOUISE HOPKINS

Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, until Sun 11 Dec ●●●●

Freedom of Information brings together key examples of Louise Hopkins' output over the past decade. From the works on furnishing fabric with which she made her name via various over-painted found images, Hopkins' consistent application of laborious technique to economical concept produces an oeuvre that is strongly unified aesthetically and intellectually.

Her work mines the legacy of modernism's reductionist strategies – the monochrome, the grid etc – but returns to them repressed qualities, including the decorative, and the commercial/popular as opposed to the industrial/alienated. This can be read as an effort to give modernist tropes renewed life by playing formal properties against conceptual ones – with Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, an obvious precedent. In this case, as with Hopkins' work, we become aware of our investment in visual information when it is presented as trace.

The most recent works here, such as *Relief (739)*, feature painstakingly reworked floral motifs, with Hopkins characteristically obscuring the pattern's facile legibility with delicate repetitions and fillings-in. It is this play between revealing and concealing, effected in a complicity with pre-existing visual codes and marks which ultimately undermines them, that connects the fabric works with Hopkins' other signature approaches: overpainting maps, erasing comics, whiting-out music scores, blacking out nouns, verbs and adjectives from printed texts. Although the visual impact differs in each case, the conceptual effect – of an obsessive engagement with systems of meaning that compromises their legibility – makes *Freedom of Information* more than the sum of its parts.
(Dominic Paterson)



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West, Rosamund, "Louise Hopkins – Freedom of Information", *The Skinny*, (November 2005)

A graduate of Glasgow School of Art, Louise Hopkins' work in painting and drawing from the last 10 years is currently being showcased in the prestigious Fruitmarket Gallery. Her practice is one of small-scale, subtle intervention, of interference, sometimes obliteration on a 2-D surface. The 'Freedom of Information' of the title reflects the strange duality of this show, alluding both to notions of anti-censorship and to the freedom with which Hopkins has played with the information on display, restricting the perceptions of the viewer at will to create unexpected impressions.

Working almost exclusively on pre-printed surfaces - sheet music, maps, comic strips - Hopkins has staged her interventions in paint, minutely changing the nature of the page and of the information contained thereon by selectively covering, excluding details, whole elements, often replacing them with blankness or substituting her own information to create a whole new world of ideas, imagery and association. Hopkins' suggestiveness, without defined parameters or stated purpose, opens up multiple strata of association, allowing the viewer to mine rich veins of thought and meaning, yet giving no definitive answers. This allusive approach, while giving the viewer no easy answers, can often prove both rewarding and challenging by opening up channels of thought but leaving us to go down them alone.

In the first room, 'Europe and the Middle East' (2001) initially stands out. Hopkins has intervened with the eponymous map, obliterating the sea and replacing it with desert, her mottled paintwork suggesting a continent swallowed by global warming, an ecological meltdown conjectured and made real. Her intervention plays with time and space, evoking both a foreshadowing of doom and perhaps remnants of the past - momentarily the bizarre notion that this is a rediscovered map of a waterless, prehistoric Europe is entertained.

On the same wall, 'World Map' (2001) reveals a kind of converse of this barren land. Hopkins has here used blue paint to cover the land mass of the world, her undulating brushstrokes denoting a globe swallowed by water, perhaps suggesting another apocalyptic future of melted ice caps and the visions of Kevin Costner, global warming or a forgotten past of the planet enveloped in ice. In the middle room an earlier piece, 'World Map (ppii)' (1997) shows the world once again painted blue but in a thicker paint, the solidity of the surface of the obliterated land creating a pleasing, tactile aesthetic; a braille-like rendering which blurs the lines between 2- and 3-D and between sight and touch.

While these pieces explore the world map in terms of geographical intervention and confusion, other pieces in the central room experiment with the signifiers of human habitation and occupation. 'Map (Black) 3' (2001) shows Europe with all geographical information excised, painted over in black with only the place names remaining. Travel, the exotic, is reduced to pure text, a seething mass of information of the naming of all that we have created. It is in some ways a visual annihilation of the natural landscape, yet a new vision is created, the white lozenges of the remaining words in seething formation reminiscent of a microscopic image of bacteria, raising questions of what it is that we do and have done in this world.

Louise Hopkins' exhibition is one which may require much of the viewer in terms of defining meaning. Her intimate, intricate pieces play with information, restricting the viewer and skewing our perceptions of time and space while creating a subtle interplay between the dimensions and between the senses. It is a pared down show, allusive and at times elusive yet worth the close attention it requires.

THIS EXHIBITION RUNS AT THE FRUITMARKET, EDINBURGH UNTIL DECEMBER 11. ENTRANCE IS FREE.

Black, Catriona, "Altered images", *Sunday Herald*, (16 October 2005)

16 October 2005 sunday herald 27

THE CRITICS ARTS

Altered images

VISUAL ART
By Catriona Black

LOUISE HOPKINS
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
FRUITMARKET GALLERY, EDINBURGH; UNTIL DECEMBER 11
★★★★★

NINE years ago, with a solo show at the Tramway, Louise Hopkins's career hit the big time. Now, with a major show at the Fruitmarket Gallery surveying the artist's career so far, her reputation is cemented. There remains no doubt that Louise Hopkins is an artist of international importance, consistently unpeeling our deepest preconceptions with an unwavering hand.

The English-born, Glasgow-based artist is almost an anachronism in today's art world. She works quietly and patiently in her studio. Her cultural reference points are universally ingrained, and timeless. Her paintings and drawings are not site-specific: they are entirely self-contained. They are made to last, and left to speak for themselves.

Hopkins rarely paints on a blank canvas. The world isn't a blank canvas, and neither are our minds. Every time we look at or try to understand something, a complex web of suppositions and assumptions comes into play. We can only ever read one or two words at a time, and never the whole page. So it is with maps, sheet music, and comic strips. Hopkins takes these universal languages and infiltrates them, turning our assumptions inside out and forcing us to start comprehending the world all over again.

The very word "comprehend" means to seize. Any military person will tell you that the power to map out territory gives you the power to seize it. This applies politically as well as militarily, if you consider the Euro-centrism of such supposedly neutral terms as the Middle East.

In Europe And The Middle East, Hopkins reworks a map made in 1943 for the British Council. The sea is painted over in a careful facsimile of the land, resulting in a vast unwatery landmass which is quite unrecognisable. All the towns and countries remain, but their shapes and boundaries are lost. Peering close, it's possible to identify the areas where Hopkins has intervened: fictional towns are suggested with grey squiggles instead of clearly printed names.

This is no Gulliver's Travels map of fantastical lands and made-up names. It is a wake-up call to us for thinking we know the world just because we're familiar with its standard representation. We might be able to discern, close-up, Hopkins's deceit, but she still successfully obstructs our usual mental short-cuts. Without whole swathes of blue to define the shapes in our peripheral vision, we're lost in uncharted territory.

Hopkins doesn't stop at subverting the marks we make on paper; she also questions the authority of the paper itself. In a series of delicate works shown two years ago at the doggerfisher gallery, the artist unhinges the lines and punch holes on foolscap and graph paper.

Scratching away the pale blue grids, with all their supposed authority and scientific infallibility, Hopkins redraws them with an imperfect human hand. It is a perfect metaphor for the limits of science, which is as prone to human subjectivity as any other field of knowledge.

Hopkins has done the same to sheet-music, redrawing the staves of love songs and removing the notes and words. All that is left are the rests and repeats, like breaths and scratchy whispers.

NEED TO KNOW MORE?

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Gale, Lain, "Redrawing the map of modern art", *Scotland on Sunday*, (16 October 2005)

Redrawing the map of modern art

The everyday world is an enduring canvas for a painter who conjures up the spirit of the age of Turner

Iain Gale

Louise Hopkins: Freedom of Information

Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

ART is necessarily about communication. But whereas the Renaissance masters and arguably their successors through to the 20th century were able to convey their messages via prescribed iconographic systems and common language, today's artists, through the social, political and ethnic diversity of their audiences, face a more complex task. It is hardly surprising then that so many of them should be fascinated by semiotics – the signs and symbols by which we order our lives.

None more so perhaps than Louise Hopkins. Born in England but Glasgow-based and taught, Hopkins broke on to the British art scene in 1994 with engaging paintings made on the reverse of furnishing fabrics and has since become one of Scotland's finest, showing to international acclaim.

Hopkins is a painter. But she does not start with a blank canvas. Rather, she appropriates existing imagery for a support. In formal terms her roots lie in the achievement of Gerhard Richter and, similarly, like the Surrealists and Pop artists she uses everyday, mass-produced imagery and signage, intervening to transform the anonymous into a unique piece imbued with original and unexpected meaning.

Her painting has often been described as destructive rather than creative and certainly, with the exception of the floral pieces, every stroke is intended to eradicate. But as she obscures the originals, Hopkins creates something entirely new and it soon becomes clear this is more than the parlour game it seems.

The first examples we encounter at the Fruitmarket retrospective are maps. A map of the world in which Hopkins has painted out everything but the names of the oceans. A map of Europe and the Middle East in which the water has been removed and new roads inserted to unite the nations.

Next door hangs a recent floral work in which, painting on the reverse of the printed fabric, she recreates the flowers in a limited monochrome palette, both subverting their original colourful purpose and addressing the very reasons behind our need for an entire decorative genre.

In contrast, on the opposite wall are the first of Hopkins' music scores in which she has removed the notes, and across from them pages from a newspaper meticulously altered with black ink to leave only the adverbs.

This can be a little bewildering and I would suggest the best place to start is upstairs, with some of Hopkins' works based on comic strips. Here she brushes out every character and background, save the speech bubbles. The astonishing thing is that the pages still make sense, but now it is up to us to create the narrative in a visual arrangement still redolent of conflict and intercourse, in which the possibilities are suggested by no more than the abstract forces of the grid. It is interesting to see just how quickly our minds do this;

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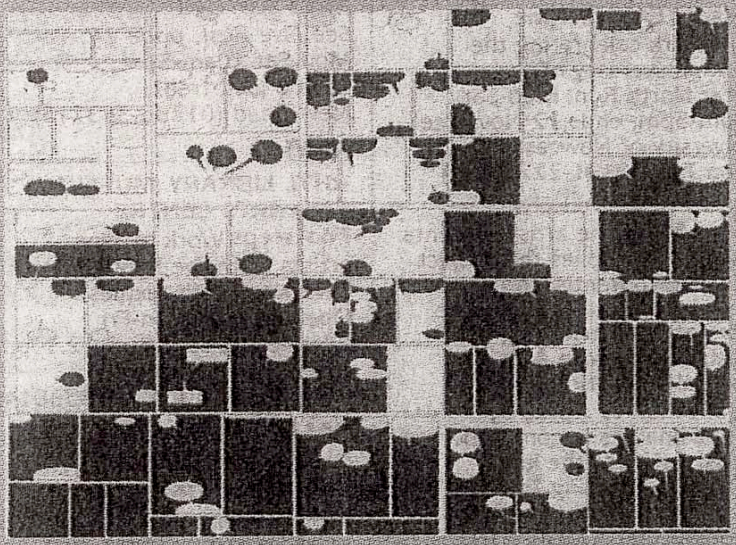
Chapman, Peter "Louise Hopkins", *Independent*, (8-14 October 2005)

INDEPENDENT 8 - 14 October 2005

Art

PRIVATE VIEW



Louise Hopkins

to 11 Dec

Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

All painters start with a tabula rasa or blank sheet in front of them. Don't they? Surely making that first mark on the snowy-white canvas is the stuff of artistic cliché? Apparently not for Louise Hopkins, who chooses canvases that are pre-printed with generic marks or specific images.

In this way, Hopkins can use what is there as a kind of catalyst, as if she has pitched right into the creative process. In a new exhibition of her work, Freedom of Information, we see the extent of her "collaboration" with different forms of printed matter. The show includes her paintings on sheet music, maps, comics and photographs.

Although the results are often beautiful, apparently a painterly concord between artist and work, their primary impulse is far more than mere embellishment. Indeed, Hopkins seeks to undermine and disorientate both the existing pattern and the viewing experience. In a sense, she seeks to use her craft to impose her visual will on what went before.

Fruitmarket Gallery, 45 Market Street, Edinburgh (0131-225 2383) to 11 Dec

Peter Chapman

Jeffrey, Moira, "Visual Art – Louise Hopkins, Freedom of information, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh", *The Herald,* (12 October 2005)

Visual Art

LOUISE HOPKINS, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION, FRUITMARKET GALLERY, EDINBURGH

MOIRA JEFFREY

★★★★★

THE paintings of Louise Hopkins throw up such contradictory vocabulary that you know she must be on to a good thing. Words such as meticulous, destructive, ordered, creepy, beautiful, disruptive and sensuous don't normally sit together to describe a single object. With the work of this Glasgow-based painter all of these conflicting responses seem to make perfect sense: as though her paintings were a complex weather system of sunshine, storm and showers rather than a single sunny day.

In the past decade she has worked on all kinds of found surfaces: sheet music, graph paper, photographs, fabric, maps, comics and books. Each work uses a unique, but linked method. Existing surfaces may be scraped way with a razor, obliterated with white paint, inked out or carefully and obsessively reworked with fine brushwork. The results are odd hybrids: paintings that bear the traces of their previous lives. Songs that can no longer be sung, newspapers that can't be read.

This can be menacing: Untitled (282) from 1999 is a painting on fabric where a scene of cavorting figures becomes a poisoned fog of indecipherable black shapes. Or they can be touching, like the haplessly human mark of her hand as she imitates the lines of pre-printed blue graph paper. There is a delicacy, playfulness and a painterly sensitivity about even Hopkins's most destructive work that means it has a surprisingly emotional charge despite its methodical creation.

This beautifully hung and immaculately-lit exhibition brings together works from private and public collections in the UK, Europe and Mexico and as you see 10 years of her work unfold, its sheer labour intensity becomes apparent. Each of her large fabric paintings is a record of hours of almost insanely repetitive activity. In her most recent work, Relief 739, a print of foliage and cherries becomes a tangled jungle web. In a world dedicated to speed, there is something heroic about her attempt to slow everything down, to pay such meticulous yet ambivalent attention to little-noticed materials.

The exhibition is called Freedom of Information. In an era where we are bombarded with information, these paintings raise many questions about what room we still have to make up our own minds as well as what potential there might be, in a mechanistic age, to "think" with our hands as well as our heads.

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Mansfield, Susan, "A very different breed of comic book artist", *The Scotsman*, (4 October 2005)

A very different breed of comic book artist

Cartoon strips, newspapers and fabrics are the raw materials for Louise Hopkins' unusual paintings

Susan Mansfield

MOST artists are familiar with the blank canvas experience: the moment at the beginning of a work when one is confronted with an expanse of nothing, and has to choose where to make the first mark.

Glasgow-based painter Louise Hopkins sidesteps this by painting on materials which already contain text or patterns: maps; pages of comics; newsprint; richly patterned furnishing fabrics; or sheets of graph paper. Her work interacts with them in a quietly determined way, changing but not destroying the original.

The artist, whose work has been exhibited widely in Britain, Europe and the US and has been shortlisted for the Jerwood Painting Prize, is about to have a major show at Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery, her biggest ever solo show in a public space. It is a survey of a decade's work, titled *Freedom of Information*. "I'm interested in our relationship with information, how much gets invested in it, how there's a feeling that information is going to make everything all right.

"I'm interested in the different modes of exchanging information and whether or not they enable freedom. I'm questioning the authority that we give information. It's most clear in the maps, but implicit in all the work. I think there's a lot of doubt in the work."

Her work tampers with the delivery of information. She takes a map and paints in areas of land where the sea should be, takes a page from a newspaper and painstakingly paints out all but a few connecting words. There is a comic strip in which only the speech bubbles remain and a sheet of music devoid of notes.

Implicit is the question about the faith we have in printed matter: can a love song truly describe love? Can a map describe the world? She takes the white noise of data whizzing around in the world and, in small ways, slows it down, adds silence. "I find it really interesting what happens to speech and silence. The silence that happens when you switch your radio off is different to other kinds of silence.

"One of the things that interested me in painting, in art, was being able to think and make things at the same time. The sense that maybe anything is possible in a painting."

Hopkins, 40, studied art in Newcastle, and spent four years in Australia before coming to Glasgow to study on the celebrated MFA course at Glasgow School of Art. It was, perhaps, an unusual decision for a painter to apply for the Glasgow MFA, which had produced a number of leading conceptual artists.

But Hopkins wanted to shake up what she was doing. "It was a very decisive move to do this specific MFA. One of the things I was very interested in was the multi-specialist aspect of the course, the way painters are working next to video artists – there always seemed to be a lot of possibilities there. For me, that was really exciting, also it was an opportunity to reassess my practice."

It was while on the MFA that she first abandoned canvas for "found" materials. "It was something I experimented with at certain points and withdrew from, went back to painting on canvas then experimented again.

"There was never one single decision that my practice was going to involve mainly painting on found surfaces."

When she made her first series of works on furnishing fabric in 1996, two years after graduating from the MFA, she was establishing a way of working which would remain consistent for the next decade. One of the key new works she has made for the Fruitmarket show is *Relief, (79)* a large-scale painting on furnishing fabric where she has taken cloth with a rich, green leaf pattern and added marks in black with a fine brush.

"It felt a bit like a performance done in private, the sense of sustaining this kind of activity of extremely meticulous, miniscule marks made on an extremely large scale." It took a long time, she says, though she won't say exactly how long. She worked to her own strict rules: only black, not changing the pattern itself, even by adding a single leaf. Was she not tempted? "No. I've really narrowed things down. There is so much experimentation going on already in terms of what I've decided to do, I'm not tempted to do any more. It never became repetitive, mechanical. It's about continually stepping back, looking at it, making decisions, changing things."

She says that working on a found surface is like "throwing myself into something, being completely surrounded by it, having to deal with what I've landed in the middle of". "I look for a way to disrupt and re-work what's already there, maybe from a fascination with it or a frustration with it, trying to transform it into something else that still has something to do with what it started off being."

Her work plays with our expectations: the associations we make with a piece of fabric, or a page from a tabloid newspaper, are subverted. Familiar documents become unreadable. "Whether it's a map or a graphic novel, these are things which can be visually consumed quite quickly. Turning it into a painting is a way of slowing down the process of looking, of engaging with something, whether that's for me or for someone looking at the work."

Often the materials she chooses have ideas already embedded in them. "Maps come with a whole set of political biases that aren't always acknowledged. I started thinking about maps when I saw a Pacific-centred map of the world. Certain countries put themselves in the middle of the world and certain countries don't. It's totally political, frightening and fascinating. Even a piece of graph paper might look neutral, but it's incredibly loaded. Whether it's imperial or metric, for example. Imperial is associated with some countries, metric with others."

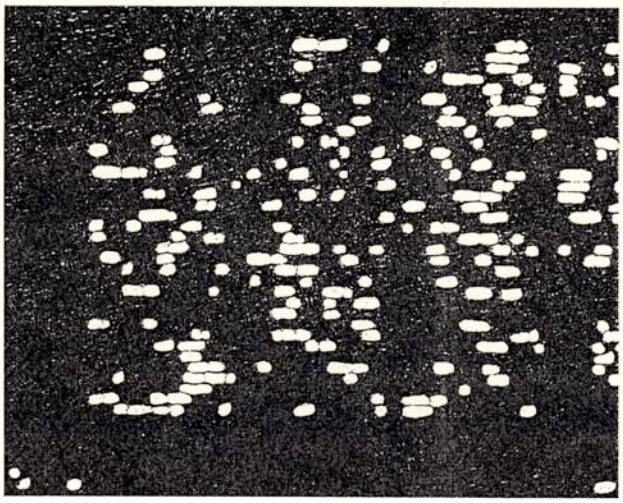
But her work is not political. She doesn't create alternative maps, she creates paintings. Cubism is a key influence on her artistic practice. The sense of fragmenting space and time, creating a space where you can see "everything, all at once". And, like cubism, her work contains an element of breaking down, a question not only about how we see the world but what the nature of the world is: "stuff and matter, what the world's made up of, these cells, these atoms, how it really is".

● Louise Hopkins: Freedom of Information is at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, from 8 October to 11 December.

● Duncan Macmillan is away.

Louise Hopkins is all set for her first major solo show at Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery Picture: Sean Bell

Hunt, Ian, "Exhibition Review: Louise Hopkins", *matters,* Summer 2003. Issue 17.



Despite some works in this show that appear to mark time, **Louise Hopkins** has moved on, in her own way, into territory that is more complex and rhetorical, cryptic even, and yet with no loss of clarity and decisiveness in the overall effect. Her cleverness isn't clever; it doesn't rob you of anything when you work it out. She is pursuing a highly self-aware art, and one that now demands from the viewer an even greater concentration on particulars. The concentration called forth is itself a peculiar experience, because frequently the decision to go on looking at a painting involves a superstitious regard. We tend to invest those works we choose to study with the powers of salvation, even when they are works which admit humour, accident and contingency. Conversation still distinguishes this veneration and hope when the works of X or Y are declared to 'be' painting, to occupy and coincide with its honorific space. Works by Louise Hopkins are paradoxical objects because they both seem to demand superstitious veneration as accomplished performances, and to shrug it off — yet without entirely discrediting our wish that something might 'be' painting, and be so honourably. Ulrich Loock's account of the furnishing fabric works in *Glasgow* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1997) is the best. But the work has now changed, relying less on the indexical repetition of the given support in favour of variation. These works manage to reveal slowly their embedded spatial and intellectual complexities and pleasures, get richer the more you look. A measure of their accomplishment is that a small work may be at least as likely to promote these effects as larger ones. Look hard at many abstract artists of whose work who you profess to be fond; how many of them really do it in the small-scale works?

The strangest works here originate in colour maps, one of the North Pole, one of the Pacific, I think I managed to work out. (Maps are materials our eyes are drawn to, but dangerous matter for artists satisfied with trite alteration.) In the Pacific work, *Untitled 000*, torn areas of the map are replaced by areas of fine strokes delineating recognisable stepped falls of water, which obey orthodox perspective. This emphasis is varied by some apparent wave forms at the periphery, separated from the stepped falls. In their slowness they recall, for example, the charming early Renaissance waves in Brueghel's Courtauld Institute seascape. All this is hard to see, initially even the fineness of the strokes is hard to see. The North Pole work tears the map in such a way that not only are some areas removed, but the concentric latitude lines are partly adjusted, hinting at a cryptic spiral. The sheet itself is out of true on its mount, on tilted axes. Existing areas of the map are elevated by painted ice cliffs of regular height. Water and ice-sheet are confused. The top profile of the sheet is torn to suggest mountains, as of early pictorial cartography, and the lines of longitude are remade and gathered as though to an inner centre, out of view. The gathering to a point motif is repeated in other areas, eccentrically, the lines leading to the ungraspable multiplied end points extending behind and below the sheet. A nineteenth-century fantasy that the earth is open at the poles (E.A. Poe) is suggested, but the main visual point is the subtle insinuation of three-dimensional geometries, genuinely giddy ones.

Two ink on newspaper works, *Untitled (the of the)* and *Untitled (the if of)* obliterate by black ink line all but prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, verbs in the articles, standfirsts and picture captions of newspaper spreads. How methodically, it's impossible to say: but it seems unlikely that a rule would be followed blindly to the visual effect. Abdication or extreme limitation of choice was common to much 90s painting (the results often resemble 'lines' done in detention). Hopkins best works made a particular and unacademic contribution here, a supple concatenation of the contingent elements in the given support by a watchful yet never *wholly* mastering eye. The effect from a distance of the recent newspaper works is, it has to be said, of a relatively indifferent found abstraction — early Udomsak Krisanamis territory of irregularly illuminated tower blocks, done more neatly. Up close, however there's more to read than his zeroes and nines: 'what is the to the', we are asked. The found sense and counter-sense that sounds through these reports, relieved of content and the weight of nouns in favour of the lightest and flimsiest of words and repeated soft fricatives (*if, of, the*), is delightful, intruded into by only a very occasional and grave 'but'. The game admits free replays, though spatial movement is limited to the lateral transgression of sense across separate columns and compartments. The pleasures are obvious, but these build on earlier work in their basic adherence to the picture plane (and on an earlier map work of Northern Europe, where only names were visible); the present map works described do not. A single painting on the reverse of furnishing fabric, *Untitled 0402*, is also a departure. The familiar beige grisaille insinuates painted leaves and stems. But these are newly licensed growths, independent of the given pattern of flowers, as the unpainted areas let us know. The regularity of the overall effect is illusory; these growths, weaving through, under and over the printed stain of the floral design that bleeds through are inventions, and they don't repeat themselves as the pattern does. The space implied is only shallow, but in combination with the lateral movements to which the eye is led, darting about in order to understand what is being looked at, the effect is rich.

There is no sentimental recuperation of Modernism in these works — if they were buildings, there'd be no portholes — but there is a wildness and equally an order. In the eighteenth century reason, and nature were sometimes used as synonyms. Perhaps in Hopkins work that coincidence of their dominions is again suggested.

Ian Hunt writes on art and is the publisher of the poetry imprint Alfred David Editions.

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Hunt, Ian, "Review – Louise Hopkins", *Art Monthly*, (December – January 1996-97)

Reviews

■ Louise Hopkins

33 Great Sutton Street London October 9 to November 7

Louise Hopkins's delicate and resilient paintings dramatise how decisions about procedure can tentatively indicate their place in wider discussions of freedom and contemporary rhetorics of freedom. Method is one of the inescapable things the paintings display: after the decision was made to make them, they had to be made. This is not in itself a huge claim for the work, for which it is still early days, but it does indicate that the notion of artistic work as a self-invented task – with all the possibilities for sentimentalised retreat and withdrawal that involves – might still make a more negotiable prison than those that result from playing contemporary culture at its own games and according to its own rules.

The recent series of paintings is made on the reverse of stretched furnishing fabric, which is prepared with glistening layers of translucent gesso. Areas of the pattern are worked up in oil with small brushes, in shades varying from off-white to dark sepia. Variations of tone across a painting are apparent, but fairly restricted. The unpainted areas, in which the local colours of the print appear as an attractive set of close-toned cool greys, tend to recede, which means a repertoire of push-pull effects is available. The series also exploits figure-ground relationships (the viewer's sense of looking at part of a shape, the rest of which is not defined but which is possibly very large; one of the paintings, *23*, could possibly be resolved into a map of Scotland, where Louise Hopkins works).

These kinds of pleasures apart, the project is founded on at least two denials. The cloth is seen reversed, its face turned to the wall. Secondly, local colour is denied: the decorative submits to a restricted, though not anti-colouristic discipline. Close up, the denial of the local colour of the print means that leaves and petals are rendered as though made from the same stuff: an effect that some will find exacerbates the squeamish factors of the pattern that has been chosen. The peculiar horror of hydrangea is the fact that the blossoms are formed not from petals but from sepals, ie leaves. Looking at the plant – an impostor, a natural fake – one senses an affront to one's mental system for classifying flowering plants. There aren't any representations of hydrangea in the fabric, but the stylised full-blown roses, leaves, campions and primroses take on a profound lack of colour that is creepy in the way a head of hydrangea can be.

Sensed as a whole, as paintings, the motifs do not dominate, however. The repeat in the fabric is not very visible, and it is further obscured by the painting of particular areas. And the repetition of the series itself calms acts of recognition (the inevitable echoes with childhood illness and states of immobility or hypnagogia) by displaying the use of fabric as a literal 'support', a way of working. It's a procedure from which the ghost of lyricism won't vanish. Some works on paper take on Agnes Martin and lyricism directly, by whiting out the staves, notes and lyrics of sheet music, still just legible by the sheen of the paint: I CAN'T STOP LOVING YOU. I KNOW. I LOVE YOU SO MUCH IT HURTS. Neither an ironic nor a sentimental gesture but a push-pull of avowal and disavowal, having and not-having, which changes according to the light.

These are themes common enough to contemporary art, but here the effect is of openness achieved through a discipline not specially loved or cloven to for its own sake, of outcomes achieved through it that are not foreseen or foreseeable. Frustration is not frozen into place or proclaimed as a virtue. But the works will change their meaning according to how the sense of series – and the possibilities for both openness and dogmatism within a series – develops.

Louise Hopkins's procedure is bound by what looks like an extreme specialisation of labour, a willed curtailing of freedom, possibly by a love of negation. But it has within it the ability to ring suddenly true of what freedom can be like (within a difficult love, perhaps, or within what used to be called a vocation, a notion preserved in the curious tasks artists invent for themselves). The eye returns to these works, looking for a way through, confident that one will be found though hesitating to proclaim what it is. Just when things look stifling and mildewed it becomes possible to breathe. It is the doctrinaire exponents of freedom in art that are very often acting out a trapped circuit of neuroses, not works such as these, which are prepared to admit and question the quality of their attachment and dependence on what supports them. ■

The exhibition is now at **Tramway**, Glasgow until December 22.

Ian Hunt is a writer and editor.