



COLOUR

Boundary

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David Sweet

**Gallery North Northumbria University**

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## Foreword

This is how it happens. At the back of the eye is the retina. Towards the central area called the Macula are 6-7million *cone* receptors feeding into the central optic nerve. These are what determine our sensibility to colour. The 120 million *rod* receptors nearby meanwhile make visual the material world in our vista. That's it, millions of tiny little receivers sending signals to be decoded in our brain influencing how we see and feel about the space before us.

On the 19th January 2009 Gallery North was launched with the opening exhibition 'Building with Colour'. It is fitting that 5 years on the exhibition 'COLOUR/Boundary' should energise this same place and continue a dialogue centred on painting and contemporary attitudes to colour and materiality.

In 2012 CSN – Colour Studio Northumbria was established as a dedicated space for research, practice and experimentation. The studio's inauguration coincided with 'Ivory Lamp Mars Vine Bone', an exhibition of paintings by Lisa Milroy and a symposium dedicated to the colour black. These events were also the start of a long term international research partnership with the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL and the University of the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki. The drivers of the Northumbria Colour and Materials project have been the painters Professor Helen Baker, the original Director of Gallery North, and Sue Spark, Head of Painting. Both are passionate about exploring complex orchestrations of colour in their work.

Nearby in the Art Conservation department at Burt Hall, students and researchers forensically unpick the layers of the painted past to reveal and repair original surfaces as originally experienced and intended by the artist. With the application of the mass spectrometer the science of colour can be analysed and interrogated. Colour reduced as it has never been seen before down to its molecular atomic structure.

The Department of Arts is pleased to host the COLOUR/Boundary exhibition in Gallery North and in particular would like to thank David Sweet for all his hard work and vision in realising this project.

Keith McIntyre  
Head of Department of Arts  
Northumbria University  
December 2013

## Painting and the Colour World / David Sweet

The 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* is regarded as of major importance in the development of cinema sound. It featured an effect that has become familiar to the modern moviegoer. The innovation, called 'split surround sound', caused the audience to hear noises apparently emanating from different points within, and even outside, the confines of the screen. The 'sound designer', Walter Murch and his team won an academy award for their efforts and established a new industry standard for the audible component of film that remains part of the structure of contemporary cinematic experience.

On the many occasions when we are made aware of the effect, it seems that what we see and what we hear in the cinema are not fused into a single, naturalistic whole. Under these conditions, our experience consists of an overlay of sight and sound perceived as two separate, almost independent fields or worlds. There is, of course, a precedent for this in the atavistic experience of 'silent' films, where the viewer would follow the movement of the visual narrative while listening to music which would have kept pace with the action and added an expressive dimension to the emotional rise and fall of the depicted events.

Though separable, the sight world and the sound world interact but, unlike our eyes and ears in everyday situations, they do not necessarily open onto the same reality: an explosion might be accompanied by a burst of orchestral music, or a landscape by a narrator's voice. In the cinema we have no problem with this twinned sensory input. We understand how to simultaneously engage with both worlds and derive a compound pleasure from their joint contribution to the experience of film as a fully mature medium.

It's true, of course, that the overlapping worlds that constitute modern cinema are accessed through two of the five senses. Film, 'popular' film at least, with its characteristically audio-visual address to the audience may therefore seem to be significantly dissimilar to the experience in front of the silent medium of painting, where the viewer has to rely on a single sense, on eyesight alone. But I want to use it as a starting point for a discussion of colour. This is because I want to argue that in painting in which colour features strongly, the colour creates a world, like the film sound world. The painting creates a separable world. The experience I'm trying to describe is one where, as with cinema, these worlds co-exist but do not seamlessly integrate. They do not necessarily open onto the same reality.

This integration does happen of course in the many pictures, in what might be called the realist tradition, built around the 'local colour' of observed objects. But elsewhere, in Renaissance figure paintings for instance, the composition was often initially established in terms of light and shade, in grisaille, then tint, or transparent colour was added on top. The light and shade had to be consistent and 'correct', but the painter had greater licence in deciding what colours to put where. The tonal and chromatic worlds are distinct, as sound and vision in cinema, though both are accessible to the same sense. What's seen is divided and re-combined to produce our experience of Renaissance art.

In some examples the interests of colour are strong enough to determine much of a painting's character. The choice of myth as a subject in the 16th and 17th century for example permitted painters to produce, rather than reproduce, an antique world filled with a particular luminosity that another subject may not have suggested. It also lent

itself to busy, eventful scenes, involving lots of figures, frozen in highly entertaining poses, as in Nicolas Poussin's, *Adoration of the Golden Calf*, from a Biblical story but treated as a pagan Bacchanal. Poussin is clearly influenced by earlier Venetian painters like Titian, but he has a strong sense of order even when putting together a group of drunken revellers. Looking at the *Adoration*, and many of his other multi-figure compositions, one is very aware of what might be called the *terrain*, the rhythmic mass created by the entangled limbs and bodies of the participants. But equally visible in the painting is the chromatic system Poussin imposes on the scene, the sequence of distinctly coloured garments and flesh tones throughout the assembly, yellow, red, blue, white, picking out the individual and separating them from their neighbours. In his deployment of colour boundaries Poussin is like a geographer constructing a map.

Translating Poussin into geographical terms, one could say that there is something like a territory or terrain, a continuous landmass whose outline can be charted. This is what we would see from space. In any map, the outline of the terrain will persist, but what it contains varies depending on the data that is of interest to the cartographer. Physical maps might display annual rainfall or average temperature or elevation. Political maps show national frontiers or regional boundaries. Both types tend to feature colour. Those recording physical properties rely on tonal differences within a small number of hues while political boundaries are frequently shown by noticeable contrasts between assigned colours. This latter type seems to be comparable to Poussin.

I want to suggest that by constructing a map one is also producing a world, the world of temperature, of rainfall, of Europe, and so on, by using colour. It relates to the outline of the terrain, but it stands apart as a separable field. It's like a third

dimension, not *the* third dimension, but one that nevertheless contributes a sense of solidity and conviction to experience, like cinema sound.

In the modern period, as one would expect, things become more unstable as painters were able to modify what I've been calling the terrain in order to sustain more intense chromatic sensations. The Impressionists heightened the tingle and fizz of non-earth pigments by applying them to white primed canvasses in short, stabbed brush marks. Instead of orientating their colour world to the lascivious goings-on of antiquity, they painted the French landscape under the glare of sunlight, when colour is at its brightest, choosing subjects associated with leisure and enjoyment. Fauvism started with a similar terrain to Impressionism but produced a different colour world by recalibrating the chromatic system, separating it from observed nature and making it more self-referential, thereby emphasising the optical relationships between hues identified as primary, secondary or complementary. But they also, notably in the person of Henri Matisse, developed the joined-up use of colour to cover a greater area, instead of the intermittent Impressionist points and stabs, so it could spread and flow through the drawing. With this development the terrain becomes more schematic, with flatter planes that can take a greater loading of colour.

As might be clear from what I have been saying about the cinema sound analogy, in Poussin, Impressionism and Fauvism, the terrain is also an active world. It might be simplified, as in Matisse, but we still recognise the walls, tables, windows, etc. which belong to the system of ordinary experience. However in this exhibition, many of the paintings might be described as 'abstract', so less defined by reference to 'our' world. The development of abstraction raises the possibility, often mentioned, that painting

could eliminate the terrain and deal only in the values of the colour world, bringing it nearer to the condition of music with its notes, scales and chords. There are many examples of colour field painting built on this concept and, as every student painter finds out, it's certainly possible to fill a canvas with overlapping irregular patches of different colours to create a sense of space out of chromatic tensions and interactions. The same colour, brushed all over the canvas to leave a 'hand made' finish will, through unavoidable imperfections, offer similar opportunities for the eye to read spatial signals.

But I began with the medium of cinema with its interrelated but separable, active worlds of moving image and split surround sound as a model experience. If we compare watching a film to listening to a radio drama, it's clear that a purely audio medium can produce an entirely adequate platform for the kinds of stories we follow in the cinema. With nothing to see, we are able to summon up mental images of characters, actions and situations that occupy an imagined space in which we become immersed, just by listening. The ear gives access to that space in a way that the eye gives us access to the spatial invitation of the colour field painting described above. But it gives us access to only one world.

There are real pleasures in experiencing a single almost infinite world composed entirely of sound, and the fact that music is addressed overwhelmingly to a single sense does not seem to limit its appeal, power or cultural achievement. It may seem odd therefore to suggest that pictorial art should not aspire to the condition of music. The musical simile can seem a good way of explaining the operations of abstract painting, especially when colour is emphasised. However, I'm arguing that painting

has traditionally offered the eye something like the audio-visual experience of the cinema rather than seeking to immerse the viewer in a single world. The world of the terrain and the colour world of the map are both active in the experience of painting; and by *terrain* I do not mean *pattern*.

Colour and decoration have always been able to form a comfortable alliance of mutual dependency. A two-dimensional structure can be designed and filled with any combination of hues whose chromatic relationships may be striking, discordant or harmonious. The pattern into which the colour fits will have its own visual characteristics. It may be florid or reserved, busy or minimalist, or anywhere in between. It can also be figurative or abstract, and as pattern is most often applied to a surface, the similarities with painting are inevitable. And painting hasn't tried to avoid the comparison. It has employed stripes and grids, which are devices it shares with the visual language of pattern, and simplified objects into flat shapes before formally re-organising them to suit its own compositional purposes, which is a practice appropriated from the activities of the designer.

The distinction between pattern and painting is not glaringly obvious. I would say that it rests on the fact that the relationships between elements within a painting are 'pictorial' rather than 'decorative'. This comparison often leads to a debate about the relative cultural value of the 'decorative arts', however, it might be more interesting to consider how the idea of 'pictorial relationships' can be interpreted in the context of the present discussion.

When I talk about the separable fields of vision and sound in cinema, or the territorial

outline and codified colour in topography, I suggest they give rise to a certain solidity or density of experience, yet they do not necessarily open onto the same reality. In both cases two worlds are in play. Translated into pictorial art these are the worlds of painting and the colour world. Painters, working on a blank plane, have to *produce* a world. They do not have to reproduce one, as mirrors and cameras are compelled to by their physics. The world produced by the first painters that we know of was a world of animals, a population of bison, antelope, (but not reindeer) scratched into the cave wall. That was their terrain. Matisse's equivalent world comprises flattened rooms and tipped up tablecloths to which he super-adds a second world of full and active colour.

The paintings in this exhibition display a similar structure. Each painter has created an invented terrain, of geometry, both loose and tight, of complex interlocking shapes, of a woven space of gestural movement and stasis. On this world they have mapped another in which colour relationships become visible within chosen boundaries: The division of the monochrome, the contrasting material spectrum of earths and artificial pigments, the heraldic palette and the optical tingle of the worked surface, the push and pull of background and foreground, the border between the tonal and the chromatic.

The coexistence of two worlds produced in these paintings, as with the two worlds of vision and sound in the cinema, gives them a particular character. We do not experience them as we do patterns or music or radio or reproductions of the 'real' world. After all that, it might be an anti-climax to say to the viewer that they just have to be looked at, which seems too easy. But as well as being looked at, they have to be seen, and moreover, seen as paintings, which is of course, more difficult.





## **Clyde Hopkins**

### **About the Orinoco 2013**

Goethe, in 1840, wrote about painters' 'dread of the motley'. He defined motley as placing colours 'next each other in their full force', 'falsely arranged in relation to light and shade'. Shade and shadow traditionally provided the initial pictorial armature, with forms gradually emerging from darkness into visibility. But in this painting there is no shade, only a pitiless kind of light. Yet each colour is right in itself, associated with pigment with its own material characteristics and name, like Rose Madder or Naples Yellow. The impression of strong light comes from the intense legibility of the painting's elements, which have something of the quality of symbols. Unlike forms, which can be eclipsed or half lost in shadow, the full anatomy of a symbol has to be explicitly seen for it to be effective. The elements in Joan Miro's later, abstract paintings have this legibility, developed from his treatment of objects like utensils or coffee pots, in earlier work, where every rivet, prong, handle and spout was unflinchingly itemised.

The loops, spirals and discs pass through the chromatic geography of the painting, sometimes confined by a complex system of border fringes and divided spaces, each bearing a specific hue which distinguishes it from its neighbour. The colour itself seems precious, as if made from a rare earth or scarce mineral, applied carefully so as not to waste a drop. But in many areas of the canvas, the blue and purple section particularly, the sensation of pure colour is supplanted by the optical buzz of tiny points of pigment that settle on the surface in an uncannily even matrix, as if each corresponded to a single cell on the retina. This treatment melts the areas into a mirage or memory, like colours in a dream, producing passages of visual stimulation off set by the variegated column of solid pigment on the left, a sequence of blue, yellow, red and green, interspersed with neutrals, to which the eye keeps returning almost for reassurance.







### **Clyde Hopkins**

Clyde Hopkins was born in East Sussex and studied Fine Art at the University of Reading in the 1960s. He currently works in Deptford at APT studios, and in St Leonards on Sea. Principally a painter, he also makes screenprints, which are editioned by Advanced Graphics London. He has exhibited work for over forty years, from a schoolboy show in the Gas Showrooms Barrow in Furness to recent shows in London and Sussex.

Solo exhibitions include the Serpentine Gallery London (1978 and 1986), the Acme Gallery London (1979), the Ikon Birmingham and Rochdale Art Gallery (both 1985), Salisbury Art Centre (1988), Modern Times at the Castlefield Gallery Manchester (1989), Kunstverein Kirchzarten Germany (Kunst Europa 1991), Reg Vardy Arts Foundation Sunderland (1994), Atkinson Gallery Millfield School (1996), *Vodka, a Stiff Breeze and Paranoia* at the London Institute Gallery (1998), the Francis Graham Dixon Gallery London (1989, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1997) and Galeria Joan Prats New York (1990 and 1994). In 2012 he had two one-man shows – *brown madder* at Chelsea Futurespace, London, and *Indian Yellow* at the Merston Gallery, Chichester. He has exhibited twice at the 116 gallery in Tenterden, Kent - in 2010 and 2013.

Group exhibitions at public venues throughout the UK and Europe include the Hayward, the Whitechapel, the Axiom, the Bede, MOMA Oxford, the Royal Academy, John Holden Manchester, Stephen Lawrence Greenwich, Hastings Museum and Art galleries. Many private galleries have also exhibited his work. *Colour Boundary* is the second group exhibition curated by David Sweet showcasing his work, the first being *Delight* in 1996.

He was awarded the Mark Rothko Memorial Fellowship (USA) in 1980-81 and in 1999 the Lorne Award. His work is in public and private collections in the UK and North America.

He has taught in many art colleges and universities and in 1982 was appointed Head of Painting at Winchester School of Art. He moved to Chelsea College of Art in 1990 and was made an Emeritus Professor after leaving in 2006.

[www.aplstudios.org/artists/CH](http://www.aplstudios.org/artists/CH)

### **Mali Morris**

Mali Morris was born in North Wales and studied Fine Art at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (BA) and the University of Reading (MFA).

Her first major solo exhibitions were at the Serpentine Summer Show 3, London, 1977, and the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1979. She has shown extensively since then in over thirty solo shows, and has taken part in many group exhibitions: John Moores at the Walker in Liverpool, and in London at the Whitechapel Gallery, Serpentine Gallery, Hayward Gallery, and the Barbican, as well as a number overseas.

She has held solo shows in London, Tokyo and New York. Angel Row Gallery Nottingham organized a touring show in 2002-3. Poussin Gallery, London, showed *Mali Morris: Work From Four Decades* in 2005 and *Mali Morris: New Paintings* in 2008. *Mali Morris: Paintings on Canvas and Paper* was in the Sir Hugh Casson Room for Friends, Royal Academy, London, 2010, at The Cut, Halesworth, 2011, and at Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, 2012. *Back to Front* was at the Eagle Gallery London in 2012.

Her work is in private and public collections worldwide, including the Arts Council England, British Council, Contemporary Arts Society, Government Art Collection, Royal Collection, and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. She was Chair of the selection panel for Jerwood Contemporary Painters in 2009, and a Selector/Mentor for Jerwood Painting Fellowships, 2012-13. In 2014 she will be a selector for John Moores Painting Prize China, in Shanghai.

Mali has taught and examined at many Departments of Fine Art, including the Royal College of Art, Slade School of Art, University of Reading, Newcastle University, and Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, London, where she was Senior Lecturer in Painting from 1991-2005.

In March 2010 she was elected as a Member of the Royal Academy of Arts, and shows annually at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions.

[www.malimorris.co.uk](http://www.malimorris.co.uk)

## List of Works and photo credits

### Caroline de Lannoy

- 06 Re-echo (Violet) 2013  
oil on board, 20 x 20 cm  
Photo: Caroline de Lannoy
- 14 Angular Notation 2012  
oil on canvas, 120 X 120 cm  
Photo: Caroline de Lannoy
- 15 Re-echo (Red) 2013  
oil on board, 20 x 20 cm  
Photo: Caroline de Lannoy
- 16 Re-echo (Green) 2013  
oil on board, 20 x 20 cm  
Photo: Caroline de Lannoy

### Sharon Hall

- 06 Untitled (Orange Fan) 2009  
oil on linen, 80 x 100cm  
Photo: Sharon Hall
- 17 Not Titled (White Diagonals with Linen) 2013  
oil on linen, 50 x 60 cm  
Photo: Alan Sams
- 18 Not Titled (Yellow Diagonals) 2011  
oil on linen, 80 x 100 cm  
Photo: Sharon Hall
- 19 Tondo with Linen 2011  
oil on linen, 60 cm  
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### Clyde Hopkins

- 09 About the Orinoco, 2013  
oil on linen, 105 x 90 cm  
Photo: Colin Mills
- 20 Bucolic Hippie Painting #3 (Spello) 2008  
oil on linen, 70 x 55 cm  
Photo: Colin Mills
- 21 Gastropodus, 2012  
oil on linen, 70 x 55 cm  
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- 22 Albion's Bounty (Bindweed) 2012-13  
oil on linen, 70 x 55 cm  
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### Mali Morris

- 10 Swingback, 2012-13  
acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 cm  
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- 23 Rain in Durango, 2013  
acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 cm  
Photo: Colin Mills
- 24 Second Act, 2007  
acrylic on canvas, 18 x 13 cm  
Photo: Colin Mills
- 25 Wilbury, 2012  
acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 cm  
Photo: Colin Mill

### David Sweet

- 13 Moulin Rouge. 2013  
acrylic on canvas, 124 x 117 cm  
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- 26 R.K.O. I. 2013  
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88 x 88 cm (124 cm x 124 cm)  
Photo: Stephen Meredith
- 27 Any-Angled Light II, 2011  
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Photo: Stephen Meredith
- 28 Radial, 2012  
acrylic on canvas 91 x 76 cm  
Photo: Stephen Meredith

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