



Natalie Dower
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Natalie Dower : *Reflections*

RELATIONSHIPS are at the centre of Natalie Dower's work. They are often coded through rules based on proportion, composed of mathematical puzzles, or phenomenological in terms of a plurality of place. Dower's approach feels supermodern and constructive. Her ingenuity and innovation are reflected through the use of mathematical systems, such as the 'Fibonacci Sequence' or the 'Dudeney Dissection', which activate the works' interwoven surface facture. The awareness of a more terrestrial space synchronises with a systematic field of vision, and allows the parts to function reciprocally.

Dower's line of enquiry concerning specificity of colour and harmonious proportion needs to feel precise and highly calculated. This need calls to mind her friend and mentor Malcolm Hughes. Hughes taught in the Life Room with Dower, but it is work like his *Four Unit Painting K1–K4* that influences Dower's handling of space. It seems critical and one of the constant factors that contributes to her own constructive idiom.

When I spoke to Dower in her studio recently, a conversation about colour and its processes of interaction, focused on her sense of internal logic. It is a logic informed by a wide variety of influences: the chemist and poet Primo Levi, for example, the composer Stravinsky, or the influential astronomer, Timothy Ferris. Dower's work, with its cross-fertilisation of ideas, rules and deterministic complexity, is evidence of the possibilities of which Hughes spoke – of an art derived from a sense of order, with 'endless variety'. Dower may initiate a number of works with one linking system as a starting point, but specific choices about colour, scale, or material result in highly individual images and allow the paintings and reliefs to punctuate space in physical and dynamic ways.

Dower's ability to work at varying speeds on a number of different systems, and to order those systems (and the way in which things happen) according to the speed at which she is working, opens up the possibility for her to call upon more non-deterministic operations. This introduces a demographic in the paintings and constructions, which connects to past experience through the analytically built surface. The rigour of the system, which always employs mathematical diversion, holds us in an equilibrium of the continuously unexpected.

In this exhibition the sense of the unexpected is heightened by showing works from different time periods, in new relationships. This brings about a physiological and chromatic resonance that mirrors a sense of futurity, both urban and architectural. Dower is able to question her predetermined goals by allowing nature to be seen as an impetus. This manipulation and spatial organisation allows unpredictable constraints to evolve in a state of flux.

Travelling Star 1996, when partnered with *Dudenev Circle* 1989 for example read through a codified experience. We understand that code through the works' temporal mobility. The pairing triggers a multiple sense of duration, echoing the objects' past, present, and future. Links are created to other images such as the black and white painting *Dudenev Encoded* 1987, where Dower dissects an equilateral triangle into four irregular shapes that can be reassembled as a square. In *Dudenev Circle* Dower has reversed the colour system, by creating a white circular sphere where the cut out rectangles cast shadows onto the wall. *Travelling Star* has a liquidity within the ground colour, which takes some time to notice. The intermittent flashes of green, pink and blue spirals create a visual flaring, oscillating between a retinal impression and a black hole in deep space.

Spin Off 2015 is an exquisitely conceived picture, its dark ground a key to the painting's success. It feels like a hybrid in that it seems to be a combination of two systems. In conversation with Dower, I discover that its 'spiral track' works clockwise from the top right corner, and travels inward in moves of twenty-eight. The interior rectangle is formed with the use of spiral track points. The interior square is formed from peripheral points.

"I have counterpointed systems, but I didn't with *Spin Off*. The unusual thing here is that it is a section of a larger painting, (hence the title). It happens sometimes – a work being 'found' during the course of materialising a plan. Only when I am scaling up something 'found' that I have already got to grips with, can the work be guaranteed not to have changed from exactly what I was expecting. The developments could affect areas but it is usually the colours that need changing because they are not right in terms of the 'gestalt!'" – NATALIE DOWER

In this intimate painting, Dower has an angled square opening made by four small turquoise squares. The space feels like a mapped location, at the edge of an environment. It echoes modern life, and its transient contemporary existence. *Three Triangle Series: Three Colours* 2015 also has a tension achieved through the scale and proportionally related composition, with adjacent forms held in perfect equilibrium. During Dower's time in Morocco, she noticed the fluctuation of light that produced a feeling that

things far away were as sharply defined as things nearby, and this feels key to the juxtapositions in the painting.

To some, the idea of working within systems presents a sense of limitation, but for Dower it is a kind of liberation. This emerges discussing the series of reliefs *Spiral Track no.s 1, 2, 3* 1984 in which the system is the dissection of a square into four different shapes that even hinged together, can be assembled as an equilateral triangle.

"I remember where I was, and the excitement of the exact moment when I realised the enormous range of possibilities that it offered. For the next decade every drawing, relief, sculpture and painting, ranging in scale from centimetres to metres, was generated from that. What I had seen was that I could use the squares, with their divisions, to compose a grid, which would offer a huge range of configurations, either complex or simple, from which I could choose what I wanted, and which would serve for all of the above purposes."

Seen together the rhythmic combination of *Jungle Sphere* 1988 (a circular relief on three levels) and *Square Root Two Spirals, Nine Moves* 2015 could reflect the endless syncopation of the city. The duality of these two works opens up space and time, transporting you in one moment to a parallel encounter of the personal, and a global mechanisation. The feeling of the artificial and manufactured in *Jungle Sphere* is offset by the symbolized sense of anthropological place in *Square Root Two Spirals, Nine Moves*. There seems a manipulation of nature, which has been completed by an architectural interface.

Within the Tracks 2015 uses a *Square Root Two Spirals* system, in which the rectangles are designed to be halved and halved endlessly, still with the same proportions. Dower employs a sulfurous, scumbled surface in the triangles that rotate and spiral in the largest rectangle. The painting has a hypnotic atmosphere and the repeatedly halved rectangles or triangles push against its borders in an attempt to escape the frame.

Natalie Dower has created poetic precision in new alignments and combinations. The paintings and constructions have infinite intensities of geometric and existential space. Each work is internally coherent, its identity anchored in an industrial sense of order and the systematic idea. Her process of exploration through structure and colour is a reflection of her intention to create, as Dower says, a "stimulus to the imagination engendered by discovery."

LAURENCE NOGA 2015







List of Works

Cover

Two Spirals with Rectangle 2015
oil on canvas, 35 × 50 cm

2

Travelling Star 1996
oil on panel, 21.2 × 21.2 cm

Dudeney Circle 1989
avonite, 31 × 31 × 4.5 cm

6

Three Triangle Series, One Sixth Offset: Four Colours 2014
oil on panel, 30 × 35 cm

Three Colour Spiral Track no. 2 1984
oil on wood, 35.5 × 38 × 2.5 cm

7

Spin Off 2015
oil on board, 13.25 × 18.9 cm

Three Triangle Series: Three Colours 2015
oil on canvas, 43.5 × 43.5 cm

8

Spiral Track no.s 2, 3, 1 1984
oil on wood, 27 × 30.5 × 5 cm

9

Jungle Sphere 1988
oil on wood, 46 × 46 × 3.8 cm

Square Root Two Spirals, Nine Moves 2015
oil on canvas, 60 × 85 cm

10

Within the Tracks 2015
oil on canvas, 24 × 30 cm

NATALIE DOWER

- 1931 Born in London
1948–49 St Martins School of Art, London
1949–52 Camberwell School of Art and Crafts, London
1952–54 Slade School of Fine Art, London
1954–66 Taught at St Albans School of Art; Bath Academy of Art, Corsham; Byam Shaw School of Art; Camberwell School of Art and Crafts; Chelsea School of Art, London
1966 Moved to Morocco; taught at The American School of Tangier
1973– Works in Portugal and London

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1976 Concourse Gallery, Polytechnic of London
1981 Foyer Gallery, Riverside Studios, London
1983 Air Gallery, London
1986 Gummesons Konstgalleri, Stockholm, Sweden
1987 *Transformations* Curwen Gallery, London
1990 *Transformations 2* Curwen Gallery, London
1992 *The Secret Life of the Grid* Curwen Gallery, London
1995 *Out of the Arc* Curwen Gallery, London
1996 *Mathematics and Visual Art* Rewley House, University of Oxford
1997 *Within Measure* Francis Graham Dixon Gallery, London
2007 *The Music of Systems* Jonathan Clark Fine Art, London
2012 *Line of Enquiry* Eagle Gallery, London
2015 *Reflections* Eagle Gallery, London

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986 *Colour and Systems* Arts Council Touring Exhibition
Systemic Constructive Drawings Wentworth Gallery, University of York
1992–93 *Countervail* Mappin Gallery, Sheffield; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, Coventry; King's Manor Gallery, York
2000 *Mondiale Echo's* Mondriaanhuis, Holland
Established, Undervalued and Young Artists Crane Kalman Gallery, London
2014 *Chance and Order* Eagle Gallery, London
2015 *From Centre* Slate Projects & Saturation Point, London

Dower's work is held in collections including Arts Council England; Arthur Andersen & Co; Government Art Collection; Mondriaanhuis, Holland; and Warwick University.

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An abstract geometric artwork featuring large, overlapping triangular and polygonal shapes in yellow, white, black, and blue. The composition is dynamic, with sharp angles and a sense of movement. The colors are solid and vibrant, creating a high-contrast visual effect.

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