

18 Variations

Richard Bell

18 Variations

Painting | Relief | Drawing

2020-2024

Richard Bell

22 February - 13 April 2024

NEWLYN
ART GALLERY
& THE
EXCHANGE

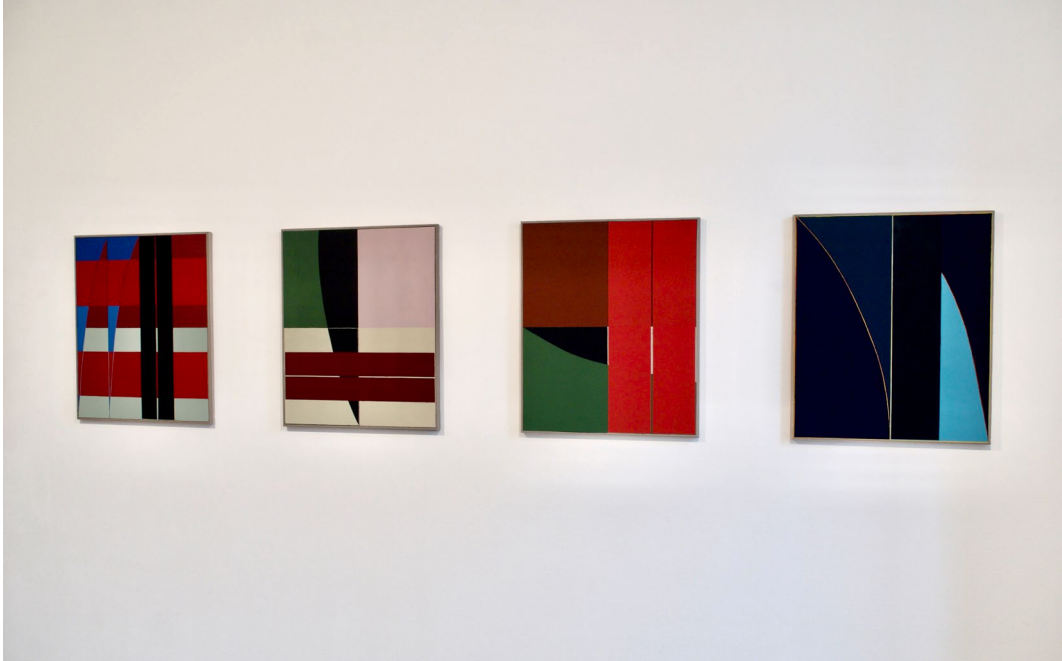


plate 1

Notes and Reflections

My practice has long been concerned with the elasticity of form and colour in abstract painting and the possibility of painting as a form of relief-making. Since 2022, the layering of colour planes on a shallow painted surface (usually on a linen canvas support) is developed further by the painting of physical levels and depth. I have termed this process 'relief painting' - often involving the collage of shaped painted card and linen material on wood support.

During this period, I also began making drawings with successive layers of graphite densities in vertical and horizontal divisions of the surface area. This is an ongoing endeavour, but I have found them useful not just for themselves, but as models and even companions to the paintings.

This kind of inter-relational existence of two discrete series of work is something that has evolved as significant to my thinking, and integral to my practice - and so feeds directly into the curatorial decisions for hanging this exhibition at Newlyn.

Consequently, I am presenting 'Equivalences (curve)' a grouping of four paintings made in 2021/2022, together with the related series of nine relief paintings (p 1 & p 2 respectively) and the single ensemble of the nine graphite drawings (p 4).



plate 2

'Equivalences (curve)' as a series, combines the activity of underpainting and overpainted surfaces - allowing the concealed sub-layers of colour spaces and edges to show through as a trace of the painting's construction.

There is a 'curve' and a black colour painted element in each one of the four levels across the series - which provides a constant rhythm and reference point. The curved element evokes the concept of elasticity, transformation, and non-orthogonal space. For the last colour-level in each painting, surface qualities (oil and wax on linen) are applied with a palette knife to emphasise the increasing depth and materiality of the painting system. The combination of a planned approach to colour organisation, improvisation, and colour choice (intuition) unfolds during the painterly process.

Other works in the exhibition are hung with a mind to their specific foci and overlapping rationales: a new pairing of paintings titled (Colour Figure V (iii) & (iv) made this year (p 3), are generated from the monochrome spatial-figures found in two of the relief-paintings.

A group of four works titled (2-part monochrome) also from 2024, pair together two graphite variations on paper with a corresponding monochrome painting on linen - both made with layers of graphite and painted surfaces (p 17).



plate 3

Concepts of palimpsest, edge, and boundary are being tested across this whole body of painting and drawing research, which by 2022 was well underway - and the making of it coincided with the two-person exhibition 'Thinking Thresholds' with fellow artist / curator Della Gooden.

In an accompanying text for 'Thinking Thresholds' and when considering my work, I remarked on how this title signified for me a tipping point, where qualitative changes might occur:

I want to create a situation where an unexpected event becomes integral to how the work is perceived, such as the type of meeting point or boundary discovered in the modelling process, how a delicate shadow is created by the varied colour levels, or how the articulated relationships between two or more works in a series can create disquiet as well as coherence.

As a musing on the concepts of that exhibition and our work in it, Della wrote a poetic-text which I think remains useful as a reading of my work and practice now:

Richard Bell, 2024

Thinking Thresholds

*The canvas is still and flat, the paint lies inert.
Then the artist moves - puts them together to make a painting.
That first physical encounter marks an end to things as they were,
and the beginning of something else.*

*An inflected tangle of encounters must follow.
More endings and beginnings that linger, peter out, or give way.
Some are out of control,
all is upside down, catastrophic.*

*Others are effortless, timeless.
Calm, simultaneous, overlapping...
...lapping moments of thinking and doing.
Progress is promising.*

*In all of this can we locate pivotal thought?
In that milli-fraction of time when a modification is known,
but not yet done... what logic?
Was there a trigger? Was it whim?*

*How precocious it is to transition from thought to doing.
Such a considerable moment, unconsidered.*

*Attached to thinking, inside time lost, things get done.
Thresholds are crossed.*

Della Gooden, 2022

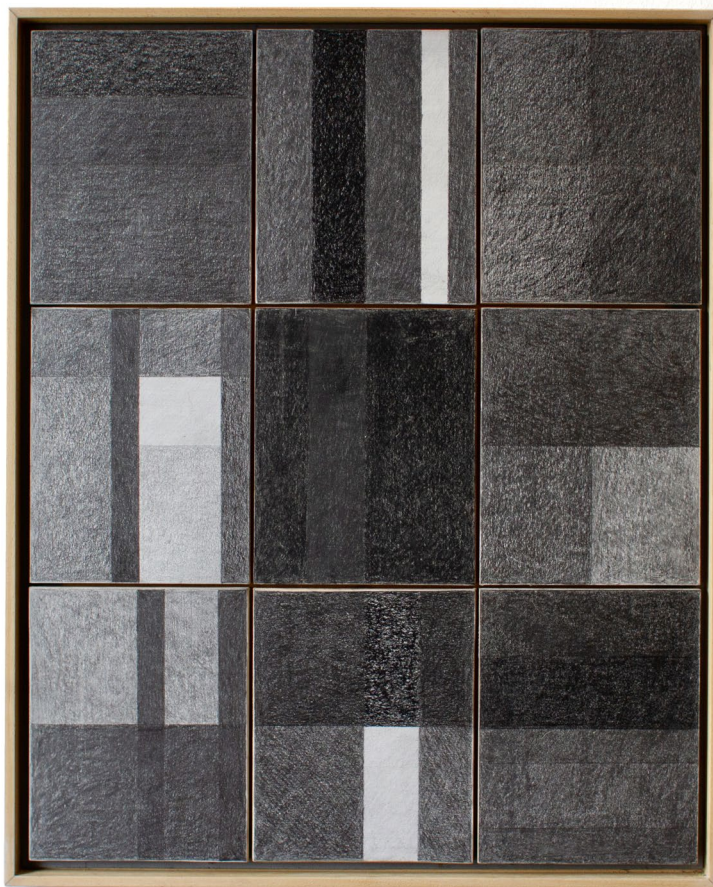


plate 4



plate 5



plate 6

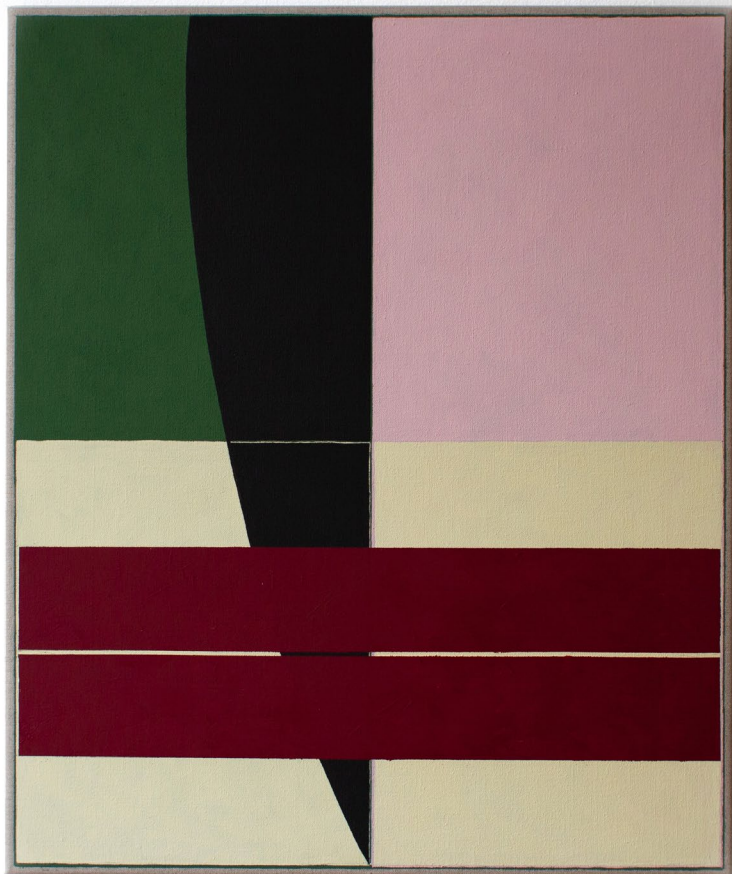


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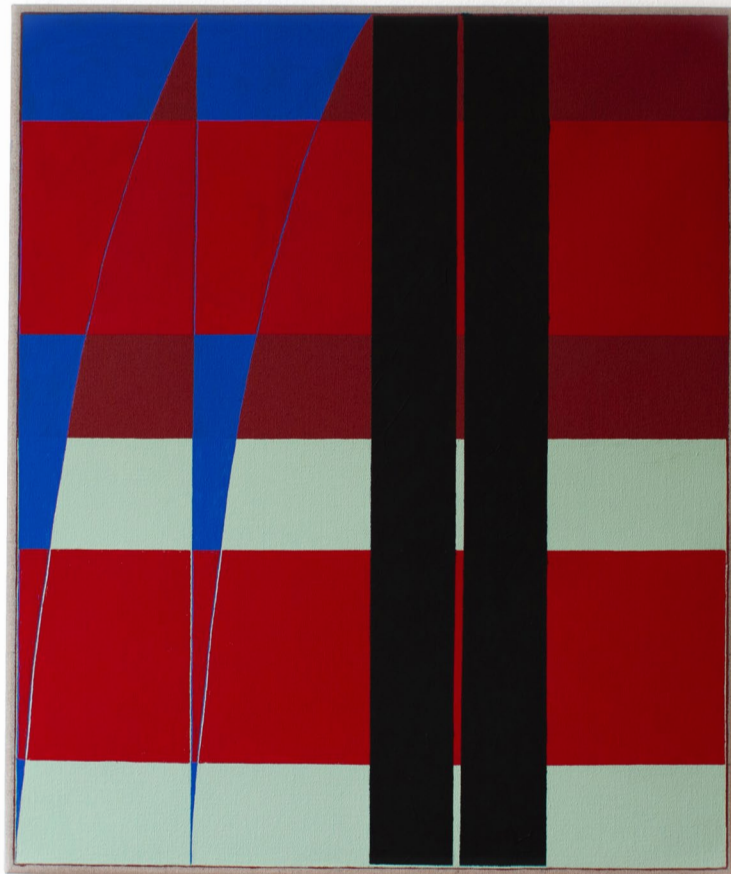


plate 8



plate 9



plate 10



plate 11

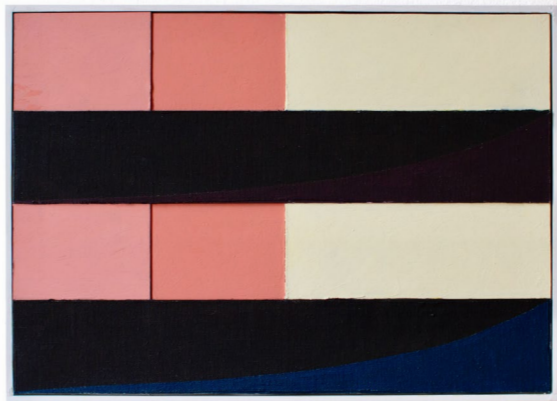


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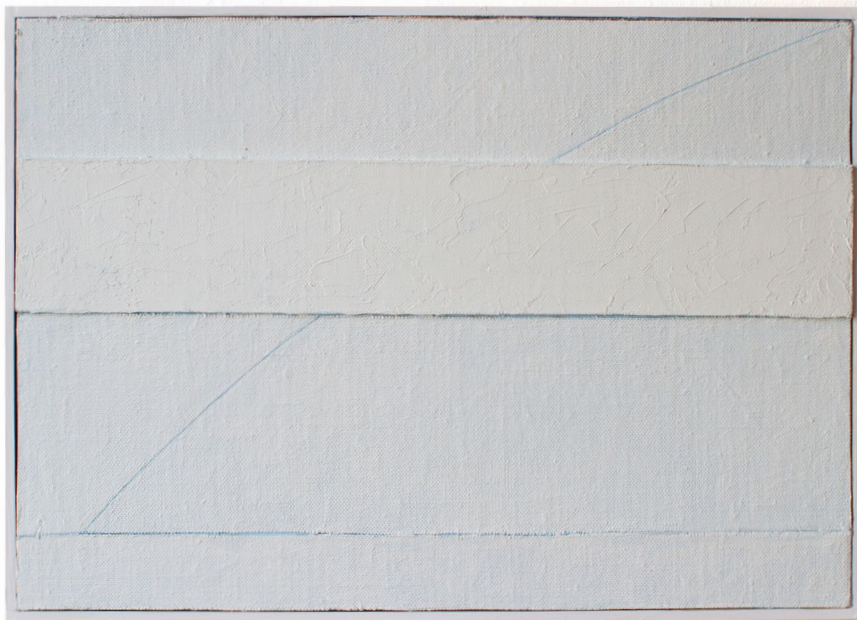


plate 13



plate 14

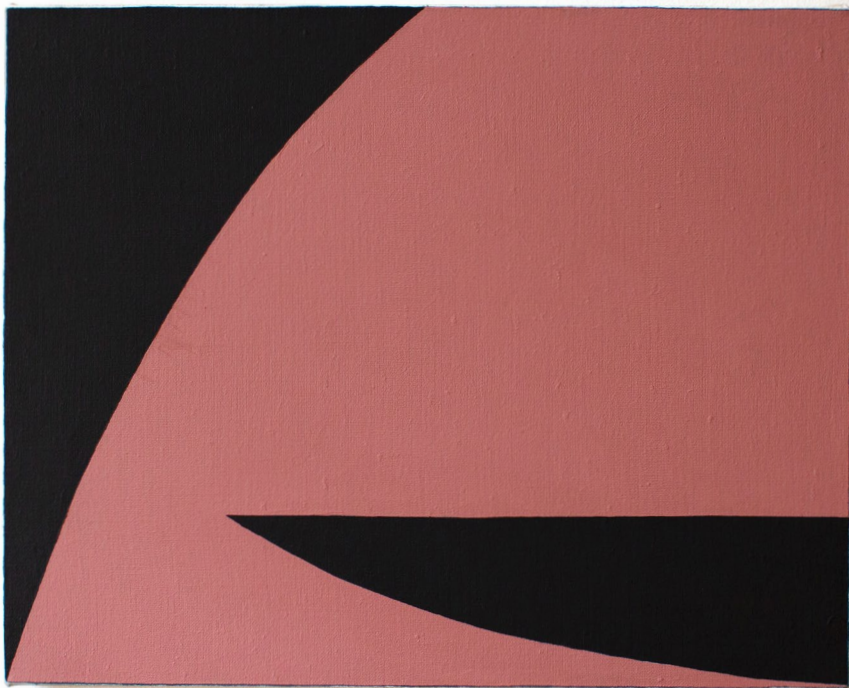


plate 15

plate 16



plate 17

List of Plates
Newlyn Art Gallery

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| p 1 Installation, 2024
Eq P (curve i-iv)
Newlyn Art Gallery | p 7 Eq P (curve) (iii), 2021
Oil and wax on linen
60cm x 50cm | p 13 Relief Painting V(v), 2022-23
Oil on card and linen on ply
42cm x 29.5cm |
| p 2 Installation, 2024
Relief Paintings
Newlyn Art Gallery | p 8 Eq P (curve) (iv), 2021
Oil and wax on linen
60cm x 50cm | p 14 Colour Figure V(iii), 2024
Oil on and wax on linen
51cm x 40.7 |
| p 3 Installation, 2024
Colour Figure Paintings
Newlyn Art Gallery | p 9 Relief Painting H(i) & V(i),
2022-23
Oil on card and linen on ply
42cm x 29.5cm | p 15 Colour Figure V(iv), 2024
Oil on and wax on linen
51cm x 40.7 |
| p 4 Nine Variations, 2022
Graphite on paper on ply
49cm x 61cm | p 10 Relief Painting H(ii) & V(ii),
2022-23
Oil on card and linen on ply
42cm x 29.5cm | p 16 Two-part monochrome
(Red) 2024
Oil on and wax on linen/
graphite on paper
each part 30cm x 30cm |
| p 5 Eq P (curve) (i), 2021
Oil and wax on linen
60cm x 50cm | p 11 Relief Painting H(iii) & V(iii),
2022-23
Oil on card and linen on ply
42cm x 29.5cm | p 17 Two-part monochrome
(Pink) 2024
Oil on and wax on linen/
graphite on paper
each part 30cm x 30cm |
| p 6 Eq P (curve) (ii), 2021
Oil and wax on linen
60cm x 50cm | p 12 Relief Painting H(iv) & V(iv),
2022-23
Oil on card and linen on ply
42cm x 29.5cm | |

Biography

Richard Bell (b.1955 Welwyn, near London) is a British abstract artist. He studied painting (Fine Art) from 1973-1977 at Falmouth School of Art, Portsmouth Polytechnic (Dept. Fine Art), and Eastern Illinois University, USA (Scholarship 1976). He won an Arts Council grant in 1979 to make a series of wood reliefs.

Recent exhibitions include: *'HARDPAPER'* at Phoenix Art Space, Brighton (March-April 2024); *'New Acquisition'* Paintings (made in 2018) shown at the Mondriaanhuis, Armersfoort (Solo: Nov 2023); *'I Chose This'* inclusion of a set of four paintings chosen from the Arts council Collection (GB) held at Newlyn Art Gallery and The Exchange (2023); *'Thinking Thresholds'* with Della Gooden at 'theycometheysitttheygo' Gallery, London (2022); *'Rhythm & Geometry'*, 'constructivist art in Britain since 1951' at The Sainsbury Centre, Norwich and tour to Djangoly Gallery, Nottingham (2021/2023); *'Hard Painting x2'* at Phoenix Art Space, Brighton (2020); *'30x30 Collection'* Mondriaanhuis, Armersfoort, Netherlands (2020); *'Transforming Surfaces'*, Arthouse1, London (2019); *'entr'acte : intermission'*, AbstractProject Galerie, Paris (2017); *'Ground, Rules, Paintings: A Quartet'* La Galerie Lycée Gabriel Fauré, Foix, Paris (2017); *'Le Salon des Réalités Nouvelles'*, Paris (2017); *'Eye and Mind'*, Mercus Barn, Ariège, France (solo, 2016).

Curatorial projects include: *'Transforming Surfaces'*, a group show at Arthouse1 Gallery, London (2019); *'Colour Presentations'* 6 artists - group show touring England and Wales & funded by the Welsh Arts Council (1986); co-organised *'Complexions'* shown at Dean Clough, Halifax, and Galerie L'idée, Holland, supported by British council (1989).

Work can be seen in key public and private collections, including: The South Bank Collection (Arts Council); The Sainsbury Centre (UEA), The Mondriaanhuis Collection, Armersfoort, Netherlands, Kunst Sammlung Stadtische Museen, Jena, Germany, and John Simons' Collection.

Richard Bell lives and works in London.
<https://www.richardbellart.co.uk/>

Acknowledgements

'18 Variations' as an exhibition is the outcome of conversations with Newlyn Art Gallery following the inclusion of my paintings last year in '*I Chose This*'. This was a beautiful exhibition at both The Exchange and Newlyn Art Gallery that gave children from local schools a rare opportunity to explore the Arts Council Collection, and to select work for the gallery.

I am therefore especially grateful to Newlyn Art Gallery for the invitation to present this exhibition. This body of work was initially envisaged whilst staying in Lostwithiel (Cornwall) during the 2020 covid lockdown period.

I would also like to thank the artist and curator Della Gooden, for her insightful work and her collaboration on 'Thinking Thresholds'.

Richard Bell, London, 2024

Credits

Gallery Direction and Curators: James Green, Cat Gibbard, Fran Ford

Catalogue and Photography

Catalogue design and consultation: Emma Pearson and Ben Moncaster

Installation views ©John Pearson

Images of artworks ©Lisa Gilby

John Pearson, Emma Pearson and Ben Moncaster. Thank you for your patience and attention to detail.

Exhibition concept and publication ©2024 Richard Bell

'Thinking Thresholds' poetic text ©2022 Della Gooden

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