

a visual/sound installation with Joel Cathcart 2011

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CLIR JOAN BAIRD, MBE, Chairman of Banbridge District Council

Welcome to the EE. McWilliam Gallery & Studio and the exhibition Barbara Freeman: On The Square. On behalf of Banbridge District Council, I would like to thank Barbara Freeman and Joel Cathcart for all their hard work preparing for this exhibition. Thanks also to David Brett for his support and his insightful essay in the catalogue. The Fenderesky Gallery, Flax Art and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, have all helped to realise this exhibition. Thanks also to Professor Jan Smaczny, Hamilton Harty Professor of Music, Queen's University Belfast, for agreeing to open the show.

We are grateful to the Gallery's Programming Committee: Prof. Philip Napier, Dr Maurna Crozier, Jasper McKinney, Martyn Anglesea, Dr Suzanne Lyle, Anne Stewart, Cllr John Hanna, Cllr Marie Hamilton, Cllr Jim McElroy, Catriona Regan, Thérèse Rafferty and Dr Riann Coulter for their continued support and advice.

The F.E. McWilliam Gallery and Studio and Banbridge District Council, its Councillors and staff, extend a warm welcome to all visitors to this exhibition.

BEYOND THE SQUARE

-Riann Coulter

Barbara Freeman: On the Square is the first solo exhibition by a contemporary sculptor to be held at the EE. McWilliam Gallery & Studio. It is also the first exhibition where sound plays a significant role. Working with the composer Joel Cathcart, Freeman presents an installation of sculpture, drawings and sound created in response to the particular sensory experience of visiting the Gallery and the sculpture garden.

In fact, to call Freeman a 'sculptor' is reductive. As David Brett discusses in his essay in this catalogue, throughout her long and distinguished career, Freeman's practice has incorporated painting, drawing, sculpture, sound and installation. These diverse elements are held in a productive tension by a commitment to what she has described as the desire to 'work through what the world felt like rather than through what it looked like'.

Freeman received a traditional training, but is also self-taught, in that she trained herself to use the digital media that are now central to her work. She studied in London in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but quickly became dissatisfied with the reliance on narrative and description that dominated sculpture departments of the period. Recalling her college years, she has written:

When I left college, in '62, I had had about six years study in life drawing and modelling. I had, from time to time, some good teachers like Anthony Caro and Elizabeth Frink; but what were we doing it for? It seemed to have no existential connection to the life we were actually leading. It was full of a kind of idealist rhetoric which I simply hated. And in giving up that sort of sculpture, the major purpose was

to give up that sort of descriptive representation altogether. What I wanted, I now see, was to work through what the world felt like rather than through what it looked like.²

Freeman was relieved when, later that year, she saw Caro's seminal work *Early One Morning*.⁹ A large construction in bright-red welded steel, *Early One Morning* has no obvious visual signifiers and no single preferred viewpoint. Caro intended the diverse elements to be unified by the intense colour and compared their coherence into a sculptural whole to the relationship of notes within a piece of music.⁴ Caro's interest in the connections between sculpture and space and sculpture and music are also features of Freeman's work.

Another early influence was an exhibition of Eduardo Chillida's in the Galerie Maeght, Paris, in the early 1960s.9 In works including Modulation of Space I, 1963, Chillida created a fluid dialogue between his material and the space it occupied.9 For Freeman, at this important point in her development as an artist, these encounters with abstract, or non-representational, works proved that it was possible to make contemporary sculpture. As she recalls, this vision of sculpture required a new way of thinking about form, drawing, and art in general: 'this meant no more lines around forms; no more shading and hatching. It meant a very different kind of drawing that was going to be based around either diagrams or gestures'."

Freeman's rejection of description and representation has resulted in work that is primarily abstract and driven by sensation rather than narrative or visual stimulus. The distinction between abstraction and non-representational art is blurred. Taken literally, 'abstract' suggests art which begins with an original image that is then refined, or simplified, until the original form is no longer discernable. 'Non-representational' implies an image that does not originate in, or refer to, to a particular thing. Thus Cubism could be seen as abstract, in the original usage of the word, because the composition often originated with a portrait or a still-life; whereas, Kasimir Malevich's famous *Black Square*, 1915, is a truly non-representational painting because it does not refer to an original image.

Although the term 'abstract' is now used generally to refer to all nonrepresentational art, writing in 1989, Declan McGonagle rejected the term in relation to Freeman's art. Instead, he argued her paintings were concrete expressions of sensations encrusted with the sort of detail which, for the artist, locates meaning in time and space, and for the viewer can create equivalent experience. These works are made as a result of experience, not to describe it.⁶⁸

Freeman has questioned the idea that her work is abstract and contested the division of art between abstraction and figuration. She writes,

I feel there is a great kind of flow that goes backwards and forwards, and I would have thought that's a feminine thing – the discomfort with very precise categories.⁹

Although Freeman resists distinct labels, in an essay on her work, Fionna Barber has pointed out that many female artists have found abstraction liberating. While representation tends to determine the production of meaning and often makes it difficult to escape gender stereotypes inherent in society and language, non-representational art potentially offers greater freedom.¹⁰

Abstraction has allowed Freeman to explore the intersections between art forms. The relationship between music and visual art, particularly abstraction, has been long and fruitful. Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian pioneer of the avant-garde

The richest lessons are to be learned from music. With few exceptions and deviations, music has, for several centuries, been the art which employs its resources, not in order to represent natural appearances, but as a means of expressing the inner life.... 11

Freeman dates her interest in contemporary music to a concert by John Cage and David Tudor that she attended in Washington DC in 1967, and cites composers including Xenakis, Boulez and Cage as inspiration. In the last decade, she has worked with a number of composers based in Ireland, including, in this project, Joel Cathcart. Recently, she took inspiration from Bach when she created a series of giclée prints based on the baroque dance notation, which had influenced him.

While music has often inspired Freeman, her engagement in sound is not solely musical. She is interested in compositional processes such as improvisation, as well as the numerical and statistical methods used by composers. She has stated that her desire is not to 'illustrate' sound but rather to transform musical structures in time into visual structures in space. In a sense, her creative process is like musical composition and

through form, colour and texture, she aims to mirror the rhythm, melody and harmony of specific pieces of music.

As David Brett has pointed out 'sounds can only exist in spaces, and sounds – propagating outward from their source – create the space in which they are heard.' Freeman has a particular interest in responding to physical spaces as both an actual volume and as a sonic environment. Describing her initial conception of this exhibition, Freeman wrote:

The architecture and spaces of the F. E. McWilliam gallery define this project, originating both from within and without, the one passing through the other to create new visual/sound objects that are always changing.¹³

The sculpture that forms the centerpiece of the exhibition is created from four engraved Perspex cubes within cubes. This form echoes the central space of the gallery – a square delineated by four central pillars. It reflects light and colour from the skylight above and the window to the garden beyond.

In contrast to the machine-produced cubes, the suite of fifteen drawings in charcoal, conté and chalk are soft-edged and gestural. These qualities display the hand of the artist and introduce an expressive element into the installation as a whole. All based on the idea of the square, some of the drawings evoke diagrams for dance steps, while others are more like architectural plans or the outlines of buildings seen from far above.

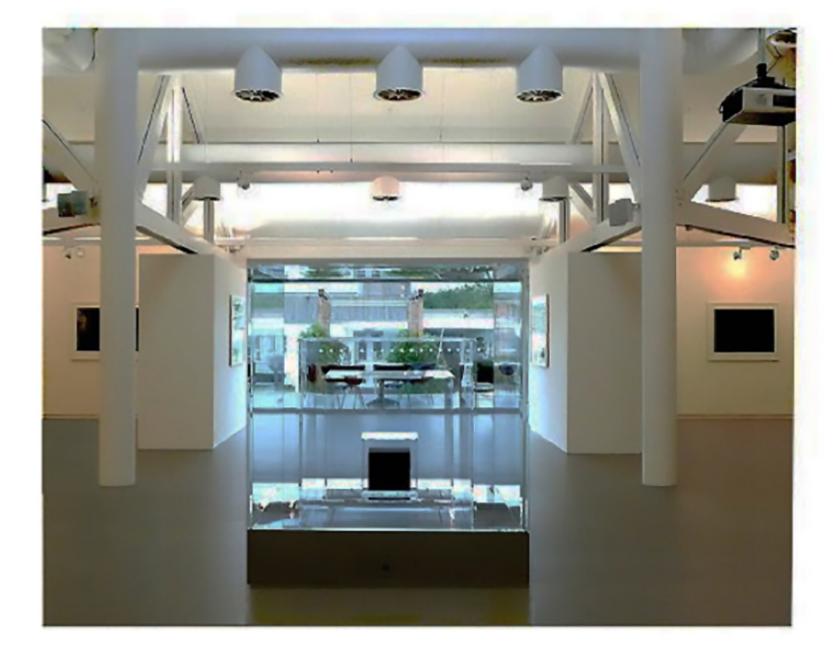
Joel Cathcart's sound installation consists of two parts: a pure instrumental tone which emanates from the central sculpture, and a soundscape, based on recordings from the garden, which can be heard

through speakers throughout the gallery. As Cathcart explains in his text in this catalogue, both sounds are intended to operate on the threshold of aural perception. The potential overlap between the recordings and the background noise from the gallery and environs challenges the conventional dichotomy between indoor and outdoor spaces.

Ultimately, On the Square is an installation of diverse elements that unite to create a dynamic interaction of light and sound in space. That these elements are particular to this place, and that Freeman was inspired by the experience of visiting the Gallery, results in a productive dialogue between F.E. McWilliam, the inspiration behind this space, and Freeman's thoughtful, compelling and original art.

Barbara Freeman in Barbara Freeman: Works on Paper 1966 – 2006, ed. David Brett, Black Square Books, Belfast, 2006, p.1.

- 7 Ibid.
- ³ Sir Anthony Caro, Early One Morning, painted steel and aluminium, 289.6 x 619.8 x 335.3 cm, Tate Collection, presented by the Contemporary Art Society 1965, Image available at www. tate.org.uk/collection.
- 4 Tate display caption, August 2004.
- During the early 1960s Chillida had regular exhibitions at the Galerie Maeght.
- Eduardo Chillida, Moduletion of Space I, iron, 54.5 x 70 x 40cm, 1963, purchased from the Galerie Maeght through the McRoberts and Tunnard Gallery (Grant-in-Aid) 1965. Image available at www.tate.org.uk/collection.
- Berbara Freeman in Barbara Freeman: Works on Paper 1966 2006, p.1.
- Declan McGonagle, Foreword, De Humani Corporis Fabrics: Paintings and Drawings by Barbara Freeman, Orchard Gallery, Derry, 1989, unpaginated.
- * Barbara Freeman in conversation with Fionna Barber, quoted in Fionna Barber, 'Painting the Good Object', De Humani Corporis Fabrica: Paintings and Drawings by Barbara Freeman, unpeginated.
- * Fionna Barber, "Painting the Good Object", unpaginated.
- 11 Wassily Kandinsky, 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art', 1911.
- David Brett, 'Notes', The Banks of the Bann: Barbara Freeman & Paul Wilson, Millennium Court Arts Centre, April-May, 2005, p.13.
- Barbara Freeman, Proposal for On the Square, 2010.



installation at the F.E. McWilliam Gallery

ON THE SQUARE AN INSTALLATION BY BARBARA FREEMAN WITH JOEL CATHCART

David Brett

This is a very suitable venue Barbara Freeman's installation because F.E. McWilliam's work and studio represents the sort of place from which she set out.

She received her formal artistic education in the nineteen fifties, passing through several London colleges as a part-time student of sculpture, maintaining herself by making life-size castings of figure groups for exhibitions and industrial fairs. Her tour-de-force was a group of miners wielding giant drills, for a Soviet trade fair at Olympia. A piece of work such as that, done through the nights, would provide the wherewithal to pay fees and to live frugally for a year. What she learned through the days were the crafts of casting, carving and life-modelling, because these were the activities in which sculpture then consisted. Methods of making were principally either additive (modelling) or subtractive, (carving). There was a great deal of life-drawing.

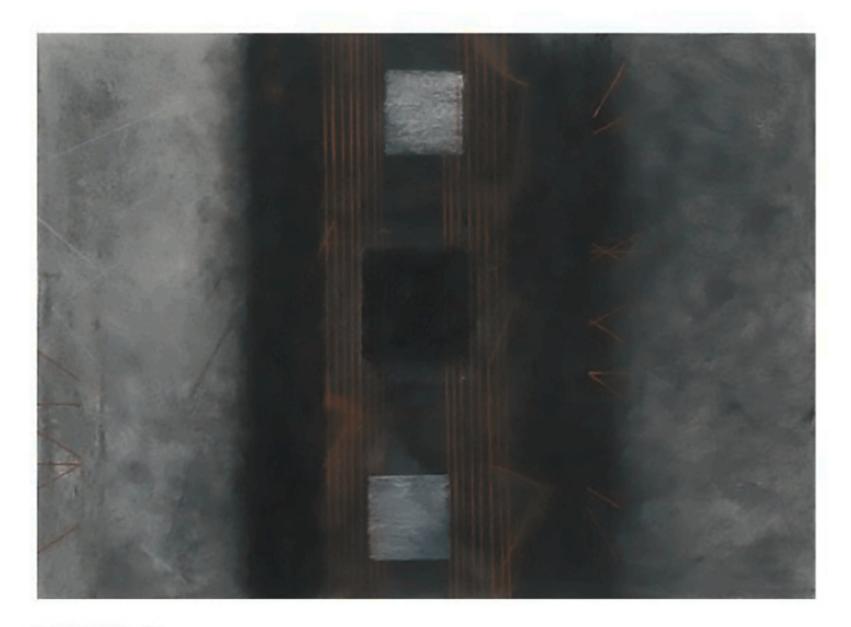
This artisanal manner of teaching was less and less connected with the actual practice of contemporary art with every year that passed. However, it could provide a good training in hard physical work and in the habit of finding out for oneself. A trainee sculptor (and the notion of 'training' was widely used) worked toward definite kinds of objects and followed well-recognised processes, in intricate crowded spaces called 'studios'. These were, typically, places filled with found objects from nature, sketchbooks, and maquettes.

Any education beyond that had to be self-education. Very few female students continued into mature practice, though plenty set out in that direction.



On The Square is the product of something very different.

Freeman's present 'studio' for example is a dust-free environment containing three computers and a digital printer about the size of a small piano. The only material in evidence is paper, and almost nothing is being made there. The complex Perspex cube, which is the centre-piece of On The Square was, in fact, designed on-screen and manufactured near Stansted Airport (fig. 1). It arrived in a box, by truck, and in some respects it was designed by K2 Fabrications according to a brief



Drawing 11 charcoal & chaik on paper 88x123cm.





sent forward by the artist who knew from previous experience the characteristic approach of the firm. Different versions of this cube have appeared in other installations.

This is a 'look, no hands' technology far removed from the artisanal nature of McWilliam's studio. Barbara Freeman learnt digital technology from a series of 'how-to-do-it' books, and by incessant practice.

The artisanal aspect of the artist's work appears in the drawings (fig. 2), which have intricate textures and tonalities in contrast to the smooth fabrication of the cube, and in the method of notched assembly by which the cube has to be constructed. This was principally a matter of necessity, so that the cube could be transported in a flat pack, but it has become an artistic element of architectonic character.

These differences are not really qualitative, but part of the wider and deeper cultural change of the last decades. The availability of good small electrical tools and more recently digital technology have transformed sculpture through methods of assemblage, all kinds of light projections, and sound technology.

This particular installation is the most recent in a series of related manifestations which have employed sound in several interactive ways, and it employs a concrete visual language which she first exploited almost fifty years ago.

Those who like to see an artist in terms of historical continuity will easily recognise in *On The Square* an extended homage to Russian constructivism, with particular reference to Malevich's *Black Squares* of 1913, or the graphic inventions of El Lissitzky. In the course of several

working visits to Communist Eastern Europe made in the nineteen seventies, fellow artists in Hungary, and what we must now call 'former Yugoslavia', recognised her work as directly in this tradition. Reference to the paintings and drawings of Josef Albers are also traceable.

In terms of biographical continuity, the artist initiated this cubic theme when she began her professional career. On The Square is in origin a latter version of a cube, entitled Bethel, which was last exhibited in Leeds City Art Gallery in 1972 (figs. 3). That was one of a long series of small works made around the idea of a square. This series included reliefs and constructions in recalcitrant materials, such as stainless steel, brass and Perspex. Several of these are in private collections. Though not on show here, many of Barbara Freeman's highly coloured paintings and prints are on a basic square format and employ digital methods (fig. 4)

An unstated cultural continuity in basic geometrical figures connects the square/cubic format back in time to Renaissance occultism, number mysticism and the religious rejection of the image. It is not by chance that the artist's studio contains, not curiously shaped flints or pieces of bone, but a chart of prime numbers, diagrams and books on geometry. We can recall, if we please, the Mosaic injunction against making graven images, and the Islamic ritual of centring the universe upon a black cube.

In a note on her childhood the artist has written "When I was a little girl I had the grandiose idea of being a mathematician. When I studied geometry at school I loved it. I could not get enough of the drawing. I loved the transparency of the space and the planes created in it, where nothing is solid. Space created by layers of emptiness."

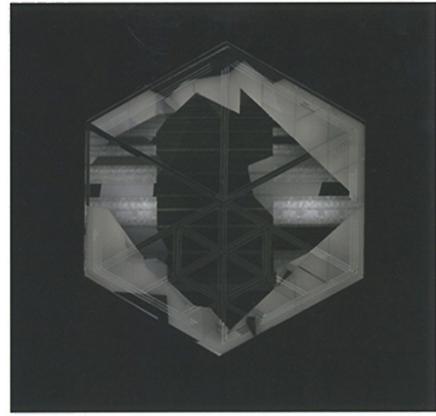
And lastly, the work exhibits an aesthetic continuity with the more or less perennial discourse of the relations between form and sound. Digital software, either in visual or sonic matters, dances to the same tune of 'layers', 'symmetries', 'texture', 'granulation' and other commands. Programs for electronic scores translate fluently into dimensional scores. Programs can be realised through the most elegant little devices, which do not, unlike instrumentalists, demand to be paid, with consequent growth of 'sound art' and 'sound artists'.

It follows from these premises that Barbara Freeman's art is indifferent to ideas such as 'personal expression', 'issues' or political rhetoric. The question it seems to ask is not 'what is in this for me?', but 'what do I bring to this?'

The artist does not describe herself as a 'sound artist', but she has worked with others in that field, and collaborated with composers such as Nicola Lefanu, David Lumsdaine, Michael Alcorn, Paul Wilson, Ian Wilson and, on this occasion, Joel Cathcart. She has had an instrumental piece dedicated to her, by Simon Mawhinney, and a substantial orchestral suite by Kevin Volans. She has no musical skills (though there is a rumour that she once played the soprano saxophone in a Soho jazz band), but has a lifelong love of contemporary music and a discriminating involvement.

Joel Cathcart is a composer and performer from Bangor, and a PhD candidate at Queen's University Music Department. He studies instrumental composition with Piers Hellawell. Among the several projects that he is working upon is a large and expansive composition that will fill the Ulster Museum with sound, and shorter works that





(fig. 5) Two giclee prints image size 28x28cm

employ texts and the human voice. Another collaboration with Barbara Freeman is in the planning stage.

On this occasion a pure instrumental tone pulses outward from the cube and interacts and contrasts with a soundscape recorded in the garden, emanating from ceiling level speakers – rather as the surrounding building and landscape penetrates and reflects within the cube, gently undermining the perceptual distinctions between indoor and outdoor space.

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Barbara Freeman has lived and worked in Belfast for the past-thirty years, longer than anywhere else. She has now had more exhibitions than she can count. She thinks it peculiar that she is still referred to as an English artist, as if that explained anything. If pressed she might admit to be being 'east-end cockney Jewish' from the land of Wren churches and Jack the Ripper, but her whole drive is to live and work as widely as possible. What matters is, not where you come from but where you are going.

NOTES ON SOUND

Joel Cathcart

There are two sounds presented as part of this exhibition.

Firstly, a highly distilled pulsing sound which emanates from the central sculpture. This pure tone was sourced from the vibrations of a large glass bowl

Secondly, a field recording made in the gallery gardens, combining the rustling of the shrubbery with the steady drone of the motorway.

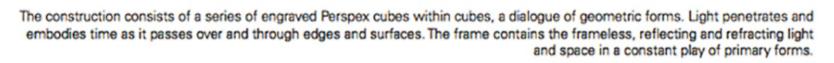
Both sounds are intended to operate on the threshold of aural perception. Lengthy silences heighten the sense of austerity, and suppress the immediate awareness of sonic artifice. The potential overlap between installed and native environmental sounds also serves to challenge the conventional dichotomy between indoor and outdoor spaces.

I regard these refined and contemplative sounds as appropriate companions to the luminous precision of Barbara Freeman's visual work.



The architecture and spaces of the gallery define the project originating both from within and without, the one passing through the other to create new visual/sound objects that are always changing. Sounds from nowhere, distant motorway, wind and rain. The rustling of leaves in the trees

The Cube (work in progress), engraved Perspex and wood, 150x150x150cm, 2011



The Cube (work in progress), engraved Perspex and wood, 150x150x150cm, 2011



The drawings form a counterpoint to the sculptural forms. To let the contemporary and the archaic inhabit the same space. Two dimensions and three. The machined and the hand-crafted. The opaque and the transparent, the precise and the unfocussed.

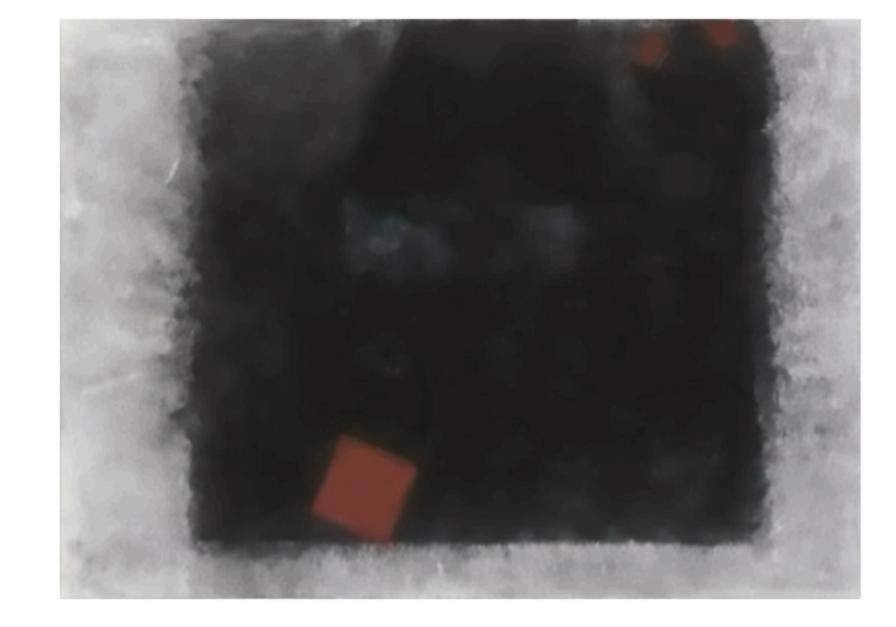
Drawing 5, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011



The formal austerity in the drawings is undermined by the spontaneous and intricate veils of white chalk. The hand roams across the surface just as a skater moves across the ice in a process involving time, space, place, and the space between.

Drawing 3, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011





Charcoal, burnt clay and chalk on paper. Ancient materials that enable one to combine textural density with a soft brightness and surface luminosity. The velvety dark space. Is there any space deeper or darker than that of a wall of charcoal?

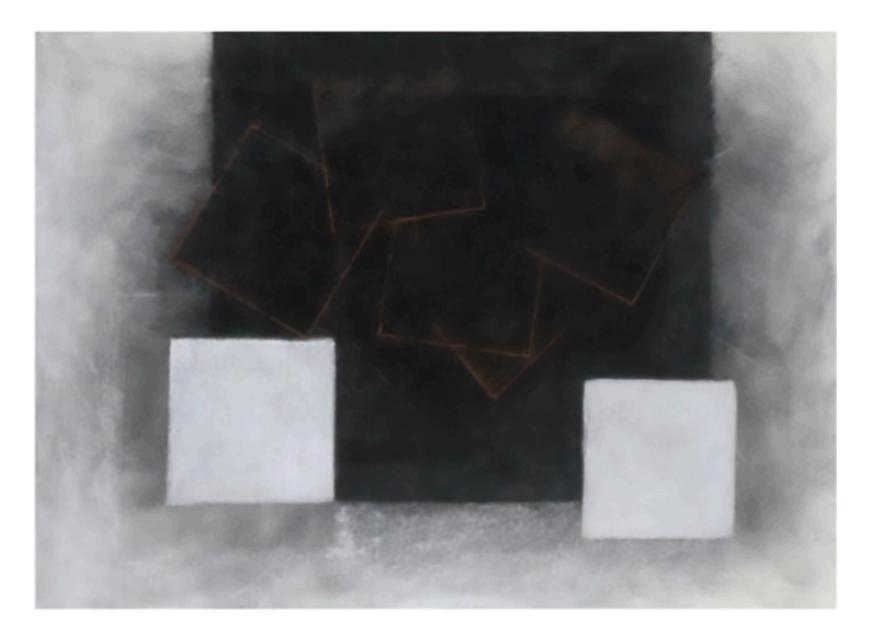
Drawing 2, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011

The idea was not to draw the cube or aspects of it, but to draw with the cube, in company with it, in the same place. To think about the cube as I drew and the particular quality of light and space that it creates in itself and around itself. The thought and the perception are made palpable by the material and process.

Drawing 13, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011

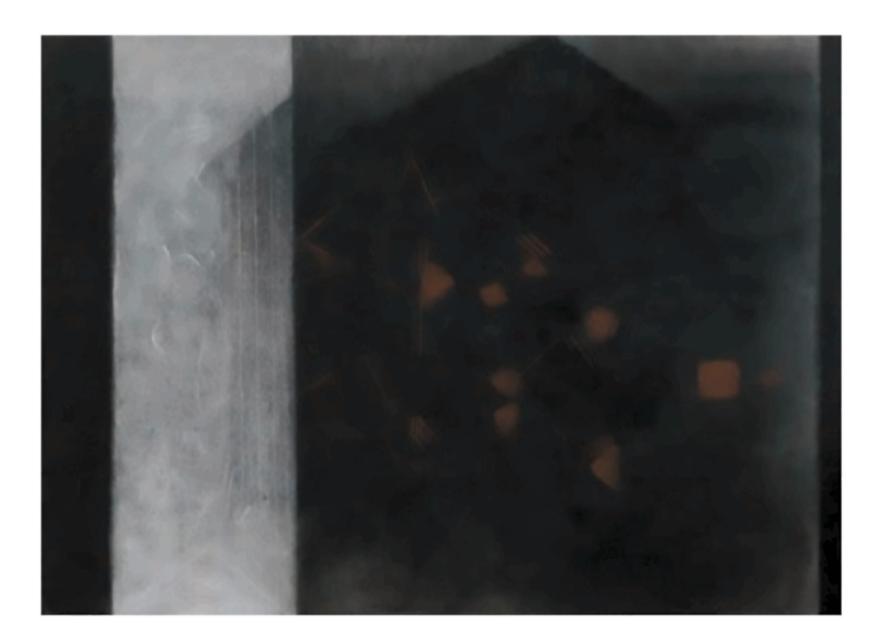
The charcoal moves softly across the paper surface picking up random textures from below and moves towards a finish in tentative ambiguous moves. What appears in front is often softer than those forms beyond.

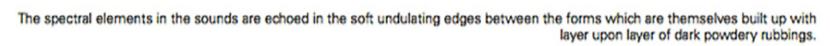
Drawing 12, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011



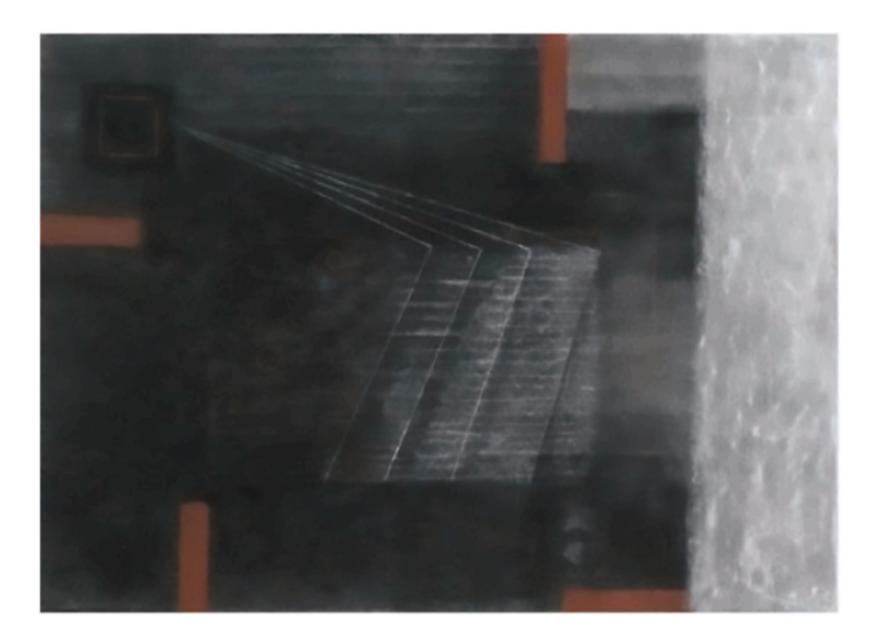
Compared to the precise structure of the cube the shapes in the drawings are unsure of themselves; near things are often soft and unfixed, distant forms are sharp, unsettling our sense of space from coming to going, from inward to outward, always in motion just as our bodies exist in the world.

Drawing 6, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011



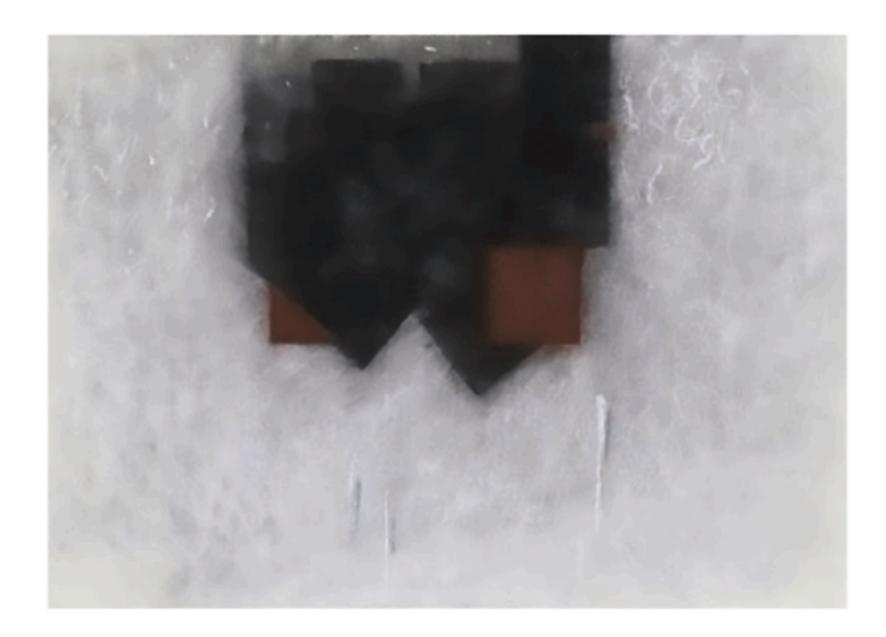


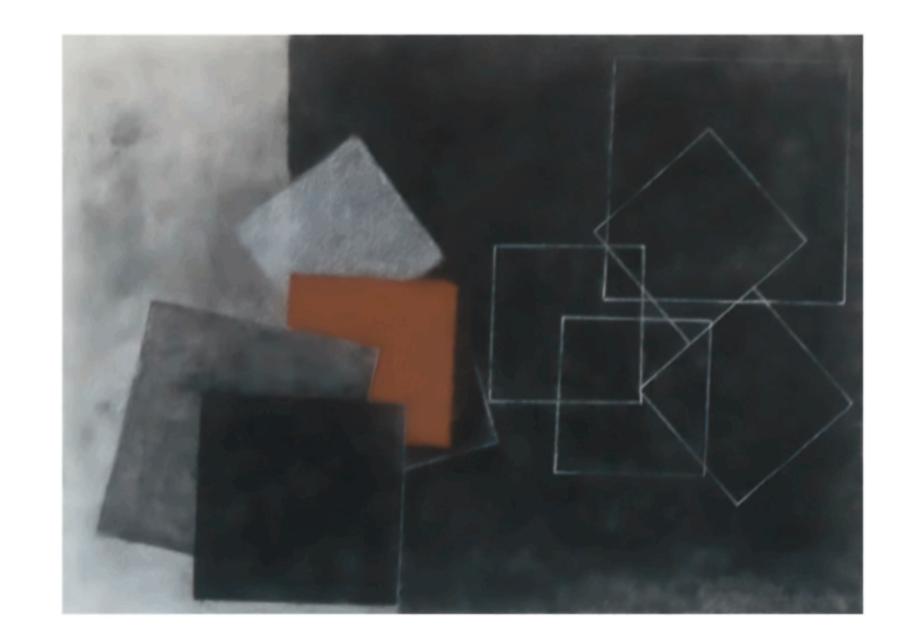
Drawing 10, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011



Whenever I drew it was for drawing's sake. Early on I had to abandon life-drawing and that style of figure drawing that consists of lines and tones describing objects. It got in the way of a spiritual and emotional expression because it describes the world. To describe the world is actually to determine the world.

Drawing 1, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011





Deceptively simple - squares within a rectangle - but their relationships one with the other are constantly breaking up and remaking themselves, always in a state of flux.

Drawing 14, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011

Stable yet dynamic, flat yet deep, diagrammatic yet atmospheric.

Drawing 15, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 88 x 123cm, 2011



Barbara Freeman, Square 2, Charcoal, conté and chalk on paper, 56 x 56cm, 2011

BARBARA FREEMAN

selected cv

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS:

- 2011 On the Square, visual/sound exhibition at the F.E. McWilliam Gallery, Banbridge
- 2012 Durations, visual/sound exhibition at the Naughton Gallery at Queen's University as part of the Sonorities Festival. From Etching to Digital Print – A creative Journey, starting at the Strule Arts Centre and touring through 2012 – 2014.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2011 A Set of 30 Giclee Prints, Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast
- 2010 The Bach Series Prints and Drawings, The Alley Arts Centre, Strabane
- 2009 New Works Four Artists, Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast
- 2006 New Paintings, Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast. Selected Paintings 1996 – 2006, Gordon Gallery, Derry. New Paintings, Vanguard Gallery, Cork.
- 2005 The Banks of the Bann collaboration with composer Paul Wilson at the Millennium Court Arts Centre, Portadown.
- 2004 Time Frames collaboration with composer Paul Wilson at the Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast.
 Khazaria a book of combined images and text with writer David Brett.
 Arttank Gallery, Belfast and the Saint Patrick Centre, Downpatrick.

- 2002 Ceilp collaboration with composers from Foinn Chonallacha at
 An Gaileari Donegal. Also at The
 Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast
 New Paintings at the Eigse Carlow
 Arts Festival and the Boyle Festival
- 001 Recent Paintings Hart Gallery, London.
- 2000 Millennium Images Ireland /
 America, Seattle U.S.A. (invited artist).
 Paintings and Prints After
 Boulez Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast.
- 1999 Paintings and Prints After
 Xenakis Rubicon Gallery and the
 Original Print Gallery, Dublin.
 Paintings Keller Galerie, Weimar,
 Germany (European City of Culture)
- 1998 The City Dreaming large drawings at The Waterfront Hall, Belfast. In Parallel Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast collaboration with four composers for the Sonorities Festival at Queens University.

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES:

- 2004 Residency at The Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester. New York, U.S.A.
- 2000 Residency at The Centrum Foundation, Seattle, U.S.A. Residency at The Virginia Centre For The Creative Arts, U.S.A.
- 1999 Guest ArtistThe Keller Galerie, Weimar, Germany.
- 1997 Residency at Fundacion Valparaiso,

- Mojacar, Spain. The Cill Rialaig Project, Co. Kerry, Ireland.
- 1995 Abbey Fellow, The British School at Rome.

The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Co. Monaghan, Ireland. Arts Council of Northern Ireland awards 1992, 1998. 2004, 2006.

PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS:

AerLingus, New York. Claremorris City Council The Boyle Civic Collection. Royal Court of Justice, Belfast. The Royal Hospitals, Belfast. National Museum of Fine Arts, Hungary. National Museum of Art, Macedonia, West Yorkshire County Council. The Office of Public Works and IAWS, Dublin, Norwich Union, S.K.C. Dublin, Lincoln Buildings, Belfast. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Northern Bank, Belfast, Life Association of Ireland, Dublin, Contemporary Irish Art Society, Allied Irish Bank Computer Centre. Trustee Savings Bank. Department of the Environment.N.I. University of Cork. Mestna Galerie, Koper, Slovenia. University of Debrecen, Hungary, Leeds City Council. University of Bradford. Cartwright Hall, Bradford. University of Leeds.

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