

CELESTIAL MECHANICS

TESS JARAY
LINDA KARSHAN
JEANNE MASOERO

MEGAN PIPER

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BLAIR ASBURY BROOKS

Celestial Mechanics takes its name from Jeanne Masoero's most recent, ongoing series of paintings. The term 'celestial mechanics' was introduced in the eighteenth century by French astronomer and mathematician, Pierre-Simon LaPlace. His *mécanique céleste* expanded on Sir Isaac Newton's seventeenth-century theory of universal gravitation. Before this, planetary movement was understood as divine intervention. 'Celestial' connoted the heavens—the sun, planets and stars, as well as the omniscient being looking down upon us. With the idea of gravity, the 'celestial' expanded to include another organising principle.

'Blue—the colour of heat. Blue stars the hottest' reads a cursive inscription at the bottom of a drawing by Masoero. The drawing itself has red ink veins, whose angles are pushed and pulled by shivers of red and green ink wash. There is no blue. But there is heat in the tension between her colours, lines, and strokes. Therein lies the achievement of Jeanne Masoero as well as of Linda Karshan and Tess Jaray. For how do canvas, paint, paper, and graphite manifest the universe?

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Masoero starts her paintings with a white canvas. The white is crisp, almost piercingly bright. Then, as she does in her drawings, she adds a light graphite grid. Upon this, Masoero makes colourful marks—lines, dots, flecks—which accumulate into a form that is held in a constant state of flux. It is both expanding and contracting. There are no definite edges, but rather a sense of building energy. Masoero only uses acrylic paints, which dry quickly and have heightened hues. In one work, red and yellow dots cluster around a labyrinth of blue lines. The juxtaposing colours and marks seem to spark, like exposed electric wires meeting—and Masoero does not let that moment pass. With a careful hand, she guides us through the

crackle of energy by seducing the viewer first to move in to see the microcosm, then move away to see the macro effect of the layers. Even then, the question remains, what are we seeing?

Masoero's sources are diverse. She keeps a large book of images captured by the Hubble Telescope in her studio. Is that what we're seeing on the canvas? There is a kinship between her images and the boundary-less nebulae and supernovas but, she highlights, her forms also have the glow and shimmer of Byzantine mosaics. Less expected is her interest in Mayan and Mexican reliefs, which include figures forced into unusual positions by the stones' tight borders. It is possible to see the sinuous Mexican figures in the compositional tensions of Masoero's built-up marks—her forms do not have visible borders, but they seem to respond to and maneuver around invisible forces. This jigsaw of elements comes together in what the artist calls an 'abstract chiaroscuro'.

Like Masoero, Tess Jaray's works are a confluence of unexpected influences. All of Jaray's works in this exhibition are from her *Many Moments* series. The series, from 2005, takes its inspiration from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, which Jaray visited some twenty years prior. The mausoleum is a cross-shaped building, whose rough brick facade belies its elaborately mosaicked interior. From the top of the marble walls, the architecture is covered in mosaic—intricate vines, geometric patterns and biblical scenes. Although the glass tesserae range in colour, the overall impression is of blue, with some containing gold within clear glass. Jaray spent time alone in this space, lying on the floor, looking up at the central dome and sketching. The dome is also predominately blue, its symmetry jolted by the gold cross at its peak. Rings of gold stars circle the cross. The curve and the pattern combine and seem to extend towards the sky. Would I read the dome pattern that way, were I to see it in person, or do I perceive it as a passageway to infinity because Jaray's paintings are my entry-point for this medieval mosaic?

Jaray builds up her paintings' surfaces. She starts with a drawing, working out the geometry, which determines the size

of the canvas. All of the *Many Moments* works are square—which is, for Jaray, a dynamic shape (a rectangle is, comparatively, neutral). Then she creates, in a sense, a mask. First, using acrylics, she paints the colour(s) of the notes that create the geometric composition. On top of this, she lays a vinyl sheet that includes her laser-cut composition. She removes the sheet, leaving the small geometric fragments stuck to the paint. She then paints the surface of the canvas, including the vinyl fragments that cover the acrylic layer, with a carefully-mixed, uniform oil paint. The oils take weeks to dry. The final step before varnishing is to remove the vinyl fragments. Jaray wears a thimble to protect her fingers from the pressure of the needle needed to detach the vinyl and reveal the painted colour beneath. The result is a pockmarked surface. From a distance, the paintings have the optical effect of movement. And, like Masoero's paintings, they call you closer, leading you to the evidence of the artist's hand—the brushstrokes and the imperfections left by the painstaking removal of the vinyl squares. Jaray's paintings play with us, with the frisson of a turntable needle touching a spinning record, as the music enters the space.

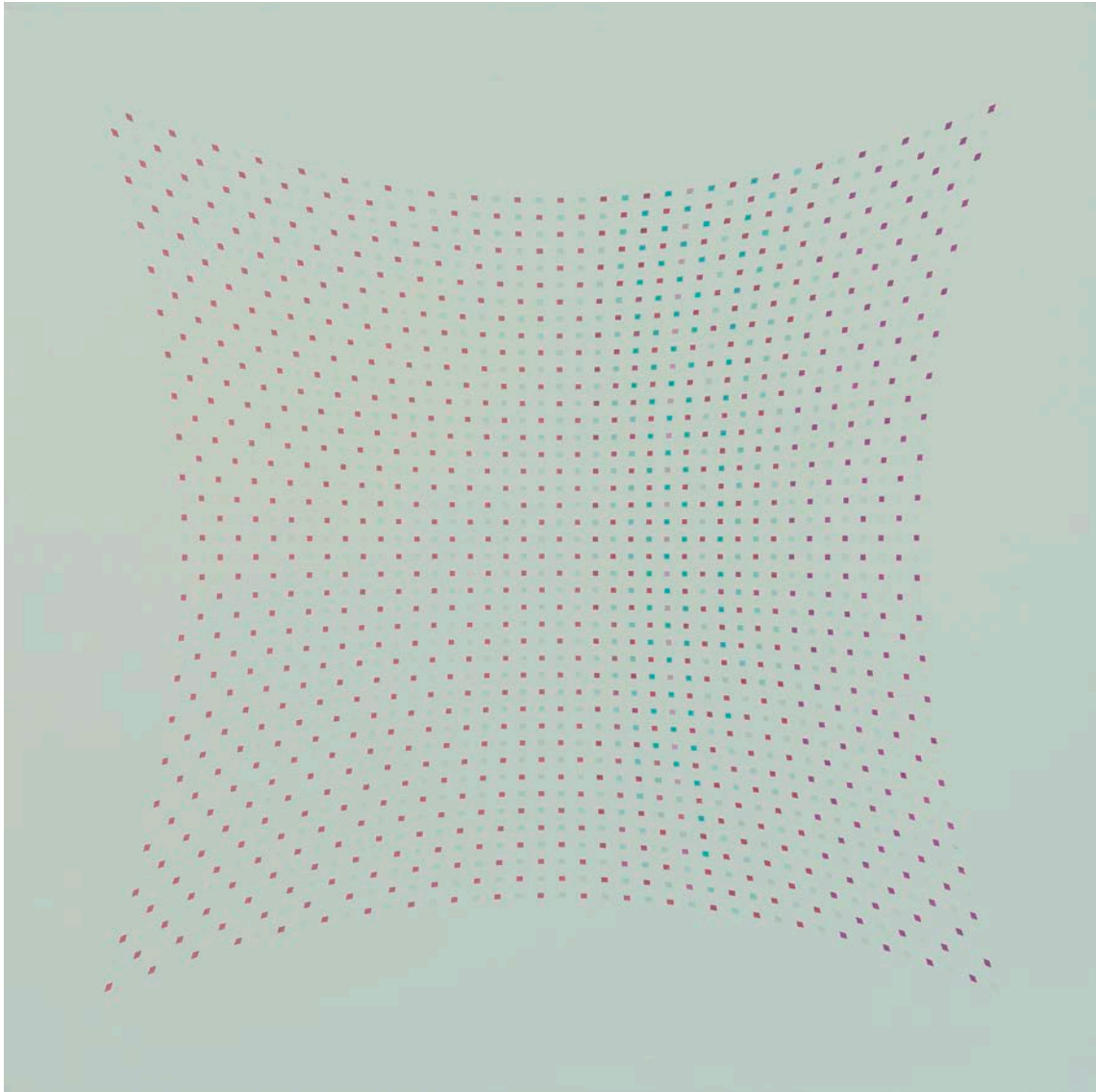
Whilst each of the works in this exhibition encourages the viewer to move, only Linda Karshan's drawings are the direct result of her own movement and, as she explains, her 'inner choreography'. Karshan's grids are neither preparatory guides nor the modernist grid. Nor does she use the rulers one may suspect. Her lines are born of her performative process which is, in turn, informed by numerical order and her training as a dancer. Karshan refers to a line from Plato's *Timaeus*: 'Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and this image we call time.'⁽¹⁾ Her drawings show the rhythm of her process and the effect of gravity on her body. She has visited the seventeenth-century astronomical compasses housed in the Royal Cabinet of Mathematical and Physical Instruments in Dresden. Looking at her drawings, would you would you think of these gilded tools?

(1) Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

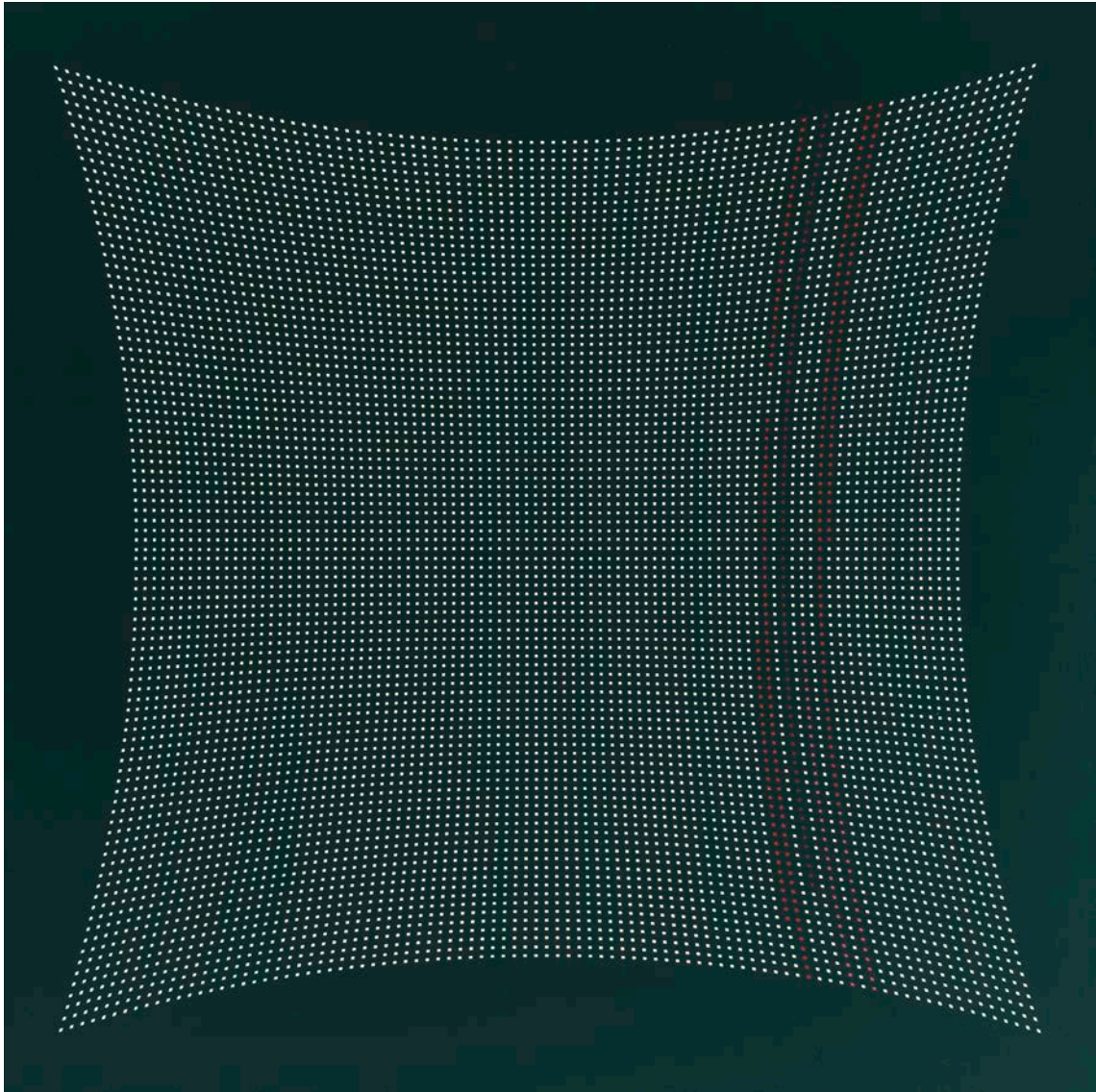
Using her right hand, instead of her natural left, Karshan's relationship to the mark is 'free'. Her right hand does not have the left's muscle memory of, say, turning a key or writing a cheque. Instead, her hand is an instrument of her body, as she extends her reach and touches graphite to paper and gravity pulls her body down, rather like the action of a compass. The timeless action embodies Plato's notion of the 'moving image of eternity', which is why, Karshan says, the same images recur within her practice. Karshan refers to the central horizontal and vertical lines on her paper as the Greek cross. Unlike the cross in the dome of the Galla Placidia, the Greek cross is equilateral. For Karshan, the cross is made with two movements, with a counter-clockwise turn of the paper in between. She is performing man's simplest mark-making.

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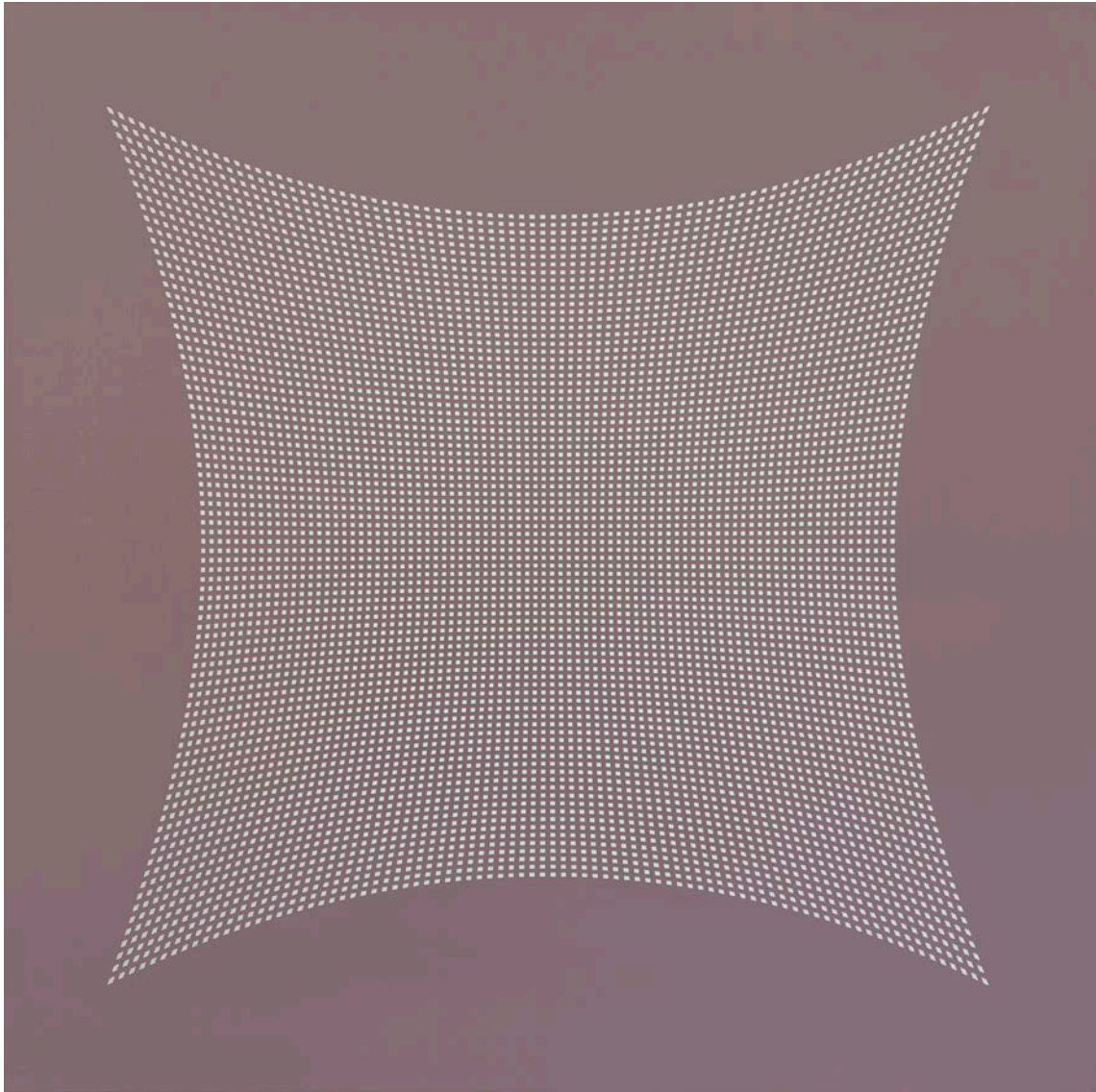
While all three artists engage with our position in space, their work is also characterised by evidence of the artist's hand and actions. Masoero's time-intensive process is evident in the colourful, diverse marks, precisely placed on pristine white backgrounds. Jaray's brushstrokes are visible in her planes of rich colour. The weight and movement of Karshan's body directly affects the thickness and density of the line drawn on the paper. The works in *Celestial Mechanics* evoke the universe but also embrace the humanity of their creators.



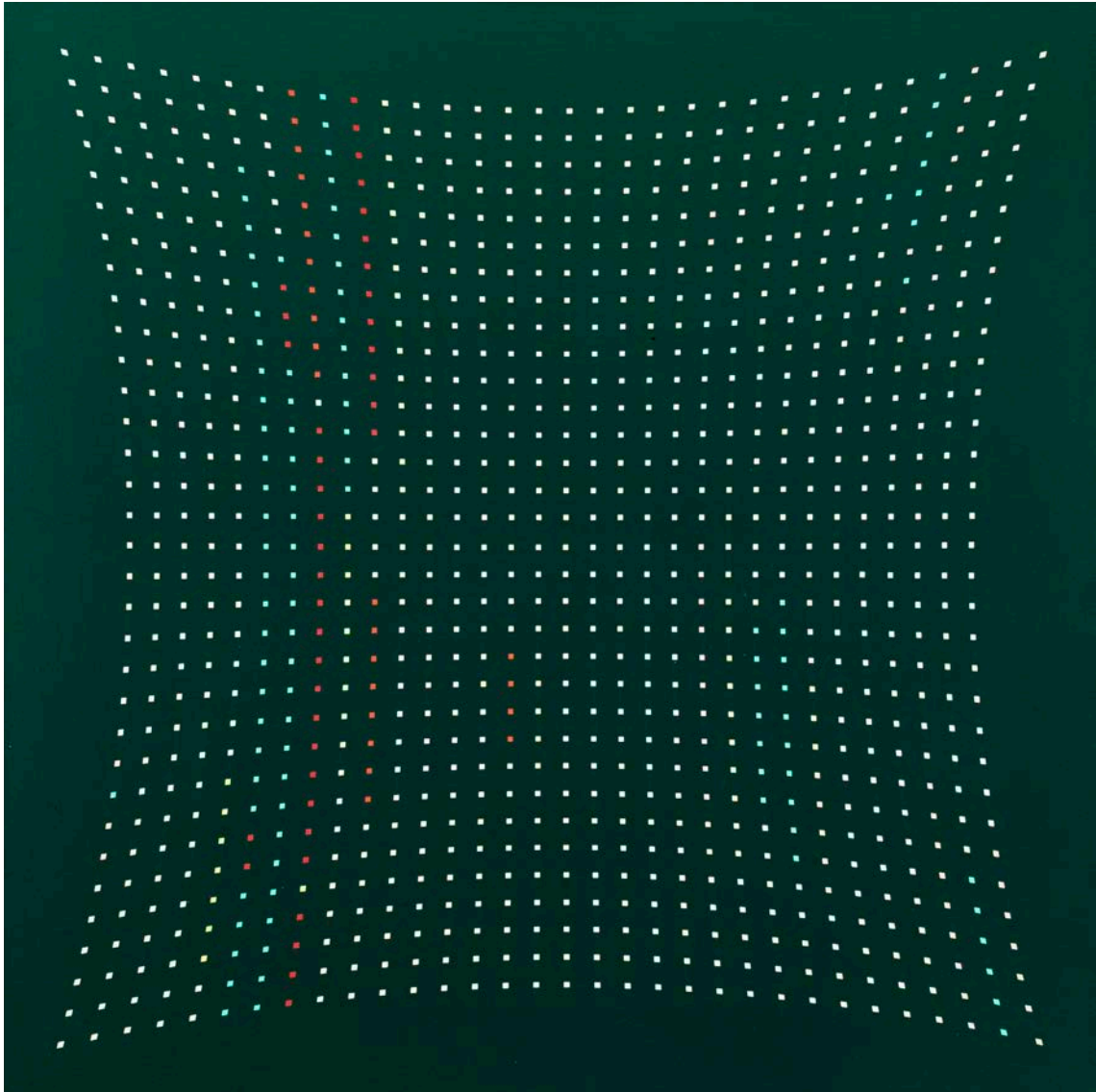
Tess Jaray, *Many Moments with Change*, 2005



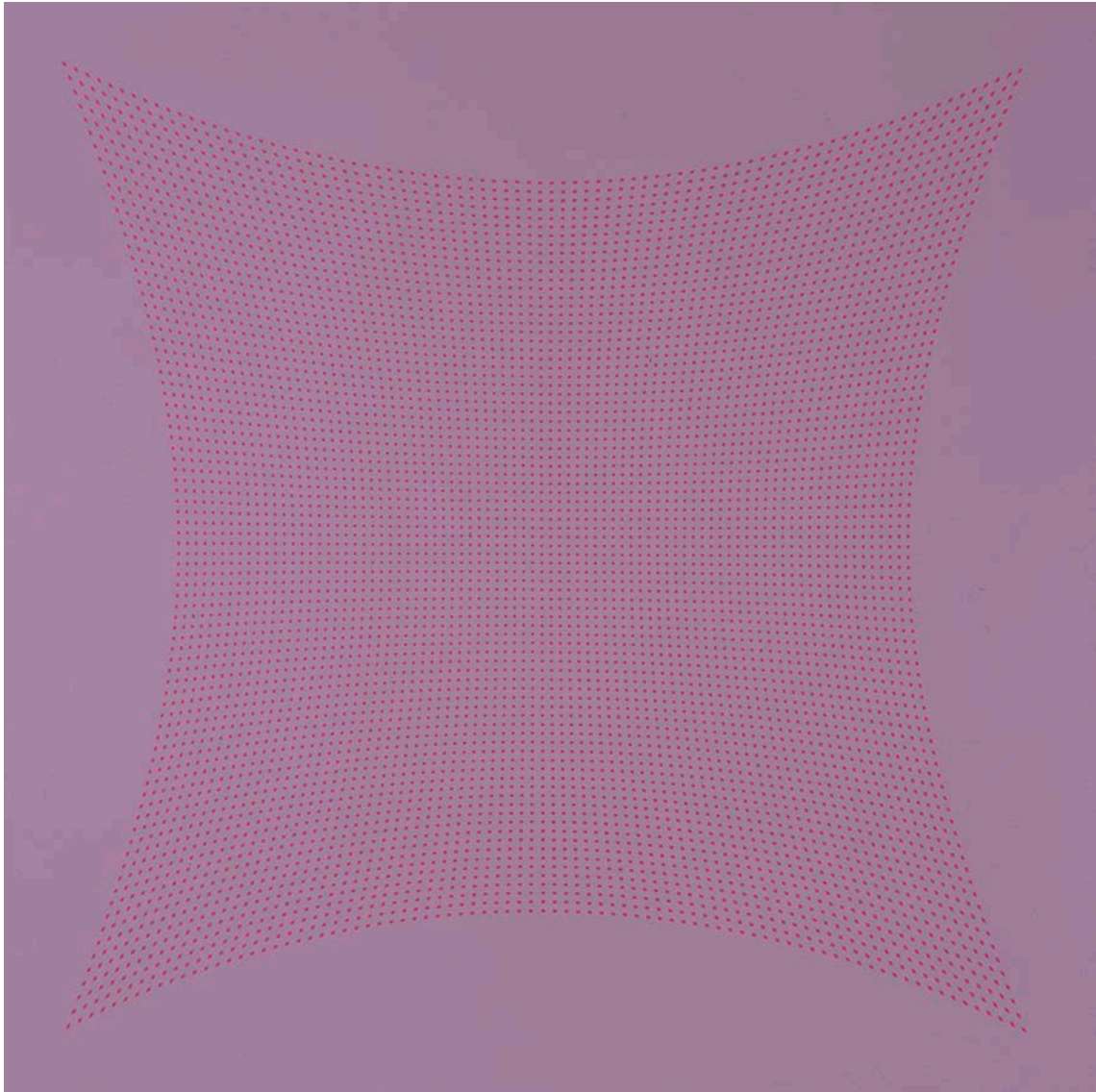
Tess Jaray, *Many Moments with Red Lines*, 2005



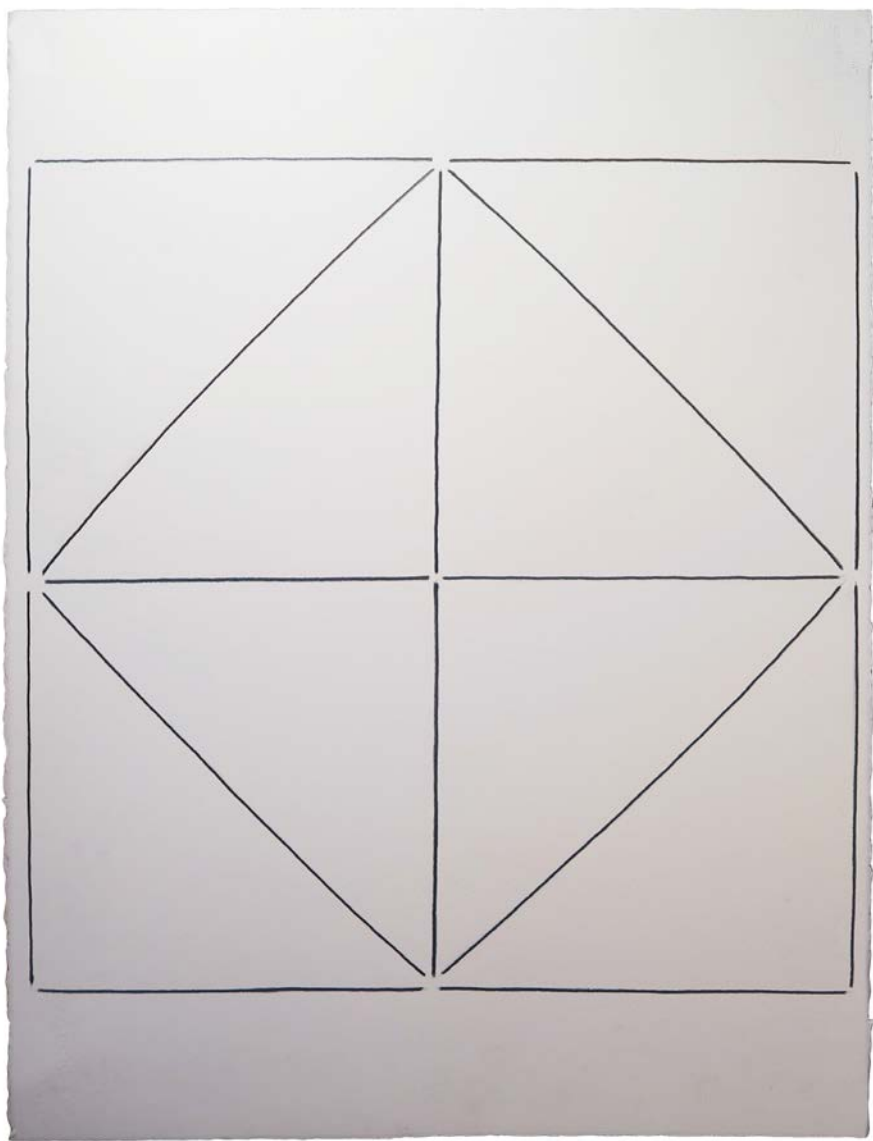
Tess Jaray, *Many Moments Grey and Mauve*, 2005



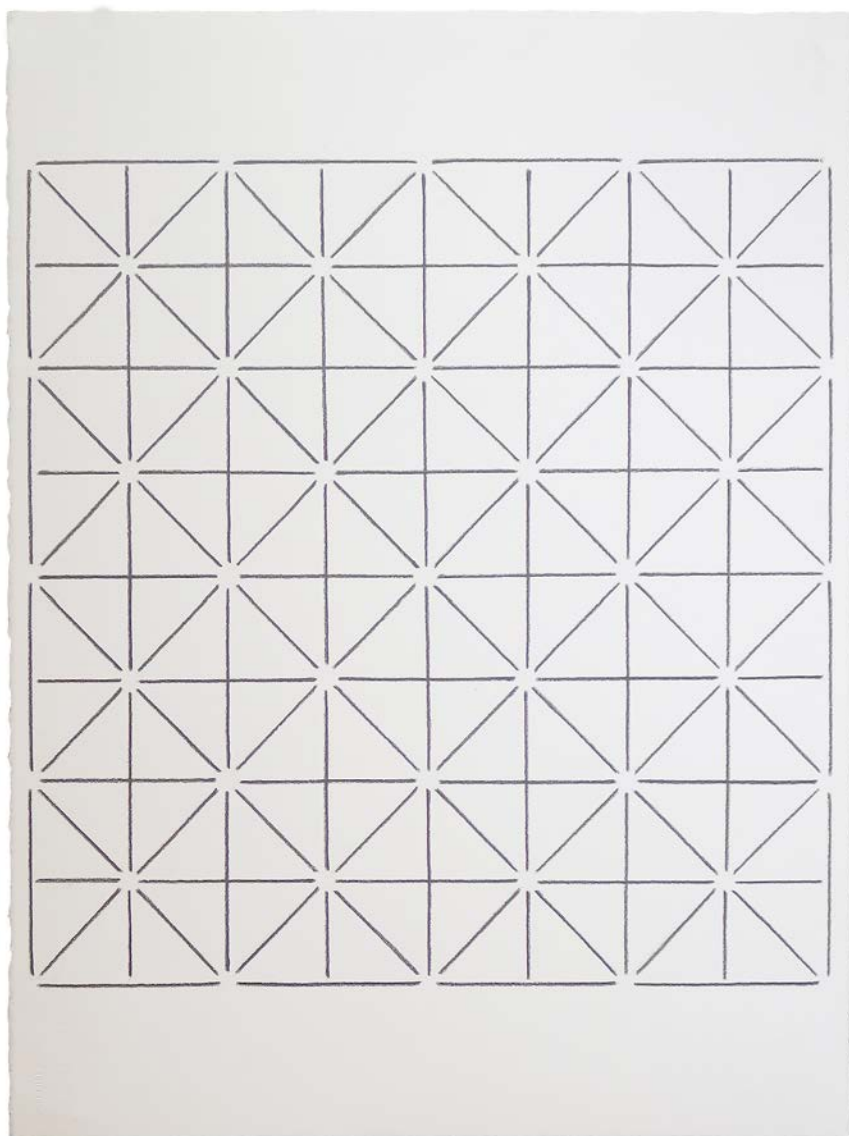
Tess Jaray, *Many Moments Dark Green Broken*, 2005



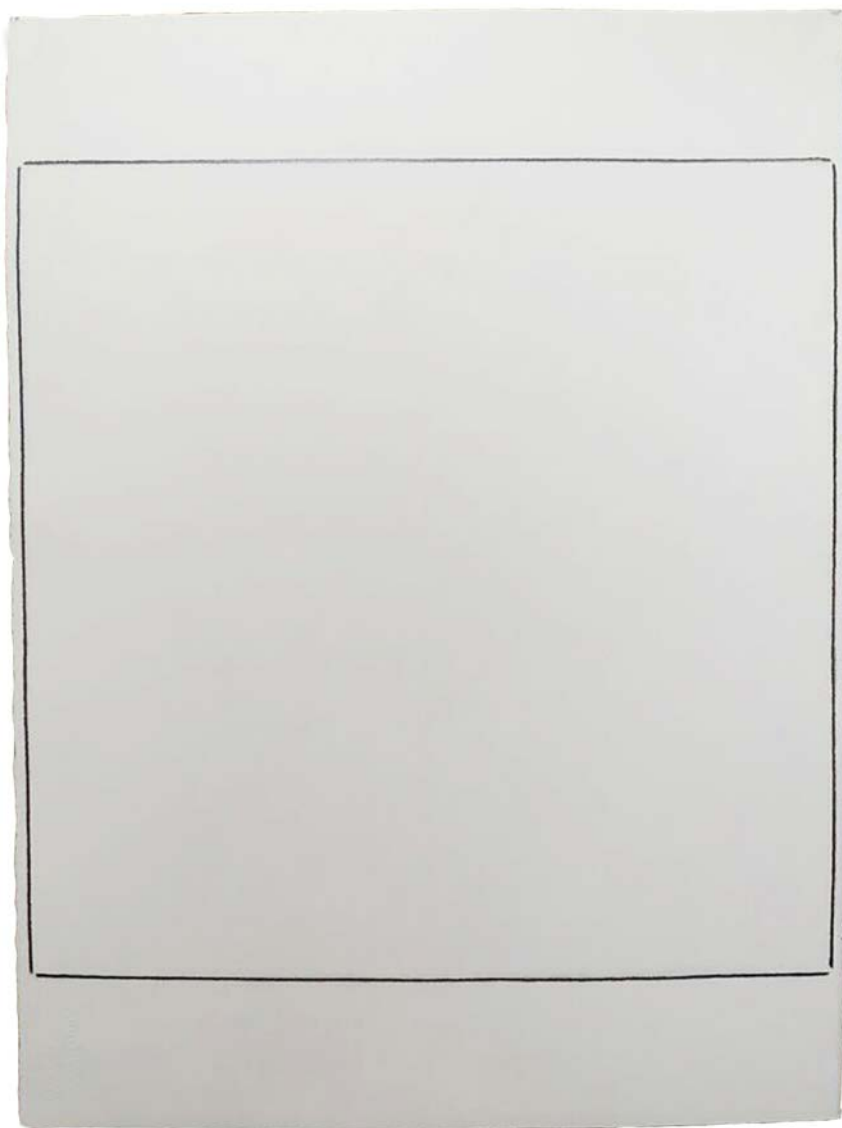
Tess Jaray, *Many Moments Close Toned Pink*, 2005



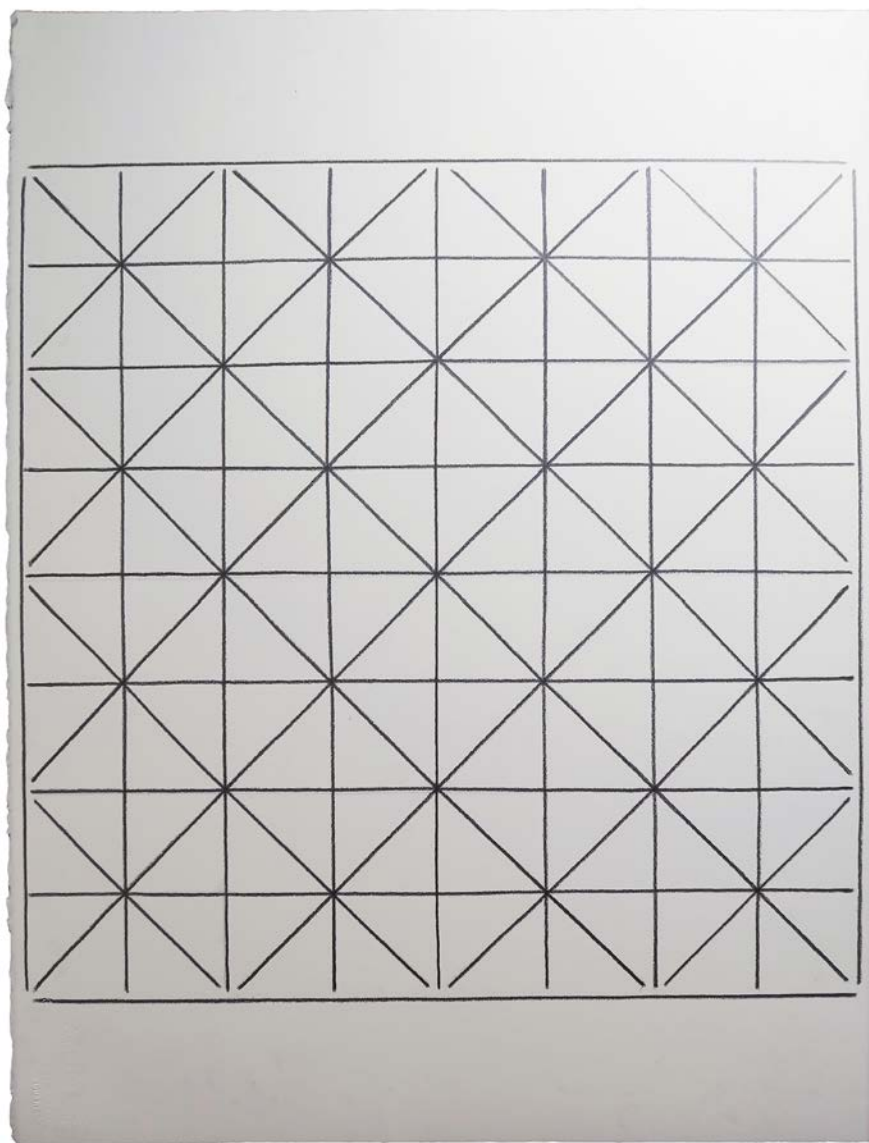
Linda Karshan, 18/8/17; 22/8/17 *Crux Quadrata and Gravitational Lensing*, 2017



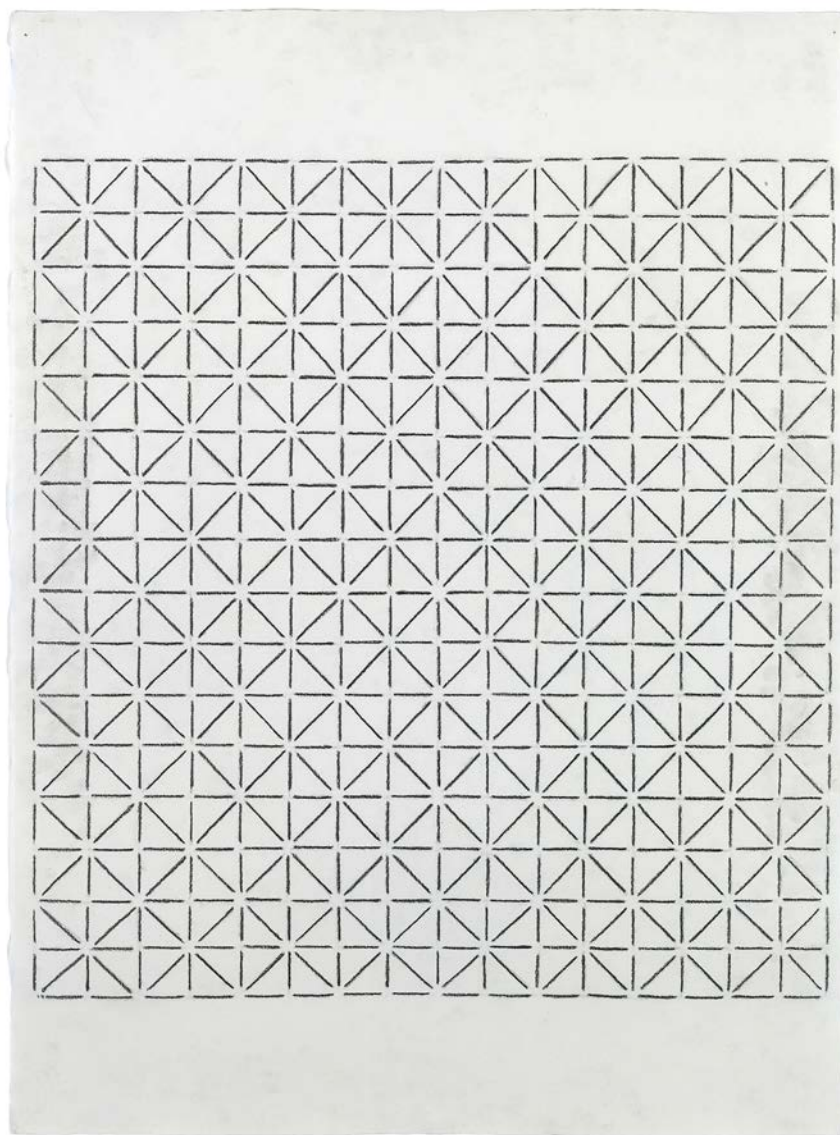
Linda Karshan, / 25/8/17, 2017



Linda Karshan, / 9/7/17, 2017



Linda Karshan, *17/8/17 I But Existence is a Curve*, 2017



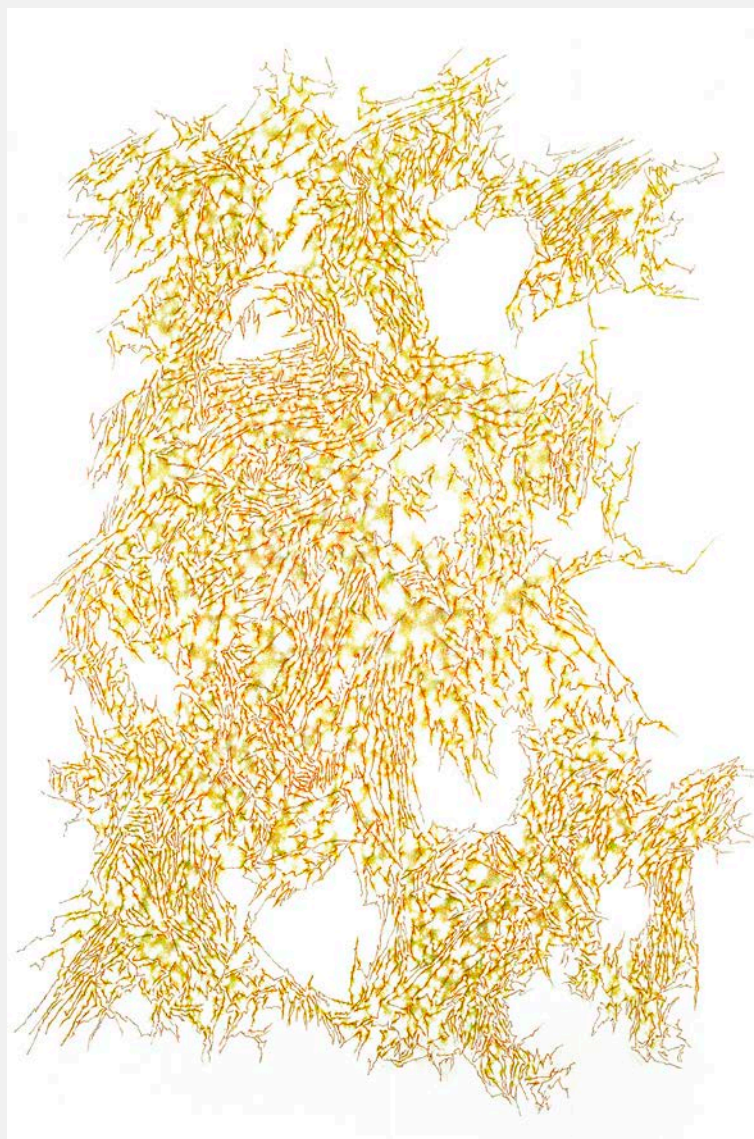
Linda Karshan, 2015 *NY Happy Drawing*, 2017



Jeanne Masoero, *Angular Momentum*, 2017



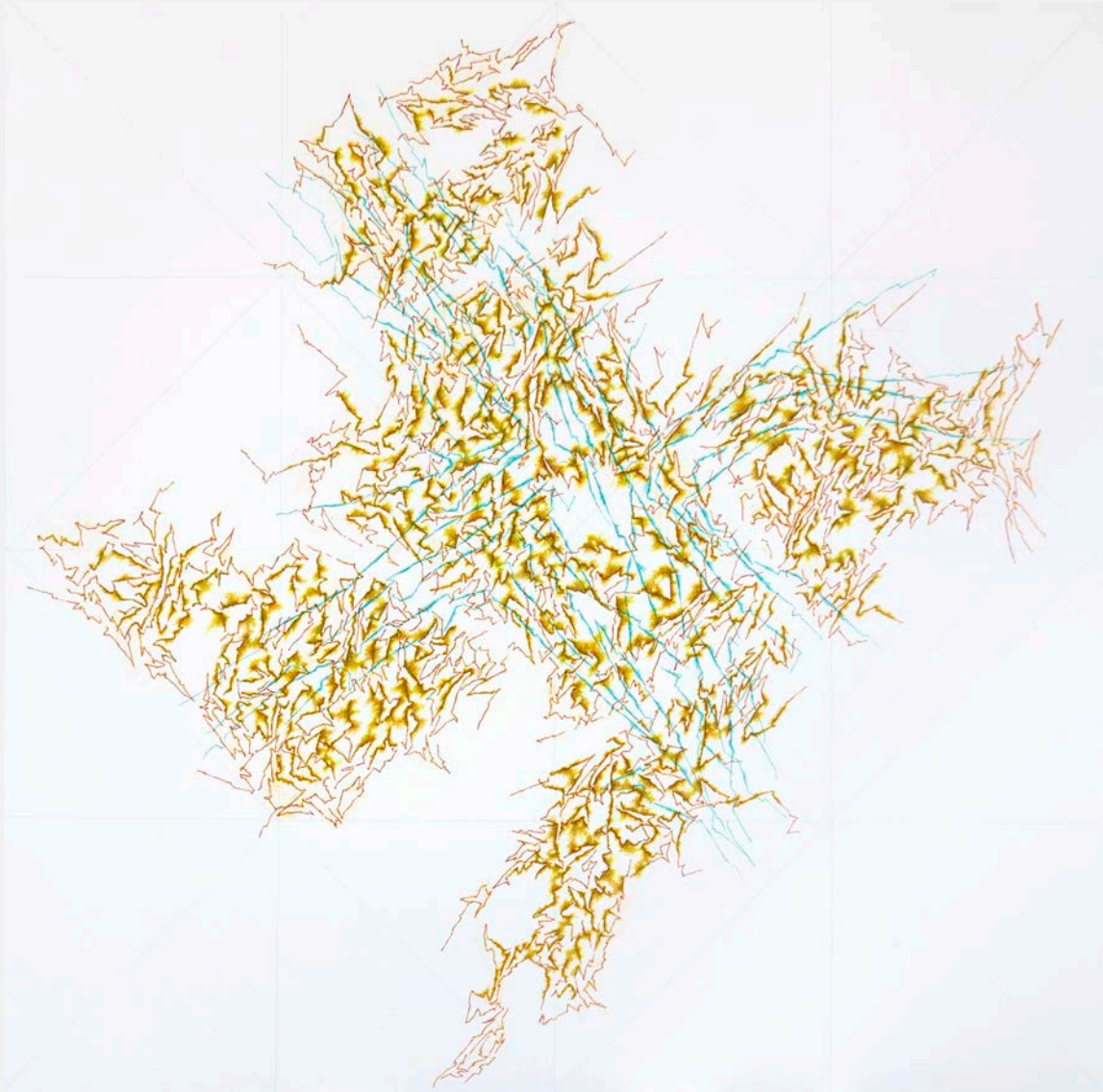
Jeanne Masoero, *Dark Energy*, 2017



Jeanne Masoero, *Magnetic Field IV*, 2015



Jeanne Masoero, *Spectral Line*, 2017



Jeanne Masoero, *Star Birth*, 2017

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Oil on linen
51 x 51 cm / 20.1 x 20.1 in

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Tess Jaray
Many Moments with Red Lines, 2005
Oil on linen
112 x 112 cm / 44.8 x 44.8 in

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Tess Jaray
Many Moments Grey & Mauve, 2005
Oil on linen
62 x 62 cm / 24.5 x 24.5 in

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Tess Jaray
Many Moments Dark Green Broken, 2005
Oil on linen
114 x 114 cm / 44.8 x 44.8 in

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Tess Jaray
Many Moments Pink, 2005
Oil on linen
62 x 62 cm / 24.5 x 24.5 in

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Linda Karshan
*18/8/17; 22/8/17 Crux Quadrata and
Gravitational Lensing*, 2017
Graphite on Arches watercolour paper
76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in

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Linda Karshan
I 25/08/17, 2017
Graphite on Arches watercolour paper
76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in

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Linda Karshan
I 9/7/17, 2017
Graphite on Arches watercolour paper
76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in

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Linda Karshan
I 17/8/17 But Existence is a Curve, 2017
Graphite on Arches watercolour paper
76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in

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Linda Karshan
2015 NY Happy Drawing, 2015
Graphite on Arches watercolour paper
76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in

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Jeanne Masoero
Angular Momentum, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
110 x 105 cm / 43.3 x 41.3 in

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Jeanne Masoero
Dark Energy, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
105 x 110 cm / 41.3 x 43.3 in

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Jeanne Masoero
Magnetic Field IV, 2015
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 100 cm / 59 x 39.3 in

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Jeanne Masoero
Spectral Line, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 115 cm / 47.2 x 45.2 in

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Jeanne Masoero
Star Birth, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 115 cm / 47.2 x 45.2 in

TESS JARAY

Jaray was born in Vienna in 1937 and moved to England in 1938. She studied at St Martin's College of Art and Design (1954–57) and the Slade School of Fine Art (1957–60) where she was taught by William Coldstream and Ernst Gombrich. Jaray was the first woman to teach at the Slade and taught there for over 30 years, from 1968–99. Jaray has exhibited extensively throughout her career. Solo exhibitions include Whitechapel Gallery, London (1973), the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (1984) and Serpentine Gallery, London (1988). Public collections include the British Museum, Arts Council Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum and Tate Collection. Over the last twenty years, Jaray has completed a succession of major public art projects. She was made an Honorary Fellow of RIBA (Royal Institute for British Architects) in 1995 and a Royal Academician in 2010. She lives and works in London.

LINDA KARSHAN

Karshan was born in Minneapolis in 1947. At Skidmore College, New York (1965-67) she studied drawing and painting under the architect Robert Reed (born 1938) who had been Joseph Albers' (1888-1976) protégé at Black Mountain College, North Carolina. She subsequently went on to study art history, first at the Sorbonne in Paris (1967-68) and then at the Slade School of Fine Art in London (1969). In 1983, continuing her studies, Karshan took a Masters degree in Humanistic Psychology, which fed into her exploration of the process of drawing. Karshan has exhibited extensively throughout her career. Solo exhibitions in the UK include Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (2003) and Sir John Soane's Museum, London (2002). Karshan's work is represented in leading museums and galleries around the world, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Morgan Library and Museum in New York, to the British Museum and The Courtauld in London, and the great print rooms of Berlin, Munich and Dresden. She lives and works in London and New York.

JEANNE MASOERO

Masoero was born in London in 1937 to Italian parents. She spent the first six years of her childhood in Italy, before returning to England. She studied at Goldsmiths School of Art (1956-59), where she was taught by Kenneth Martin, and completed her MA, as well as an additional postgraduate year, at the Slade School of Fine Art (1960-63). Whilst studying at the Slade she attended courses under Kenneth Martin at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Masoero taught at Goldsmiths, Reading, Kingston, Wimbledon and the Royal College of Art (1965-2000). She has exhibited extensively throughout her career. Solo exhibitions include the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (1979) and a retrospective at the Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne (2002). Her work is included in public and private collections in the UK, Europe, America, Australia and Japan. She lives and works in London.

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MEGAN PIPER

First Floor
41 Dover Street
London
W1S 4NS
www.meganpiper.co.uk

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