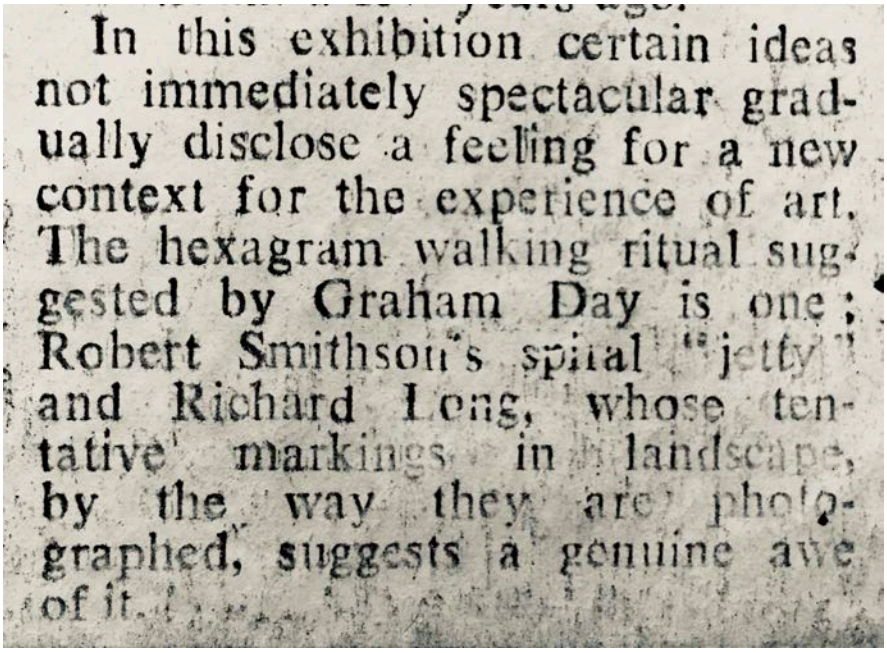
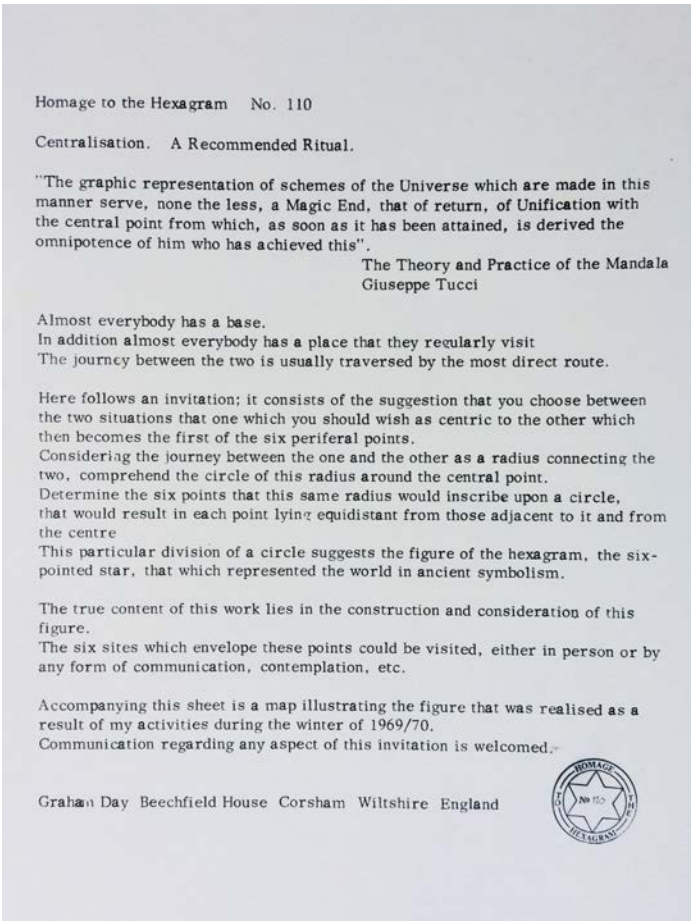
Interview with Colin Crumplin[1]recorded for the catalogue of the
Exhibition: Graham Day : Retro-Perspective 1970-1997
Diorama Gallery, London1997. Illustrated winter 2022/23

Colin Crumplin: I first met you in autumn 1970, earlier that year Guy Brett had written a review in the London Times of an exhibition[2], where he talked about the piece that you had exhibited in relation to other artists in the show such as Richard Long and Robert Smithson, can we begin there?



In this exhibition certain ideas not immediately spectacular gradually disclose a feeling for a new context for the experience of art. The hexagram walking ritual suggested by Graham Day is one; Robert Smithson's spiral "jetty" and Richard Long, whose tentative markings in landscape, by the way they are photographed, suggests a genuine awe of it.

Graham Day: Sure, he talked about a piece, a walk.It was a list of instructions that suggested you draw a line on a map from your base, home, to the place you most often visited, work, studio, lover, whatever. Use that radius to



Homage to the Hexagram No. 110

Centralisation. A Recommended Ritual.

"The graphic representation of schemes of the Universe which are made in this manner serve, none the less, a Magic End, that of return, of Unification with the central point from which, as soon as it has been attained, is derived the omnipotence of him who has achieved this".
The Theory and Practice of the Mandala
Giuseppe Tucci

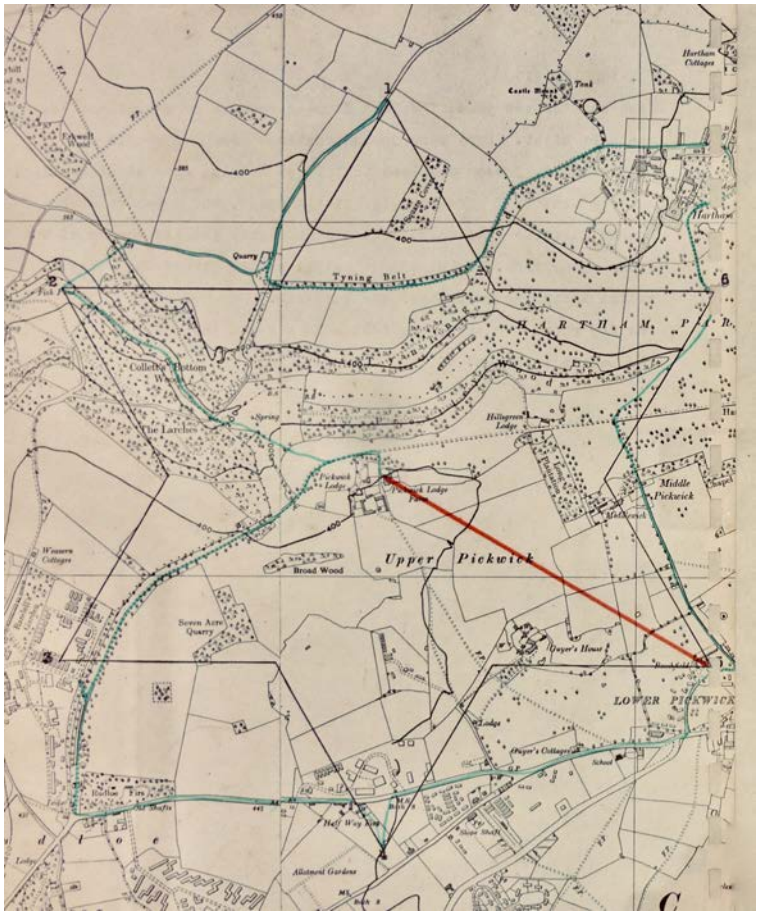
Almost everybody has a base.
In addition almost everybody has a place that they regularly visit
The journey between the two is usually traversed by the most direct route.

Here follows an invitation; it consists of the suggestion that you choose between the two situations that one which you should wish as centric to the other which then becomes the first of the six periferal points.
Considering the journey between the one and the other as a radius connecting the two, comprehend the circle of this radius around the central point.
Determine the six points that this same radius would inscribe upon a circle, that would result in each point lying equidistant from those adjacent to it and from the centre
This particular division of a circle suggests the figure of the hexagram, the six-pointed star, that which represented the world in ancient symbolism.

The true content of this work lies in the construction and consideration of this figure.
The six sites which envelope these points could be visited, either in person or by any form of communication, contemplation, etc.

Accompanying this sheet is a map illustrating the figure that was realised as a result of my activities during the winter of 1969/70.
Communication regarding any aspect of this invitation is welcomed.

Graham Day Beechfield House Corsham Wiltshire England



draw a circle and with the same radius step off the other five locations on the circle. You could visit these peripheral sites and when you were at base camp in the centre you were literally ‘centered’. It was a feature that ran through a lot of my work, trying to create a harmony, sounds a bit neurotic!

Makes me think of Long and Sol le Witt.

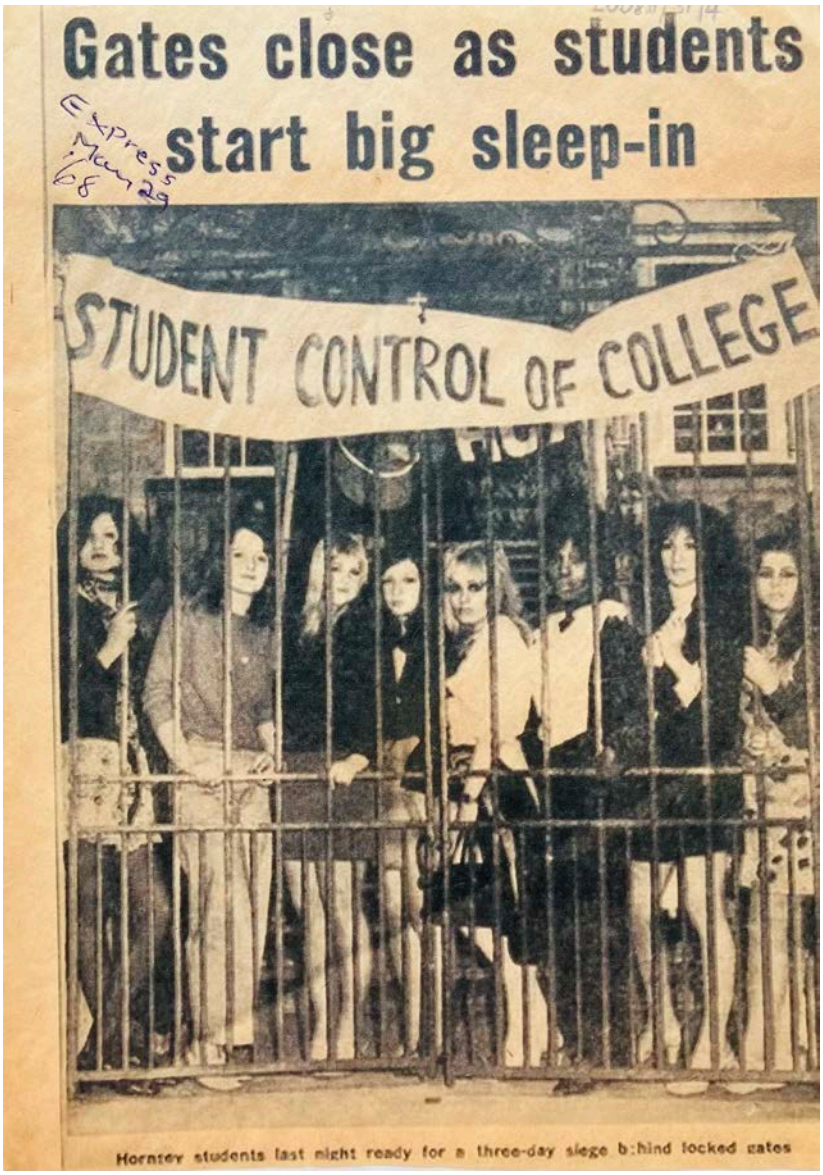
I wasn’t interested in those people, it wasn’t the walks as such that I was interested in, it was the geometry, the order and harmony. I’d moved to this new place in the middle of the country. I’d never been in a field before in my life. I was born in the centre of London and had always lived in the city.

So it was about being in a new place, in the country, in a little cottage?

No, it was Stafford’s Farm behind Pickwick[3]. I remember David Spurring[4] who had the room below mine, we asked Ma Stafford if we could watch the 1968 moon landing on the big black and white T.V. in the kitchen surrounded by shotguns and piles of dead pigeons, the stove alight even though it was high summer, that sweet smell of horse manure and feeling so depressed because the moon landing was such a fabulous display of weirdness, technology and bravery that anything I was thinking about seemed so insignificant in comparison.

Why did you want to go to college in the country

Because before that I’d been at Hornsey[5] art school in London, it was 1968 the évenéments in Paris, the student


Gates close as students start big sleep-in

Express Mon 29 '68

STUDENT CONTROL OF COLLEGE

Hornsey students last night ready for a three-day siege b:hind locked gates

and workers uprising remember? It was very dramatic, although for me it was annoying, as I’d been trying to get to college for a few years, having left school without the right exams and had been doing evening classes[6]. I just kept

failing English Language which you needed and finally my best friend, Billy Slade, a poet, took it for me and of course he got an A grade which was great except that the school thought it was a reflection of their wonderful teaching and pestered me for years afterwards for stuff to put in their magazine. So I finally got to college and the whole place started to collapse around me.

(*laughs silently)*

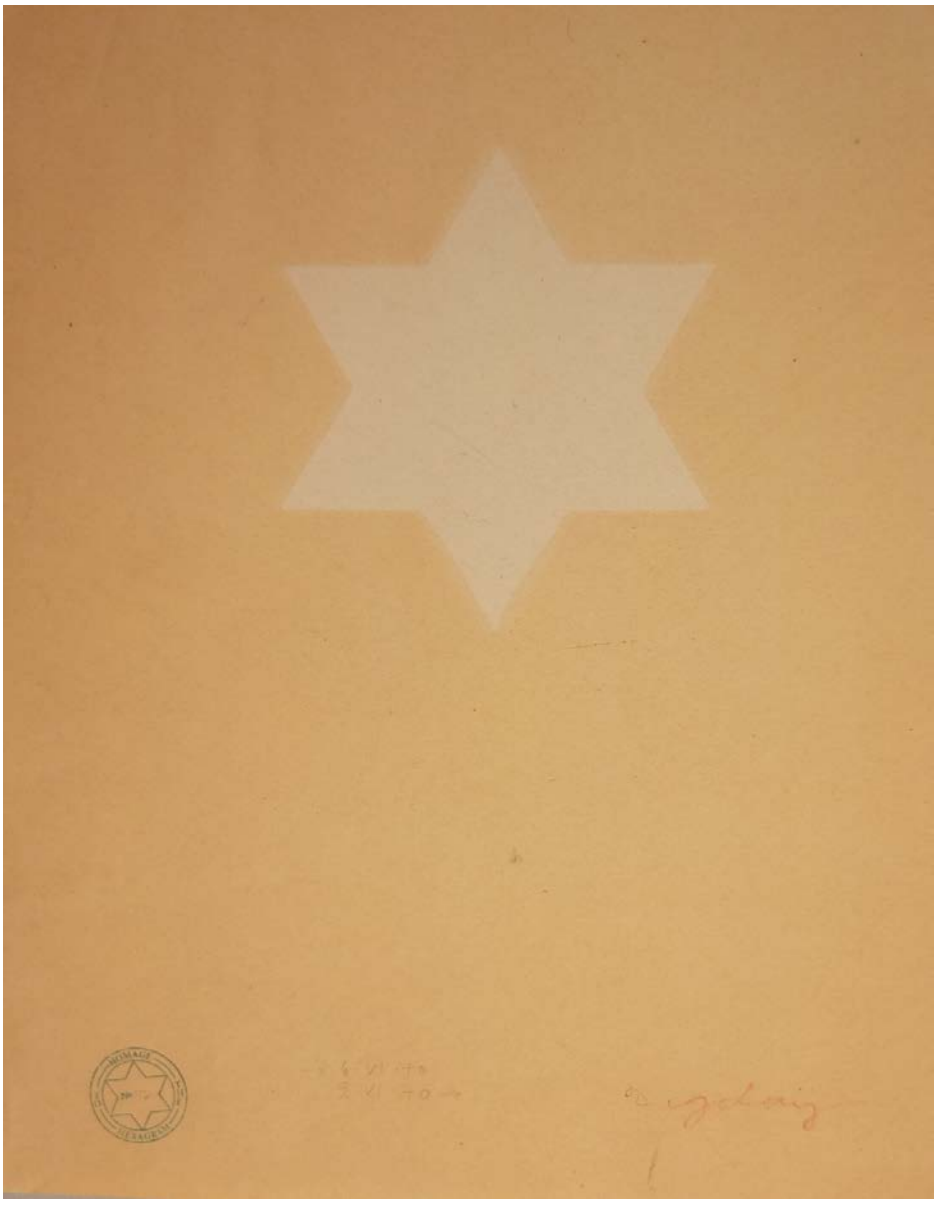
It was funny because to get to the next college you had to have a reference etc from the Foundation course, but there were no staff. The Principal had been locked out, international T.V. crews had the place staked out, it was chaotic. So I wrote my own glowing reference

But why did you want to go to the country ?

London was incredibly druggy in the mid 60's, people were dying, people I knew, it was grim. Also it was an opportunity, being an independent student you could go anywhere. I looked at those little prospectuses and went on a tour of schools in the south with a fellow student, Jenny Delfont, in her red mini, got to Corsham[7] saw the beautiful avenue of yew trees leading up to the mansion and choose that. The next three years were like a wonderful dream. People put it down, I guess they didn't get the point. Everything was taken care of for you, all you had to do was your own work.

The first things that I saw of yours were the star pieces, six pointed stars, we should talk about them.

The first piece in the show is called SOLAR PRINT. I was trying to make art where the work was made by not making any work, just re-arranging what already existed . It was just a sheet of newsprint and I put a cut-out cardboard star on top for a period, a couple of days and left it in the sun so that the uncovered paper darkened, leaving a print of the star when it was removed; so that as you were looking at it you knew that the image was disappearing into the paper, catching up with the background, so you would be looking at nothing, it was living, or dying.

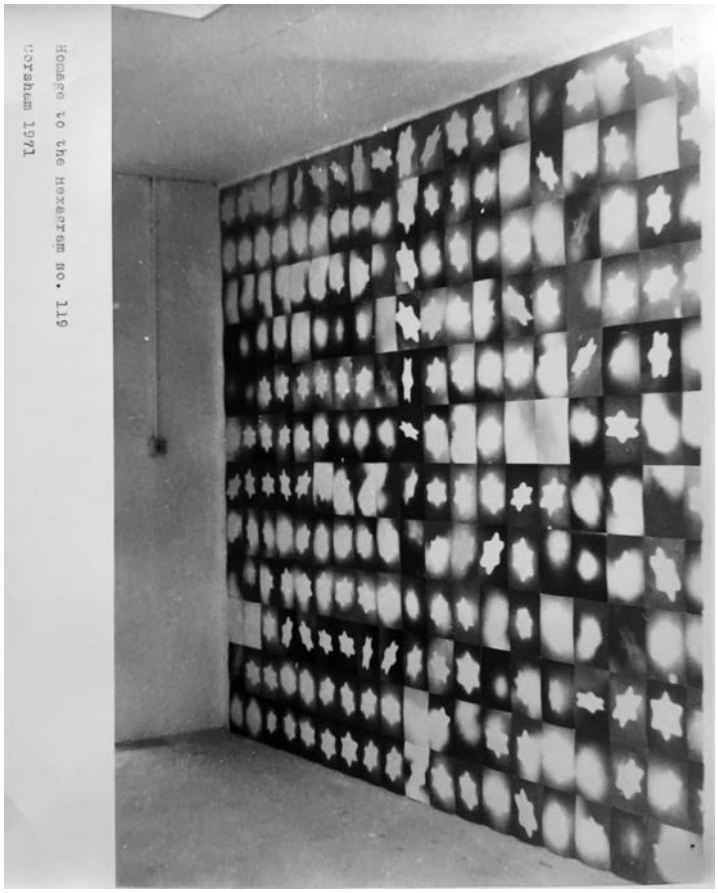


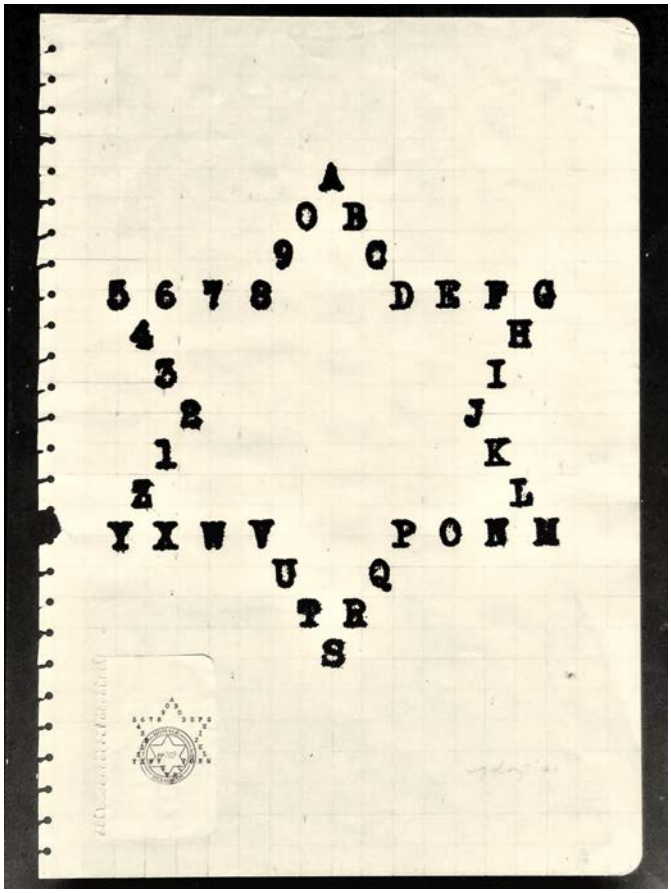
What significance did the star as a form have for you?

It didn't have any specific religious Jewish symbolic meaning for me, I was reading Ouspensky's New Order of The Universe where he describes it "as the 'period of dimensions' the three space dimensions and the three time dimensions in their perfect union where every point of space includes the whole of time and every moment of time includes the whole of space; when everything is everywhere and always. But this state of six dimensional space is incomprehensible and inaccessible to us – **We can never see a six pointed star.**" It was a perfect shape, very easily seen and remembered, dynamic. The six points are equidistant from one another and from the centre. A perfect multisymetrical equilibrium. I decided to make the star the vehicle for all of the work that I did then, each piece was stamped "Homage to the Hexagram" and given a number. I set about 'illustrating' the star by my work being experiencing the star and not just seeing it. I set up a pinhole camera in an empty room with a small star shaped aperture and filmed the appearance and fading as the clouds in the sky outside altered the intensity of star as it delicately waxed and waned.

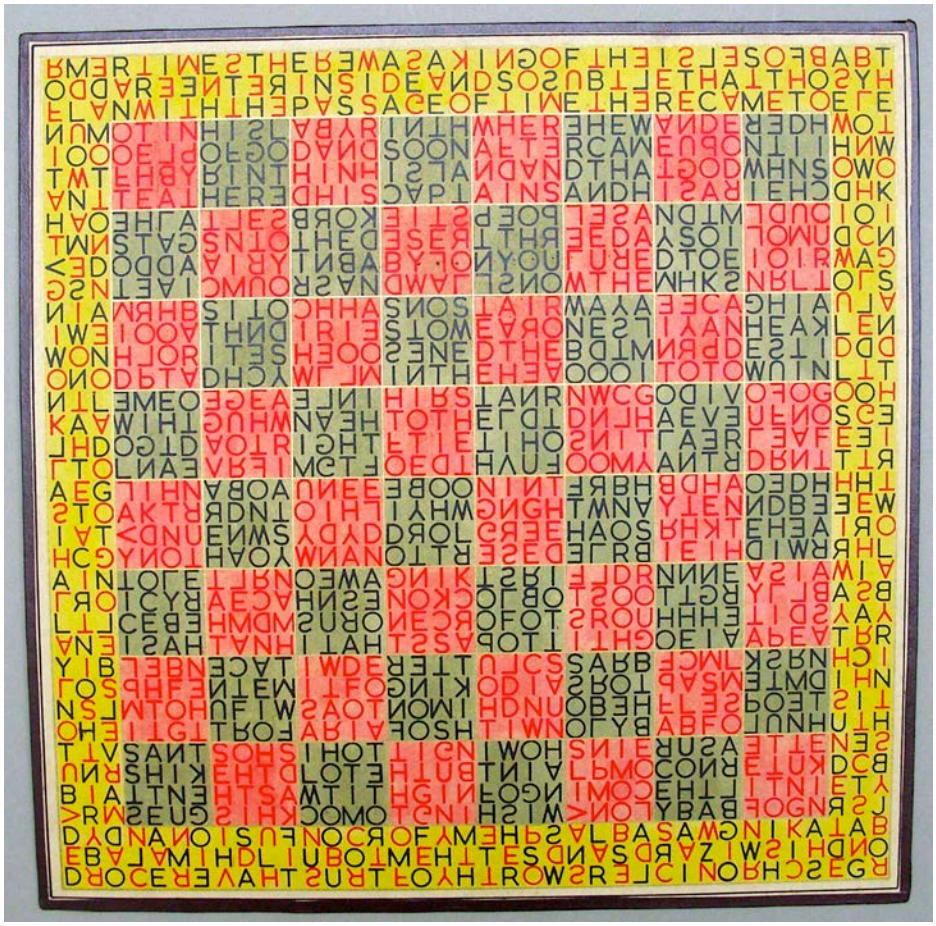
Something else about this work then was about the materials.
The simplicity of them, their economy. It wasn't to do with money. Pared down to the basics

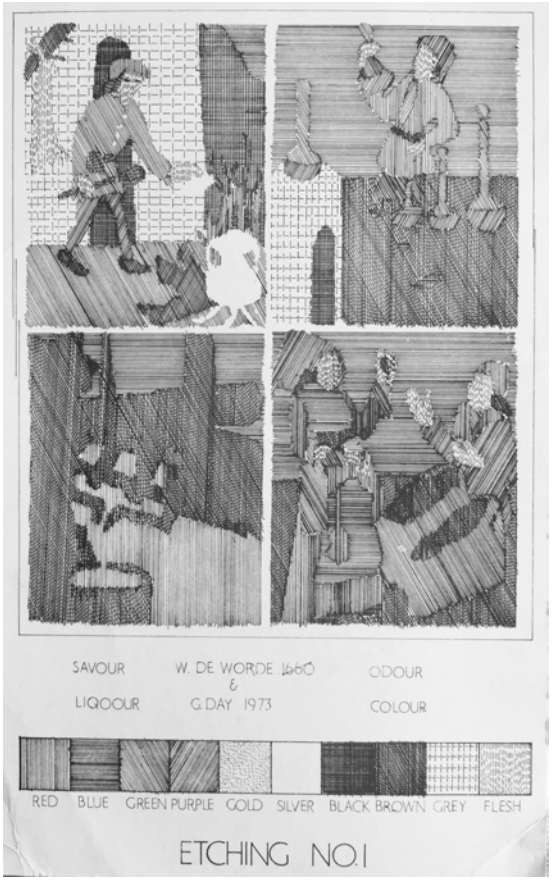
It was a deliberate non-luxurious use of basic things. It was also a sort of reverence, a homage to the 'thingness' of things. Remember it's late 60's, Zen, Arte Povera, English Conceptualism were all in the air. Everybody was mythologizing the mundane.





Other 'star' pieces of yours around that time involved printed texts; and and the Borges chess board story The Two Kings.





Concrete poetry was big in the late 60's when I was at Corsham. John Furnival taught in the design department, and he introduced me to Dom Sylvester Houeard who worked with typewriters. I took existing texts, descriptions, stories and set them in type so that the form of the piece was the content, you read the text and experienced visually what it was like to be physically in a maze.

How were they printed?

I looked into etching and its conventions, in heraldic prints colours were identified by lines in different directions.

Sol Lewitt?

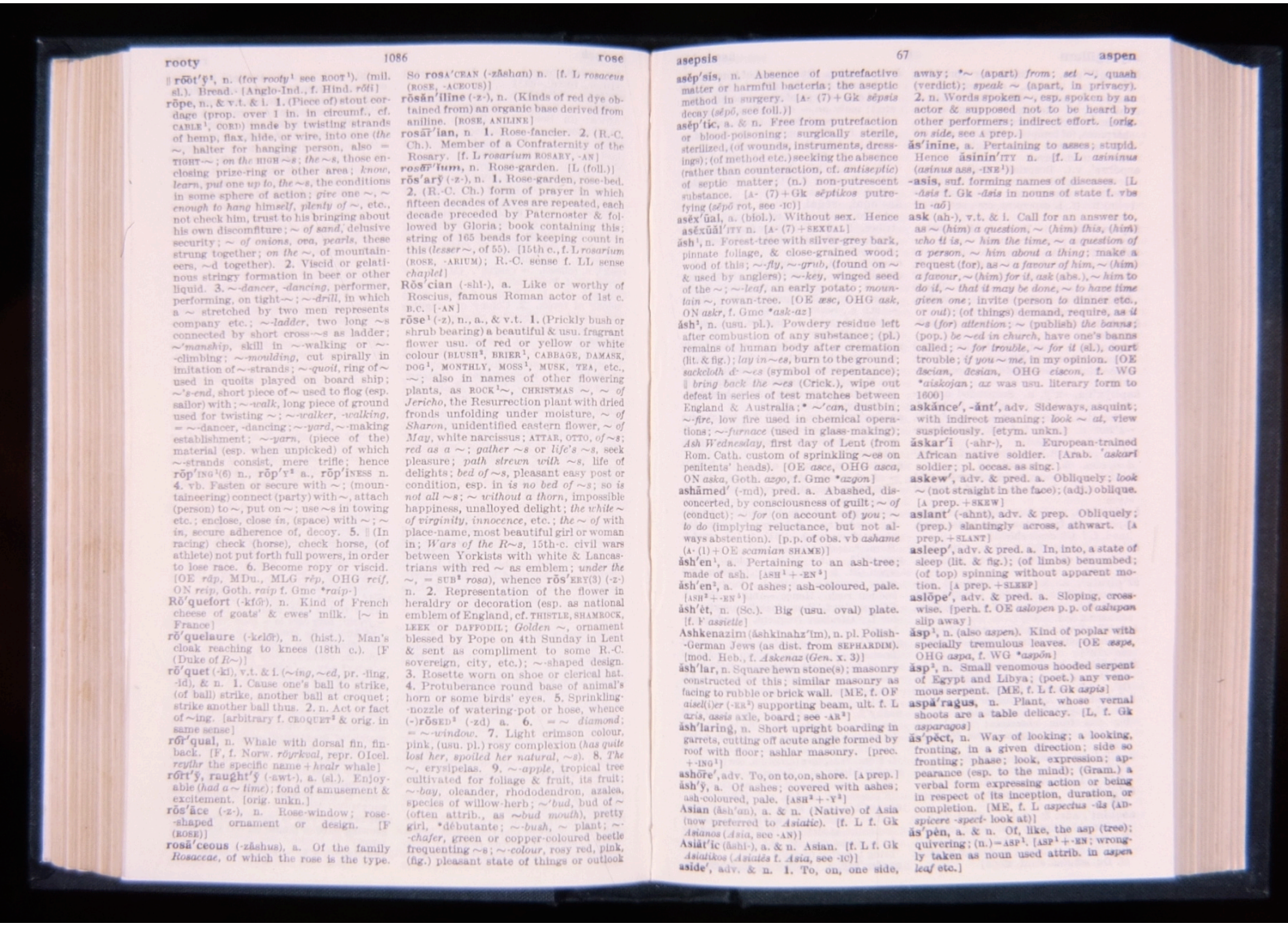
No. I mainly used screen-printing in black, and red if you needed a contrast, on newsprint in open editions. Printing seemed an obvious method, they could be given away, exchanged, sent out worldwide.

Then there were other book pieces, The Green Lady.

This was a book i made, there as a TV documentary about the famous kitsch painting, I photographed images from the tv, one of which was blank, screenprinted them and artist friends to draw their version.

Also text pieces. I remember we the dictionary.

We were learning bookbinding and Roy Salter, the binder, had us take a book apart to understand how it was made and then put it back together again exactly as it was. I was reading John Cage at the time, my girlfriend Caroline Dale had given me his collection of essays, ‘Silence’, and I thought of using that but then I came across his anecdote of how one day he looked up the word ‘music’ in the dictionary and the preceding entry was ‘mushroom’, which started him searching out and eating funghi, one of which nearly killed him. I liked the idea of a chance encounter having dangerous consequences, of being sidetracked, of getting rid of intention. I threw all of the loose pages up in the air a couple of times, collected them up without any order and rebound them.



rooty 1086 rose

‖ **rōōt'ȳ**[2], n. (for *rooty*[1] see ROOT[1]). (mil. sl.). Bread. [Anglo-Ind., f. Hind. *rōṭī*]

rōpe, n., & v.t. & i. **1.** (Piece of) stout cordage (prop. over 1 in. in circumf., cf. CABLE[1], CORD) made by twisting strands of hemp, flax, hide, or wire, into one (*the* ~, halter for hanging person, also = TIGHT-~; *on the* HIGH ~*s*; *the* ~*s*, those enclosing prize-ring or other area; *know, learn, put* one *up to, the* ~*s*, the conditions in some sphere of action; *give one* ~, ~ *enough to hang* himself, *plenty of* ~, etc., not check him, trust to his bringing about his own discomfiture; ~ *of sand*, delusive security; ~ *of onions, ova, pearls*, these strung together; *on the* ~, of mountaineers, ~d together). **2.** Viscid or gelatinous stringy formation in beer or other liquid. **3.** ~*-dancer, -dancing*, performer, performing, on tight-~; ~*-drill*, in which a ~ stretched by two men represents company etc.; ~*-ladder*, two long ~s connected by short cross-~s as ladder; ~*'s-manship*, skill in ~-walking or ~-climbing; ~*-moulding*, cut spirally in imitation of ~-strands; ~*-quoit*, ring of ~ used in quoits played on board ship; ~*'s-end*, short piece of ~ used to flog (esp. sailor) with; ~*-walk*, long piece of ground used for twisting ~; ~*-walker, -walking*, = ~-dancer, -dancing; ~*-yard*, ~-making establishment; ~*-yarn*, (piece of the) material (esp. when unpicked) of which ~-strands consist, mere trifle; hence **rōp'ISH**[2](6) n., **rōp'Y**[2] a., **rōp'INESS** n. **4.** vb. Fasten or secure with ~; (mountaineering) connect (party) with ~, attach (person) to ~, put on ~; use ~s in towing etc.; enclose, close *in*, (space) with ~; ~ *in*, secure adherence of, decoy. **5.** ‖ (In racing) check (horse), check horse, (of athlete) not put forth full powers, in order to lose race. **6.** Become ropy or viscid. [OE *rāp*, MDu., MLG *rēp*, OHG *reif*, ON *reip*, Goth. *raip* f. Gmc **raip-*]

Rō'quefort (-kfŏt), n. Kind of French cheese of goats' & ewes' milk. [~ in France]

rō'quelaure (-kelōr), n. (hist.). Man's cloak reaching to knees (18th c.). [F (Duke of *R*~)]

rō'quet (-kĭ), v.t. & i. (~*ing*, ~*ed*, pr. -ling, -id), & n. **1.** Cause one's ball to strike, (of ball) strike, another ball at croquet; strike another ball thus. **2.** n. Act or fact of ~ing. [arbitrary f. CROQUET[2] & orig. in same sense]

rŏr'qual, n. Whale with dorsal fin, finback. [F, f. Norw. *röyrkval*, repr. OIcel. *reythr* the specific name + *hvalr* whale]

rŏrt'ȳ, raught'ȳ (-awt-), a. (sl.). Enjoyable (*had a* ~ *time*); fond of amusement & excitement. [orig. unkn.]

rōs'āce (-z-), n. Rose-window; rose-shaped ornament or design. [F (ROSE)]

rosā'ceous (-zāshus), a. Of the family *Rosaceae*, of which the rose is the type. So **rosā'CEAN** (-zāshan) n. [f. L *rosaceus* (ROSE, -ACEOUS)]

rōsăn'ĭline (-z-), n. (Kinds of red dye obtained from) an organic base derived from aniline. [ROSE, ANILINE]

rosā'rian, n. **1.** Rose-fancier. **2.** (R.-C. Ch.). Member of a Confraternity of the Rosary. [f. L *rosarium* ROSARY, -AN]

rosā'rium, n. Rose-garden. [L (foll.)]

rōs'ary (-z-), n. **1.** Rose-garden, rose-bed. **2.** (R.-C. Ch.) form of prayer in which fifteen decades of Aves are repeated, each decade preceded by Paternoster & followed by Gloria; book containing this; string of 165 beads for keeping count in this (*lesser* ~, of 55). [15th c., f. L *rosarium* (ROSE, -ARIUM); R.-C. sense f. LL sense *chaplet*]

Rōs'cian (-shĭ-), a. Like or worthy of Roscius, famous Roman actor of 1st c. B.C. [-AN]

rōse[1] (-z), n., a., & v.t. **1.** (Prickly bush or shrub bearing) a beautiful & usu. fragrant flower usu. of red or yellow or white colour (BLUSH[2], BRIER[1], CABBAGE, DAMASK, DOG[1], MONTHLY, MOSS[1], MUSK, TEA, etc., ~; also in names of other flowering plants, as ROCK[1]~, CHRISTMAS ~, ~ *of Jericho*, the Resurrection plant with dried fronds unfolding under moisture, ~ *of Sharon*, unidentified eastern flower, ~ *of May*, white narcissus; ATTAR, OTTO, *of* ~*s*; *red as a* ~; *gather* ~*s* or *life's* ~*s*, seek pleasure; *path strewn with* ~*s*, life of delights; *bed of* ~*s*, pleasant easy post or condition, esp. in *is no bed of* ~*s*; *so is not all* ~*s*; ~ *without a thorn*, impossible happiness, unalloyed delight; *the white* ~ *of virginity, innocence*, etc.; *the* ~ *of* with place-name, most beautiful girl or woman in; *Wars of the R*~*s*, 15th-c. civil wars between Yorkists with white & Lancastrians with red ~ as emblem; *under the* ~, = SUB[2] *rosa*), whence **rōs'ERY**(3) (-z-) n. **2.** Representation of the flower in heraldry or decoration (esp. as national emblem of England, cf. THISTLE, SHAMROCK, LEEK or DAFFODIL; *Golden* ~, ornament blessed by Pope on 4th Sunday in Lent & sent as compliment to some R.-C. sovereign, city, etc.); ~-shaped design. **3.** Rosette worn on shoe or clerical hat. **4.** Protuberance round base of animal's horn or some birds' eyes. **5.** Sprinkling-nozzle of watering-pot or hose, whence (-)**RŌSED**[2] (-zd) a. **6.** ~ ~ *diamond*; ~ ~*-window*. **7.** Light crimson colour, pink, (usu. pl.) rosy complexion (*has quite lost her, spoiled her natural*, ~s). **8.** *The* ~, erysipelas. **9.** ~*-apple*, tropical tree cultivated for foliage & fruit, its fruit; ~*-bay*, oleander, rhododendron, azalea, species of willow-herb; ~*'bud*, bud of ~ (often attrib., as ~*bud mouth*), pretty girl, *débutante; ~*-bush*, ~ plant; ~*-chafer*, green or copper-coloured beetle frequenting ~s; ~*-colour*, rosy red, pink, (fig.) pleasant state of things or outlook

asepsis 67 aspen

asĕp'sis, n. Absence of putrefactive matter or harmful bacteria; the aseptic method in surgery. [A- (7) + Gk *sēpsis* decay (*sēpō*, see foll.)]

asĕp'tic, a. & n. Free from putrefaction or blood-poisoning; surgically sterile, sterilized, (of wounds, instruments, dressings); (of method etc.) seeking the absence (rather than counteraction, cf. *antiseptic*) of septic matter; (n.) non-putrescent substance. [A- (7) + Gk *sēptikos* putrefying (*sēpō* rot, see -IC)]

asĕx'ūal, a. (biol.). Without sex. Hence **asĕxūăl'ITY** n. [A- (7) + SEXUAL]

ăsh[1], n. Forest-tree with silver-grey bark, pinnate foliage, & close-grained wood; wood of this; ~*-fly*, ~*-grub*, (found on ~ & used by anglers); ~*-key*, winged seed of the ~; ~*-leaf*, an early potato; *mountain* ~, rowan-tree. [OE æsc, OHG *ask*, ON *askr*, f. Gmc **ask-az*]

ăsh[2], n. (usu. pl.). Powdery residue left after combustion of any substance; (pl.) remains of human body after cremation (lit. & fig.); *lay in* ~*es*, burn to the ground; *sackcloth &* ~*es* (symbol of repentance); ‖ *bring back the* ~*es* (Crick.), wipe out defeat in series of test matches between England & Australia; * ~*'can*, dustbin; ~*-fire*, low fire used in chemical operations; ~*-furnace* (used in glass-making); *Ash Wednesday*, first day of Lent (from Rom. Cath. custom of sprinkling ~es on penitents' heads). [OE *æsce*, OHG *asca*, ON *aska*, Goth. *azgo*, f. Gmc **azgon*]

ashāmed' (-md), pred. a. Abashed, disconcerted, by consciousness of guilt; ~ *of* (conduct); ~ *for* (on account of) *you*; ~ *to do* (implying reluctance, but not always abstention). [p.p. of obs. vb *ashame* (A- (1) + OE *scamian* SHAME)]

ăsh'en[1], a. Pertaining to an ash-tree; made of ash. [ASH[1] + -EN[3]]

ăsh'en[2], a. Of ashes; ash-coloured, pale. [ASH[2] + -EN[3]]

ăsh'ĕt, n. (Sc.). Big (usu. oval) plate. [f. F *assiette*]

Ashkenazim (ăshkĭnahz'ĭm), n. pl. Polish-German Jews (as dist. from SEPHARDIM). [mod. Heb., f. *Askenaz* (*Gen.* x. 3)]

ăsh'lar, n. Square hewn stone(s); masonry constructed of this; similar masonry as facing to rubble or brick wall. [ME, f. OF *aisel(i)er* (-ER[2]) supporting beam, ult. f. L *axis, assis* axle, board; see -AR[2]]

ăsh'laring, n. Short upright boarding in garrets, cutting off acute angle formed by roof with floor; ashlar masonry. [prec. + -ING[1]]

ashōre', adv. To, on to, on, shore. [A prep.]

ăsh'ȳ, a. Of ashes; covered with ashes; ash-coloured, pale. [ASH[2] + -Y[2]]

Asian (āsh'ăn), a. & n. (Native) of Asia (now preferred to *Asiatic*). [f. L f. Gk *Asianos* (*Asia*, see -AN)]

Asiăt'ic (āshĭ-), a. & n. Asian. [f. L f. Gk *Asiatikos* (*Asiatēs* f. *Asia*, see -IC)]

aside', adv. & n. **1.** To, on, one side, away; *~ (apart) *from*; *set* ~, quash (verdict); *speak* ~ (apart, in privacy). **2.** n. Words spoken ~, esp. spoken by an actor & supposed not to be heard by other performers; indirect effort. [orig. *on side*, see A prep.]

ăs'inine, a. Pertaining to asses; stupid. Hence **ăsinin'ITY** n. [f. L *asininus* (*asinus* ass, -INE[1])]

-asis, suf. forming names of diseases. [L *-āsis* f. Gk *-āsis* in nouns of state f. vbs in *-aō*]

ask (ah-), v.t. & i. Call for an answer to, as ~ *(him) a question*, ~ *(him) this, (him) who & is, him the time*, ~ *a question of a person*, ~ *him about a thing*; make a request (for), as ~ *a favour of him*, ~ *(him) a favour*, ~ *(him) for it, ask* (abs.), ~ *him to do it*, ~ *that it may be done*, ~ *to have time given one*; invite (person to dinner etc., or out); (of things) demand, require, as *it* ~*s (for) attention*; ~ (publish) *the banns*; (pop.) *be* ~*ed in church*, have one's banns called; ~ *for trouble*, ~ *for it* (sl.), court trouble; *if you* ~ *me*, in my opinion. [OE *āscian, ācsian*, OHG *eiscon*, f. WG **aiskojan*; *ax* was usu. literary form to 1600]

askance', **-ant'**, adv. Sideways, asquint; with indirect meaning; *look* ~ *at*, view suspiciously. [etym. unkn.]

ăskar'ī (-ahr-), n. European-trained African native soldier. [Arab. *'askarī* soldier; pl. occas. as sing.]

askew', adv. & pred. a. Obliquely; *look* ~ (not straight in the face); (adj.) oblique. [A prep. + SKEW]

aslant' (-ahnt), adv. & prep. Obliquely; (prep.) slantingly across, athwart. [A prep. + SLANT]

asleep', adv. & pred. a. In, into, a state of sleep (lit. & fig.); (of limbs) benumbed; (of top) spinning without apparent motion. [A prep. + SLEEP]

aslōpe', adv. & pred. a. Sloping, crosswise. [perh. f. OE *aslopen* p.p. of *aslūpan* slip away]

ăsp[1], n. (also *aspen*). Kind of poplar with specially tremulous leaves. [OE *æspe*, OHG *aspa*, f. WG **aspōn*]

ăsp[2], n. Small venomous hooded serpent of Egypt and Libya; (poet.) any venomous serpent. [ME, f. L f. Gk *aspis*]

aspā'ragus, n. Plant, whose vernal shoots are a table delicacy. [L, f. Gk *asparagos*]

ăs'pĕct, n. Way of looking; a looking, fronting, in a given direction; side so fronting; phase; look, expression; appearance (esp. to the mind); (Gram.) a verbal form expressing action or being in respect of its inception, duration, or completion. [ME, f. L *aspectus* -ūs (*aspicere -spect-* look at)]

ăs'pĕn, a. & n. Of, like, the asp (tree); quivering; (n.) = ASP[1]. [ASP[1] + -EN[2]; wrongly taken as noun used attrib. in *aspen leaf* etc.]

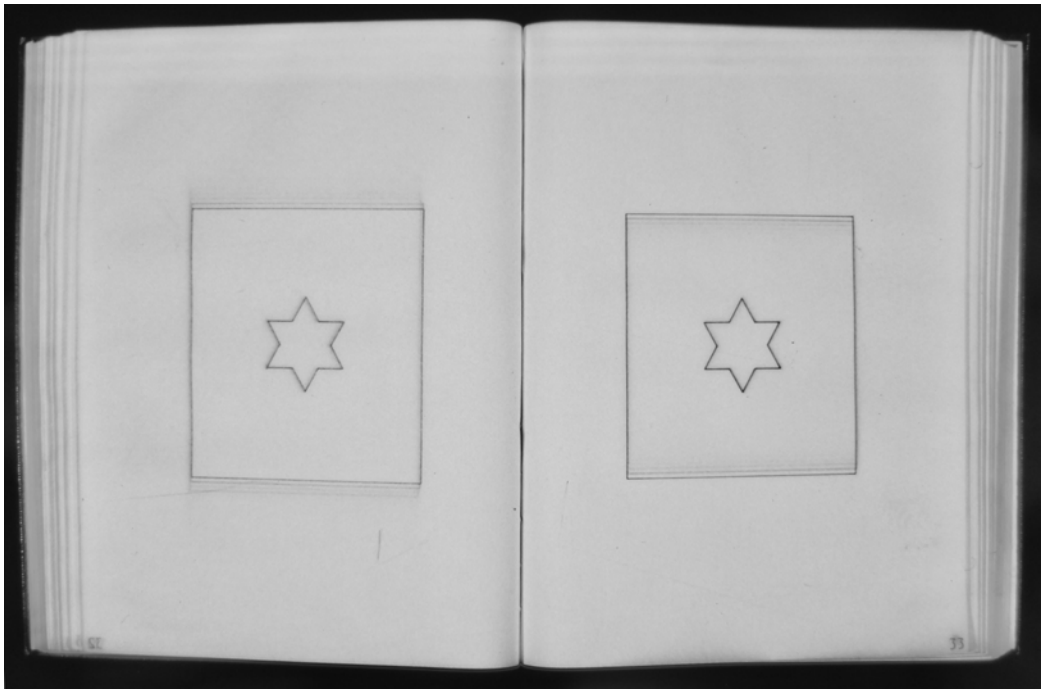
The pages of a standard dictionary?

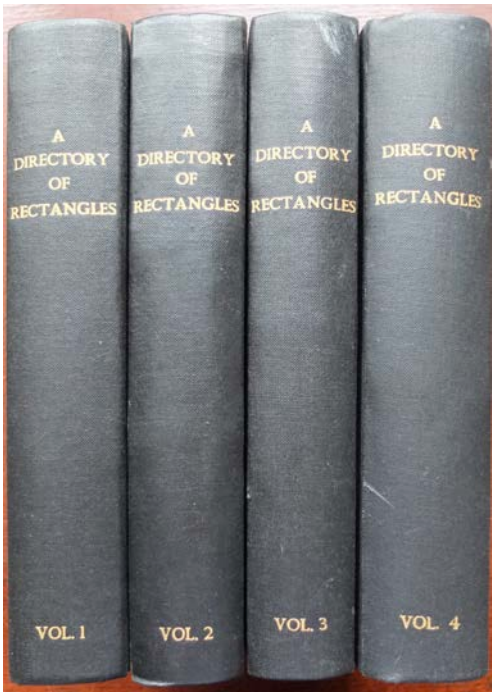
Then I changed the title on the spine from Concise Dictionary, it had been cut up.

Was there a connection with Brion Gysin and the Beat writers?

No, I knew about Burroughs and his cut-up technique of producing weird juxtapositions of lines but that wasn’t the lead.

Another book of yours from the late 60's and early 70's in your retrospective is the Directory of Rectangles. Four big volumes, two thousand different





drawings of rectangles that decrease by 2 mm on each page.

Instead of deciding what shape to make things, that is to choose, I thought that if you drew all of the possibilities, somewhere in there would be the answer. It was also a kind of spiritual exercise, practical meditation. At Anthony D'Offay's[10] gallery I'd seen a show of drawings by the Japanese print master Hokusai of lions[11]. Every morning before starting to work he would draw a lion, to guard over him during that day. A little propitious exercise that I guess became a habit. My book took a couple of years to complete, ten pages a day.
I wanted to make a book where the first page was completely different from the last, but at no point in between could you really see where the change occurred. I was reading Raymond Roussel[8]. I'd discovered in Rayner Heppenstall's monograph that one of Roussel's techniques was to construct a homonymic equivalent of the first sentence in the book and the story had to flow seamlessly from one to the other, a sort of floppy palindrome.

I remember seeing the rectangle books in an early show with a funny mixture of people such as Michael Craig-Martin, you and David Hockney[9]. I have always thought of the "Directory" as having to do with the idea that it is difficult to find a perfect relationship between a shape and the page that it sits on.

Another book concerned with progression was Pradakshina which is something to do with Buddhism?

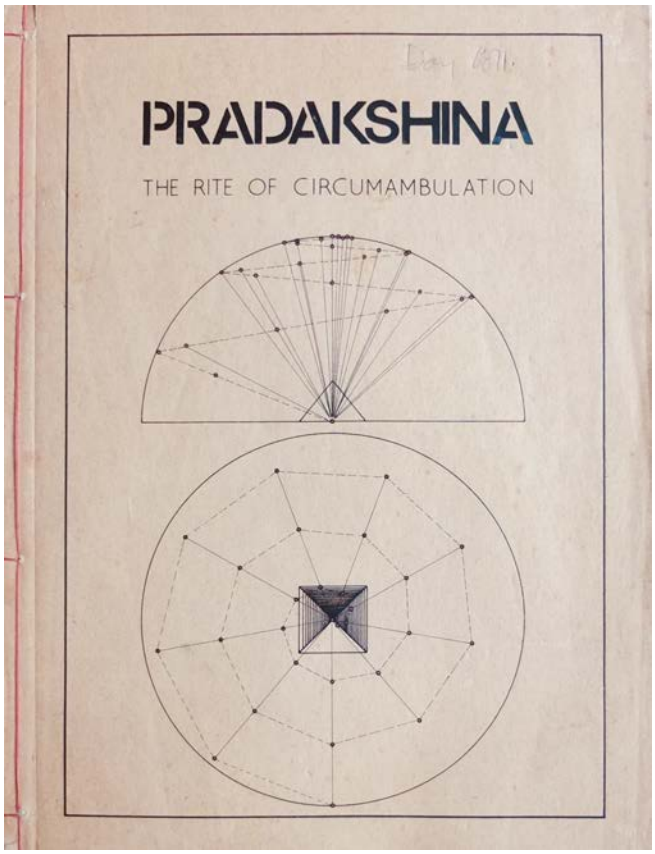
The subtitle is 'The Rite of Circumambulation', that is, walking clockwise around a venerated object. It consists of a series of 28 drawings of a pyramid whose viewpoints are located on a spiral traced on the surface of a dome. The first being at ground level shows as a triangle and the last, directly above is a square. The drawings become more and more alike the closer you get to the top.

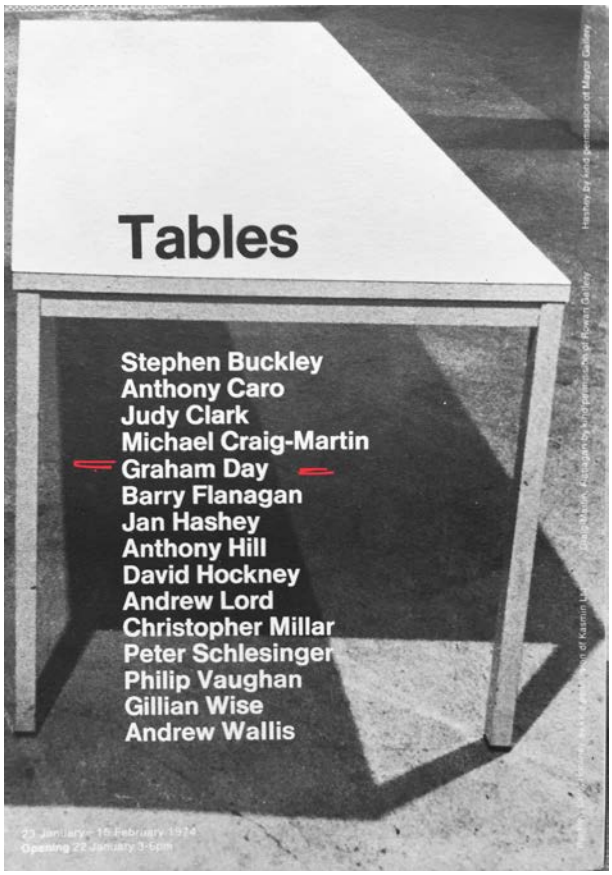
That makes me think of LeWitt again, the first wall drawings of his that I remember seeing, where points on a wall were all joined up, to one another.

Of course, I was aware of him. I even helped Dave Mann[12]and other students draw the pencil lines on a wall piece of his at the old Arnolfini gallery[13] around 1968; yellow 9H pencils, I've still got one somewhere. But I never bought American minimalism. It was too stripped down. There seemed to be a kind of intellectual suicide about it. I was much more aware of other cultural influences than American, so it wasn't a driving force with me at all.

So you didn't get the point of the new American work. In fact you've never been to New York. Why is that, everybody else that you must know has been there?

I had an American girlfriend for a while, Eileen O'Connor, who was a correspondent for A.B.C. News[14] She was always trying to get me to go, saying things like "people will love you, you're so English, they'll just eat you up'"

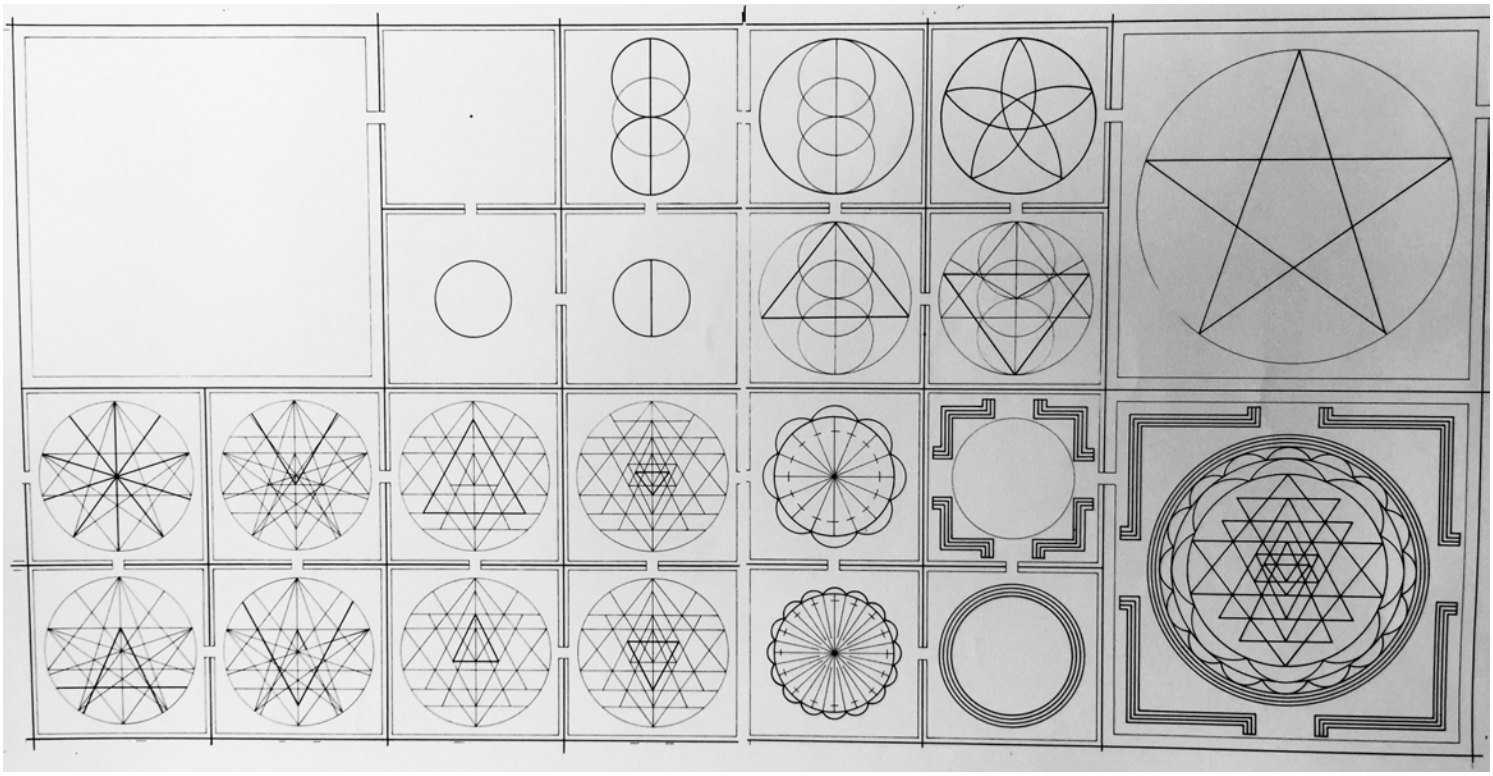




Somehow it put me off going. I took heart when I read in the Richardson biography that Picasso never went there either.

So the influences were not western but eastern, particularly Indian art. A whole wall of your retrospective has little opened out concertina books of drawings about how to construct a complicated looking diagram.

It's called the Sri Cakra Yantra means auspicious circle device. I spent seven years figuring out how to accurately draw it, 1970-1977. I was fascinated by it from the first moment, it's just nine triangles, four pointing up overlapped by five pointing down.



What does it mean, how is it used?

It's perhaps the most widely recognized image in Tantric art. For me it represented a super charged example of the star imagery that I'd used a lot already. There is a precise explanation of what each part and phase of its construction symbolize, basically it represents a divine moment of supreme ecstatic harmony. I instinctively appreciated what it was about and never felt the need to understand and use the figurative iconography that its different parts symbolized. It was the precise geometry that fascinated me. I made numerous hand painted book versions of it before deciding on my own definitive version that i printed and published in 1977.

When did you first see it?

Sometime in the late 60's, probably in Watkins bookshop in Cecil Court[15]. I was always down there looking at books on megalithic stones circles and the pyramids, you know, geometries that held the meaning of the universe, hippy stuff like that.

In 1971 you started a two year post graduate course in Fine Art at the Slade School of Fine Art[16]. Who was teaching there who influenced you?

At the Slade was where I first met Keith Critchlow[17] who was teaching there and at the Architectural Association[18]. He had a hand in setting up the "Research into Lost Knowledge Organization", concerned with earth mysteries, esoteric poetry and lots of Islamic geometry. It wasn't hippy stuff at all, it was very academic you had to do serious reading.

Such as?

The bible was "The Mathematics of the Cosmic Mind"[19]. But it all led to a crisis in my life.

What happened, you cracked up?

No, no, in my work. In 1971 at the Hayward gallery in London there was a fantastic show called 'Tantra'[20] that had been put together by Phillip Rawson, who I later got to know. It was one of those amazing shows that had everything and more of the stuff that I had been looking at. It was so right for its time although it was heavily criticised by some Indians who thought that the omnipresent erotic element portrayed Indian culture in a bad light. No, the crisis was because I saw for the first time that I was just taking and using Indian imagery without understanding what it was for, what it meant. Even though I empathized with the drawings on an instinctive level, I realized that to just appropriate the stuff was phony and I made this conscious decision to drop all the Indian influences and look at the culture that I came from. So I focused on geometry that legitimately could be thought of as from my culture.

Such as?

So I choose western perspective conventions and watercolour as being the subject and materials in which to work.

But perspective is a 15th century Italian invention, it can't be thought of as yours.

Compared to the esoteric oriental stuff it can. I did a series of what I thought would be English pictures. Just as with the rectangle book where I, as it were, listed all of the different rectangles rather than choose one, so I juxtaposed different western perspective systems in the same picture, pointing up that they were all equally valid ways of representing reality.

Like a lexicon of space.

I just drew simple things like chairs and tables, the staple elements of 17th century perspective primers, chequered floors, staircases[21]. There are several of carpets, where the carpet is divided up into four parts. They have the same pattern but it looks very different drawn in different conventions.

And these were done using watercolour?

Yes, I painted several just using one convention. On expensive handmade paper, a complete change from the previous low-key approach. I summed up the series with five large paintings each with a group of the same components but in five different perspective conventions.
I'd been rather shocked when I saw the Tantra show, I realized how superficial I'd been, imitating primitive Indian working methods when I was working in the centre of London within walking distance of virtually any materials that I could imagine.

Did the people at the Slade prompt this criticism of your work?

No. One of my tutors was the painter Keith Vaughan[20] who didn't really relate to what I was doing. He'd either be up and bitchy or down and dismissive. I wasn't surprised when I heard that he'd killed himself a few years later. No, it was Critchlow.[17] I was very impressed with his detective approach, he would work things out, back to their roots, to the source. He was incredibly dismissive of anything superficial, no sense of humour whatsoever, which is odd because his method of teaching seemed based on Sufi[22] ideas. The difference I realized later was that he was a commentator, an explainer: he always strove for the comprehensive overview, why and how; whereas I was trying to be creative, I didn't care about understanding, I wanted to be it.

Was there, is there, a sense of conflict with Critchlow ?

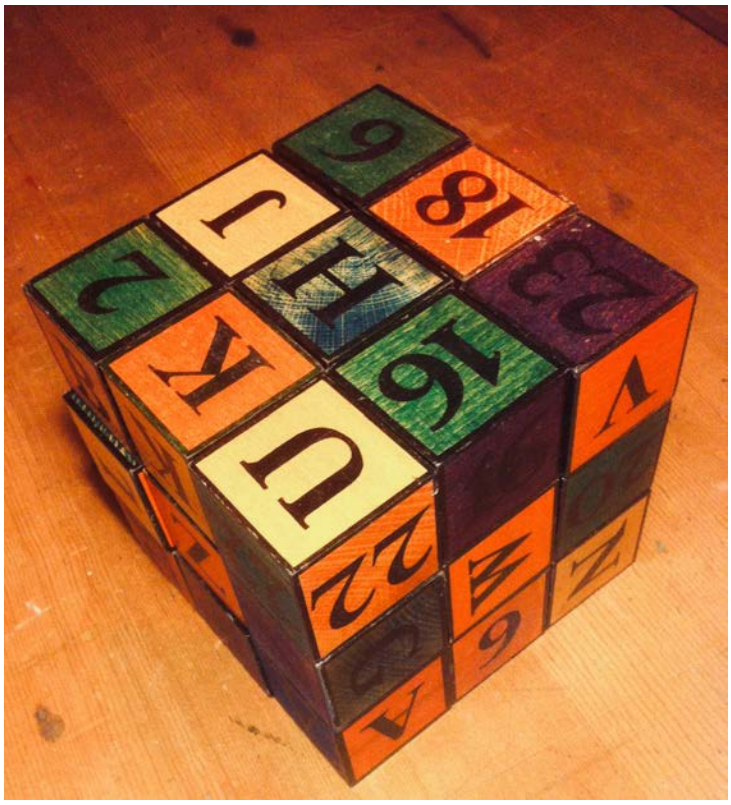
I've given up on him. For years I defended him against people who called him a paranoid snob, but now I ignore him.

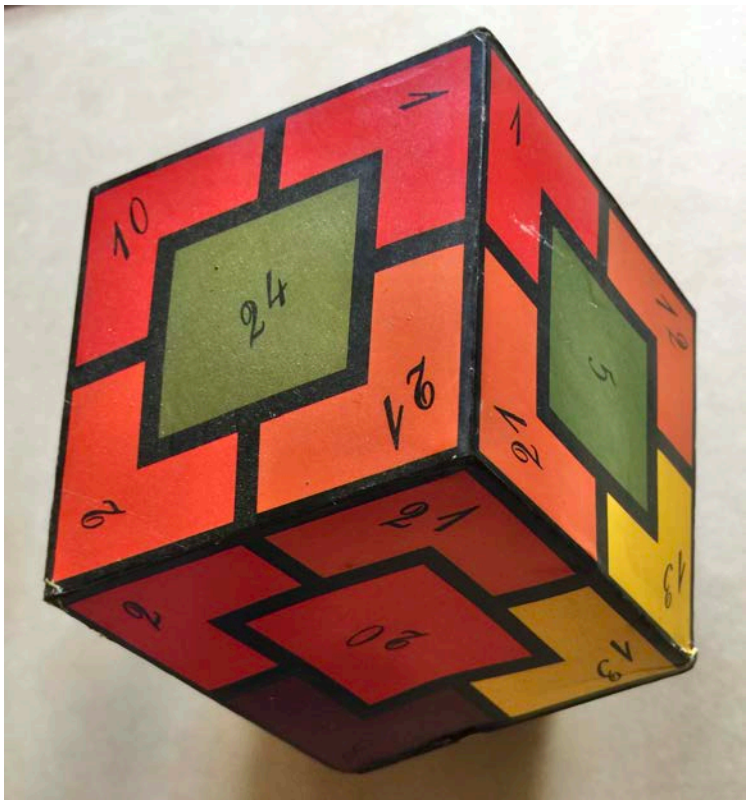
I can sense this is an issue but let's not get sidetracked.

The majority of the pieces in the Tantra show belonged to Ajit Mookerjee[23] and when in 1977 I published a booklet demonstrating how to draw the Sri Cakra diagram I sent him a copy and we corresponded. He was enthusiastic and that set me back on track. I'd been a bit over nervous in earlier junking the multi-cultural approach.

What happened then?

Well, to try and resolve the problem of being fascinated by Indian ideas and needing to make my work within the means of my own culture I printed and bound the Sri Cakra book retaining an oriental structure like a concertina





but printed it in crisp black lines on very white modern paper and this led me to make a series of objects where the form fitted the content like a glove, no packaging, refined down to the minimum for comprehension.

This is the cube with the letters on each face?

That's called The Aleph[24]. There's a Borges short story about an object that shows the viewer everything in the world, and when I discovered that if you stacked up 27 cubes in a 3x3x3 way you wouldn't be able to see the one in the middle which left 26 that were visible….

….The alphabet.

26 is a funny number, it has no obvious shape. So I painted the letters on the cube.

What about the cube in the centre, the invisible one?

Full stop, comma, question mark etcetera. Isn't it funny how things reflect their time. I made these pieces 20 years ago before computers kicked in, messing around with lead type is strictly artisanal now but it wasn't back then.

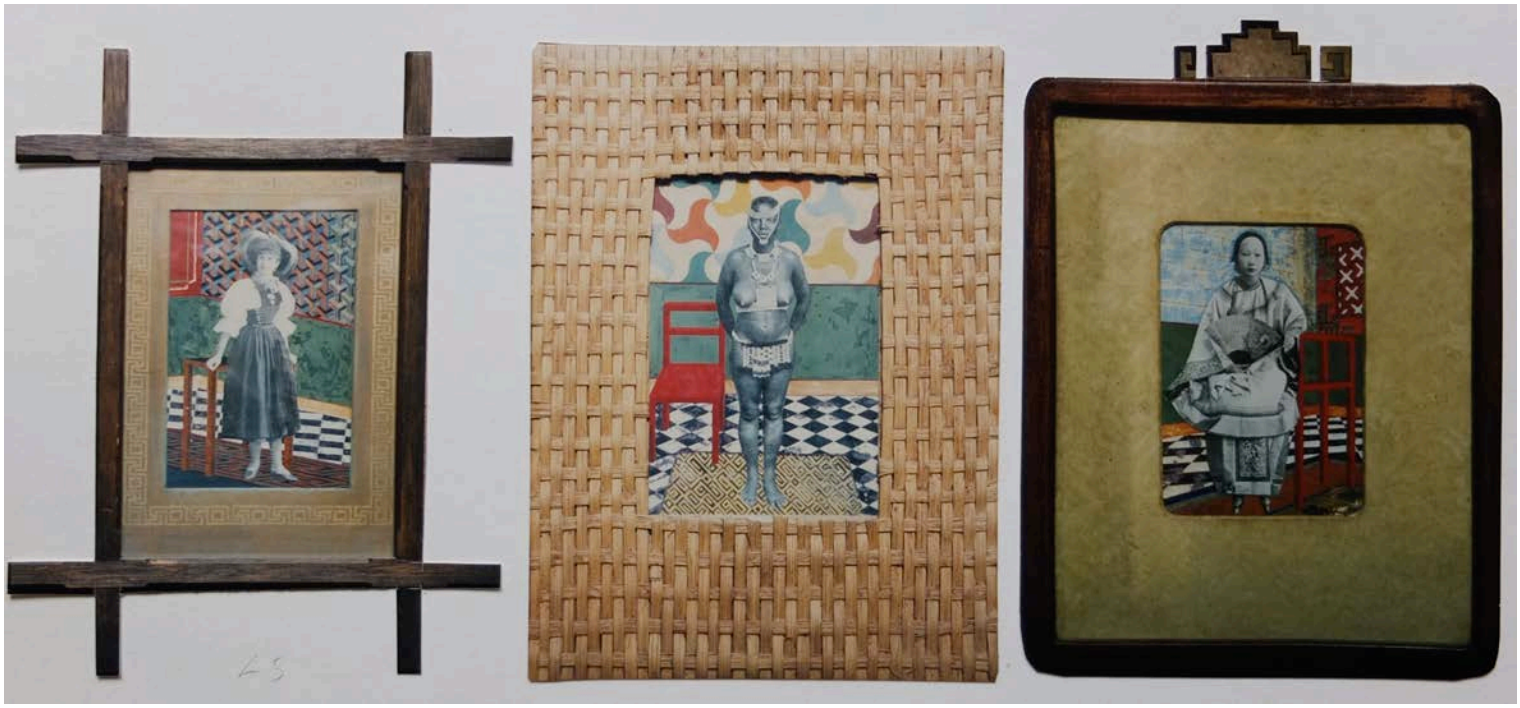
Do you see this object group as English? Did it solve the dilemma?

I made several object where I tried to fit the form to the function without anything superfluous. What could be more English that the alphabet? Another one was a perpetual calendar coloured according to the English weather seasons. Also a clock where the hour hand carrying the sun/moon revolved once in 24 hours. Time and how to represent its passage has always been an interest. But it was more to do with reading, about thinking and wanting to give ideas shape. Imagine making a sphere, what would be the idea behind that?

As well as these English pieces you also made some books about people from other cultures.

Another piece with prints of women was Resurrection. I'd always thought how phoney those photos of people from far away places looked in those British books, stagey backdrops. You could see their wristwatches sometimes, you knew it was a scam. If the women were portrayed as primitive you could show their tits. Also they were printed crudely on cheap paper.

"People's of the British Empire in National Costume"[25].



That sort of thing. I wanted to reverse the process, give them back their dignity. So I deliberately tore the pages from the book and painted over the backgrounds with scenes from my house, as though they were my guests.

Are you sure that you were not guilty of just re-doing again what had originally been done to them? We should leave other people alone.

O.K. I take your point but remember we're are not talking people flesh and blood, but furry little dots of black ink made from carbon and glue.

You also worked in conjunction with a fellow student around this time.

Yes, Steve Wheatley, a poet. I established IDEOGRAPH PUBLICATIONS. He wrote the poems and I designed the layout and we silkscreened them in small editions and tried to get specialist bookshops like Better Books on Charing Cross Road and Compendium in Camden Town to take them, it was part of trying to find ways of operating as an artist but not through the gallery set up.

One of the things you had always done was to take from lots of sources. What happens quite quickly is that you're taking things that are loaded with meaning from all sorts of cultures. It's all very well to regard anything to do with Stonehenge or Avebury or somewhere as 'our culture' but it simply isn't ours. They are cultures that we know very little about.

But at least we are near it physically.

I have known Avebury since I was a teenager and I love it, but I don't know how much it's mine.

No, I don't agree. Stonehenge must be site-specific, it relates to what you can see from, that point on the planet.

But the people who made it might have come from somewhere else, not be local.

Like another planet? I was never a hippy, although I am very interested in Indian Painting, I don't want to go to India particularly. People are always saying to me you can't understand it unless you go there, see the life, how people live. Well maybe they are right. But at least Stonehenge has had the same night and day cycle as me, had it a little longer, but that's what I mean about being connected.

I don't feel attached to Roman culture either, which was here for as long and afterwards. I assume that most Romans that were here were not Italian at all. They would have been Gauls who'd become Romanized and then a

certain integration process occurred. It's also a culture that encompasses religions into its own pantheon of Gods in order to do the other kind of imperialism.

What about Roman drawings. Think of their architecture, the Colosseum, the Pantheon, how could they be built without drawings or plans all those curves within curves?

I've never seen any, which is strange. Completely aside from that. It just seems that once it is established in your work, this idea of multiculturalism is really important.

That's what I mean about not wanting to travel to India and the far east. People expect me to want to go. My interest in other cultures is not the flora and fauna or social problems but what they put down on paper and has survived.

But if you go there you could experience it first hand.

London is full of Indians studying their own culture. Are you aware of how good our collections are, of how much material comes to London at auction? Also it's such a hassle, if you went to Portugal tomorrow I bet that you couldn't even ask for a loaf of bread.

Pane, pano' something like that[26].

O.K. you win. No, I'm interested in, and motivated by, the two dimensional world, paintings, drawings, maps, books, photographs. I'd rather read a recipe than eat the meal. Books can have influences in the real world, think of the Koranic prohibition on image making, which isn't actually in the Koran but in the Hadith, the teachings; that led the Arabs to explore geometry with such elaborate results in architecture, textiles and calligraphy.

So we are back to your old mix of geometry and eastern ideas.

I decided to make a big piece of work that involved something familiar to all periods and cultures.

Food? Sex?

No, This was The Shape of Time I always been struck by calendars, how some cultures used the sun and others the moon as the determining factor for their year. I drew a line of 365 units and bent it into different shapes.

Geometric shapes?

Simple geometric shapes, circle, square, star, heart, twelve in all. These each represented the year, one unit per day. Into these I stuck little pins, these represented the lunar cycle, white map pins for full moons, black for no moon and half and half for the first and last quarters. I was hoping that the geometric shapes would provide a unifying link between the apparently unrelated cycles.

And did they?

Well, not exactly, but don't forget that I was also making these experiments as paintings, or rather coloured drawings and having to make them convincing bits of paper visually regardless of the scientific intention.

Was the name derived from the book of the same title?

No, Michael Kidner[27] put me on to that later, not in the beginning. I wanted to call all of this work Naive Science, you know, like in naive art where you can stumble across something without knowing its value, so I thought you could apply the same thing to science and try to get a result, but if you read, up started doing research it wouldn't be naive it would be amateur.

So why didn't you use the title, it sounds amusing.

Because you can't strategize and be naive. People told me about other time systems in history, sent me articles, you know what it's like if you teach, you're surrounded by teachers who by nature pass on information. By the time I'd completed twelve paintings I was an expert on the shape of time and my pictures were really naive!

One of the things that changed at some point in here is that for the first period through to the early 80's you were working in the country.

I was teaching part-time back at Corsham and living the country life but traveling around a lot in the vacations. Cind Oestreicher[28] and I would go off with other people and roam around European cities. In fact, I didn't do much work in the late 70's. I was being painted by Cind, fixing up an old house[29] and traveling all the time.

But work happens when you're not actually working.

I didn't worry about it, it's good to mess around, not be diligent. I wasn't a student any longer, you have to create your own discipline when school's over. The Shape of Time piece, which, by the way, all folds up and goes into a little black portfolio which I carried on these trips and worked on in lots of different places. I tried to build something of where I was into the work. There are the names of the months which were changed after the French revolution, Moorish decoration from Fez, staircases from Rome, Japanese glitter. It became like a friend, another travelling companion, I'd worry about leaving it on trains. Making that black portfolio to carry the work around was to have a big effect on my work for the next ten years.

That sounds dramatic, why?

Because it was making it that started me studying paper marbling.
Everybody recognizes marbled paper, it's become a cliche, it signifies olde-worlde, Jane Austinny, unashamedly retro….I know, I know but have you ever tried making it?

No I haven't but I know that it's a big deal for you.

It's fascinating. For ten years, mid 80's to mid 9O's I did made numerous paintings using integral marbling.

You did a solo show about it with Rose Issa[30] in London in 1988.[31]

It opened on February the 29th!

I didn't get to it but, I remember somebody putting it down as a bunch of forgeries.

I called them transcriptions, forgeries, which must be much more difficult to produce successfully, have an intention to deceive.

So what was the show all about?

I presented sixty pieces of work, all on paper, in fact lots of different papers, some new some very old, some I'd made from plants.

And on them?

Basically it was the result of extensive research into the techniques and history of marbling.

Why do you think paper marbling grabbed your attention?

Isn't it funny when you look back at how events dovetail and pan out, if you run time backwards like in that Martin Amis book[32]. The sequence is so unlikely, it's so surprising, how other people behave.

I feel an anecdote coming up.

I was having one of those distressing end of affair conversations. We'd had the lunch, she had to get back to work and hailed a cab on Cromwell Road and re-joined the stream. We'd been walking and had arrived at the V&A [33] which, with the cabs lurking outside presented us with an ultimatum, on the right lay the fast track, back to biz, on the left the museum promising idle wandering through corridors stuffed with treasure where all that you were allowed to do was look, think and read. Not like the new British Library[34] where you can also listen. You're concentrating on a 8th century Japanese woodcut and from behind you the tinny whine of John Lennon leaks out from earphones that have recordings of important music. We had to wait 30 years for that!

Get back to the plot.

She chose the cab and me the museum. There was a show of works on paper from India with a little 17th century picture made up from an elephant and rider in different bits of marbled paper[35] I was fascinated, it hovered between representation and abstraction, it wasn't absurd to see a marbled elephant. The technique and the subject alternated, vied for attention. Plus, I couldn't work out how it was made, it was the only example in the show and the joins between the individual bits of paper had been overpainted with gold lines. And so the process starts. You get an initial input that doesn't fade, you start to read around, seek other examples, arrange to meet people who answer questions and if you've got itchy fingers you start to try out the techniques.

What were the first pieces that you made?

The Mapmonde. I had found out that the separate bits of marbled paper were not individually stuck down but had been arrived at by the paper being masked out in stages and the patterns built up, all lying flat and integral to the support sheet of paper. Coming from a background of printmaking I could immediately see ways of doing it. Image-wise I came up with the globe image because it was made up from lots of facets that would demonstrate the technique well, and because one of the earliest images of marbled paper to arrive in England was of a globe in an Album Amicoram presumably brought back by a 17th century European traveller from Istanbul. A side reason was because I had always admired Uccello's analytical drawing of a chalice in the Ufficci museum in Florence, I chose that for the same reasons, the revealing facets. Because it was a loaded image and very pretty everybody liked it. I gave it to Rose Issa who, more than anybody understood my work and has been a fantastic encouragement.

So are the beginnings of marbling to be found in the Ottoman Empire?

No, for a show that I did in a museum in France in 1990 40. I commissioned a history of marbling to be written for the catalogue 41. According to Professor Yuan K. Yeoung, the origins of marbling can be traced back to 8th century China where it was known as liu sha chien – floating sand paper. From there it spread west like so many other important skills such as papermaking, ink and printing, the compass, gunpowder. And to Japan where it got stuck and didn't develop. So if you look into the history of the subject you see that it has lingered and been influenced by so many fascinating cultures. Chinese, Japanese, Central Asian, Persian, Indian, Turkish, the whole gamut of places that had always interested me.

Did these different cultures use marbling differently, what was it's function?

The technique spread westwards, picking up a varied history en route.. Also like other crafts that were the province of families and guilds it was shrouded in mystery through fear of the secret, the method, being imitated and the patronage lost. It was an adaptable technique its basic function was to package something, present its contents to its public?. The malleability of the technique allowed it to be used in a wide variety of applications and a diverse range of styles. In Japan it underlay official edicts and poems to deter tampering with a specific text, just like in modern day cheques. In India, Southern India, with her textile printing tradition and trading links with other countries it was presented as a technical curiosity. In Persia it was pretty, in Turkey it became associated with the flower motif, possibly because of the anagram link lalah – allah.

Lalah meaning?

Tulip.

And from Turkey how did it come to Europe?

Via Venice, also along North Africa. Exploding once it got under way in Europe, decorating the volumes of the fabulous libraries of competing colonial monarchs. Sombre during the French revolution, lurid for the Romantics; eventually becoming mechanised by the Germans and, each sheet no longer being unique, it lost its allure and became the cliché that you know it by.

But revived by you. And others?

There have been many resurrections, but there is a problem. If you are interested in technique the big danger is that you can hide behind it and let it take any flak directed towards your work, set up a mystique about it that inhibits criticism.

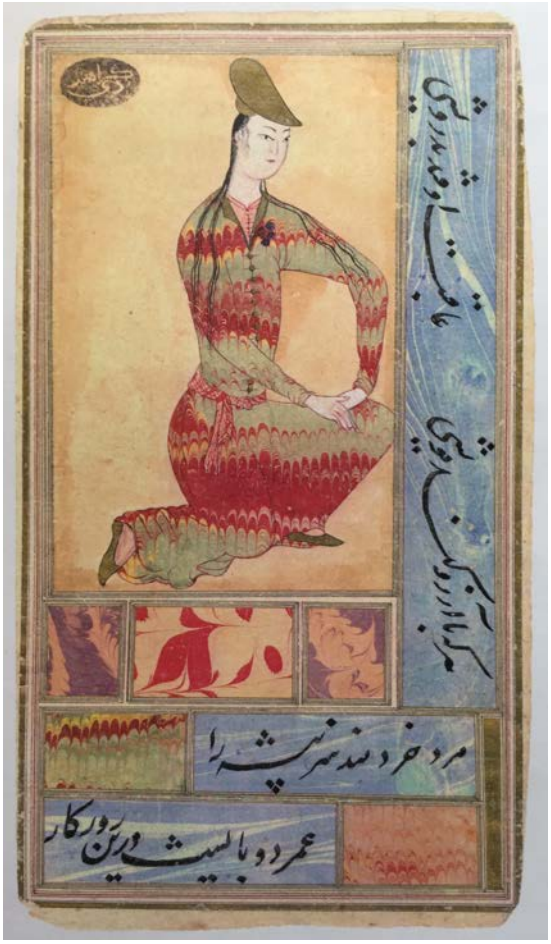
I have never thought of you as a craftsman.

Neither have I, but it has been a problem, how my work has been perceived.

How come?

Well, it is an unhappy mixture of craftsmanship and scholarship; it doesn't stun the craft world because I try out lots of different techniques and consequently never become a living treasure at one of them and the scholars wince because the research is half-cocked.

Most academics, whose raison d'etre is dedicated to establishing accurate chronologies, sifting fact from fiction, they hate copies, transcriptions. They see them as red herrings, blind alleys.



That's right, unless it's long enough ago. Roman copies of Greek sculpture are OK.

No, that's because they are good copies.

Also because they are illustrations, depictions of a common heritage. Until recently you didn't not paint a crucifix picture just because somebody else had already painted one. There was a need for images that confirmed beliefs.

And now.

There's no need for painting anymore, not actual paint on canvas, it's so primitive, unless of course that's the attraction.

As a painter I don't go along with that, let's get back to the forgeries criticism.

Well, marbling is a book art, it's small scale and done on paper, you can marble material but it always looks unconvincing.

Is there a particular type of paper for marbling?

The paper is all important because the paint is so thin you are always aware of its presence. Also, for integral marbling where the paper is mordanted, marbled, washed, dried and pressed several times you need decent stuff and if you are a paper fetishist you hunt out interesting sheets.

From where?

I once bought at a book auction a fantastic portfolio of hundreds of sheets of old paper, some with 15th century watermarks. Strangely the only other bidder was sitting right next to me in the crowded room. The experienced auctioneer effortlessly whipped up the soufflé of lust, greed and competition. I held firm and happily paid through the nose for the treasure trove, the most wonderful thing that I have ever bought. After the sale the unsuccessful bidder offered me half the hammer price just for the blue sheets of which there were dozens, full sheets, untrimmed and the very ones that I didn't need. So, watch out if you collect l5th century drawings!

You said that forgeries can be defined by their intention to deceive, yet you eagerly set about trying to produce little oriental pictures using antique methods and old paper, it's not surprising that people were suspicious is it?

That's a bit rich coming from you. I have on my shelves a catalogue of yours where you drew a cup in 100 different styles[39]. Those pictures of mine were also as much about history as about paper marbling. Firstly I choose well known images to study, secondly I enlarged them 200 % to make it obvious, and still set myself the task to make them look convincing to the untrained eye.

But what was your intention, why redo anything

Because when you are trying to make materials perform, to understand, without any outside help or sufficient instructions you have to try and get inside the head of the hands that made the original pieces that you've seen, they are your mentor and guide.

But as you've said that could be a 8th century Chinese monk or William Morris, which. or rather, who?

I choose Decanni pieces from southern India because they were the most curious, the most challenging. When you are teaching yourself you seek approval, confirmation that you can do whatever it is well, innovation is unhelpful at that stage, presumptuous, it's too early, it gets in the way, you are concerned with materials, trying, testing, you don't want to think. It is not until you can do something with predictable results that you can claim it, file it away in the box of technical tricks. So, yes I did set out consciously to imitate 17th century Persia and Indian drawings [40] but they were not exhibited as such. It was my work. I had a seal made of my name and each picture was stamped.

But the stamp was in Arabic.

Sure, it was another aspect of trying to take on the mantle, absorb the skills of the originators who themselves connected to other times and trades. And yet to the people I imagined were my audience, this would be appreciated, as was indeed the case when His Highness Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan bought two of the pieces from the London show. This was because he owned the originals, I didn't know that when I made them because I had worked from old illustrations. He told me that he liked them because it made him look more closely at the originals and re-live the original pleasure. I was amazed that the original picture could so easily re-claim its echo. I liked that magnetism, it linked me to the source. So they were never forgeries although I have seen some at auction, they never fooled those hawk-eyed Persian dealers, in context it's obviously what they were.

A pastiche?

Enough already! I was just working away, following my nose, I can't help it if Persian dealers aren't big on post modernist irony. Anyway, it all moved on. I started to combine the marbling with photography in the Photo Domino series.

The photo I can see, what's the domino?
In France decorated papers were made by dominiters. I read somewhere that it comes from the word for hood [41]. They worked in secret, shrouded, veiled. I'd been in North Africa and photographed some diminutive mannequins

in the window of a haberdashers. When I got back I printed the image down using the gum bichromate technique where you make up your own light sensitive emulsions and can coat different types of paper. I over marbled the lengths of different materials that swathed the models. I liked the contrast, I felt that it got back to the fascination of the little Indian picture that I had seen in the V&A. I then went on to do a series of mannequins, making up a family group, but mannequins look so unfriendly. I also made other pieces unconnected to the Indian ideas, River of Books was one that I liked. I was just enjoying the kick of being able to do it and didn't need the history crutch.

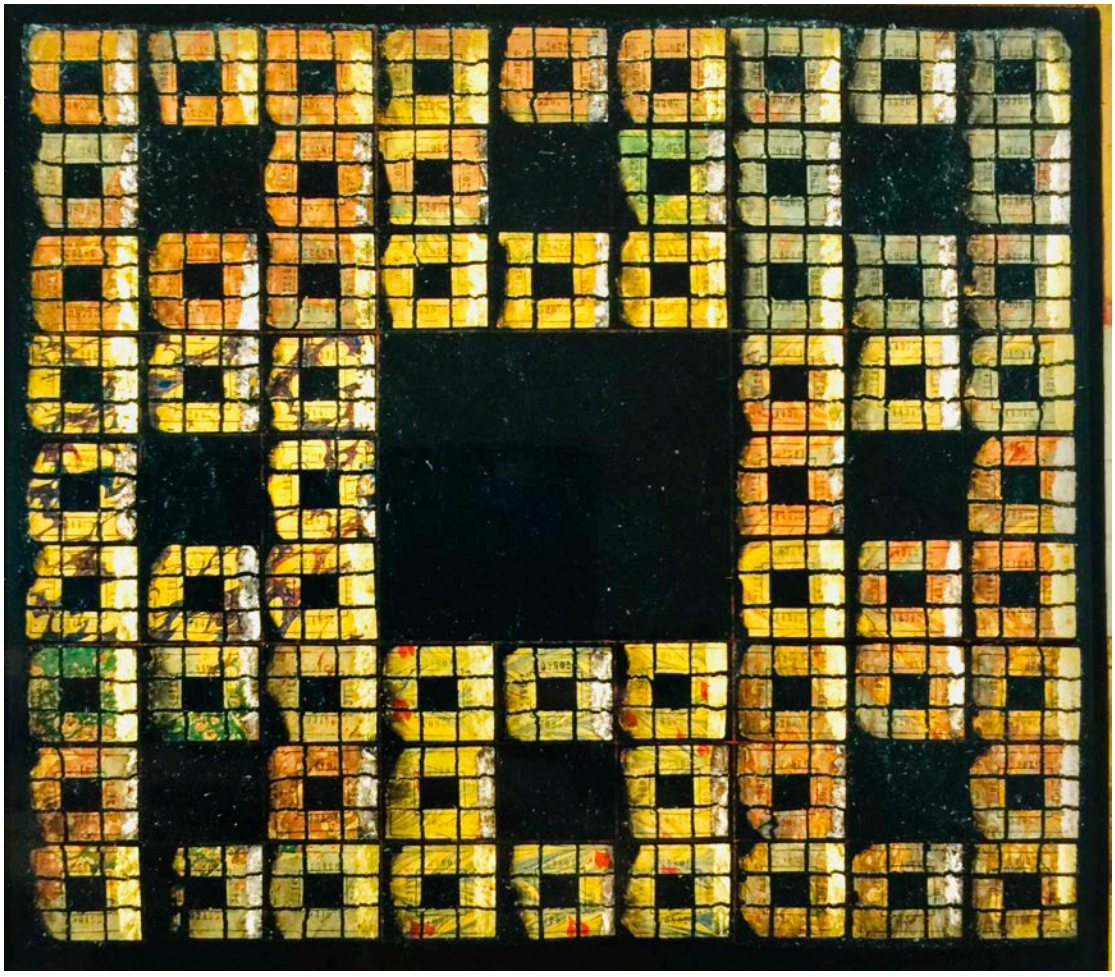
But it came to an end?

Eventually it all fell apart. With craft set-ups you need constant conditions, the right temperature, this and that, otherwise things don't turn out; remember marbling is a temperamental business, very alchemical. So I decided to pull it all together, sum it all up and make a piece that would stand as a milestone and started casting around for the framework. Walking down Milsom Street [42] one day I saw that Waterstone's bookshop was having a massive clearance sale. They had just been taken over by W.H. Smith who were selling off surplus stock. For someone who likes books the store was a nightmare. Books were everywhere, in enormous piles all over the floor, without any order. Chaos, unimaginable. I had made a painting in the 70's based on a Borges story The Library of Babel, which contains all of the possible combinations of the letters of the alphabet, which are not infinite but might as well be. Anyway, I stood dumbfounded in the shop reached out and picked up the first volume that looked interesting. From dumbfounded I went straight to ecstatic as I flicked through page after page of geometric forms, a stupendous compendium of late mannerist etchings of the five Platonic solids [43], where even the facets of the facets had facets. I rushed out of the store clutching my prize, to have to queue up and pay would have demeaned the miraculous discovery. Funnily, I met Tim Waterstone at a party last year and knowing that he had already sold the chain, (he was now into baby clothes) I told him the story, thinking it would amuse him; it didn't, he took a very dim view and told me that the most common book thieves were priests, which I can believe, you feel you have a right to it. I spent two years working in the old Diorama building by Regent's Park [44], re-drawing the twenty pages, six shapes to a page in thin violet crayon on beautiful paper that had come from the sale[45] of materials after the death of Cockerell the most famous English marbler. It has a cockerel watermark and was especially made for marbling. I first made 3 paintings where each of the individual shapes had different marbling, but that was to complicated for the multifaceted shapes so I simplified it by washing over parts with watercolour.

And that was the end of the marbling phase for you.

After I'd finished the marbling I gilded the intertwined ribbon border, you know how it is, your working on something that needs concentration but you don't have to think about it and so your mind wanders, starts to speculate about making other things that might be interesting to try.

Such as?



Things I'd come across, like Serpinski's theory that a cube of finite volume can have an infinite surface.

Not infinite surely.

Apparently, as a theory; forever reducing evenly and systematically. You have to imagine new smaller particles and tools that microbes would find clumsy. The theory seemed to me like a description of life, you couldn't get to the bottom of it everything came from somewhere. So I made a picture illustrating the theory out of Chinese paper that had been brought back to England by a Methodist missionary in the l920's which I partly gilded, partly marbled and partly burnt, each square stamped with consecutive numbers and arranged a la Serpinski.

That was One Way Ticket.

By now I had settled down into working on one big project after another and it was through first meeting Rose Issa on the tube one day that I got into the next big thing. It was through her ability to speak and read Persian, Arabic and French that I got a wonderful insight into middle eastern art. She explained the nuances of Persian classical poetry, she brought the culture alive, I was no longer a voyeur. One of the most renown Persian texts is the Manteq-al-Tayr, the Conference of the Birds by Farid ud-din Attar a 12th century sufi from Nishapur. His poem, written in rhyming couplets with the same meter as Rupert the Bear stories, is a tale of pilgrimage. The birds of the world gather and decide to search for their fabled king the Simurgh. The different birds represent a variety of human types such as the timid finch, the coy duck, vain peacock etc. They fly over seven valleys that represent the increasingly difficult terrain that the neophyte must pass, on their route to enlightenment. Only thirty birds survive the arduous journey and come face to face with the object of their desire. Now, simurgh also means thirty birds in Persian: si 30 and murgh birds. This pun is crucial to the story yet when Chaucer published his Parliament of Fowls, a remix for English readers with no mention of Attar less than two hundred years later he retained the thirty birds but lost the pun.

What form did your Conference of the Birds take?

I eventually collected thirty examples of letters arranged into the shapes of birds; zoomorphic calligraphy was a Turkish speciality where it neatly sidestepped the Koranic prohibition on image making, the letters making up the words could be thought of as only temporarily taking up the shape of say an elephant or a pear, they were read not

seen, just like the text pieces that I'd made in the late 60's. I had made a study of this type of 'concrete poetry', of which there are Greek, Hebrew, Chinese and European examples in addition to Persian, Arabic and Turkish ones [46]. I cut the bird letters onto blocks and printed them down, using them like big rubber stamps, rearranging the same thirty blocks in accordance with the stanzas that I had chosen from key parts of the book. By also printing on very thin transparent Nepalese conservation tissue paper I doubled the number of images in my repertoire because they could be reversed and remain visible when stuck down. Repetition is in your blood if you are into print.

Was Warhol in there?

I'd always liked him, not for his take on American society but because he made it OK to print badly. After years of people trying to make their prints look like one-offs, he made one-offs that looked like prints, he let everybody enjoy the print quality. But what I was going to say was that repetition of words and phrases is a big part of the poem, it's called anaphora, that was one of the reasons that I decided to print the pictures offset from the stamps. I saw an equivalent between the text describing the images and images describing the text. One thousand years before Warhol, in caves on the silk route at Tun Huang in western China, Buddhist monks stamped out votive images in neat little rows that immediately make you think of Andy. For me making reference to well known precedents is a way of seeding the work, of paying homage, not cultural rape.

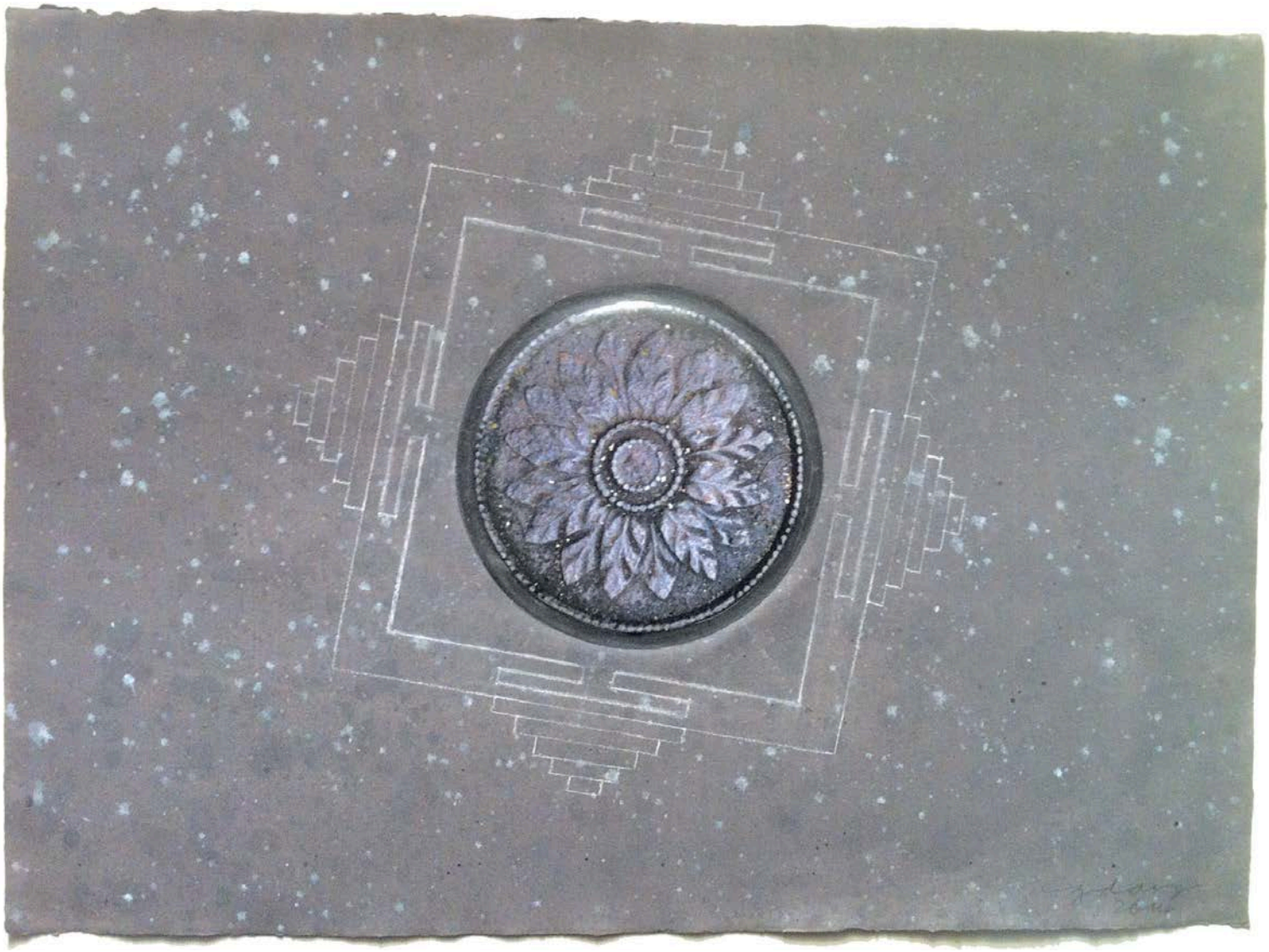
Like Picasso and African masks?

It's a different world today, those things must have appeared in Paris then like moon rocks do now: unknown. But now we all know everything about anything, or imagine that we can find out at the touch of a button.

Your method of working is established now, the early 90's. A succession of projects not necessarily related where techniques and materials, usually paper and print are chosen because they comment on and amplify the idea or theme. So I think that I will recognize what comes next but can't predict the subject matter.

Coal hole covers.

Exactly!



I've always been interested in Indian Yantras. Some are inscribed on copper, often circular they are meditative plaques that I mostly bought from Henry Brownrigg, whose major enthusiasm for the minor arts is appreciated by many collectors [47]. In my mind they connect to the beautiful old metal coal hole covers that litter most London streets. Set into equally delicious paving slabs. Beautifully patinated and for the most part ignored, although strangely, Muir Dawson[48] in Los Angeles who sold my work and republished an important book on marbling had previously put out a little book on the metal covers of, which is now a rare item[49]. I had always admired them, mentally collecting and enjoying discovering unusual examples. When I moved to Notting Hill Gate I noticed that there were lots outside those massive white houses so I started photographing them, soon amassing thousands of different models, only choosing ones without makers names on them as I wasn't interested in the social history of the foundry. I enlarged them back up to 100% and screened them onto India paper in varnish over which I sprinkled metal powders which were later burnished to varying degrees of brilliance, working with gouache on the backgrounds trying to suggest both the paving stone and the Indian manuscript where you might find a yantra illustrated. When I was putting the exhibition of them together for the exhibition in, an old school friend reminded me that 40 years earlier our primary school teacher Ivor Cutler took us out one day armed with thick black crayons and woody paper to make rubbings of covers in the streets of Camden Town.

He's a cult figure now.

He was back then. I remember being struck by his odd socks. I had always imagined that my interest in yantras had come as a student discovering indian art but maybe that early exercise in frottage was responsible.

What determined the decoration on the coal hole covers, why are they always round?

The patterns were to stop people slipping on them and they were round to prevent the lids from falling down the hole, seeing as how they were lifted up and down regularly. From there I went on to develop the theme which I called URBAN YANTRAS[50] by keeping a metallic figure on a distressed ground and made a series of shallow reliefs of common shapes in gilded resin attached to sheets of old Indian paper of double square format that I had got

from Nigel McFarland[51]. I tried to make a compendium of shapes that would be recognizable and meaningful to all cultures; moon, teardrop, undulating curve, spiral, things like that.

And some of the shapes were quite large, physically.

I made two large versions out of wood to dominate the entrance of the museum where they were shown, it was important to stop people seeing them as street furniture and start thinking Indian.

One could see a whole lot of what you have done as being kind of oppositional. If I think about the art that was being reproduced in magazines and shown quite a lot when you were starting right through till now, then one might think of it as being large, often quite bombastic, frequently non figurative, simple, not referring to many other things, not concentrating on how it was made very much, often being made by people other than the artist. In that sense oppositional, certainly oppositional to the late minimal work that was the focus of the period, do you see it like that?

It's true that I never felt part of any movement, I never knew of other people working in the same vein, there was with the marbling, there was a craft fraternity thing, particularly with the west coast Americans that I consciously avoided. I just got fascinated by things and fiddled away, influenced by the people close to me, building little messages in that only the other person would get. In the yantra show I tried to confront my interest in Indian art, I wrote the catalogue preface where I said that maybe the diagrams were more important than the meanings ascribed to them. They were more basic, that perhaps other cultures and times could attach other meanings to them or perhaps they didn't need any meanings or explanations at all. We could just experience that triangles point and circles are round.

How was this critically received?

"Why are you committing intellectual suicide, a highly educated fifty year old, you should be explaining things not going backwards". Yet one of my desert island pictures would be that Japanese brush and ink drawings of a circle, a triangle and a square,[52] I would like to get that far back.

And for it to be seen as meaningful by people from other cultures. Most of the people who would make observations about your work presumably come from a group whose picture of what is worth doing is at least to some extent based on the body of published and reproduced work which has a different set of criteria. The parameters for what's worth doing for most of the artists who were in the Satchhi Sensation [53] show are so different

from yours that they are bound to bring criticisms, just as the wide distribution of feminist writings in the 70's and 80's would make your women friends critical of making images in a certain way.

The penultimate piece in the show is a collective portrait of people that I have been influenced by in various ways. *But their identities are submerged.*

They are spelt phonetically in Greek that's all.

That's pretty submerged for most of us. Who's the first one, top left?

That's me.

It's structurally different from the rest.

The others are all depicted in the form of a Chinese jade disc, a bi, symbol of heaven, they are very mysterious, the earliest ones are found in Neolithic burial mounds placed in rows on top of bodies. They are beautifully proportioned, with delicate swirling decoration laboriously etched on the later ones. Jade is such a venerated material, warm, subtle, it cannot be carved, only laboriously drilled. Their purpose is not clearly understood by archaeologists, yet they have fascinated people for thousands of years.

What's the connection between your friends, Chinese jade discs, the moons of Jupiter and Greek myths?

I am. I always imagine that working with such basic stock references people will get the point, although in fact there are connections. Astronomical discoveries to this day are given names from Greek and Roman mythology. Io for example was chosen as a name for one of Jupiter's moons because when its path was first noted in the 15th century it wasn't exactly clear how it moved, so the story of Io, who erratically roamed the middle east after being bitten by a gadfly was the appropriate name.

And who did you depict as Io?

Look, the whole point of the piece is that the work is there on the wall, nothing is hidden, you bring to it what you have. Look, think and read as much as you like.

How did you simulate the jade discs?

The I choose the ones that I wanted from a famous American collection, photocopied them at 100% then re-photographed them and printed them down using gum bichromate onto Somerset Satin paper which is tough yet bright. Then I marbled over the discs, trying to make patterns that related to the story or the person being depicted. I had already put them into a sequence that corresponded to the form of the moon's discovery. Some weren't known until the Voyager probe sent back images in the 80's, Galileo had previously discovered four. They have all been officially designated names from mythology. I identified with Ganymede, cup bearer to the Gods. Then I overworked the marbling with watercolour and screenprinted the carved decoration back in with diluted silver ink, waxed and polished them, trying to make them resemble the group on display in the British Museum.

And the names underneath?

The top line are the mythological names in gilded capitals, below those are the friend's names in silver, Anna Currey[54] helped me spell the names in Greek, two are in white gold which should remain bright whilst in time the rest will tarnish. Finally underneath that are little numbers almost invisible in white, from 1 to 16. The whole ensemble is arranged so that the numbers add up to 34 which ever way they are totalled. This is the so-called magic square of Jupiter.

The final disc is different from all of the others, complete, without a blank space in the middle.

That's Sinope, you will remember that as she frolicked on the shore she was seen by Jupiter who descended and in his attempt to seduce her promised that he would grant her whatever she desired.

Which was?

She asked to remain a virgin for the rest of her life.

I can't help thinking of Duchamp. You know that the work is full of hidden meanings that are ungraspable, they can only be sensed.

That's why he is so important, lots of people take from him, artists from very different camps, each chooses the bits that they think they relate to.

And you?

I got the bit about making very personal work in an impersonal way

So how do you describe your position in the art world ?

Back in 1970 which is where we began, Michael Simpson[55] described me as part archivist and part alchemist, that makes sense, very Pataphysical, the science of things that might have been.

END OF INTERVIEW

Details of the works illustrated in the interview can be found in the relevant exhibitions.

Notes

1 English artist. Born 1946
2 VISIONS PROJECTS PROPOSALS. Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham, UK.11 July – 2 Aug 1970
3 Near Bath, South West England, UK.
4 Engish artist Born 1949
5 Hornsey College of Art, North London. Now part of Middlesex University. The évenéments, a student uprising that began in England and rapidly spread to France, paralysing Paris in May 1968 when workers collaborated, causing de Galle temporarily to flee the city.
6 At the Working Men's College in Mornington Crescent, North London. Now mixed.
7 Corsham was the village that was home to Bath Academy of Art from 1946 -1986 when it merged with another college and moved to its present location in Bath, S.W. England where it is now called Bath Spa University College.
8 French novelist, 1877 -1933. Author of ' Impressions d'Afrique '. 1910 and ' Locus Solus'. 1914
9 'Tables'. Garage Art Limited. London. 23 Jan – 15 Feb 1974
10 Then at 8 Vigo St. London W. 1
11 The Nisshin Joma (Daily Exorcisms) of Katushika Hokusai 1760 – 1849
12 English graphic designer and typographer
13 In Bristol, S.W. England
14 Now with C.N.N. covering the White House, Washington
15 Off Charing Cross Rd. London W.1
16 The Slade School of Fine Art. Part of University College London.
17 Now head of the School of Visual Islamic Traditional Arts. London.
18 Architectural Association, London.
19 Gordon I. Plummer Theosophical Publishing House U.S.A. 1966
20 Artist and teacher 1924 – 1995. See obituary in the Guardian newspaper by 16 Nov 95
21 For example see: Jean Dubreuill La Perspective Practique. Paris 1663
22 For basic explanation see 'What is Sufism' by Martin Lings. Geo. Unwin & Allen 1975
23 Indian writer and collector. 1915 -1990
24 'The Aleph and other Stories' 1933 -1969′. Jonathan Cape GB
25.The living Races of Mankind. Hutchinson & Co. Undated.
26 Pao
27 English Constructivist artist. Born 1917
28 Anglo – American painter. Born 1961
29 Chequers in Wiltshire, where Day has lived since 1976.
30 Independent curator in fine art and film from the middle-east, North Africa and India
31 Abri. The Mysterlous Art of Paper Marbling. Kufa Gallery, London. March 1986
32 Time's Arrow 1995
33 Victoria and Albert Museum. London.
34 Now at Euston Road. London
35 Two oxen, a lion and other animals from the India Office Library and Records. c. mid 17th cent
36 Now at the British Library. Olga Hirsch coll. B3
37 Marbrure Integral. Bibliotheque Municipale, Rennes, France. Feb 1990
38 Histoire de la Marbrure M-A Doizy 1996
39 Colin Crumplin. 'Hommage a Queneau'. 1977
40 See Martin F.R. 'The Miniature Painters of Persia, India and Turkey From the 8th to the 18th century' 2 vols 1912
41 See' De la Dominoterie a la Marbrure'. M -A Doizy. Art & Metiers du Livre. France 1996
42 The main shopping street of Bath, U.K.
43 The 'Perspectiva Corporum Regularium'. Vienna 1568
44 Built by Daguerre in the 1830's to display his spectacular panaramas and scientific demonstrations.
45 The sale was on March 27 1990. The business is still in operation
46 See 'The Word as Image ' Berjouhi Bowler. Studio Vista 1970
47 At Portobello Market in London
48 Dawson's Antiquarian Books

49 Manhole Covers of Los Angeles by Robert & Mimi Melnick 1974
50 Urban Yantras. Leighton House Museum. London. 16-27 May 1995
51 Khadi Papers. Paper merchants and importers.
52 By the Zen master Sengai. c.1830. Mitsu Art Gallery. Tokyo Japan.
53 1996. Royal Academy, London.
54 Irish writer and illustrator.
55 English artist born 1940