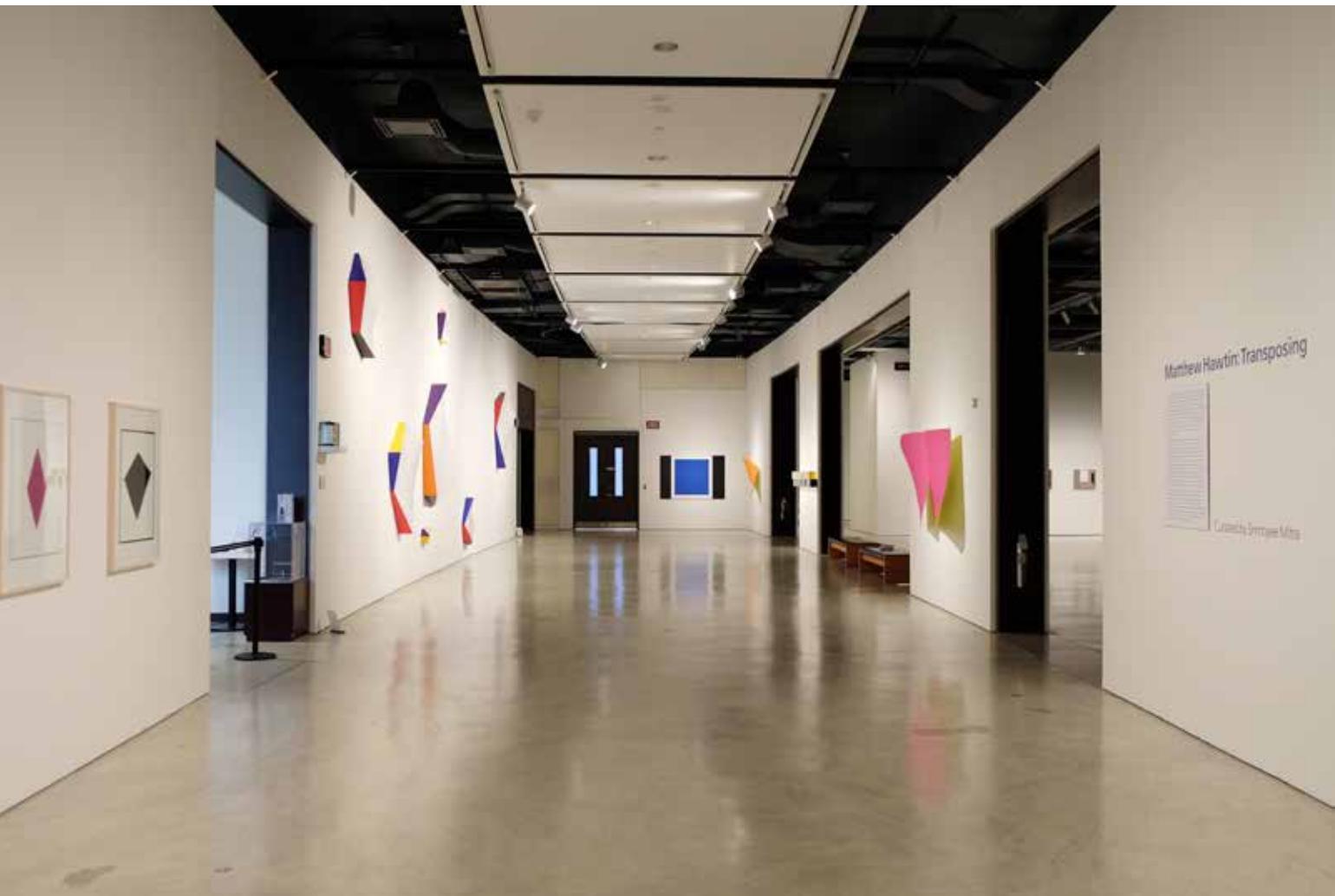


Matthew Hawtin

TRANSPOSING



Transposing; installation view, Art Gallery of Windsor, 2016

Matthew Hawtin's aesthetic language investigates painting at an intersection between sculpture, design and architecture by exploring the fundamental elements of line, colour, surface, shape and form. The work exists in a space where thoughts and feelings can live as minimal objects of meditation that reflect the spectrum of our daily emotions.

Born in the UK and raised in Canada, Hawtin studied Fine Arts at York University in Toronto and completed a Master of Fine Arts in the UK. The *Torqued Painting* series – acrylic paintings with ‘torqued’ surfaces – investigates the subjectivity and objectivity of painting, relationships that were highlighted in his first solo exhibition in 1999. Exemplified by a physical re-structuring of the canvas, the artist leaves the floating surface to hover on and off the wall. Later, using fiberglass panels for support, Hawtin expanded his visual language with the *Torqued Panels* series, further exploring the boundaries between painting, sculpture and design.

Hawtin has been a practicing artist for over 15 years and has exhibited in Canada, the USA and Europe. His work is featured in many private collections throughout the world.

Jaclyn Meloche

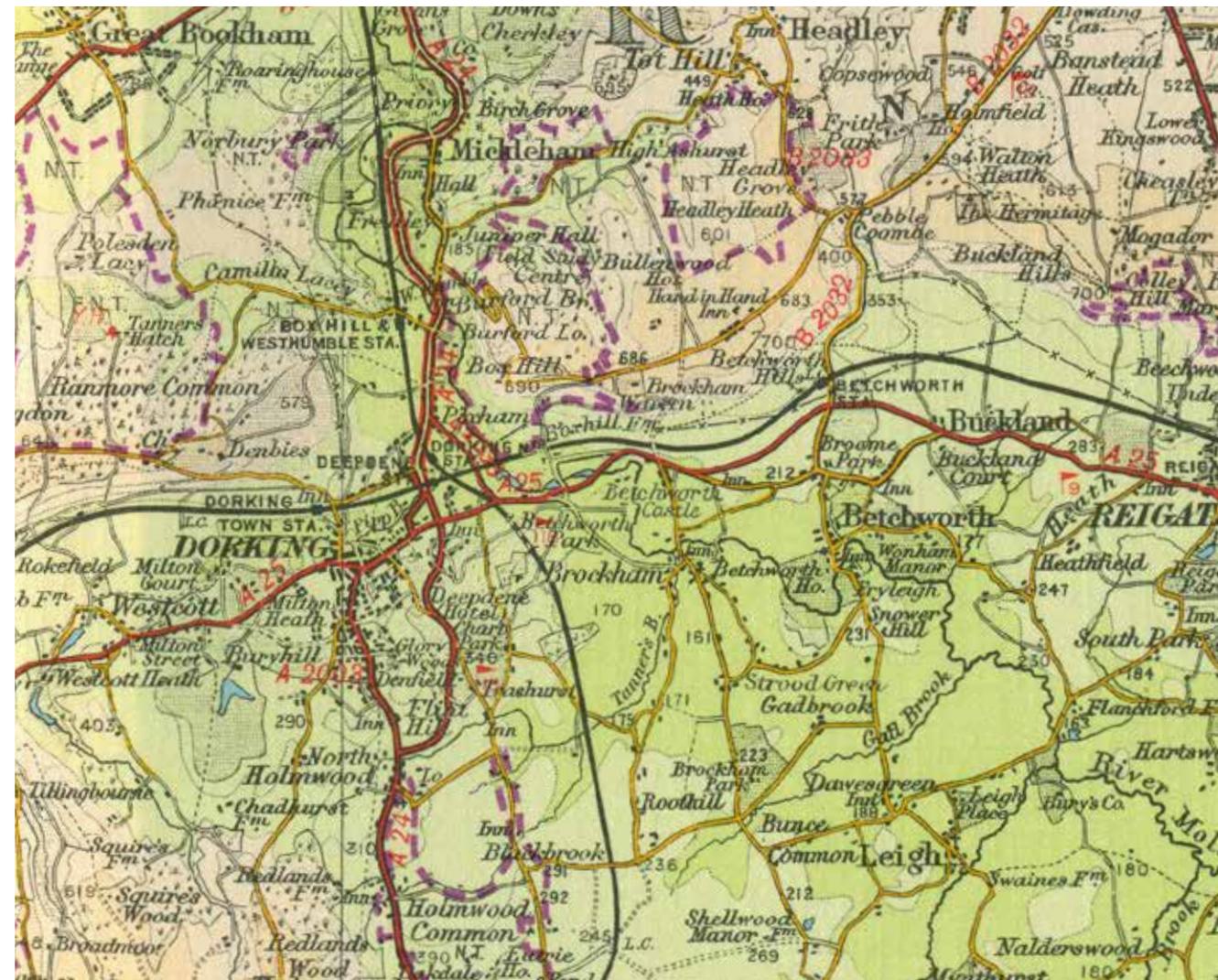
Interim Curator of Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of Windsor

Transposing + Transporting

Matthew Hawtin Here and There

Christopher McNamara (2016)

It's 2008 and I'm on an afternoon train southbound out of London's Victoria Station. The landscape turns greener and greener as the afternoon light flickers on the train compartment interior. I'm on my way to visit Matthew Hawtin, who has moved to the sleepy village of Dorking. The names of the towns we approach are announced by a cheerful woman's smooth, pre-recorded voice: "Clapham Junction, Sutton, Cheam, Ewell East, Epsom, Ashted, Leatherhead, Box Hill & Westhumble, and Dorking." The landscape reminds me of the illustrations from a Rupert Annual — the colourful illustrated story books I would get each Christmas — a favourite since my childhood and the year or so I lived in Brighton... the seaside city further south.



It's a far cry from my current home and, for that matter, for Hawtin, who moved to Windsor as a child from his ancestral home of Banbury in the UK. But this small UK town in the region of Surrey is now his home (temporarily). When I get off the train I take my bags and walk along the high street, which I come to realize is laid out like a horseshoe. I pass several shopkeepers engaged in a ritual I soon become very familiar with in my UK travels: the painting of glossy, often colourful paint on the windowsills and stoops of the shop fronts. I imagine the many layers of paint on the sills and wonder how often they get painted. I finally pass a fish and chip shop, an Indian takeaway and the Queen's Head Pub and arrive at Friary Mews — the ivy and holly covered laneway and wooden door that leads to the artist's seemingly secret enclave. This is only one of several living spaces that I have come to know Hawtin in.



View of the South Downs, UK, 2008

When I first met Hawtin, his studio and house were a mere few blocks from my own house in the Windsor enclave of Walkerville. It was here, in the late 1990s when we began to visit one another's studios to look at new work, to talk about films we had been watching and books we had been reading. It was a good way to bounce ideas off of one another — and despite our very different visual practices, we were able to find a great deal to talk about and consider in each other's work. I had begun working on electronic music projects and was in the practice of incorporating a DJ persona into my performance and audio/visual works. Hawtin had also been performing as a DJ, hosting a weekly at a café in downtown Windsor. In retrospect we were both contributors to a burgeoning electronic music scene — providing us with a common currency for talking about the process of making things.



Artseen installation, Windsor, 2000

To approach the works in *Transposing*, it is perhaps important to consider Hawtin's process. Indeed, the exhibition provides more than a small glimpse into the artist's journey. It is as much about "transporting" as it is about "transposing." To live and work in Windsor, many artists find it necessary to also launch satellites into other places. The artist becomes an itinerant cultural worker.

This notion of being an itinerant in the art world is seen quite clearly in the Techno community of Detroit. Much like the Motown music of a couple decades earlier, the electronic music artists living and working in Detroit in the late 80s and early 90s quickly found a global audience for their work – often gaining recognition abroad while being largely anonymous in their own neighbourhoods. It was in these early days of Techno that Hawtin's brother, Richard, with Matthew's numerous contributions, began to create a space and culture for an audience quickly awakening to the possibilities of a future-looking sonic and visual experience.



Plus 8 Records was the name of this first venture — and it would soon become a highly influential label and scenemaker. But the first moments seemed largely a fanciful pitch into a global/cosmopolitan world that must have appeared a world away from their 1960s modern LaSalle basement rec room. Along with partner John Aquaviva, they made a steadfast and assured push into the world of legitimacy. I remember once seeing a t-shirt featuring the Plus 8 logo in those early days. Around the smart red and black 8 were the names of the places the early artists on the label hailed from: “London • Rotterdam • Detroit • Windsor.” It felt so cosmopolitan.

Of course, this did become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Windsor was known for cars, of course, and rye whisky... but by the mid 1990s, those in the know about electronic music also knew that Windsor (as Detroit’s international suburb) was home to a particular brand of Techno music — and Richie and Matthew were front and centre in making the case for what was happening in the region.



For Hawtin's first mid-career exhibition at the Art Gallery of Windsor, the beginnings of his visual practice are arranged, fittingly, like a record shop display. Here we find Hawtin's visual contribution to the emergent scene — with multiple iterations of his designs for the record label. There is an almost cheeky ruse in these works — some of the official releases are actually 12" x 12" prints — resembling a vinyl record release, but in actuality the label released these as visual works. There is a continuum at work here — from concept to fully realized releases all of which are treated as tangible products. The artists of Plus 8 are making the case for a highly integrated platform for visual and sonic art.

In the early days of techno, the edges are hard, distinct and abrupt. This is not the vocal infused, harmonic electronic pop music exported from the UK — this was a distinctly regional sound that could soothe in one moment and then challenge the listener and the very limits of a home sound system in the next moment. The hard edges.



Transposing, 2016; album and CD covers and prints

Hawtin had just finished his undergraduate studies — where one of his instructors challenged him to go all the way with his experiments in hard-edged abstraction. *Different Planes of Atmosphere* is a playful and mind-bending large canvas — framed in black for a 2014 museum installation in London. The references seem to suggest a historic look back — not only from the vantage point of a mid-career retrospective, but also in a new wave graphic sensibility. I am momentarily transported back in time. It's suddenly 1980. I have a copy of the New Zealand band Split Enz's record that had laser-edged triangles hidden in an iridescent underlay of the 12" vinyl. "I don't know but sometimes I get frightened" plays out from my Radio Shack speakers in my teenage bedroom.

But the work is more serious here in *Different Planes of Atmosphere* — and with that black frame it could easily be snuck into an exhibition at London's Serpentine gallery — around the corner from a room full of Malcolm Morleys.



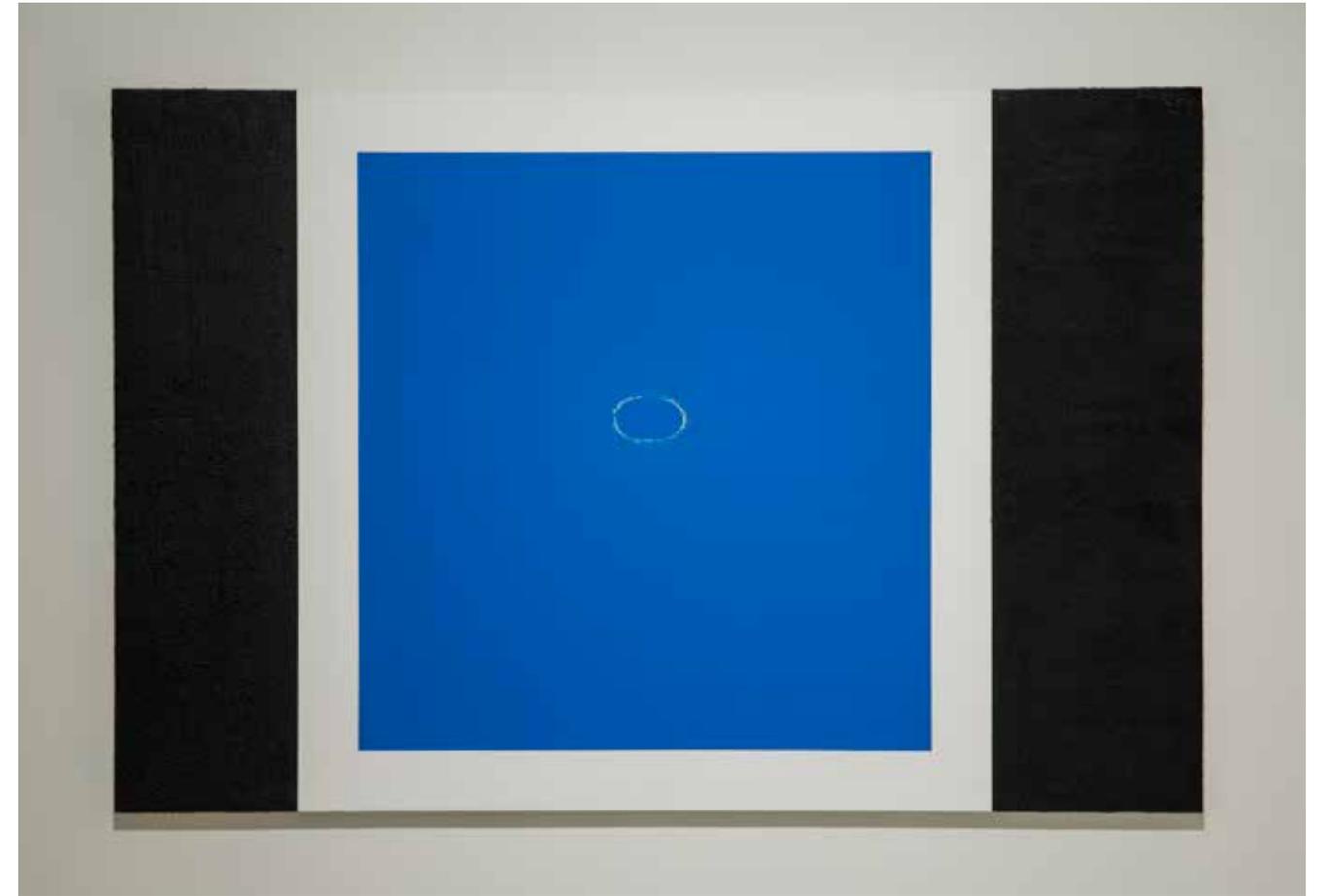
Different Planes of Atmosphere, 1993; acrylic on canvas; 140 x 190 x 5 cm

The frame quickly disappears in most of the works in this exhibition — a conscious rejection of the materials at the edges of his colour fields. Hawtin worked at Windsor Castle for a while — commuting from Friary Mews and that Rupert the Bear village. Here he worked as a “cataloguer” for the Royal Collection doing the job of examining and listing information about the royal art collection. I imagine him working amidst the gilded frames of the 19th-century paintings and come to understand more and more what is at play in his editing out of such ornamentation.

Without the frames, Hawtin is free to consider the materials and forms in a more expansive and inclusive fashion. His paintings refer to the canon of modern geometric abstraction, but as they evolve, the sensibility is one that combines an interest in formalism with something more rooted in a sparse poetry — sometimes elegant and sometimes mysterious as the titles take us to near and far places in an interplay between language and the materiality of the works.



The skimmed concrete surfaces of *The Picture Screen of Thought* reflects the artist's transition from the hard edged flat works to the sculptural "torqued" paintings that follow. It's a fitting marker for the transition – flirting with the idea of making the surface more than 2D – yet it's not quite dimensional. The flat black bars on either side of the painting are a thin membrane of cement. It is a sensibility far from the green pastorals of southern England. This is the surface of the interior support columns in an Albert Kahn industrial building in Detroit, the kind of space that was once a bustle of automotive manufacturing and then, for a time briefly before shuttering, a space for all night music events. The party plays on... Between these two pillars on the flat, smooth surface is an almost egg-like shape seemingly scratched into the surface. It is at once precious and profane. Is this a modern, secular altar to the sanctity of life or is it some kind of random marking etched into the paint of a bathroom door?



The Picture Screen of Thought, 1997; acrylic and cement on wood panel; 122 x 184 cm

Such questions are left unanswered, but they are good ways to think about the artist's process. I remember one of my early studio visits with Hawtin when we were first becoming acquainted with each other's work. I recall the neatly stored panels and canvases in his studio on Walker Road, and I remember a particular series of works which were formally clean and sparse, but which were aggressively, almost violently distressed in certain areas revealing the structure and textures hidden underneath. It is a kicked in door. A negation of the purely minimal. The damage becomes a concession — the impossibly clean surface is unattainable, so why bother?



But both he does in his more recent works. His works on paper, like *Spark 2* and *The one that wasn't* are sumptuously sparse and understated and seem to function as studies. They are a means to arrive upon the nearly unmarred surfaces and, as it turns out, shapes. Each subsequent, dimensional iteration in the gallery space is the product of a serious and thorough investigation of materials and how they can be purposed and shaped in ways that allow him to arrive as closely as possible to the essence of an idea. In Hawtin's studio it is not uncommon to find, in addition to these cut paper forms, tiny paper maquettes of gallery spaces, with miniature versions of the paintings he is intending to develop for an exhibition. I am reminded of a story I once heard of the film editor, Walter Murch, working meticulously to craft his version of a cinematic release. It was his practice to place tiny (toy) theatre seats in front of the small screen of the editing table in order to imagine the impact and scale of the scenes he was cutting.



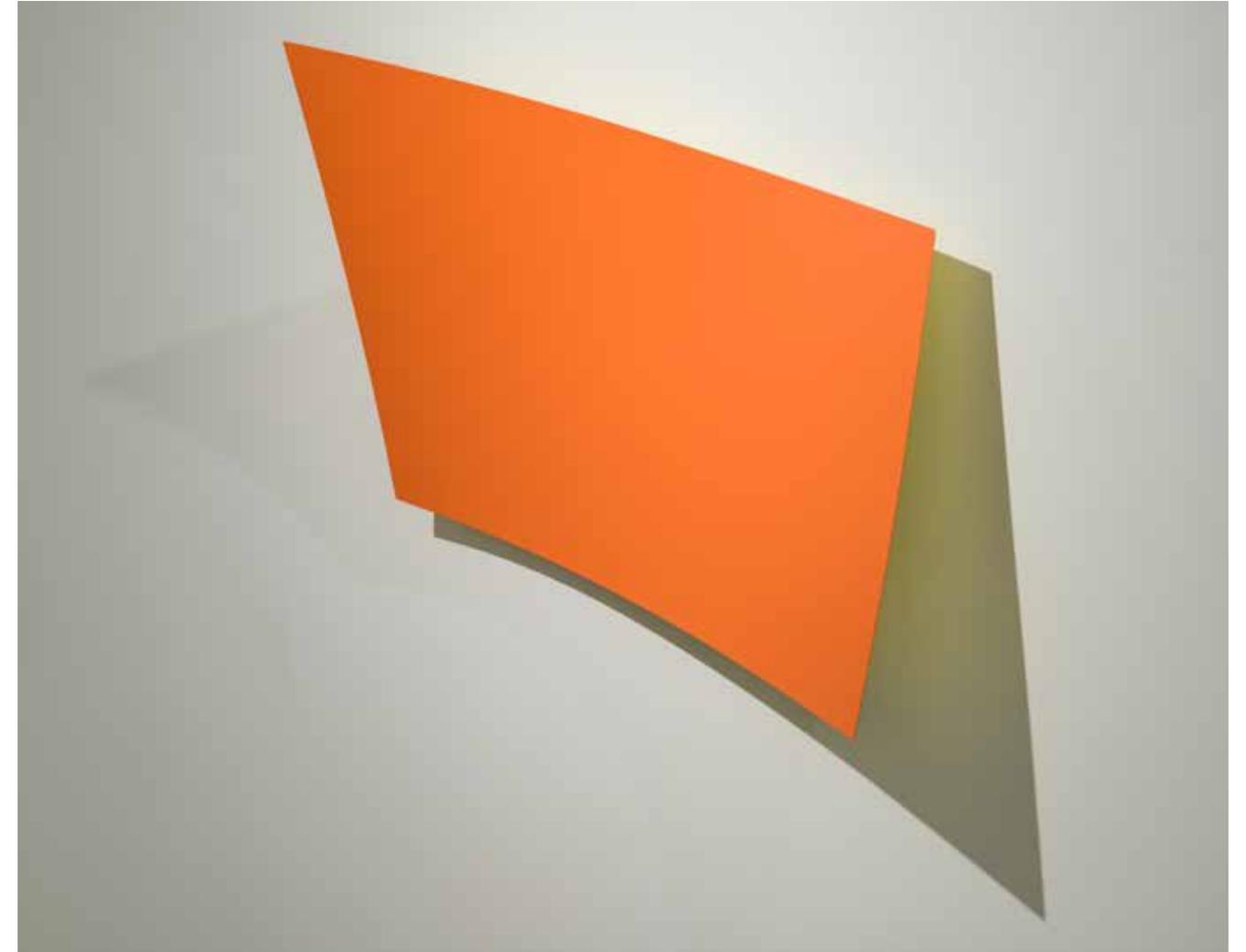
Transposing, 2016; works on paper

The gallery space becomes the frame in much the same way the cinema does with all of its trappings and ornamentation becoming the delineation between the visual plane and the world outside the edges. The two panel piece, *Touché*, is a fitting case in point. The two shapes almost touch and that point of convergence is like an industrial pinch-point, a tool to cut fabric. But this magenta piece also seems to be scratching at the surface of logo or sign. It could almost be a new record label in the works. It floats in the space of the gallery almost like magic defiant of gravity. The aura of the museum space with its clean lines begs us to consider this painting as a lobby entrance sign or like a graphic “welcome.” The experience is immersive.



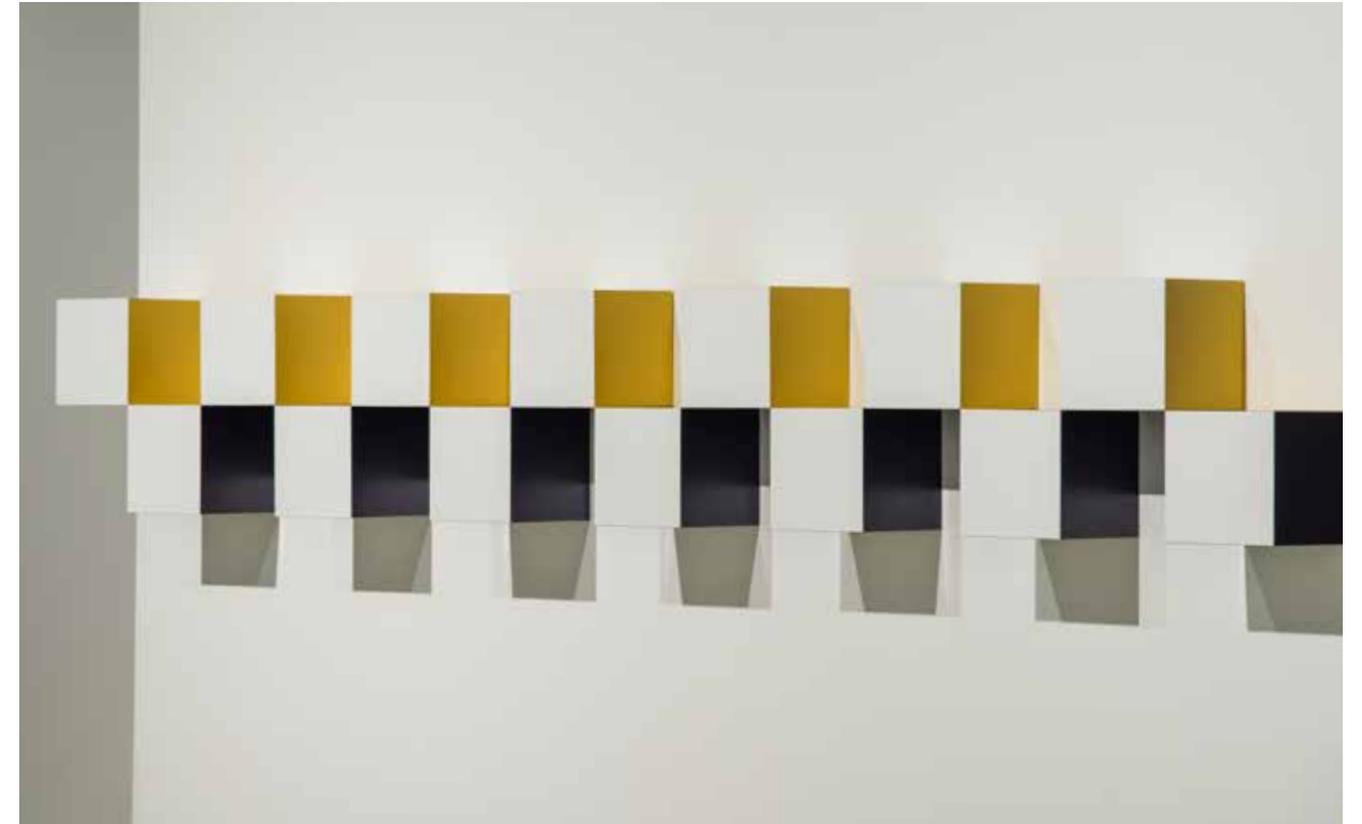
Touché, 2016; acrylic on fiberglass panel; 112 x 175 x 34 cm

Once the notion of removing the frames is embraced, the painted surfaces move away from the wall and, in the process, dance on the borders between paintings and sculptures. Installation artists have negotiated this territory and idea for years. For the painter, the exhibition space is perhaps a bit more confined to the formal trappings and expectations of presentation. In this paradigm, Hawtin seems a polite malcontent. The amount of effort needed to create the illusion of floating is not obvious to the viewer. Although important to the artist, the viewer suspends any questions about how the sculpture is hung and merely engages with the paintings in a more cerebral and visceral spatial manner. In other words, the museum becomes an ambient room.



Sherbert, 2016; acrylic on fiberglass panel; 113 x 110 x 33 cm

The 14 cubes that make up *Untitled* is a collaboration with the Minus label for the *min2MAX* release of the same year. A site-specific sculpture for a record release and launch in Berlin, the 14 cubes are arranged horizontally in the gallery. They fit, as if bespoke for the space, lining up to fit perfectly from one edge of the wall to the other. Made up of MDF and a high-pressure laminate, the cubes look like toys, brightly coloured and seductively smooth. The reflections of light on each surface adds a subtle hue to the cast shadows on the wall. It's a formal study of shape, light and shadow. But it's also a nod to the English gentry. Hawtin tells me he remembers the wainscoting in the houses he has been to in the UK: the wooden trim and chair rails of the English domestic spaces, painted over and over for decades and bearing witness to a steady succession of dwellers. This is the private equivalent of those oft-painted shop front windowsills and doorways — the ones on the horseshoe shaped street that led to the artist's door.



Untitled, 2006; MDF and high-pressure laminate; 30 x 15 x 210 cm

This leafy burrow was not the only place where Hawtin lived while in the UK. I once stayed with him in the Barbican area of London. When I walked the streets near his home, I nearly got the impression that the entire neighbourhood had been built in one instance — a poured concrete answer or salve to all the post-war ills that London had endured. Like Rotterdam in the Netherlands, the built heritage was entirely constructed on a bomb-strafed stage. Only instead of the re-imagined Dutch-style narrow structured spaces, the aura is decidedly British and orderly, he slightly brutal exterior of his flat conceals a surprise on the interior courtyard. An explosion of greenery is lit by a seemingly open sky above. The light refracts on the white surfaces and the leafy potted plants.



The order and simultaneous randomness provide a direct line to the current torqued works. The largest wall in the gallery is dedicated to *Fallout*, a series of canvases that could also be imagined as architectural models that are each the same shape, yet of different scales. While they appear to be randomly arranged on the wall, Hawtin tells me there is a logic to how they are placed. Each coloured side surface has a direct connection to the surface of another piece. The seemingly remote islands have a silent kinship with each other. The title suggests the remnants of some cataclysmic event (an airstrike? an industrial accident?), but there also seems to be a celestial connection — we are above the satellites and beyond the range of taking topographical images of the southeast of England or the southwest of Ontario, out to the far reaches of an imagined space. The lens is pointed out into space — not a space of darkness and loneliness — but a space of boundless possibilities and promises.



Fallout, 2016; acrylic on canvas; various dimensions (seven canvases)

But let's do a cosmic zoom back to earth and back to the river that divides Windsor from Detroit. These same shapes on the wall of the Art Gallery of Windsor could also be seen as the large masses of ice that move at their own pace along the river in the waning weeks of winter. It is, perhaps, a fitting place to consider the nature of Hawtin's work. The works are not rooted in one place. There is a simultaneity to all of this work — it is at once future looking and mindful of the heritages of painting. It is of the region and it is also "from away." The ice shapes may change along their route and join others in the lakes beyond. Viewed from above, the dark waters might provide a lovely frame for the celestial, architectural, and poetic dimensions of Hawtin's work.

We are transposed and transported and see the world conflated and expanded. All movements at once.

Christopher McNamara is a video, sound and photo-based artist who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario. He teaches video and digital media at the University of Michigan.



Abstract Frames (first series), studio installation, 2014

Matthew Hawtin: Transposing

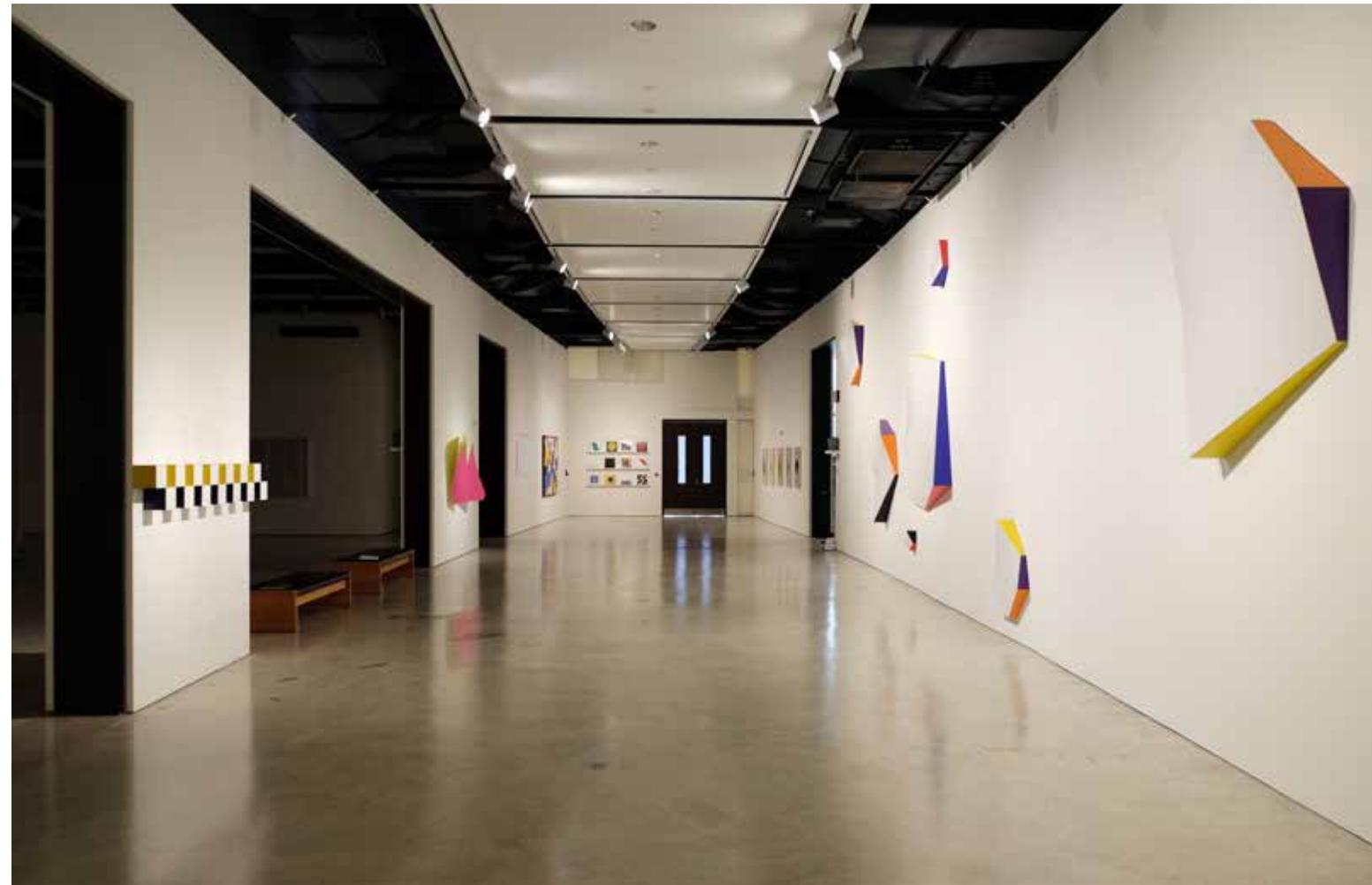
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Transposing; installation view, Art Gallery of Windsor, 2016

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