

Fay Nicolson, *Marginal Notes (Disarray)*, 2013

**A. the weave, grid, fold.
Read through a history of ∞**

by **ASTRID KORPORAAL**

FAY NICOLSON

Fay Nicolson's exhibition, *A P E L*, can be seen as an attempt to shore up order—to push it to its breaking point, to explore the flotsam left in its wake. This remainder, floating between possible signifiers, keeps a certain relationship to the edge, the irrational at the border of the rational.

Human beings are involved in a complicated relationship with borders. Limitations are what shape our world, but also what can shield us from different perspectives. In the process of experimentation, overlaying and repeating systems, we catch a glimpse of the infinite, the invisible, the immaterial; the chaotic void upon which we build our lives.

In transfinite math, the infinite is considered as a specific kind of number, a paradox-

ical limit that makes calculation possible, and yet follows its own rules. There is a connection to be made here with Nicolson's practice, in which she questions what it means to be a partner, complement or support.

This can apply not only to the relations within and between works, but also to the material and human relationships involved. Tracking these interactions, zooming in and out of the medium, the complement's relation to its other can be studied through infinite divisions or multiplications.

An image, floating on a metal strip at the corners of a white wall, can be seen as providing a point of focus or as bending, shifting to the shape of the surrounding architecture. An infinite number of elements can be included

as part of the image of the work, which is thus never perceptually complete. The works overlay different structures with an immaterial dedication to the gaps between forms. A visible order, with invisible supports.

Ironically, the question of mathematics, metaphysics and artistic practice, the question in common, binding these disciplines together; the question of the relationship between mental constructs and real-world objects, seems to be performed, posed, poised, at the boundaries of academic infrastructure. Thinking about the way in which educational structures exist brings us back to the matter of material, how things are used. Finding these connections means following the path of associations made by our minds, the ways

in which they are structured and the detours we take when faced with something that can be conceived of, but not known.

There were no clear distinctions for the Greeks between mathematics, metaphysics, and religion; in many respects they were all the same thing. The Divine Brotherhood of Pythagoras posited that empirical reality was a sort of shadow or projection of abstract math, abstracting the Golden Mean from seashells' whelks and trees' rings. Circling back to the idea of complementary existence, we can hypothesize that those ceramic sculptures, shaped by the opening and closing of a hand, do not resemble seashells by mere coincidence.

Jumping layers of reality is characteristic

of abstraction, and mathematics and art are the languages that can weave connections between different planes of understanding, between mental processes and the processes of things. However, "a language is both a map of the world and its own world, with its own shadowlands and crevasses—places where statements that seem to obey all the language's rules are nevertheless impossible to deal with."

¹ David Foster Wallace, *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity*.

These shadow-lands between production and practice are where the work takes place.

The contemporary artist needs a metaphysical toolbox for understanding the qualities of materials, both virtual and actual. How can we conceive the relationship between the mind and the hand when science tells us

space is curved, colours do not belong to objects themselves and astronomic singularities have infinite density?

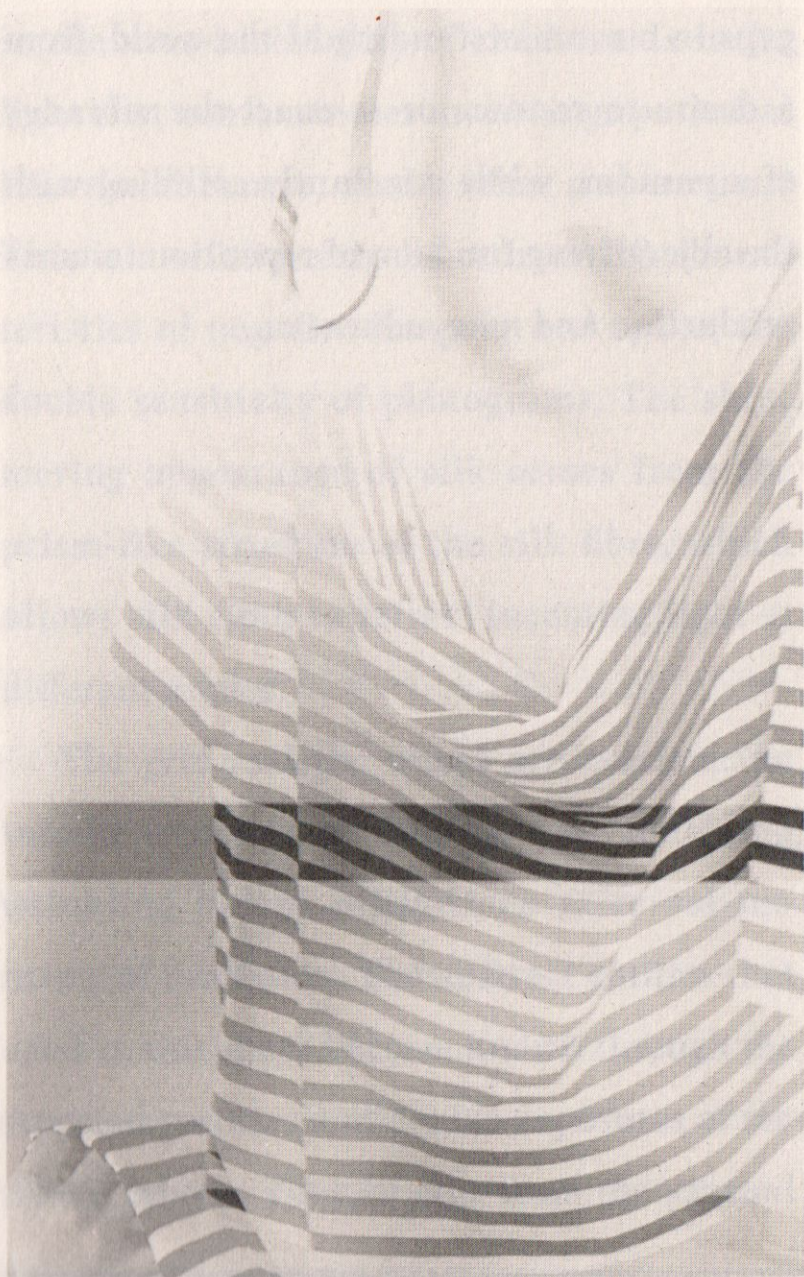
Coming back to the matter of the exhibition, the weave connects past and future through the act of the hand. Each stitch in time connects the potential of multiple futures. The grid is a fiction used to denote spaces of equal distance, divorcing objects from contexts beyond their own qualities. The grid is a space of infinite growth, moving outwards from the centre; a loss of boundaries, and the weave implies a space of contamination, diagonal movement.

Generally only the silk of moth caterpillars is used for textile manufacturing. There is a story of light and dark returning here—of work done under the cover of night,

in the near-invisibility of shadows. Is it the light that contaminates and brings potential into the darkness, or the other way around? This is a relationship born from the characteristics of negative imagery and space, the double sensitivity of photograms. The shimmering appearance of silk comes from the prism-like structure of the silk fibre, which allows silk cloth to refract incoming light at different angles.

The grid and the weave are overlaid: an infinite process of folding and unfolding, wrinkling binary distinctions to reveal moments of hesitation. The abstract entities that exist in this space become known through the repeated gestures and double exposures of mediated labour. They emerge from the sensual

gaps in our understanding of the world, from a desire to re-trace or re-enact the vibrancy of a paradox, while constantly colliding with the objectifying function of repetition in mass production and mass education.



Fay Nicolson, *Marginal Notes (Strip I)*, 2013



Fay Nicolson, *Marginal Notes (Strip II)*, 2013