MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot.

Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program
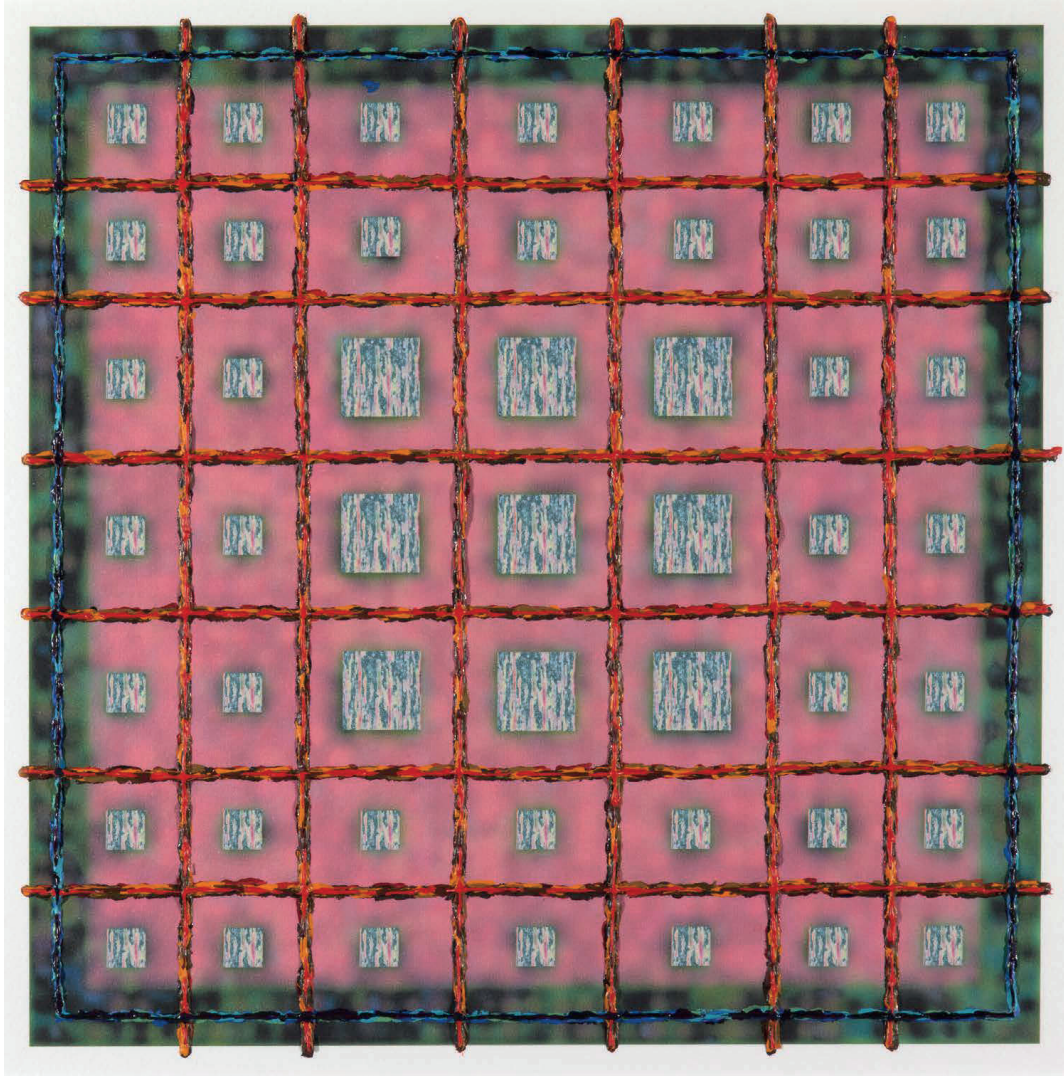
• •

MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition program
Curated by Diana Sherlock

Mary Shannon Will
Blue Mark, 1998
Acrylic and archival inkjet on paper
38.10 x 38.10 cm
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Contents

About • • • • • •

The Travelling Exhibition Program (TREX)

Since 1980, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program. The TREX program strives to ensure every Albertan is provided with an opportunity to enjoy fully developed exhibitions in schools, libraries, healthcare centres, and smaller rural institutions and galleries throughout the province.

The TREX program assists in making both the AFA's extensive art collection and the artwork of contemporary Alberta artists available to Albertans. Four regional organizations coordinate the program for the AFA:

REGION ONE — Northwest: The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie

REGION TWO — Northeast / North Central: The Art Gallery of Alberta

REGION THREE — Southwest: The Alberta Society of Artists

REGION FOUR — Southeast: The Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA)

Beginning in 1972, the Alberta Art Collection was proposed as an opportunity to support and encourage Alberta artists by purchasing original works, as well as creating a legacy collection for the people of Alberta.

As a crown agency of the Government of Alberta, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act was later established in 1991 with a mandate to support the arts in Alberta. This mandate is accomplished by providing persons and organizations with opportunities to participate in the arts in Alberta; fostering and promoting the enjoyment of works of art by Alberta artists; collecting, preserving, and displaying works of art by Alberta artists; and encouraging artists resident in Alberta to continue their work.

The Alberta Society of Artists (ASA)

The Alberta Society of Artists is a major contributor to Alberta's visual arts history, through its members, its exhibitions, and other initiatives. The ASA was founded in 1931, making it the oldest society of juried professional artists in the province. The ASA is an active membership of professional visual artists who strive for quality and distinction. Through exhibitions, education, and communication, the society increases public awareness of the visual arts. The ASA is contracted by the AFA to develop and circulate TREX exhibitions to communities throughout southwestern Alberta.

Exhibition Statement • • • • • •

A dot is a point in space. A series of dots in a row draws a line. A line can signal an interruption or an end, but it can also extend infinitely in either direction from any point. A flat, two-dimensional surface that has the potential to extend indefinitely between points or lines is a plane. A point, a line, a plane, each is a basic building block of a visual composition. A set of parallel, intersecting lines on a plane is a grid. A grid is a system.

MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot. exhibits the artist's use of the dot or pixel, the line, and the grid to make artworks that explore chance colour combinations and nonrepeating patterns within rule-based systems. The exhibition includes twenty-six colourful abstract paintings, drawings, digital prints, and mixed media works on paper produced by the artist between 1987 and 2017. Together, they provide an intimate glimpse into the artist's life and work; bright gems oscillating with concentrated energy drawn from her experience of the world.

Shannon Will was born in Sampson, New York, in 1944 and trained as a potter in Iowa. After moving to Calgary with her husband, artist John Will, in 1971, she became known regionally for her colourful, patterned, constructivist-type ceramic sculptures and abstract pointillist paintings made during the 1980s. During this time, Shannon Will shifted her practice from three dimensions to two and started to make up rules to guide her artmaking process — for example, she might use the letters from the name of a place or a friend to select her paint colours and determine the order in which she laid them down. In this way, fundamental colour theories, formal elements, and rational structures were playfully reconfigured by chance to produce surprising, vibrant abstractions of endless variety.

By the 1990s, Shannon Will had started to make large abstract pastels with lone ambiguous shapes in the middle. The shapes were found, salvaged in the studio, or blown up from doodles done while on the phone or watching baseball on TV. Rules determined her mark making — for example, building up the surface by using only squiggly lines drawn diagonally from left to right across the paper — and colour choices. These drawings are expressionistic, more loosely rendered than the pointillist painting

7

Encircled (1987), which typifies her earlier two-dimensional work. The tension between the figure and the ground in the pastels convincingly flips the viewer's perception between deep and shallow space. Over time, the space in the work flattens and the Modernist grid becomes the most visible constraint to affect the artist's composition and process.

The square pastel, *Black Rectangles* (1994), comprises three black horizontal rectangles stacked in a vertical line delicately woven into a plane of colourful hand-drawn gridded lines that become muted, almost monochromatic, as they mix on the surface of the paper. The lines extend to each edge of the rag paper to create a unified surface that glows with an inner light of diffused colour. Recalling American Minimalist Agnes Martin's subtly expressionistic gridded paintings, *Soft Boogie* (1998) also creates a subjective abstract space by drafting a series of equally spaced horizontal pencil lines overlaid with wide vertical bands of pencil-crayon marks to create a grid in which a raised dot of pink paint floats, rather humorously, in each cell. The grid, more than any other formal structure, is associated with early twentieth-century Modernist painting. It contained and supressed subjectivity, narrative, and representation in favour of formalist abstraction. Shannon Will went on to mischievously disrupt the grid's rationality, autonomy, and stability with emergent patterns and chance combinations of colour.

This is most evident in her archival inkjet and mixed media works, where grids of digital pixels glitch and dissolve under the artist's subjective systems. Two residencies at the Banff Centre (1994–1995) afforded the artist access to new computer technologies and graphics software (Adobe Photoshop). Computers use algorithmic systems (rules) to visualize the world in pixels and grids. In many ways, computer coding based on binary systems — 0 or 1, on or off, this or that, right or wrong — is the epitome of rationalist thinking, an attempt to expunge uncertainty.

Never one for hard truths, Shannon Will applied her own idiosyncratic, chance-based conceptual systems to repeatedly modify the pixelated images and patterns produced by the software. *Chamisal* (1998) and *Red Mark* (1998) both resulted from

layer upon layer of colourful patterns being combined and flattened to generate unimaginably sensuous digital abstractions that defy the logic of the pixel and the grid. In some works, such as *Blue Mark* (1998), *JAW* (2000), and *AM Glitter* (2001), the artist painted or applied hobby-craft supplies such as Mactac to the digital prints, re-grounding them in the material world and the handmade. The mathematical meets the metaphysical in *Intersection 00:00:22* and *00:00:27* (2008) — two works from an editioned series of twelve prints extrapolated from a Flash movie just five seconds apart — where scanned pages from a friend's diary were abstracted across space and time.

Shannon Will's artmaking process revels in the infinite, ungraspable beauty of art and life. She painted small, square, intimate acrylic paintings on custom-made rag paper and on similarly scaled wooden panels for the last fifteen years of her life. They are mathematical, metaphysical, and metaphorical, referencing people, places, and things in the world that have shaped the artist's experiences in ways that are beyond representation. The sunset series (2009), *Edge of Blue* (2013), and *Turquoise Dream* (2013) were made painting line upon line of different colours in a grid. Each new line of colour was painted directly on top of the previous dry colour using a slightly narrower brush. The edge of the colour underneath remains visible, changing the viewer's perception of it in relation to the others. The optical effect becomes an unpredictable, unique experience for every viewer.

Shannon Will was an important ceramic sculptor and conceptual painter who worked in Calgary, Alberta, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, for over fifty years until her death from ALS on October 20, 2021. *MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot.* continues ideas explored in the late artist's career survey show, *Mary Shannon Will: People, Places and Things*, curated by Diana Sherlock for Nickle Galleries in 2020. A catalogue produced about this exhibition is available for purchase through the Nickle Galleries at the University of Calgary.

Diana Sherlock, Curator

● ●

Artist Biography | Mary Shannon Will

Mary Shannon Will (1944–2021) was an accomplished artist known for her intricately patterned and colourful ceramics, paintings, drawings, and prints. She studied ceramics at the University of Iowa (1964–1967), the Tuscarora Pottery Summer School (1966–1967), and the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque (1970–1971). She moved to Calgary with her husband, artist John Will, in 1971, and immediately set up her ceramic studio.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Shannon Will made functional studio pottery, but her pots quickly morphed into brightly coloured ceramic sculptures that recall sensuous botanical and biological organisms. While she was working around artists at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1980 and 1981, her pre-existing interest in systems, rules, and chance blossomed to guide her use of colour and pattern in a series of abstract geometric ceramic sculptures made between 1978 and 1985. These works — with their glowing glazed surfaces of solid and graduated colour precisely patterned with hundreds, sometimes thousands of tiny dots and dashes — marked the trajectory of her practice for the years to come.

Shannon Will began to make prints, drawings, and paintings using highly subjective systems and processes from the mid-1980s on. In the mid-1990s, she was an artist in residence at the Banff Centre, where she discovered a synergy between the pixelated digital technology of Photoshop and her method of working with generative systems, patterns, chance, and colour. Here, she began producing archival inkjet and mixed media works with paint in which grids of digital pixels glitched and dissolved under her subjective systems.

In 2005, the artist returned exclusively to painting small, intimate, and square works in which the layers of colour glowed and shimmered to create a jewellike depth. These works were intuitive responses to the people, places, and things that shaped the artist's experience and perception of the world in which she lived: a trip to India with her friends, a pueblo in New Mexico, a shape from a doodle done while watching film noir. Unlike many other conceptual artists, Shannon Will never allowed the system to completely override her personal responses to the process or materials. Beauty was her endgame.

Shannon Will had lifelong studios in both Calgary and Albuquerque, and she moved back and forth between the two frequently. Trips to New Mexico often included visits to Taos, Chaco Canyon, Acoma, Frijoles Canyon, and other ancient pueblos that are home to the diverse Indigenous peoples of the Southwest. Over the years, the people, light, colour, and cultures of the Canadian Prairies and the American Southwest intertwined to weave a strong network of relations and experiences that shaped the artist's life and art.

During her career, Shannon Will consistently exhibited her work in venues across North America. Most recently, Diana Sherlock curated the career survey *Mary Shannon Will: People, Places and Things* for the Nickle Galleries at the University of Calgary (2020–2021). Numerous private and public collections include her work, notably the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Canada Council Art Bank, University of Lethbridge Art Collection, Art Gallery of Alberta, Glenbow Museum, Nickle Galleries, and University of Alberta Museums Art Collection. Born in Sampson, New York, in 1944, Shannon Will died in Calgary of ALS on October 20, 2021.

Curator Biography | Diana Sherlock ● ● ● ● ● ●

Diana Sherlock is a Canadian independent curator, writer, and educator. She is a settler of English/Scottish/Irish heritage who is thankful to have lived most of her life in Mohkinstsis (Calgary, Alberta) and to have worked with many artists who make their homes in the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, and the Métis Nation in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

Since 1994, her curatorial projects have created opportunities for contemporary artists to produce and exhibit new work in response to specific collections, contexts, histories, and cultures of display. Recent curatorial projects include *Mary Shannon Will: People, Places and Things*, Nickle Galleries, Calgary, 2020–21; *New Maps of Paradise* with Eric Moschopedis and Mia Rushton, Nickle Galleries, 2016; *In the making*, Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Calgary / Kenderdine College Art Galleries, Saskatoon, 2014–15; *Folly: Château Mathieu*, private residence in Mathieu, Normandy, France / Esplanade Art Gallery, Medicine Hat / Nickle Galleries, 2009–14. Additionally, she has presented

work and produced projects with Stride Gallery (Calgary, Alberta), lorch + seidel contemporary (Berlin, Germany), Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton), Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff, Alberta), TRUCK Contemporary Art (Calgary) / CIRCA (Montreal, Quebec) and others.

Sherlock has published over eighty texts in gallery catalogues and contemporary art journals internationally, including *Border Crossings*, *Canadian Art*, *CMagazine*, *FUSE*, *BlackFlash*, *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, *.dpi Feminist Journal of Art and Digital Culture*, *Galleries West*, and the *Calgary Herald*. Her essay *Capitalizing on community: The makerspace phenomenon* is included in the anthology *The New Politics of the Handmade: Craft, Art and Design* (Bloomsbury, UK, 2021), edited by Nicole Burisch and Anthea Black. She is the volume editor of *Rita McKeough: Works*, a monograph including a full-length album and an artist's multiple representing this significant Canadian artist's performances and installations (EMMEDIA Gallery & Production Society, M:ST Performative Art, and TRUCK Contemporary Art, Calgary, 2018). Her most recently edited monograph, *Larissa Fassler: Viewshed*, is just out (DISTANZ, Berlin, 2022). Sherlock is a consultant with CMCK Public Art, with whom she recently coauthored (with Ciara McKeown) curatorial assessments of both the City of Calgary's and the City of Edmonton's public art collections. She taught at the Alberta College of Art and Design (now the Alberta University of the Arts) for twenty years.
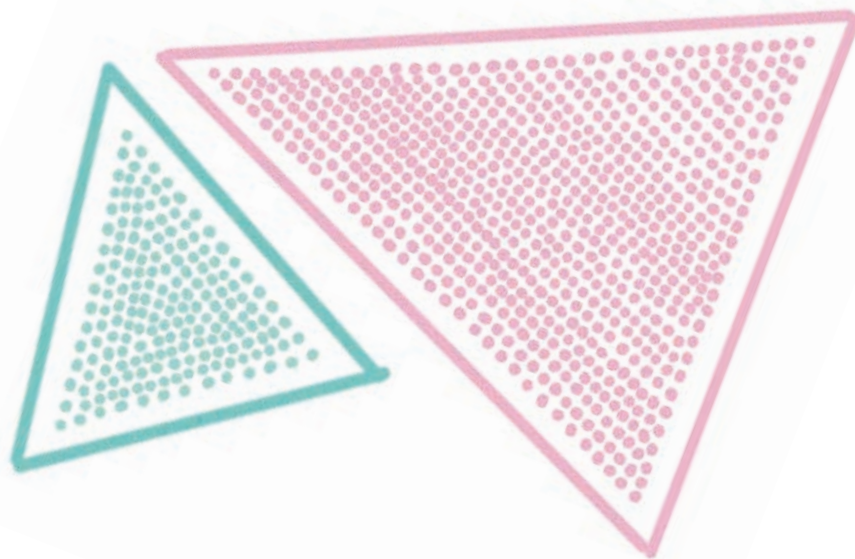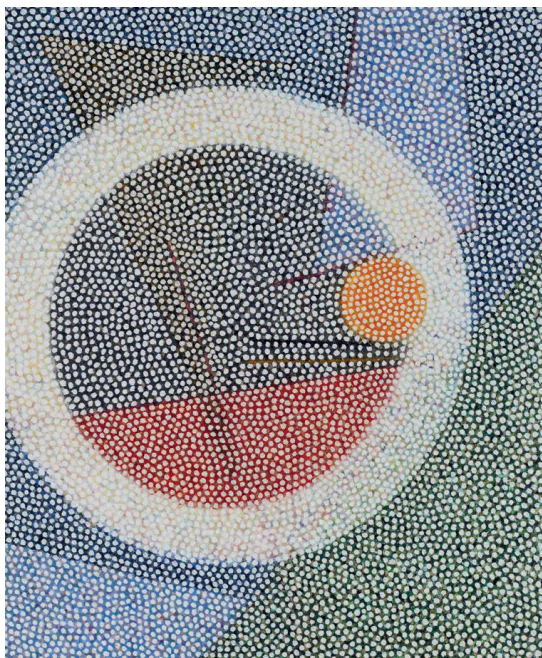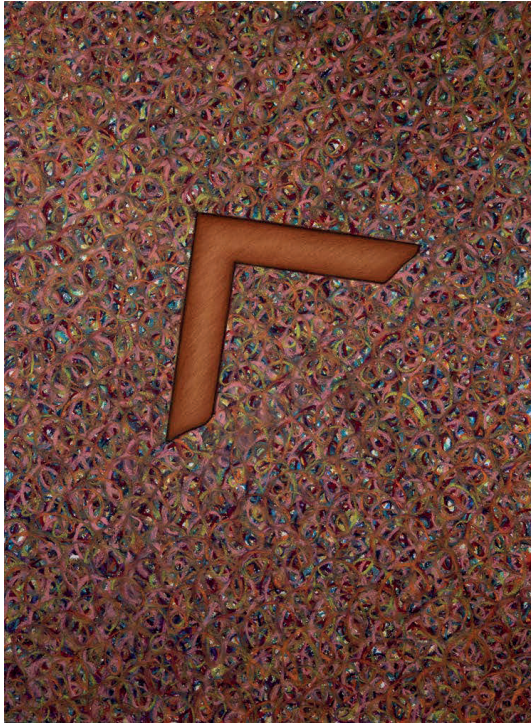
Mary Shannon Will
Encircled, 1987
Oil, oil stick on paper
43.18 x 35.56 cm
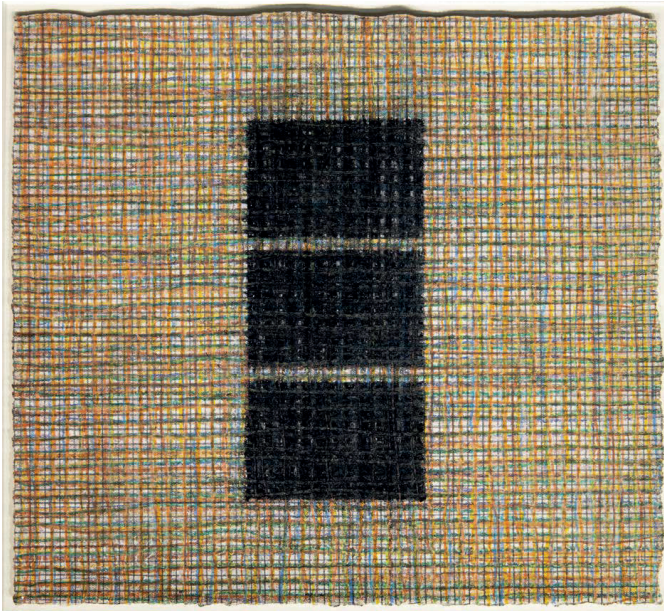Collection of the
Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Mary Shannon Will
Purple Shape, 1992
Pastel on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Brown Shape, 1992
Pastel on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
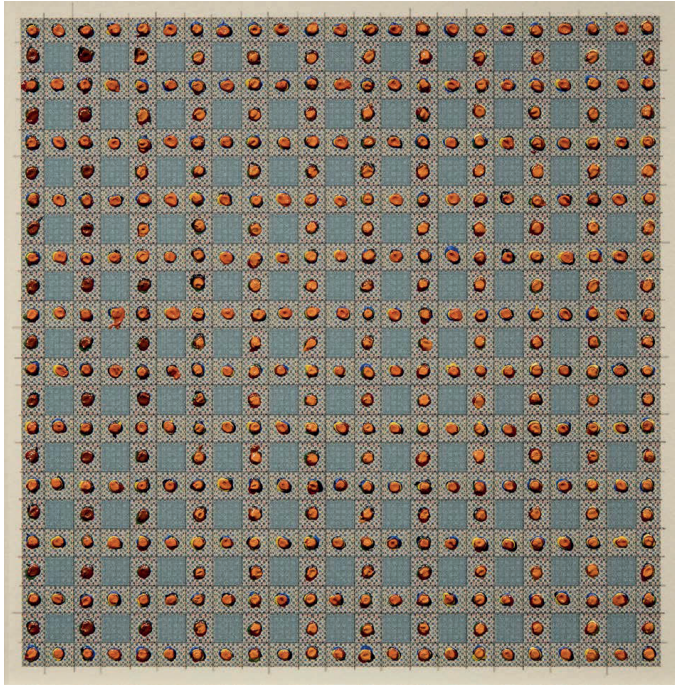Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Pink Shape, 1992
Pastel on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of
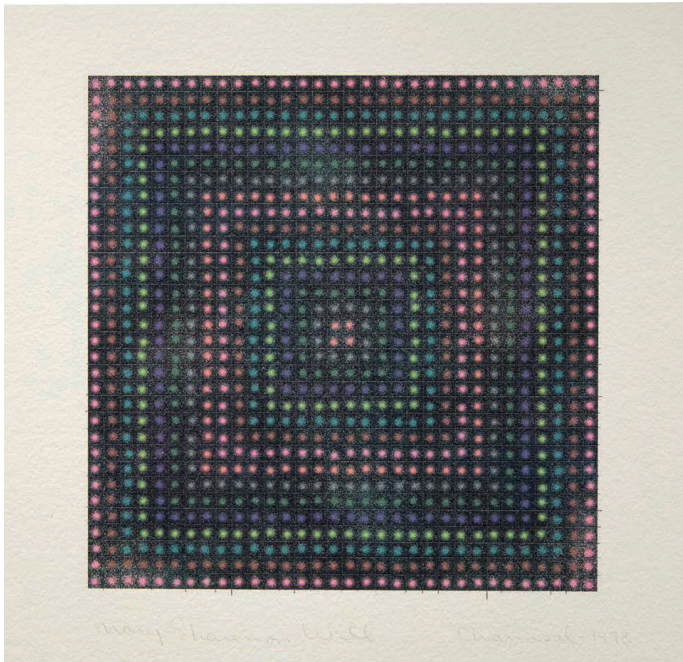Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Black Rectangles, 1994
Pastel on paper
25.40 x 27.94 cm
Collection of the Estate of
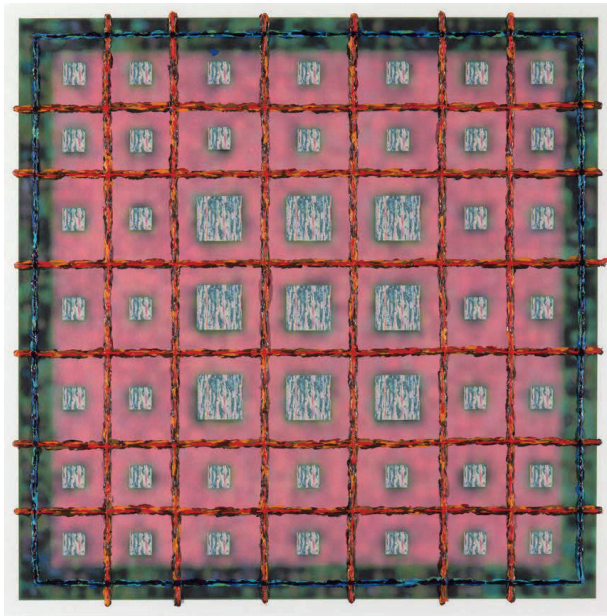Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Soft Boogie, 1998
Graphite, coloured pencil,
and acrylic on paper
25.40 x 25.40 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
JAW, 2000
Graphite, acrylic, and
archival inkjet on paper
20.32 x 20.32 cm
Collection of the Estate of
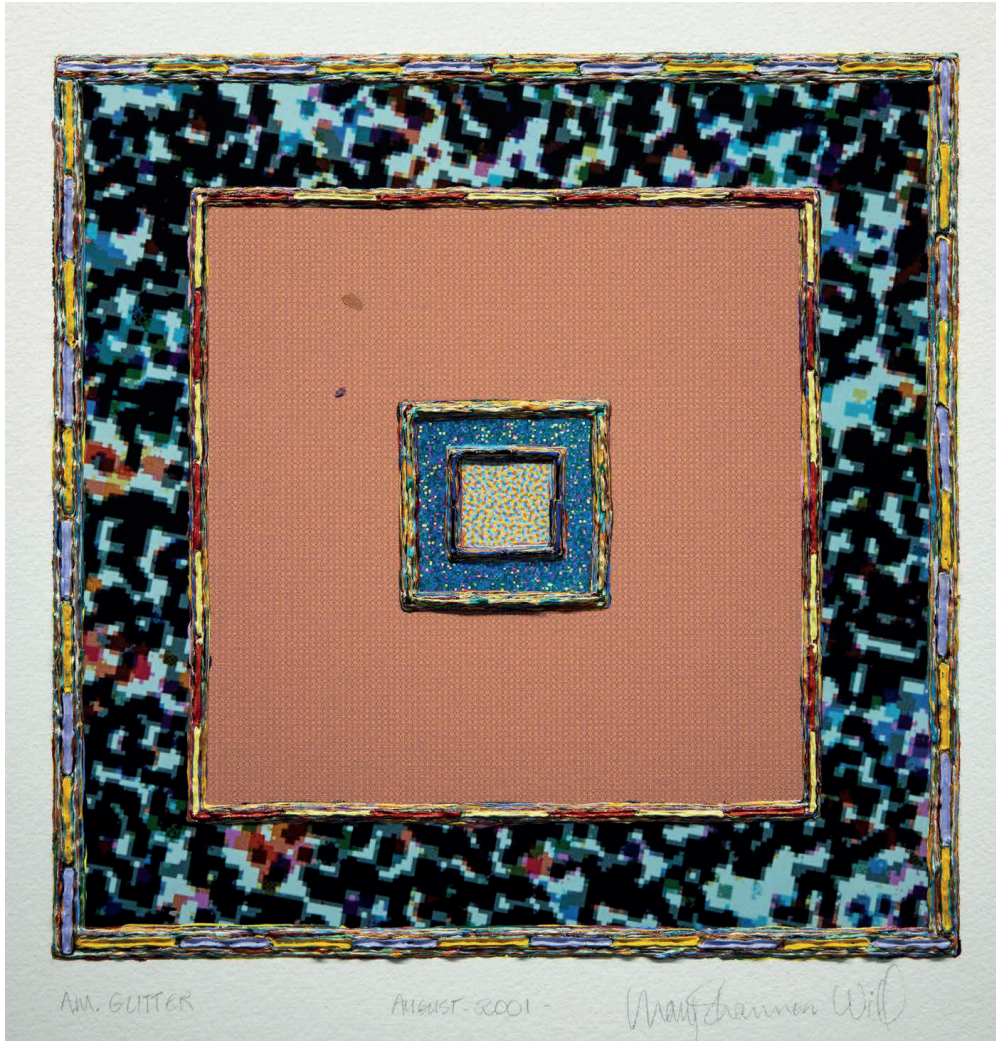Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Chamisal, 1998
Graphite and archival
inkjet on paper
38.10 x 38.10 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Blue Mark, 1998
Acrylic and archival inkjet on paper
38.10 x 38.10 cm
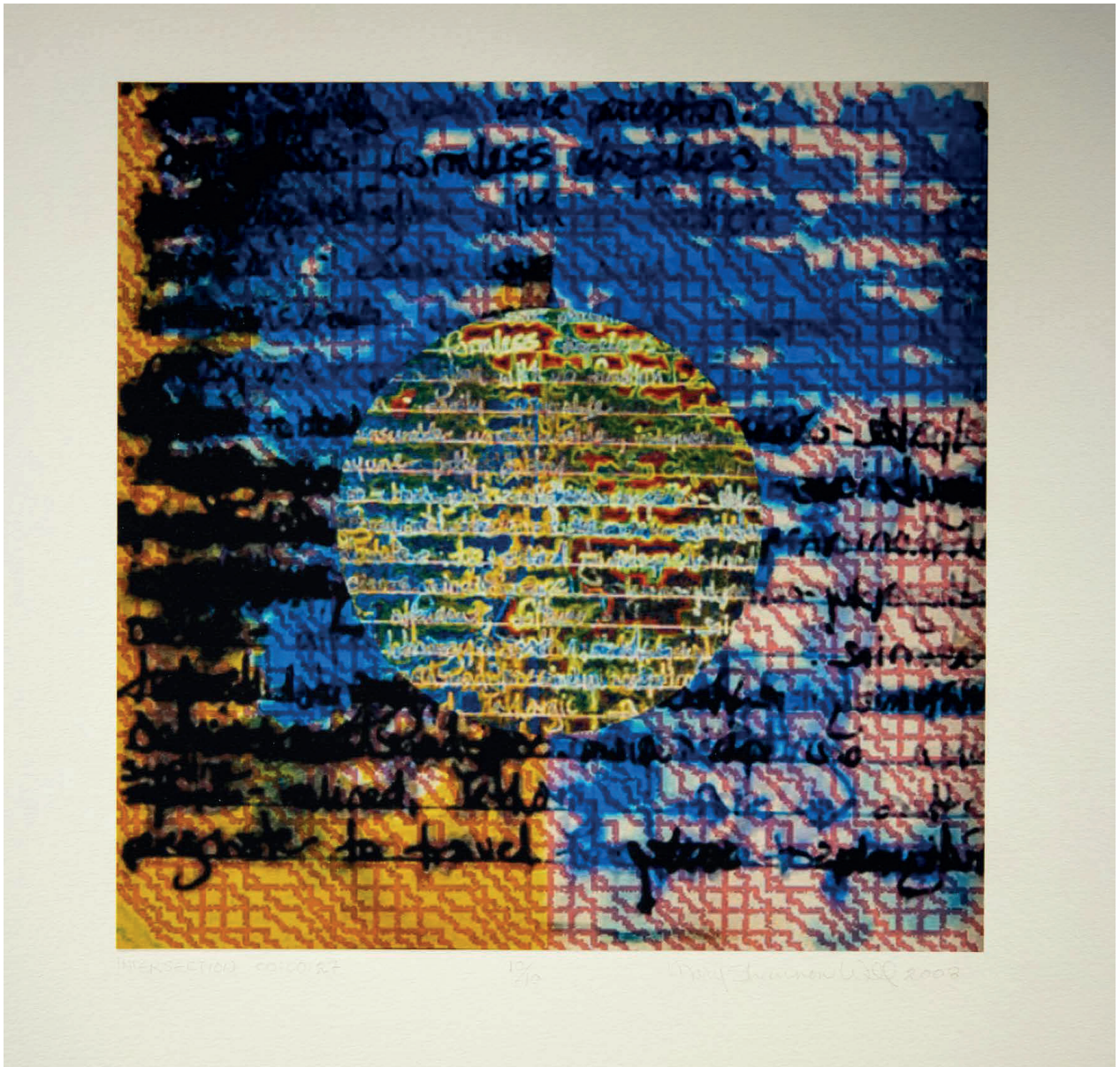Collection of the
Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Mary Shannon Will
Red Mark, 1998
Archival inkjet on paper
33.02 x 33.02 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
AM Glitter, August 2001
Acrylic, archival inkjet, and
Mactac on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of Michelle Shannon

Mary Shannon Will
Intersection 00:00:17, 2008, edition 10/10
Archival inkjet on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Intersection 00:00:27, 2008, edition 10/10
Archival inkjet on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery
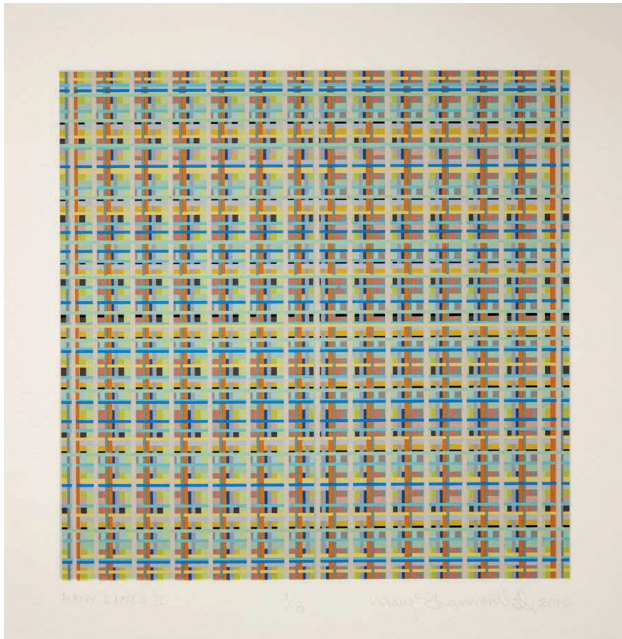
Mary Shannon Will
Many Lines II, 2010, edition 6/8
Archival inkjet on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of
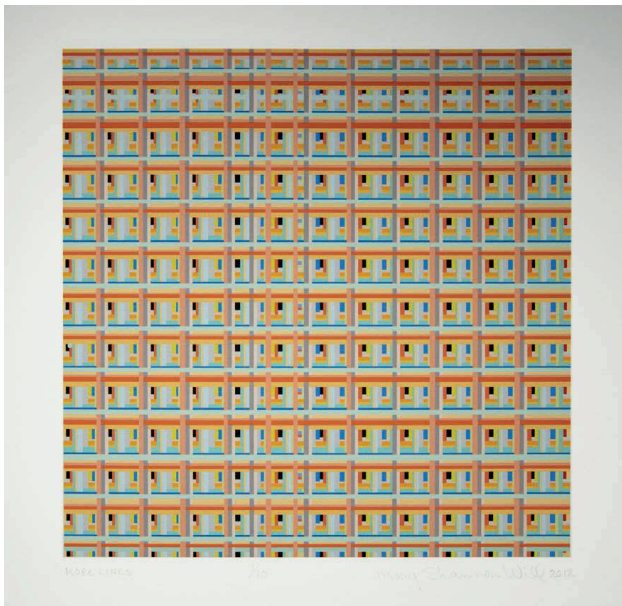Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
More Lines, 2012, edition 1/10
Archival inkjet on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Lines Remembered, 2013, edition 1/10
Archival inkjet on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Extra Yellow, 2010 edition 2/8
Archival inkjet on paper
55.72 x 43.02 cm
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts
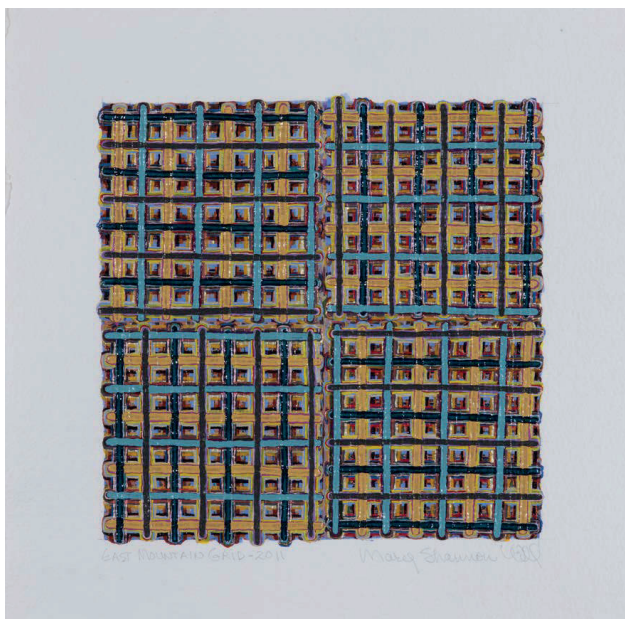
Mary Shannon Will
East Mountain Grid, 2011
Acrylic on paper
30 x 30.16 cm
Collection of the
Alberta Foundation for the Arts
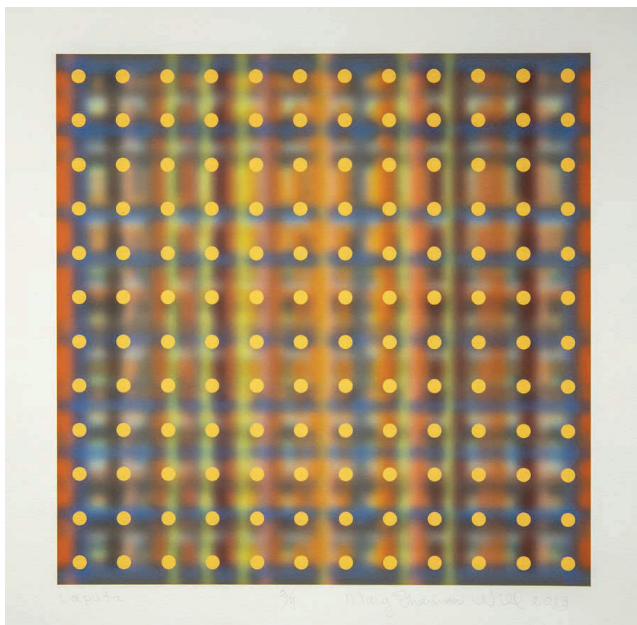
Mary Shannon Will
Laputa, 2018, edition 2/4
Archival inkjet on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
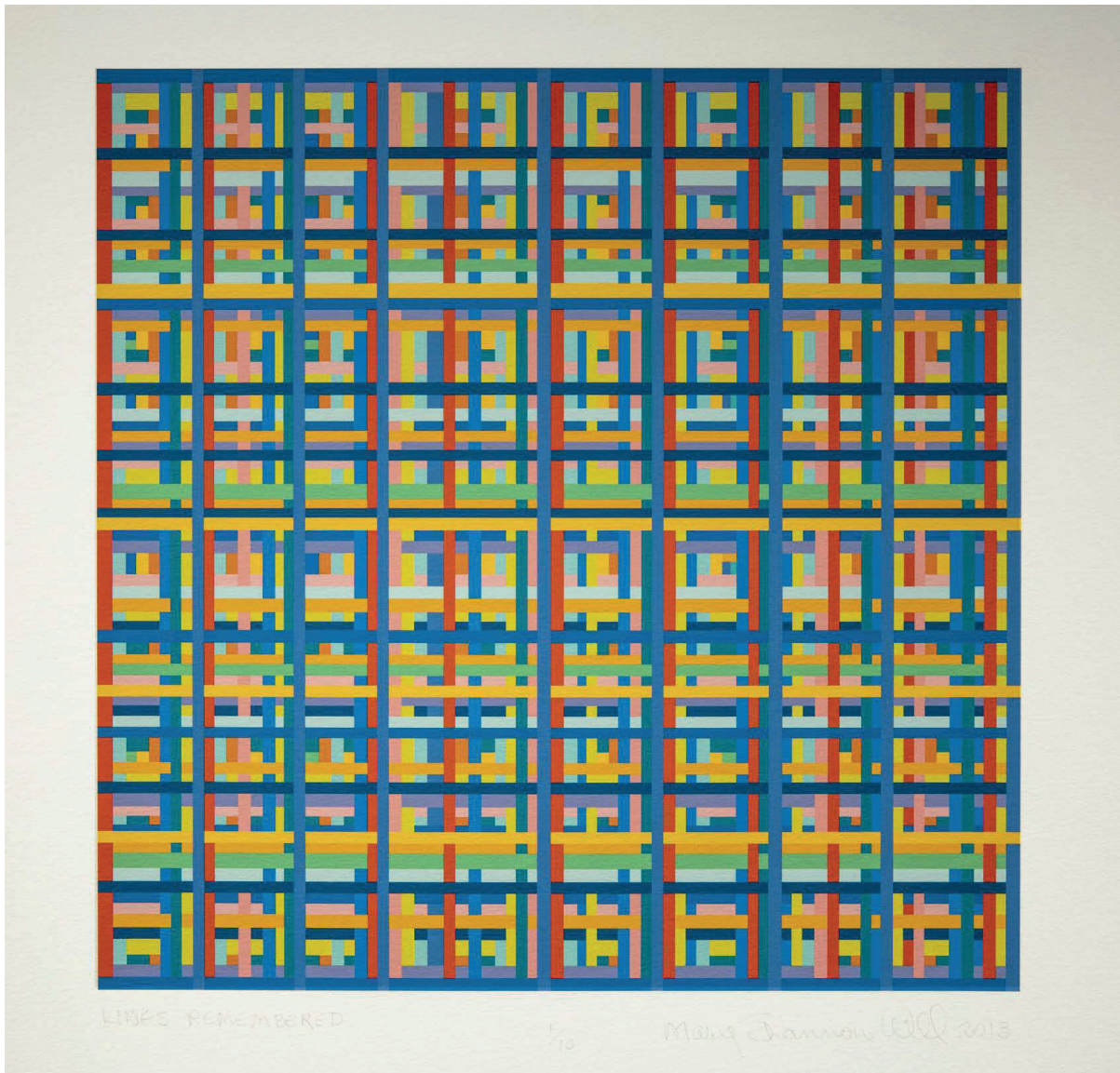Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery
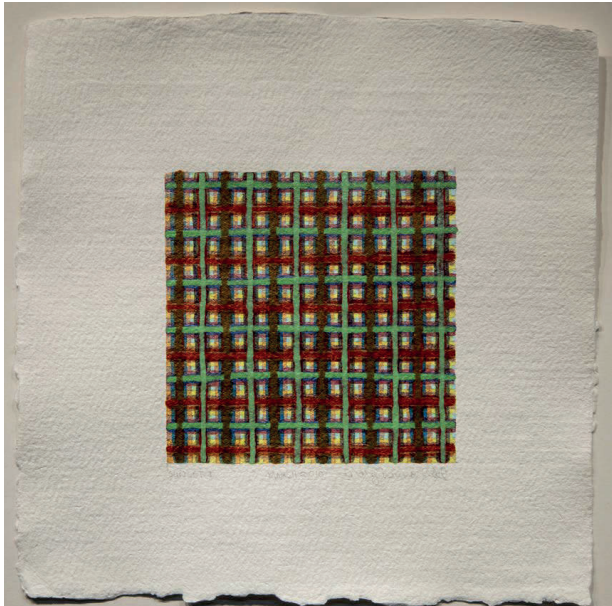
Mary Shannon Will
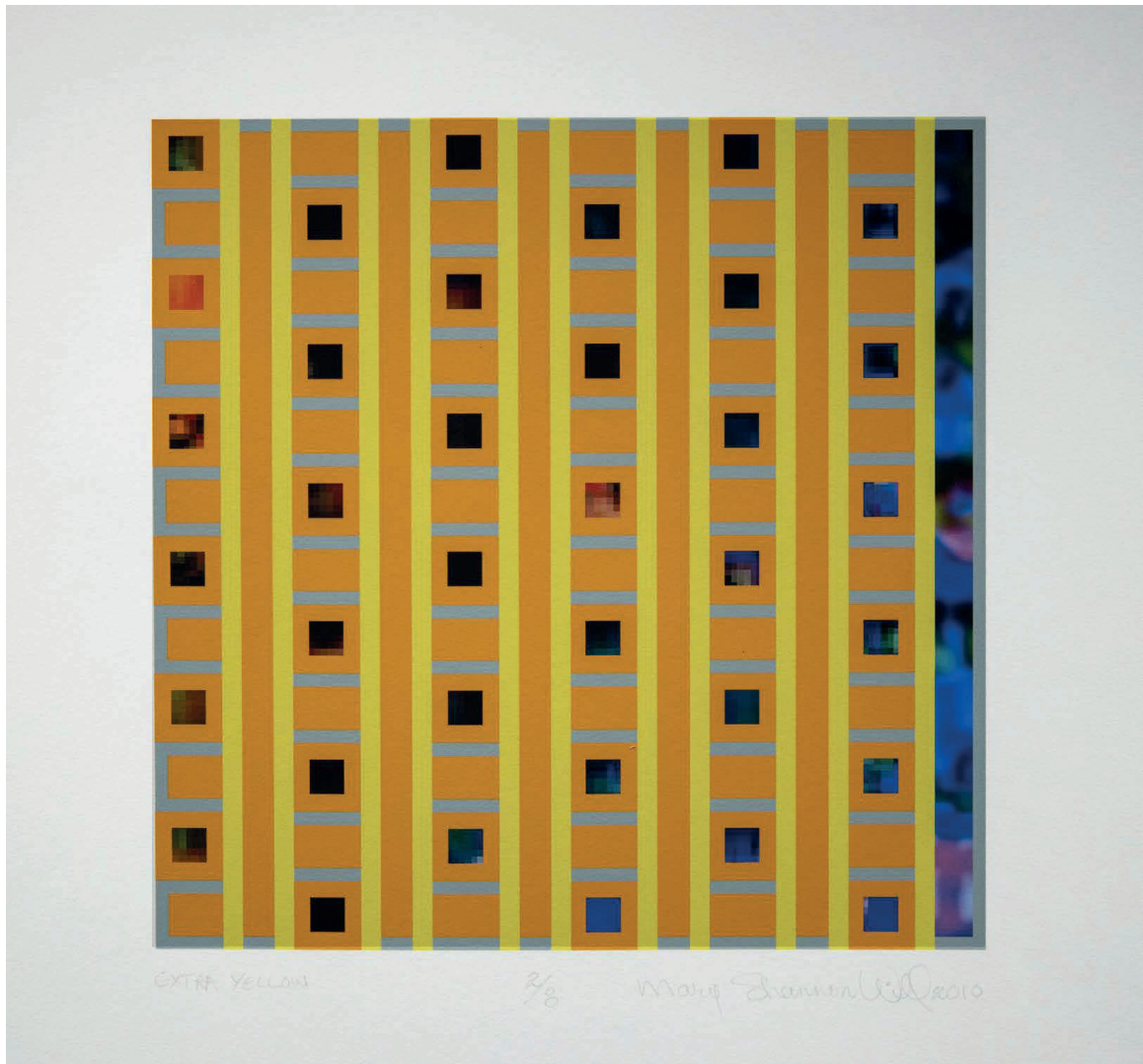*Sunset I*, March 2010
Acrylic on paper
30.48 x 30.48 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery
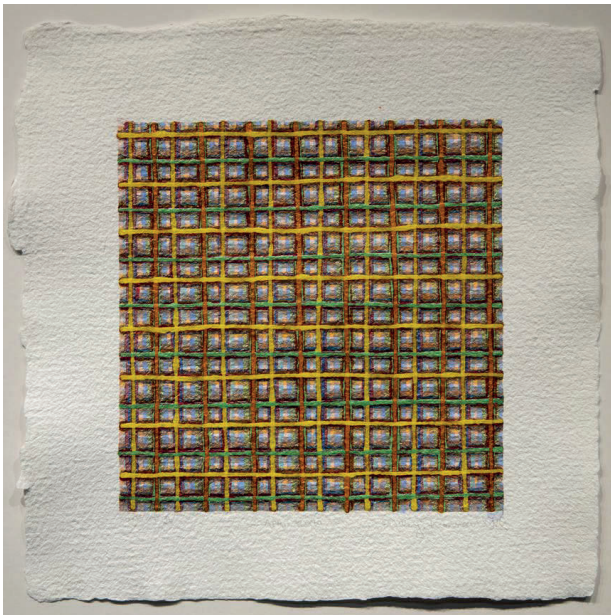
Mary Shannon Will
Sunset II, April 2010
Acrylic on paper
30.48 x 30.48 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery
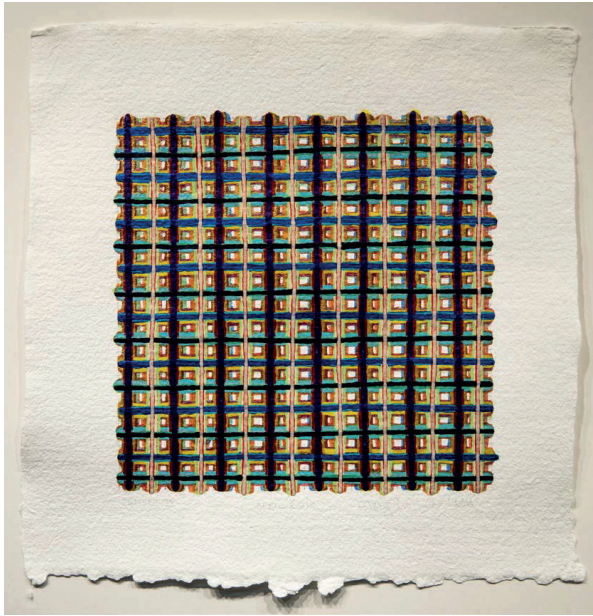
Mary Shannon Will
Sunset IV, April 2010
Acrylic on paper
30.48 x 30.48 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery
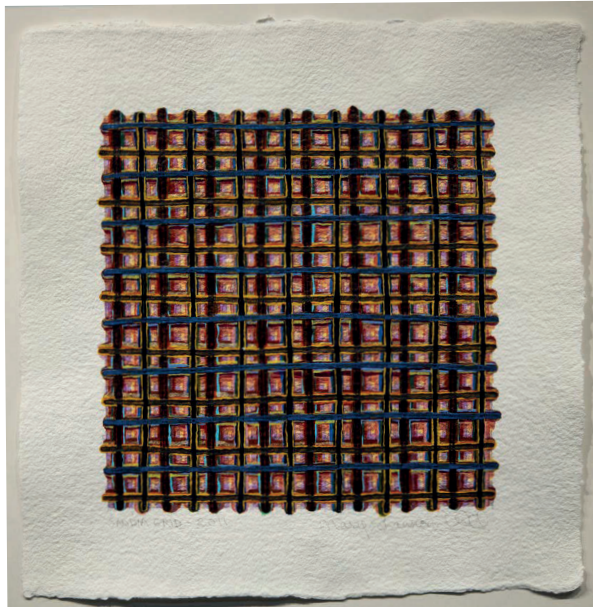
Mary Shannon Will
Sandia Grid, 2011
Acrylic on paper
30.48 x 30.48 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Mary Shannon Will
Edge of Blue, 2013
Acrylic on paper
30.48 x 30.48 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery
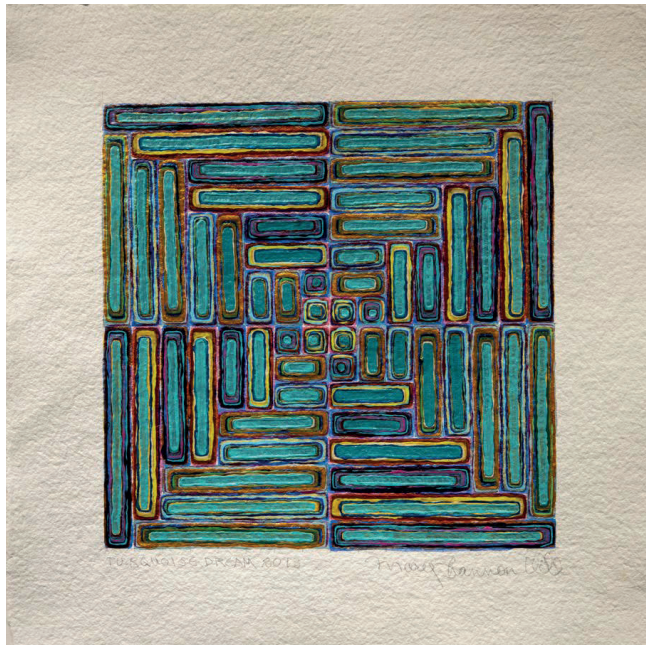
Mary Shannon Will
Turquoise Dream, 2013
Acrylic on paper
30.48 x 30.48 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery
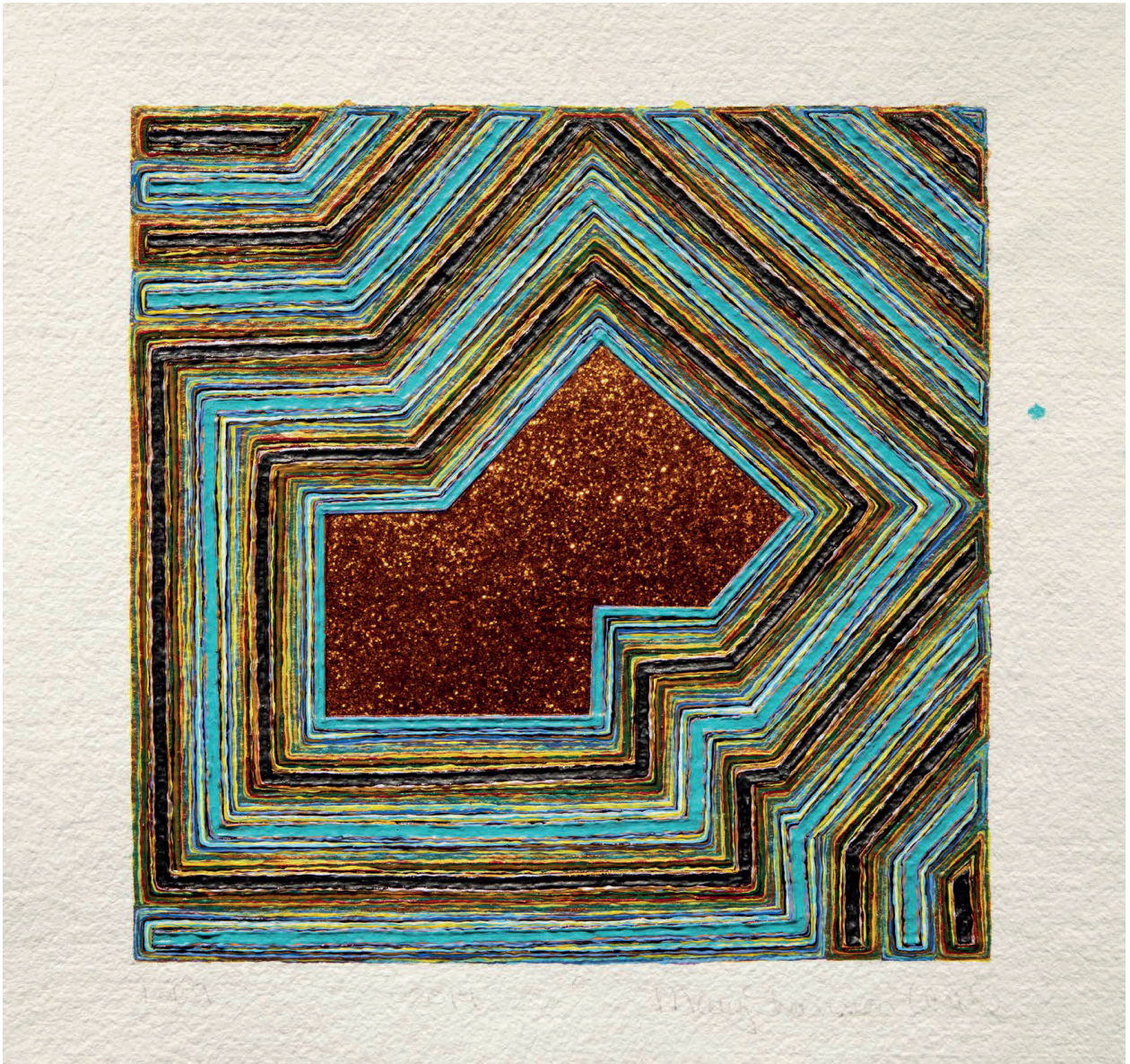
Mary Shannon Will
1 of 9, 2017
Acrylic and Mactac on paper
30.48 x 30.48 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Education Guide

This Education Guide consists of activities to move audiences through the various themes presented in *MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot.* The content of the exhibition and the following lesson plans have been carefully developed and designed to enhance the curriculum set by Alberta Education. The guide includes a short section on art history movements relevant to the exhibition, questions for discussion, activities, and vocabulary designed for the level of ability, understanding, and complexity of the participants:

Beginner — participants who are just beginning their exploration of art.

Intermediate — participants who have some experience looking at and creating art.

Advanced — participants who have much experience looking at and creating art.

Throughout the Education Guide, you will find key concepts, words, and terms emphasized that can be found in the Vocabulary section.
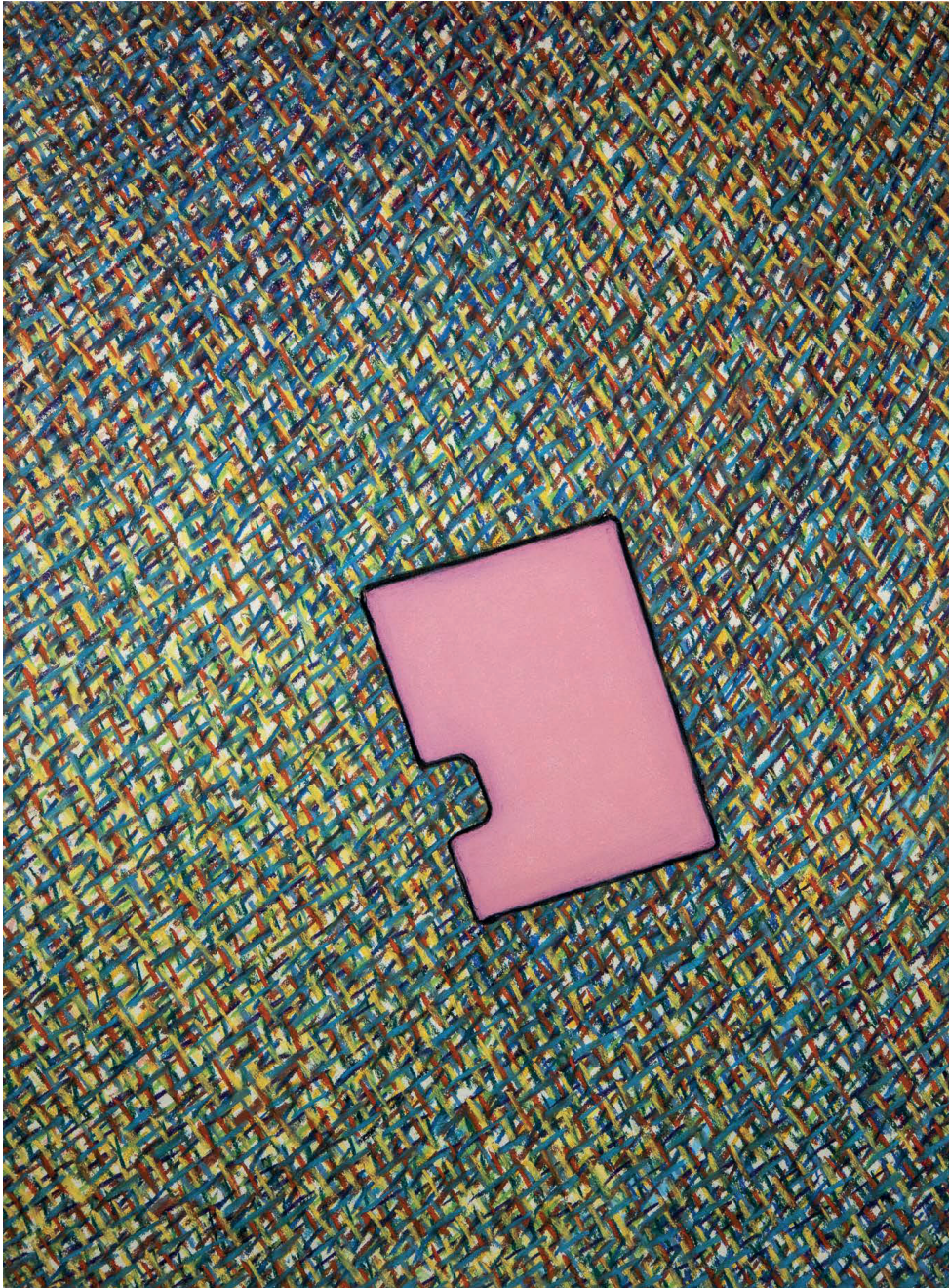
Mary Shannon Will
Pink Shape, 1992
Pastel on paper
76.20 x 55.88 cm
Collection of the Estate of
Mary Shannon Will
Courtesy Paul Kuhn Gallery

Art History Checkpoint • • • • • •

This section provides a brief overview of some important art movements that influenced Mary Shannon Will's artistic career and the artworks included in the travelling exhibition *MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot.*

Impressionism

In the nineteenth century, a new art movement surfaced in France. Artists began a practice of creating quick and spontaneous, or "on the spot," paintings in outdoor environments instead of highly detailed and realistic paintings in a studio based on sketches. The visual style associated with this new practice became known as *Impressionism,* as the compositions aimed to capture an "impression" of the momentary and ephemeral effects of natural light. This was achieved by working quickly with paints and paintbrushes in the open air, or *en plein air.*[1] Artists began to observe colours outside the artificial setting of the studio and started using paint and pigment in a way that made the artworks look as if they were saturated in pure light. Prior to Impressionism, artists would typically start their paintings with a base layer, or "ground," of medium-dark reddish-brown and work up to lighter tones and then back down to darker ones. Impressionist artists found that this darker ground dulled their additive colour layers so instead chose to paint on a light-colored ground. Oil paint (which was the typical paint medium at the time) is semi-transparent, and therefore using a light underpainting helped Impressionists to intensify the brightness of colours in their paintings.[2]

Many art historians credit Claude Monet as one of the first artists to work in this style, followed by a number of other notable early Impressionists, such as Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas.[3]

• ••

1   Tate (website), "Impressionism," Art & Artists, Art Terms, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/art-terms/i/impressionism.
2   Dr. Kim Grant and Dr Charles Cramer, "Impressionist Color," Khan Academy, accessed July 24, 2022, https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/avant-garde-france/impressionism/a/impressionist-color.
3   Tate (website), "Impressionism," Art & Artists, Art Terms, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/art-terms/i/impressionism.

Fig. 1 Claude Monet (1840–1926)
Impression, Sunrise, 1872
Oil on canvas, 48 x 63 cm
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris
Public domain

Fig. 2 Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1914)
Les Canotiers à Chatou, 1879
Oil on canvas, 81.2 x 100.2 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington
Public domain

Expressionism

Expressionism is an artistic style that has developed in a variety of ways within different geographical regions and historical contexts. As an art movement, however, Expressionism is most commonly understood as a reaction to Impressionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within Europe. Expressionist artworks visually embody the more intangible emotional and psychological experiences of life, rather than attempting to capture a sense of reality in the present moment. This was accomplished with the heightened use of emotionally evocative colours, aggressive mark making, and abstraction in compositions. Artists were also increasingly looking inward to depict more subjective and/or narrative content. In its earliest stages, Expressionism emerged most prominently in Austria, France, and Germany with artists such as Egon Schiele, Vincent van Gogh, and Wassily Kandinsky, respectively.[4]

Expressionism has since come to be understood more fairly as an ever-expanding international trend as opposed to a very specific art movement that can be neatly categorized within a particular time period.[5]

In Austria, Egon Schiele was tackling morally controversial topics such as sexuality, death, and violence primarily through dark, expressive paintings of the human form.[6]

Fig. 3 Egon Schiele (1890–1918)
German title: *Halbakt* (*Selbstdarstellung*), 1911
Pencil and gouache on paper, 44.0 x 30.9 cm
Leopold Museum, Vienna
Public domain

---

4   Shira Wolfe, "Art Movement: Expressionism – Expressionist Artists, Art & Overview," *Artland Magazine* (online), accessed July 24, 2022, https://magazine.artland.com/art-movement-expressionism.
5   Ibid.
6   Ibid.

In France, Vincent van Gogh was translating a deeply complex psyche into vivid landscapes, still-life paintings, and portraits.[7]

Fig. 4 Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890)
The Starry Night, 1889
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Public domain

In Germany, Wassily Kandinsky was exploring spirituality in art through the visual abstraction of shapes and emotive colour theory.[8]

Fig. 5 Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944)
Composition VI, 1913
Oil on canvas, 195 x 300 cm
State Hermitage Museum, Russia
Public domain

7   Ibid.
8   Ibid.

Constructivism

In the early 1920s, shortly after the First World War and the Russian Revolution, a number of Russian artists, including Aleksei Gan, Vladimir Tatlin, and Alexander Rodchenko, started an art movement known as *Constructivism*. Constructivist artists worked with materials that aligned with functionality, reproducibility, and industrial technologies, modern ideals that were inherently well suited to serving the masses. Additional notable artists involved in popularizing Constructivism include Varvara Stepanova, Lyubov Popova, and El Lissitzky.[9]

Modernism — a movement that was occurring simultaneously — championed rationality and science, structured ways of knowing and representing the world, and concrete methods for improving it. Constructivists were politically and socially engaged with these new Modernist ideals, and they created art, architecture, design, and fashion to further a utopian vision of a collective society that could be expressed in primary geometric forms. Constructivists pursued formal abstraction in art and were also interested in abstract ideas expressed in other fields, such as music and mathematics. They developed a new visual language in art and design that combined pure geometric forms with primary colours and black, white, and grey to create strictly planned compositions. Impressionist or Expressionist compositions were replaced with abstract constructions in which form and function were one.[10]

9   Laura Hillegas, "Constructivism Brought the Russian Revolution to the Art World," Artsy (blog), January 4, 2019,
     https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-constructivism-brought-russian-revolution-art.
10 Ibid.
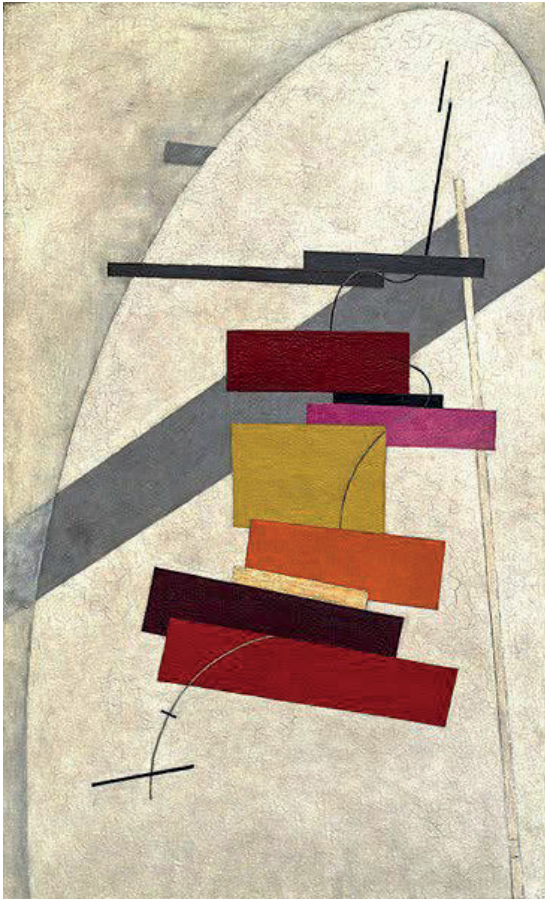
Fig. 6 El Lissitzky (1890–1941)
Untitled, circa 1919–20
Oil on canvas, 79.6 x 49.6 cm
The Guggenheim Museum, New York
Public domain
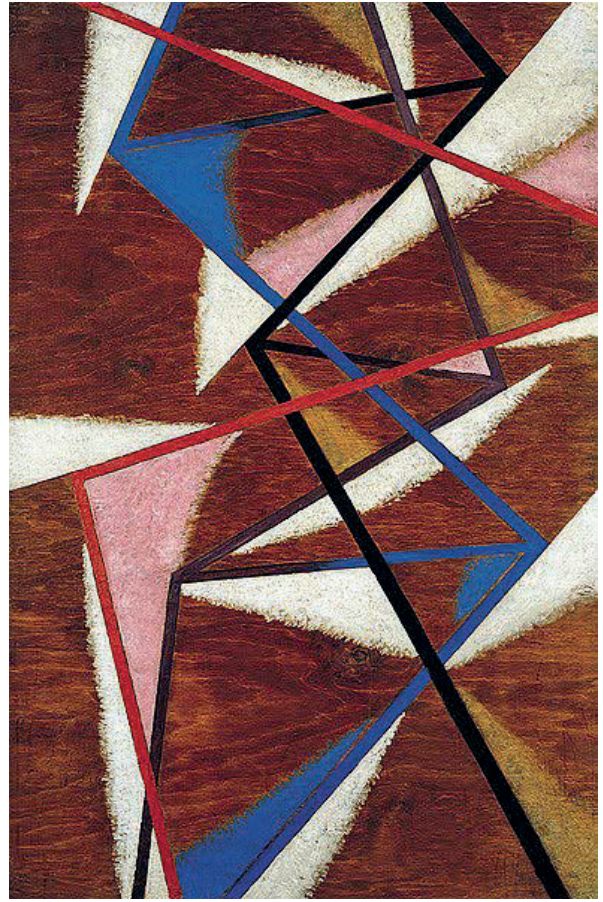
Fig. 7 Lyubov Popova (1889–1924)
Painterly-Force Construction, 1921
Oil with marble dust on plywood, 92.7 x 70.0 cm
Dickinson Gallery, London and New York
Public domain
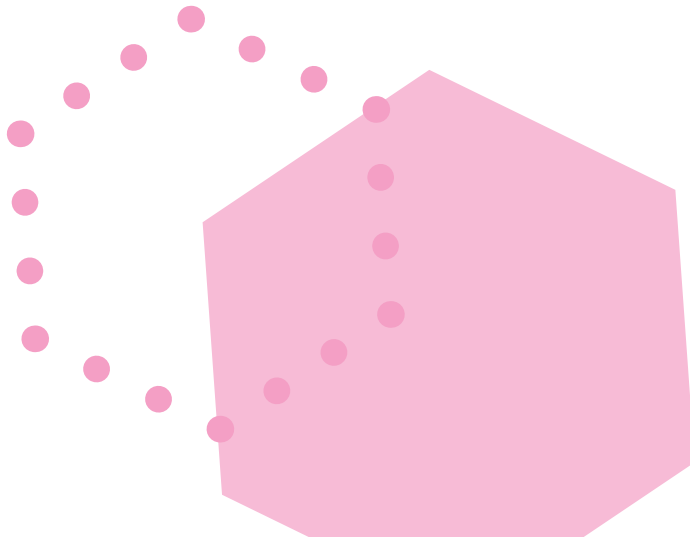
Pointillism

The artistic style and technique of *Pointillism* was developed by artists Georges Seurat and Paul Signac in Paris in the mid-1880s as a reaction against the fluid, spontaneous, and loose visual renderings of Impressionism. Pointillism offered a much more scientific approach to painting, making use of *optics* to compose images. This was accomplished by meticulously placing small but separate dots of unmixed paint colours side by side in various patterns. When viewed at a distance, the colours blend to form a complete image, similar to the way tiny pixels work in a digital photograph.[11]
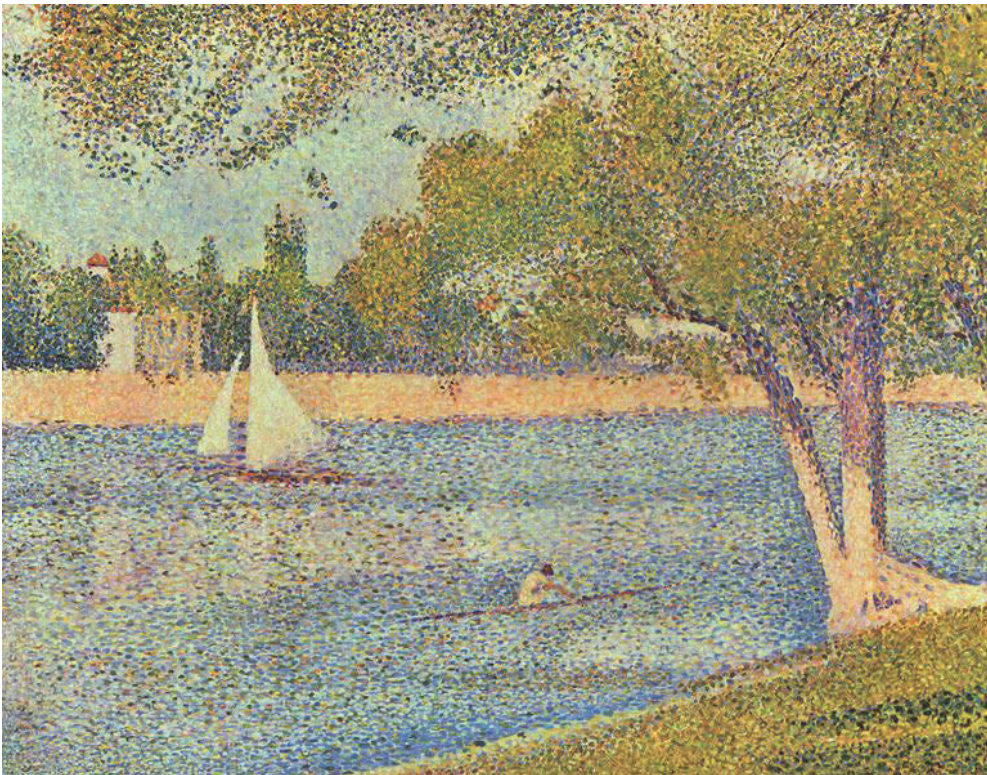
Fig. 8 Georges Seurat (1859–1891)
The Seine á La Grande Jatte, 1888
Oil on canvas, 65 x 82 cm
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium
Public domain

· ·

11 Sotheby's, "Pointillism: 7 Things You Need to Know," May 21, 2018, https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/
    pointillism-7-things-you-need-to-know.

Conceptual Art

Conceptual art is difficult to define because it can take the form of just about anything. Before the emergence of Conceptual art, painters or sculptors would typically think about expressing their ideas or capturing their understanding of reality visually with paint or sculptural materials and using generally agreed-upon artistic techniques. Conceptual artists instead began to use whatever materials and forms they felt would most appropriately get a particular idea across. Conceptual art therefore embodies a wide range of artistic styles and mediums, and artworks range from performances to written descriptions or instruction-based artworks that have also come to be known as rule-based art, or sometimes generative art (see the following section, Rule-Based Art, for further explanation).[12]

Artist Marcel Duchamp is commonly known as one of the forerunners of Conceptual art. He significantly influenced the development of the movement with his boundary-pushing ideas. Duchamp assisted in founding the Society of Independent Artists in New York, and in 1917 the society organized an exhibition that was open to any artist who could pay a small fee. Duchamp entered a porcelain urinal, which he titled *Fountain*, as an artwork under the pseudonym of R. Mutt. The board of the society was outraged and didn't want to exhibit this mass-produced functional object as a sculpture, but an anonymous editorial in the *Blind Man* offered a persuasive defence of the urinal as an artwork. The editorial also provides a helpful explanation of the *readymade* art object.[13]

Fountain by R. Mutt   Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz

THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS

"Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under a new title and point of view — created a new thought for that object." (Anon., 'The Richard Mutt Case', *Blind Man*, New York, no.2, May 1917, p.5)."[14]

Fig. 9 Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968)
Fountain, 1917
Urinal readymade, signed R. Mutt
Caption read: "Fountain by R. Mutt, Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS"
Edited by Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood, and Marcel Duchamp, *The Blind Man* no. 2, (New York, May 1917): 5
Public domain

12 Tate (website), "Conceptual Art," Art & Artists, Art Terms, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/conceptual-art.
13 Tate (website), "Marcel Duchamp – Fountain 1917, replica 1964," Art & Artists, Artworks, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573.
14 Ibid.

Rule-Based Art

Rule-based artworks are created by methodically following simple guidelines or systems, usually set by the artist. This artistic approach oscillates between artmaking and pragmatic reason. Much of what is considered rule-based art is a commentary on subjectivity and objectivity as well as the limitations of thought and technical skill.[15]

Many art historians look to artist Sol LeWitt's instruction-based artworks as primary examples of this form of artmaking. LeWitt would hire individuals to construct installations based only on his instructions; however, these instructions were often open to interpretation, so no two installations were ever identical. LeWitt likened himself to an architect who created designs but left the actual building to others. His works would often engage geometric patterns and mathematical concepts used by architects, but his instructions never reached the level of precision or exactness that an architect's blueprints or designs would have.[16]

Here is an example of written instructions for the artwork *Wall Drawing 273*, by Sol LeWitt (you can see an example of this work completed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art on the next page).

A six-inch (15cm) grid covering the walls. Lines from corners, sides, and center of the walls to random points on the grid.

1st wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides;
2nd wall: Blue lines from four corners;
3rd wall: Yellow lines from the center;
4th wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides, blue lines from four corners;
5th wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides, yellow lines from the center;
6th wall: Blue lines from four corners, yellow lines from the center;
7th wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides, blue lines from four corners, yellow lines from the center.

Each wall has an equal number of lines. (The number of lines and their length are determined by the draftsman.)[17]

15   Cary Levine, "Logical Conclusions: 40 Years of Rule-Based Art," *The Brooklyn Rail* (online), April 2005, https://brooklynrail.org/2005/04/art/logical-conclusions-40-years-of-rule-bas.
16   Art Class Curator, "The Art of an Idea: Math and Art Integration with Sol LeWitt's Instruction," Art Class Curator, March 13, 2018, https://artclasscurator.com/sol-lewitt-instruction.
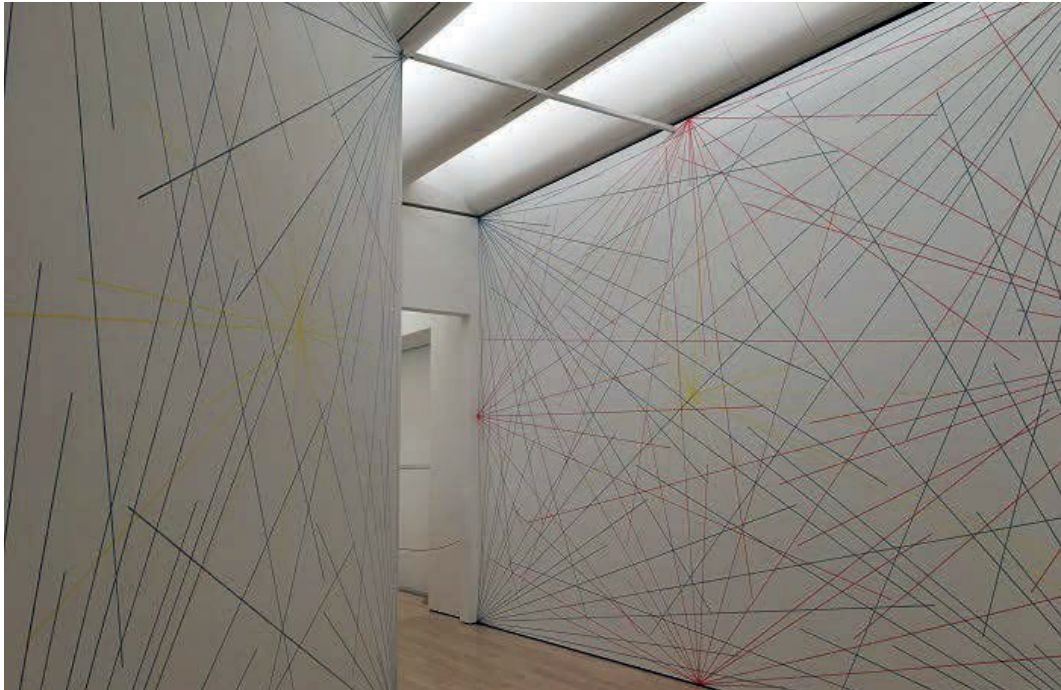17   Ibid.

Fig. 10 Sol LeWitt (1928–2007)
Wall Drawing 273, 1975
Variable dimensions
The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
© The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Minimalism

Art that can be categorized within *Minimalism* makes no attempt to represent an outside reality. In this way, it is set apart from art that is representational, such as landscapes, portraits, or *still-life* paintings, and it is also quite different from *Abstract* and Expressionist artworks that reflect an emotion or feeling. Instead, Minimalism in art embodies order, simplicity, and harmony. The medium each artwork is made with and the compositional form it takes is the reality that the artist wishes to embody — the art itself is the experience.[18]

The Minimalist art movement started in America in the late 1950s and really took off in the 1960s and 1970s with artists such as Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and Agnes Martin.[19]

"Art work is a representation of our devotion to life." — Agnes Martin[20]

Fig. 11 Agnes Martin (1912–2004)
Praise, from the *Rubber Stamp Portfolio* 1976, published 1977
One from a portfolio of thirteen rubber stamps, 28 x 28 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. and the Publications Department of the Museum of Modern Art
© 2022 Estate of Agnes Martin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

18   Tate (website), "Minimalism," Art & Artists, Art Terms, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/art-terms/m/minimalism.
19   Ibid.
20   MoMA (website), "Agnes Martin," Art and Artists, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.moma.org/artists/3787.

Fig. 12 Agnes Martin (1912–2004)
Untitled, 1978, edition 1000
Watercolour and coloured ink on transparentized paper, 22.9 x 22.9 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection Gift
© 2022 Estate of Agnes Martin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Discussion Questions • • • • • •

Below are questions that are intended to prompt meaningful discussion about the content presented in *MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot.* The questions can be selected and the vocabulary altered to suit the appropriate age level.

- Which of Mary Shannon Will's artworks stand out to you most as using a prominent and structured *grid* within the *composition*? Which artworks are more Constructivist in style? Which have Expressionist undertones?

- Mary Shannon Will was quite intentional about selecting colours for her artworks, and she would often find ways to select colours in a spontaneous or playful manner. Are there certain artworks you are more drawn to because of their colours? Why do you think you are drawn to these colour combinations?

- How do colour choices and colour interactions within an artwork's composition impact your emotions?

- Look at each artwork from a distance and then get up close. How does your perception of the artwork change as you see more of its details? What happens to what you see as you move farther away?

- Spend some time looking closely at the artworks *Sandia Grid*, *Sunset I*, *Sunset II*, and *Sunset IV*. Each of these artworks follow a similar grid compositionally, but the colour combinations are different in subtle ways. Which colours are strongest in each of the different grids? Which colours pop forward visually and which colours recede into the background?

- Do any of the artworks remind you of textiles? Which ones? Do they remind you of other things?

- In this exhibition, some of the artworks were created digitally while others were created with paint, graphite, pastel, or combinations of various art materials. Without looking at the art labels, can you spot which artworks have digital elements?

Engagement Activities

Chalk It Up to the Grid

Mary Shannon Will used a grid system to develop many of her compositions, and she also used rule-based systems to select colours or determine in which order she laid them. This activity will explore these art methodologies.

On a driveway or in an empty parking lot, draw a five-foot-by-five-foot square and grid the square into twenty-five equal parts using chalk. Mark one corner square as *A* and its opposite corner diagonally as *B*. Have a group of participants take turns using different colours of chalk to draw a continuous line from square A to square B and set rules that must be followed to achieve this — for example, the line must not be drawn diagonally through squares and can only move parallel to the outside edges of the full square. Participants can draw their lines in any route they wish that follows the set parameters. After everyone in the group has drawn their lines, discuss the variations in the lines. What impact do these variations create in the overall composition?

Yarn Ball Weave Toss

Some of the artworks in the exhibition look like swatches of woven fabric and some are complex entanglements and layers of linework. To illustrate the concept of layered linework and interwoven textures, use a ball of yarn or string to conduct a group weaving activity.

Standing or sitting in a circle or a square with a group, have one person hang on to the end of the string and toss the ball to someone else. The receiving person does the same until everyone in the group has become part of an interwoven web. Participants can choose to continue the activity with a secondary colour. Next, carefully lay the web on the ground to view the pattern from a bird's-eye view. Photograph if desired and discuss with the group how the web might have turned out differently if they had changed their approach to the activity in any way.
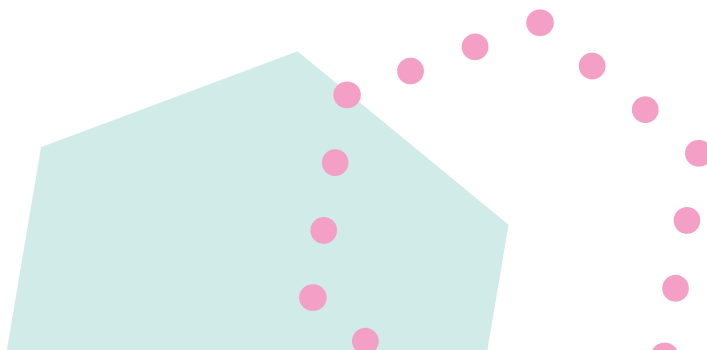
Beginner Lesson: Colours, Shapes, and Lines — Oh My! ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Take a close look at Mary Shannon Will's artworks *1 of 9*, *Brown Shape*, *Pink Shape*, and *Purple Shape* and contemplate the use of abstract geometric shapes in each. In this lesson, participants will study shapes and lines by cutting out different-coloured shapes and use bright markers to trace around them.

Materials

Printer paper, construction paper in a variety of colours, safety scissors, glue sticks, and markers in a variety of colours.

Instructions

Step 1   Cut out at least one basic shape from a piece of construction paper. You could cut out up to ten small shapes or a few larger shapes.

Step 2   Glue each shape down on a sheet of printer paper. The shape(s) can be glued down in a pattern or in a random arrangement.

Step 3   With coloured markers, trace around each shape. Then trace around the outline you created. Continue doing this until the page is filled with a pattern of linework.

Variations

This activity can also be completed by more advanced participants. Have them choose a flat object that has sentimental value or holds visual interest for them (e.g., a ticket stub, a pressed flower, or a sticker). They can trace the object multiple times with other media, such as acrylic paint or pastels. Challenge participants to select colours for their artwork based on their chosen object, either to match the object's colours or to represent the object's meaning through colour metaphors. Participants might try developing a simple set of rules to follow, to guide their actions — for example, "I will only use colours I find in the object," "I will use each colour only five times," or "I will stop drawing lines when I run out of room or colours, whichever comes first."
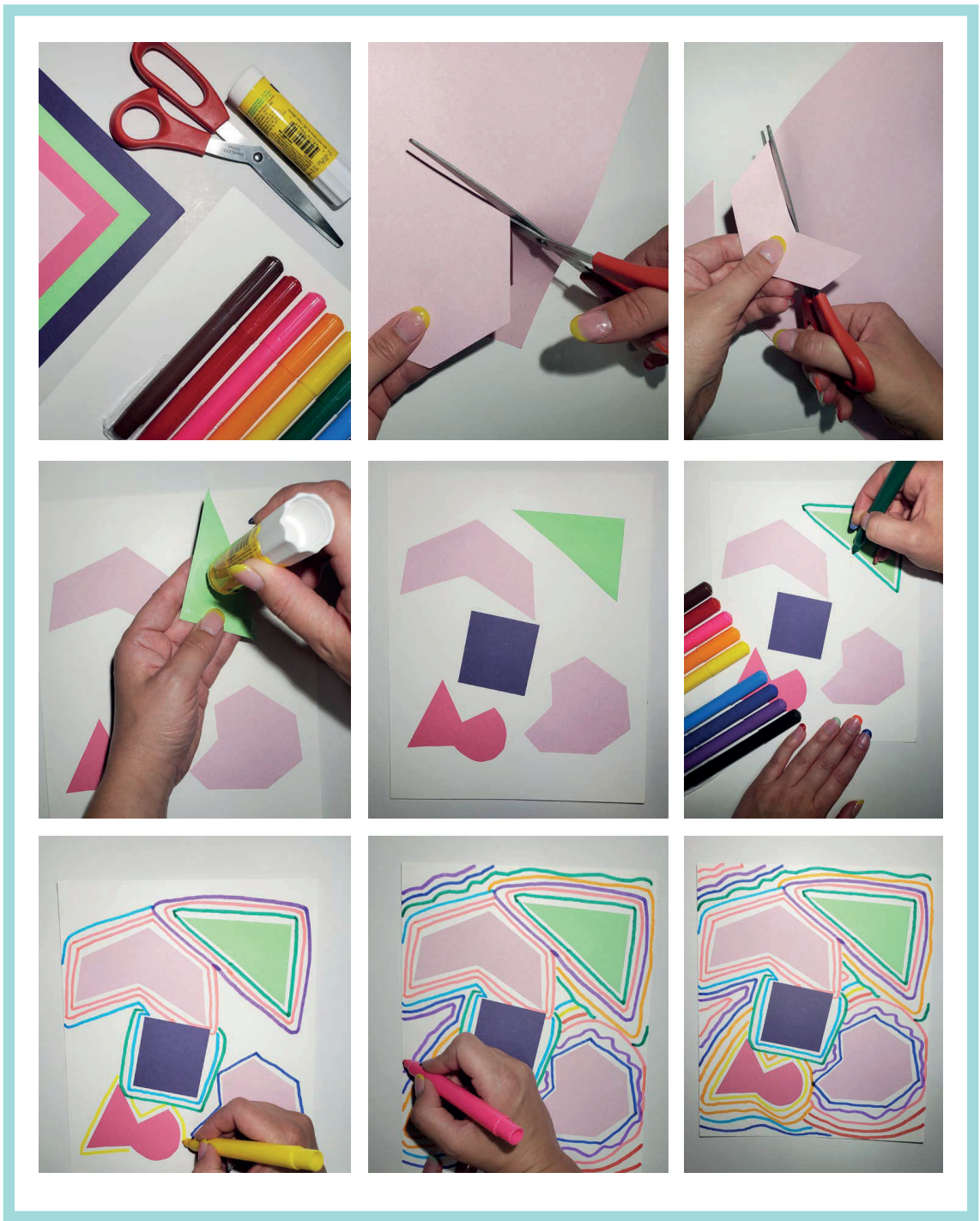
Intermediate Lesson — Bubble Wrap Monoprints ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Investigate the layering of pixels in Mary Shannon Will's artworks *Red Mark* and *AM Glitter*. In this lesson, monoprint techniques will be used to layer dots of colour from sheets of Bubble Wrap to mimic the layering of pixels and dots in many of Shannon Will's artworks.

Materials

Three pieces of Bubble Wrap cut into ten-inch squares, a paint roller and three paint trays, acrylic paint in three colours, a twelve-inch-square piece of paper to print on, and a protective sheet or tablecloth.

Preparation

Lay the protective sheet or tablecloth over the work surface if desired and prepare the three paint trays with each different colour of paint.
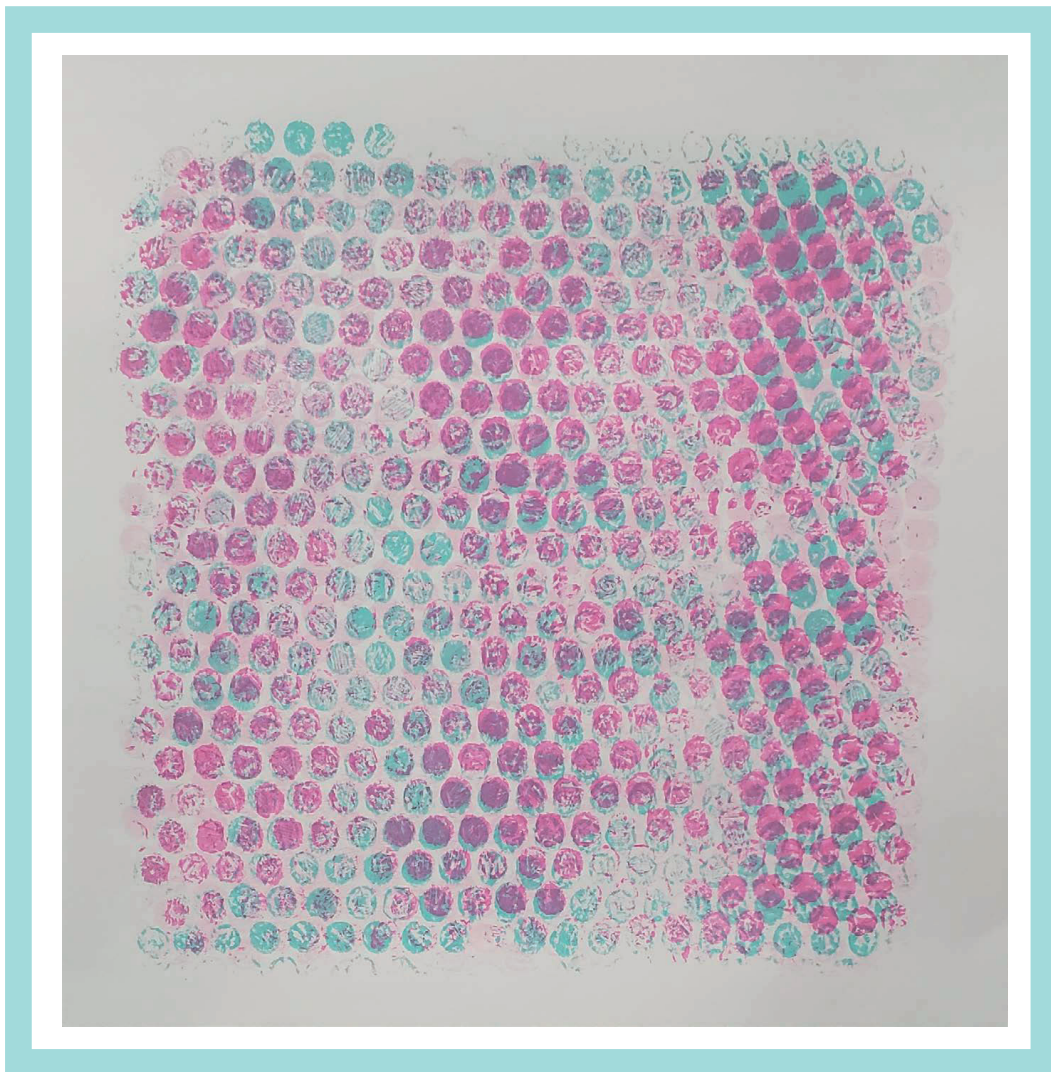
Instructions

Step 1   Prepare the first Bubble Wrap sheet by rolling your first paint colour onto the bubble-textured surface. It may work best to print your colours starting with the lightest and working up to the darkest, but feel free to experiment!

Step 2   Once the Bubble Wrap sheet is covered with paint, flip it over onto the surface of your twelve-inch-square piece of paper and press down with your hands all over the flat side of the Bubble Wrap to print the texture onto the page.

Step 3   Peel off the Bubble Wrap sheet and let that layer of paint dry.

Step 4   Prepare the second Bubble Wrap sheet by rolling a second paint colour onto the bubble-textured surface.

Step 5   Repeat steps two and three.

Step 6   Prepare the third and final sheet of Bubble Wrap with your last colour of paint.

Step 7   Repeat steps two and three.

Step 8   Once the monoprint is fully dry, sign your name on the front or back and give your monoprint a fun title — try coming up with a title that relates to the colours you chose!
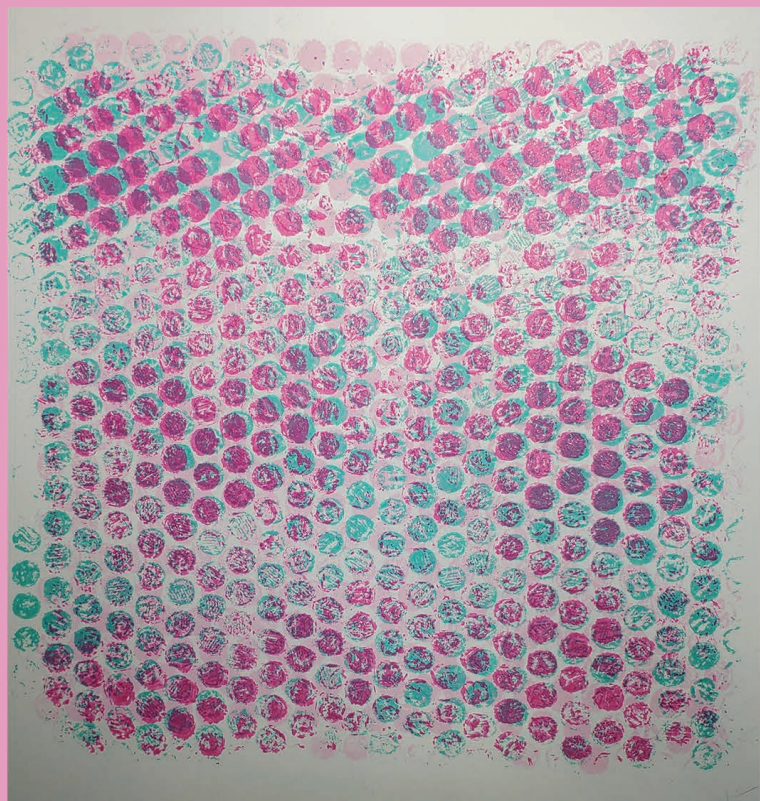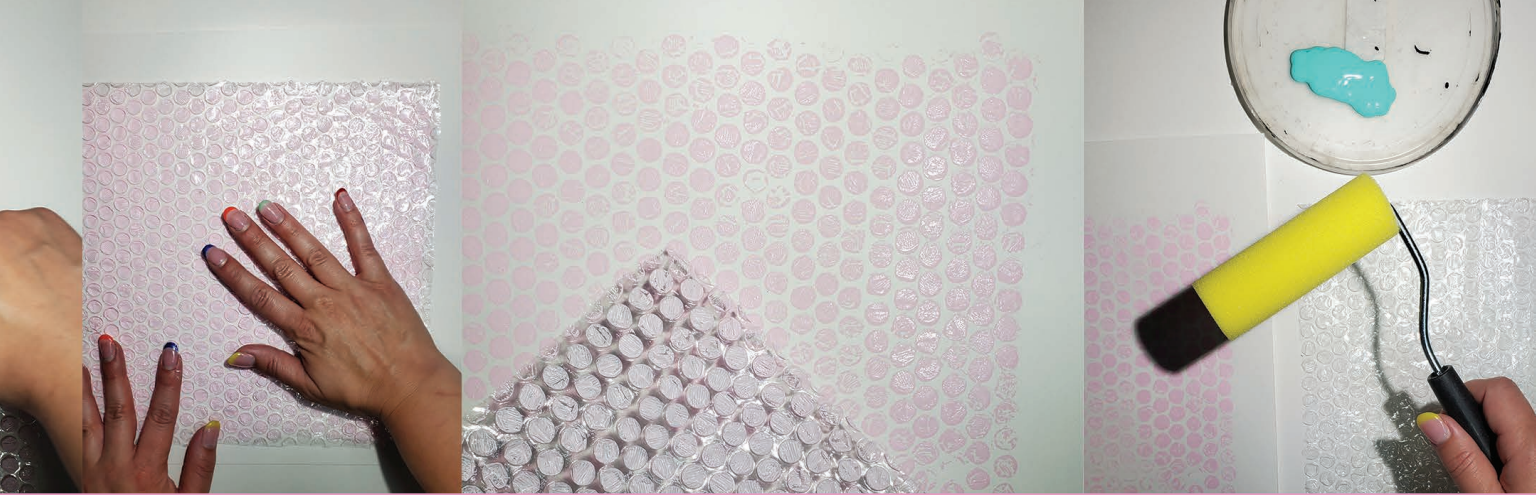
Variations

This activity can also be completed by cutting basic geometric shapes out of Bubble Wrap and printing the shapes in the same way.

* Lesson example image — see next page for full instructional images.

Advanced Lesson: Colour Swatch Dots

● ●

Review the titles of all the artworks in the exhibition *MARY SHANNON WILL dot.dot.dot.* Many of them simply describe a colour present in the artworks, such as *Extra Yellow* and *Purple Shape*, while others create an evocative connection to the colours, such as *Turquoise Dream* and *Edge of Blue*. This lesson outlines how to develop a small abstract and minimalist artwork using hole-punch dots from paint-colour swatches and encourages a playful approach to developing an abstract artwork.

Materials

Three or four paint-colour swatches from a hardware store, a handheld one-hole-punch tool, a small canvas board, clear craft glue, a matchstick or toothpick, a one-inch flat-head paintbrush, an empty tin can, and newspaper.

Preparation

Write down the names of the colours on the swatches. In the example swatches used, there's Antique Fuchsia, Pink Zinnia Bloom, and Teal Zeal, to name a few. Have participants title their work before they begin creating it by combining some of the colour names into a new title — for example, Zinnia Zeal. Next, hole-punch each paint-colour swatch sheet into many dots and keep each colour in a separate pile.

Instructions

Step 1   Coat the small canvas board with a thick layer of clear craft glue. The glue can be poured on in the centre and then spread out evenly using a paintbrush.

Step 2   Using the toothpick or the wooden end of a matchstick, pick up coloured hole-punch dots one by one and place them onto the sticky surface of the canvas board. Each dot should be placed directly adjacent to the previous dot.

Tip: Add dots starting at one corner and continue across line by line to fill the entire canvas board (as shown in the example) or create a spiral with the dots by starting at the centre and working your way outwards.

Also, if the glue on the canvas board starts to dry, simply brush on some more before you continue placing the dots.

Step 3   Once the board is filled with dots, allow it to dry completely.

Step 4   To fully secure the dots in place, apply a final coating of glue: Spread a piece of newspaper out to protect your work surface from any spills, then place your canvas board on top of an empty tin can. Carefully pour a generous coating of clear craft glue over your canvas board, allowing some to drip off the edges while you spread the glue evenly across the surface with a paintbrush. Once the board is coated, clean the edges and carefully brush away any dripping glue with the paintbrush. Leave the canvas board on top of the tin can to dry.

Variations

This activity can also be done by hole-punching magazines or construction paper if paint-colour swatches are too difficult to come by, or if participants want to choose alternative materials for conceptual reasons. Experiment with adding acrylic paint lines or mark making using other media on top of the dots after they've been glued down securely by way of the steps outlined above.

* Lesson example image — see next page for full instructional images.

52
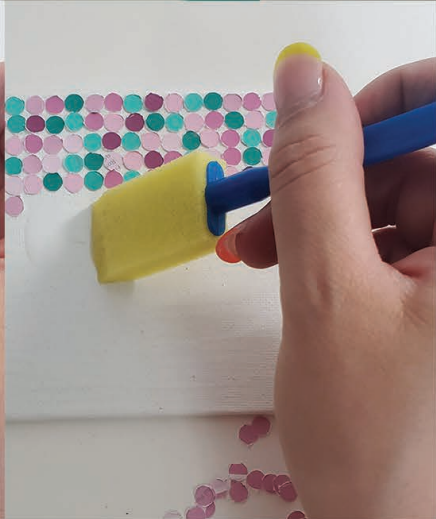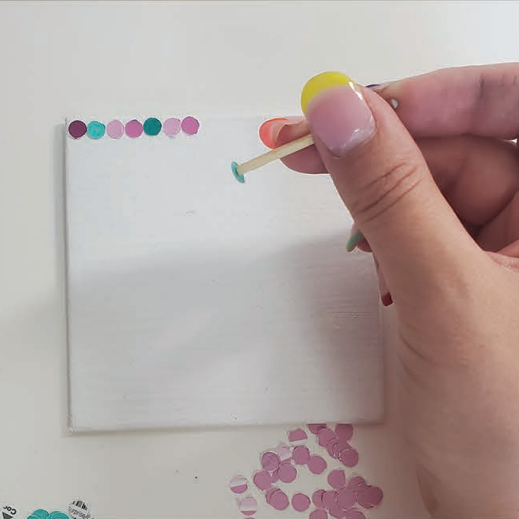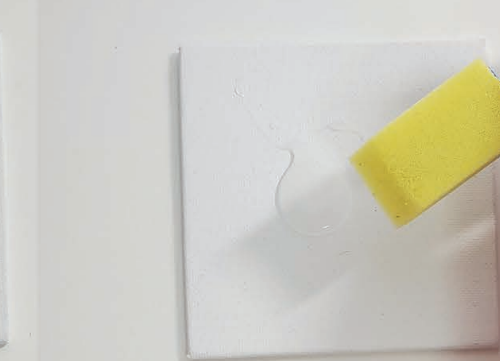
Vocabulary ● ● ● ● ● ●

Some definitions have been simplified, paraphrased, and/or slightly modified for clarity (spelling Canadianized for print purposes).

Abstract – Relating to or denoting art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but rather seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, colours, and textures.

Composition – The arrangement or placement of visual elements in a piece of artwork.

Conceptual art – Art in which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished piece. It emerged as a movement in the 1960s, and the term usually refers to art made between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s.

Constructivism – A particularly austere branch of abstract art founded by Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko in Russia around 1915 and into the early 1920s.

En plein air – "In the open air" (chiefly with reference to painting).

Expressionism – Art in which the image of reality is distorted in order to make it expressive of the artist's inner feelings or ideas.

Grid – A network of lines that cross each other to form a series of squares or rectangles.

Impressionism – Impressionism developed in France in the nineteenth century and is based on the practice of painting outdoors and "on the spot" rather than in a studio from sketches. Common Impressionist subjects were landscapes and scenes of everyday life.

Minimalism – An extreme form of abstract art developed in the USA in the 1960s and typified by artworks composed of simple geometric shapes based on the square and the rectangle.

Modernism – A global movement in society and culture that from the early decades of the twentieth century sought a new alignment with the experience and values of modern industrial life. Building on late nineteenth-century precedents, artists around the world used new imagery, materials, and techniques to create artworks that they felt better reflected the realities and hopes of modern societies.

Monoprint – A form of printmaking where the image can be made only once, unlike most printmaking forms, which allow for multiple originals.

Optics – The branch of physical science that deals with the properties and phenomena of both visible and invisible light and with vision.

Pointillism – A technique of Neo-Impressionist painting using tiny dots of various pure colours, which become blended in the viewer's eye. It was developed by Georges Seurat with the aim of producing a greater degree of luminosity and brilliance of colour.

Readymade – The term was first used by French artist Marcel Duchamp to describe the works of art he made from manufactured objects. It has since often been applied more generally to artworks by other artists made the same way.

Rule-based art – Art created utilizing one or more logic-based systems to direct the design and creation of the object.

Still life – A painting or drawing of an arrangement of objects that typically includes fruit and flowers and objects contrasting with these in texture, such as bowls and glassware.

Vocabulary Sources • • • • • •

Dictionary.com, s.v. "optics," accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/optics.

Lexico.com, s.vv. "abstract," "en plein air," "grid," "pointillism," "still life," accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.lexico.com.

McKella Sawyer, "What Is Composition in Art?" Concept Art Empire, accessed July 25, 2022, https://conceptartempire.com/what-is-composition ["composition"].

Philip Galanter, "Generative Art and Rules-Based Art," originally published in *Vague Terrain*, June 2006, made available on the artist/writer's website, accessed August 2, 2022, http://philipgalanter.com/downloads/vague_terrain_2006.pdf ["rule-based art"].

Tate (website), Art & Artists, Art Terms, accessed July 25, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms ["conceptual art," "constructivism," "expressionism," "impressionism," "minimalism," "modernism," "monoprint," "readymade"].

Resources ● ● ● ● ● ●

Below is a list of resources, some of which were referenced within this exhibition catalogue. Others, not explicitly referenced in this catalogue, may be useful for venue facilitators to share with their audiences to help educate or to develop dialogue about the exhibition's themes

Art Class Curator. "The Art of an Idea: Math and Art Integration with Sol LeWitt's Instruction." Art Class Curator (blog). March 13, 2018. https://artclasscurator.com/sol-lewitt-instruction.

Grant, Dr. Kim and Dr. Charles Cramer. "Impressionist Color." Khan Academy. Accessed July 25, 2022. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/avant-garde-france/impressionism/a/impressionist-color.

Hillegas, Laura. "Constructivism Brought the Russian Revolution to the Art World." Artsy (blog). Jan 4, 2019. https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-constructivism-brought-russian-revolution-art.

Kidspace. "Abstract Painting." Kidspace Children's Museum (blog). July 22, 2020. https://kidspacemuseum.org/for-families-at-home/abstract-painting.

Levine, Cary. "Logical Conclusions: 40 Years of Rule-Based Art." *The Brooklyn Rail* (online). April 2005. https://brooklynrail.org/2005/04/art/logical-conclusions-40-years-of-rule-bas.

MoMA (website). "Agnes Martin." Art and Artists. Accessed July 25, 2022. https://www.moma.org/artists/3787.

Sotheby's. "Pointillism: 7 Things You Need to Know." May 21, 2018. https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/pointillism-7-things-you-need-to-know.

Tate (website). "Conceptual Art." Art & Artists, Art Terms. Accessed July 25, 2022. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/conceptual-art.

Tate (website). "Impressionism." Art & Artists, Art Terms. Accessed July 25, 2022. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/impressionism.

Tate (website). "Marcel Duchamp – Fountain 1917, replica 1964." Art & Artists, Artworks. Accessed July 25, 2022. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573.

Tate (website). "Minimalism." Art & Artists, Art Terms. Accessed July 25, 2022. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/minimalism.

Wolfe, Shira. "Art Movement: Expressionism – Expressionist Artists, Art & Overview." *Artland Magazine* (online). Accessed July 25, 2022. https://magazine.artland.com/art-movement-expressionism.

Credits ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

TREX Southwest would like to credit the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for their ongoing support, as well as the following individuals who contributed to the preparation of this travelling exhibition:

Artist – Mary Shannon Will
Curator – Diana Sherlock
Editor – Rachel Small
Education – Ashley Slemming
Photography of education activities – Ashley Slemming
Catalogue Design – Ashley Slemming
Crating – Doug Haslam
Photography of artworks – Paul Kuhn Gallery
Lenders – Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Paul Kuhn Gallery, and Michelle Shannon

Special thanks to:

Gail Lint – Art Collection Consultant, AFA
Neil Lazaruk – Art Collections Preparator/Photographer, AFA