

Chaos and Roses

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Kevin Laycock lives and paints in Leeds. Since studying at the Royal College of Art, Laycock has exhibited widely throughout the UK, mainly through Art First. He has been a Lecturer in Art and Design History and Practice at the University of Leeds since 2001.

Chaos and Roses is Laycock's first new collection of work since *Collision*¹, a cross-disciplinary collaboration with composer Michael Berkeley CBE, which toured to a number of venues in England and Ireland 2009-13. *Collision* was the practice based element of Laycock's doctoral research into The translation and interpretation of the structural elements of Michael Berkeley's musical compositions through painting and digital media², which was completed in 2012.

Chaos and Roses was conceived in 2015, largely following Laycock's late night hospital visits to see his mother Betty. The title in part references the roses which filled Laycock's home and studio following the death of Betty on 27th November 2015. Laycock is keen to emphasise that the series is not about his mother, but rather it was the emotional energy that her illness and death generated in him that drove the creation of the work.

Thematically, Laycock acknowledges a deliberate move away from his earlier, more intuitive and expressionist work, such as *Cosmic Trifle*³ (Figure 1). In *Chaos and Roses* he cites three specific reference points. Firstly the academic writing of Professor Michael Hann, Chair of Design Theory at the University of Leeds, particularly *Structure and Form in Design*⁴, a critical examination of the fundamental aspects of design geometry together with methodologies to synthesise and analyse designs; the work of two British abstract painters the late Jeremy Moon⁵ and Jennifer Durrant whose work he first encountered as a fine art undergraduate; and thirdly the emblematic designs of the fashion houses of Chanel and La Croix.



Figure 1: *Cosmic Trifle*, 2005, Thomas Williams Collection.

¹ Gallery Oldham in conjunction with the University of Leeds (2010)

² University of Leeds (2012)

³ *Cosmic Trifle* is in the private collection of Thomas Williams, London

⁴ Hann MA (2012), *Structure and Form in Design: Critical Ideas for Creative Practice*, Bloomsbury Academic

⁵ Jeremy Moon (1934-1973)

Moon was a leading figure in British art in the 1960s and 1970s. Laycock was attracted to Moon's system based practice of the early 1970s, the abstract and the geometric, with its inclusion of grid-like forms composed of vertical, horizontal or diagonal lines.

Moon's allegiance was to hard-edge abstract painting in which everything was stated unambiguously, and he denied any attempt at representation. Moon's painting shows an interest in formal geometric concerns, but simultaneously achieves a ready wit and playfulness that gives the work a startling contemporary quality.⁶

Chaos and Roses comprises seven works, all square, all oil on wood panel. The use of wood represents something of a departure for Laycock and is a result of his desire to create an extremely hard, clean, paint surface. This hard surface gives Laycock's colour palette an extra vibrancy, the colours seem brighter and more arresting. Again, unusually for Laycock, he made a preparatory sketch for each work on graph paper as a way of plotting with absolute precision the arrangement of the geometric shapes within the confines of the square. Laycock describes the preparatory work as taking longer than the actual act of painting, which as described above was completed with frenetic energy. He sanded down the surface after each layer of paint repeating this process many times.

The reaction of the viewer is paramount to Laycock and this collection is designed to be immersive and seductive, creating a feeling of being balanced and settled. The sequencing of the work is important too, with each of the seven works taking something from the last, building into a complete collection.

After a period of relative inactivity, *Chaos and Roses* has awakened in Laycock a new interest in painting. He promises that his next body of work will build on this new direction.

Published online: 15 March 2016

⁶ Jeremy Moon Biography, Alan Wheatly Art, www.alanwheatley.com