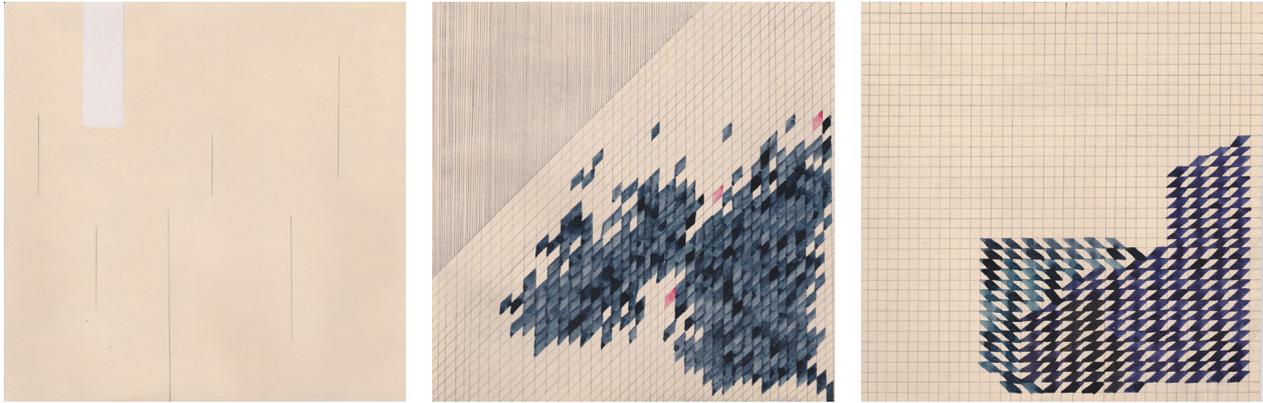


Inhabiting the Grid

Haleh Redjaian

19 March – 3 May



Notes for Daydreaming, 2017-18, Acrylic and colour pencil on paper, 19.5 x 19.5 cm each

Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde is pleased to present German-Iranian artist Haleh Redjaian's second solo exhibition at the gallery, entitled *Inhabiting the Grid*. In "Grids," art critic Rosalind Krauss' authoritative essay on the subject, she dogmatically positions the grid as the modernist tool *par excellence*, a formal structure that firmly and finally expels from the realm of the visual, all traces and possibilities of literature and narrative, reality and illusion¹. Though grids recur throughout Haleh Redjaian's oeuvre, she has consistently experimented with novel ways of challenging this dogma, creating art that remains minimal and non-objective but creates space for the expression of individual subjective experiences like memory, emotion and affect.

Redjaian's most recent work has been influenced by her reading of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*². In it Bachelard develops a unique approach to understanding and analysing built space by combining phenomenology's embodied subjectivity with the poetics of everyday life and individual experience. He begins his analysis with the house, arguing that it is always more than a purely functional configuration of orthogonal planes. Embodied and affective experiences make the structural rigidity of such spaces undeniably flexible, allowing room for poetry. Retained as memories and reactivated through feats of imagination, such subjective experiences of space are retrieved through a unique cognitive faculty that is a powerful combination of the two, what Bachelard calls "daydreams." Redjaian approaches the grid the way Bachelard reads the house. In her drawings on paper, textile works, wall drawings, and installations using thread, the grid is never entirely dominant or only functional. Its authoritative logic is subtly and repeatedly challenged. It does not appear as inert, rational and objective but as dynamic, partial, and contingent.

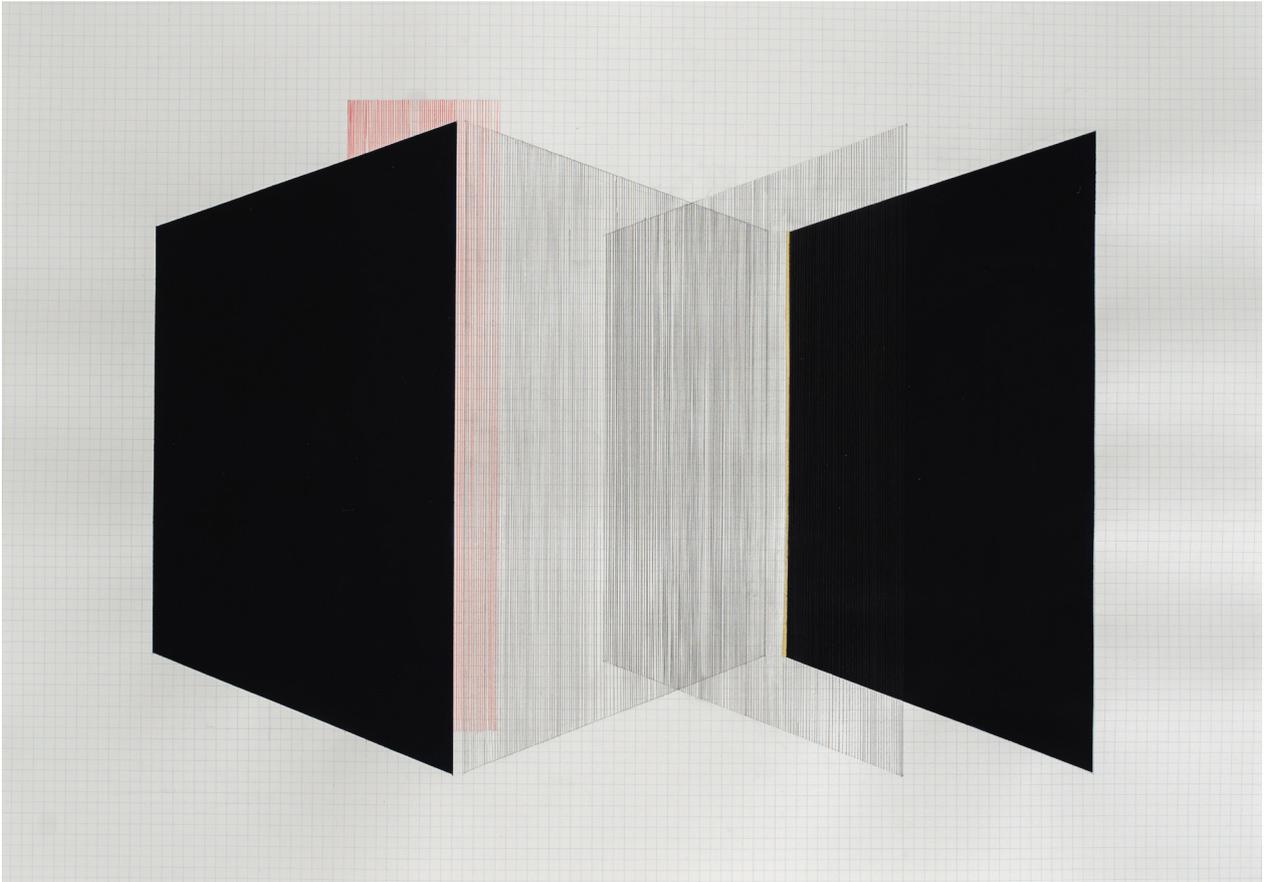
Redjaian often begins with graph paper or a drawn grid as base for her drawings. She then overlays it with lines, marks and shapes that purposefully exceed the rigid boundaries of the individual rectilinear units, disrupting

the grid's precise order. What makes her drawings both compelling and confounding is that these disruptions are rarely unruly or expressive. On the contrary, they consist of carefully ruled lines and simple geometric shapes. They speak the same language of form as the grid but scramble its syntax and grammar. They are deployed in a manner that is generative not dogmatic, that is playful and poetic, that creates new and unexpected meanings. Resisting the tyranny of the grid, they create room within its structure for narration, allowing herself and us to remember, feel, imagine, breathe and daydream. Redjaian's irreverence towards the grid as structure can be seen in her *Notes for Daydreaming* (2017-18), a suite of 20 small square drawings on paper, which play with line and shape, translucency and opacity, flatness and depth, order and disorder, and pattern and noise.

Though idiosyncratic, Redjaian's compositions are never accidental, and motifs and strategies repeat between works, as she tests them out in different permutations and combinations and through different materials. In some of these drawings the grid functions like a scaffold or a screen, more as a structure of support or separation than of order. In one, a field of closely spaced parallel horizontal lines in graphite are drawn over a bright red grid, approximating a jagged edged rectangle that seems to hover unanchored. In another, a square of gold leaf fills the centre of the frame, the metallic surface's textured reflectivity projecting it slightly in front of the picture plane. However, its bottom half obscures part of a regular trapezoid composed of parallel horizontal lines that get closer together from the bottom to the top, embedding it within a perspectival device that recedes back into space. In yet another, which structurally resembles a sketch of a Donald Judd stack piece, a vertical arrangement of six thin rectangles, separated by gaps of the same thickness, occupies the centre of a gridded field. Each of the first five rectangles is painted a slightly different shade of pink introducing subtle differences into an otherwise regular pattern, while the sixth one, which anchors the bottom of the page, is filled in gold leaf, as if to emphasise difference. A regular trapezoidal field of parallel horizontals

¹ Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," October 9 (Summer 1979): 50-64.

² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translation Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).



In Parallel, 2018, Acrylic, colour pencil, graphite and gold leaf on grid paper, 43 x 60 cm

stretches between the pink rectangles once again suggest the recession into space. While the base grid remains visible behind the translucent pink washes and precise pencil lines, the gold leaf obscures it entirely asserting its spatial presence in front of the grid, creating a soft tension between surface autonomy and spatial depth through Redjaian's subtle variations.

Redjaian does not limit her experiments with line and space to only two dimensions. She also uses thread to draw in space, constructing exquisite site-specific installations that often reference architecture. However, her interest in our responses to such articulations of space extends beyond the purely phenomenological to include affect, emotion and memory. In her last show at the gallery, Redjaian created a delicate, minimal installation that captured the characteristic torqued plane of Tehran's iconic Azadi Tower, a fond and familiar landmark from childhood trips to visit her grandmother. The piece investigated the way memories can accrue around a monumental structure and the way architecture can evoke a powerful emotional response, its transparency emphasising the elusive nature of both memory and emotion. Her current show resituates these interests into a more intimate, domestic register. Her ambitious new installation consists of three freestanding rectangular metal frames filled in with fields of vertically stretched threads. Recasting the wall as a see-through screen or permeable membrane rather than as a solid barrier, the installation gestures towards division, scrambling spatial distinctions between inside and outside or here and there. Playing with notions of transparency and opacity, of access and seclusion, it attempts to create an open shelter,

an enclosure for daydreams that does not withdraw completely from the world.

Text by Murtaza Vali

Artist's Biography

Haleh Redjaian (born 1971, Frankfurt) lives and works in Berlin. She completed a Postgraduate degree in Fine Art from HISK, Antwerp. Her works on paper, textiles and site-specific wall installations are grounded in geometry, but she uses its rules to reshape and retrace the apparent order of angles and lines. Her compositions subtly belie their own errors and form what she calls a 'natural abstract language'. Redjaian believes that these works, nimble yet systematic, refer in part to the manner in which people create, adapt to and deviate from order in their lives. She often bases her drawings on a precise background, such as grid paper, and weaves graphite into its rigid structures with rough shadings and free-radical lines. Conversely, Redjaian may overlay two pieces of grid paper, drawing directly onto their discordant lines, creating a paradoxical order in the result. She has participated in several group and solo exhibitions including in *sequence I and II* in Bregenz and Munich (2016), *Out of Office* at Museum für Konkrete Kunst, Ingolstadt (2017) and *Städtische Galerie, Bietigheim-Bissingen* (2018), *in-between spaces* at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai (2015) and *Up on the toe, the air is thinner* at Arratia Beer, Berlin (2015), among others.

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