



(left) LORRAINE RASTORFER *Flora* 2012  
Acrylic on panel, 1200 x 1500 mm.

(below) LORRAINE RASTORFER *Elixer* 2009  
Acrylic on panel, 1500 x 1200 mm.

fabric moving in the wind. Indeed, we could suppose these are pieces of cloth, each with a story to tell about the place they are from. *Schokolade*, or chocolate if we were to speak it in English, could be a remnant curtain from a Parisian confectionery store; *Tanzen* a detail from a dancer's hem, billowing like a flag as it is lifted by a gust. But the artist does not present us with such tales to mythify her paintings. We are given titles that she has selected from a thesaurus, intended to be suggestive whilst staying open to interpretation.

In conversation Rastorfer speaks primarily of the grid, of the idea that her works allow a glimpse or 'entry point' into the underlying layers that she creates.<sup>2</sup> Her technique of using iridescent underpainting and then 'combing' over the surface is also central to her practice; all but two works in the show utilise this method. It seems then that skill trumps form—these are enquiries into the complexities that painterly procedure can create within a two-dimensional space rather than depictions of something greater that the artist is trying to convey.



The paintings do however acquire an emotive quality from the chance-like drips and luminosity of application. *Elixer*, the barest and most minimally 'combed' work in the exhibition, is a blithe piece that achieves its radiance through the woodgrain shining through the paint. The perfectly executed lines are taut, appearing like gossamer ripples across the façade. The surfaces in *The Fates* series have been flooded to allow rivulets of paint to run down the board like waterlogged mascara, creating a dark and stormy 'interior' that is visible only by looking behind the lattice that sits atop. In these works the layers are difficult to decipher, there is a sense of confusion. Cutting through is a pervasive feeling of sadness that seems to manifest itself in the cold palette of silver and black, the 'crying' effect achieved by the trapped drips of paint and the harsh preciseness of line.

A more sensuous expressiveness is found in *Flora*, a sketch of a bloomy crawler etched onto a heavily dribbled board. Unlike the grid paintings, it vibrates with a sense of liveliness. The freehand drawings extend in various directions, forming in clusters above the dripped and dabbled surface. Metallic pigments give the work a sumptuous radiance akin to that of velvet. It appears as if parts have been flecked with a sponge to elucidate the surface with three-dimensionality and texture. The type of mark-making employed here is bold, reminiscent of Japanese calligraphy (or *shodō*), a process that Rastorfer learned when she lived in Japan for two and a half years following her 1989 graduation from Elam School of Fine Arts. The imprints are strong, appearing almost to be embossed into the surface like a brocade. Again there is a fascination with fabric and texture, but without the formal constraints of the grid-like structure.

Why then does Rastorfer preoccupy herself with the grid? It is not a particularly fertile ground to traverse. Rosalind Kraus has observed that, 'as the experience of Mondrian amply demonstrates, development is precisely what the grid resists'.<sup>3</sup> But perhaps art is not always about evolution. The grid, and the artist's technique of teasing the pigment, allows a workable forum through which to explore the variables of a painting. The sinuosity of line and sweeping application of paint tells us that these are more than just a network of demarcations. Presented in the exhibition are splendid examples of studies into colour, form and density.

1. Pepe Karmel, 'The Golden Age of Abstraction: Right Now', *ARTNews*, April 2013, p. 66. Also available at <http://www.artnews.com/2013/04/24/contemporary-abstraction/>.

2. Email from Lorraine Rastorfer to author, 16 July 2015.

3. Rosalind Krauss, *Grids*, MIT Press, Boston 1979, pp. 50–64.