

Grids Various

The series I shall call 'Grids Various' runs from August 1975 to July 1976. Its basis is a grid of horizontal rectangles, each bisected on the angle. The resultant 'all-over' triangulated grid is a way out of a 'problem' with the Laces: their implicit and unwanted hierarchy.

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A problem that seems to exist with circles & the putting of one thing on the canvas is that it makes one thing significant, when, in actual fact, that thing isn't significant. Somehow a sense of the arbitrary is needed. perhaps some sort of combination of them

So many different things to think of and do at once that I can't grasp the overall attitude and feeling to take.

(Killeen, the black notebook, p. 9)

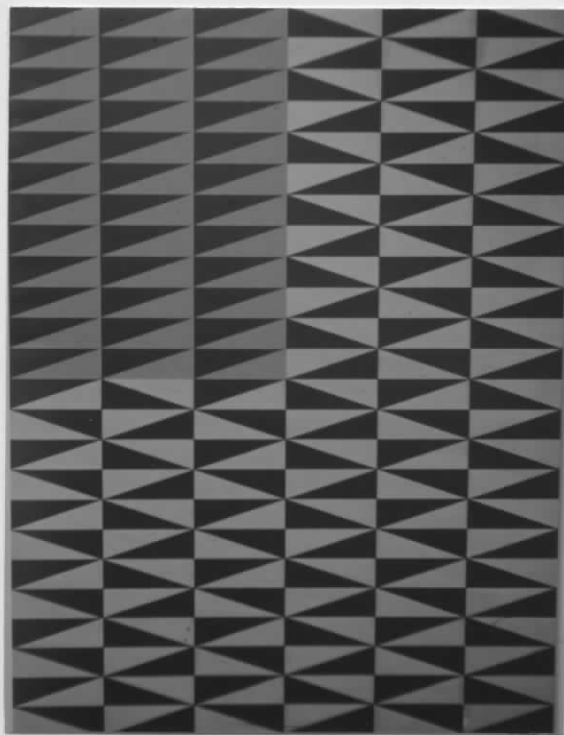


fig. 120. *Pacific plywood*, October 1975

Various interference patterns persist through the Grids Various, creating 'a sense of the arbitrary' -- interferences in which one grid intrusively overlays another, sometimes so interrupting it as to make it partially or completely illegible. ('Interference' should be taken here in its dictionary sense of the interruption of signals by the interference of waves from different sources or paths, or (esp.) by (intrusion of) atmospherics or unwanted signals.)

The simplest of these interferences come in the form of an *insert* -- as in *Pacific plywood*, October 1975, for instance. [fig. 120] Here, a pattern of yellow and dark brown triangles whose browns all point to the right, is set into the top left quarter of a pattern of dark brown and naked plywood triangles, whose browns point alternately to the right and the left. Since both patterns are clearly based on the same grid of horizontal rectangles, each of which is simply bisected on the angle, no confusion results. We are offered here two *alternative* readings of a triangulated grid, a merely double reading, rather than an unreadability.

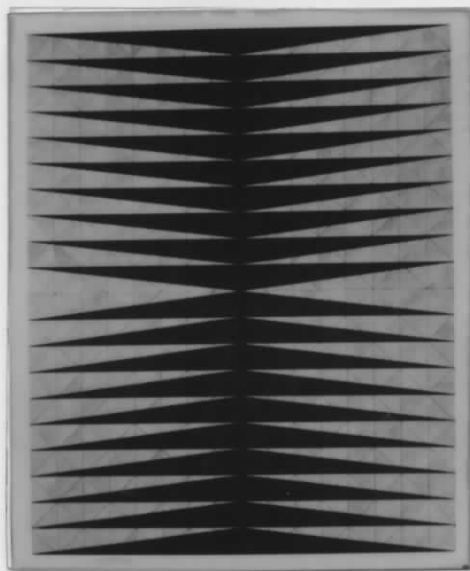


fig. 121. *Navarre*, September 1975

Elsewhere, the interference comes in the form of *overlaps*. Such overlaps are of varying complexity. Let us start with the simple. In a number of drawings, comb shapes are set over grids of triangulated squares -- in *Pimento*, October 1975, for instance, and in *Navarre*, September 1975. [fig. 121] Such combs extend so completely over the grid below them that their edges are coincident with its. They seem, therefore, locked into place by the frame, stuck there for good.

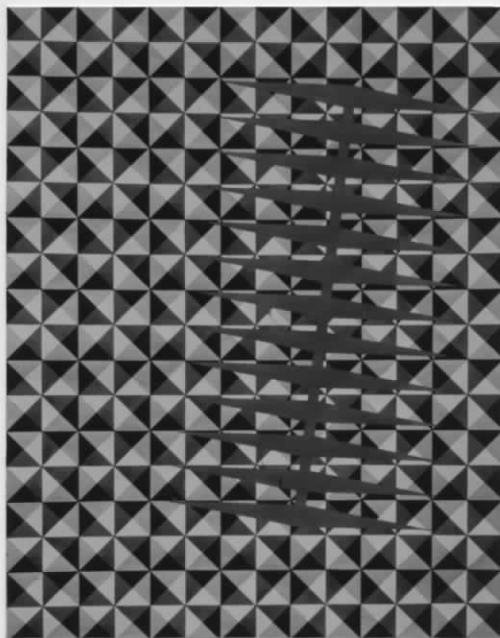


fig. 122. *Peacock's reason*, November, 1975

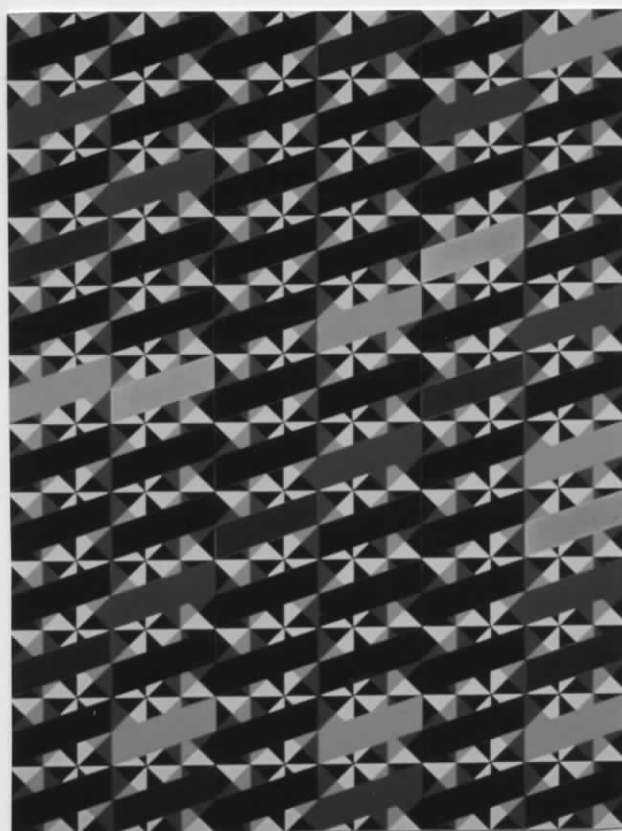


fig. 123. *Frog green*, May 1976

In a few of the comb-over-grid drawings, however, the comb seems to float free from the grid, as though it had broken its moorings. In *Peacock's reason*, November, 1975, [fig. 122] for example, the comb seems positively to float over the grid, since it is quite untouched by the frame's edge, and clearly asserts, with its diagonal tilt, and its displacement from the centre, its detachability from that grid which acts as its ground. It drifts, with a slow-motioned lean, across the grid-backdrop, as a satellite might drift over star studded space.

Another possibility of interference by layering is provided by stacking diagonal bands, alternately coloured in and left open, over a differently angled grid. With *Frog green*, for instance, of May 1976, [fig. 123] six stacks of diagonal bands are picked out in various colours, of green, yellow, grey, red blue and black, over a differently angled triangulated grid of red, black, yellow and white. In *Leaves*, October 1975, [fig. 124] a stack of bands is again floated over a triangulated grid of squares, but here the bands themselves enjoy a complication. They are internally subdivided into equilateral triangles, three black and three yellow triangles in each.

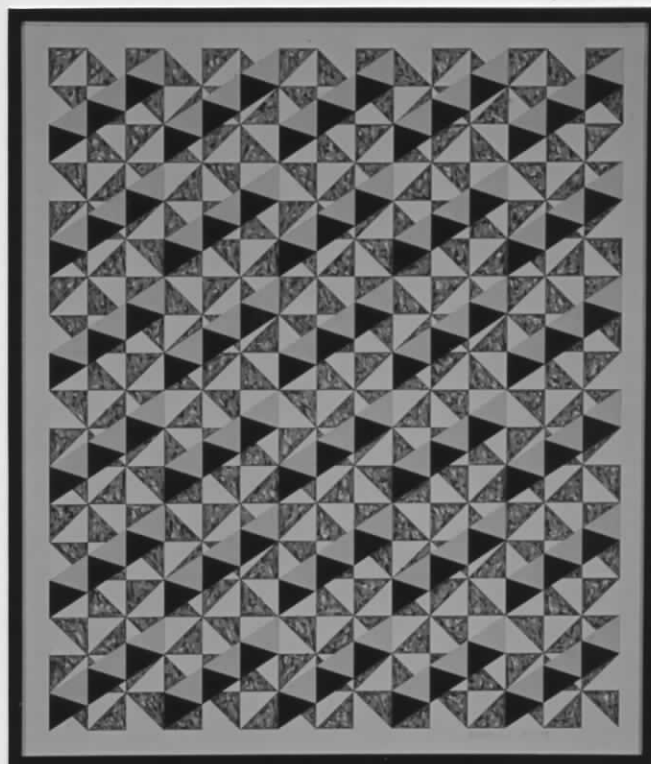


fig. 124. *Leaves*, October 1975

Though their diagonals are jarringly different from any of the diagonals of the grid 'beneath', the bands in *Frog green* are, in fact, formed by a structure

which the grid itself makes available. They are formed by making a diagonal one square thick, from the bottom left to the top right of a rectangle formed from six of the squares which are the basic unit of the grid below -- a rectangle two squares high and three across. So Killeen demonstrates the possibility of a certain incoherence implicit in the very coherence of the grid. (It is the possibilities allowed by such an 'incoherence', we will see, which Killeen will most particularly explore in his next series of grids.)

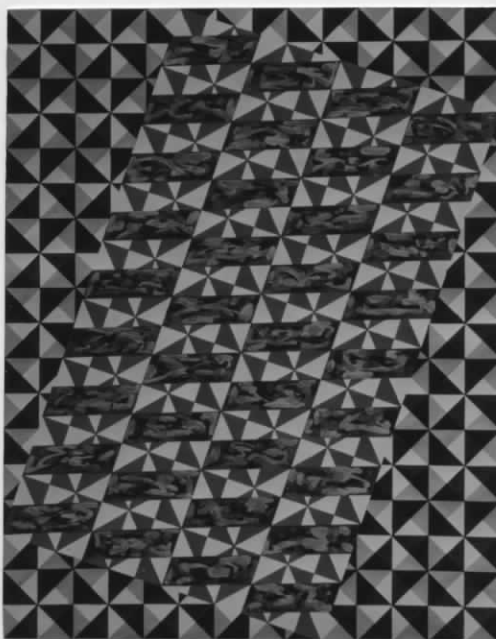


fig. 125. 'Three grids', November 1975

In *'Three grids'*, November 1975, [fig. 125] a red and white triangulated oblong, its structure based on a grid of horizontal rectangles, is diagonally floated over a 'background' grid whose structure is based on a horizontal and vertical grid of squares, each quartered into triangles of blue, yellow, white and black. Over the 'middle layer' provided by this red and white grid there is laid a horizontally aligned pattern of four stacks of marbled bands, each band formed by making a diagonal, one square thick, from the bottom left to the top right of a rectangle formed by the grid beneath, a rectangle which is two squares high and three squares across. So, once again, an 'interference' is derived from a form inherent in the underlying grid structure itself, and a disarray produced from the array of the grid.

Perhaps the most complex 'interference' comes in *Three patterns*, August 1975. [fig. 126] Here, three overlapped grids are divided into triangles so small in relation to the whole that they may read almost as Seurat-like dots. As

Andrew Bogle has written, 'The title informs us of the tripartite composition; but the way the patterns interrelate is so complex it is impossible to visually separate them'.¹ The grids are overlapped in a way which produces a kind of collision, a jumble, a coagulation in which coloured particles seem to adhere one to another, and to thicken as if into clouds of colour.

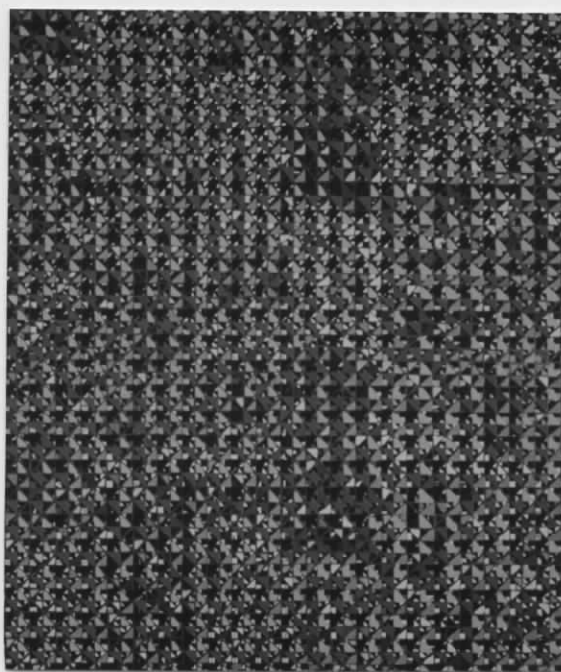


fig. 126. *Three patterns*, August 1975

Underneath the three grids of *Three patterns*, but with so little of it coming through that it appears in the form of an illegible trace, is the work I call '*Painted over*', of August 1975 -- a Sampler of various of Killeen's geometrical motifs (stars, laces, shields, combs, grills, grids) which now exists only in the form of a slide. The artist has labelled that slide: 'Destroyed' -- a fitting word too for the grids with which it is now overlaid. They are so intermeshed as to produce something like the physicist's sense of 'interference', in which waves of different phases are combined to cause a complete neutralisation.

Another interference effect in these grids is that of an organic, Seurat-like marbling, a 'handmade', brushworky dabbling, set into the otherwise immaculate flatness. We might well call this the 'intrusion of atmospherics'. See, for instance, the overlaying horizontal bands of *Three Grids*. [fig. 125] It modulates too all of the coloured triangles in the base layer of one of the major

¹ Andrew Bogle, *The Grid: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p. 12.

works of the Grids Various, *Frogshooter*, March 1976. [fig. 132] and it provides one of the four tones of the triangulations of *Leave*, October 1975. [fig. 124]

Such mottling is a means, no doubt, of vivifying with the organic, and with the mark of the hand, the 'inhuman' purities of the geometric; it is another attempt to meddle with the stock opposition, geometric/organic, and all of its attendant oppositional train: human/inhuman, painterly/linear, fecund/sterile, warm/cold, natural/unnatural, intellectual/emotional, etc., etc.; it is an attempt to escape from the prison of the either/or.

Finally, there is that atmospheric interference effect which we might call Killeen's 'clouds'. These white, irregularly organic shapes appear, for instance, in the black triangles of *Blue Baron*, October 1975 [fig. 127] (*Blue Baron* is a hero of the clouds)

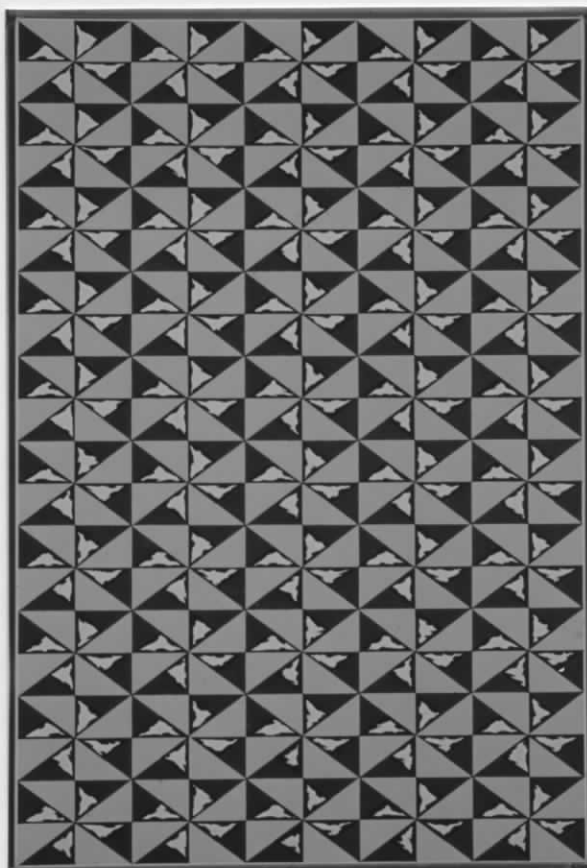


fig. 127. *Blue Baron*, October 1975

But aren't there 'pure' grids in this series, grids quite uninterfered with? Well yes -- *Muscari*, September 1975, for instance, and the similar *Salmon catcher*, of the same date. They are minor works, it seems to me, preparatory, merely, and experimental. (Significantly, they are not translated from drawings on paper to the larger and more prestigious endeavour of canvas or board.) We will see some of them, anyway, in close-up as it were, in far finer works, when Killeen comes to paint his next and last series of grids, the 'Grids on Aluminium', from December 1977 to July 1978.