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## ARTREPORT

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### Finding The Light In The Work Of Rachel Garrard (<http://artreport.com/finding-the-light-in-rachel-garrards-paintings/>)

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We caught up with the multi-media artist Rachel Garrard (<http://www.rachelgarrard.com/#0>) at the opening of her solo exhibition Hidden Light (<http://www.gassergrunert.net/exhibitions/rachel-garrard-hidden-light>) at Tanja Grunert's new space (<http://www.gassergrunert.net>) in Chelsea. The exhibition was curated by Mitra Khorasheh and includes works by the artist that explore space and light through unusual materials like stone, ash, and smoke. Garrard uses these materials in a performative painting practice in which the shapes on the canvas reflect the geometry of her own body. Through a reduction of elements—wood to ash, stone to powder, fire to smoke—Garrard performs a distillation of her particular human form to create a kind of spiritual geometry of light. What results are paintings that are both earthly and ethereal, tied to the specificity of their creation but also speaking to movement and change, as light travels across surface.



Rachel Garrard, "Hidden Light" Exhibition. Photo: Ambrose Creative

*Art Report: How do you create the triangular shapes that dominate your canvases?*

**Rachel Garrard:** The triangles are applied to the canvas or linen in different ways. In *The Peaks Only I Can See* I applied ash mixed with water to raw canvas, left it to dry, washed it off and left it [again] in the sun to dry. What remains is the faint residue of ash, built up in layers.

With *Residual* I masked the triangles and held the raw canvas directly onto a flame. This way, the fire burns and marks the canvas. Focusing on the flame to not get burned, my movements and the movements of the flame get imprinted onto the canvas, leaving a swirling residue of smoke and fire.

In *After Your Glow* I used rock pigment [collected from my travels]. I spent some time traveling through the Andes mountains in South America, and along the way picked up a number of different rock samples. Back in the studio I ground these down into fine powder, mixed it with a binder, and painted in onto the linen in layers.



"Hidden light" installation view, Rachel Garrard. Photo: Tanja Grunert Gallery

*AR: I am fascinated by your unusual materials, do you consider yourself a painter? Do you see your work as sculptural in any ways?*

**RG:** Until recently, much of my focus was on light, sculpture, and video projection. I think I have a very three-dimensional mind, I see more in space than on a flat surface. So yes, although these are paintings they are really depicting something three-dimensional. I see them as moving light and shadow. For me [these paintings] are very much alive, almost as though they are capturing a point in time and space, as the triangles, or light rays, move towards and past each other. They are almost like a crystalline structure or beams of light moving towards the center. I have worked with many different mediums and don't really distinguish so much between them. This is a painting show, but these forms could just have easily been made as sculpture or video projections.

Also the materials that I am using have a substantial quality. They are not manufactured colors, they have a life and a history, like ash, which was once wood. I like using ash because for me it really has a presence, a sense of being something quite sacred and containing something hidden. I collected the ash from the ceremonial fire of a Temascal, a traditional Mesoamerican sweat lodge. The ash of the fire is thought to hold a special quality and is often collected and used for sacred rituals. Ash is very symbolic in many cultures, like In India the Sadu's cover themselves in it to show that they have transcended the material life. It is thought to be the 'imperishable truth' as all that remains when all else is burnt away.



"Residual", Rachel Garrard. Photo: Tanja Grunert Gallery

**AR:** *It seems that your process is very holistic; it begins with collecting the materials, changing/reducing them in some way, and then applying them to canvas in an experimental fashion – How do you see your process as performative?*

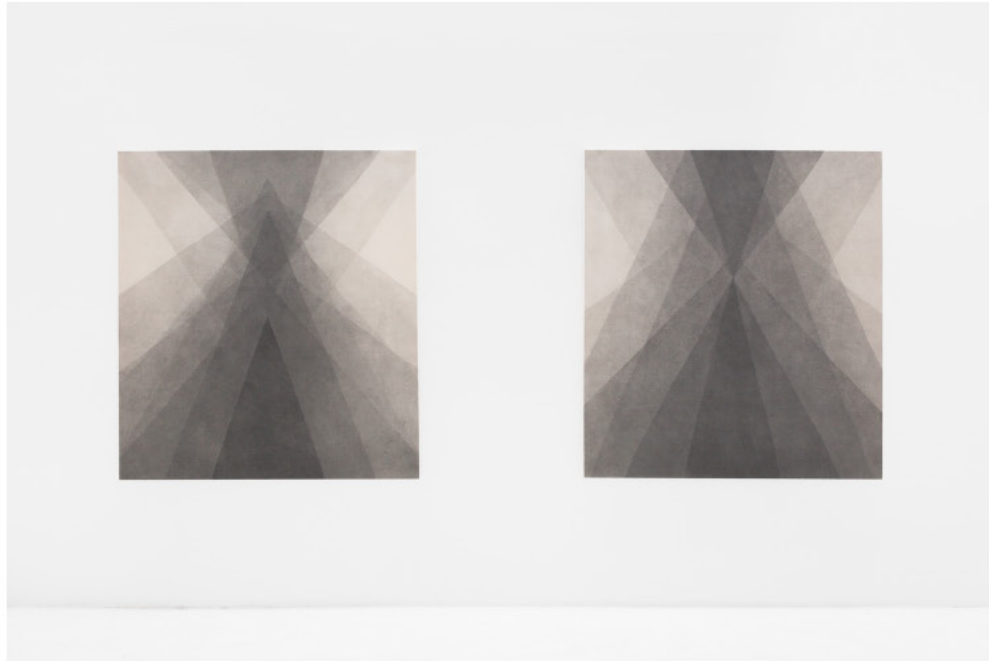
**RG:** Yes I think all of my work is very much about process, coming about in acts that are either durational in time (as in a performance or video), or tied to a particular method of creation. They are all performance in that they enact a transformation, beginning in one state and transformed to another. I often like to document the process, as it is the moment and the act of transformation that interests me. What remains is really a residue of that process.

**AR:** *Nature and natural elements clearly inspire your work, are there any particular artists or movements that inspire you as well?*

**RG:** I am very interested in the processes and cycles found in nature: forming, unfurling, growing and dying, death and rebirth, coming into and out of existence. I love waterfalls and lakes, cenotes or the sea, the mountain, the jungle—they are profound and sublime, as if they hold a secret essence. I like to watch the changes in nature, or study the cycles through science literature.

The the holographic universe and the work of quantum physicist David Bohm also inspire me. Bohm asserts that the tangible reality of our everyday lives is really a kind of illusion. Underlying it is a deeper order of existence, a vast and more primary level of reality that gives birth to all the objects and appearance of our physical world.

I like artists whose work captures this kind of familiar but indescribable hidden essence, like Mark Rothko or Agnes Martin's paintings. Their paintings are sublime like nature, and hold so much power in such a reduced and subtle way.



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"Follow", "Reach", Rachel Garrard. Photo: Tanja Grunert Gallery



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"Nave", "Hollow", "Inside", Rachel Garrard. Photo: Tanja Grunert Gallery



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"After your glow", Rachel Garrard. Photo: Tanja Grunert Gallery

Rachel Garrard (<http://www.rachelgarrard.com/#0>) is one of those rare contemporary artists whose process-based style speaks to both deep aesthetic focus and continual innovation. Hidden Light (<http://www.gassergrunert.net/exhibitions/rachel-garrard-hidden-light>) will be on view at Tanja Grunert Gallery (<http://www.gassergrunert.net>) February 27 – March 26, 2016.