

# SEARS·PEYTON·GALLERY

## NEW YORK·LOS ANGELES

### Agnes Barley

#### CV

Born 1970 in Jacksonville, FL

Lives and works in New York, NY

#### EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 *Spring Selections*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2020 *Summer in Love*, OV Projects, Ixelles, Belgium  
*All About Water*, The Storefront Gallery, Bellport, NY  
*Fall Selections*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2019 *Whitney Houston Biennial*, La Mama, New York, NY  
*Summer Essentials*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY  
*Elementary*, Havens Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY
- 2017 *Light in the Dark*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY  
*Agnes Barley: Shadow Structures*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2016 *We Move Through Time Together*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2015 Group Show, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2014 *Real Estate*, Ventana 244, New York, NY  
Group Show Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2013 *Ten*, Jen Bekman Gallery, New York, NY  
The Anderson Center, Red Wing, MN  
*Drawing Now*, Blackston Gallery, Carousel du Louvre, Paris, France
- 2012 *Agnes Barley: Shadow Structures*, Blackston Gallery, New York, NY  
*Dead in August*, NYCAMS, New York, NY
- 2011 *American Painters*, Soncino, Italy  
*The Shape of the Line*, FF&G, New York, NY  
*AoNE*, Silvermine Arts Center, New Canaan, CT
- 2010 *Selections*, The Drawing Center, New York, NY  
*FIT*, Allannederpelt, New York, NY
- 2008 Pawn Shop, E-Flux, New York, NY SUITE New York, New York, NY
- 2006 *Meditations in an Emergency*, Jen Bekman Gallery, New York, NY  
*Greatest Hits*, Jen Bekman Gallery, New York, NY
- 2005 *Good on Paper*," Jen Bekman Gallery, New York, NY  
Troy Soho, New York, NY  
Gallery at Minor Memorial Library, Roxbury, CT

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- 2004 *Recent Work*, Jen Bekman Gallery, New York, NY  
New Arts Gallery, Litchfield, CT  
*Pieces of Peace*, World Bank, Washington, DC2011  
The Shape of the Line, FF&G, New York, NY
- 2002 *Rem Koolhaas: Delirious New York*," Eikart Gallery, New York, NY
- 1997 Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna
- 1996 *Momentbild Wien*, Museum of Luxemburg  
*Junge Szene*, Secession, Vienna Semper Depot, Academy of Fine Art, Vienna  
*Produkt, Process, Bier*, Kunstraum Wien, Vienna Kunst Austausch  
*Boerse*, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna Kommunikationsbuero, Vienna
- 1995 Jadengasse, Vienna Institute for Contemporary Art, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna  
*Schlussausstellung*, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna House Gallery, Jacksonville, Florida

### GRANTS AND RESIDENCIES

- 2018 Bovina Residency Worth Art Advisory
- 2017 Atlantic Center for the Arts with Joan Snyder, New Smyrna Beach, Florida
- 2013 Anderson Center Residency, Red Wing, Minnesota
- 2010 Seven Below Arts Initiative - Burlington Arts Center
- 2009 Foundation for Contemporary Art
- 1995 Austrian Ministry for Science, Research and Art  
Domaine de Kerguehennec, Center for Contemporary Art, France
- 1991 Austrian Ministry for Art and Education

### EDUCATION

- 1992-97 Academy of Fine Art, Vienna, Austria, MFA Painting
- 1991-92 Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, New York
- 1988 Parsons School of Design

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**Agnes Barley**

### **Artist Statement**

In my painting practice I focus on construction and deconstruction of structure and form to explore ideas about place, context, time and meaning.

My work conjures places that exist metaphorically yet are not tangible. From 2008–2010, I created an extensive series of collages based on the architecture of waves. The work evolved from remote forms to swelling structures and finally deconstructed into minimal references. The transition from a monolithic presence to an ebbing system was a study of how a sense of place is established. Both the waves and their unfolding parts maintain integrity of place, a sense of landscape and architectural intention. The architecture of the wave opened a meditation on where one exists. Where is memory, where is meaning, where is connection?

My purest response is through form. Though forms may not be answers my work distills linear relationships and composition into constructed metaphors of the human experience that offer suggestions of where one might look. The metaphorical architecture of the collages laid the groundwork for later grid-based structures that summon the suggestions of volume, horizon, shadow, and direction to unveil a sense of being.

One profound inspiration for my work is gothic painting. Such paintings, although they predate formal ideas of perspective, reveal inspired spatial feats. The 'living' part of many gothic paintings exists far from the plain of the painting. It often appears as if the face and hands of the Madonna or the torso of the Christ child are holes in a tapestry or float mirage like in a desert of gold. In the case of Giotto, the 'living' elements transcend the plain of the painting in an almost spiritual relief. It is easy to imagine that the visible parts of the figures could not necessarily be logically reconciled with the parts behind robes. I enjoy thinking that this illusion is a form of spiritual architecture that disembodies concepts of where one exists. I am interested in the harmony of this dissection. My work explores this chasm in its pursuit of place.

Consistent in this varied pursuit of place has been a reductive mark making approach. My work consistently distills the elements of form -- including line, brush stroke, structure, and color-- to their merest essential. In turn my work has conjured idealized forms as place markers. As my work continues, I have come to see the distilled marks as foundations, as if I gave a solid reality to shadows. I strive now to use this mythical depth of shadows as substructures in more layered painting constructions to come.

# THE LAST MAGAZINE

## Agnes Barley's Shadow Structures

By Annette Lin

*The Last Magazine*

March 29, 2017

It's hard to imagine a series of minimalist, monochrome geometric reliefs as "soft", and yet in Agnes Barley's hands, they are.

Her latest show, "Agnes Barley: Shadow Structures" at Sears Peyton Gallery in New York's Chelsea, is dedicated mostly to an untitled series of medium- and large-scale relief panels and sculptures, all involving stacked geometric arrangements in meditative white. Her series (*Untitled Collage*) *Late Grid Waves* is also on display, but the main focus lies on those mesmerizing, graphic reliefs that play with space, light, and line through variations in height and the occasional shadow thrown here and there.

To get a sense of Barley is to get a sense of her work: She's soft-spoken and warm in person; when she catches a glimpse of the guest book, where a friend has written "Dear Agnes" and left a kind message, she's genuinely touched. Likewise, her pieces are welcoming and inviting—surprising, perhaps, for such stripped-back, distilled compositions. Part of it comes from her technique: Wood is applied to panels and then painted with a mixture of powdered clay and paint, and buffed to a finish that is neither overly shiny nor flatly dull. The rest comes from Barley's injection of sentiment, emotion, and intuition into each shape. The influence of Ellsworth Kelly is clear—like him, she seeks a simplicity and elegance in form; unlike him, her focus is on the ephemeral rather than the physical, and the concepts she is translating, such as breath and memory, ultimately lend her work a gentler, dreamier quality.

After all, for her, the panels are merely windows into a larger world where these forms exist. "The work is incredibly geometric, and the core of the painting is this underlying grid that represents a kind of infinite possibility," Barley explains. "What you see here is just a small piece of something that exists far beyond what I could show."

It's this expansive quality that leads one to recognize Barley's panels as landscapes. Indeed, her work often centers around the idea of place, although it's not necessarily a physical place she's referring to. "The [pieces] are really about: *Where do I exist? What space have I carved out for my ideas or my being?* They're more metaphorical senses of place that really represent identity and connection to yourself and to the world around you, to others, to ideas."

Most recently, she's begun to explore this sense of place in a new light, literally. Her latest works include a series of wall sculptures, one of which is on display here at the entrance, its bold, protruding dimensions contrasting against the flatter planes of a relief piece next to it in a yin-yang relationship. There are roughly ten in total, the rest still at her studio, as well as a freestanding piece that is on view. Each was made as she explored this new way of looking at her traditionally two-dimensional practice.

"My work is so much about place as a metaphor for context and identity, so [to work with three-dimensional sculptures], it was suddenly like, *Oh wow, is that the view I never have of myself?*" she says, gesturing to the freestanding piece. Walking to the other side, she says, "It's very haunting, this inversion. It's almost like, *What do I really look like?*"

While her previous work defined space through her use of color, here, she uses color to define, and defy, space: The monochrome, she explains, is like a "cloak of dusk" where forms flatten and "you can no longer distinguish parts from the whole." Barley didn't consider the effect of the gallery lights, however, particularly on the freestanding sculpture, where each shape appears to dissolve into the others, but the lights cause the entire piece to cast shadows that overlap playfully and intriguingly. "In my old studio I had a lot of natural light so the experience was very different, because the light would move and change so the shadows that were cast varied throughout the day," she says. "Light would happen to the sculptures. I love the shadows that I find in the studio. But what it does for me here is it creates another direction in the work that wasn't there originally. And this is so interesting to me. Beautiful things happen with the shadows in sculpture."

# THE LAST MAGAZINE

## TLM09: Agnes Barley

*The Last Magazine*

September 10, 2012

“The question is always, *Where?*” says the painter Agnes Barley, “though it’s not always about proximity or place. *Where is meaning, where is connection, where is life and time and stillness?*” Barley’s idiosyncratic use of such a specific adverb seems curious at first, but it provides a critical clue to the dynamics of her work. An unorthodox understanding of place and spatial mechanics animates Barley’s tranquil, delicate abstractions, one that doesn’t always dovetail with the conventional methods of locating the objects of our everyday experience.

Barley’s work is indebted to giants of modern color field painting such as Ellsworth Kelly, as well as the elegantly controlled gestures of contemporary artists like Elliott Puckette. In her compositions, crisp, sharp-edged shapes in subtle hues are moored against a warm, neutral backdrop. Barley’s works are often collages; using a thin veil of paint to create “idealized brushstrokes,” she administers rich jewel tones and subtle pastels to paper, which she then cuts and applies to an empty ground.

Especially when viewed in sequence, the interior logic of Barley’s choices emerges as an elegant pattern language, both lexical and visual—part tangram, part mesostic. In some series, certain groups of shapes are employed as footings, anchoring the variations in color and composition that individualize each piece. Each completed collage feels like a component in a private grammar that lends itself to further study.

Despite their distilled appearance, Barley’s works are not always pure abstractions. Her compositions are often inspired by fleeting natural phenomena and retain a suggestion of form. She chose to study waves, she says, because she views them as “a suggestion of place that is tied to time.” Her waves—slender rectangles and triangles that skew at oblique angles—are influenced by the depiction of the Nile in ancient Egyptian art, a seemingly never-ending march of uniform triangles that suggests the unyielding power of time over all living things.

Barley seeks to “create forms that are a reflection of how we’re situated in the world,” she says. While her early pieces were rooted in the conventions of traditional landscape painting, more recent works have been distilled down, their compositions derived from marks that are more suggestion than indelible gesture. Whether gently touching or floating at discrete distances from each other, the shapes that make up her works suggest the relationships that are the meat of human experience.

Even with her light touch, Barley is fascinated with structure, restriction, and the visual tension that results from the two-dimensional construction of three-dimensional architectural space. A trace of orthogonal projection persists in many of her compositions, from her “Shadow Structures” series through to her more recent “Waves” group, although she notes that “nothing is truly orthogonal” in her work. Instead, Barley’s newer pieces are “folding landscapes,” she says, their odd angles creating a quiet sense of perspective and depth that very often leads the viewer inward.

Her latest works are even more suggestive of interiority, a beguiling amalgam of presence and absence. “Void and landscape are equally important,” she notes, adding that “it’s been important for me to forge a relationship between something and nothing.”

A new book of Barley’s paintings, published by J&L, is scheduled for release later this year, in conjunction with a new exhibition at New York’s Blackston Gallery. In the meantime, Barley continues to hone the methodologies that have guided her practice from the start. Each time she succeeds in creating a harmonious relationship between shape and negative space, the result is nearly musical. “There’s a bell,” she says. “It’s almost tantric.”