

**LAURA
GANNON**

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How do we choose our specific material, our means of communication? 'Accidentally.'
Something speaks to us, a sound, a touch, hardness or softness, it catches us and
asks us to be formed. We are finding our language, and as we go along
we learn to obey their rules and their limits.
- Anni Albers

During a 1982 conference, American artist Anni Albers talked about how materials have “laws” of their own, and how artists attune themselves to these inherent guidelines. Rather than being all-deciding creators, they are in dialogue with their medium. It is the same attentive attitude that permeates the practice of Laura Gannon.

Since 2015, Gannon has been focused on making works that defy the traditional definition of painting or sculpture.

She paints and sculpts pieces of linen until they take shape as autonomous artworks, alike enough to be related to each other, but distinct enough to resonate with each other. For it is with precise dedication that Gannon has been developing a body of work in which the impact of each decision is visibly, necessarily significant for the next. In the words of Albers, Gannon is finding her language, and every choice in her making process opens up its vocabulary, contributes to its syntax, strengthens its grammar.



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When starting a piece, Gannon does not have, or otherwise tries to lose, any preconceived idea for it. Completely committing herself to the work, she is and makes in the present. In the studio, most notably as well. Being based there nearly full-time, she relates to the space in an affectionate, almost anthropomorphic way. The studio's conditions are crucial in her practice - during the Launch Pad LaB Residency, she made her atelier resemble the one she has in London. Moreover, the studio dictates the scale of the works. Until now most of her works have been either torso-sized, full body-sized or slightly bigger, vis-à-vis the available floor space on which she works. During the residency, she made works on an even larger and somewhat squarer scale, only once done before, going well beyond two meters in width and height.

Her raw material is usually the same: a linen so fine, its grain is imperceptible. Especially after she draws on it or paints it, it looks far more solid, as if it were another material altogether. The same goes for her works in watercolour paper. In both, her strong sense of colour is key. After pieces in metallic inks - golden ochre, shimmering silver, absorbing black and delicate pink, amongst others - she chose a bold and bright colour palette to explore further during the Launch Pad LaB Residency. A rather artificial palette perhaps, with a more synthetic feel. The iridescent acrylic paints she selected are shades of endless green, statement yellow, electric blue, radiant orange and vivid reddish-pink. Their intuitive, yet thoughtful pairing adds to their intrinsic qualities. However, their luminosity is also brought about by Gannon's strenuous treatment of the linen. The way the light hits the creases, creates a dazzling dimensionality.

Gannon folds and wrinkles her base material, bends and breaks it in order for its raw materiality to manifest itself. The visceral character of the works stems from this rough, labour-intensive approach. Hence, a palpable tension arises between their fragility and force. This contrast is also heightened by the last steps in Gannon's treatment. She weaves strips of linen or watercolour paper through the surface of the work; or instead cuts out abstract shapes. Each action leads up to a system of addition or subtraction. Having at least one fixed parameter (such as using the same linen), enables a certain receptiveness to let this system build itself. The resulting geometric repetition bears witness to 1960s minimalism and architectural modernism, but in a less rigid, freer fashion - all surface interventions are done by simple hand-eye coordination.

The act of adding to or taking away from the works' surface also impacts their installation. Often the artworks are suspended a bit away from the wall, hanging in front of rather than directly onto it. Especially for the cut-out pieces, this allows not only for light to come through, but also for viewers to activate the work by reading the wall behind it. The spatial context where the work is displayed undeniably functions as another layer in its experience. For example, during the Launch Pad LaB Residency, it was the first time, due to the specific studio architecture, that the back of the works were fully visible, hence exposing the construction, the weaving, the naked colour of the linen. It also demanded other movements of the audience in the space.





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The corporeal response of viewers to, but also, and maybe even more so, the corporeal genesis of the work is a not to be underestimated aspect of Gannon's practice. For her, this pure physicality is attained through the abstraction in her mark-making on the materials. There is no figurative narrative to occupy the mind. The abstraction facilitates thinking from the realm of her own body. In that sense, Gannon's pieces could be understood as an expansion of the self, herself. Her psychological and bodily engagement when making is deeply embedded in them. Her practice is essentially an embodied one.

This embodiment, the female body, is not neutral, but political. Gannon is highly aware of the difference in agency between genders - noticing big and small, for example how the reddish-pink acrylic she is using is named "Carmen".

Raised in a conservative, male-dominated environment in Ireland, the decorative value of women was imbued in her from a young age. However, her mother atypically worked and kindled curiosity for crafts, clothing, (mostly female) writing, buildings and politics. Combining sensuality and intellectuality, these interdisciplinary interests are ingrained in Gannon's frame of reference. Often, the titles of her works reflect this: 'Wild Money' (2019) refers to the eponymous short story in which Maeve Brennan explores artists' relationship to money and a whole series of 2021 linen works is named in reference to the practice of architect and designer Lina Bo Bardi. These suggestive titles are a means to instill storytelling in abstraction; a means for the outside world to find a place in the inner world of the works in the studio.



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Her keen sense of architecture especially informs Gannon's films. Before concentrating on the new works, Gannon in fact built a practice around audiovisual works, often intimate portraits of distinctive buildings by female architects such as Eileen Gray. This was the case for some of her most-known projects, including 'Silver House' (2015) and 'A House in Cap-Martin' (2007). In these films, Gannon shows an intense feeling of space, an architect's attention to detail, decoration and the way design influences physical and mental behaviour. She also understands a building as a living thing - literally enlivened when occupied, deteriorating when unoccupied.

The major difference, aside from technical practicalities, between this medium and her studio practice, might be that her films revolve around existing objects, with occasionally added fictional elements, while in her sculptural paintings everything starts from her mind, her body. Nevertheless, there are similar concerns that can be discerned in both films and sculptural paintings. In her video works, Gannon manages to merge past and present or, on the contrary, to fracture time. The filmic temporality, its duration and rhythm, finds its counterpart in the sculptural, painterly marks made, each indicating a durational action, a rhythmic pattern, time passed. Additionally, as much as light is a constitutive element of film, it is also for Gannon's linen works which respond to it, are given depth by it. And in line with that, it is the spatiality that is the main character. In both, Gannon succeeds at letting the exterior and the interior spheres dissolve into each other. Arguably, in keeping with Anni Albers' language analogy, Gannon developed a perceptive vernacular in one medium, and then translated to another.

Laura Gannon (b. 1972, Galway, Ireland) works and lives in London. She studied Fine Arts at the University of Ulster in Belfast and at Goldsmiths College in London. She was also selected for the LUX Associate Artist Programme in London (2008-2009). Recent solo exhibitions include 'Silver House', VISUAL Carlow, Carlow (2019); 'Laura Gannon', Kate MacGarry, London (2018); 'Espace Croisé', Contemporary Arts Centre, Roubaix (2016); and 'Silver House', West Cork Arts Centre, Skibbereen (2015). Her work was included in numerous group exhibitions internationally. She has received multiple awards and scholarships, including from the Irish Arts Council, Arts Council England, Fluxus Art Projects, Outset Art Fund and The Elephant Trust. She participated in residency programmes at Untapped, Rapallo, IT (2018) and Tate Britain, London, UK (2014-15).