

When the summer finally arrives in Orkney, it can seem intoxicating. “I felt it this year more than others,” says Brandon Logan, who lives in the remote Scottish islands. “For the solstice, my friends and I stayed out from sunset to sunrise. The morning broke with an electrical storm. It felt like a Venetian summer.”

The capacity for one place to evoke another – for an Orkney dawn to spur memories of Venice – finds an analogy in Logan’s paintings. Often, these seem other than what they are. Constructed from lengths of string and layers of acrylic paint, they evoke looms or the serried strings of musical instruments. They have frequently been compared with textiles, both in their method of creation and their repeating linear patterns, but many other associations can be made: horizon lines, Brutalist high-rises, Colour Field painting, the tessellated patterns of modernism and antiquity.

Each painting casts into history, incites memory, summons analogies – and yet each painting is avowedly *itself*, an object and a structure. Lengths of string have been arrayed vertically on top of a wooden board, in the manner of a warp for a tapestry. Logan has masked off horizontal segments and flooded the cavities in between with layers of acrylic paint, creating the ‘weft’ that traverses each work. Eventually, there are sufficient layers that the paint and string can be peeled away from the board in one piece, a papyrus-like mesh. Raw string remains visible in the areas that were masked.

The process behind Logan’s work is a given, equivalent to poetic meter. Against the ‘constants’ of technique and materials, colour and smaller details of composition are in continual flux. Bands of colour traverse the strings like pulsing refrains. Each band has a thin corona around it – the residue of an earlier colour that has been occluded mostly from view. *Man from Milan* (2025) began as a sequence of yellow stripes; the yellow remains as a fringe spillage around the neater stripes, each a different colour, that Logan has laid on top. In *Grape Pool* (2025) and *March Wash* (2025), the areas of bleed are more prominent, clogging the strings. Chromatically, these areas function as highlights or flickering after-traces. They are reminders, too, of the viscosity of the medium, the oozing formlessness that precedes the ordering work of measuring, masking and segmenting.

Elsewhere, the composition is more elaborate, even faintly heraldic. In *Devil’s Bit* (2023) and *Canine* (2023), the unity of the stacked horizontals is disrupted by the intrusion of two self-contained oblongs – ‘insets’ that employ their own independent patterns. The zigzagging red cyphers in *Devil’s Bit* resemble repeating ‘Ns’, mirroring each other across a divide. But their declarative import is a feint – a red herring. Logan’s paintings refuse to resolve into one thing.

Each painting is comprised of a grid – the warp of the string, the weft of the stripes of paint. In its resistance to illusionism, the rectilinear structure is akin that of modernist painting or minimalist art (there’s a curious resemblance, in some of Logan’s paintings, to the ‘stacks’ of Donald Judd). And yet the resistance isn’t as intransigent – as absolute – as that of certain exponents of high modernism. His grid is close to that theorised by Rosalind Krauss, a structural paradigm that also serves as an imaginative terrain: “The grid’s mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing

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Text by James Cahill

with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction).”<sup>1</sup>

Logan’s grids are precisely this – material objects and mythic structures. Their formalism belies a depth of subjectivity. The majority of the works in ‘Willow Trust Illusion’ were made this summer in Orkney, where the artist grew up, and where he returned to after studying at Edinburgh College of Art (he now works out of a studio in the old library at Stromness). The paintings bear witness to the “excess of light” experienced at the northern latitude: earth tones are offset by strong – occasionally strident – blues, pinks, greens and yellows. More obliquely, they attest to a sense of separateness. As he responded to the light and colour of the Orkney summer, Logan had the fantasy of a London summer in mind. From his remote vantage, he has observed, London and its gay life can seem an almost “fantastical thing.”

Like windows, Logan’s compositions allow us to see through, but also act as screens or barriers. The alternation between opaque paint and ‘transparent’ string is part of a larger gravitation between muteness and vocality. The bars of colour can seem like redactions, ‘blanking out’ what lies beneath.

In certain instances, Logan has extended the interplay between surface colour and interior structure by carving hollow shapes into the work, through the string. The original process of accumulation, whereby layers of paint fused with lengths of string, is thereby reversed. The act of hollowing out breaks the painting into a geometric tracery. The turquoise horizontals of *Buddy Blue* (2023) are broken up by a system of vertical apertures, alternately long and short. The overall composition acquires the dense intricacy of chainmail, or the volumetric complexity of a Brutalist honeycomb façade.

With or without these apertures, Logan’s works profess their own fragile physicality. In the painted sections, the filaments of the string remain visible; the paint seems to have sunk through them, disrupting any easy hierarchy of painted ‘surface’ and underlying ‘support’. The passing resemblance to textiles ultimately serves to underline how his paintings are different – delicate, brittle and hermetic, the result not of an inherited technique but a method that he devised organically and haphazardly. “I was trying to get towards something process-based,” he has explained. “Canvas was a barrier to that – too much of a readymade. I wanted something where every step, from the beginning of the work, is visible in the work.” A significant point of reference was the art of British artist Roger Ackling (1947–2014), who used sunlight to burn linear or grid patterns onto fragments of wood – objects in which “the action is indelibly part of the work.”

Logan is emphatic that his paintings are abstract – any pictorial suggestions are incidental – and yet the works’ titles simultaneously push them into a mimetic role, as though the abstract bars of colour *could*, after all, stand for something real. *Sea Comet* (2025) consists of twenty-four lines rising in an oblong stack. Sixteen of them are marine blue. The others are like transient plays of light – an orange gleam, a green glow, a streak of yellow that might just be the first (or final) appearance of sunlight on water.

*Night Sky in June* (2025) presents a sequence of roseate stripes, each seeming to bleed around its edges with a different colour. The ethereality of a midsummer sky in Orkney is distilled into a pattern that suggests the reverberations of memory, its insistent repetitions and smaller (nearly imperceptible) deviations. At other times, the relationship between title and work is more incidental – one of disjunction rather than affinity. In *Cristina’s Bar* (2025), bands of colour (three at a time) accumulate in tiers with their own unanswerable logic.

Just as the environment of Orkney glimmers within the colours of certain paintings, other aspects of the artist’s make-up – his queerness, or what he terms a certain Orcadian sensibility – can be read into the works. But again, the connection is necessarily elliptical – impossible to concretise. The resonance of a title might be personal or impersonal. “Some just get named for the colour that they are,” he remarks. “Another might end up named for someone who broke my heart.”

Subversively miniaturizing the grid-based geometries of modernist painting, Logan’s art also reprises one of the fundamental contradictions of that genre – its capacity to be non-representational and mythic. The multiplying bars of colour can seem like tantalising blanks where meaning once subsisted, but equally they have the power of echoing voices. At once abstract and allusive, his paintings are marked by an essential doubleness. Just as their physical make-up alternates between two essential elements – acrylic colour and string mesh – their associative power ebbs and flows. Feeling radiates out and then recedes, as if disappearing through the gaps.

1. Rosalind Krauss, ‘Grids’, 1978, reproduced in *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 8–22, p. 12.