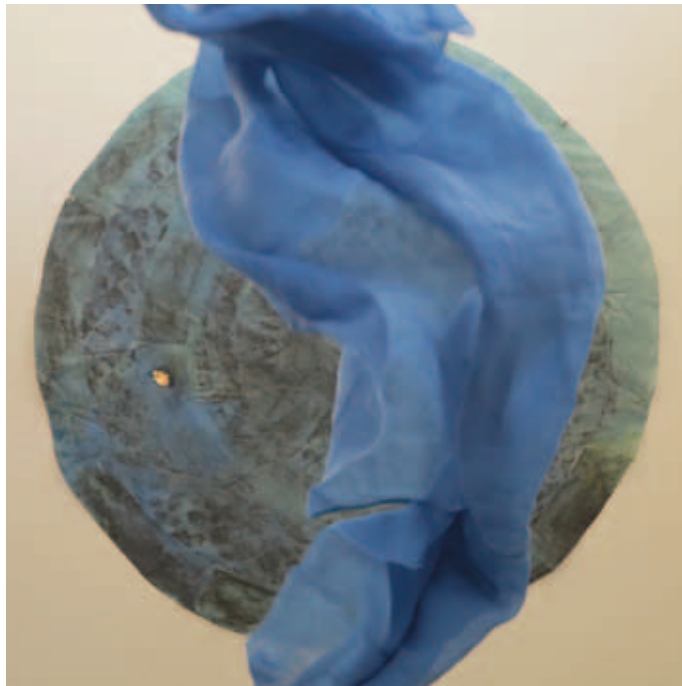




# Temporal Stabilities

Liz Rideal



## TEMPORAL STABILITIES

This publication celebrates an exhibition at 4m2 Gallery, John Cabot University, Rome and a collaboration between three institutions and five academics: Professor Liz Rideal (Slade School of Fine Art, UCL), Assistant Director Harriet O'Neill and Research Fellow Clare Hornsby (British School at Rome) and Associate Professor Inge Lyse Hansen and Associate Professor Lila Yawn (Department of Art History and Studio Art, John Cabot University).

The Cosmati paving in Roman churches provided the material research context for semi-precious stone frottages. These resulted in visualizations that represent a palimpsest of pilgrim footfall. The artworks reflect a fusion of ghostly past pilgrims and Rideal's twenty-first century 'haunting' of the space. The images constitute an amalgam of artistic methodology, and exist as a hybrid form that echo spaces redolent of hidden histories. They act as a creative metaphor that articulates the complex and self-reflective ways of working in the public arena while simultaneously engaging with the public, the geographic and the cultural site.

Rideal's fluid photographs and drawings on frottage suggest a fleeting human presence through recorded interventions against backgrounds of immutable stone; churches, ruins or pavements. Her process is a visual response to research that elides photography with painting and focuses on drapery as subject. The project merges an idea of contemporary Roman pilgrimage connecting art, history, archaeology, photography and the digital.

## COSMATI - COSMATESQUE

*Harriet O'Neill*

The phrase, 'temporal stabilities' chimed as Liz Rideal and I explored the Church of San Clemente's three levels and more specifically the cosmatesque ornament which adorns the upper basilica. Previously I had focused on the evident physical accretions made to the Church, an interest Rideal shares. In addition to this she searches for traces of use which are often erased from scholarly literature but are nonetheless visible in the changes wrought to the surfaces of cosmatesque pavements by tourists and pilgrims. In so doing hitherto invisible bodies return to sight as multiple temporalities are brought together. It should be remembered that this is a fundamentally Roman project. Recent press coverage has drawn attention to the damaging impact of salt in the flood waters on the cosmatesque pavement in the Basilica of San Marco, lifting pieces from the surface and altering their appearance. These dramatic changes sadly contrast to the gradual wear we see in Rideal's compositions.

Cosmati is the name given to the twelfth and thirteenth-century *marmorari romani* while the fantastic geometric polychrome marble and mosaic inlays they created are described as cosmatesque. Cosmatesque ornament, replete with symbolic spiritual meanings, was exclusively employed in sacred spaces, and arguably the best examples are found in Roman basilicas. Cosmati work was not only used for pavements but to adorn cloisters as at San Giovanni in Laterano, portals including that of Santa Maria in Castello, altars, a particularly beautiful example being that in Santa Prassede, episcopal thrones, notably in San Lorenzo fuori le Mura and paschal candelabrum and ambone of the type that can be seen at Santa Maria in Aracoeli. Significantly the raw materials; porphyry, marble, hardstones and glass were sourced and adapted from the ancient *spolia* available in medieval Rome, a process which involved slicing columns to make the striking 'rounds' which form the central elements of cosmatesque decorative schemes. The choice of materials was motivated not only by expediency and availability but because refashioning *spolia* created visible connections between





ODI VINI NOMINES  
VSTIA MOX MEA  
HIEVSER VAVITAM  
RRIS SIC



Cosmati pavement, Sistine Chapel, Vatican, image © Katie Cuddon



the medieval Church and antiquity and thus signalled the 'Rebirth of Rome' which had begun under Pope Paschal II (1094-1118). The removal of the Papal Court to Avignon in 1309 brought cosmatesque production to a halt with the notable exception of pavements. These pavements can be seen physically in spaces such as the Sistine chapel and also fictively, in paintings. For example, the throne in the *Ognissanti Madonna* c. 1310 by Giotto (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) is ornamented with cosmatesque decoration, a suitably honorific surface to seat the Virgin and child.

Rideal's focus on cosmatesque pavements encourages us to look down at the surfaces pilgrims and worshippers walked and continue to walk upon, the geometric patterns guiding them to and preparing their minds for the spiritual encounter at the high altar. Just as the pavements were intended to affect the worshippers, their cumulative footsteps altered the very appearance of marble, hardstones and even porphyry. In her talk entitled 'Ghosts in the Pavement' delivered at John Cabot University, Rideal referred to *Dance to the Music of Time* by Nicholas Poussin of 1634-1636 (Wallace Collection, London), a painting which explores the circular nature of human activity and in so doing speaks to the constant flow of people seeking redemption and aesthetic pleasure in sacred spaces. There is however a curious disconnect between viewing surfaces which have been so altered by human touch, and indeed contributing to the process ourselves and yet being distanced from them because we are only looking. Even canvases such as *Pavement of St Mark's, Venice* by John Singer Sargent dated to circa 1880-82, where the undulating, damaged and shimmering pavement is so beautifully rendered, frustrates the viewers' desire to participate, underlining that they are only observers. Rideal engages with this tension by taking rubbings from the cosmatesque floors, a process which has roots in the Victorian enthusiasm for making brass rubbings in churches and Max Ernst's 'frottage'. The resulting drawings and photographs add another dimension to the already multilayered cosmatesque pavements. Although abstracted, the final compositions retain something of the original surfaces just as the pavements themselves betray their ancient origins.

## TEMPORAL INSTABILITIES

*Inge Lyse Hansen*

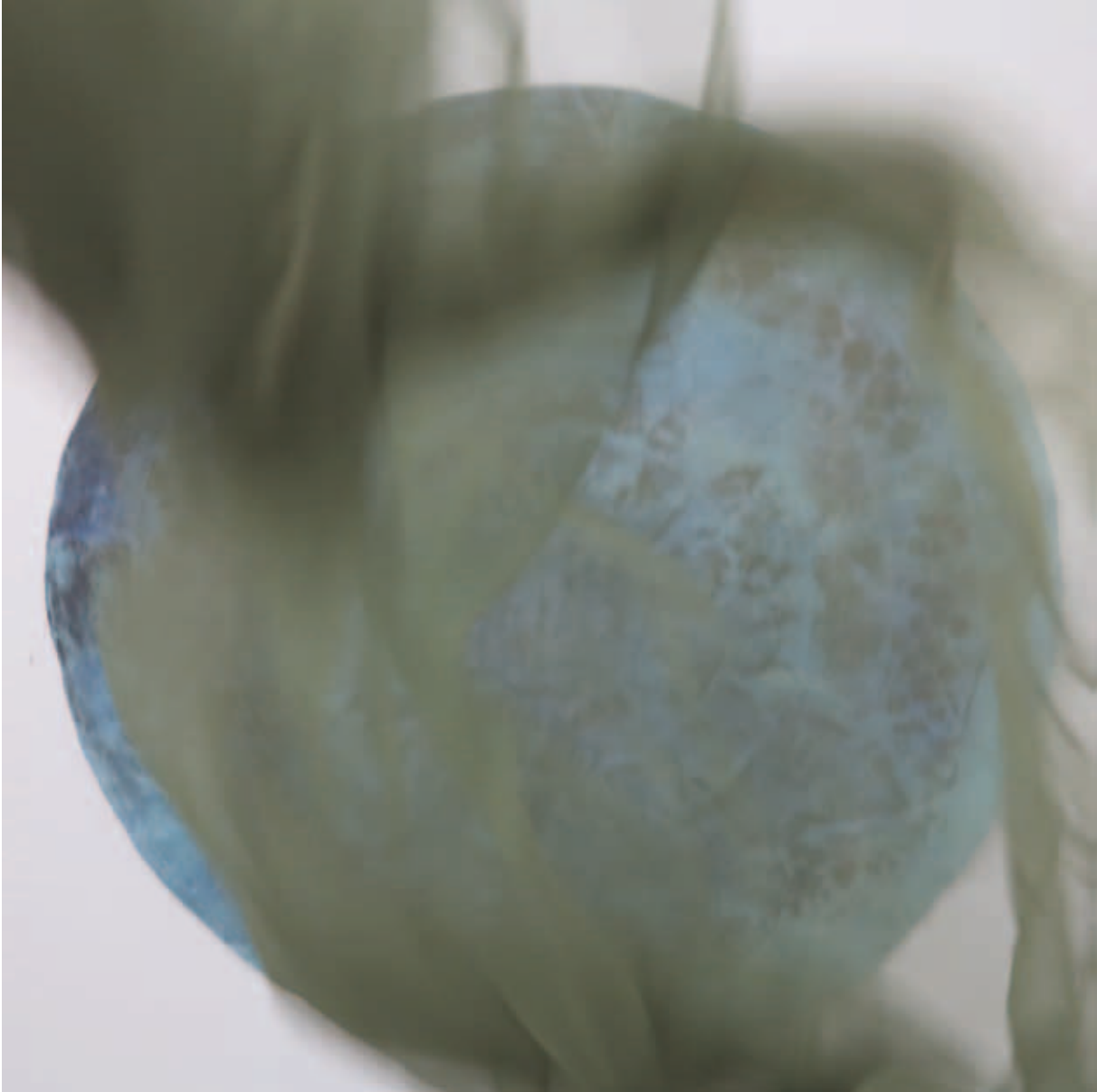
Can marble be like silk? Liz Rideal's photographs, of elaborate medieval marble pavements in cosmatesque style intersected by flashes of diaphanous coloured silks, at first sight appear to pose questions of unlikeness rather than likeness. Look again, though, and the soft fabric - the wisp of a movement captured by the lens - changes. At times, it is like a cloud of pure colour, there but impossible to capture, like a ghost of a memory; at times, it appears as if rising like a column from the floor, set in its momentary identity, like a frozen waterfall. And the crisply present marble floors - they draw your eye in restless movement, inviting you hither and further. From the detailed geometric patterns, to the swirling, intersecting circles and bands, to the criss-cross setting of framing rectangular slabs, the immutable marble flows and shimmers in vibrant colours.

Once the photographs are printed on silk, or the frottage rubbings become paintings, the transformation is complete: The marble surface now a diaphanous veil, the captured movement of silk reanimated by the slightest breath. Liz Rideal's work interweaves the temporalities of stability and instability - and in doing so she captures something essential about the cosmatesque pavements themselves.

Constructed from reused marbles, the opus sectile pavements carry within their very nature a reference to prior times. Most obviously, they draw on that vast 'natural resource' of marble-cladding that adorned prestigious buildings and spaces of the ancient city, now relaid and refashioned in a new setting. Each marble chosen is also a link to a wider Mediterranean world of the origin of the marble quarries: dark wine-red Porphyry from Egypt, two-tone light-on-dark green Serpentine from Greece, golden Numidian Yellow from North Africa, creamy white and lilac Phrygian Purple from Turkey, soft buttery white Luna/Carrara from Italy, and a host of others if you keep your eyes peeled. Together, they are like a map of an interconnected world where you can hop-skip between











continents. Look in close-up detail and the strata of veining and patterns within the marbles reveal the geology of their distant past and their own inherent metamorphic character. Temporal instability is within the very nature of marble.

The palpable delight in marble use, the striking visual emphasis on the material of marble, that characterizes the pavements call to mind these multiple pasts as a living present. Their colours and patterns form overlapping associations with imperial-period spaces, like the Pantheon, with late antique churches, like old St. Peters, and with the contemporary Byzantine and Islamic East. Indeed, the cosmatesque style grows out of a creative reuse that had most likely already seen three, four or five prior reincarnations of the marbles. And still, the marbles are clearly selected with a discriminating eye: dark red and green juxtaposed by whites and accented with yellow and violet dominate. The effect is a vibrant chromatic cohesion that accentuates the entirety of the floor surface.

Most striking among the designs are the circular disks in red porphyry. Sliced like salami from monumental columns they most clearly carry within their shape continuities of form. They are still columns, only now shape-shifted from verticality to horizontality. Linked by meandering guilloche bands they occupy the central spaces of the floors like rings in water from a skimming stone. They are the surface tension of the floor plane that draws us in, emboldened by the rivulets of geometric patterns. Designs may echo the processional movement of liturgy, mark significant locations and sightlines of ritual, mirror the spaces of domes or window rosettes, but above all they draw attention to the space. They draw attention to us being in this space, and to this space as a *made* space.

At every turn, the pavements pose us questions about making and seeing. The dense sapphire and emerald colours with flashes of golden yellow evoke associations of fine metalwork or glassware, the variety of repetition in patterns are like rich tapestries or luxurious brocades, the grey-blue striations of the white marbles that encircle the floors seem to conjure up the sound of fountains. Even the pieces of fragmentary inscriptions, like ghosts of memories, play their part. Their partial legibility reminds us that both they and this new setting are made.

The temporal instabilities that flow through the cosmatesque pavements are like the silk thrown before the lens of the camera by an unseen hand, the accent that layers histories into our viewing, the creating eye that turns marble into silk.



A question of fate

I don't want to glorify ruin but in the Curia,  
the first parliament built by Julius Caesar  
as an extension to the Roman Forum,  
where augurs came to announce the desires  
of the gods —  
there is a most beautiful mosaic floor.  
A template of circles and squares gathers  
the litter of tiles and pots, red porphyry,  
green and white marble, swirling as if molten,  
into the harmonics of a dissembled lyre.  
No strict tessellation, unlike the square chips  
of mosaics decorating Roman villas  
that depict myths (satyrs, sea-monsters, fish  
and seahorses, a luxuriance of flowers and fruits,  
wild creatures, and exotic birds in every tree)  
with the acutance and detail of pixilation,  
in the Curia each shard is determined by  
its unique edge; preserving the integrity  
of the largest fragment, the most disruptive,  
as if it alone bears the beauty of the whole,  
like the conclusion to an argument.

*Sharon Morris*









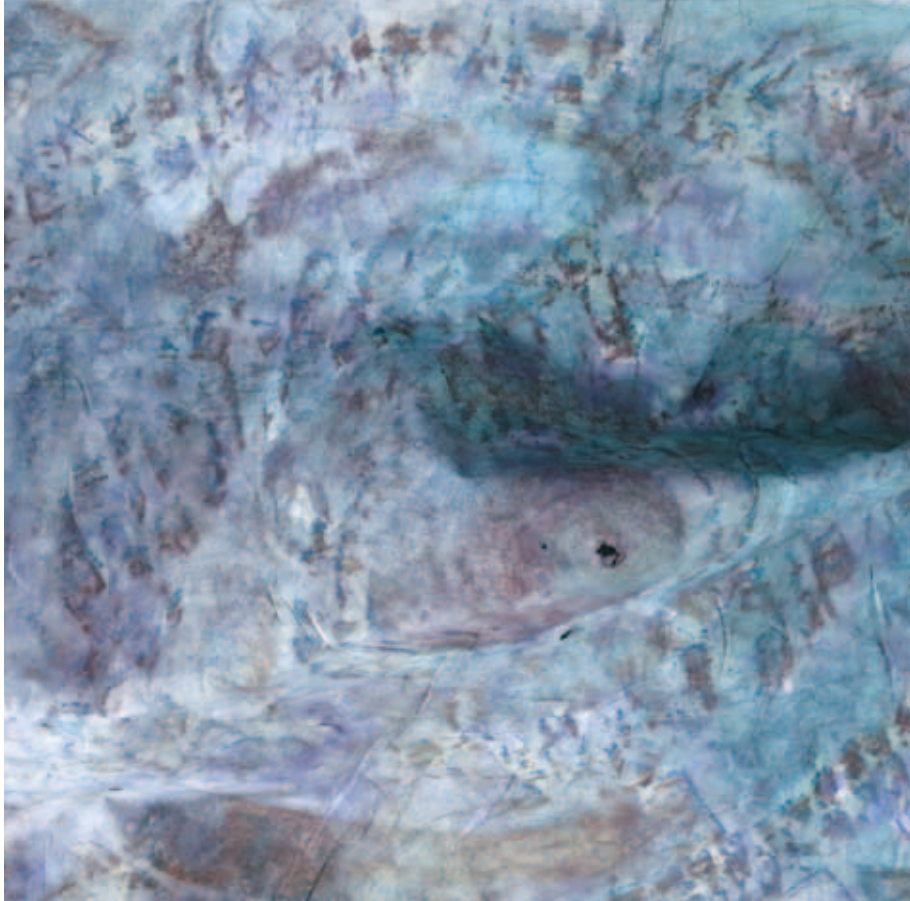








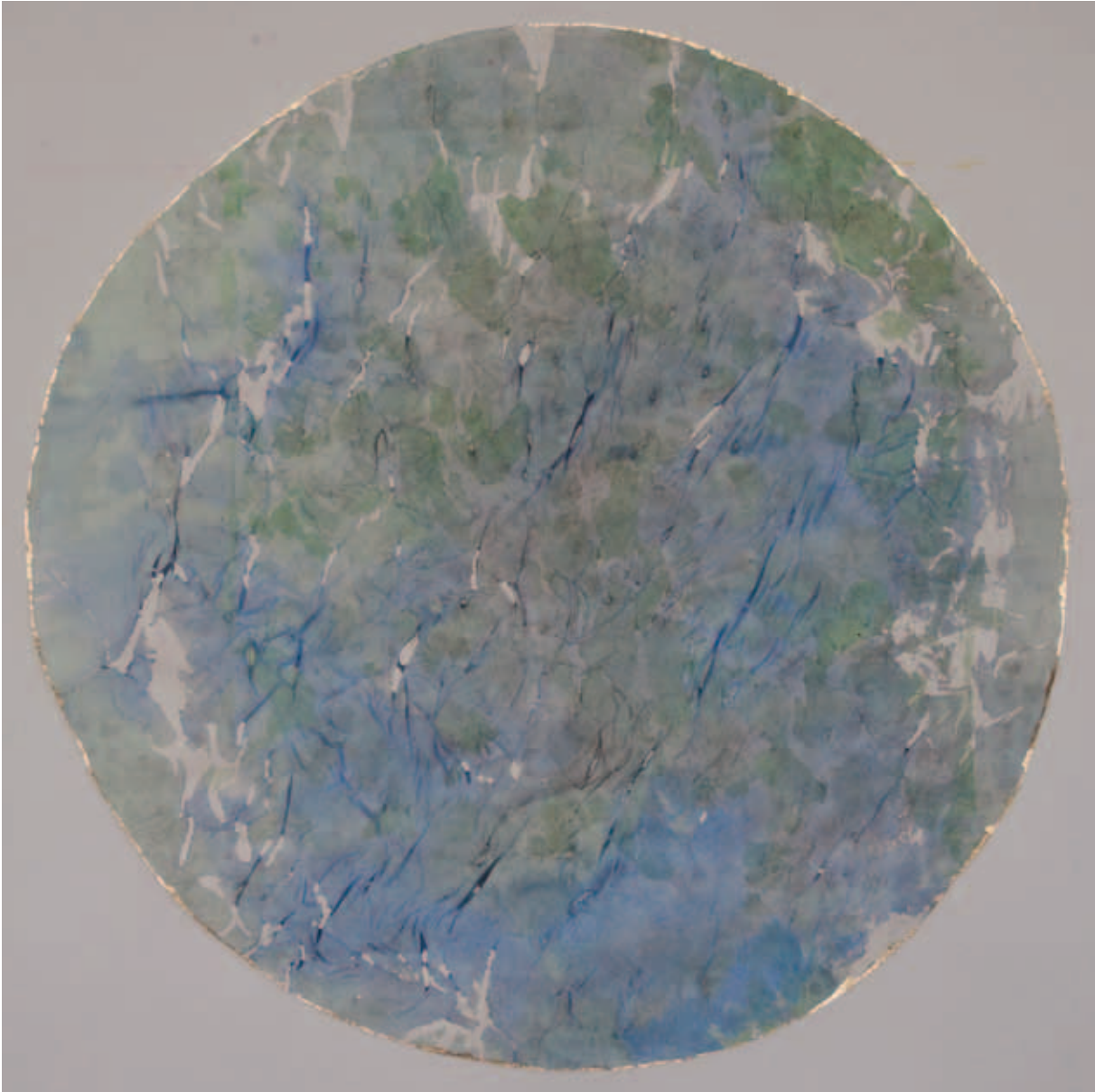


































All works 2018 - 2020 (HxW)

Digital pigment prints on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag William Turner 300gsm, 42cm x 60cm.

Digital photographs printed onto Silk Georgette 50gsm, 178cm x 134cm & 90 x 90cm.

Frottage drawings & watercolour on Japanese paper, dimensions variable.

Cover

Front (outer): *Low Fly Float (Santi Quattro Coronati, Rome)*. Silk print

Front (inner): *Etruscan Shield (Blue)*. Silk print

Back (outer): *Flower Bomb (Santi Quattro Coronati, Rome)*. Silk print

Back (inner): Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337) *Ognissanti Madonna (Madonna in Maestà)* c. 1310 Tempera on wood, 325 x 204 cm Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

p3 *Rome re-cycled (Santi Quattro Coronati, Rome)*. Silk print

p4 Cosmati pavement, Sistine Chapel, Vatican. (© Katie Cuddon)

p7 *Incised Calligraphy*. Frottage drawing, 97cm x 61cm

p8 *Etruscan Shield (Moss)*. Silk print

p9 *Secret pavement*. Pigment print

p11 *Vectors*. Silk print

p13 *Re-cycled Jigsaw*. Pigment print

p14 *Chapel of San Silvestro, I, Rome*. Pigment & silk print

p15 *Chapel of San Silvestro, II, Rome*. Pigment & silk print

p16 *Chapel of San Silvestro, III, Rome*. Pigment & silk print

p17 *Chapel of San Silvestro, IV, Rome*. Pigment & silk print

p18 *Eau de Cologne*. Pigment print

p19 *Etruscan Shield (Verdigris)*. Pigment print & frottage watercolour drawing, 96cm (diameter)

p20 *Medallion (Seagrass)*. Pigment print & frottage watercolour drawing, 96cm (diameter)

p21 *Medallion (Pontine)*. Pigment print & frottage watercolour drawing, 96cm (diameter)

p22 *Brume Border*. Silk print

p23 *Chess Landscape*. Frottage watercolour drawing, 97cm x 67cm

p24 *Optic Nerve I*. Pigment & silk print

p25 *Meconopsis (Blue Poppy)*. Silk print

p26-27 *Optic Nerve II*. Pigment & silk print

p28 *Poetic Aura*. Silk print

p29 *Concentric*. Frottage watercolour drawing, 97cm x 78.5cm

p32 Christian funerary inscription, late 4th century AD, Santi Quattro Coronati, Rome

p32 John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Pavement of St Mark's, Venice* 1880-1882, Oil on canvas, 53.3 x 72.4 cm

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Steven J. Ross



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the grey gallery





