Relationships are at the centre of Natalie Dower’s work. They are often coded through rules based on proportion, composed of mathematical puzzles, or phenomenological in terms of a plurality of place. Dower’s approach feels supermodern and constructive. Her ingenuity and innovation are reflected through the use of mathematical systems, such as the ‘Fibonacci Sequence’ or the ‘Dudeney Dissection’, which activate the works’ interwoven surface facture. The awareness of a more terrestrial space synchronises with a systematic field of vision, and allows the parts to function reciprocally.

Dower’s line of enquiry concerning specificity of colour and harmonious proportion needs to feel precise and highly calculated. This need calls to mind her friend and mentor Malcolm Hughes. Hughes taught in the Life Room with Dower, but it is work like his Four Unit Painting K1–K4 that influences Dower’s handling of space. It seems critical and one of the constant factors that contributes to her own constructive idiom.

When I spoke to Dower in her studio recently, a conversation about colour and its processes of interaction, focused on her sense of internal logic. It is a logic informed by a wide variety of influences: the chemist and poet Primo Levi, for example, the composer Stravinsky, or the influential astronomer, Timothy Ferris. Dower’s work, with its cross-fertilisation of ideas, rules and deterministic complexity, is evidence of the possibilities of which Hughes spoke – of an art derived from a sense of order, with ‘endless variety’. Dower may initiate a number of works with one linking system as a starting point, but specific choices about colour, scale, or material result in highly individual images and allow the paintings and reliefs to punctuate space in physical and dynamic ways.

Dower’s ability to work at varying speeds on a number of different systems, and to order those systems (and the way in which things happen) according to the speed at which she is working, opens up the possibility for her to call upon more non-deterministic operations. This introduces a demographic in the paintings and constructions, which connects to past experience through the analytically built surface. The rigour of the system, which always employs mathematical diversion, holds us in an equilibrium of the continuously unexpected.
In this exhibition the sense of the unexpected is heightened by showing works from different time periods, in new relationships. This brings about a physiological and chromatic resonance that mirrors a sense of futurity, both urban and architectural. Dower is able to question her predetermined goals by allowing nature to be seen as an impetus. This manipulation and spatial organisation allows unpredictable constraints to evolve in a state of flux.

_Travelling Star_ 1996, when partnered with _Dudeney Circle_ 1989 for example read through a codified experience. We understand that code through the works’ temporal mobility. The pairing triggers a multiple sense of duration, echoing the objects’ past, present, and future. Links are created to other images such as the black and white painting _Dudeney Encoded_ 1987, where Dower dissects an equilateral triangle into four irregular shapes that can be reassembled as a square. In _Dudeney Circle_ Dower has reversed the colour system, by creating a white circular sphere where the cut out rectangles cast shadows onto the wall. _Travelling Star_ has a liquidity within the ground colour, which takes some time to notice. The intermittent flashes of green, pink and blue spirals create a visual flaring, oscillating between a retinal impression and a black hole in deep space.

_Spin Off_ 2015 is an exquisitely conceived picture, its dark ground a key to the painting’s success. It feels like a hybrid in that it seems to be a combination of two systems. In conversation with Dower, I discover that its ‘spiral track’ works clockwise from the top right corner, and travels inward in moves of twenty-eight. The interior rectangle is formed with the use of spiral track points. The interior square is formed from peripheral points.

‘I have counterpointed systems, but I didn’t with _Spin Off_. The unusual thing here is that it is a section of a larger painting, (hence the title). It happens sometimes – a work being ‘found’ during the course of materialising a plan. Only when I am scaling up something ‘found’ that I have already got to grips with, can the work be guaranteed not to have changed from exactly what I was expecting. The developments could affect areas but it is usually the colours that need changing because they are not right in terms of the ‘gestalt.’” – NATALEE DOWER

In this intimate painting, Dower has an angled square opening made by four small turquoise squares. The space feels like a mapped location, at the edge of an environment. It echoes modern life, and its transient contemporary existence. _Three Triangle Series: Three Colours_ 2015 also has a tension achieved through the scale and proportionally related composition, with adjacent forms held in perfect equilibrium. During Dower’s time in Morocco, she noticed the fluctuation of light that produced a feeling that things far away were as sharply defined as things nearby, and this feels key to the juxtapositions in the painting.

To some, the idea of working within systems presents a sense of limitation, but for Dower it is a kind of liberation. This emerges discussing the series of reliefs _Spiral Track no.s 1, 2, 3 1984_ in which the system is the dissection of a square into four different shapes that even hinged together, can be assembled as an equilateral triangle.

‘I remember where I was, and the excitement of the exact moment when I realised the enormous range of possibilities that it offered. For the next decade every drawing, relief, sculpture and painting, ranging in scale from centimetres to metres, was generated from that. What I had seen was that I could use the squares, with their divisions, to compose a grid, which would offer a huge range of configurations, either complex or simple, from which I could choose what I wanted, and which would serve for all of the above purposes.’

Seen together the rhythmic combination of _Jungle Sphere_ 1988 (a circular relief on three levels) and _Square Root Two Spirals, Nine Moves_ 2015 could reflect the endless syncopation of the city. The duality of these two works opens up space and time, transporting you in one moment to a parallel encounter of the personal, and a global mechanisation. The feeling of the artificial and manufactured in _Jungle Sphere_ is offset by the symbolized sense of anthropological place in _Square Root Two Spirals, Nine Moves_. There seems a manipulation of nature, which has been completed by an architectural interface.

_Within the Tracks_ 2015 uses a _Square Root Two Spirals_ system, in which the rectangles are designed to be halved and halved endlessly, still with the same proportions. Dower employs a sulfurous, scumbled surface in the triangles that rotate and spiral in the largest rectangle. The painting has a hypnotic atmosphere and the repeatedly halved rectangles or triangles push against its borders in an attempt to escape the frame.

Natalie Dower has created poetic precision in new alignments and combinations. The paintings and constructions have infinite intensities of geometric and existential space. Each work is internally coherent, its identity anchored in an industrial sense of order and the systematic idea. Her process of exploration through structure and colour is a reflection of her intention to create, as Dower says, a “stimulus to the imagination engendered by discovery.”

LAURENCE NOGA 2015
List of Works

Cover
Two Spirals with Rectangle  2015
oil on canvas, 35 x 50cm

2
Travelling Star  1996
oil on panel, 21.2 x 21.2cm

Dudeney Circle  1989
avonite, 31 x 31 x 4.5cm

6
Three Triangle Series, One Sixth Offset: Four Colours  2014
oil on panel, 30 x 35cm

Three Colour Spiral Track no.2  1984
oil on wood, 35.5 x 38 x 2.5cm

7
Spin Off  2015
oil on board, 13.25 x 18.9cm

Three Triangle Series: Three Colours  2015
oil on canvas, 43.5 x 43.5cm

8
Spiral Track no.s 2, 3, 1  1984
oil on wood, 27 x 30.5 x 5cm

9
Jungle Sphere  1988
oil on wood, 46 x 46 x 3.8cm

Square Root Two Spirals, Nine Moves  2015
oil on canvas, 60 x 85cm

10
Within the Tracks  2015
oil on canvas, 24 x 30cm
NATALIE DOWER

1931  Born in London
1948–49  St Martins School of Art, London
1949–52  Camberwell School of Art and Crafts, London
1952–54  Slade School of Fine Art, London
1954–66  Taught at St Albans School of Art, Bath Academy of Art, Corsham; Byam Shaw School of Art, Camberwell School of Art and Crafts, Chelsea School of Art, London
1966  Moved to Morocco; taught at The American School of Tangier
1973–  Works in Portugal and London

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1976  Concourse Gallery, Polytechnic of London
1981  Foyer Gallery, Riverside Studios, London
1983  Air Gallery, London
1986  Gummesons Konstgalleri, Stockholm, Sweden
1987  Transformations  Curwen Gallery, London
1990  Transformations 2  Curwen Gallery, London
1996  Mathematics and Visual Art  Rewley House, University of Oxford
1997  Within Measure  Francis Graham Dixon Gallery, London
2012  Line of Enquiry  Eagle Gallery, London
2015  Reflections  Eagle Gallery, London

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1986  Colour and Systems  Arts Council Touring Exhibition
  Systemic Constructive Drawings  Wentworth Gallery, University of York
1992–93  Countervail  Mappin Gallery, Sheffield; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, Coventry; King's Manor Gallery, York
2000  Mondiale Echo's  Mondriaanhuis, Holland
  Established, Undervalued and Young Artists  Crane Kalman Gallery, London
2014  Chance and Order  Eagle Gallery, London
2015  From Centre  Slate Projects & Saturation Point, London

Dower’s work is held in collections including Arts Council England; Arthur Andersen & Co; Government Art Collection; Mondriaanhuis, Holland; and Warwick University.