

The logo for Whitechapel Gallery, consisting of a blue square with the text "Whitechapel Gallery" in white, positioned above a horizontal white line, which is itself above another blue square.

Whitechapel  
Gallery

# Mary Heilmann: Looking at Pictures

8 June – 21 August 2016

Large print labels and interpretation

Gallery 8

## Outside gallery:

Biography has played an important role in Heilmann's work since the late 1970s. Following the death of two close friends, Heilmann 'began to feel a need for more content in [her] life' and increasingly gave personal titles to her work 'like a *three-word poem* that is a part of the piece'. The paintings on view here commemorate the loss of friends; recall places of personal significance; celebrate favourite literary works, music and movies. Some titles are very specific, referring to the address of her grandmother's house or to an artist friend; others are more open ended, offering the possibility of multiple interpretations. In 1999, Heilmann published her memoir *The All Night Movie*, chronicling her life from childhood in San Francisco and Los Angeles in the 1940s, through her struggles to break into the New York art scene in the 1970s, until the early 1990s when her work receives wider recognition.

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Although iconographic elements now appear in Heilmann's paintings – including a chair, tile pattern from a dance floor, crashing waves, road markings – the work remains largely abstract and geometric. In the past few decades, she has exuberantly expanded her repertoire of motifs and patterns and her previously understated palette has given way to a profusion of eye-popping colours.

Heilmann invites viewers to take a seat on her candy-coloured chairs, to relax, look at her pictures, solve her puzzles, become immersed in her stories and to write their own three-word poems.

## Inside gallery – from left, clockwise



### **Our Lady of the Flowers**

1989

Oil on canvas

Private Collection

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

This work resembles Heilmann's early painting, *Corona Borealis* (1970), with the small pink shapes arranged like the stars in the constellation or like a garland of flowers. Titled after Jean Genet's debut novel set in the Parisian underworld, this painting also makes reference to religion, particularly to Catholicism, which played an influential role in Heilmann's upbringing and remains strong in her psyche.

**Robert's Garden**

1983

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, Neuss



Left to right:

**Johngiorno**

1995

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, Courtesy  
Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



**Franz West**

1995

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, London

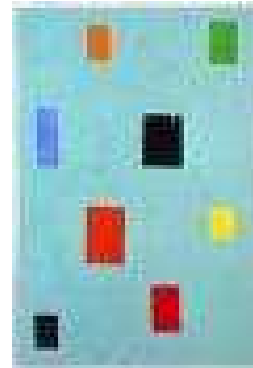


**311 Castro Street**

2001

Oil on canvas

Van Lierde Collection,  
Belgium

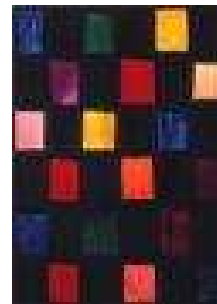


**The Thief of Baghdad**

1983

Oil on canvas

Private Collection



**The Passenger**

1983

Oil on canvas

Thomas Ammann Fine Art,  
AG, Zurich





## Good Vibrations Diptych, Remembering David

2012

Oil on canvas, eleven glazed ceramic dots

ISelf Collection, London

Heilmann often combines two or more motifs – dots, stripes, webs – in a single work. The two canvases here were initially separate paintings, which she later combined when exhibited in 2012. The colourful ceramic dots were added at that time. Titled after a song by the Beach Boys, the work also is a remembrance of her friend David Rattray, a poet, writer and translator who died in 1993.

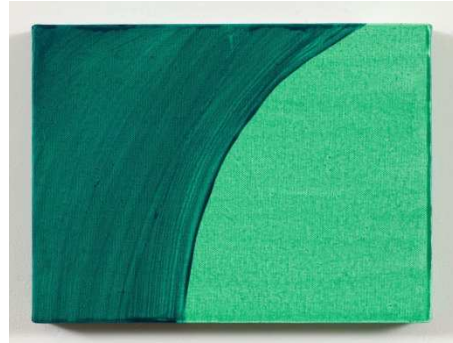
**Green Room, Turquoise  
Lights**

2015

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of the Artist

Courtesy 303 Gallery, New  
York, and Hauser & Wirth



**Crashing Wave**

2011

Oil on canvas

Hauser & Wirth  
Collection, Switzerland





From left to right:

**No Passing**

2011

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Artist

Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York, and Hauser & Wirth



**Maricopa Highway**

2014

Oil on canvas

Collection of Shelley Fox Aarons and Philip Aarons

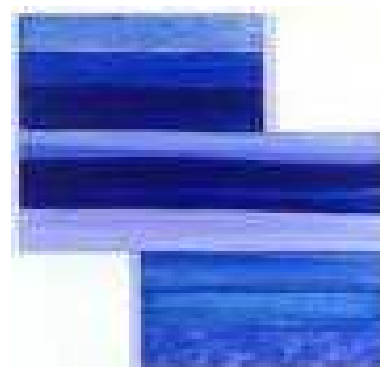


**Miramar**

1994

Oil on canvas

Hauser & Wirth Collection, Switzerland





## Night Swimmer

1998

Oil on canvas

Collection of Lisa Spellman

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

*Night Swimmer* affirms Heilmann's relationship to water. She spent her childhood by the ocean – swimming and diving competitively in high school, hanging out on the beach and watching surfers were a big part of her formative years. This seascape, which depicts the ocean at night, was painted in the 1990s in Heilmann's studio in Bridgehampton, Long Island. The title refers to the R.E.M. song, *Night Swimming*

**Primalon Ballroom**

2002

Oil on canvas and wood

Courtesy Kenny Schachter  
and Ilona Rich



Left to right:

**Woody Jr.**

1997

Oil on canvas and wood

Courtesy Kenny Schachter and Ilona Rich

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## **Carmelita**

2004

Oil on canvas

Private Collection

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

As with many of Heilmann's works, this painting is named after a song. Released on his 1976 album, Warren Zevon's 'Carmelita' is about the misfortunes of drug addict living in Los Angeles. The stripes are a recurring motif in Heilmann's landscapes, seascapes and serape paintings, and are influenced by colour combinations that she sees in the world around her.

Left to right:

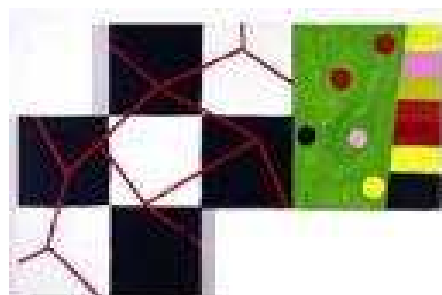
## **Music of the Spheres**

2001

Oil on canvas

Collection of Yvo Mathier

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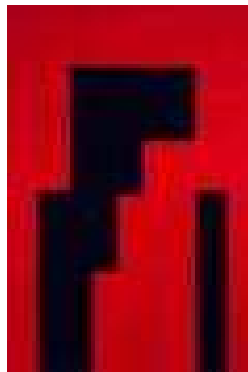
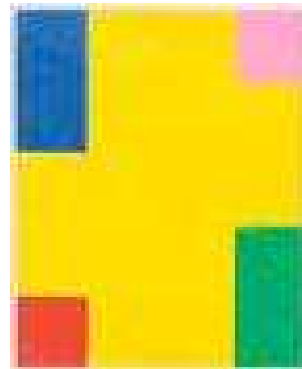
**Taste of Honey**

2011

Oil on canvas

Private Collection

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth



**Bush of Ghosts**

1980

Acrylic on canvas

Hauser & Wirth Collection, Switzerland

Heilmann rarely assigns a title to a work before completing it and sometimes does so only when it is exhibited, which may be months or even years later. (continues on next page)

Although it was painted in 1980, this work was titled only after Brian Eno and David Byrne released their album *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1981). Heilmann felt an affinity with their innovative use of sampled vocals and other sounds and also with the record cover designed by Peter Saville.



## Ghost Chair

1989

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Artist, Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York, and Hauser & Wirth

*Ghost Chair* was painted at the end of the 1980s when AIDS-related deaths had taken a significant toll worldwide. This painting commemorates the friends Heilmann lost to the disease, particularly in the New York arts communities.

Throughout the gallery:

**Sunny Chairs #1–12**

2016

Painted plywood

Collection of the artist

Courtesy 303 Gallery, New  
York and Hauser & Wirth

This edition of 12 chairs is on  
sale to benefit the  
Whitechapel Gallery. Please  
ask at the information desk  
for details.



## **ACCESS INFORMATION**

For details on parking, assistance dogs, adapted toilets, lifts, large print transcripts and free audio described tours or any other access facilities:

**T +44(0)20 7522 7888**

**[access@whitechapelgallery.org](mailto:access@whitechapelgallery.org)**

**Please return this large print booklet to the gallery assistant.**