

James Howell

Alistair Rider

ISBN	9781911422211
Publisher	Circa Press
Binding	Hardback
Size	300 mm x 260 mm
Pages	204 Pages
Illustrations	120 color, b&w
Price	£50.00

james howell

CIRCA

- First monograph on a leading American Minimalist artist whose career is undergoing critical re-evaluation
- Publication coincides with a major Howell retrospective exhibition at Von Bartha Basel, which will travel to venues in Germany and the UK

'My life is a big experiment. Anything that supports the direction my art is taking is an affirmation.' - James Howell. James Howell (1935-2014) was raised in Kansas City and first trained as an architect before becoming an artist. Although he ceased practicing architecture almost as soon as he qualified, he retained a strong spatial sensitivity, and was meticulously attentive to his living and working environments. For more than half his career he lived and painted in the Pacific Northwest of America. In his sixties he remarried and moved to New York, occupying a studio apartment on Perry Street, in Greenwich Village, where he worked for the rest of his life. In the mid-1990s, Howell began working on a long-term project called *Series 10*. He used meticulous calculations and measurements to determine in advance a specific achromatic hue. He divided the square canvas into a series of horizontal bands to produce the perception of a smooth, subtle gradation between two values. In each band, he mixed percentages of titanium white, ivory black and raw umber pigment, revealing a seemingly infinite array of shades of grey. He recognised that by prescribing clear parameters for his work, he would be free to pursue endless variations. James Howell's *Series 10* paintings possess a powerful atmospheric force; they exude an ambience that appears greater and more extensive than the physical parameters of their frames. In Howell's words, they are 'studies of shifting light and shadow, without the interference of any form'. Noted for his experimental approach to colour theory, Howell meticulously studied the parameters of the colour grey, fascinated by its unlimited tonal possibilities. The sublime and minimal are both apparent within the gradation of light and shadow in his paintings. 'Grey', he explained, 'embodies passages of time, for me. It is mysterious - and I like its softness; also its simplicity, and space.' Moreover, he considered his paintings to be fields of energy, as well as an investigation between the physical and metaphysical properties of grey. He always used the square as a format, which he divided into 28, 29 or 30 uniformly sized horizontal lines. Each line is stroked vertically, progressing from being lighter at the top of the work to growing gradually darker towards the bottom. The movement of light is so subtly executed that at times the effect is almost impossible to distinguish. Howell's extraordinary studies in light and colour challenge us to explore the very fundamentals of perception. Howell's work is held in numerous private and public collections, including: the Albright-Knox Art Museum, Buffalo, NY, USA; the von Bartha Collections, Basel, Switzerland; Das Kleine Museum - Kultur auf der Peunt, Weissenstadt, Germany; Das Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany; and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Estában Vicente, Segovia, Spain.

'My life is a big experiment. Anything that supports the direction my art is taking is an affirmation.' - James Howell. James Howell (1935-2014) was raised in Kansas City and first trained as an architect before becoming an artist. Although he ceased practicing architecture almost as soon as he qualified, he retained a strong spatial sensitivity, and was meticulously attentive to his living and working environments. For more than half his career he lived and painted in the Pacific Northwest of America. In his sixties he remarried and moved to New York, occupying a studio apartment on Perry Street, in Greenwich Village, where he worked for the rest of his life. In the mid-1990s, Howell began working on a long-term project called *Series 10*. He used meticulous calculations and measurements to determine in advance a specific achromatic hue. He divided the square canvas into a series of horizontal bands to produce the perception of a smooth, subtle gradation between two values. In each band, he mixed percentages of titanium white, ivory black and raw umber pigment, revealing a seemingly infinite array of shades of grey. He recognised that by prescribing clear parameters for his work, he would be free to pursue endless variations. James Howell's *Series 10* paintings possess a powerful atmospheric force; they exude an ambience that appears greater and more extensive than the physical parameters of their frames. In Howell's words, they are 'studies of shifting light and shadow, without the interference of any form'. Noted for his experimental approach to colour theory, Howell meticulously studied the parameters of the colour grey, fascinated by its unlimited tonal possibilities. The sublime and minimal are both apparent within the gradation of light and shadow in his paintings. 'Grey', he explained, 'embodies passages of time, for me. It is mysterious - and I like its softness; also its simplicity, and space.' Moreover, he considered his paintings to be fields of energy, as well as an investigation between the physical and metaphysical properties of grey. He always used the square as a format, which he divided into 28, 29 or 30 uniformly sized horizontal lines. Each line is stroked vertically, progressing from being lighter at the top of the work to growing gradually darker towards the bottom. The movement of light is so subtly executed that at times the effect is almost impossible to distinguish. Howell's extraordinary studies in light and colour challenge us to explore the very fundamentals of perception. Howell's work is held in numerous private and public collections, including: the Albright-Knox Art Museum, Buffalo, NY, USA; the von Bartha Collections, Basel, Switzerland; Das Kleine Museum - Kultur auf der Peunt, Weissenstadt, Germany; Das Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany; and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Estában Vicente, Segovia, Spain.

Alistair Rider is Senior Lecturer in the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews, in Scotland. He writes about European and North American art from the 1950s to the present day, and has a special interest in abstraction, particularly minimal art. He is the co-editor of an anthology of writings on Carl Andre from 2008, as well as a book-length study of the artist, *Carl Andre: Things in their Elements*, from 2011. He is currently preparing a study on long-term artists' projects since 1960.