

### Anne Hironnelle: In the Layers

In my darkest night,  
when the moon was covered  
and I roamed through wreckage,  
a nimbus-clouded voice  
directed me:  
“Live in the layers,  
not on the litter.”  
Though I lack the art  
to decipher it,  
no doubt the next chapter  
in my book of transformations  
is already written.  
I am not done with my changes.

—Stanley Kunitz, excerpt from “The Layers”

To encounter the folded-paper drawings of Anne Hironnelle is to witness decades of artistic evolution that began with traditional clay vessels. In her latest series, Hironnelle arranges segments—like stanzas in a poem, like verses in a song—making visual alliterations in her constructions, creating harmonious studies of layered, elemental forms. Hironnelle has done this from the beginning, no matter the medium: she has arranged forms like a composer of prose, of music, but hers are physical, visual. From parsing vessels into drawing and into pure sculpture, to exploring color via saturation, then accentuation, now in a duet of the two, Hironnelle has innovated upon tradition, transcending boundaries, finding and layering new ways of expression that defy easy categorization. The artist herself also resists classification: she is a ceramist turned sculptor turned painter turned collagist who makes drawings with folded tracing paper—she inhabits each one of these roles, in concert, and each informs her most recent series. *In the Layers* is at once the culmination of everything Hironnelle has done and a jumping off into uncharted ground.

#### **(r)evolutions**

Early on, wanting to draw but not knowing how to begin, Hironnelle used one of her stoneware vessels as a guide, outlining its profile and its opening (from above, in vertical and horizontal views) onto separate sheets of tracing paper, then using her potter’s wheel to blur at least two of the drawings, further activating the superimposed compositions, and three dimensions became two [fig. 1]. Layering the drawings struck a chord—the papers were like clay, able to be added, taken away, “nothing precious,” as Hironnelle says—and so began her practice of transforming sculpture into drawing. She then enacted this idea of deconstruction with vessels, and they became pure sculpture [fig. 2].

When she took her ceramic forms from the pedestal to the wall, in essence contracting three dimensions towards two with a series like *Abouturns*, these too became subjects of a later drawing series [figs. 3-4]. In the *Combines*, Hirondele further abstracted the sculptural abstractions by floating them, layered, excerpted, like lines from poetry or a chorus from song.

More sculpture-drawings series followed: *Tumbles* precipitated *Tumble Drawings* [figs. 5-6], and *Circle Disks* presaged *Aperture Drawings* [figs. 7-8]. In these drawings, the sculptures are represented in their entireties rather than as disparate elements, though still in layers. It's important to emphasize that the drawings came *after* the sculptures. Hirondele was working out how to draw from pieces she made. She was exploring the very essence of sculpture while making drawings that are more than drawings, for they have dimension, too, in the layers. In the process, Hirondele was both revealing and obscuring in these constructions, analyzing the parts while making the wholes, offering us another way of looking at sculpture.

Hirondele's *Partners* series [fig. 9] represents the next step toward pure drawing. While her ceramic works had become narrative long before (from the moment she stopped making functional vessels), with *Partners*, an interaction was made very clear not only with the title, but with a new medium: wood. Still employing elemental forms (circle, triangle, square, rectangle), there is playfulness in Hirondele's arrangements and their parts' defiance of gravity: the elements are interdependently independent. Here, too, the subsequent drawings mark a change, as their layers seem to meld into one unified surface, bold in their frontality [fig. 10]. Hirondele has said that this series led to her current folded-paper works, a revelation until we look closely at both series and discover that the forms that were just touching in two and three dimensions in *Partners* have now become fully integrated and enmeshed in these latest folded-paper pieces.

With all of the couplings of sculpture and drawing over the past two decades, Hirondele was laying the blueprint for her latest series, which is distinct from what she's done before. The suites of folded-paper drawings in *In the Layers* have no three-dimensional antecedents: *sui generis*, these works, while simultaneously a continuation of her method and the latest innovation within her process, are a departure. Their lack of referent and untethered-ness mark a new direction for the artist. As we'll see, her attitudes toward color and her process have also undergone quiet (r)evolutions within the overall constancy and dedication of Hirondele's art practice.

## hue

Hirondele's use of color has a trajectory that resolves in an authorial way in *In the Layers*. As with drawing, she was hesitant to use color at first, keeping her sculptures white and related drawings black, white, and grey. After initially using primary colors, Hirondele crossed the divide into bright green, dark purple, and orange, saturating the *Abouturns*, coating the insides of the *Tumbles*, accentuating the *Circle Disks*. Respective drawings followed suit, their layers holding separate aspects and hues of their three-dimensional counterparts. Now, with the works in *In the Layers*, Hirondele brings her years of exploration and experimentation with

color into sharp focus, using pigments to both steep and highlight in arrangements that are at once contrapuntal and complimentary. Atop backgrounds of blue, blue-grey, or orange, some of the folded-paper drawings offer top notes of bright colors that define specific points in the layers and folds; others rely simply on the doubled or quadrupled tracing papers for their definition.

The ground colors—the blues warm and the orange cool—have been painstakingly invented by Hironnelle, the opposite end of the path from using only primary colors. She mixes them from a combination of hardware store latex paint and Golden acrylics, keeping sample swatches with detailed notes on measurements in her studio for reference: it can sometimes take a day to come to the color she wants. Hironnelle sees inspiration in other artists' colors, speaking of a "Carmen Herrera blue" and a "Carol Bove pink," as she experiments with hues of her own making.

Hironnelle gives us the range of her explorations into color (including the lack thereof, with monochrome tiers in *Unfolding* as well as in the foursome centered on water); she introduces bands of colors, like guideposts, limning the folded and layered papers in *Burst, Opening*, and the *Divide* pieces; and she also shows us virtuosity with color as leitmotif, referring to her inspirations in art, poetry, and music. In *Miró Quartet*, Hironnelle recalls the Spanish painter-sculptor-ceramist's use of color and line interchangeably, taking turns accenting each other, faceting sections of the whole. *Eliot Quartet* and *Take Five* both have syncopated arrangements, their folds and layers lit up, visual inflections akin to quatrains or beats within the larger context of the recitation of balanced forms.

### **process**

Hironnelle used different combinations of iron-oxide glazes on her early vessels, unable to predict their outcome upon the finely turned and tuned clay forms. She embraced the uncertainty to great effect, creating objects of transformational simplicity, their precise forms counterbalanced by the roughness and imperfections of their patinas. Fast forward to the latest folded-paper drawings with their seemingly perfect angles and edges—studies in geometrical accuracy. Closer looking reveals the hand of the artist: beautifully imprecise in their joinings, not quite achieving perfection, coming gracefully short, like the black lines of a Mondrian painting stopping before the edge of the canvas—our eyes complete the line, the perfection, but in reality, it's not so.

Hironnelle creates the frameworks and lets her hand show in the layers. Within those structures, there is a balance of control and freeform, and her interjections of color recall trills in music, rhymes in couplets, windows in walls. Her sensitivity to the materials she works with is reflected in their outcome: always elegant, seemingly simple but imbued with an engaging complexity when we stop to look closely. The architectural meets the organic; the precise meets the *wabi-sabi*, all coalescing in her distinctive style. Her thoughtful deliberations with paper attain the level of visual meditations.

Images:



fig. 1 *American Craft* magazine cover, December 2000-January 2001



fig. 2 *Guggenheim Teapot*, 2012, stoneware, 9 x 13 x 8 inches

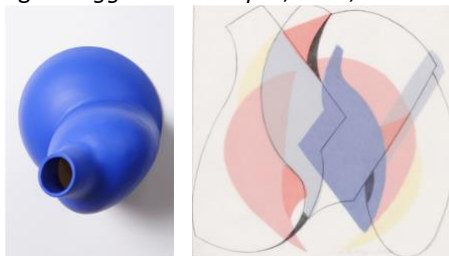


fig. 3 *Abouturn 33*, 2006, stoneware and paint, 12 x 12 x 11 inches

fig. 4 *Combine Drawing 6*, 2007, graphite and Prismacolor on tracing paper, 10 x 10 inches



fig. 5 *Tumble 5*, 2014, stoneware and paint, 8 ½ x 8 ½ x 7 inches

fig. 6 *Tumble Drawing L-1*, 2017, graphite and Prismacolor on tracing paper, 16 x 16 inches



fig. 7 *Circle Disk 15-4*, 2015, stoneware and paint, 14 ½ x 14 ½ x 1 inches

fig. 8 *Aperture Drawing 3*, 2016, graphite and Prismacolor on tracing paper, 16 x 16 inches



fig. 9 *Partners 16-3*, 2016, stoneware, paint, and birch wood, 13 x 20 x 4 inches

fig. 10 *Partners Drawing 1-L*, 2016, 17 x 23 inches