

I felt, as I progressed with after-image exercises, that the form (circle, square, cross) was far too dominant? You become so aware of colour or shape, that the aspect of colour becomes completely overshadowed. Colour is the subject/matter in painting. Form and content must always be indistinguishable.

I thought that if I have, through the same shape, the shape would get lost in the surface.

Quotes of Michael Kiefer from conversation with Charles Rowland Coppin 1979

A form loses its identity if it is repeated often enough, and soon I began using nearly identical blocks of contrasting colour in the belief that they would build up a sensation of colour areas rather than a sharply defined colour image.

"Afterimage Colour" Art Centre, University of Sussex, 1967

The after image produced resistance in painting. The artist remained on the surface of the painting and repetition reduced it to anonymity thus giving priority to colour reading... a sensation of colour, or a colour field as it was called. However, as a formal device the colour could be realised with no more than two colours.

Michael Kiefer, comments, 2002

I considered the 'strip' sufficiently anonymous to be used as a vehicle for colour, but essentially, for two colours, simply because you don't need any more. To introduce a third colour... requires an arbitrary decision. If you add complications unnecessarily, you merely add more and more confusion.

While I was engaged with the search for a solution to the third colour, a very important article appeared in "Scientific America", in May 1963, on what was called the Möbius... a modern translation is 'Interference Pattern'. I found it absolutely beautiful. The whole principle on which the Möbius is based is that if you have two bands crossed by a third at a single angle, the effect it produces is an entirely new colour.

Quotes of Michael Kiefer from conversation with Charles Rowland Coppin 1979

The strip is infinite in length but ends arbitrarily at the picture's edge. In order to contain the shape I introduced the wave. Light waves in waves, not straight lines and waves are measurable.

Michael Kiefer, comments, 2002

I began to use a wavy line in my paintings in 1964. At that time it suggested itself as a way of extending the Möbius pattern, but the fact that a wave has a length and height, soon revealed other possibilities.

Quotes of Michael Kiefer from a conversation with Charles Rowland Coppin 1979

The waven in its 2D (parallel) form is fixed. In 3D it varies with the viewing angle. I wanted to continue to painting the wave seen from all angles and not merely from behind its most self-serving orientation. I considered, 2002

My interest in the relation with the fact that I brought two wave surfaces into communion with each other.

"System" Whitechapel Art Gallery, March 1972

The colours... "When I was painting two waves meeting at right angles and wondering what shape the line of intersection will take. I found it out like a piece of wire and bend the two profiles at right angles to each other. I can do this with my eyes in front of a flat surface. I can record its profiles at regular intervals as a rotation. Finally in the manner of a computer I can map the contours into colour fields.

When you move your eyes the after-image moves with you. As a result, should you transfer your gaze to a more distant location, the more distant surface, the larger the after-image would appear to be in relation to that surface, instead of smaller as one would expect. My reason for having painted the after-image so faint was that I wanted the spectator's own "after-image" to become apparent to him.

I am seeking a more organic shape, which will nevertheless retain rational roots. Combining two geometric waves on an X Y axis gives greater control and variety (one can make a genuine mix from a combination of X and Y curves) or the graph produced by two compass curves, which are either added or subtracted from each other, experiences such a curve.

Michael Kiefer, 20 June 1992 letter
No. 20 (accompanying 19 drawings for the Henry Moore Archive)

... If we regard the column as an object equivalent to any other object in nature, then it raises certain questions about perception. How can we comprehend an object which we can never see it all at one time? Can we build up a pattern out of successive views which would present an immediate and synthetic image? Can such image be regarded as an act assuming it to be a faithful reflection of the object and devoid of the artist's personal comment? Can we present the information so that a computer could be programmed to read a three dimensional shape? Does the computer help us to understand our own mental processes?

Michael Kiefer, unpublished text

Space is not a vacuum. It is a flux of energies albeit invisible unless we have access to the particle accelerator at Cern. However there is tension in the elastic...

Space is not empty, but a turmoil of energy – emotional, physical, intellectual, genetic – you name it! To express energy, I tried using elasticized cloth. The cloth allowed me to stretch or release the wavelength at will and to watch and to feel the effect as I did so. It was exciting and immediate. The image of Balmain was not planned, he just appeared out of the process.

Michael Kiefer, unpublished text

Elastic Rigid Frame
It is not the computer but woven elastic cloth which freed me from the lattice. The elastic is flexible and has a body dimension which involves the whole person in the creative act while at the same time functioning as an analogue device.

Michael Kiefer, comments, 2002

My work with stretched elastic is intended to show the tension and distortions between an ideal system and how the distortions and instabilities the ideal. In Poland in 1951 I felt the communal system being stretched by Solidarity, Margarete Drabent, an English woman, in a talk... on BBC's Critics Forum said "It's as though the effect of stretching and heating and pulling is to try and make the inalterable into the alterable into the form and precise. It is a kind of aesthetic attempt to square the circle, to turn the raw material of emotion into something pure and harmonious."

Drabent as above. I thought I should always be able to return to base.

Michael Kiefer, unpublished text

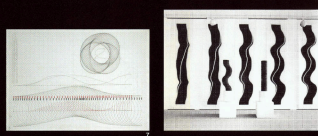
Doodee
Slicing the cloth made it more stretchable and magnified the transformation, which could be obtained from a single stretch.

Wastepaper Basket
... In my search for an expression of space the cloth proved itself to be most useful in limiting to one-way stretch. It therefore brought me back to elastic beading or steel springs, which would be free to stretch in all directions...

In its use to record the Springs I was contemplating notions of order from order to chaos.

... Space makes its own form, where internal and external forces meet in a tension. I found a flexible material which offered resistance to the tug of the elastic.

Michael Kiefer, unpublished text



I had been drawing of the wave as a simple line or band. In these drawings I explored it in the context of a grid. A grid is composed not only of lines but also of spaces, which become the structural elements.

Carving into Lucite, Milan Gallery, April 1973

But the concept itself, an infinite lattice as a means of locating myself in cosmic space, is no longer meaningful. Space becoming elastic.

Michael Kiefer, 16 June 1992 letter
(to accompany 9 drawings for the Henry Moore Archive)

The lattices were not right, not at all like the space I felt.

Waves Lattice, Transform

The lattice was restricting my freedom. I wanted to loosen it but without abandoning the principle of an underlying order that society acknowledges.

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Elastic Flexible Frame
The tension in the elastic was controlled by the frame in which it was set. (by using a ring) To achieve symmetry I wanted a flexible frame of flexible rods. The frame was now absorbed into the construction much as space is absorbed by gravity.

Michael Kiefer, comments, 2002

Space, as understood by Plato, is a complex and fragile equilibrium of force emanating from the Big Bang and equilibrium requires more than single forces, more than elastic rods to be used. So, by making a frame of flexible rods I hoped to make visible my notion of space as an unstable balance between opposing forces. I have been following two paths that of the column and the two space around it and now I wanted to find a conjunction of the two. Intuitively, I am drawn towards pattern for a solution. Pattern is a cultural expression not a general one. Pattern is a culture's response to what it understands as constituting its environment. The environment is never known but always an imaginative construction based on a feeling prompted by observation and experience. Examples that immediately come to mind are Celtic and Muslim patterns and the Song line of the Australian Aborigines. But what pattern in this scientific way have we formed of our own cosmos four and a half billion years after the Big Bang?

Michael Kiefer, A view over the channel, Patagonia, Katorstovart, 1994

Pentagon
The elastic construction made themselves, they excluded me. The pentagon reconceived me as a participant rather than an observer of their world. The pentagon lacks vertices, it points in all directions. It exerts a breathing space between neighbours, it can not define but can still form an army. It suggests a metaphor for water's materialized environment that rings true.

Michael Kiefer, comments, 2002

The pentagon felt interested me because of the odd number of its sides. It breaks the circuit of a wavy line drawn through the vertices. To draw the circle the line must be twisted out of its picture plane to form a saddle shape. But I was seeing a pattern of Penrose's tilings, which confirmed my interest. The picture made these tilings reminiscent of the swirls and eddies in a fast flowing stream, which appear and disappear as you look. However, I realized that I could not extend the pattern without understanding the rules that governed it. The rhythm in the pattern repeats but not regularly, and it is a pattern, which grows or diminishes in scale. Here was a pattern that was becoming changing as I looked from one spot to the next. With every sniff of my attention a new pathway would appear to liberate me, the viewer one. It was a pattern that could never be completed.

Michael Kiefer, unpublished text

All around us we confront a bewilderment of spaces, some shared, others private, some inherited, others acquired... nothing troubles me more than time and space and yet nothing troubles me less as I never think about them. Charles Lumsden. However painters think about space more than most people - they confront it on their canvases every day. They have to, it is part of their business to do so. I am not a painter.

It occupied the impressionists, it questioned the cubists, it has been a lifetime's preoccupation for me.

I find myself more and more interested in questioning space but it is a non-question since I have no answer.

Michael Kiefer, unpublished text

- illustrations:
- After image
 - 1 Ring Sun 1960, oil on canvas, 152 x 102 cm
 - Stripes
 - 2 Reflections 3 1964, oil on canvas, 107 x 74 cm
 - Moire
 - 3 Red Yellow Blue Moire 1964, oil on canvas, 91 x 69 cm
 - Wave
 - 4 First China 1966, oil on canvas, 218 x 147 cm
 - Column
 - 5 Colour Installation 1969, Bengalia sculpture
 - 6 Colour Column 4 1972, acrylic on canvas, 208 x 168 cm
 - 7 Disc Column Drawing 2 1984, ink on paper, 56 x 78 cm
 - 8 Katerina's Installation 1995, mixed media installation

- Wave lattice
- 9 Heart Landscape 1974, acrylic on canvas, 93 x 140 cm
 - 10 Emeralds Working Drawing 1993, ink on paper, 226 x 121 cm
 - 11 West Wind 1996, oil on canvas, 152 x 152 cm
 - 12 Elastic Rigid Frame
 - 13 Elastic Rigid Frame
 - 14 Elastic Rigid Frame
 - 15 Elastic Flexible Frame
 - 16 Translucence Sculpture 1989, fiberglass rod and elastic, 244 x 230 cm
 - 17 Installation, 1993 Musée des Beaux Arts, Vincennes

- Pentagon
- 17 Yellow and Blue Clusters 1999, colour pencil on paper, 76 x 86 cm
 - 18 Lycopodium 1999, ink cardboard and acrylic on board, 244 x 396 cm
 - 19 Manouche Laine 2001, acrylic and marble dust on board, 122 x 51 cm
 - 20 A Visit to a Vase from Outer Space 2001, acrylic on board, 244 x 366 cm

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Selections of Statements and Quotes: Alicja Włodzicka, Agnieszka Gut

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Lessons: "The reason why they are not eight?"

Fool: "Yes, indeed. That would make a good fool!"

William Shakespeare, King Lear

Michael Kiefer, "A view over the channel", Patagonia Katorstovart

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