

# Julia Morison

b.1952

Diploma in Graphic Design: Wellington Polytechnic

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This small pale painting is very odd. Made of interlocking wooden panels (some with craquelure),<sup>1</sup> *Whoopie @ 110 Degrees* appears to be buckling and bending in real space, projecting so its wide protruding centre is the closest part to the viewer, and its main directional alignment heading up towards the right. It looks double-jointed, as if the pieces of wood are all joined by hinges to make a rickety, staggered, steplike formation. In actual fact, it is perfectly flat.

The painting's converging sides imply a perspectival space where the top diamond at its upper edge is far away, and the bottom edge closest – like the conventions of aerial perspective in Chinese scroll paintings. Solid and angular, its chunky, seemingly warped, rectangles tumble like water from a mountain stream, while the thick bands that follow the edges show Morison's long interest in the innovative American painter, Frank Stella – particularly his shaped 'pinstripe' paintings of the mid-1960s (such as *Claro Que Si*, 1964). Unlike Stella's, Morison's contours are not parallel.

Several different textures and methods of patterning ensure that each section has its own distinctive character. The surface cracking is achieved by layering together incompatible oil and water-based varnishes. One panel has rows of holes as if prepared for little fence posts, and others have no holes or stripes at all. The different types are woven together as if the forms are overlapping and extended.

At the same time as Morison constructed this painting, she also made some texturally similar, but much bigger works like *Crossing The Rubicon* for Telecom Prospect, the 2001 City Gallery national survey.

The surface qualities of all these works allude to the patina of pale cracked sunbaked clay, as do the rows of holes and path-like lines. The added planes of distortion caused by the joined shapes bring a touch of humour, especially after the solid painting is already positioned vertically on a wall. They make it look like a flapping banner, or a swinging knotted tie made of mud. The alternating glossy and matt surfaces emphasise the doubling up of the painting's form.

In the mid-1980s, clay was one of 10 symbolic materials (like blood, gold, excrement, lead) used by Morison in a series of spectacularly ambitious projects involving ancient knowledge

systems such as alchemy and Kabbala, but blended with Modernist corporate logos and surrealist collage. The work from the late-1990s on moved away from such symbolic substances, but as *Whoopie @ 110 Degrees* shows, some paintings still retain the surface appearance of those elements.

Morison's interest in parallel bands and implied lines, developed later in projects like *Gargantua's Petticoat* (2006) and *Myriorama* (2008), but on a massive scale using installation. This intimate little abstraction, with its zigzagging planes, is a compact sampler of many attributes Morison has explored in other stages of her extremely varied career.

## John Hurrell

<sup>1</sup> A network of fine cracks in the paint or varnish of an artwork.

### Galleries and museums:

[www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz](http://www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz)

[www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz](http://www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz)

[www.govetbrewster.com](http://www.govetbrewster.com)

[www.tepapa.govt.nz](http://www.tepapa.govt.nz)

[www.64zero3.com](http://www.64zero3.com)

### Articles:

Wood, A.P. 'Fugues And Labyrinths: Julia Morison's A Loop Around A Loop'. *Art New Zealand*, 121.

### Books:

Clark, T. and Curnow, W. (1991). *Pleasures and Dangers: Artists of the '90s*, Moët & Chandon Art Foundation in association with Longman Paul, Auckland, pp. 70–94.

Horrocks, S. and R. (1991). *Julia Morison Interview*. Clark and Curnow, *Pleasures and Dangers: Artists Of The 90s*, Longman Paul.

Paton, J. (2006). *Julia Morison/A Loop Around A Loop*, Christchurch, Dunedin Art Gallery.

### Web search:

Frank Stella

