Kettle's Yard is pleased to announce a major solo exhibition of Howardena Pindell (b. 1943, Philadelphia) spanning the artist’s six-decade career and including paintings, works on paper and video. ‘A New Language’ will trace the development of Pindell’s experiments in artistic form, and examine her work as exemplary in articulating empowerment and responding to racism from the 1970s to the present day.

‘A New Language’ is Pindell’s first solo institutional exhibition in the UK, organised by the Fruitmarket, Edinburgh in collaboration with Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge and Spike Island, Bristol.

The exhibition takes its title from a text by the artist; writing in A Documentation, 1980-1988, Pindell declared, “I am an artist. I am not part of a so-called ‘minority’, ‘new’ or ‘emerging’ or ‘a new audience’. These are all terms used to demean, limit, and make people of color appear to be powerless. We must evolve a new language which empowers us and does not cause us to participate in our own disenfranchisement.”

Pindell studied art at Boston and Yale Universities before starting her career at MoMA, New York, in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. The first Black woman on the museum’s curatorial staff, she worked there for twelve years before resigning in 1979 in protest against widespread industry reluctance to condemn Donald Newman’s Artists Space exhibition ‘The N***er Drawings’. Pindell was a founding member of A.I.R (Artists in Residence), the first women’s cooperative gallery in New York, which launched in 1972.

The exhibition will open with a group of works showing the abstract artistic language developed by Pindell in the late 1960s and early 1970s, one that focused on the circle, the grid and use of repetition. Pindell pioneered several techniques over this period, including spray-painting layers of paint through stencils to create haze effects on large canvases, as well as accumulating thick layers of acrylic on unstretched canvases which were nailed directly to walls. Predominantly white and cream, it was this latter series that saw Pindell begin to affix paper chads – remainders from the holes punched to create the stencils – directly to the surface of her work. Increasingly Pindell allowed other non-conventional materials – hair, thread, glitter and perfume – to fix on the surface of these works, challenging dominant contemporary styles like hard-edged abstraction and minimalism in favour of texture and sensuality.

In addition to these abstract paintings, the exhibition will include works on paper from this period. These works range from experiments with sequential numbering on graph paper to diaphanous tracing paper assemblages and ‘chad’ collages. Although these works are abstract, Pindell has explained how the numbers, circles and text fragments have personal and social resonance. She has connected her repeated use of the circle to a circular mark used to denote glasses and tableware for Black patrons at restaurants she encountered in the segregated Southern states as a child.
During her time at MoMA Pindell promoted the work of artists of colour and women artists, serving on the museum’s Byers Committee to investigate racial exclusion in acquisitions and exhibitions. This activism became difficult to sustain as Pindell faced criticism from colleagues struggling to make – or resistant to – change, as well as artists of colour outside the museum who fought for quicker and more meaningful change. Her commitment to abstraction throughout the 1970s also meant her work was often deemed unpoltical, at a time when figuration and explicit engagement with anti-racism were favoured by both the Black Arts Movement and the white establishment. Following a car accident in 1979, Pindell began to bring her own story into her work, incorporating figuration for the first time to help regain memories lost due to a head injury. She developed a sense of social and political urgency, and a conviction that the pressures, prejudices and exclusions she faced as a Black artist and as a woman needed to be part of her art.

Pindell's important video work from this period, *Free, White and 21* (1980), will be shown. The work is a dialogue manque between Pindell and a white feminist, who the artist also plays, in which Pindell describes instances of racist violence that the white feminist first disputes and then aggressively dismisses. Made for the landmark exhibition ‘Dialectics of Isolation: Third World Women Artists’ at A.I.R. Gallery, the work powerfully decries the inequalities of the Women’s Liberation Movement. Another video work, *Rope, Fire, Water*, will also be shown. Though it was conceived at the same time as *Free, White and 21*, Pindell could not find the support to make *Rope, Fire, Water* until 2020. The video is a meditation on racialised violence in the United States, connecting the brutalities of enslavement with torture committed in Jim Crow states and police violence in the present day. Made in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, the video ends with an elegiac appeal to remember those killed through racialised violence.

The exhibition will also present two important strains in Pindell's later practice, her memorial works and her shaped abstract canvases. *Columbus* (2020), a mixed-media work on canvas and a companion to *Rope, Fire, Water*, is an example of Pindell's memorial work and exposes the violent subjugation perpetrated by the 15th-century explorer who is still celebrated as the United States’ founding father. Her shaped abstract canvases reveal the multiple ways in which Pindell combined political content, autobiography and abstraction after 1980. Works such as *Diallo or Separate but Equal Genocide: AIDS* refer to specific events and commemorate those lost to state violence and inaction. While these works incorporate text and symbolic imagery, they are also highly worked painterly surfaces. For many of these works, like the more abstract *Tarot: Hanged Man*, Pindell made the surfaces from strips of canvas stitched together. The uneven forms and jagged sutures of these works interrupt Pindell’s worked surfaces, exposing taught thread and gallery walls.

The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication, *Howardena Pindell: A New Language*, edited by Fiona Bradley. It includes writing drawn from across Pindell’s career, along with essays by Anna Lovatt, Adeze Wilford and Amy Tobin.

A symposium accompanying the exhibition will take place on 30 September 2022 at Kettle’s Yard, organised in collaboration with the Centre for American Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art and the Department of History of Art, University of Cambridge.
Notes to Editors
For all PRESS enquiries please contact Rees & Co:
Rosanna Hawkins | rosanna@reesandco.com | +44 (0)20
3137 8776 | +44 (0)7910 092634

About Howardena Pindell


Pindell’s work is in the permanent collections of major museums internationally and her achievements as an artist are equalled by her role as a curator, educator and activist. She was the first Black female curator at the Museum of Modern Art, and a co-founder of the pioneering feminist A.I.R. Gallery. In 1979, she began teaching at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, where she remains a professor.


About Kettle’s Yard
Kettle’s Yard is one of Britain’s best galleries - a beautiful and unique house with a distinctive modern art collection, and a gallery exhibiting modern and contemporary art. Supporting this is an established learning and community engagement programme, archive, and programme of chamber concerts. In February 2018, Kettle’s Yard reopened after a two-year development by architect Jamie Fobert. The new Kettle’s Yard includes exhibition galleries, education spaces, a café and welcome areas. Kettle’s Yard’s mission is to contribute to society by inspiring and engaging audiences through art, learning and research of the highest quality. We believe that great art should not be the privilege of the few, but for everyone. Our values reflect Kettle’s Yard’s creator Jim Ede’s support for artists and belief in art’s power to make us look again and change how we act in the world.

www.kettlesyard.co.uk

About the Fruitmarket
Fruitmarket is a free, public space for culture in the heart of Edinburgh, which provides inspiration and opportunity for artists and audiences. We programme, develop and present world-class exhibitions, commissions, publications, performances, events and engagement activities, opening up the artistic process. Creativity makes space for meaning, and we create a welcoming space for people to think with contemporary art and culture in ways that are helpful to them – for free. Further information at fruitmarket.co.uk. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

www.fruitmarket.co.uk

About Spike Island
Spike Island supports, produces and presents contemporary art and culture across an 80,000 square foot former industrial building in Bristol. Its diverse artistic programme includes free major exhibitions, events and engagement activities taking place on-site and online. Championing outstanding work by emerging and underrepresented local, national and international artists, the programme enhances access to contemporary art for audiences from all backgrounds. Alongside its public offer, Spike Island directly supports artists through new commissions, over 70 subsidised studios, and sector-leading artist development opportunities that widen access to its programme and facilities. Its Exhibition Services business supports the bespoke production and installation of artists’ film and video throughout the UK and internationally. Spike Island is home to a dynamic community of hundreds of artists and creative businesses, working in flexible, affordable workspaces, alongside UWE Bristol’s Fine Art department, Spike Print Studio, and café bar Emmeline.

www.spikeisland.org.uk