



Peter Logan: Kinesis

Messums West, 10 May – 21 July 2025

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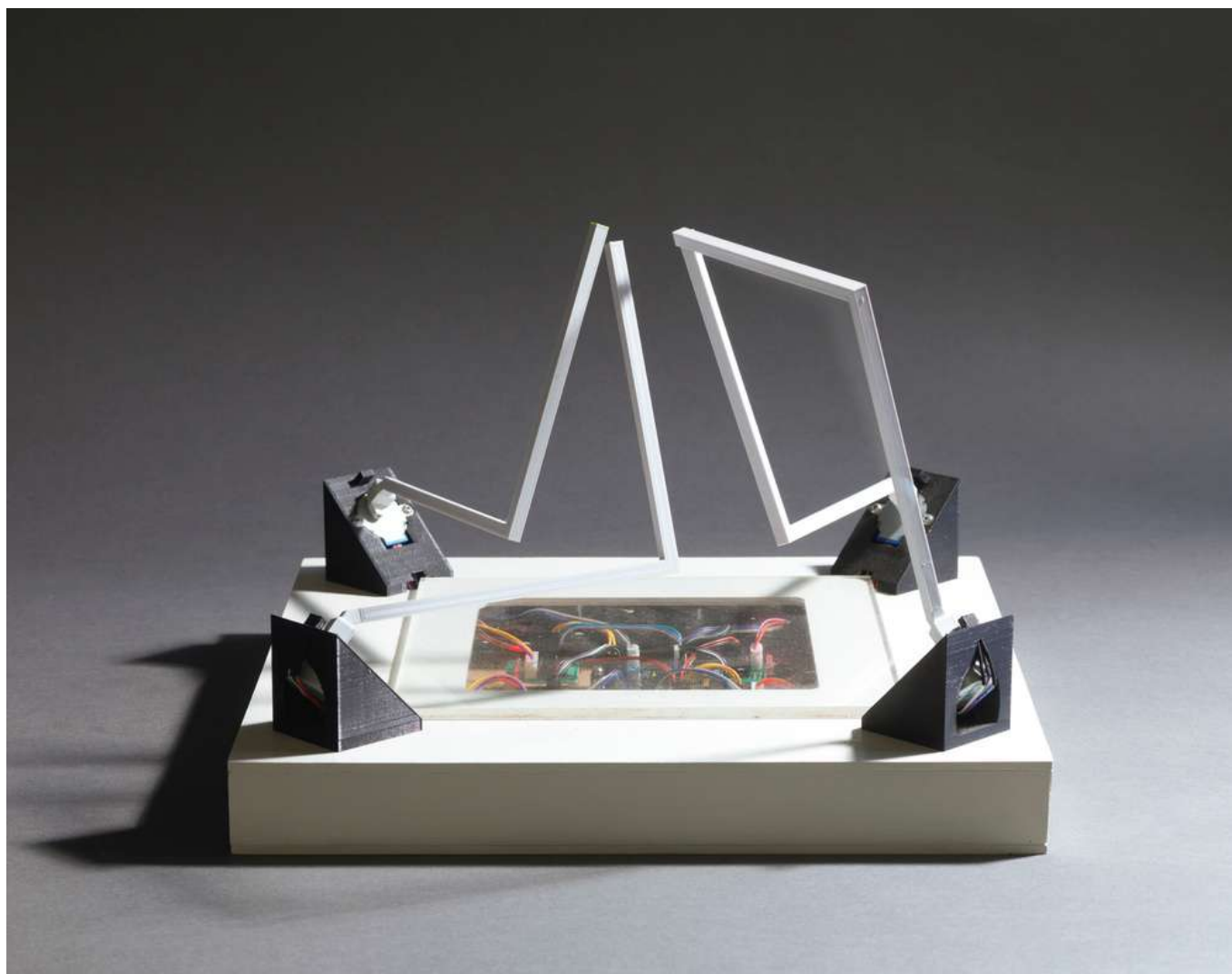
Movement takes centre stage at Messums West with a solo exhibition by pioneering kinetic sculptor Peter Logan (b. 1943). Extending around the Messums West site, *Kinesis* presents for sale, for the first time, the artist's exquisite working models, maquettes and drawings, alongside a series of his large-scale kinetic sculptures, distributed around the grounds of the gallery. The pieces on show are a cross-section of Logan's life's work, demonstrating his developments and remarkable innovations in sculpture, and exhibiting some of his most important works. The exhibition also showcases several extraordinary small electronic maquettes inspired by key early pieces destroyed in a devastating fire in 1979, which Logan now hopes to recreate. The exhibition is also a unique opportunity to see Logan's critically acclaimed 'Square Dance' (1969) (a version of which is in the permanent collection of the Tate Gallery), which will be on show in the magnificent 13th century Tithe Barn, accompanied by an electronic sound score composed especially for the piece by Brian Hodgson.

Born in Witney, Oxfordshire, in 1943, Logan studied sculpture at Oxford School of Art, (1961-63) and Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts (1963-66) under Robert Medley, before enrolling at the Slade School of Fine Art (1966-68), where he specialised in Theatre and Film Studies. His tutor at the Slade instructed him to attend the theatre at least three times per week, and Logan enthusiastically obliged and quickly fell in with a group of emerging and established dancers, choreographers and musicians associated with The Place, who taught him the physical, visual and intellectual language of dance.

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Logan began to incorporate this knowledge into his sculptural practice, creating kinetic work based on the principles of dance choreography. He bought small electric motors from Army Surplus shops, which could be found all over London in the 1960s, and used light aluminium tubing, and all manner of other components, including balloons and tree trunks, to create pieces which illustrated carefully choreographed sequences of movement. Logan stresses that the physical sculpture he creates is not in fact the work of art; the 'hardware' is the necessary tool which performs the specific movement that is the art. 'The purity of the movement is the sculpture. It is an illogical argument. You have to see it to know it', he says. Thus, his sculptures are conduits, like individual dancers interpreting and performing a routine, or musicians playing from a score, and he has never been afraid to revisit old pieces to hone their mechanisms in order to create a more effective rendition of the performance. Therefore, although many of his pieces are editioned, each is subtly technically different from the last and so, in this sense, they are variants, rather than replicas.

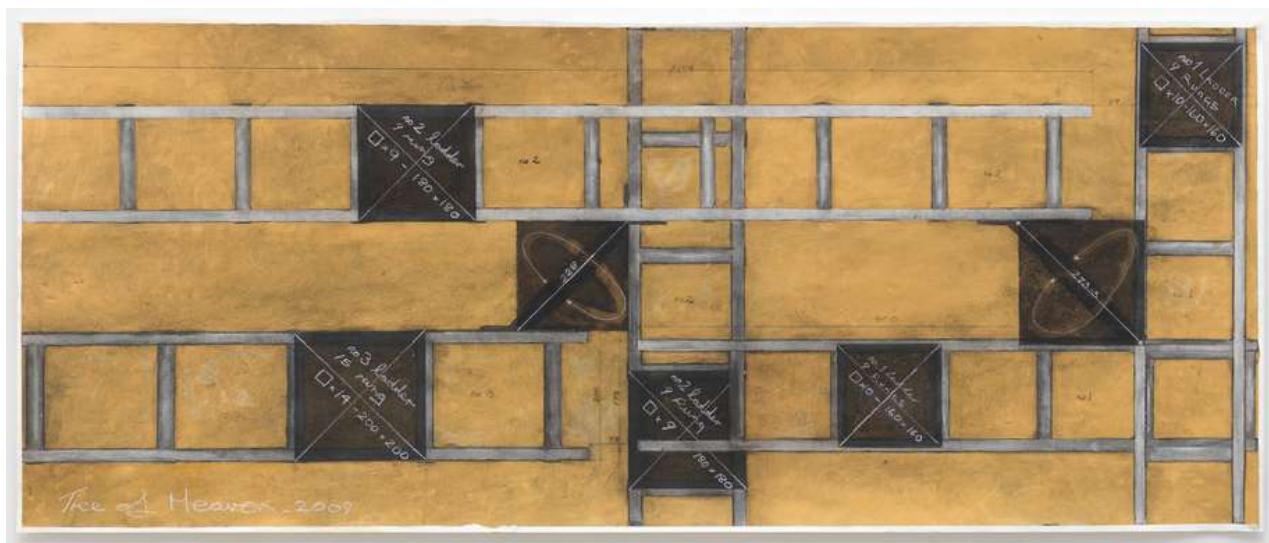


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Each of Logan's kinetic pieces derives from a fascination with elements of performance in the abstract; however, having seen projects by Schlemmer and Bauhaus M.B., Logan decided that the most inhibiting single factor for the expression of movement was the stage itself. He found that he preferred to use found open spaces for the presentation of mechanical performances and this, as well as the scale of structures he began to create, then brought the work into more recognised sculptural terms. Each structure describes spatial relationships, with their rotary motion investigating physicality, tension, rhythm and time. The sculptures present individual original performances, meticulously choreographed by the artist and inspired by a range of stimuli, from quiet incidents of movement observed in everyday life, such as the gentle falling of a feather or a leaf, or the sweep of a dancer's hand, to an image such as the 12th century 'Ladder of Divine Ascent' icon in the monastery of St Catherine in Egypt, which prompted Logan's 'Tree of Heaven', composed of interlocking ladders that dance in the wind. Every piece has a relationship with the human body in some way, and Logan therefore describes his work as 'minimalist', rather than 'abstract'.

An extremely humble man, Logan has never been afraid to ask for help. Although a highly skilled craftsman (as testified to by his delicately crafted, entirely functional conceptual models), he was never particularly drawn to technical manufacturing processes and recognises his own limitations in the field of engineering. His work has evolved over decades of collaboration with leading mechanical engineers and technical machinists from around the globe. 'Engineers are incredibly generous', he says, and 'good teachers'. Moving parts add a host of complications to an artwork and Logan stresses the vital importance of precision in the manufacture of his work. He was told early on that, for an engineer, a drawing is a contract, and so learnt the art of technical drawing, specifying every detail of what needed to be created in order to realise his vision of movement as form.



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His process is characterised by a sequence of key stages, each of equal importance. First, he conceives of an idea based on an observation, and illustrates it in pencil, charcoal or pastel in large drawings which combine observational drawing with abstract geometry, in which the feeling of the final sculpture begins to emerge. Then Logan composes a choreography based on this concept, recording the movement he wishes to achieve using a special form of dance notation. Once satisfied with his choreography, Logan begins to design a three-dimensional structure which can perform the movements. He initially creates this in balsa wood, and then in a more finished working model (often several models) imagining the shapes, proportions and mechanisms of the final sculpture. This stage often involves Logan consulting with engineers and technicians to work out the materials and practicalities of the full-scale piece and corresponds with detailed technical drawings which Logan creates by hand that are necessary for the accurate fabrication of the final work. Only once the drawings have been made and Logan is satisfied will he pass the designs onto engineers who manufacture the work – although even this stage is conducted in close collaboration with the artist, and the work is brought back to Logan's studio for him to complete personally.

The finished sculptures are feats of engineering, and their immense beauty lies in the precision of their movements, achieved through Logan's infallible eye for detail. Alongside finished sculptures and working models and maquettes, the exhibition at Messums West presents the vast archive of drawings and literature for 'Fandango' – the centrepiece of the Long Gallery exhibition – demonstrating the level of conceptual and technical work which goes into the creation of each piece.

Logan was an early pioneer of digital art – part of a group of international artists in the 1960s to embrace this relatively new and constantly advancing technology as a medium for creative expression, developing work set within strict scientific parameters. His first kinetic works moved with constantly rotating motors, but, later, he began to experiment with digital programming, enabling him to incorporate more and more elaborate movements. He also began to think more carefully about the sustainability of his practice and has, over the years, transitioned from using mains power to solar, and has sought to use the most efficient motors possible – each arm of his monumental 'Square Dance' sculpture (a version of which will shortly be going on public display at Tate Britain) uses a single one-watt motor. Over the past 40 years, he has also embraced the exciting unpredictability of wind power, developing sculptures which still carry out their choreography, but incorporate an element of chance and chaos too. 'Chaordic' is the word he uses to describe the movement of these pieces – a set of distinct kinetic patterns occurring in a random order dictated by the prevailing winds. 'The wind wants to destroy', he says, 'its object is to flatten'. Logan has spent a large portion of his career defying this tendency of nature, creating epic and intriguing sculptures which captivate the eye and inspire the imagination.

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Many of Logan's important early pieces were destroyed in a studio fire in 1979, however, over the past few years he has begun to reimagine several of them, creating initial mechanical maquettes in the hope that they can be commissioned and realised on a large scale. Even in their diminutive size, their movements are hugely emotive. Like the dancers who first inspired him, Logan has found his language through movement.

Logan's work can be found in important collections, including the Tate Gallery, London, and has been exhibited in many international institutions and public spaces around the globe, including the Royal Academy of Arts, Whitechapel Gallery, Hayward Gallery and National Theatre in London; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; and the Museo Guggenheim, Bilbao; the Ville de Saint Nazaire; and the Hakone Museums in Japan.



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Square Dance

1969

Aluminium with automated control unit

210 x 360 x 360 cm

Exhibitions:

Permanent Collection, Tate Gallery, London (acquired 1970);

Akademie der Kunst, Berlin, March 1970;

Kinetics, Hayward Gallery, London, September–November 1970 (no numbers).

Literature:

Jasia Reichardt, 'Mechanical Ballet', in *Cosmorama*, July 1970, p.338, repr.

Image credit: Tate Gallery

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LONDON
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Maquette for Square Dance, 1969

2024

Mixed media with automated control unit

NFS – able to be commissioned as a large-scale kinetic sculpture for internal or external display.

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Maquette for Triangle, 1969

2025

Mixed media with automated control unit

NFS – able to be commissioned as a large-scale kinetic sculpture for internal or external display.

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Messums West, 10 May – 21 July 2025

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Maquette for Straws Circle, 1969

2025

Mixed media with automated control unit

NFS – able to be commissioned as a large-scale kinetic sculpture for internal or external display.

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Fandango (Solar Mobile)

1997

Aluminium with automated control unit

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LONDON
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Small Silver Pencil

1993

Aluminium on a stone base

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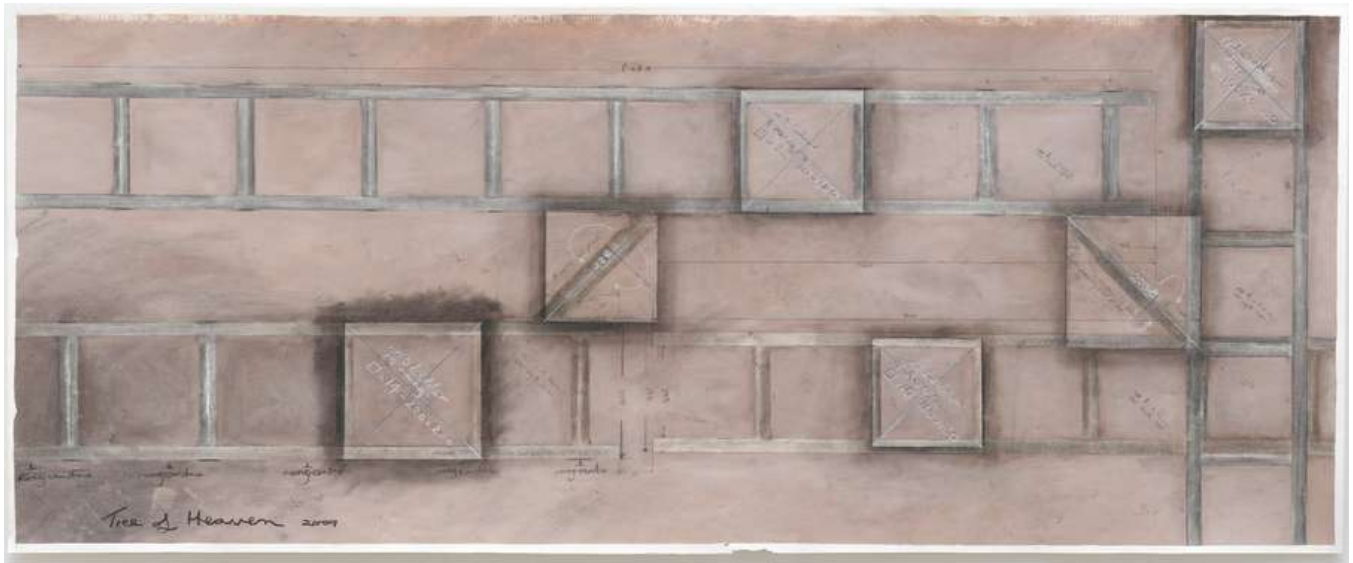
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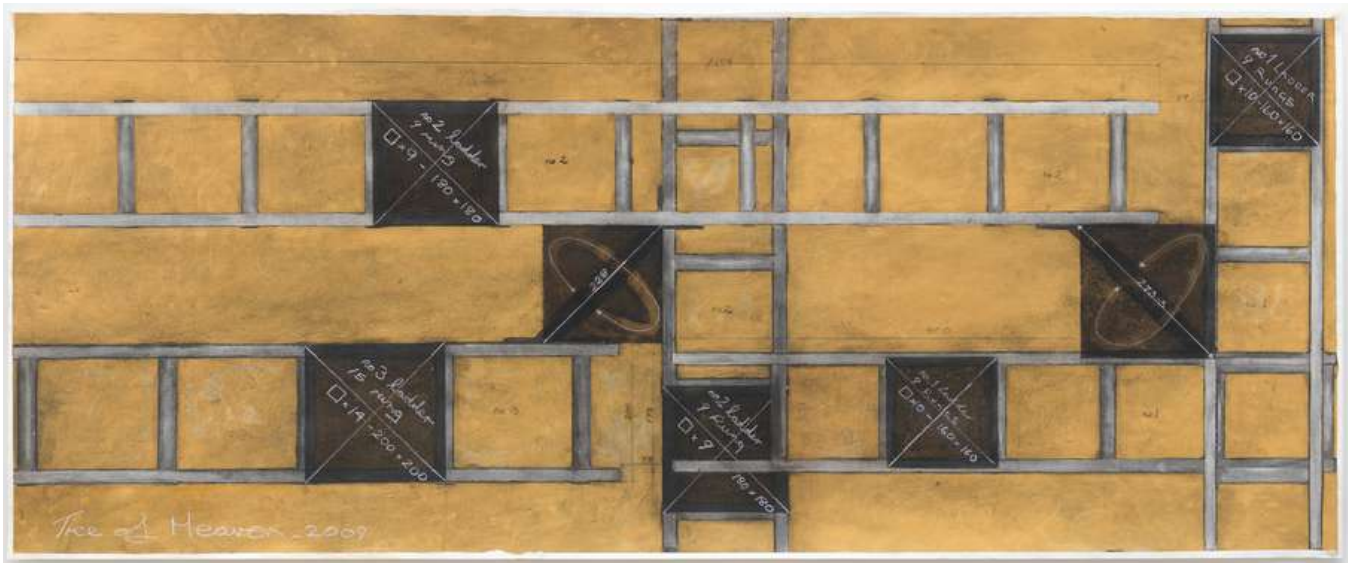


Tree of Heaven I

2009

Pencil and acrylic on paper

Unique



Tree of Heaven II

2009

Pencil and acrylic on paper

Unique

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Tree of Heaven III

2009

Pencil and acrylic on paper

Unique

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Maquette for 'Turning Stone, Touch Stone'

1994

Aluminium

Unique

Exhibitions:

Thinking Big: Concepts for Twenty-First Century British Sculpture, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 2002-3

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Maquette for 'Self-Seeded Sycamore' I

2008

Brass and sycamore wood on a plywood base

Unique

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Maquette for 'Self-Seeded Sycamore' II

2008

Brass and sycamore wood on a plywood base

Unique

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Maquette for 'Self-Seeded Sycamore' III

2008

Brass and sycamore wood on a plywood base

Unique

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MESSUMS
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Maquette for 'The Lightness of Being' I

2011

Balsa Wood, steel and acrylic paint on a wooden base

Unique

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Maquette for 'The Lightness of Being' II

2011

acrylic and steel on a stone base

Unique

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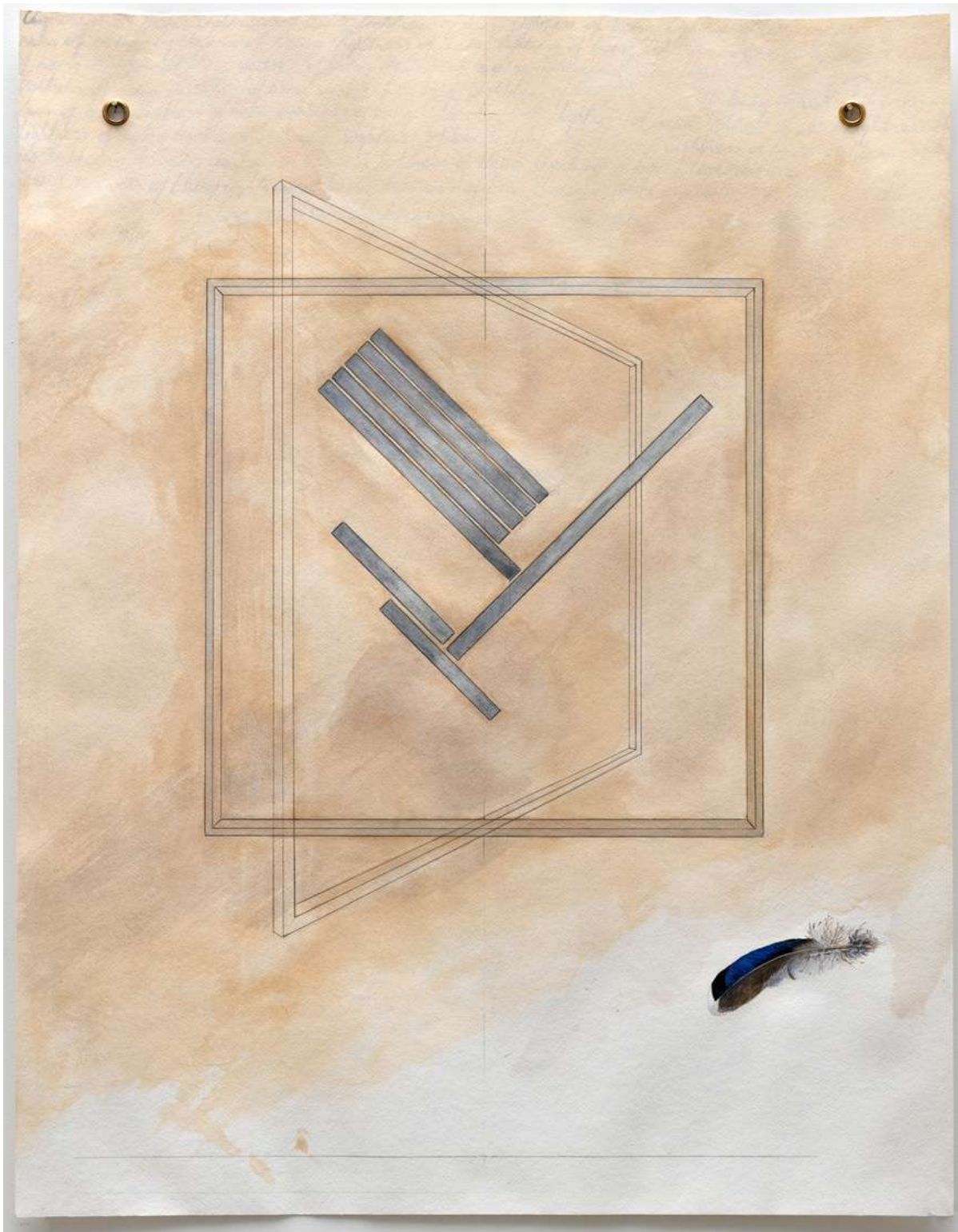
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The Lightness of Being II

2011

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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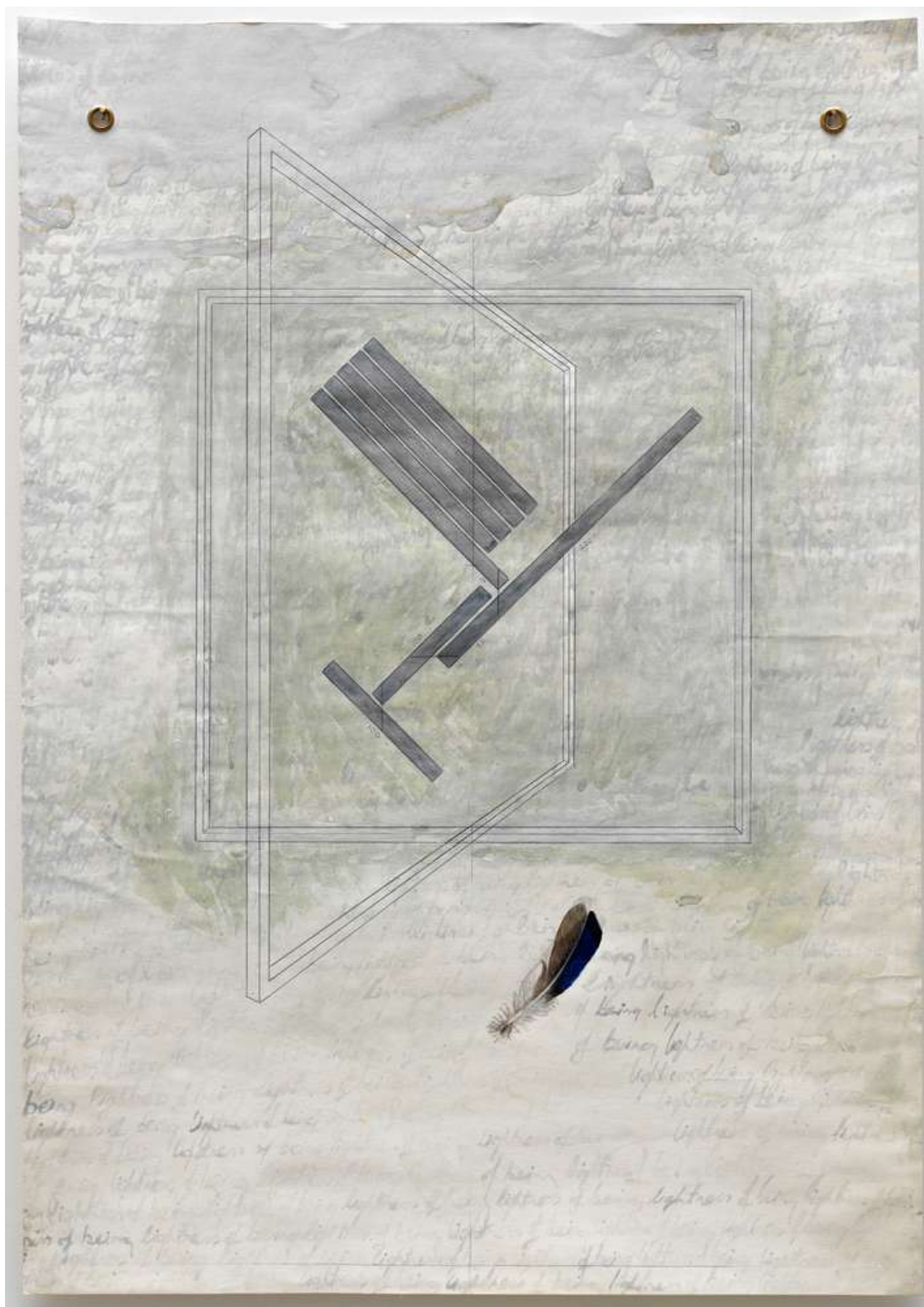
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The Lightness of Being III

2011

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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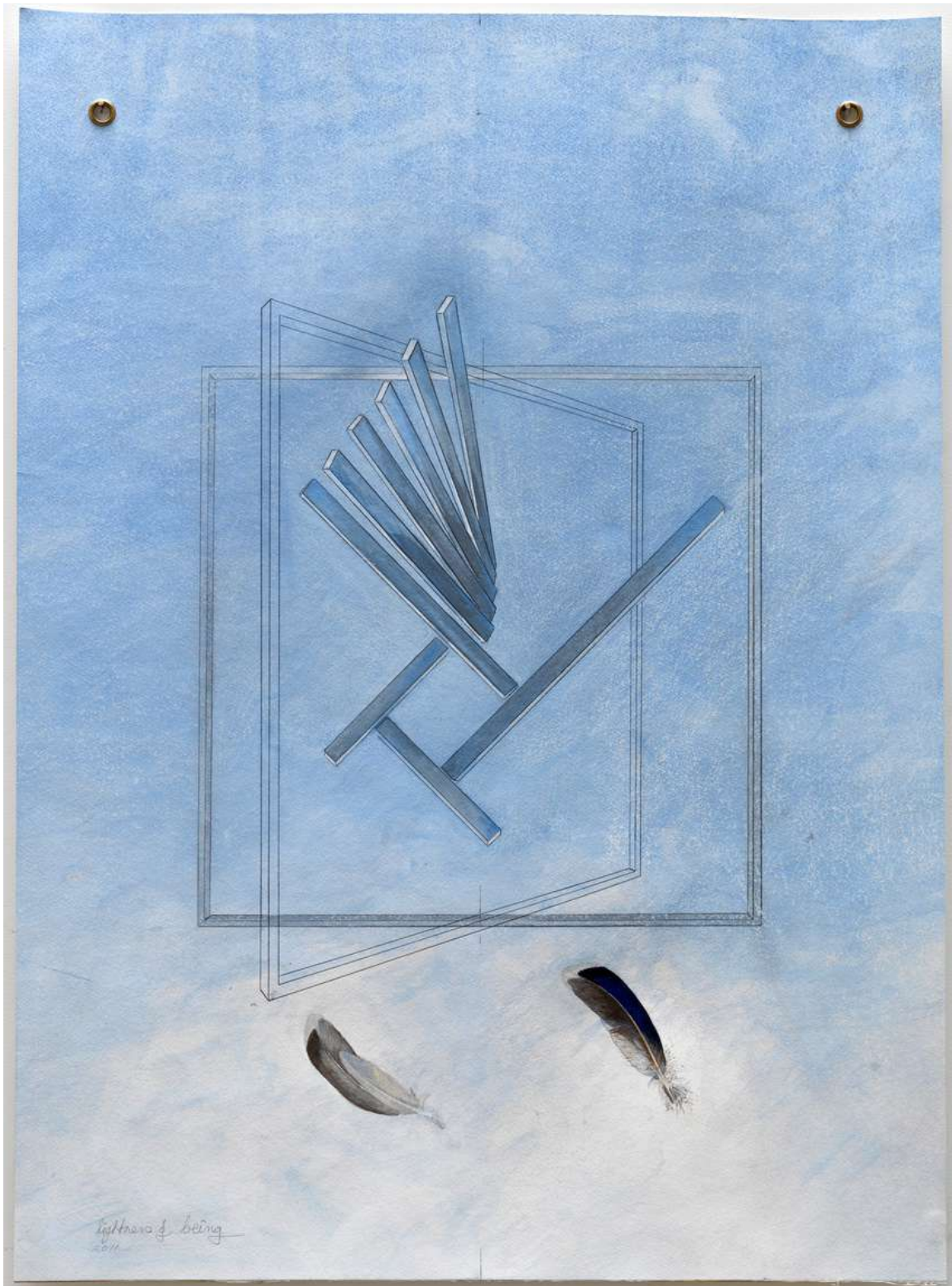
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The Lightness of Being V

2011

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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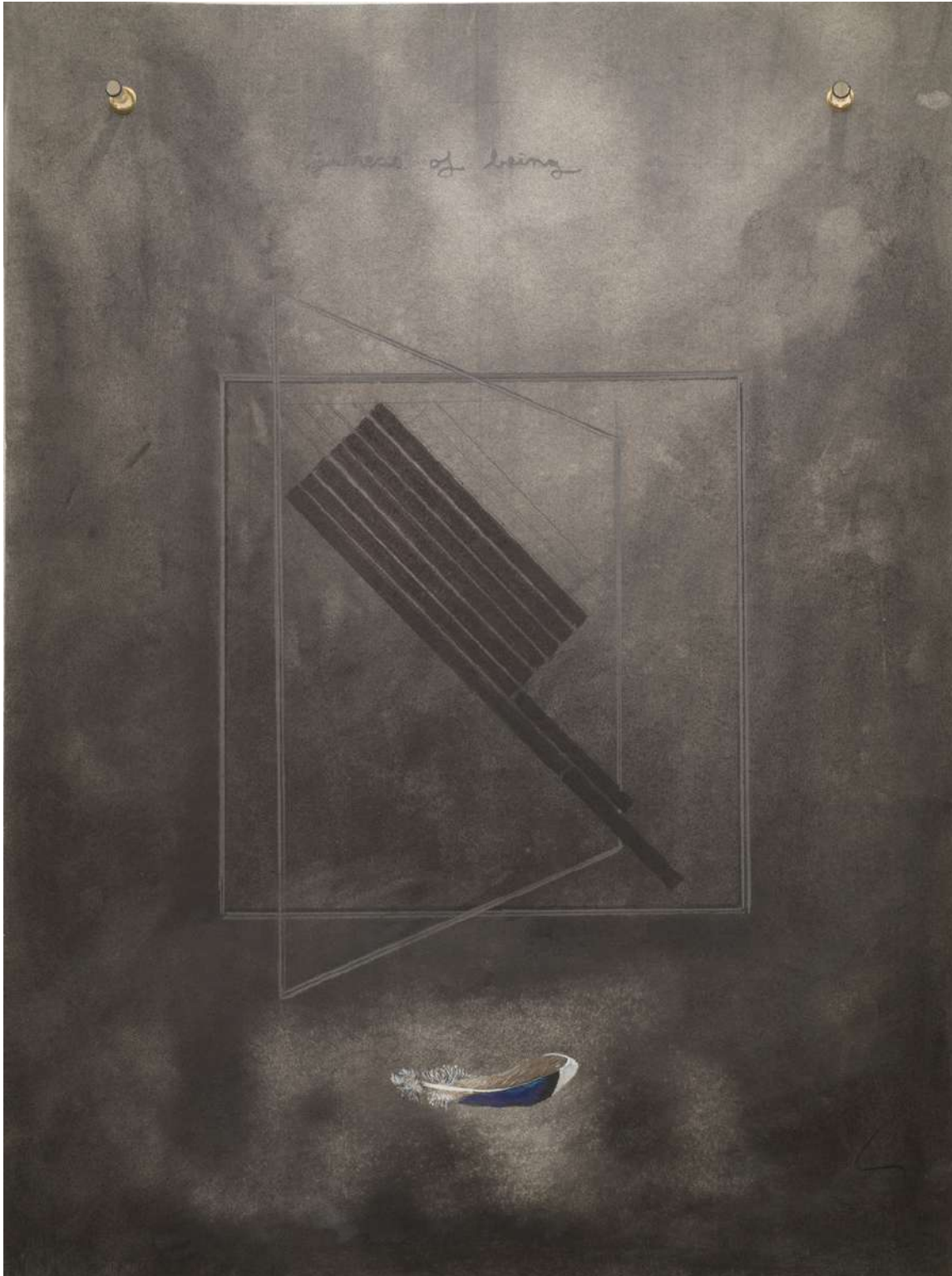
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The Lightness of Being VI

2011

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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Rondo (variation)

2025

Aluminium

Unique

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LONDON
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Rondo II

2007

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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LONDON
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Rondo III

2007

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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Rondo IV

2007

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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Rondo VI

2007

Pencil and acrylic on paper

97 x 73 cm

Unique

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