

Review

Kim Lim: Space, Rhythm & Light;
Andrew Cranston: What made you
stop here? – review

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Art



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‘An arc of radiant steel, and a measure of time’: Day, 1966 by Kim Lim. Photograph: Nick Singleton/Estate of Kim Lim/ the Hepworth Wakefield

The Hepworth Wakefield

Toughness meets grace in a fine retrospective of the late Singaporean-British artist Kim Lim, while the convivial Scottish painter Andrew Cranston finds ready-made canvases, using the covers of old hardback books

There is a vision of wind on water in this [captivating show](#) achieved entirely through incisions in a sheet of white paper. The page is square, the scissored cuts not much more than a sheaf of extremely thin parallel lines. But they run at exactly the right diagonal across the surface to suggest that transient breeze and shift, redoubled in shadows cast through each incision on the wall behind the page – motion captured through the meticulous calculation of paper, void and angled line.

The art of **Kim Lim** (1936-97) darts between drawing and sculpture. Born in Singapore to Chinese parents, Lim lived in Malaysia under Japanese occupation, trained as a ballet dancer from early childhood, and moved to Britain at the age of 17. There never seems to have been a moment when she was not on the move.



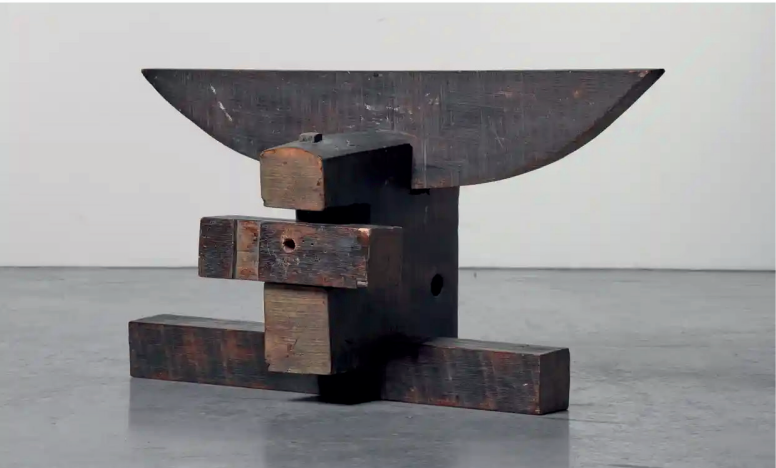
Kim Lim polishing her brass sculpture *Twice* (1966) in 1968. © Estate of Kim Lim. Photograph by Jorge Lewinski © Lewinski Archive at Chatsworth/ Bridgeman Images

At 18, she was studying sculpture with [Elisabeth Frink](#) and [Anthony Caro](#) at Saint Martin's, but soon switched to the Slade to pursue a more daring abstraction. She had her first show at the ICA at 25 – the same year she married and started a family – and never seems to have gone unstinted, or unexhibited. Lim was the only woman given space in the [1977 Hayward Annual](#) exhibition, and her works are in public collections all over Britain. But a 15-year hiatus followed her premature death of cancer at 61.

Space, Rhythm & Light is the ideal show for anyone unfamiliar with Lim's art. Beautifully curated across five airy galleries by Abi Shapiro, it presents works in painted steel and scavenged wood, aluminium, Perspex and glass, marble, paper and muckle Portland stone. And what it demonstrates, from first to last, is an exceptional

combination of toughness and grace – encapsulated in a 1966 photograph of the former ballerina reaching up to polish a heavy brass sculpture.

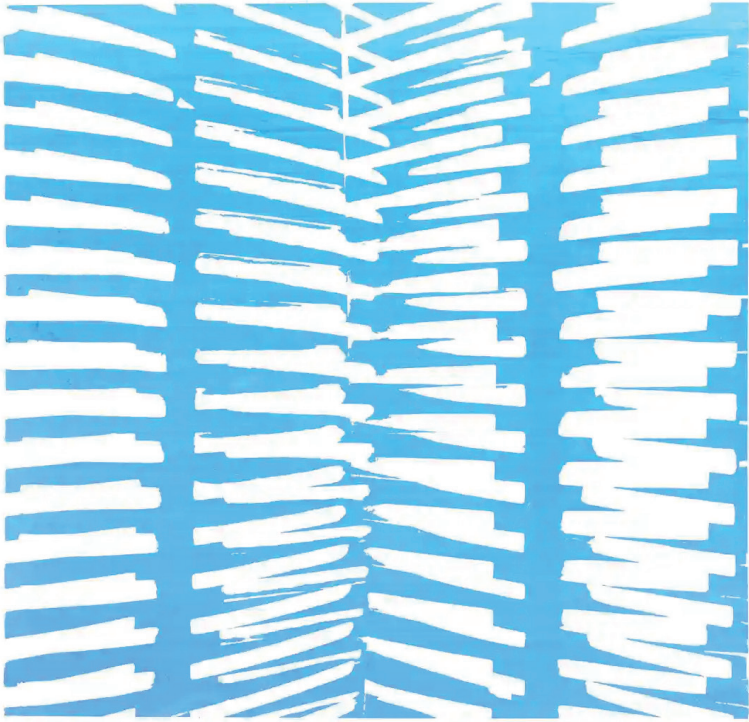
Twice is the work's title, and it is here at the Hepworth Wakefield: the same shining form twice over propped at right angles, somewhere between a limb and a letter, reaching up to a point (or toe) that kicks high in the air. A jubilant sight, drawing blossoming into three-dimensional shape, this is a pivotal work. Earlier forms sometimes appear to be period pieces of British sculpture in charred flotsam and enamelled metal. But Lim becomes wholly unique. *Ronin* is a stack of wooden forms resembling a Japanese calligraphic symbol while also embodying a ferocious Samurai.



Ronin, 1963 by Kim Lim. © Estate of Kim Lim/ Turnbull Studio. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2023

Lim and her husband, fellow sculptor [William Turnbull](#), seem to have travelled ceaselessly – through India to south-east Asia and the Middle East, constantly seeking what mattered so much to her: the sight of art in situ. Back home in Camden, north London, she made abstract sculptures in her garden that conjure water in acrylic or marble, or enclose it in overlapping bronze rings that doubled as ponds for birds.

One of her most beautiful works, *Day*, stands like a glowing white fountain or rainbow in the Hepworth's own gardens: an arc of radiant steel, and a measure of time. She could achieve so much with the inflection of a simple line. Especially beautiful are her very simple silver V shapes, in cast aluminium, configured in pairs that marry, separate, splay or take off like birds in upward flight.



Intervals (Blue), 1972 by Kim Lim. Photograph: © Estate of Kim Lim. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2023. Photo: Mark Dalton

In her 50s, Lim undertook the immensely arduous carving of weighty stone blocks. Solid, abruptly truncated as a ruined pillar, each pale monument is incised with pencil-thin lines that sometimes seem to sway, ever so slightly. The subtle undulation [gives movement](#) to these monoliths. But better still are Lim's monochrome prints, where she makes the seasons pass in furling scumbles or grids of darkening lines, and her minimalist cut-paper works.

Stand at a distance from these white squares, suspended in glass boxes against the wall, and they work their music entirely through the interaction of light and shadow, paper and slit. Rain, mist, vortex, a whisper of wind: all are conjured with the most poetic interventions of her meticulous blade.

Lim's art is as pristine and austere in its semi-abstraction as **Andrew Cranston's** paintings in the neighbouring galleries are open-hearted, expansive, figurative and loquacious. Born in Hawick in 1969, this Scottish artist's mind and work are filled with resonant memories of people in rooms, scenes, atmospheres and landscapes (very often camping trips among the midges on mystical Arran). He paints on every scale, from intimist sitting rooms in his Glasgow flat, the day fading and tea on the table, to enormous twilights glimmering above luminous yachts on wine-dark waters. And he also works on the most unexpected support.

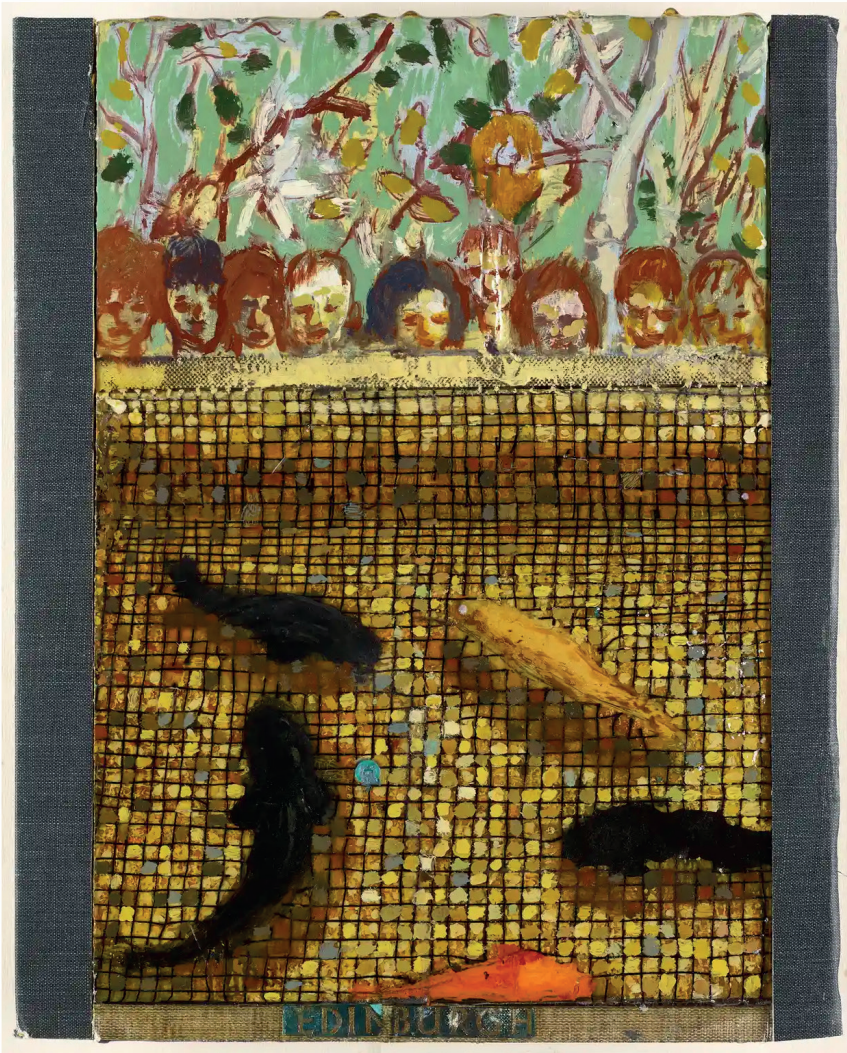
Many of the 38 images in **What made you stop here?** are painted on the covers of old hardback books – what is such a cover, after all, but another stretch of linen, like a canvas? Sometimes there is a very direct relationship between substrate and subject. A luminous painting shows James Joyce, blind behind his bottle-top specs, a bit halt with his stick, on a volume from the 1920s (wryly titled *Painting*) moving through thick points of golden light.



'Time arrested': Cat and cheeseboard, 2018 by Andrew Cranston. Courtesy of the artist and Ingleby, Edinburgh

The debt to Bonnard and Vuillard is candidly apparent: the same sense of time arrested and the outer world excluded from rooms in which figures often seem at one with the walls, cushions, rugs and objects. Cranston celebrates a birthday party in close-toned reds, guests moving about among a filmic dream of chocolate cakes, embroideries, mangoes. The curtains are closed against the sun in another room, light filtering through fabric with the most ingenious use of domestic bleach down the canvas, so that all you can make out is the occasional cat among the drowsy sofas.

Cranston uses collage, distemper, wax encaustic and varnish, particularly in a marvellous sequence of paintings commemorating the pond in Edinburgh's [Chambers Street Museum](#) so beloved of those of us who grew up there. Goldfish drift in glimmering water above equally radiant mosaics.



📷 The Sweet and the Weird, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Ingleby, Edinburgh

Mystery stirs through these paintings. Who is the boy in the tent, examining his mirror reflection in the darkness, while another looks at the hazy blue ghost of an island on the horizon? Dark heads bob on the sea, but are they people or seals (or mythical selkies)? Words appear across the gallery walls, as if spilling out of the books - Cranston is a superb communicator about life, paint, colour, the history of art, the making of his own images - and they often form into droll titles.

I especially liked the sardonic pun of *Poor Poet*, showing a figure engulfed in a blanket smoking heavily (and expensively). And at the centre of a Sickert-like room, all gloomy fug and thickening brushstrokes, stands a formidably bright lamp, epigrammatic as a Patrick Caulfield. The picture's called *The One Light We Keep On*.

This art is as convivial as its appeal is direct. The colour is glorious, the brushwork always bent on catching a memory or sensation as truthfully as possible, even at the expense of suave deliberation. Most unusual of all is Cranston's abundant humour. One of the smallest works here is the funniest: a man (the artist?) wrapped as thickly as a polar explorer, standing beneath the freezing cupola of a high-ceilinged Scottish tenement, which sheds its icy blue light on and in everything below. This is *Indoor Arctic*.

Star ratings (out of five)

Kim Lim ★★★★★

Andrew Cranston ★★★★★

● Kim Lim: [Space, Rhythm & Light](#) and Andrew Cranston: [What made you stop here?](#) are both at the Hepworth Wakefield until 2 June