

CAMPLE—LINE

**ROWAN MACE
TIME'S LIGHT
08.07 – 10.09.23**





Rowan Mace: *Time's light*
– Rhian Williams

I would like to begin these remarks on Rowan Mace's work by reflecting on the properties of form. The term might often be related to formality, or to form as a code of behaviour, with 'form' indicating limits or boundaries, suggesting restriction. But sitting with Rowan in her garden, abundant with June flowers, our conversation turns to what might emerge if one feels held, perhaps within some form. In the light of Mace's work, I sense 'form' revealing itself instead as the energy of definition: planes, angles, surfaces, lines, shapes and shadows become resonant means of holding on to space, and light. I feel transported to form as a container, as a plastic vessel with capacity. The binding feeling of formal structure releases and reconfigures itself into an emotional architecture, a locale in which to articulate feeling, memory, experience. Things begin to 'take form' in my mind. It is here that I find myself entering the delicate, strong, tensile world of Rowan Mace.

Raised in Cornwall, it was while studying at Leeds that Mace first found her work moving into sculptural, three-dimensional forms. Light and colour had always infused her practice and thinking, and in paint this produced engaged immediacy, the flat surface facilitating quick work and sharp attention to moments of intensity. But Mace found herself reaching after augmentation and development, seeking the challenge of building up from the picture plane. She began adding to paintwork, using cloth and other materials to create dimension. While this practice suggests an emerging into present space and time, these gestures were also residues of a childhood practice, re-visiting acts of balance and creativity borne of her father giving her matchsticks and Cow Gum to play and 'make things with' when she was young. Mace's work is now committedly sculptural – her pieces rise up from steadying plinths as dynamic arrangements of line and plane, surface and shade. Somehow 'domestic' (or humane) in scale, they welcome a viewer's attention, their many facets generously offering opportunities for light-filled encounter. Created and then placed in the west of Scotland – where our days go through such dramatic changes of length across the year – these works speak to how light shapes our existence, holds us in time.

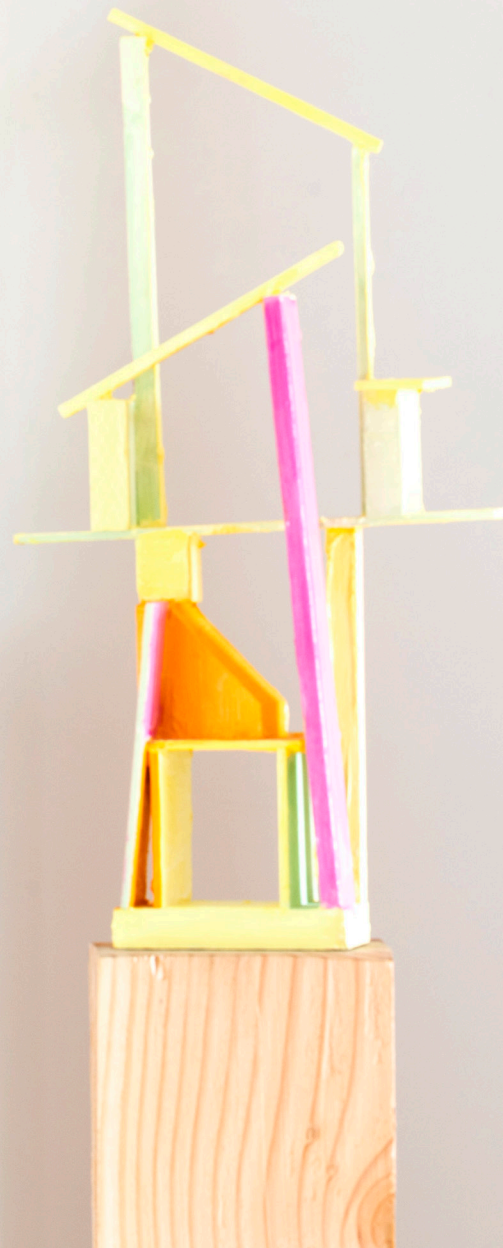


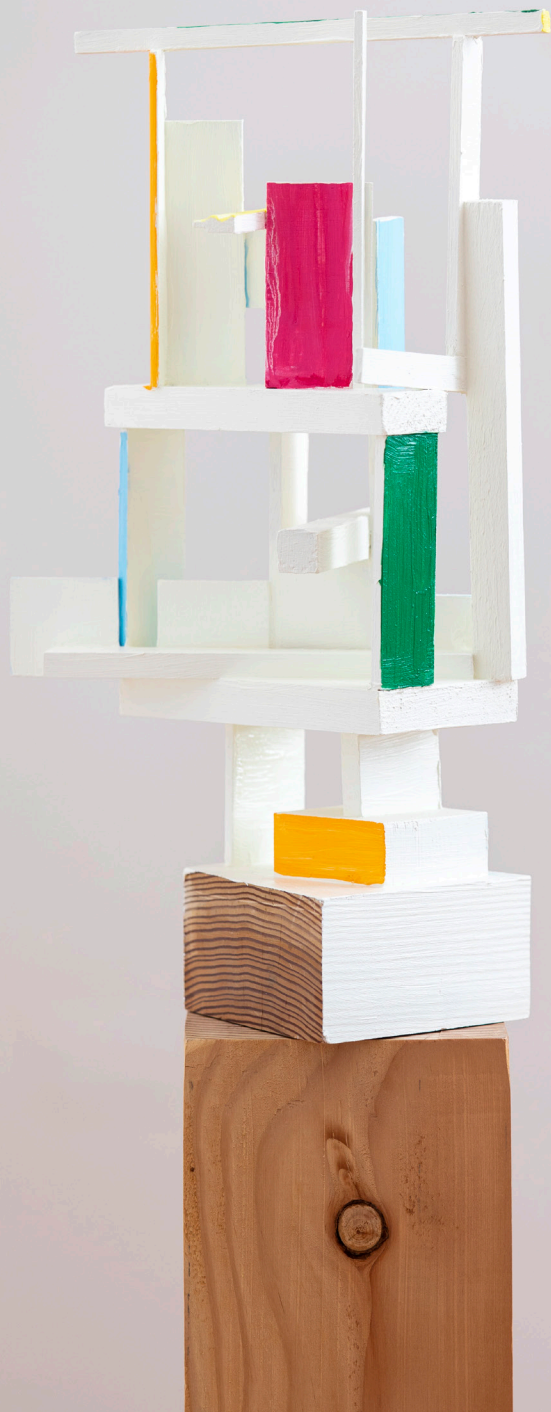
This move into space allowed Mace to work in a focused and determined way on *relations*. Taking found pieces of wood at first, and later working with refined and smooth pine surfaces (the more so to honour clarity), Mace became compelled by light falling on and through 3D structures, how it animates pigment and surface in kaleidoscopic processes of reflection and refraction. Inviting the viewer's prolonged consideration, Mace's pieces hold within their many planes and surfaces the mutable quality of natural light as context for human emotion, memory, sensation, affect. She tells me of lying in bed gazing at light falling on one of her works and feeling she could be in her mother's bedroom as a child. Walking into her studio, even on a day of quite diffuse light, Mace's limpid, luminescent colours on so many near-shifting surfaces – so skillfully generated from oil paint's vital components – transport me to mental coastal geographies, especially in the west of Wales, which shares some of the pigmentation and salty air of Mace's own Cornwall (a mindset as much as a geography that infuses these sculptural forms).



This quality of immediacy is notable because these works' undoubted relish of specific moments in time – the very act of balance so many of them capture alerts us to their potential fragility – nevertheless emerge from very prolonged and committed states of organic growth and development. Mace talks of how sculpture is slow in execution, how it requires care and patience. It might break! It asks of the artist that they stay with the work, risk themselves through application of layers of process. Over the years, she has had to come to know how materials such as wood, paint, linseed oil, turpentine and adhesive will react in different lights, temperatures, moments. This is a practice of understanding, comprehension, commitment. It is about the caring labour of nurturing. But it is also about risk (as is any act of parenting). She must find a way to give the form structure and strength, and yet have this denote, not rigidity, but rather a pellucid holder for light. She is working in the very cross-hatching of contrasts and potentially competing imperatives, harnessing the kinetic energy between propulsive impulses. This is work from an artist trained in Gestalt psychotherapy; a consciousness expert in marrying together moments in time, in sitting with trauma by refining language for clarity, concision, and authenticity ('decision making is bliss'). In front of Mace's works, I find myself thinking about dialectics, about tension and release, about seizure and about play.

I stand in front of a collection of Mace's sculptures, arranged in a kind of happenstance harmony in her studio, and feel how each is infused with its own individual nature, and yet always aware of itself as part of a group. I attend to one especially – skyblue and lemon yellow, an undercurrent of refracted powder blue, intersected by stretching skeins of cantaloupe orange – and am taken by the sheer agility of its being in space. The delicacy of placement generates touching points, light planes and shadows that risk precarity and vulnerability, and yet are steadied in a living organicism that comes from wood sanded to a clean evenness. I feel the piece opening up before me, light shafts breaking through, colours throwing out a dance of warmth and cool that keep accumulating context, feeling, timeliness. These sculptural lines adumbrate a very feeling of existence, a way of being: I feel both in the moment, and in memory, and I am anticipating the next moment and the next. I am caught in what Hans-Georg Gadamer called 'The Play of Art' (1973), a ludic energy that is art's 'mode of being' and which 'contains its own, even





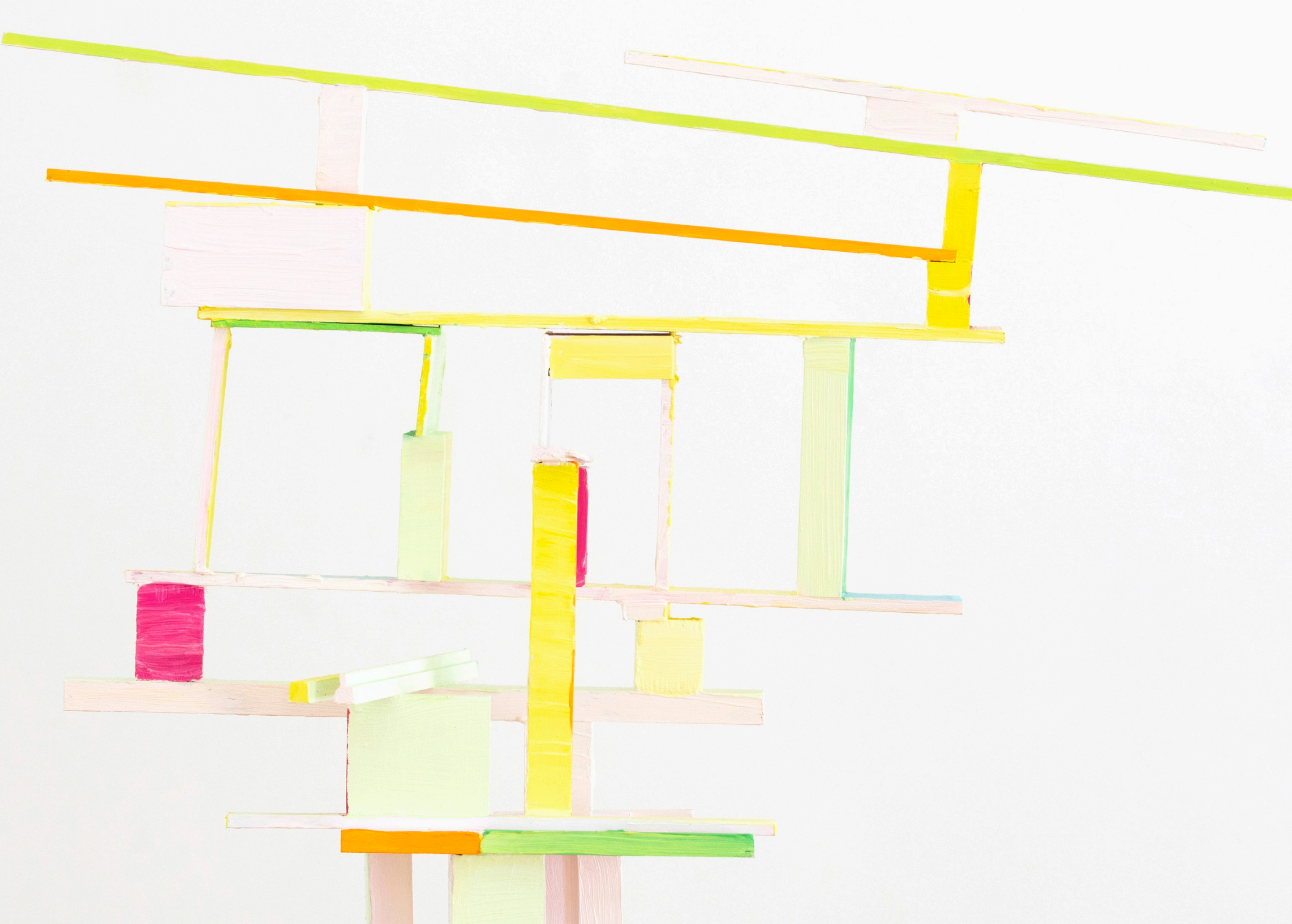
sacred, seriousness'.¹ This is where my conversation with Mace keeps leading: to art as process, as happening *within time*, even harnessing humour and mischief ('will this hold? Dare I add another angle?!'), to feel ways through profundity. The artwork emerges from moments of encounter, alive to shift and change, always anticipating relationship – with the environment, with the viewer, with the passing of time. We talk of how Mace's artworks are characterful, resonant, friendly. Cautioning against overly-directive curation or titling, Mace invites her works to breathe and exhale their significance in different moments and conditions. Isobel Armstrong's fundamental insight fills my mind: 'I regard "what thinks" as the artwork itself, not the individual subject, self or consciousness' (2000).²

Mace's works – so light-filled, and yet so calmly grounded in a confident palette – make powerful richness from the contingency of arrangement, from the poignancy of immediacy shot through with memory. We are our experiences (anguish, pain, insight, connection, joy, warmth, collapse) and we bring those to both the making and the encountering of artworks. And so it is with the forms themselves. Held within the purview of Mace's highly intelligent, perceptive, feeling eye – alert, committed, open – these works stand settled in their own changing experiences of light, air, and space. Anticipating, inviting, welcoming, manifesting each moment of encounter. I step into *Time's light*.

Rhian Williams is a writer based in Glasgow. She has particular interests in visual and material culture, poetry and ecology.

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. revised by Joes Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Continuum, 2004)

2. Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (John Wiley & Sons, 2000)





List of works

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
112 x 45 x 14 cm | 12. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
82 x 32 x 21 cm |
| 2. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
60 x 64 x 22 cm | 13. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
56 x 57 x 20 cm |
| 3. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
115 x 54 x 20 cm | 14. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
63 x 12 x 19 cm |
| 4. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
49 x 25 x 25 cm | 15. Untitled , 2021
oil paint on wood
86 x 22 x 10 cm |
| 5. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
37 x 35 x 15 cm | 16. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
44 x 22 x 9 cm |
| 6. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
31 x 37 x 20 cm | 17. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
37 x 11 x 12 cm |
| 7. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
46 x 48 x 21 cm | 18. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
34 x 25 x 11 cm |
| 8. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
61 x 36 x 35 cm | 19. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
41 x 30 x 12 cm |
| 9. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
121 x 42 x 27 cm | 20. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
37 x 30 x 13 cm |
| 10. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
48 x 25 x 10 cm | 21. Untitled , 2022
oil paint on wood
30 x 22 x 15 cm |
| 11. Untitled , 2023
oil paint on wood
61 x 52 x 10 cm | |

Dimensions are given H x W x D



Rowan Mace was born in Redruth, Cornwall in 1961. She undertook a foundation course at Falmouth School of Art where she discovered the work of modernist artists associated with St. Ives. She completed a degree in Fine Art at Leeds Polytechnic and moved to Glasgow in 1989.

Mace worked as an artist, exhibiting and teaching, until her first child was born in 1998. After a gap of about twelve years, she resumed her practice with her first exhibition at The Lillie Gallery in Milngavie. She has since exhibited in solo and group shows, including at Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art in 2015. In 2021 she had two solo shows, *Still Orange* at Stallan-Brand, Glasgow and *Slow Yellow*, Zembla Gallery, Hawick respectively. She was nominated for the Bryan Robertson Trust Award in 2021 and has been nominated for a Paul Hamlyn Award in 2023.





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