

# □ Cube Gallery

## AN INTERVIEW WITH OWEN GILDERSLEEVE

*Owen Gildersleeve* is a paper artist based in Brighton. Trained in Graphic Design, Owen creates beautifully crafted hand-cut works, layering sheets of paper in sweeping gradients of tone to create a graphically inspired composition.

**CG:** Paper is increasingly becoming your primary medium. What is it about paper that continues to draw you in?

**OG:** I've been working predominantly with paper for many years now. It's a material I keep getting drawn back to for its versatility, offering so many different applications, outputs, and finishes.

For me personally, I love the added life it can bring to my clean graphic designs, through the imperfections, subtle textures, and feel of human touch. I also enjoy the way it can help to bring my designs up off the page. My artworks take on an almost sculptural form, which is something I find quite thrilling, and I'm looking to explore more in future projects.

**CG:** In your *Intersections* series, you intentionally work with a limited colour palette. How does this restriction change the way you approach the overall composition, and what made you want to work with such a limited palette?

**OG:** I enjoy working within limitations – once you know the boundaries, you can then play within that space, seeing how far you can push out to the edges. With this series, the limitations have been quite rigid so far; using a set 4x5 grid of intersecting straight lines, and currently the same eight colours of paper arranged in a sweeping gradient, from dark up to light. The challenge is then to explore the different forms and compositions that can be created within that framework. Even though they are all part of the same family, I enjoy seeing how each piece has its own personality.

Even though I'm already a few years into this series, it feels like I've only just scratched the surface, and I still have lots of ideas for future pieces and directions I'd like to take this series.



**CG: Your work plays with the boundary between graphic design and meticulous craft. Can you walk us through how your work translates onto a physical object?**

OG: There are many stages in the creation of my artworks, which move between hands-on processes and digital refinement. They start off as a pencil sketch in my stack of sketchbooks. Then, I take an idea that has caught my interest and draw it up digitally, allowing me to refine the forms and work out the colour palette. Once I'm happy with the design, I break it into individual layers before transferring the designs onto sheets of paper for cutting. All my artworks are hand-cut using a surgical-grade scalpel, which gives a really nice crisp edge.

Once the sheets are cut out, they're layered up using board to add depth. This is when the artworks really come to life, and I love seeing the way that the shadows add depth and dimension. These layers are then pieced together, mounted, and signed, ready for framing.

**CG: The tension between digital perfection and the innate imperfection of hand-cutting paper with a scalpel is a central theme in your work. How do the subtle differences between a design made digitally and a handcrafted artwork give the Intersections series its own human warmth?**

OG: I enjoy the journey of bringing these sleek, refined designs to life through paper, and the added warmth that the hands-on process and paper textures bring to the pieces. I don't plan to add



imperfection, and in fact aim to craft these pieces as meticulously as I can, but inevitably slight flaws creep in – whether it's a nick in the paper or a slight mis-registration in the layers. I think that helps to convey the feeling of human touch, which adds personality and a sense of connection to the pieces.

**CG: Paper is a material that most individuals interact with daily. How does this relationship play into your role as a paper artist?**

OG: Paper is one of the oldest human-made materials, and one which most of us have interacted with every day since we were children. Because of this, we all have a familiarity and a close association with the material, which I feel brings an immediate sense of connection to paper art pieces. It's why paper art is so abundant today, especially at this time when human connection is needed more than ever before, and why people are so drawn to it as an artistic medium.

**CG: Your paper works explore the relationship between bold colour, sweeping gradients, and sleek forms. What is the story behind the process of creating your paper artworks, and how did your process originally come to be?**

OG: My artwork approach has been a story of refinement, gradually moving into this more minimal space, where the forms have simplified and the colour palettes have become more limited. Having worked for many years as a commercial artist, I noticed that I was increasingly drawn to the ideas and designs that were the most simple and straight to the point. This approach places the



materials into the foreground, making refinement even more necessary.

I am trying to move away from that modern-day sense, that once a project is out in the world, it's time to move onto the next thing. I think this has been heightened of late, partly due to social media and how the algorithms often favour new things – it doesn't leave a lot of space for the celebration of the old, or the revisiting of ideas. I have noticed how repetition can play a big part in a work. Take Josef Albers for example, whose 'Homage to the Square' series he worked on for 27 years – from 1950 until his death in 1976, creating over 1,000 works. This approach has pushed me to explore how far I could take these projects. Through small tweaks and changes within a set framework, I can create entirely new compositions and artworks, and I'm excited to see where this approach can lead this series and where we will go next.

**CG:** Each artwork in the Intersections series sits within a deep frame, allowing the viewer to view the edges of the artwork and the underlying composition of the paper sheets. What drove this stylistic choice to allow the viewer into the construction of the piece?

**OG:** My mother was a textiles artist and teacher, and we have a few of her pieces up in our home in Brighton. There's one in particular that I've often been drawn to, which is a small piece framed with a large mount. I've always loved the breathing room that this gives the artwork, helping to draw your eye to the central piece.

This has inspired me to take this approach into my own work, slowly developing and refining the box framing and getting more confident with the space given to the piece. I used to frame everything quite tightly, but by allowing the artworks to breathe, I have found it helps to invite the viewer in – to examine the construction of the artworks and get a glimpse of their human imperfection.

**CG:** Your latest series, Intersections, develops on your existing works while focusing specifically on scale and design. What would you say you have learnt from this series in regard to future series and projects?

**OG:** These pieces have definitely grown somewhat from my first few iterations, which were smaller and more compact. This is actually thanks to the input of Cube Gallery's Tracy and Laurence Fowles, who immediately connected with this series and shared some invaluable input on the artworks for future development.



This latest range feels far more bold and robust, with the scale increasing the impact of the designs. It has also allowed for further refinement of the artworks and their creation, and I'm really happy with how these latest works in particular have come out. I plan to continue this approach into future series – continuing to play with scale, and possibly even colour and materials.

**CG: Looking carefully at each of your compositions, there are lines and intersections that cut through all six of the Intersections series; what was it like planning each of these pieces both as individuals and as a part of a larger collective?**

OG: Each batch of 'Intersections' artworks is designed as a set, with the layers and forms of each piece interacting and connecting with one another. I have always worked in this way, so this approach comes quite naturally to me. Often these pieces are displayed together to highlight their collective qualities. This has further pushed this connected approach, and I'm looking forward to exploring possibly combining full series into single frames for future shows, to see how that can affect the impact of the artwork.

**CG: You attained a degree in Graphic Design, which still remains a significant influence in your work. Talk us through how your graphic design training has moulded your distinctive style?**

OG: I studied Graphic Design at the University of Brighton, but my early interests were always in fine art. I was particularly drawn to artists whose use of materials and mediums helped the artworks to



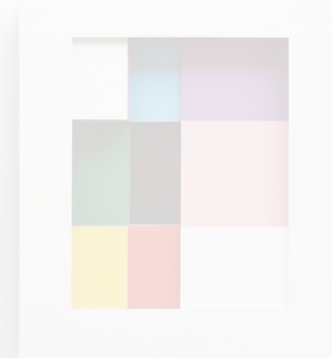
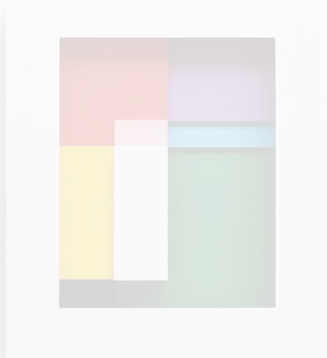
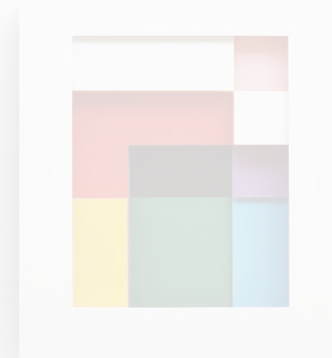
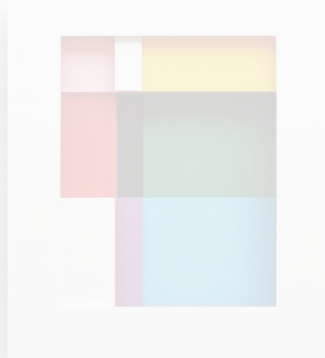
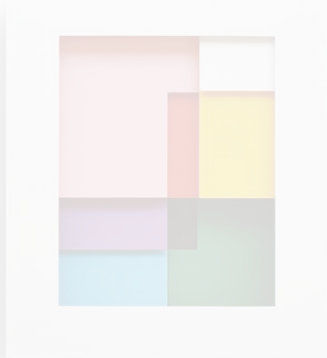
burst off the wall, such as Anselm Kiefer and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as very hands-on expressive artists like Franz Kline and Cy Twombly. But I'm also drawn to the graphic and more simplified designs and palettes of the likes of Alexander Girard, Bridget Riley and Anni and Josef Albers, as already mentioned. I think it's that bringing together of stylistic approaches which has helped to develop my own style – artworks which are very graphical in their design, but which build off the walls as physical pieces, with a human touch.

The graphic design training then helped me to refine my approach to the creation of the works, through the use of programs such as Adobe Illustrator, which I use to draw up all of my designs before making begins. This is an approach I developed for commercial purposes, but I now use to work out compositions and the use of colour palettes.

**CG: What are you currently working on in the studio, and are there any upcoming projects that you would like to share?**

OG: Alongside developing the 'Intersections' series further, I am currently working on some private commissions in the US, as well as developing a new range of my 'The Sublime Spectrum' artworks. For this, I plan to also scale up the designs, significantly increasing the layers of the artworks to see what effect that has on their impact.

I am also in the development stage of some new pieces which I hope will allow me to bring my artworks up out of the frames, continuing my exploration of layers through new materials.



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