

Howardena Pindell

Off the Grid

21 November 2025 – 18 January 2026

White Cube Bermondsey

Presenting work that spans her six-decade career, 'Off the Grid' affirms Howardena Pindell's status as one of the leading abstract artists of the last half-century. Scintillating detail, material depth and texture come together in her layered compositions that, while beautiful and joyous, never cede their political subtext rooted in African American experience. Alongside peers such as Jack Whitten, Sam Gilliam, Lorraine O'Grady, Adrian Piper and Ana Mendieta – artists who, in distinct ways, challenged the period's critical orthodoxies and expanded the formal and conceptual capacities of abstraction – Pindell's work reflects a deeply political undertaking. Ranging from early, geometric works on paper to video and large-scale canvases, 'Off the Grid' explores Pindell's subversion of the grid as a formal device alongside the wider personal and sociopolitical concerns of her practice.

A departure point for the exhibition, the motif of the grid played a significant role in the development of 20th-century Modernism and served as a ruling principle of the postwar Minimalist movement. If the grid has been appraised for its ability to structure and organise, critic Rosalind Krauss has further noted that 'no form within the whole of modern aesthetic production has sustained itself so relentlessly while at the same time being so impervious to change.'¹ The grid is also crucial to understanding division and segregation in the United States: Thomas Jefferson's 1785 Land Ordinance survey divided the country into uniformly apportioned zones, while in urban development, the grid would come to delineate neighbourhoods reserved for people of different classes and races.

Through Pindell's engagement with personal history, the racialised body and West African textiles, the grid is propelled into a realm of activism and change. Born in Philadelphia in 1943, Pindell recalls a visit to the Philadelphia Museum of Art as a child, where she encountered Marcel Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy* (1921), which provided with an early visual concept of the grid. In 1965, she became one of the first Black women to study art at Yale, where she was introduced to the colour theories of Bauhaus educator Josef Albers via his protégé Si Sillman. Graduating with an MFA in 1967, she moved to New York and began work at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), later becoming the first Black woman to hold a curatorial position there. Though she was not involved in its undertaking, she spent time at MoMA's 1972–73 'African Textiles and Decorative Arts' exhibition, where she learned of loose stitching,

layered amulets and other sophisticated features of African textile arts. Artworks bearing similar features and qualities can be found throughout the exhibition, from the kaleidoscopic 'Hole Punch' works with their dense topographies of paper circles, to the 'Woven Tapestry' series with their ley lines of open seams.

It was during her time at MoMA that Pindell developed the 'spray dot' and 'hole punch' techniques that continue to inform her work to this day. There, she began to experiment with office supplies, punching holes in manila folders, cardstock, envelopes and other stationery to create stencils that she would then spray paint through. Paintings like *Untitled* (1971–72) achieve a diffuse, apparently gaseous effect, the interplay of colours creating subtle modulations as well as voids of uncertain depth. Employing the 'spray dot' process in turn produced innumerable 'chads', tiny discs of paper refuse that would later comprise her 'Hole Punch' works. Making use of the everyday materials in her office environment, Pindell conjures associations with the monotonous secretarial labour so often enacted by lower-socio-economic echelons of women in the late '60s and '70s. Equally, Pindell connects her impulse to create compositions with small circles to a formative memory in her childhood during the Jim Crow era. Stopping by a root beer stand with her father, Pindell describes noticing a small red circle at the base of the mug, which she learned was used to identify and separate the restaurant utensils intended for Black customers.

Pindell's art repeatedly returns to the circle motif, which both obstructs and overwhelms her gridded compositions. A unit of micro- and macroscopic scales, Pindell understands circles as a universal form that gives all things, in being 'the shape of the sun, the moon, atoms, [and] molecules'.² The early work *Space Frame #3* (1969), for example, created when the Space Race was reaching its zenith, features painted, elliptical forms which disrupt the graph paper ground, the use of which nods to her father's love of mathematics. Resembling diagrams or star charts, the 'Space Frame' works also reminisce the use of the grid as a technical device during the Renaissance period to attain scale and perspective. In *Letter Series, Mildred Pindell to Howardena Pindell* (1974), meanwhile, Pindell's graph paper is all but obscured by a chaotic, uncontainable mass of painstakingly numbered chads that pile beyond the paper's limits. The artist's subversion of the grid is, however, nowhere more apparent than the wall-based *Untitled* (1971/2025). Comprised of rolled canvas strung into a six-by-six

grid – one reminiscent of a scientific set square – the sculpture renders material the otherwise abstract form and, in what Pindell has referred to as ‘a kind of mocking gesture’,³ sees the grid having lost all its rigidity.

In 1979, Pindell survived a serious car accident but sustained a traumatic head injury which left her with partial memory loss. Shortly thereafter, she committed herself to making work of an explicitly political nature. Many of the works on view from the '80s period speak directly to her experiences of institutional racism and sexism within the art world but, just as importantly, confront issues of genocide, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and ongoing racial prejudice in the United States. The activist impetus in Pindell's practice is most apparent in her video works, all three of which are on view in the gallery's auditorium. These speak frankly of the gross injustices committed against people of colour; the now-canonical *Free, White and 21* (1980), sees Pindell recount experiences of racism to the apathetic response of a white woman, also played by the artist donning a wig with a whitened complexion. Years later, Pindell would return to the medium of film to create *Doubling* (1995) and, more recently, *Rope/Fire/Water* (2020), both of which make use of archival imagery and interrogate the long-standing, harrowing violence perpetuated against African Americans since the Atlantic slave trade.

In the ‘Tesseract’ paintings – a recent series named after the four-dimensional hypercube issuing from mathematical geometry – Pindell's spray-painted dots again proliferate. Here, the grid is no longer present visually and is instead usurped by the dynamism of the implied tesseract. Within the variegated layers of coloured dots, floating forms can be made out, recalling bacteria, cells or primordial microorganisms. Emerging as if from a void, these shapes are set within expansive picture planes that gesture towards the vastness of the cosmos or the depths of the ocean, with their ‘not-yet-explored remains of slave ships’.⁴ ‘Off the Grid’ culminates in Pindell's ‘Deep Sea’ series and the monumental three-panel *Oceanic Underwater* (2025), the artist's response to Claude Monet's panoramic *Water Lilies* (1914–26). Comprised of vaporous fields of translucent blues and pastel lilacs, rich purples and crystal whites, *Oceanic Underwater* conjures the shimmer of reflection on water, even a heavenly or galactic light. As Pindell remarks: ‘I wanted to go from this traumatic, violent thing, to something beautiful and joyful.’⁵

Howardena Pindell was born in 1943 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and lives and works in New York. She has exhibited extensively, including selected solo exhibitions at Fruitmarket, Edinburgh, UK, touring to Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK, Spike Island, Bristol, UK, and Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2022–23); Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland (2022); The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Texas (2022); The Shed, New York, touring to Oklahoma Contemporary, Oklahoma City (2021–22); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois (2018); Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, Georgia (2015); Cleveland Institute of Arts, Ohio (1994); Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut (1989); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (1986); Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama (1985); A.I.R. Gallery, New York (1983); and Rockefeller Memorial Galleries, Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia (1971).

Selected group exhibitions include Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris (2025); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2024); Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2024); Olivia Foundation, Mexico City (2024); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2023); National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2022); Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain, touring to Centre Pompidou, Paris (2021); Tate Modern, London, touring to Brooklyn Museum, New York and Broad Museum, Los Angeles, California (2017–19); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2017); Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Austria, touring to Museum Brandhorst, Munich, Germany (2016); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas (2013); Seattle Art Museum, Washington (2009); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California (2007); and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2006).

1 Rosalind Krauss, ‘Grids’, *October*, Vol.9, 1979, p.50

2 Nicole Acheampong with Howardena Pindell, *The New York Times Style Magazine*, 9 June 2025 (online)

3 Fiona Bradley and Howardena Pindell, ‘Artist's Talk’, Fruitmarket Gallery, 30 November 2021 (online)

4 Christina Sharpe, ‘To Make Use of Every Part’, *Howardena*, 2025, White Cube, p.91

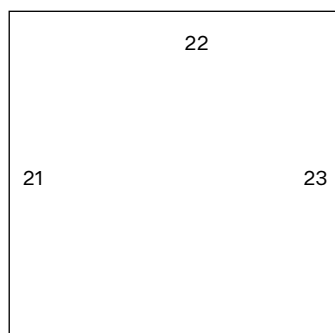
5 Courtney Willis Blair and Howardena Pindell in conversation, ‘The Grid’, *Howardena*, 2025, White Cube, p.153

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|----|--|----|---|
| 1 | <i>Space Frame #2</i>
1969
Acrylic, graphite and pastel on canvas
92 × 127.9 × 5 cm 36 ¼ × 50 ⅜ × 1 15/16 in. | 10 | <i>Untitled #22</i>
2022
Handmade abaca paper, cotton thread and intaglio-printed paper circles
86.7 × 173 × 7.6 cm 34 1/16 × 68 1/8 × 3 in. |
| 2 | <i>Space Frame #3</i>
1969
Acrylic and pastel on canvas
91.4 × 126 × 5 cm 36 × 49 5/8 × 1 15/16 in. | 12 | <i>Untitled</i>
1973–74
Sculp-metal, wire and hole-punched paper collage on panel
43.6 × 53.8 × 5 cm 17 3/16 × 21 3/16 × 1 15/16 in. |
| 3 | <i>Untitled</i>
1971–72
Acrylic and paper collage on canvas
102 × 86.5 × 4 cm 40 3/16 × 34 1/16 × 1 9/16 in. | 13 | <i>Untitled</i>
1973
Ink and hole-punched paper collage on vellum
37.8 × 44.1 × 4 cm 14 7/8 × 17 3/8 × 1 9/16 in. |
| 4 | <i>Untitled #49</i>
1974
Watercolour, crayon, tracing paper and unprinted papers on paper
37.6 × 35.2 × 6 cm 14 13/16 × 13 7/8 × 2 3/8 in. | 14 | <i>Untitled</i>
1973
Ink and hole-punched paper collage on vellum
30.8 × 27 × 4 cm 12 1/8 × 10 5/8 × 1 9/16 in. |
| 5 | <i>Memory Test: Inflation (You Have a Friend at Chase)</i>
1980
Acrylic, ink, thread, hole-punched paper collage and nails on board
52.1 × 42 × 7.6 cm 20 1/2 × 16 5/16 × 3 in. | 15 | <i>Untitled</i>
1975
Sculp-metal and hole-punched paper collage on board
27 × 22.5 × 2 cm 10 5/8 × 8 7/8 × 0 13/16 in. |
| 6 | <i>Memory Test: Palm</i>
1980
Acrylic, thread, hole-punched paper collage, printed matter, cardstock and glitter on paper
45 × 52.6 × 7 cm 17 1/16 × 20 1/16 × 2 3/4 in. | 16 | <i>Duration and Concentration</i>
1973
Graphite, ink and hole-punched paper on graph paper
45.4 × 39.1 × 4 cm 17 7/8 × 15 3/8 × 1 9/16 in. |
| 7 | <i>Five</i>
1973
Ink on graph paper
62.2 × 73.5 × 3.9 cm 24 1/2 × 28 15/16 × 1 9/16 in. | 17 | <i>Duration: 5/16/73</i>
1973
Graphite, ink and hole-punched paper on graph paper
44.6 × 38.5 × 3.9 cm 17 9/16 × 15 3/16 × 1 9/16 in. |
| 8 | <i>Untitled</i>
1973
Graphite, ink and hole-punched paper on graph paper
61.8 × 73.2 × 3.9 cm 24 5/16 × 28 13/16 × 1 9/16 in. | 18 | <i>1–6031 with Additions, Corrections and Coffee Stain</i>
1973
Graphite, ink and coffee on graph paper
61.8 × 73.6 × 3.9 cm 24 5/16 × 29 × 1 9/16 in. |
| 9 | <i>Untitled (Talcum Powder)</i>
1973
Ink, hole-punched paper, thread, rubber cement and talcum powder on board
36.1 × 40.9 × 3.8 cm 14 3/16 × 16 1/8 × 1 1/2 in. | 19 | <i>Untitled (Space Frame)</i>
1969
Watercolour and oil stick on graph paper
51.9 × 62.1 × 4 cm 20 7/16 × 24 7/16 × 1 9/16 in. |
| 10 | <i>Letter Series, Mildred Pindell to Howardena Pindell</i>
1974
Hole-punched and photocopied paper with thread on board
134.4 × 39.1 × 5.1 cm 3 9/16 × 15 3/8 × 2 in. | 20 | <i>Gray Space Frame</i>
1968
Acrylic, ink and pastel on graph paper
60 × 72.6 × 3.9 cm 23 5/8 × 28 9/16 × 1 9/16 in. |

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	20	19		18	17	16	15	14	13	12		

9×9×9

- 21 *Tesseract #21*
2024
Acrylic on canvas
165.1 × 241.3 cm | 65 × 95 in.
- 22 *Deep Sea #24*
2025
Acrylic on canvas
152.4 × 121.9 cm | 60 × 48 in.
- 23 *Tesseract #26*
2024
Acrylic on canvas
198.1 × 223.5 cm | 78 × 88 in.



- 24

Untitled

1971/2025

Canvas, enamel, grommets and foam

365.8 × 365.8 cm | 144 × 144 in.
- 25

Untitled

1977

Acrylic, hole-punched paper and sequins on canvas

212.1 × 239.7 cm | 83 ½ × 94 ¾ in.
- 26

Gardens

2025

Acrylic, hole-punched paper, matte medium and glitter on sewn canvas

209.6 × 242.3 cm | 82 ½ × 95 ⅝ in.
- 27

Deep Sea Archaeology

2024

Acrylic, hole-punched paper, matte medium and glitter on sewn canvas

213.4 × 236.2 cm | 84 × 93 in.
- 28

Lavender Garden

2024

Acrylic, hole-punched paper and concentrated watercolour on sewn canvas

245.1 × 205.7 cm | 96 ½ × 81 in.
- 29

Yokozuma (Deep Sea)

2024

Acrylic, hole-punched paper and gloss medium on sewn canvas

213.4 × 241.3 cm | 84 × 95 in.
- 30

Untitled #31 (The Solar System Is Beige)

2024

Acrylic, hole-punched paper, concentrated watercolour and matte medium on sewn canvas

248.9 × 217.2 cm | 98 × 85 ½ in.
- 31

Autumn

2024

Acrylic, hole-punched paper and matte medium on sewn canvas

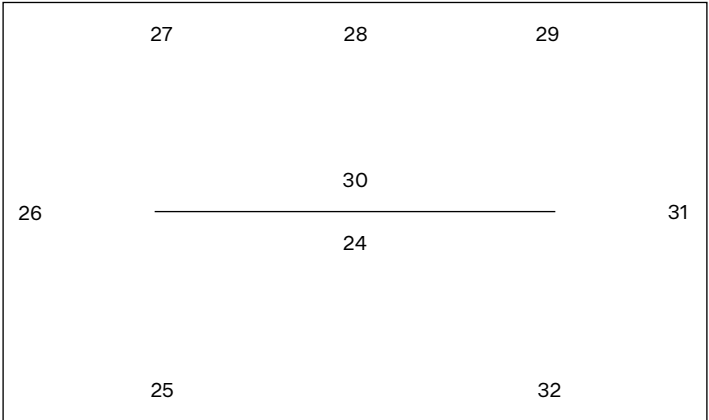
209.6 × 244.5 cm | 82 ½ × 96 ¼ in.
- 32

Untitled

1977

Acrylic, hole-punched paper and sequins on canvas

212.1 × 239.7 cm | 83 ½ × 94 ¾ in.



- 33

Untitled

1971

Acrylic on canvas

161.2 × 222.5 cm | 63 7⁄16 × 87 5⁄8 in.
- 34

Deep Sea #2

2024

Acrylic on canvas

198.1 × 223.5 cm | 78 × 88 in.
- 35

Untitled

1969-72

Acrylic on canvas

161.6 × 213.4 cm | 63 5⁄8 × 84 in.
- 36

Deep Sea #9

2024

Acrylic on canvas

198.1 × 223.5 cm | 78 × 88 in.
- 37

Untitled

1970

Acrylic on canvas

172.7 × 213.4 cm | 68 × 84 in.
- 38

Untitled

1971

Acrylic on canvas

106.7 × 167.6 cm | 42 × 66 in.

- 39

Untitled

1972

Acrylic on canvas

228.6 × 264.2 cm | 90 × 104 in.
- 40

Oceanic Underwater

2025

Acrylic on canvas

Overall: 182.9 × 823 cm | 72 × 324 in.
- 41

Deep Sea #18

2024

Acrylic on canvas

198.1 × 223.5 cm | 78 × 88 in.
- 42

Untitled

1970

Acrylic on canvas

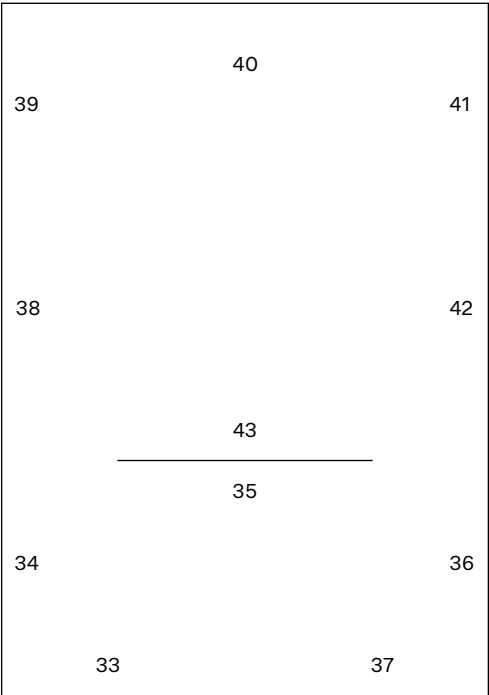
97.2 × 172.7 cm | 38 1⁄4 × 68 in.
- 43

Deep Sea #20

2025

Acrylic on canvas

180.3 × 276.9 cm | 71 × 109 in.



AUDITORIUM

44 *Free, White and 21*
1980
Standard-definition video, colour and sound
12 minutes 15 seconds

45 *Rope/Fire/Water*
2020
Edition 1 of 30
Digital video
16 minutes

46 *Doubling*
1995
Single-channel video, colour and sound
Duration: 3 minutes

Courtesy the Artist, Garth Greenan Gallery, New York
and White Cube

Doubling and *Rope/Fire/Water* include images of racial violence
and slavery which are graphic in nature. Viewer discretion is advised.

White Cube Bermondsey is open
Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm
Sunday, 12pm – 6pm.
Admission is free.

Children must be kept in hand at all times.

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