

10 LIFE LESSONS ON DEDICATION FROM TWO LONE WOMEN ARTISTS

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PERMALINK

'The search is what everyone would undertake if he were not stuck in the everydayness of his own life. To be aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair.'

– Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*

In London's Serpentine Gallery until 15th May, **Hilma af Klint: *Painting the Unseen*** shows pioneering abstract works by a reclusive Swiss who painted under guidance from spiritual beings. During her life, Af Klint refused to display her nearly 1200 works and before her death in 1944, stipulated they should not be shown for a further 20 years since society wouldn't understand. The current Serpentine show has attracted critical acclaim and large audiences, and has promoted Af Klint to cult figure status.

Meanwhile, over at Raven Row until 1st May, a show of **Channa Horwitz** displays works by another secluded yet pioneering female artist that was largely overlooked over the course of her life. Throughout the 1960s and 70s Horwitz quietly pioneered her own brand of West Coast minimalism based on a system where the numbers one to eight are used to depict time and movement.



Hilma af Klint, Serpentine Gallery

What we loved

The Horwitz exhibition is particularly striking for her ability to bring so much life in a simple set of rules. The drawings are intimate and idiosyncratic, using little hand-drawn blocks of colour that can direct music, dance or yoga positions.



Channa Horwitz, Raven Row



Channa Horwitz, Raven Row

Compared to the eccentric mysticism of af Klint's bold works , Horwitz is perhaps the more comprehensible to a modern audience. Just as developers use ones and zeros to code the world into computers, so Horwitz's grids are an attempt to flatten and understand reality, to impose order. One could draw parallels with Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-3) and the vibrancy he found in the New York city grid.

At the same time however, Horwitz's attractive patterns are also naïve to a contemporary audience all too aware of the negative implications of mechanisation, for example via big data collection or false representation. Looking at her grids I was reminded of a video work by Hiro Steyerl called '*How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013' currently on display in the new *Media Networks* display at Tate Modern (watch an extract [here](#)). This work explores decommissioned Photo Calibration Targets —giant patterns of lines and dashes— which were intended to test the focus of analogue airplane cameras. Steyerl's video wryly comments on the digital age, the construction of 'reality' and how measuring, in this case, led to the development of drones, enabling them to successfully hit their targets.



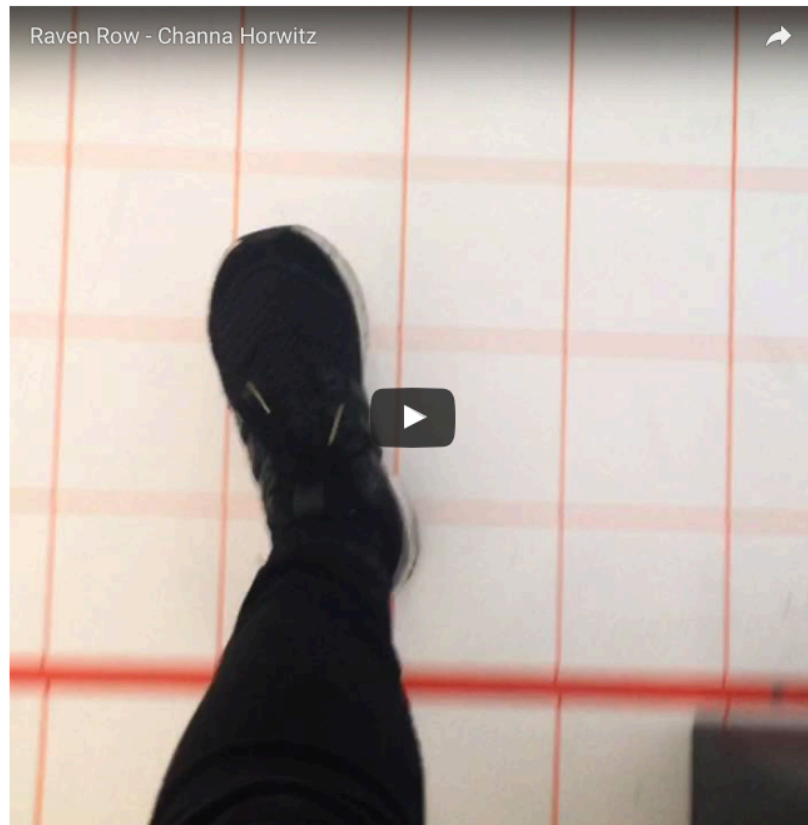
Hiro Steyerl, Tate Modern

What SMARTIFY learnt

Both Hilma Af Kilnt at Serpentine Gallery and Channa Horwitz's first large institutional show at Raven Row are well worth visiting. Both artists worked without recognition across their lifetime and imposed strict rules within which to create work.

For so many of us, the distance between an idea, what you *could* do; and execution, what you *will* do seems insurmountable. We get overwhelmed by all the things we could do and fail to find the courage and determination to commit and follow through. Here we have two female role models who fiercely maintained their position at the fringe. Instead of aiming for average, they committed to and realised a particular vision.

As Horwitz once commented: "I knew that my art was important, because it is honest."



[Hilma af Klint at Serpentine Gallery until 15th May](#)

[Channa Horwitz at Raven Row until 1st May](#)

by Anna Lowe



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