



The Psychedelic Hairscapes of Cathy Ward
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This is a guest post by artist/director [Nick Abrahams](#).

Los Angeles gets the pleasure of being the first city in America to stage a solo show by the London-based artist Cathy Ward. Her forthcoming exhibition at the [Good Luck Gallery](#) is opening on September 5th, with the artist talking about her work at the gallery on September 6th.

Cathy Ward is something of an alternative British institution, having exhibited in many medias and forms over the years with everything from large scale sculptures and installations, to tapisteries and work made from corn dollies. But the work she is best known for are the dark psychic landscapes, reminiscent of woven hair, which are both immediately familiar and unlike anything else you will have ever seen. With a technique she has been honing for seventeen years, she scrapes intricate patterns into a layer of ink to reveal fine lines of the white clay that lie underneath, these scratch works suggest many things... cosmic

struggles, full of pulsations and explosions... the dark matter or the 'dust' of Philip Pullman's novels... swirling waterways or weirs, made up of feminine eddies or sprays of water... but most of all they resemble plaited and flowing swathes of hair.... 'I can't plan them, I can't replicate them either,' Ward says.



Albina Incubii Albion

Hair of the recently deceased was carefully bound and arranged in [Victorian hair works](#), an art form and custom which gradually fell out of fashion. These memento mori often took the form of a piece of jewellery

(such as a locket), but sometimes in fabulously complicated and contorted “hair wreaths.” The hair that flows through these memorials also flows through the works of the Brothers Grimm, with Rapunzel’s climbable tresses, and later continued to flow through the counterculture of the 60s as a signifier of a rejection of cultural norms, whether by long-haired bikers or drug-addled hippies.



Lost Commune

The pulsating lines of Wards works have something of the drawings of [Hans Bellmer](#) about them, suggesting female curves and crevices, with the female body as a site of erotic mystery and power.



Cathy Ward

At a retrospective of the works of outsider artist [Madge Gill](#) in London, Ward was a natural choice for the position as artist in residence, with both artists driven to obsessive drawing styles, Gill with repetitive depiction of angels or ‘spirit guides’ , and Ward with her incredibly detailed abstractions reminiscent of woven hair, both describing very active ‘inner landscapes’ of womens minds, and there is a feeling that the act of line making may, for both women, act as a form of spell casting or be a sacred act.

There is a musicality to the waves in Ward’s work, and she has found a natural connections with certain musicians, such as Sunn O))) who used a triptych of her works on their *Monoliths and Dimensions* sleeve, and Stephen O’Malley of the band later providing a soundtrack for Ward’s animated work “Sonafeld.”

‘The Order’ is a new set of works which make specific reference to Ward’s early tuition under the Sisters of Mercy in Ashford—not the Goth band, but one of the schools run by notoriously strict nuns whose ghostly outlines people Ward’s new pictures. Ward says that the nuns all had their hair cut close to their skulls: “As a child I was shocked, appalled, fascinated that nuns sacrificed their hair in this way. Hair in the 1960s was a symbol of liberation and this livery was being wilfully, symbolically removed.”



The Order

These works often inhabit ornate frames sourced from flea markets and junk shops, giving them the feel of found objects, rediscovered antiquities from another time and place.

These works form part of the world of Cathy Ward's artistic vision. Her many projects [in collaboration with her husband Eric Wright](#) can be followed [here](#), while more information about her solo works can be found [here](#).

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