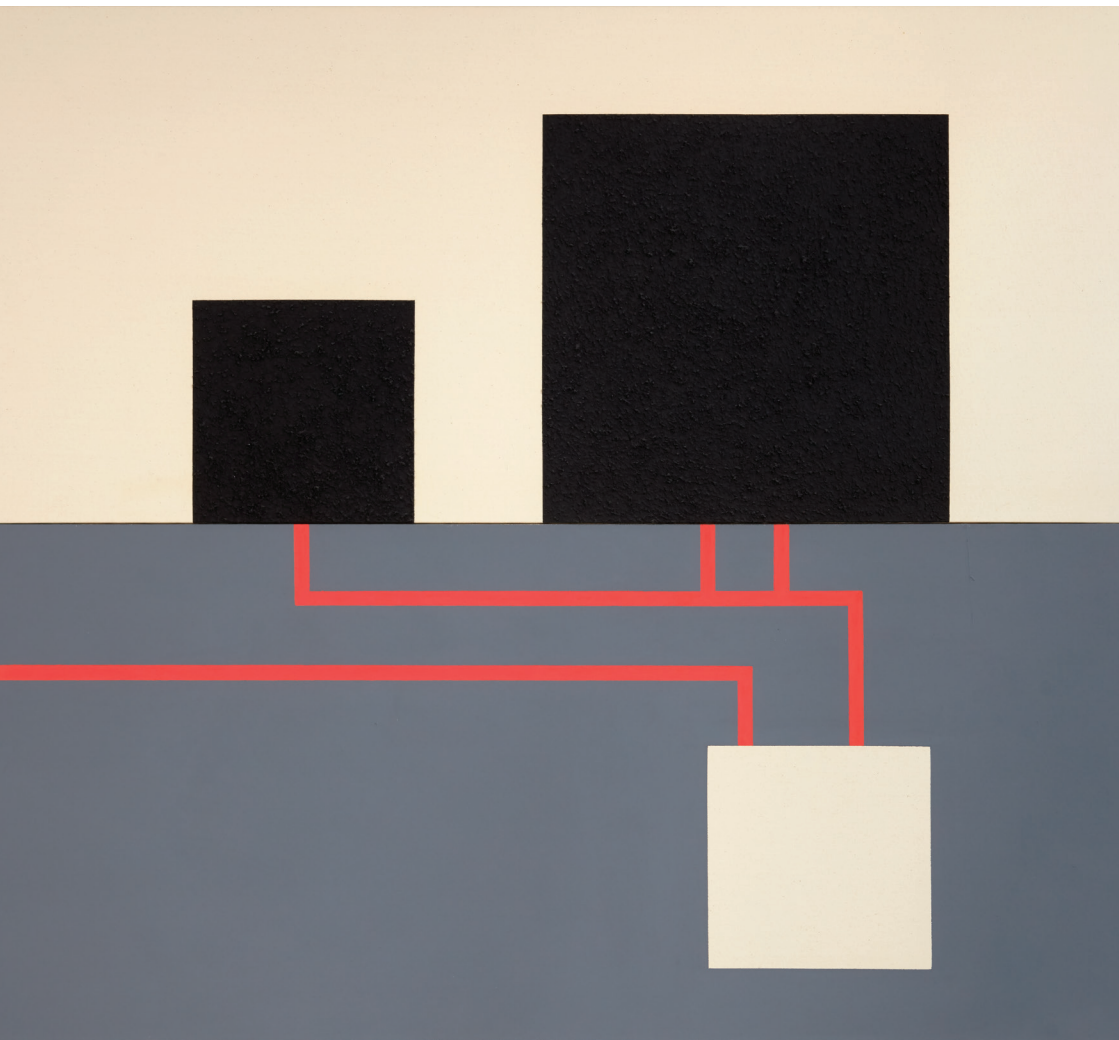


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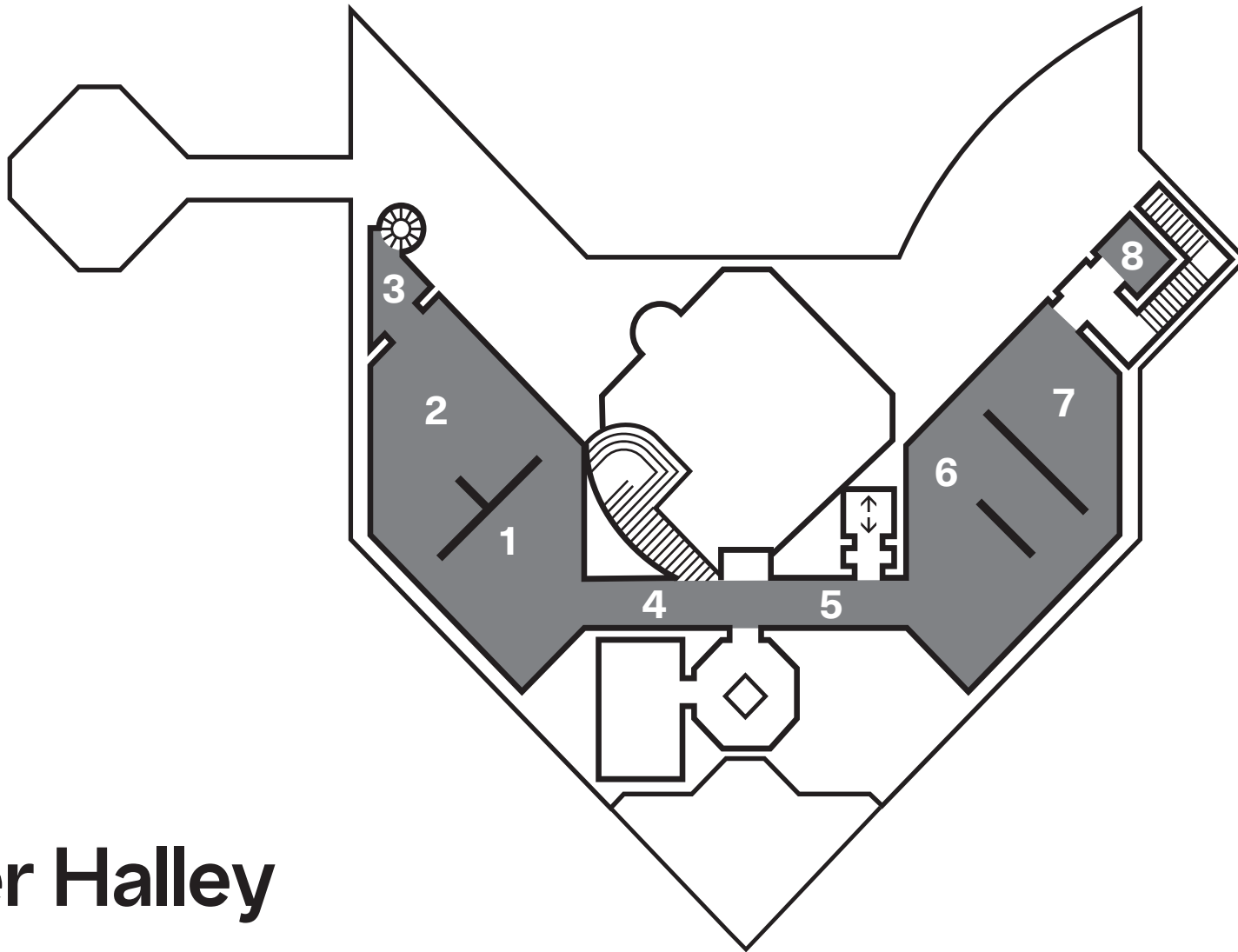
Peter Halley

Conduits: Paintings from the '1980s

31.03 — 15.10.2023

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Curators

Michelle Cotton
Assisted by
Sarah Beaumont

Level +1

1. Prisons, Cells and Conduits: Paintings 1980–83
2. (Anti)Social Networks: Paintings 1984–86
3. *Exploding Cell*, 1983
4. Drawings, 1981
5. Studies and Notes, 1981–89
6. Landscapes: Paintings 1986–88
7. *Asynchronous Terminal*: Paintings 1989
8. Kodaliths, 1983–88

The exhibition

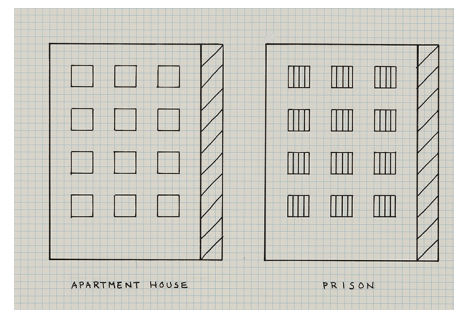
During the 1980s Peter Halley developed a signature vocabulary that he has used in his work now for over forty years. Redeploying the language of geometric abstraction, he produced diagrammatic paintings representing social subjects. With these works he addressed issues that are fundamental to art produced over the last two centuries: namely, urbanisation and industrialisation, considering their impact and legacies within a post-industrial society marked by technological change. Working at the advent of the internet and at a time that saw the mass adoption of personal computers and video games, he describes the physical and bureaucratic environments of the late twentieth-century and the systemic logic that found expression within the architectures of a new digital space. Reflecting on this period in his essay, 'Geometry and the Social' (1990) Halley wrote:

I wanted to draw attention to this geometricised, rationalised, quantified world. I saw it as a world characterised by efficiency, by regimentation of movement, and by the rationalisation of all social structures and bureaucracies, whether in the corporation, government, or university. It is a world also characterised by the commodification and quantification of all aspects of human activity – where one can put a number or a dollar sign on any human activity... [Geometry is] the language of [the] managerial-professional class. It is the language of the corporation and flow charts; it is the language of urban planning and of communications.¹

This exhibition is the first museum survey of Halley's 1980s work in over thirty years. Drawing extensively on Halley's critical writing, interviews and unpublished notes, the exhibition and accompanying publication seek to re-evaluate this

early work and its subjects of alienation, isolation, confinement and connectivity within the context of its production. The exhibition reflects upon both the artistic and critical landscape of New York in the 1980s and a period of social history shaped by economic expansion and collapse, nuclear threat and the AIDS epidemic.

It includes the work *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (1987), which was acquired for Mudam's collection in 1998, eight years before the museum opened to the public. The painting remains an anchor work for the collection, emblematic of the museum's interest in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century abstract painting, the legacies of modernism and the more recent acquisitions of digital work that it foregrounds.



The exhibition includes works on loan from the collections of Penny and Mark Aaron; the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover; Andrea Caratsch, St. Moritz; the collection of the artist; Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich; the Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles; CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux; Richard Edwards and Kevin Rasmnaraine; Gary Tatintsian Gallery, New York / Dubai; Maruani Mercier Gallery, Brussels; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Ortiz-Gurdián Collection; Rennie Collection, Vancouver; B.Z. and Michael Schwartz; Vanhaerents Art Collection; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and from lenders who wish to remain anonymous.

1. Prisons, Cells and Conduits: Paintings 1980–83

To what purpose is geometric form put in our culture? Why is modern society so obsessed with geometric form that, for at least the last two centuries, we have striven to build and live in geometric environments of increasing complexity and exclusivity? Why has geometric art been so widely accepted in our century, and why has geometric imagery gained an unprecedented importance in our public iconography?

Peter Halley, 'The Crisis in Geometry', 1984²

The vocabulary that Halley developed in the early 1980s borrowed loosely but visibly from the history of twentieth-century geometric abstract art: from the square forms used by Kazimir Malevich or Josef Albers to the grids of Piet Mondrian; from the expanses of raw canvas and colour fields of Mark Rothko to the bands of colour that Barnett Newman 'zipped' across his canvases. Similarly, from minimalism Halley adopted the use of industrial (as opposed to artisanal) tools and materials; applying paint with rollers (instead of brushes) and using Roll-a-Text and Day-Glo for their respective readymade texture and manufactured colour. While this approach enabled Halley to address the subject of painting and its history within his work, it was also symptomatic of a wider trend in cultural and philosophical discourse that from 1980 was referred to as 'intertextuality'. This idea – which can be linked to the technological development of hypertext (and latterly the internet) – consisted in generating meaning via a network of references. In Halley's work this compositional strategy is also self-reflexive, as one decision leads to

another in an ongoing and increasingly heterogeneous project which began with the paintings in this room.

Radically re-thinking the symbolic terrain of modernism, Halley deconstructed the language of abstraction and the square. These were re-imagined not as 'pure' utopian sources, but as dystopian symbols of the regulation of physical and social space and the impact of technology on contemporary life. Halley's seminal images of confinement; his paintings of 'prisons', 'cells' and subterranean 'chambers' were initially an attempt to convey the sense of social alienation, isolation and stimulation that he attributed to huge urban environments:

In 1980, I moved back to New York City, where I had grown up. What impressed me there, on a very immediate level, was the functional role that geometry served in a giant metropolis – the role that geometry had in housing and in moving people, in commerce, and in the control of everyday life.

Peter Halley, 'Geometry and the Social', 1990³

The Grave (1980), the first painting in this exhibition, was made later that year. It is one of a number of works from 1980 and 1981 that imply a human subject via an idea of loss or death and entombment using geometric form. Early in 1981 Halley arrived at the 'prison' as a motif: 'I took the modernist square – Malevich's square – put this stucco on it to make it feel three-dimensional on the canvas, put bars in the middle and said, "The square is now a prison for me. It's no longer an idealist platonic shape, but rather an image of confinement."'14

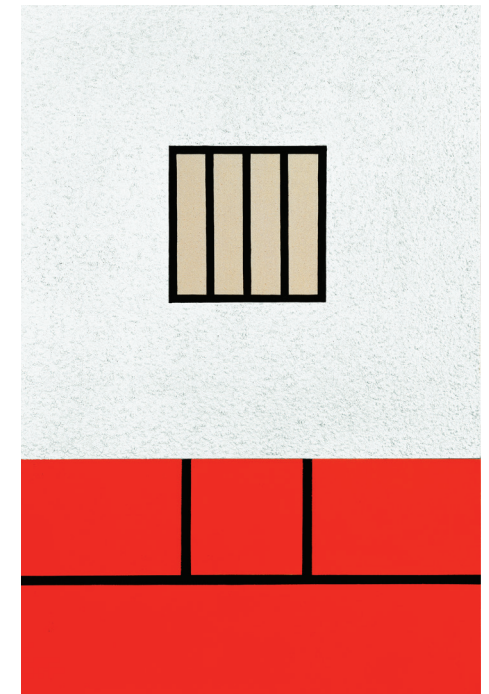
By 1981 the objects of confinement were connected by lines or 'conduits', with which he alludes to the networks of pipes, ducts and cables that supply

us with water, air, energy and information. *Prison with Conduit* (1981) incorporates three important innovations in Halley's vocabulary: it is the first painting to be made on two attached panels, the first to employ Day-Glo colour and the first to feature a 'conduit'. While the prison figures confinement, the conduit diagrams connection: 'If I began with geometry as alienation, with the square as prison, a space of enforced isolation, my perceptions soon began to change. Sitting at home in my loft, I was always aware of the physical isolation and social containment engendered by systems of industrial organisation. Cars, apartments, even office cubicles are isolating situations. But the phone rings, there's electric light, there's television, there's radio. I began to realise that even though contemporary space is defined by physical isolation, it is also characterised by inter-connections. Things come in and out – but they are all technologically mediated things. That's why the idea of the conduit – a supply line leading into the cell from underneath – came into my work.'⁵

By 1982, the subject of confinement or enclosure was also figured with a 'cell', a monochrome square painted with Roll-a-Text. The choice of this term is also significant, a cell referring on the one hand to an architectural entity but also to a source of energy (in a battery) or a unit of data storage (in a computer). In the 1982 paintings *Red Cell with Conduit* and *Glowing and Burnt-Out Cells with Conduit* colour is used to imply the presence or absence of energy.

While these paintings can be seen as diagrams of architectural space, systems and flow, the idea of an incarcerated or entombed human subject is retained through the use of scale. *Freudian Painting* (1981) depicts two prisons, which Halley 'imagined [as] a

parent prison accompanied by a child prison'.⁶ Similarly, *Two Cells with Conduit and Underground Chamber* from 1983 represents Halley's own family network, with a 'child' and 'parent' cell on the ground connected to an 'underground chamber' via a fluorescent red conduit. The underground chamber is left unpainted, an empty void with which Halley alludes to his father, who died when he was a child. The family unit is thus depicted as a networked entity, a group of isolated elements connected by a system of fluorescent conduits, with which Halley also implies a broader societal infrastructure that serves each household.



Prison with Conduit, 1981

2. (Anti)Social Networks: Paintings 1984–86

New York is the quintessential city of the heroic era of linear conquest. With its strictly grided and numbered streets. New York insists on the Cartesian quality of its plan... The semiconductor chip conforms to this same model of two-dimensional planar circulation. Gradually, just as the social has been transferred onto this schema of highways and malls, so are memory and knowledge being transposed onto these miniature circuits.

Peter Halley, 'On Line', 1985⁷

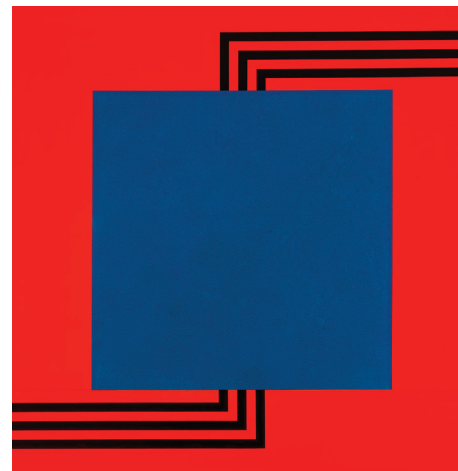
Ideal City (1984) is one of two paintings that Halley made of a space seen in plan (as opposed to a sectional view). Halley also compared the composition to 'the face of a touch-tone telephone', linking the organisation of urban, architectural space to the subject of 'connectivity', or more specifically, a 'system of linear connections [that] was also discernible in a variety of other social phenomena [such as] the electronic microchip [or] in the flow charts used to map the bureaucracies of corporations and governments.'⁸

Halley's paintings of the mid-1980s often depict prisons, cells and conduits on black backgrounds, echoing the aesthetics of the first generations of home video game consoles. The subject of alienation and social isolation figures iconographically in these paintings but also with a degree of humour. The 1985 painting *Prison and Cell with Smokestack and Conduit* draws equivalences between ideas of imprisonment and freedom, while the prison in *Yellow Prison with Underground Conduit* is completely cut adrift by its conduit.

We are today enraptured by the very geometries that once represented coercive discipline. Today children sit for hours fascinated by the Day-Glo geometric displays of video games... Now that we are enraptured by geometry, geometric art has disappeared. There is no need any more for Mardens or Rymans to convince us of the essential beauty of the geometric field embodied in the television set's glowing image. Today we have instead 'figurative art': to convince us that the humanist body hasn't disappeared (though it has).

Peter Halley, 'The Deployment of the Geometric', 1986⁹

By the mid-1980s Halley's paintings and writing became increasingly concerned with ideas of circulation and flow. From 1985 conduits appeared on the upper panels of the paintings. These took the form of 'circulating conduits', as in *Two Cells with Circulating Conduit* from 1986. They also emerged from the top of the cell as in the 1985 paintings *Yellow Cell with Conduits* and *Glowing Cell with Conduits* and *Blue Cell with Triple Conduit* from 1986. Halley explains: 'I began to make paintings in which the conduit went up into the cell, emerged through the top, and exited stage right. These paintings had a greater sense of dynamism and speed. The identity of the cell was no longer that of a terminus. It became a kind of transformer or microprocessor through which the conduit had to pass.'¹⁰

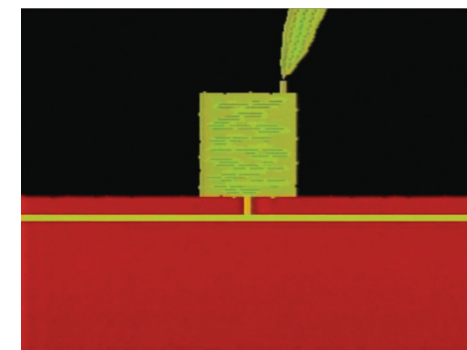


Blue Cell with Triple Conduit, 1986

East Gallery: Staircase

3. *Exploding Cell*, 1983

This two-minute computer animation is Halley's only moving image work. A line is drawn from left to right; it becomes a horizon with a cell. A black conduit appears underneath and is 'lit up by an illuminating gas',¹¹ which escapes via a smokestack before the cell turns red and explodes, leaving a pile of ashes that flicker with a stroboscopic effect. Halley explains: 'The idea had something to do with Cold War politics and the threat of nuclear destruction. So the exploding cell was originally about civilisation ending. But the narrative of the exploding cell very quickly became an ongoing part of my work. Then as time went on, the narrative became less important to me, and eventually I began to focus solely on the icon of the explosion. The more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that the explosion is also a central image in our culture. It goes back a hundred years to the beginning of modern warfare and terrorism. I've used the image of the explosion over and over in my wall-size digital prints, in contrast to the cells and prisons which are depicted in my paintings.'¹²



Exploding Cell, 1983

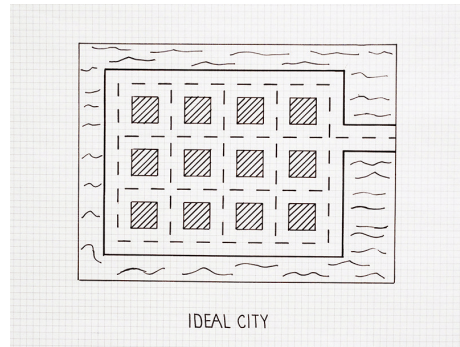
4. Drawings, 1981

Throughout the 1980s, Halley used a pen or pencil on gridded paper to set down his compositional ideas. In 1981 he produced a series of larger, formally composed works on graph paper. Unlike his spontaneous studies, these are carefully drawn with a drafting pen and ink and were made to document the initial development of his vocabulary.

Drawings such as *Kinds of Prisons*, *Prisons – Inside and Outside*, *Houses with Windows* and *Prisons, Windows* are closely linked to the paintings Halley made in 1980 and 1981, after he moved back to New York after living in New Orleans for several years. These works also contain reflections of earlier works and show the influence of the paintings of Philip Guston and conversely, reflect the architectures and designs of the Memphis Group. Areas of pattern, and in particular the use of dots also denote a gendered idea of geometry: 'I associated a square with stubble, ... as a symbol for a male figure so these prisons and cells and this constricted space ... [were] a sort of a critique of the constrained masculinity that I sometimes feel.'¹³

Other works are studies for paintings such as *Ideal City* (1984). *A Short History of America* is an earlier, informally organised collage from 1981 which gathers a diverse array of sketches and ephemera. It includes a hand-drawn route map of flights to and from Paris – Charles de Gaulle airport, a street plan of Lower Manhattan, a map of oil fields and pipelines in Saudi Arabia, a magazine photo of a cruise missile, a reproduction of Robert Crumb's 1979 cartoon *A Short History of America*, and photographs that Halley took in the corridor outside his

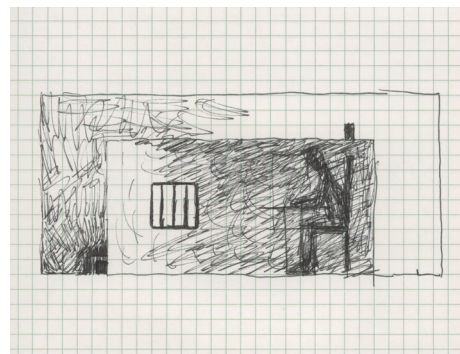
psychotherapist's office and at the John Lennon memorial in Central Park in December 1980.



Ideal City, 1981

5. Studies and Notes, 1981–89

The studies, sketches and notes on loose sheets of paper and filling twelve notebooks that Halley worked in during this period attest to an intuitive, 'diaristic' approach: technical drawings annotated with dimensions and colours, and studies for paintings sit alongside ideas for titles for Kodalith prints and other information, such as appointments, telephone numbers and addresses. Several drawings (including the ones presented here) incorporate a figure, demonstrating Halley's attention to the 'human scale' of the paintings.



Page from Notebook #5, 1985–86, including study for *Rectangular Prison with Smokestack*

6. Landscapes: Paintings 1986–88

The very idea of organic time is superseded and replaced by a mechanised, segmented, digital time... The standard of chronological measurement has become the rate of vibration of the quartz crystal. Living time is transferred onto the sequential, segmented, linear mediums of visual and audio recording. First, film replaces organic time with its strings of mechanically-timed sequential images. The videotape replaces film, further entrapping life into magnetically-encoded lines of information. In audio, as well, sound is first transferred onto the phonograph record where it is mechanically reproduced by means of the linear track of the stylus, then onto magnetic tape, and finally onto the audio disk, where a light beam reads digitally-encoded information. As the system is purified, it gains a para-spiritual quality: living sound becomes an alchemical amalgam of light-beams and numbers.

Peter Halley, 'Notes on Abstraction', 1987¹⁴

Halley's influential 1984 essay, 'The Crisis in Geometry' developed from his close reading of Michel Foucault's

1975 treatise, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and Jean Baudrillard's 1983 *Simulations*. Drawing upon Foucault, Halley described a 'geometricisation of the social [which] extended beyond the physical environment into organisational schema'. Including the 'time clock, the chart, and the graph, by which bodies and their movements could be measured and categorised'.¹⁵ Between 1986 and 1988 he addressed this notion of mechanical, segmented time in a series of landscape-format paintings.

Beginning with *No Man's Land* (1986), these works eradicated the prisons, cells and other elements from the upper part of the composition. Halley explains: 'I became interested in the idea of an emptier space. ... I eliminated the cell from the image. The conduit just runs along underground, it doesn't connect with anything. The space above is black; it's a landscape at the edge of town, emptied of activity.'¹⁶ Underscored by a single, lower panel with a conduit that runs end-to-end, these works make explicit reference to Barnett Newman's (vertical) zip motif.

With *Three Sectors* (1986), he extended the composition horizontally, adding two panels to the upper part of the composition. The work uses a sequence of colours sourced from a corporate graphic to simulate an explosion, alluding to the threat of nuclear destruction: 'The empty



Three Sectors, 1986

space is illuminated, as if the darkness had been replaced by a kind of dawn – not a natural dawn, but a sort of irradiated dawn of awful Day-Glo orange.¹⁷ Subsequent works such as *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (1987) and *Initial Sequence* (1988) employed different shades of a single colour, Halley explains: 'The issues became emptiness and speed (when the conduit became horizontal it seemed to travel faster). I wondered if lining up two or three of these panels would create the idea of something changing, going from light to dark or dark to light. I began to think that if the spatial aspect of our culture is so segmented and regimented, maybe the temporal aspect would be the same. For me the three-panel paintings recall a film strip with three frames and the soundtrack going below it.'¹⁸

If the conduits in earlier works signified connections, here they manifest disconnection. The implicit hierarchy of a cell or prison or chamber served by conduits is broken and the conduit becomes an even more disconcerting subterranean presence. These apocalyptic 'landscapes' were painted in the period from 1986 to 1988, years that saw the height of the AIDS crisis, the 'Black Monday' stock market crash and the culmination of the nuclear arms race.

Other works such as *White Cell with Conduit* (1986) and *White Cell with Conduit* and *Rectangular Cell with Smokestack* (both 1987) and the diptych, *Two Cells* (1988) embody a similar opacity that Halley described as a deliberate, 'mute' character: 'I began to use colour in a very codified and almost subdued way. The cells seemed very isolated and alone. They were very frontal, hieratic, and almost obstinate: the cell was present but mute. The paintings quite consciously refer to a [Barnett] Newmanesque kind of presence or here-ness. They were also about a refusal to speak.'¹⁹

7. Asynchronous Terminal: Paintings 1989

And lastly, we have the hegemony of the computer. This is something that has very much concerned me on an experiential level. Almost all knowledge is stored in computers nowadays, and almost all communication is mediated through the computer. However, I think we are totally unaware of the impact of this level of mediation in our lives. Further the computer represents a final concrete realisation of Cartesian thought – it is abstract thought made 'real'.

Peter Halley, 'Geometry and the Social', 1990²⁰

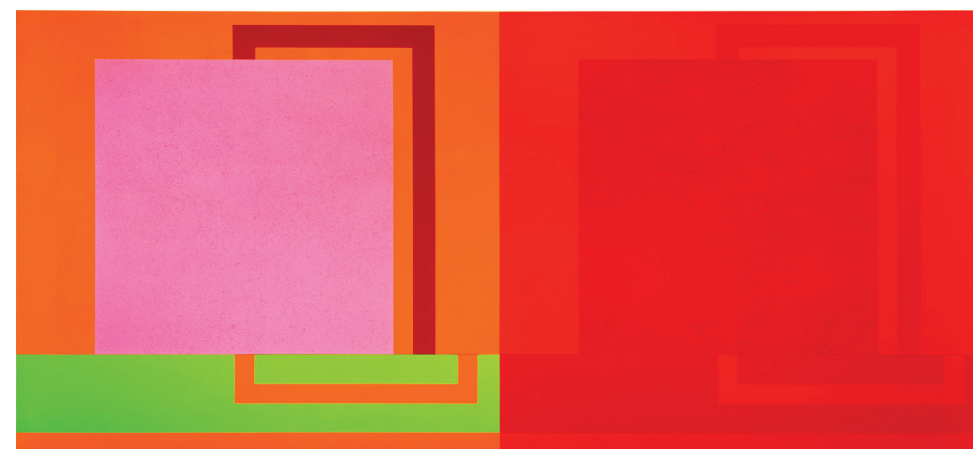
Prison, Asynchronous Terminal, Partial Grounding and *A Monstrous Paradox* (all 1989) foreground the work that Halley would continue in the 1990s (and subsequent decades). By the end of the decade the compositions began to anticipate an era of hyperconnectivity; conduits became manifold, painted with different colours, thicknesses and extending in different directions, embodying a new-found 'absurdity' in the techno-social moment: 'I wanted them to become thicker, like arteries opening to accommodate an increased flow of blood. I began to do arbitrary irrational things with them. The conduits no longer followed any kind of pathway that would describe a linear flow of information or energy. Most sacrilegiously of all, I made some of them come out of the sides of the cells and go up vertically. It seemed very funny to me because, in a technological vocabulary, nothing should go up to the sky. It was a transcendental kind of idea. There is no reason for it. These paintings became general networks of jumbled, complex and irrational sets of interconnected relationships.'²¹

Whereas Halley considered other paintings of the 1980s to be 'nominal', describing 'an inventory of objects: a cell, a prison, cells with conduits, etc.' he saw these paintings as 'much more verbal, they are more about motion. They are about being in the space rather than looking at a picture of it. They give me the feeling of rushing around in that space, of flowing through it rather than looking at a diagram of that flow'.²² These works were painted in the same year that internet access became publicly available in the US via the first commercial service provider. Halley later linked these developments within his work to the cultural moment that accompanied the first years of the internet and the World Wide Web.

Small West Gallery

8. Kodaliths, 1983–88

Halley produced a series of prints on Kodalith photographic film, a (now obsolete) material used for graphic art work. The dense black tones achieved with this photographic negative enabled Halley to produce a high contrast print that renders the text as a clear mylar 'window', which is set in front of a white matt board. These works reproduce words or phrases that were collected from a range of sources including advertising, album sleeves, ATM screens and road signs. Collectively they explore modes of receiving and processing energy and information by isolating fragments of language. They can also be linked to Halley's influential writing from the 1980s, which provided an important critical context for his paintings and the work of his peers.



A Monstrous Paradox, 1989

Peter Halley's Vocabulary

Halley's paintings use a vocabulary of form and materials that he developed in the early 1980s and continues to use in his work today. Each decision informs another, making it possible to see the evolution of this singular approach to painting via the series of works in this exhibition.

Walls

'Brick walls' appear in seven paintings from 1980 and 1981 and in some of the drawings in this exhibition. The shape and scale of the masonry resembles cinderblocks (as opposed to actual brick). Unlike subsequent works (which are painted with rollers), these works are painted with a brush.



Prisons

A square containing a smaller centred square 'window' that is 'barred' with three vertical lines and framed with lines of the same width. The first prison was painted with a brick-wall surface, and from 1981 the prison's 'walls' were painted with Roll-a-Tex. Acting partly as an 'analogy' for the isolation of 'urban life'²⁴ and partly as a corruption of geometric abstraction, the prisons transformed the ideal, pure form of the square and reimagined it 'as a space of confinement'.²⁵ 'Structure and geometry' are thus 'prisonlike, and not ideal as in Malevich or Mondrian'.²⁶ Vertical and horizontal rectangular variations of the prison, with two or three window openings, are also introduced in 1981.



Cells

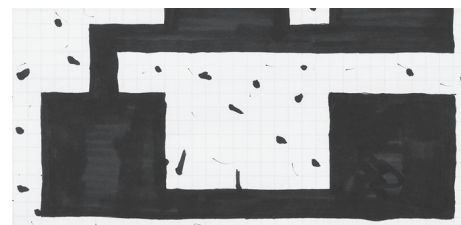
A monochrome square painted with Roll-a-Tex. Initially occupying an entire panel, cells are subsequently situated on a horizon line and painted against backgrounds. 'The cell is a reminder of the apartment house, the hospital bed, the school desk – the isolated end-points of industrial structure.'²⁷ Although predominantly square, horizontal and vertical rectangular variations appear respectively in 1982 and 1983.

Conduits

Initially painted on a second, underlying panel, conduits first appear as black lines on a fluorescent red ground. Principally connected to prisons or cells, they reimagine Barnett Newman's iconic (vertical) stripe 'as plumbing', emphasising connectivity. From 1983 they also appear as horizontal lines that run across the panel without making connections, and from 1986 they appear in more than one colour and in more diverse forms. These include being painted on the upper panel, as symmetrical (circulating conduits) or asymmetrical pairs and as a set of three parallel lines (triple conduits). From 1988 the thickness of the conduit is also varied.

Smokestack

A small rectangular form resembling a chimney that in 1984 and 1985 appears occasionally on the top right edge of a cell, and exceptionally on one prison in 1987.



Underground Chamber

A monochromatic square or rectangle on the lower panel that is either unpainted raw canvas or painted black, present in paintings from 1983, 1987 and 1988.

Roll-a-Tex

A rough-texture paint medium manufactured to disguise imperfect surfaces. Adopted from 1981 as an ersatz material to describe prisons and cells. Initially seen by Halley in the 'newly constructed condos in the suburbs of New Orleans' in the 1970s,²⁸ 'The 'stucco-texture' is described as 'a reminiscence of motel ceilings'²⁹ and 'a totally fake, extra-terrestrial, science-fictional material'.³⁰

Phosphorescent Acrylic

Photoluminescent paint is used in several works made during 1981 and 1982 to render glow-in-the-dark images that could be revealed after exposure to light.

Day-Glo

Fluorescent acrylic paint is used interchangeably to describe prisons, cells and conduits, and on the upper or lower panels. First appearing in 1981, Halley described it as 'a signifier of "low budget mysticism". It is the afterglow of radiation'.³¹ Adopting a strategy from commercial design, in which fluorescent colour is used 'in packaging and in supermarkets' to draw consumer attention, colour is used 'as a signifier'. Halley cites the philosophical discourse

of Jean Baudrillard: 'In post-modern culture everything is hyperreal, more intensely real than the real. You take red, for instance, and you want to make it more intense than the real, so you make it Day-Glo red.'³²

Panels

Most paintings comprise multiple panels, each of which is a stretched canvas. Several works from 1981 and 1982 consist of two or three separate panels. Beginning in 1981, many comprise two or more panels bolted together. Initially stacked on a vertical axis, they provide a horizontal plane upon which the composition is organised: 'It's about above versus below ground, visible versus hidden, and maybe even the conscious and subconscious.' The landscape-format paintings of 1986 and 1987 include up to three panels arranged in a lateral sequence, recalling 'a film strip with three frames and the soundtrack going below it', alluding to 'Warhol's silkscreen paintings, in which he often placed a blank canvas to the right of the photographic image conveying the idea of cinematic time'.³³

Profile

The canvases are stretched on a purposefully deep, 9 cm³⁴ frame: 'The idea was to establish a plane, on which the activity in the paintings would take place, that was very separate from the plane of the wall ... to project the painting into relief so that it would have a kind of space projected forward from the real space that it was hung in'.³⁵

The artist

Peter Halley was born in New York in 1953. He studied Art History at Yale University (1971–75), Painting (1976–87) at the University of New Orleans.

During the first two decades of his career he held institutional solo exhibitions at Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1989); CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1991); Dallas Museum of Art (1995); Museum of Modern Art, New York (1997); Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Japan; and Museum Folkwang, Essen (1998).

His work was also presented within major surveys including *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (1986); the 1987 and 1991 *Biennial* exhibitions, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *NY Art Now: The Saatchi Collection*, Saatchi Gallery, London (1987); *The Binational: American Art of the Late 80s, German Art of the Late 80s*, Museum of Fine Arts, and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; the *Carnegie International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (1988); *New Abstraction*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona and Kunsthalle Bielefeld (1996); and *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1999).

More recently he has held exhibitions at Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole (2014); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2016); and Dallas Contemporary (2021). Since the mid-1990s, he has produced a number of permanent public works including commissions for the State University of New York-Buffalo; the city library in Usera, Spain; the Dallas/Fort Worth International

Airport in Texas; and the Gallatin School at New York University.

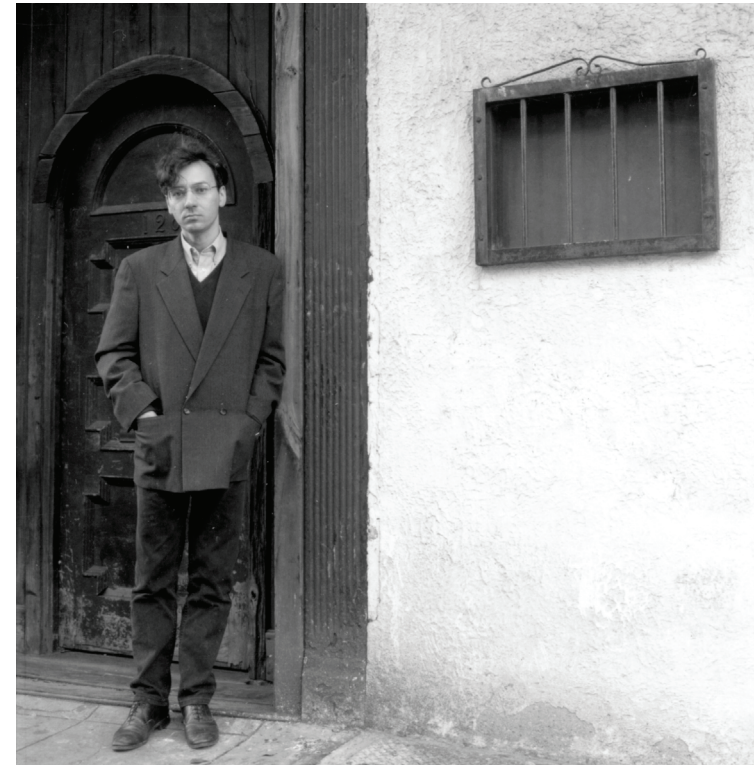
His critical writings are published within several volumes: *Peter Halley: Collected Essays 1981–1987* (1988); *Peter Halley: Recent Essays, 1990–1996* (1997) and *Peter Halley: Selected Essays, 1981-2001* (2013) and in Italian and French translation as *Scritti Sull'Arte ed Altro* (1990) and *La Crise de la géométrie et autres essais 1981-1987* (1992) respectively. He received the Frank Jewett Mather Award from the College Art Association in the United States for his critical writing in 2001.

In 1996 with Bob Nickas he founded *index magazine*, publishing fifty-one issues on art, design, fashion, film literature, music and photography. The magazine closed in 2006 and its history is

celebrated in the publication *index A to Z: art, design, fashion, film, and music in the indie era* (2014).

Halley began teaching at Yale School of Art, Yale University in 1999, serving as Director of Graduate Studies in Painting and Printmaking from 2002 to 2011. In 2010 he was designated as the William Leffingwell Professor of Painting.

His work is held in numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, London and Centre Pompidou, Paris. He lives and works in New York.



Peter Halley in front of his first New York studio at 128 East Seventh Street, 1985

Publication

Peter Halley. *Conduits: Paintings from the 1980s*

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue reproducing Halley's paintings alongside kodaliths, drawings, studies, notes and texts. Published by Mudam and Hatje Cantz, this extensive monograph includes three new essays by Tim Griffin, Paul Pieroni and the exhibition's curator, Michelle Cotton. It also features a 35-page, expanded interview with the artist compiled from various published and unpublished conversations recorded between 1985 and 2021. Interlocutors include Juan Bolivar, Dan Cameron, Yann Chateigné Tytelman, Trevor Fairbrother, Kathryn Hixson, Annette Leddy, Tom McGlynn, Giancarlo Politi and Helena Kontova, Jeanne Siegel and Jim Walrod.

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Peter Halley Conduits Paintings from the 1980s

Notes: The Exhibition

- ¹ Peter Halley, 'Geometry and the Social', 1990, published in *Peter Halley, Selected Essays 1981–2001*, New York / Paris / Turin: Edgewise Press, 2013, p. 158.
- ² Peter Halley, 'The Crisis in Geometry', 1984, *ibid.*, pp. 91–92.
- ³ Peter Halley, 'Geometry and the Social', *op. cit.*, p. 156.
- ⁴ Annette Leddy, 'Oral history interview with Peter Halley, 2021 September 29 – October 6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution'.
- ⁵ Peter Halley's talk for the Independent Curators International series 'New York Studio Events' in 1987, published in transcription within Judith Richards (ed.), *Inside the Studio: Two Decades of Talks with Artists in New York*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2004, p. 32.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Peter Halley, 'On Line', 1985, published in *Peter Halley, Selected Essays*, 2013, p. 117.
- ⁸ Richards, *op. cit.*
- ⁹ Peter Halley, 'The Deployment of the Geometric', 1985, published in *Peter Halley, Selected Essays*, 2013, pp. 131–132.
- ¹⁰ Kathryn Hixson, 'Interview with Peter Halley', *Peter Halley: Œuvres de 1982 à 1991*, Bordeaux: CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1991, p. 24.
- ¹¹ Halley adds that this phrase was borrowed 'from Duchamp', Leddy, *op. cit.*
- ¹² 'A Conversation with Max Hollein and Peter Halley' in *Peter Halley: The Schirn Ring*, Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2016, p. 73. In 1994 Halley made a series of nine brightly coloured screenprints entitled *Exploding Cell* and in 1995, *Exploding Cell Wallpaper*, a simplified, black-and-white version of the colour prints. Both the wallpaper and the prints were part of the exhibition *New Concepts in Printmaking I: Peter Halley*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 18 September 1997–8 February 1998.
- ¹³ Peter Halley interviewed by Robert Diament and Russel Tovey, *Talk Art*, Season 15, Episode 5, 9 December 2022, <https://shows.acast.com/talkart/episodes/peter-halle> (accessed 2 February 2023).
- ¹⁴ Peter Halley, 'Notes on Abstraction', 1987, published in *Peter Halley, Selected Essays*, 2013, pp. 146–147.
- ¹⁵ Peter Halley, 'The Crisis in Geometry', 1984, *ibid.*, p. 93.
- ¹⁶ Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Trevor Fairbrother, 'Interview with Peter Halley', *The Binational: American Art of the Late 80s, German Art of the Late 80s*, Boston: The Museum of Fine Art, Cologne: DuMont, 1988, p. 98.
- ¹⁹ Hixson, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- ²⁰ Peter Halley, 'Geometry and the Social', *op. cit.*, p. 160.
- ²¹ Hixson, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–28.
- ²² *Ibid.*

Notes: Vocabulary

- ²³ The small prison in *Freudian Painting* is an exception, being painted with a two-bar window.
- ²⁴ Alexandre Stipanovich, with Kathy Grayson and Jeremy Liebman, 'In the Studio with Painter Peter Halley', *Opening Ceremony New News*, 15 April 2013.
- ²⁵ Giancarlo Politi, with Giacinto Di Pietrantonio and Helena Kontova, 'Peter Halley', *Flash Art*, No. 150, January-February 1990, p. 86.
- ²⁶ Hixson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- ²⁷ Peter Halley, 'Notes on The Paintings', 1982, published in *Peter Halley, Selected Essays*, p. 68.
- ²⁸ Email from the artist, 29 November 2022.
- ²⁹ Halley, 'Notes on The Paintings', *op. cit.*
- ³⁰ Hixson, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.
- ³¹ Halley, 'Notes on The Paintings', *op. cit.*
- ³² Halley interviewed by Michèle Cone in 'Peter Halley', *Flash Art*, No. 126, February-March 1986, p. 36.
- ³³ This quotation, which is based on a statement in Halley's interview with Trevor Fairbrother, has been revised by the artist for the exhibition. The original interview is published in

The Binational: American Art of the Late 80s, German Art of the Late 80s, Boston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Cologne: DuMont, 1988, pp. 95–101.

³⁴ The stretchers were initially 9 cm and subsequently (from the late 1980s) 9.5 cm.

³⁵ Halley, quoted from Politi, *op. cit.* p. 84.

Image credits

Cover: *Two Cells with Conduit and Underground Chamber*, 1983
Two attached panels | Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic and Roll-a-Text on unprimed canvas | Collection of B.Z. and Michael Schwartz

Page from Notebook 1, 1981–82

Apartment House / Prison, 1981 | Marker ink and graphite with correction fluid on graph paper | Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York | Purchase, Ruth & Seymour Klein Foundation and Madeline Mohr Revocable Trust Gifts, 2017
Accession Number: 2017.290

Prison with Conduit, 1981 | Two attached panels | Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic and Roll-a-Text on canvas | Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts | Gift of the artist, (PA 1971), Addison Art Drive, 1991.12

Blue Cell with Triple Conduit, 1986 | Two attached panels | Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic and Roll-a-Text on canvas | Whitney Museum of American Art, New York | Gift of Heather and Steve Mnuchin | Accession number: 2004.608a-b

Exploding Cell (still), 1983 | Computer animation | 2 min 31 sec, looped | Collection of the artist

Ideal City, 1981 | Ink and pencil on graph paper | Collection of the artist

Page from Notebook #5 (detail), 1985–86, including study for *Rectangular Prison with Smokestack* | Collection of the artist

Three Sectors, 1986 | Four attached panels | Acrylic and fluorescent acrylic on canvas | Courtesy Galerie Andrea Caratsch, St. Moritz

A Monstrous Paradox, 1989 | Four attached panels | Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic and Roll-a-Text on canvas | Ortiz-Gurdián Collection | Photo: Steven Sloman

Untitled (detail), 1981 | Ink and pencil on graph paper | Collection of the artist

Prisons – Inside and Outside (detail), 1981 | Ink and pencil on graph paper | Collection of the artist

Study for Prison with Underground Tunnel (detail), 1981 | Private collection

Peter Halley in front of his first New York studio at 128 East Seventh Street, 1985 | Photo: Mark Stern

Unless otherwise mentioned © Photo: Peter Halley Studio

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