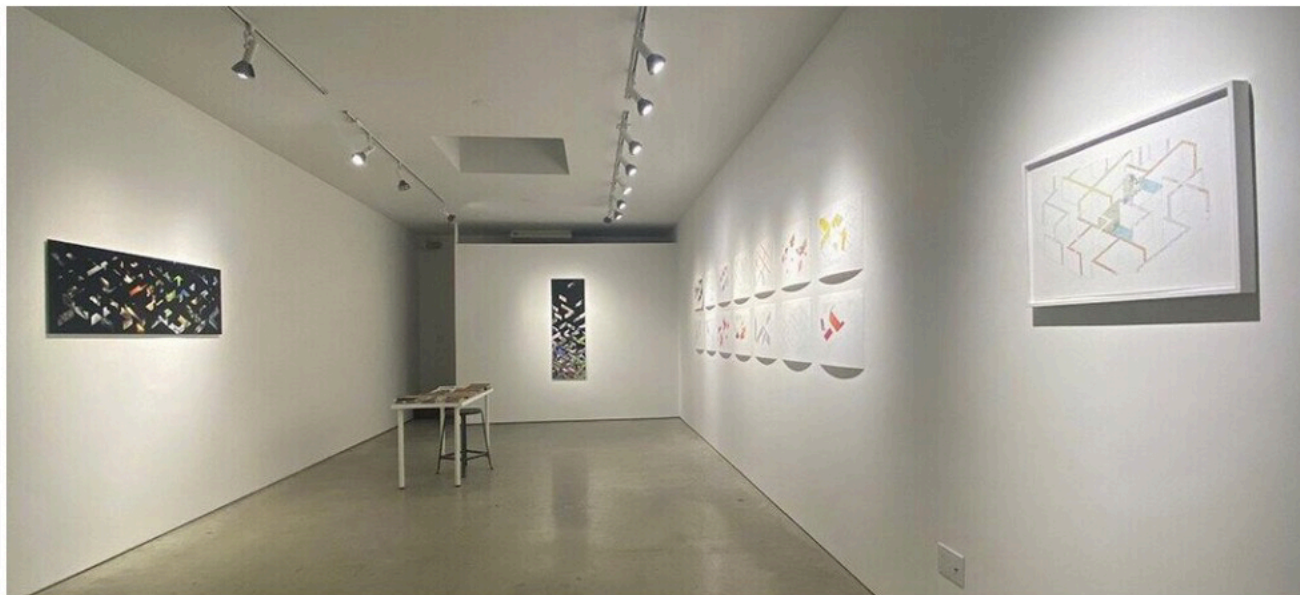


## Lyla Rye at General Hardware Contemporary

Lyla Rye's art practice invites us to be aware of how we see what we see. Her work encourages us to be active in our looking, to become conscious that perception is not passive, to realize that we actually construct what we see.

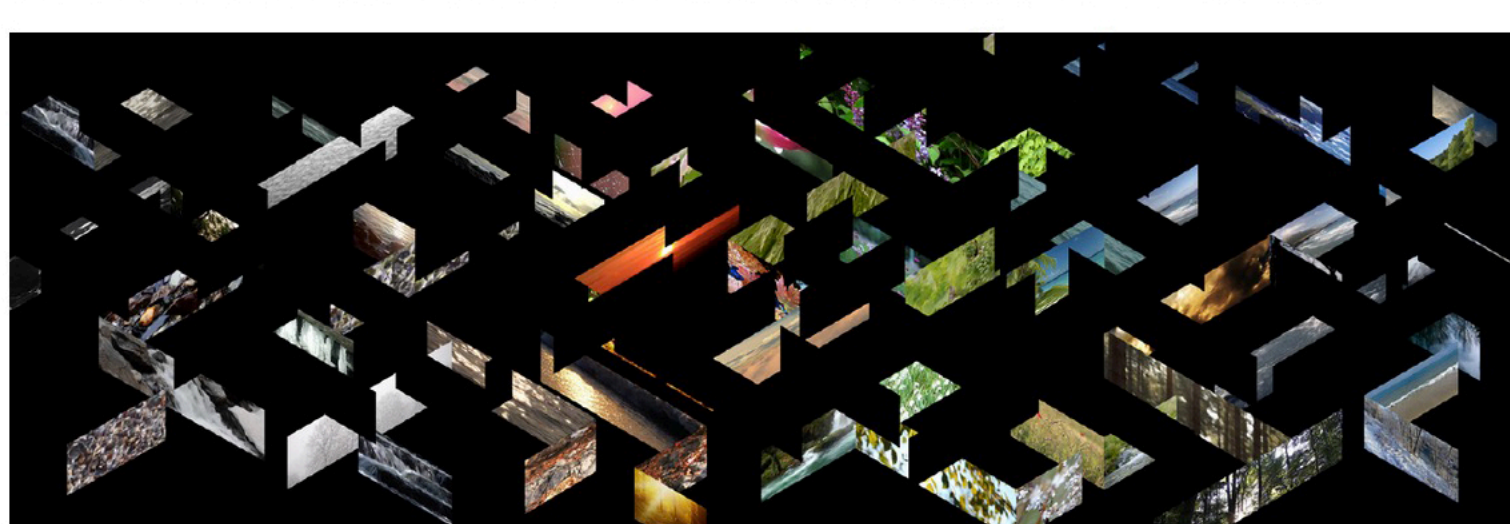
Rye's show at General Hardware Contemporary is crisp and sleek. The show consists of three bodies of work: a pair of large digital prints with colourful flecks of images over a dark background, a set of notebooks filled with collaborative work, and fifteen prints reminiscent of architectural presentations.



Installation view of Lyla Rye, *Deviations* at General Hardware Contemporary

*Suspended Meditation – Horizontal* is a wide, panoramic digital print. Colorful image fragments float over a black background, aligned to an invisible isometric grid. The effect is like delicately stacked cards or intricately folded paper. Each shape contains an image of nature: sunset, vegetation, coastline, etc. Rye has taken these images from online meditation videos, videos that often contain idealized visions of nature; scenes that are carefully composed and colour enhanced. Because these images are skewed to conform to the isometric geometry, they do not appear as windows that we see through, but as floating two-dimensional membranes within the three-dimensional space. The orientation deflects our gaze, the pictorial illusion is thwarted. They remain as posters, wallpaper, or screens.

Drawn in to read these fragments, I realized that the images were partially occluded by black shapes. For me, this discovery was sudden: a visual finger-snap. Abruptly, I could see a dense field of black rectangles, only revealed as they covered the bright images. Elsewhere, they blended in with the background. I was confronted with 'dark matter' that I had not seen before.



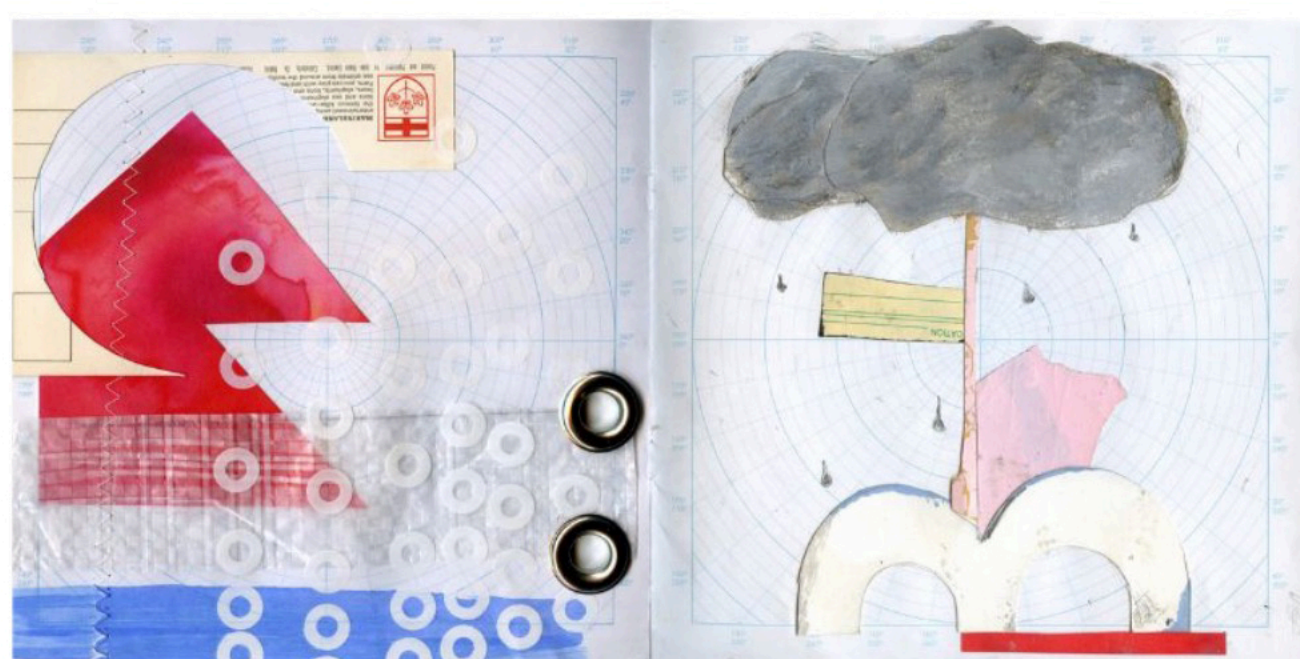
Suspended Meditation, Horizontal, 2020, archival print mounted to aluminum, 20" x 60"

The other large piece, *Suspended Meditation – Vertical* is a tall image that contains the same kind of isometrically skewed scenes as its horizontal sibling. In this case, gravity has taken hold and the colourful images are clustered towards the bottom while the top of the image is mostly empty. The densely packed images in the lower section are again taken from the found meditation nature footage. The images at the upper end of the frame are less colourful and depict nature tainted with trash and litter. The polluted images can be seen as falling over the idealized images. Rye is fascinated by how we sooth ourselves through the contemplation of aesthetic images of nature while we collectively treat the natural world in ways that are exploitive and far from reverential.



Suspended Meditation, Vertical, 2020, archival print, 60" x 20"

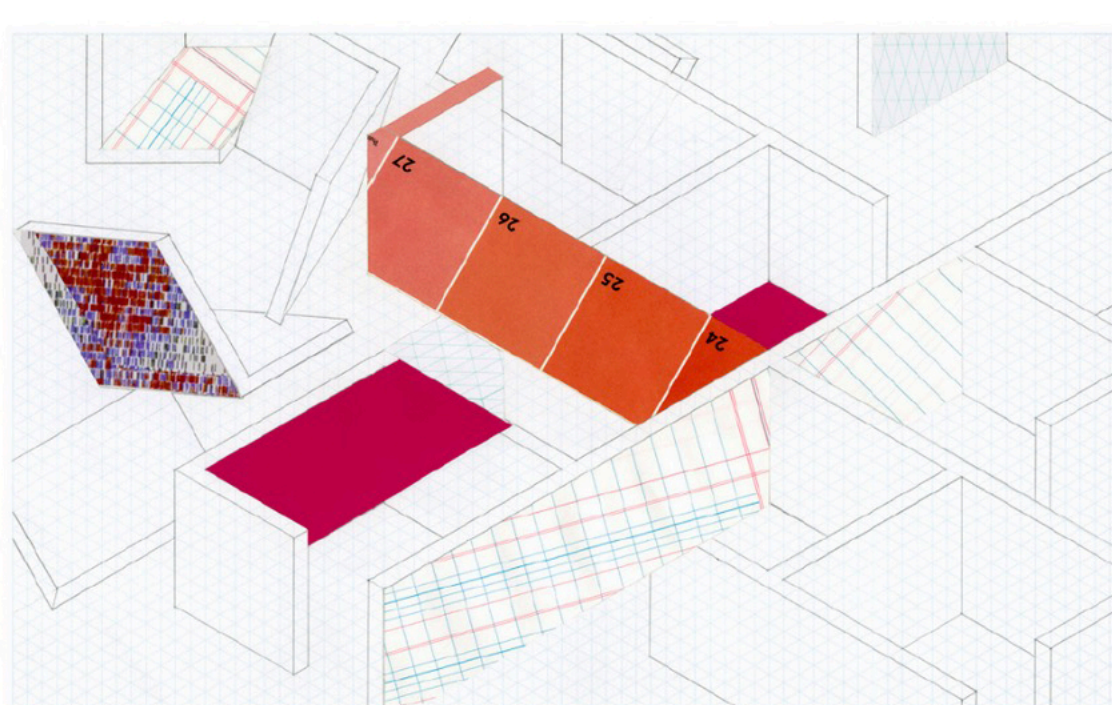
Laid out on a table are a series of grid paper notebooks. Rye calls this body of work *Catch and Release* – they are a series of collaborations between her and other artists. Each artist starts an image in the book and sends it to their colleague, who can then add to, and alter the work. Each artist catches work from their colleague, adds to it, and then must release it to be reworked again. These notebooks are fascinating to look through. They provided the artists with the opportunity for remote collaboration and interaction during a time when social distance was necessary.



Catch and Release, notebook with mixed media collage and drawing

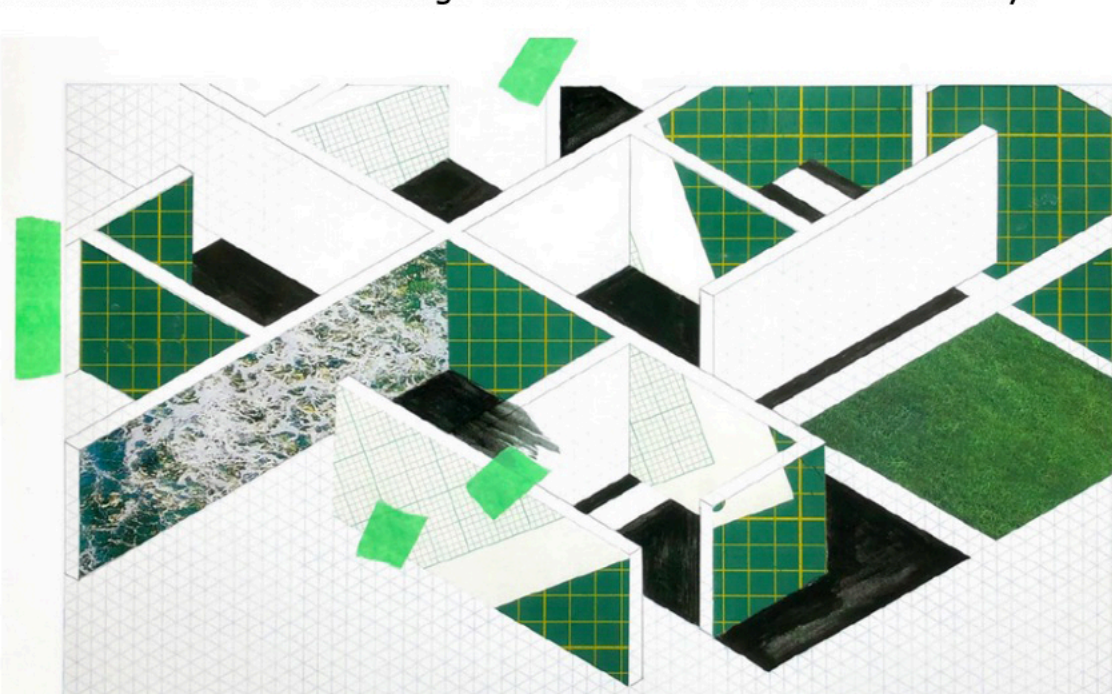
The *Deviations* are a set of prints of collage / drawings produced on isometric grid paper. This kind of grid, and the drawings they are designed to support, are typically used in architecture and engineering to represent three dimensional views of objects.

The grid is a set of rules – guides that the paper wants the artist to follow. Rye plays with these rules: sometimes she plays along, sometimes against. Each drawing includes a set of mouse-maze like walls seen from above, architecture that obediently follows the grid. But in other places Rye defies it. Pieces of geometry twist off in odd directions. Other grids, maps and printed patterns are collaged in, breaking the illusionary space of the axial grid geometry.



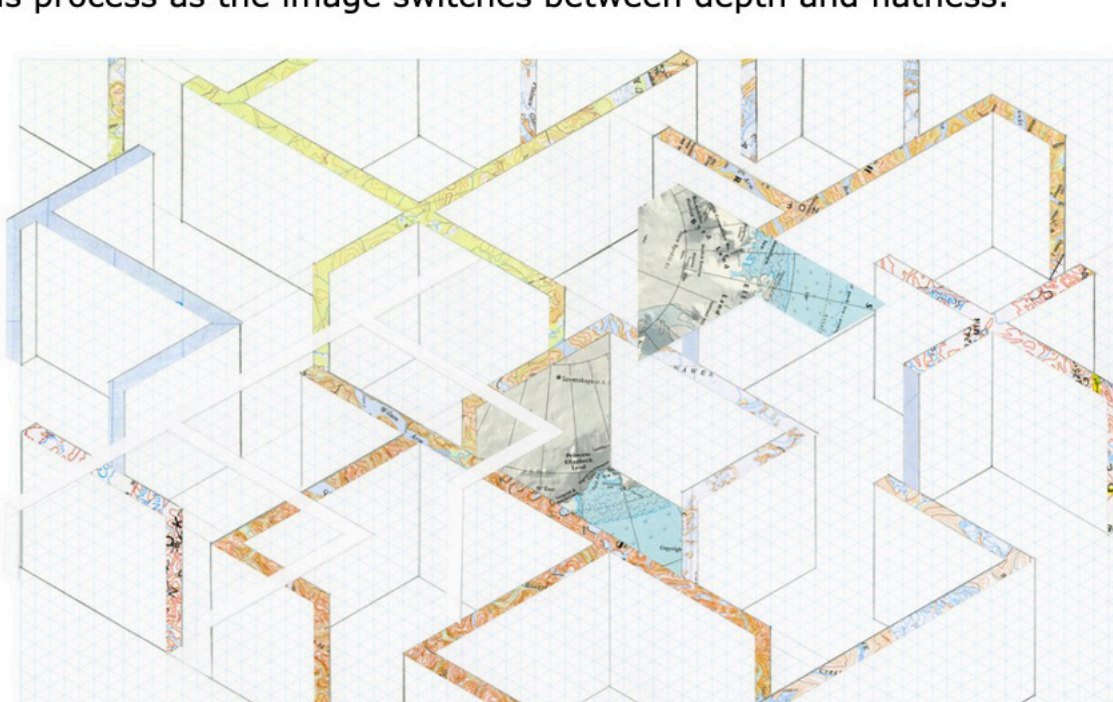
Deviation, Red Grids, 2021, Archival Digital Print, 16" x 24"

In *Deviation, Green Grid* the collage process is fully revealed. The green masking tape holding various pieces together plays a central role in the composition and the grid of the green cutting mat becomes the dominant surface in the image where areas have been cut away.



Deviation, Green Grid, 2021, Archival Digital Print on Canson Infinity Rag, 16" x 24"

The representation of three-dimensional space on a flat surface involves shared conventions between the creator of an image and the audience. Whether perspective or isometric, we as viewers are habituated to the illusion of depth such that we are not consciously aware that we are re-constructing the space behind the surface in our minds. These self-contradicting collages make one aware of this process as the image switches between depth and flatness.



Deviation, Mapping Boundaries, 2021, Archival Digital Print, 16" x 24"

Rye's work puts a little wedge between what we think we know and what else may be possible. In the *Meditation* pieces she exposes the cleft between our aesthetic love of nature and our collective mistreatment and neglect of the natural world. In the *Catch and Release* notebooks she allows the unpredictable actions of other artists to knock the creative process in new directions. In the *Deviations*, she engages in a framework with a given set of rules and then allows herself to change those rules. Rye makes us work a little harder at seeing and the result is rewarding!

Mikael Sandblom

Images are courtesy of General Hardware Contemporary

\*Exhibition information: Lyla Rye, *Deviations*, February 12 – March 12, 2022, General Hardware Contemporary, 1520 Queen Street West, Toronto. Gallery hours: Wed – Sat, 12 – 6 pm.