

To create geometric formations in cereal fields, crop circle hoaxers use a tool called a stalk stomper—essentially, a piece of rope tied to each end of a plank of wood. Under cover of night, holding the rope like horse reins, one foot on the plank, they step forward, provoking widespread ufological fancy.

[Image Description 1: An egg tempera painting by Eli Bornowsky titled "Isohedral47\_D74mod24". The square painting is abstract, comprised of a repeating shape that flips, rotates or joins together to form expanded contours. Each shape is painted in with small brush strokes in alternating colours—orange, shamrock green, royal blue, light blue, black, white and greys of varying value. The painting has a thin gold frame.]

Eli Bornowsky's egg tempera paintings in *A Way to Finish Thinking* are mottled with tessellating cells. They remind me of prairie views from plane windows, or onion skins under a microscope. Broad visual associations lure focus away from gestural fervour. Colour pigments settle in the ridges and valleys of frenetic brush strokes that combine to fill each contour.

Egg tempera has been used in painting for at least a millennium and a half, with examples found among the Fayum mummy portraits of Roman Egypt. To make the paint binder, you separate the yolk from the egg white, piercing the vitelline membrane to let the liquid drip out clean. Bornowsky's recipe adds dry white wine, which preserves and lengthens the mix.

The medium is associated with religious painting—the egg, a symbol of fertility and rebirth, and wine, of Bible fame. Here, it performs a magic trick. You could think of much painting as illusion, with pigments arranged to form an unreliable likeness—of the dead, for example. Bornowsky's works are sleight of hand. Their mathy patterns create a misdirection, drawing our attention from one thing to another, transforming known objects into visual wonders.

Believers in extraterrestrial origin theories explain crop circles as imprints left by unseen landing spacecraft. Self-styled experts designate formations as the sort no human could have made. Meanwhile, the underlying cereal field itself is a product of thousands of years of agricultural science. When seeking something to believe in, start on Earth.

-Lucien Durey

[Image Description 2: An installation view of Eli Bornowsky's exhibition *A Way to Finish Thinking*. In the foreground, a white table with black legs holds an arrangement of sculptural elements—flat and three-dimensional shapes in wood, felt, foam, clay, and paper. They are painted in alternating colours and some bear graphite drawings. Two square paintings hang in the background, comprised of repeating geometric shapes in alternating colours.]

Eli Bornowsky  
*A Way to Finish Thinking*  
Jan 11-Mar 7, 2020  
Canton-sardine, Vancouver, BC

Images courtesy of the artist and gallery: pg. 2-3 | Eli Bornowsky, *Isohedral47\_D74mod24*, egg tempera on gesso, muslin, baltic birch, 2019

pg. 9-10 | Eli Bornowsky, Installation view of *A Way to Finish Thinking*, 2020