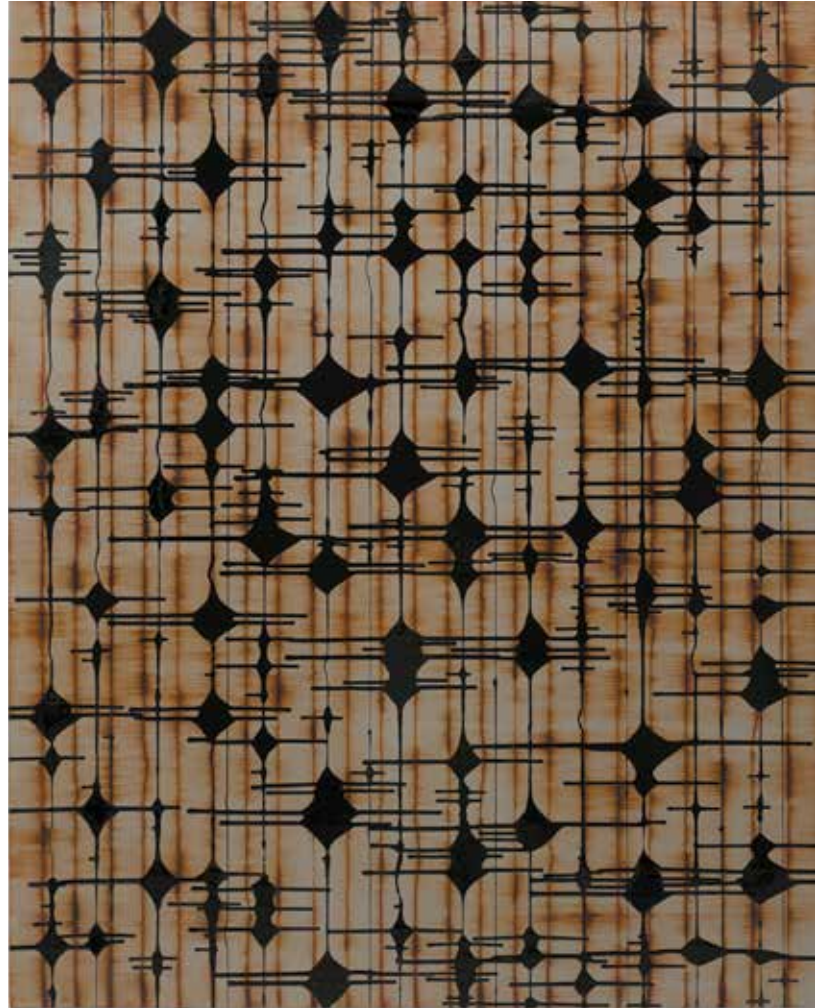


Mapping inside the mind

Mark Francis,
Rebound. 2017.
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Courtesy of Kerlin
Gallery Dublin.
Photo: Ian Skelton.



Maps, compasses and the navigation of spaces are integral elements of his work, as **Mark Francis** explains

The magnetic compass was first invented as early as the Chinese Han Dynasty around 266 BC. The first compasses were made from lodestone, a naturally magnetised iron ore. Before the invention of the compass, direction and position at sea were located by the sighting of landmarks and navigation by the stars.

As humans we have our own internal compass and perhaps intuitively navigate the streets of a city. People commonly use the phrase ‘sense of direction’ even though, at times, they lack it. A map with a compass, therefore, becomes a very powerful tool in navigation. The ‘grey matter’ of London’s black cab drivers enlarges and modifies to help them store a detailed map of the city. Scans by scientists at University College London have shown that their hippocampus is larger than other people’s. The same part of the brain helps animals and birds with their navigation.

Today, navigation relies a great deal on satellites orbiting the earth. GPS satellites orbit the earth every twelve hours and were first used by the US for military purposes. Today we take it for granted that when we get into a car we switch on the satellite navigation or use the map apps on our mobile phones.

As navigation devices have evolved through developing technology, this has led the human race to reach for the stars and explore the vastness of space. The sheer distances from one object to the other make the mind reel and conventional scales such as miles and kilometres become obsolete. When measuring the distance between our sun

and the nearest star, a new scale comes into practice – light years. One light year is 6 million million years.

This type of information has always fascinated me and mapping has informed my artistic practice over the years. From an imaginary map of the Internet to a conventional Ordnance Survey map, the overlapping networks show both chaos, order and multiple or infinite pathways to get from A to Z. I like to believe that the universe is made up of a loosely structured grid where order and chaos can coexist. I need information like this in my head before starting a painting. Thereafter, the painting process takes over and the original idea gets lost in the activity of creating.

Magnetic compass
made of wood.
China, 19th-early
20th century.



For details of Mark Francis's work, see markfrancisstudio.com and Instagram [markfrancis62](https://www.instagram.com/markfrancis62/); for details of Chinese compasses in the Museum's collection see britishmuseum.org