

In *Shadow of Land*, Gretchen Albrecht's works on copper articulate a sustained dialogue between artist and material. Pairing copper's patinated surface with oil paint, Albrecht responds to the metal's unique materiality and opens up new visual possibilities in her abstraction.

Albrecht has a long-standing relationship with copper, having first experimented with the material in 1996. Although almost thirty years ago now, she initially painted on polished copper, Albrecht soon took to staining the copper surface with a range of chemical solutions, deliberately inducing patina and thus drawing out textures, colours and forms from the metal. Whereas her works on copper share the hemisphere and oval formats, the gestural sweeps of paint, the chromatic sensitivity, and the flat geometrical shapes that feature across Albrecht's painted oeuvre, each time she transforms the polished copper into an etched surface, Albrecht reveals a new ground to paint on; a new platform for her gestural abstraction. She responds intuitively to these material expressions in her application of oil paint, with sweeping gestures, swirling brushstrokes and fields of colour that converse with the patina.

Distinctive for their smaller size, Albrecht's works on copper contrast with her large-scale canvases, sometimes metres-long, that envelop the viewer and fill the field of vision. When she first began working with copper, Albrecht was seeking a material with which she could work on a smaller scale, particularly inspired by the miniatures that adorn medieval illuminated manuscripts and the close encounter fostered by their small size. Indeed, with diameters measuring approximately 35-40cm these copper works function as intimate, almost private worlds that draw the viewer in close. It is notable, too, that the coppers' smaller scale also informs Albrecht's physical experience of making. Rather than the large, bodily sweeps of paint required for her large works on canvas, the small-scale coppers necessitate a different kind of physical engagement, wherein Albrecht is seated at a table.

Incorporating copper into her practice, Albrecht sits within a lineage of artists who have been drawn to its material properties. Printmakers such as Dürer and Rembrandt prized the copper plate for its ability to hold fine intaglio lines, and painters including Brueghel the Elder and El Greco greatly valued the jewel-like colours and luminosity it imparted on their compositions. Albrecht's engagement, however, is less with copper's smooth reflectivity than with its unstable, transformative qualities: its capacity for oxidation, its verdigris hues, its suggestion of organic growth. And, as the copper oxidises and the patina develops, the works transform themselves and function as temporal registers that visualise the passing of time.

Included in several of these works are Albrecht's 'geometries'; the artist's own term for the two-dimensional lines or rectangles that feature regularly in her work. In her process of making, Albrecht uses place-holder strips of coloured paper to experiment with the 'geometries' size, colour and positioning on the copper sheet. While the thinnest geometries

tend to be solid blocks of colour, other, wider shapes betray Albrecht's gestures, with visible strokes and multiple colours contained within them. Always clean-edged, though, these motifs sit on the surface of Albrecht's coppers, seeming to hover above the gestural brushwork beneath. They serve Albrecht in diverse ways, whether bringing a sense of equilibrium to the composition or emphasising the horizontal edge at the bottom of her hemispheres. Importantly, too, by contrasting with the sense of depth Albrecht achieves in her mark-making, these geometries function as anchor points for the imagery, and provide an effective springboard for the eye to dive into the work.

Victoria Munn, September 2025