

# MOIRA ROTH'S GLEANINGS

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## GLEANINGS #23: ZOE KERAMEA

30 May 2012 – Moira Roth's Journal

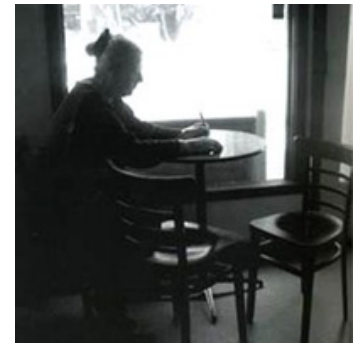
Born in 1955 in Athens, Greece, Zoe Keramea now lives and works in Athens and New York City.

Browsing through the rich material of her elegantly designed website [www.zoekeramea.com](http://www.zoekeramea.com), I sense the complexity of her work with its wide range of media (sculpture, prints, drawings, ceramics and artists' books) and their multiple sites that transform their meanings.

I keep returning, for example, to her love of the 'ringknot' pattern. In 1994 she first wove *The Beginning and the End – A Ringknot* on the beach of Agriolivadi on Patmos, a small Greek island in the Aegean Sea.

<http://www.zoekeramea.com/main/the-beginning-and-the-end-a-ringknot-1994>

## ABOUT GLEANINGS



This project is a part of the **18th Biennale of Sydney: all our relations.**

*'Over the coming months, I will conduct regular online exchanges with a selection of the 18th Biennale's artists, as well as periodic exchanges with the two curators.'*

- Moira Roth

Read more about renowned art historian, poet and playwright **Moira Roth**.

Read about Moira Roth's experience travelling from San Francisco to Sydney by ship, in a series of entries called **'Reflections from the Aurora'**.

Loading tags...



Zoe Keramea, *The Beginning and the End - A Ringknot*, 1994, manila rope, 300 cm in diameter.  
Courtesy the artist

In 2006, just over ten years later, she was invited to create a second much larger one, with the collaboration of the public, in a huge outdoor performance festival ('The Big Draw') in the metropolitan art centre, that of New York City, which later ended up displayed in a gallery.

Read more here: <http://www.zoekeramea.com/main/recent-project>



Zoe Keramea, The making of *Ringknot - A Woven Line* at South Street Seaport in New York, September 2006. Courtesy the artist



Zoe Keramea, The making of *Ringknot - A Woven Line* at South Street Seaport in New York, September 2006. Courtesy the artist





Zoe Keramea, *Ringknot - A Woven Line*, 2006, manila rope, 700 cm in diameter. Courtesy the artist



Zoe Keramea, *Ringknot - A Woven Line* at Milk Gallery, New York, November 2006, manila rope, 700 cm in diameter. Courtesy the artist

#### Email Exchange between Zoe Keramea and Moira Roth, 31 May – 5 June, 2012

##### Moira Roth

In my October 2011 exchange with Catherine de Zegher (*Gleanings*, #4), we talked about her concept of the Moebius Strip as a 'model for experiencing the unfolding of the Biennale' in its various sites.

Read more here: <http://moirarothsgleanings.tumblr.com/post/11176780307/gleanings-4-catherine-de-zegher>

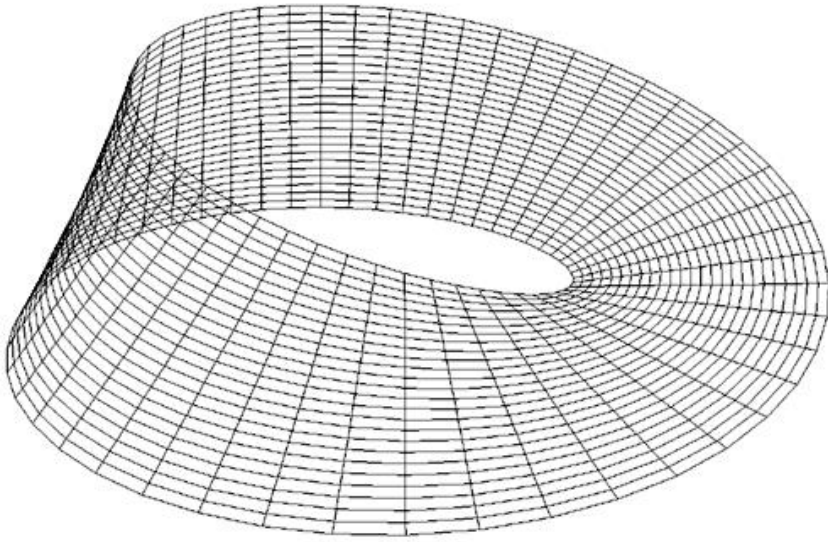


Image courtesy Paul Bourke (<http://paulbourke.net/>)

She explained then that you 'will be developing a virtual journey online for the Biennale. It will allow us to see the pathway linking all the venues of the Biennale'.

And there you are with your *Journey Lines* that has been part of the Biennale's 'creative' campaign; always present and always changing.



*Journey Lines* by Zoe Keramea as part of the 18th Biennale of Sydney creative campaign.

For months I have looked at it daily, admiring its mysterious twisting-and-turning lines drawn in four colours (to correspond to the four main venues of the exhibition), a mysterious journey line that rotates and loops upon itself – rather than having a clear beginning and end.

### **Zoe Keramea**

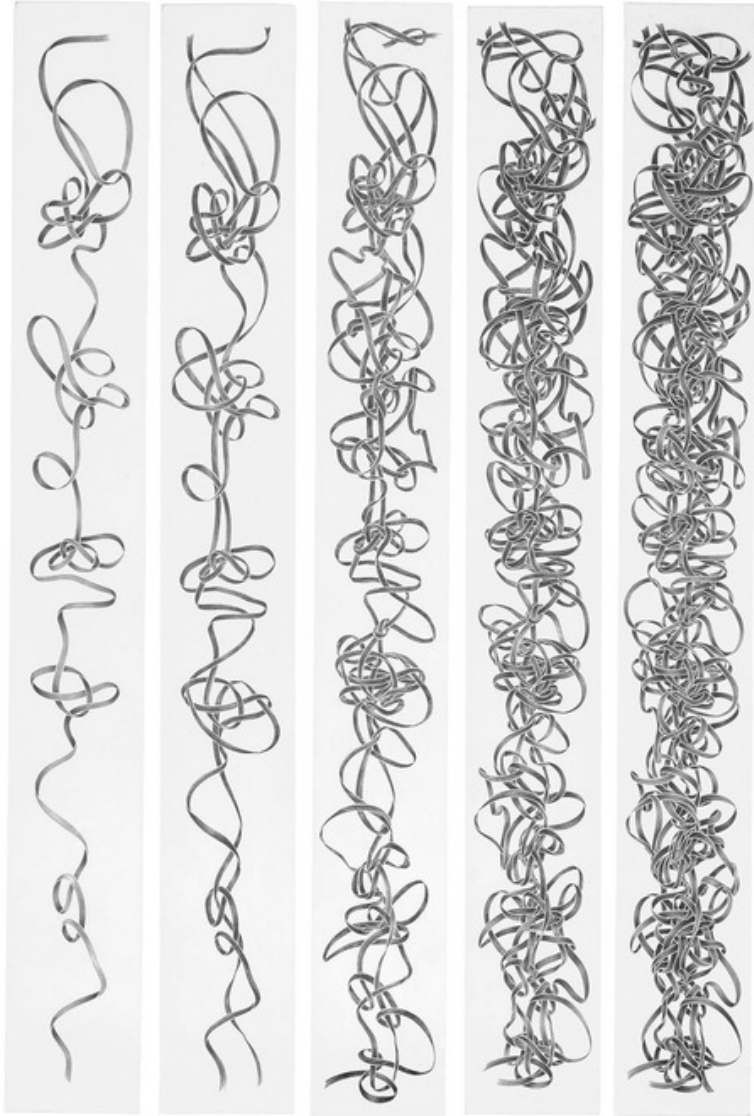
When we walk we create a line, a path in space, a journey in time and space.

This journey can be a knotted path that intersects with others, a 'journey line'.

We can view a moebius as a journey line as well.

If you start drawing a line on a moebius strip, you will realise that you return to the point you started from. The two surfaces of the paper are shown to be one. In other words, what seemed to be a linear journey is a journey in space without beginning and without end.

In 1994 I did a series of graphite drawings, 'Knots I – X,' that were very long and narrow like pillars. Each drawing is included in the next one and intertwined with it in a mental space created for the drawing.

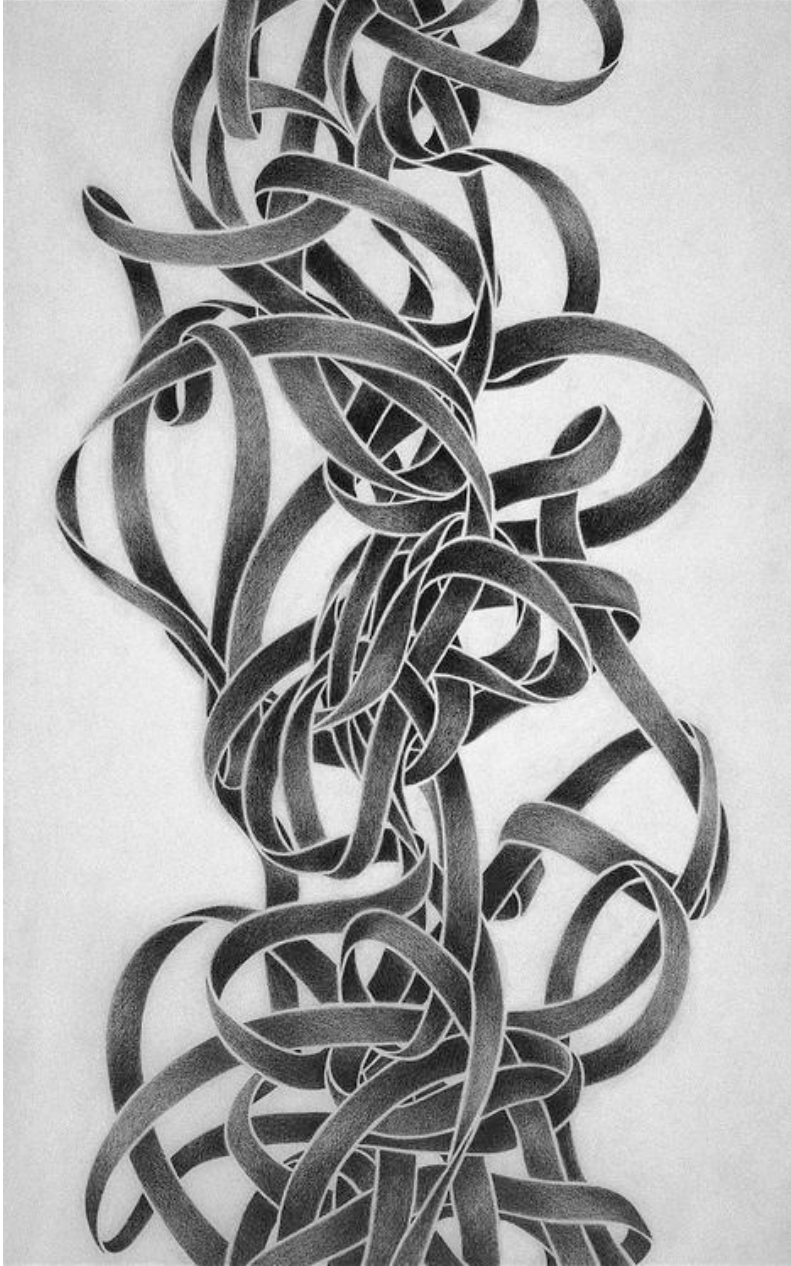


Zoe Keramea, *Knots II, IV, VI, VIII, X*, 1994, graphite on paper, each 244 x 30.5 cm. Courtesy the artist

It is not a representation of real space, but an illusion of it. There is tangling, looping, knotting, mirroring, superimposing, intertwining – all on an underlying structure of carefully worked out ratios and movements, like a musical phrase and its restatement with something added to it.

Catherine de Zegher had chosen five of these drawings for inclusion in 'Geometry of Paradox,'

my show that she curated at the Drawing Center in New York in 2005, and a detail of *Knots X* was printed on the exhibition invitation.



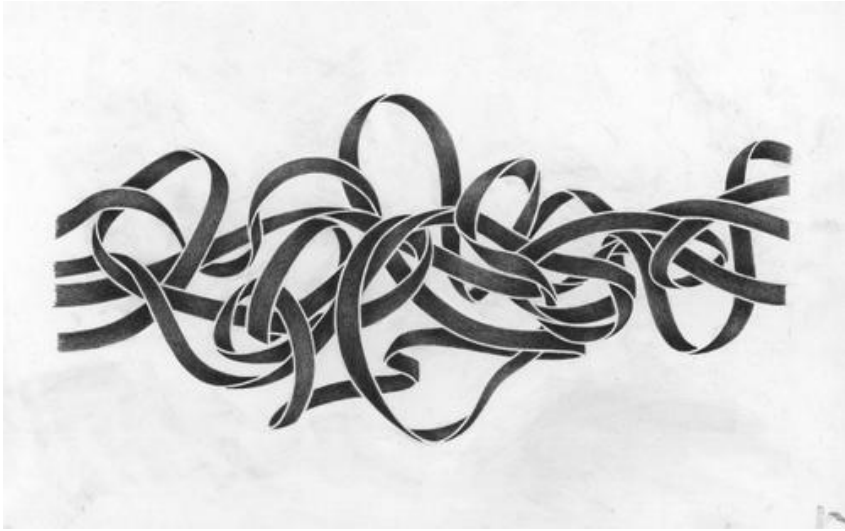
Zoe Keramea, *Knots X*, 1994 (detail), graphite on paper. Courtesy the artist

In the Drawing Center exhibition, the *Knots* were in black and white, not in colour, but for the Biennale journey line they needed adjustments in order both to function in colour and as a graphic image.

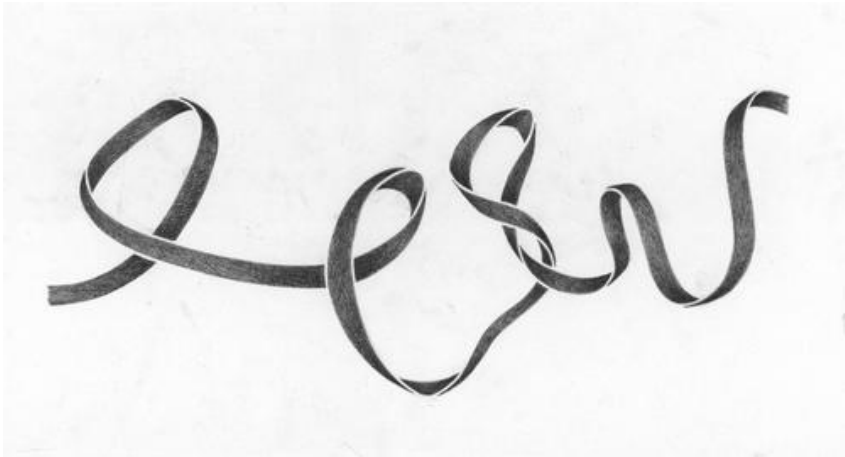
When the Biennale and the designers at Collider asked for one particular detail from *Knots* for their 'creative' campaign, I had to draw out from the old work a new one. I had to adjust the weight and balance that colour would give to the composition in such a way that it could be rotated into different positions.

I thought the lines should represent the different pathways, one for each venue of the Biennale

with an individual colour code. The continuation of colour on each line had to be clarified in four different drawings, with the lines separated to reduce the positional ambiguity in the final colouring.



Zoe Keramea, *Journey Lines*, 2012, graphite on paper, 45 x 36 cm. Courtesy the artist



Zoe Keramea, *Line 1 of Journey Lines*, 2012, graphite on paper. Courtesy the artist

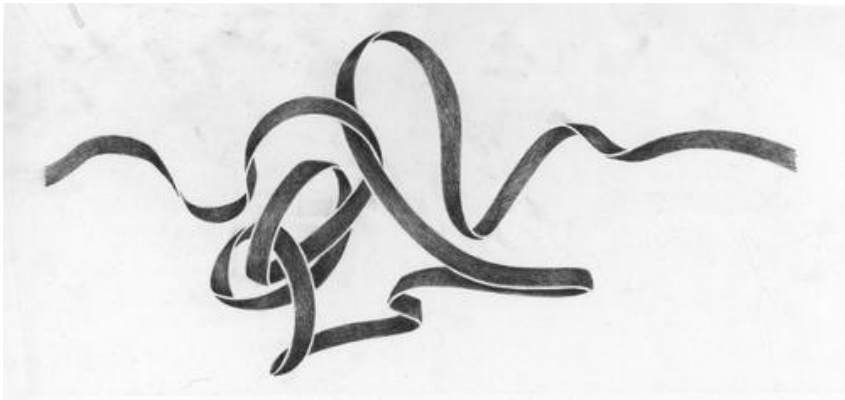


Zoe Keramea, *Line 2 of Journey Lines*, 2012, graphite on paper. Courtesy the artist





Zoe Keramea, *Line 3 of Journey Lines*, 2012, graphite on paper. Courtesy the artist



Zoe Keramea, *Line 4 of Journey Lines*, 2012, graphite on paper. Courtesy the artist



Zoe Keramea, *Journey Lines*, 2012. Rough sketch for colour indication. Courtesy the artist

The intertwining and knotting suggest the way our individual encounters with art and each other set us off in new directions.

### Moir Roth

When did you meet Catherine de Zegher?

### Zoe Keramea

I first met her when she came to my studio in New York, after a postcard depicting the detail of my sculpture *Rolling Column* had come to her attention.

I was fascinated, however, with her work before we actually met – with the very particular and original way Catherine curated and installed her shows at the Drawing Center in New York.

She suggested, for example, that in my 2005 show one of the three walls in the gallery be painted black. A radical choice, which pulled the space together and really brought out not only the five long drawings but the rest of the works as well.



Installation of 'Zoe Keramea: Geometry of Paradox', The Drawing Center, New York, 2005.  
Courtesy the artist

I found out at this time that our journey lines had somehow intertwined earlier in life – before we met – as she came south from Northern Europe and at the same time I went north from the southern part of the continent. She to spend time as a student of archaeology with the 'Belgian Archaeological Mission in Greece' at Thorikos, in Lavrio, outside of Athens – one of my favourite ancient sites – while I went from Athens to Berlin where I studied at the School of Arts (Universität der Künste).

### **Moir Roth**

I see that for the Biennale exhibition you will be showing a selection from the series 'Moths' together with your work *Nine Blocks* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

I read in an online description of *Nine Blocks* that these are nine cubes and that each of the wooden blocks is inscribed with a painted black ribbon on the surface. 'The idea is that viewers are encouraged to arrange the blocks in order to attempt to create a continuous line'.

Can you tell me what inspired you to make these, and how often have they been shown? What reactions do you get from viewers? Do people wait in line to play? Does a wall label give viewers guidelines?

### **Zoe Keramea**

The *Nine Blocks* will be displayed on the MCA floor. They are quite sturdy and the public is invited to move them around and play with them. They are like children's building blocks, but many times that size. It is a work that can be transformed constantly by the public.

The viewer is invited to rearrange them in any constellation, trying always to have a continuous line on all their visible surfaces, but with absolutely no suggestion or necessity of a particular arrangement.

Players are not bound by any particular set of rules, and they can make their own up as they go along. They can discover numberless individual solutions. Several players may collaborate.

I first showed the *Nine Blocks* for three months in 2008, at a small lobby gallery in New York City's Tribeca. People interacted with the blocks at the opening night and throughout the time they were on display. Adults were intrigued as well as children.

There was a simple sign by the *Blocks* saying: 'You are invited to gently rearrange the *Nine Blocks* to connect as many strands of ribbon as possible'. People did not wait in line to play, but rather surrounded the work watching until there was an opening.

And here, to give you a sense of their scale, is a photo of myself carefully rearranging the *Nine Blocks* on a loading dock in Tribeca.



Zoe Keramea and *Nine Blocks*, 2008. Courtesy the artist

**Moira Roth**

And the 'Moth' series of 2009?

See more here: <http://www.zoekeramea.com/main/moth-i-2009>





Zoe Keramea with *White Moth*, 2012. Courtesy the artist

Moths are emblems of transformation from the earthbound to the ethereal. They are very fragile creatures as perhaps we are.

They are nocturnal insects drawn to the light.

In Greek we call a moth a 'psyche', which means 'soul.' The word is personified in the ancient Greek myth of Eros and Psyche.

The transformation (metamorphosis) in these works is also literal as they pass from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional existence. Surface is turned into space. A flat strip of paper is enfolded into a hexahedron (triangular dipyramid) and joined to hundreds of others with thread to become a 'Moth'. The 'Moth' itself can be folded inward as it has now become a flexible structure, which can exist in any number of different states.



Zoe Keramea, *White Ribboned Moth* (two states), 2011, hand-folded Aqaba paper and thread, 39.5 x 59 - 18 cm (variable) x 15 - 3 cm (variable). Courtesy the artist

The 'Moths' are labour-intensive to make but they are delicate and extremely lightweight. They are named after the real moths they faintly resemble. I have been working on modular

sculptures made out of stainless steel wire-cloth and paper since 1997.

Read more here: <http://www.zoekeramea.com/main/sculpture>

## Maira Roth

What draws you to these ongoing concerns and subjects of lines, space, geometry, constructions, and interactive components?

## Zoe Keramea

It was my early training in music that made me aware of line: line in space, exercises in mind space, proportions and relationships between objects and shapes, juxtapositions and dreaming about it all.

Also my printmaking training and the long experimenting with intaglio techniques led me to explore ways to enfold the surface and to try to create the illusion of a more dimensional space.

Dissatisfied with the boundaries of the plate surface (a kind of proscenium arch around the image), I tried to lead the composition outside this image with the series christened 'zoetypes' by my art publisher in NY in 1992.

The etched surface is transformed into line and seems free to swoop around and even behind a printed plate: <http://www.zoekeramea.com/main/large-zoetypes-details-1991>

In the interactive works and games, time and a multiplicity of possible states and solutions become increasingly important to me (see: *Twisted*, limited editions, scroll drawings, leporello books, *Nine Blocks*, etc. on my website <http://www.zoekeramea.com/main/>).

The multiplicity of states and interactivity are seen in the App for the iPhone and iPad, *Mandala Memory*, as well: <http://www.zoekeramea.com/main/component/content/article/149-mandala-memory>

And now, let me suggest a Heraklitus quote to end our Gleanings exchange with:

'The hidden harmony is stronger than the visible.'

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19 Aug 2012

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GLEANINGS IS A COLLECTION OF ONLINE EXCHANGES BETWEEN MOIRA ROTH AND A SELECTION OF THE 18TH BIENNALE'S ARTISTS, AS WELL AS PERIODIC EXCHANGES WITH THE TWO CURATORS.

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