

Notes on the exhibition

The Vitalist Economy of Painting

Curated by Isabelle Graw

1. Prelude: Three pictures and a film

The pictures by Jutta Koether and Josephine Pryde introduce the visitors to the both subjective and materially specific perspective that defines the exhibition. Magritte's film exemplifies the inter-media conception of painting the project articulates, in which the rhetoric of painting may also be instantiated in a film. In showcasing paintings as a *particular kind* of commodities, the film anticipates another key hypothesis proposed in the exhibition.



Jutta Koether Isabelle Bild #3, 2018

On the day of Donald Trump's inauguration, media all over the world picked up a photograph that showed Angela Merkel absorbed in contemplation of a painting by Monet ("Autumn at Jeufosse," 1884) at the recently inaugurated Museum Barberini in Potsdam. As world affairs were taking a menacing and depressing turn, the German chancellor demonstratively turned her back on the news to devote her attention to an Impressionist painting. For a private photograph on which Jutta Koether based this sketchy painting, Isabelle Graw reenacted the scene. Koether uses the means of painting to amplify the intense play of colors between the Monet its beholder in the Merkel photograph, but also to recode it. The saturated orange hues of Monet's autumn leaves, for instance, are transmuted into perfunctory neon-orange marks, with shimmering novelty paints adding a fashionable accent to the Monet universe. The neon pink marks suggesting Graw's sneakers likewise makes the picture shine from within, translating Monet's rosés into a different register endowed with an even more forceful air of agency. Similarly, gel pastes that yield relief-like zones make the picture a scene of barely contained vibrancy. Finally, the frame around the painted masterwork—a picture within the picture—is exploded by the golden hue, which is scattered across the entire painting in tiny shreds. These effects lend it an affective potential that here encounters a beholder who keeps her distance from the picture (signaled by the cross-armed pose) while intently taking in the chromatic and material sensations it proffers.

Josephine Pryde Autorenfoto: Exhibition Copy (A), 2018



Josephine Pryde's works are based on an author's photograph that Graw had asked her to take in the fall of 2017 for her book *The Love of Painting. Genealogy of a Success Medium*. For this exhibition, Pryde chose to create an adapted version of the commissioned picture as well as another shot from the photo session. In both pictures, the curator is seen in front of Rembrandt's painting "Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Law" (1659) at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. A bad painting avant la lettre, the canvas shows the figure of Moses emerging from a muddy mess of earthy browns to hurl the tablets down on an imaginary party in front of him. For the photograph used in Graw's book, Pryde posed the author to the side of Rembrandt's painting; turning her back on it and smiling cheerfully, she appears impervious to Moses' threatening gesture and the force of his law. In this version, the visual focus on Graw's explanatory hand gesture—expressive hands are a recurrent interest in Pryde's art—preserves the connection to the visible segment of the Rembrandt: the suggestion of vitality in the painting is picked up by the author's *agitated* gesticulation, which likewise seems to be intent on telling us something. Pointing to the painting, she prompts the viewer to turn his or her attention to it as well.

Josephine Pryde Autorenfoto: Exhibition Copy (B), 2018



In this portrait-format version of Pryde's portrait, Rembrandt's painting is largely concealed by Graw's body, although she seems to be gesturing in its general direction. Having turned her back to the painting, she directly addresses a counterpart, and the presence of museum visitors visible in the picture underscores the situation's public character: they are the live audience to a contentious discussion of a painting, and of painting in general.

The printed red letters "Exhibition Copy" appear on the mats around the two pictures, identifying them as reproductions of an original made for circulation in the commercial art sphere. In fact, the status as exhibition copies has been literally inscribed on—one is tempted to say: engrained in—them. As such, they conversely buttress the primacy of the original, which is spared the kinds of transactions that copies are typically subject to. Then again, the works are not copies strictly speaking: they were produced in a limited edition of five plus two APs.

René Magritte Le Marchand d'art, 1956–1967



Near the beginning of this film, which René Magritte shot with the camera he bought when he first made real money with his art, the dealer's shadow falls on the surface of the picture that briefly comes into view, a visual composition that short-circuits the art of painting with the trade in paintings. Smoking and wearing the bowler hat that is a staple of Magritte's bold and simple pictorial idiom, the dealer appears surrounded by collectors (impersonated by Magritte's friends). Numerous paintings are presented to the collector for inspection like merchandise; the almost unending succession of pictures being carried into the room illustrates the movability that is the defining characteristic of the canvas painting. The exaggerated mien of annoyance with which he dismisses the smallest formats demonstrates that their value is precarious at best, while gestures accompanied by volleys of words would seem to indicate that the sale of painted pictures requires extensive discussion. Notably, the scenario with which the film confronts us is highly gendered: the male gallery owner is accompanied by a female assistant (played by Georgette Magritte) who poses with the pictures like a trade-show hostess. In the final scene, she moves a canvas between herself and the camera, collapsing the distinction between the female body and the bodily presence of the painted picture. The shot is an updated as well as ironically overdrawn version of the allegory of painting as an imperious mistress, which goes back to the early modern era.

2. Vitalist suggestions

This section brings together works that, in a wide variety of ways and by means of diverse devices, suggest that they have awoken to a life of their own and are “putting the final touches on” themselves: animate matter suffused with a semblance of subjectivity.



Charline von Heyl Big Joy, 2004

The shapeless earthy brown entity sprawling on the surface of this picture by Charline von Heyl inevitably evokes scatological associations. Here and there, however, the brown paint looks faded or hazy, an elegant gesture of retraction that introduces an aspect of negation into the work: it conjures a brownish creature and at once restrains it, suggesting meaning and at a stroke withholding it. The capillary-like structure of the underlying charcoal drawing is still visible, especially along the edges of the creature, although it has been smudged with turpentine and oil: the picture appears to hint at its operative “secret,” demonstrating that the suggestion of nascent autonomy is due to specific painterly devices that generate the impression of life and vitality and yet also cast a certain morbid pall over the vital scene.

Valentina Liernur No #3, 2017-2018



Valentina Liernur's zipper picture ties in with the tradition of slashed or lacerated canvases and other fabric media in the oeuvres of Lucio Fontana and, later, Steven Parrino and David Hammons. Unlike these artists, however, Liernur embraces the fashion reference, with echoes of punk (in the form of safety pins) and the bleached jeans and zippered sweatshirts of the 1990s. Presenting as a layered piece of apparel with an open zipper and a closed one behind it, the canvas is anthropomorphized, recalling Andy Warhol's famous cover design for the Rolling Stones album "Sticky Fingers" (1971). Yet Liernur's vaguely humanlike fabric picture is devoid of sexual codes: where the man's lower body on the Stones album flaunted a prominently silhouetted genital, all we see here is a gender-neutral flat body composed of various textile patterns, textures, and colorways. Not even the holes torn into the bleached gray fabric uncover what lies "beneath"; metaphorically speaking, they provide no clue as to the true circumstances of the work's making. On the contrary, they indicate that there is no way around the fetishistic nature of painting. Even in seeming to reveal its conditions of production, it mystifies them yet again.

Eric Nathaniel Mack Nile Born (Canadian Hockey), 2018



Eric Nathaniel Mack's work is inspired by the tradition of the fabric picture in oeuvres such as Sigmar Polke's, Blinky Palermo's, and, more recently, Cosima von Bonin's. His repeated use of textiles with stripe patterns cites the diverse ways in which stripes have been coded in painting, where they have been employed with anti-illusionistic intent (as in Frank Stella) or for purposes of institutional critique (as in Daniel Buren). But then Mack's billowing Canadian hockey motif towel nimbly transcends these two options. The work is going rogue, one might say, freeing the picture from the wall that supports it and not just expanding the spatial boundaries of the canvas painting format but actually exploding them in more than one way. The entire construction would seem to be in motion, a demonstrative enactment of the potential revitalization of painting that is implicit in it. The hockey motif, meanwhile, smuggles a narrative element into the piece. Yet the story it tells is fragmentary at best and cannot be traced back to a "source" (such as the artist's identity), defeating the desire for first origins that is fairly widespread among art audiences today, as the work's title insinuates.

Christopher Wool Untitled, 2016



In this picture, overpainting explicitly becomes an artistic principle. Broad brushstrokes of dirty white paint leave glimpses of an earlier cream-colored coat visible; it appears that two attempts were made to efface the underlying silkscreen print. The latter, produced in 2006 and overpainted in 2016, still makes itself felt in the work as a darkish tone that shows through, as though to tell us that there is no way to erase an object's history: everything will eventually rise back to the surface. In the effort to repurpose an earlier work to make something different, the old becomes palpable in the new as a kind of indomitable self-acting force. One may also spot tokens of the absent artist's fictional presence in the picture: cream-colored paint speckles and dots would seem to be traces of his labor. The impression is that the artist's work on the silkscreen print retains a direct physical presence of its own in the gesture of overpainting.

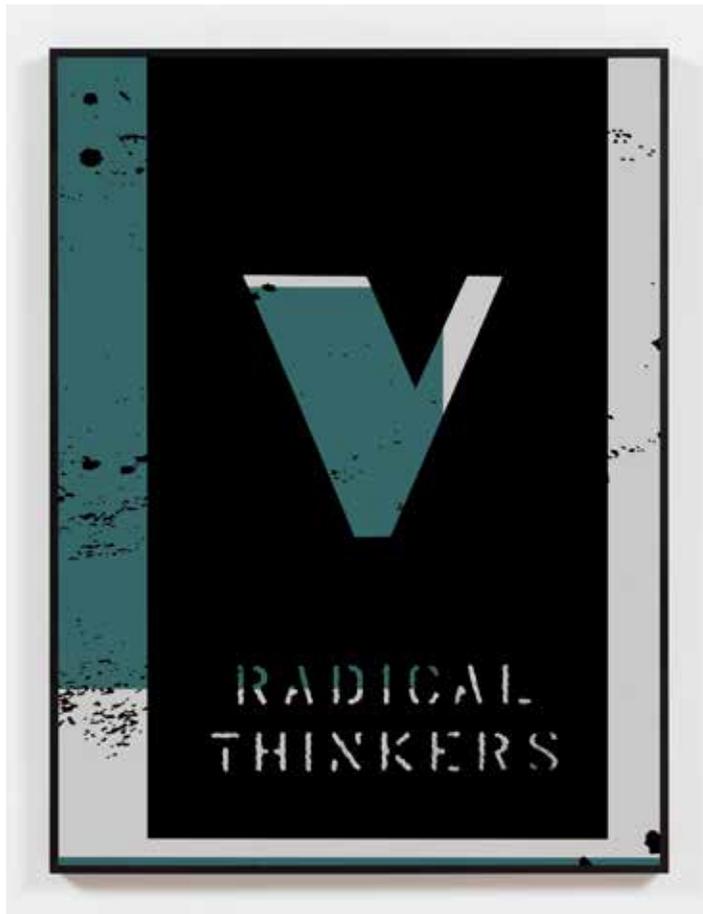
Amy Sillman
Pat, 2017



In this diptych, which bridges the gulf between the abstraction and figuration, nonrepresentational-expressionist gestures are interwoven with others that quote the art of cartoon drawing. The vertical form outlined in black that stretches across the division between the two halves of the picture looks like some sort of figure “holding on,” like a character in a comic, to a rectangle painted green, a veritable picture within the picture. The entire composition, one is tempted to say, is in motion, even still in the making, announcing the process-based technique that went into it. Visible instances of overpainting and horizontal brushwork register the work’s facture as recognizable traces of its making. The “dirty pink” that dominates its surface lends it a fleshy presence streaked with blackish grime that might be printing ink: an embodied painterly creation disfigured by the marks of the contemporary world.

3. Painting speaks

The works in this section speak to us: be it directly, by incorporating text or sound to transmit messages, be it by emphasizing the linguistic character of the pictorial signifier.



Georgie Nettell Radical Thinkers, 2016

By opting for a poster in a black frame, Georgie Nettell has chosen a widespread format in which we often encounter painted pictures in domestic settings, cafés, or Airbnb apartments. Yet the motif of the letter painting, which quotes the design of the English left-wing publishing house Verso's "Radical Thinkers" series, is unusual for a popular poster; not all beholders will identify with the content. The amateurishly executed and uneven stenciled letters, that is to say, signal distance vis-à-vis the self-image of those "radical thinkers" whose names appear on the spines of the Verso titles, many of whom, in their conviction that they are on the right side of history, can come across as quite self-righteous. On the other hand, the distinctly painterly black splotches lend an air of dignity to the radical thinkers whom the poster declares to be its true subject; in that sense, the work pledges allegiance to a form of social critique that faces enormous hostility today. In light of the widely noted impuissance of critique in the Trump era—a "radical thinking" that ignores its own entanglements is unlikely to get far these days—this work remains loyal to the cultural left while challenging it to rethink its self-conception and its premises.

Torey Thornton Their's Ours (Wool in Sheep's Clothing, Uria's Soiled Dress), 2018



Anything can be painting, even an elegant pillow to match expensive lawn furniture. In Torey Thornton's work, painting appears in the guise of just such a softly plump elongated object that speaks to us on several levels at once. The turquoise fabric with a pattern of wavy white lines betokens a life of privilege with idle hours spent by the pool, though this promise is immediately crossed and literally befouled (with dirty soil and blobs of orange glue) by another reality. On a second level, the word "Riot"—spelled in letters made of dirt—calls on black artists to rise up against the centuries-old predominance of their white colleagues. What is more, both the verbal message and the ornamental pattern on the pillow sham implicitly respond to the word paintings of one of the most commercially successful (white) artists working today, Christopher Wool, whose name also figures in the work's title. It is his uncontested status that the piece attacks like a wolf in sheep's clothing, appropriating his aesthetic. In a sense positioning himself as Wool's legitimate artistic heir, Thornton also singles him out as emblematic of an exclusion against which his work rebels.

Sarah Morris Bad School, 2018



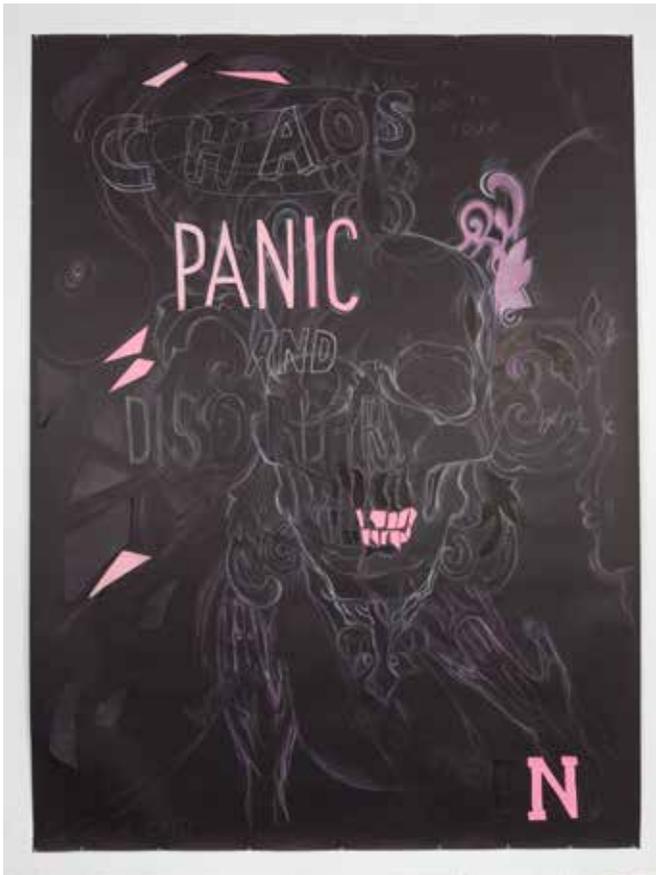
This painting by Sarah Morris speaks, though in rather indirect fashion. A portrait of sound, it visualizes the acoustic waves of a voice—the famously subdued voice of Alexander Kluge. In other words, the visual idiom of the work was generated directly out of spoken language while also abstracting from it. Its diagrammatic character points to a linguistic activity located outside of it, recording the frequency pattern of speech rather than its content. The colors the artist has chosen would seem to be a mimetic approximation of the intensity of what was said: a saturated orange for mid-range and a greenish yellow for higher and brighter notes. In a sense, the picture takes the insight at its word that conversation—in this instance, dialogue—is vital to art: it translates the voice with its authentic basis in the speaking body into the physical corporeality of painting.

Merlin Carpenter TATE CAFÉ 13, 2011



What stands out about the eighteen large-format black-and-white pictures in the “Tate Café” series is the emphatically perfunctory execution with a wide brush. Carpenter’s interest in the subject—a coffee shop and bookstore at the Tate Modern that no longer exists—was tickled by peculiar products that were sold there: leggings and wallpapers decorated with motifs from his series “The Opening” that were manufactured against his wish by the collective Reena Spaulings. After the first presentation of the “Tate Café” series at the Simon Lee Gallery in 2011, Carpenter built a reconstruction of the café—in Reena Spaulings’s New York gallery, of all places, as though to exorcize the trauma through repetition. In view of the reconstructed café, it became possible to grasp the literal quality of his paintings, which show nothing other than the actual scene there. In “TATE CAFÉ 13,” we see an acrylic-glass display and ballot box stocked with so-called comment cards: the museum solicited the visitors’ opinions with the repetitive patronizing phrase “What do you think?” The painting shows the artistic ideal of audience participation in an unwonted light, revealing it to be a populist strategy: letting visitors feel like they have a say helps make the art seem more accessible and ultimately serves to increase visitor figures. Carpenter’s impetuous and irreverent brushwork hints at this new reality of a society that prizes “active involvement” while actually discounting consumers’ views as irrelevant. If the question on the cards is somewhat infantilizing, however, the picture nonetheless does in a sense ask its beholders what they think: it speaks to them, genuinely addressing them. Here, however, the question aims at more than just a snap opinion about the work—we are encouraged to reflect on the imposition of an incapacitating form of participation.

Ellen Cantor Death Skull, 2008



In “Death Skull,” a work on paper by Ellen Cantor, terms fraught with affective intensity such as “Panic” and “Chaos” are inscribed on a goth-style black surface. They designate subjective emotions as well as the kinds of moods that can seize entire societies. The semiotic marks are an integral component of the work’s ornamental visual idiom, indicating that painting is a specific language that does not signify first and foremost and exceeds the significations it does hint at. The central motif—a skull with sunglasses and collaged pink paper teeth—reads as a humorous symbolization of the artist’s mortality. Similarly, the painted pink letter “N” in the bottom right corner of the picture is a kind of autobiographical signal, n being the one consonant that appears in both Cantor’s first and last name. As a logogram, “N” also represents Cantor’s radically semiotic conception of painting, in which symbolism is fused with autobiographical references.

4. Art enriched with—and withholding—lived reality

Manifold realities of life resonate in these pictures, but the works camouflage them, render them in caricatured or distorted form, or intersperse them with fictional scenarios. These realities, then, are never given in objectivist fashion, always eluding the beholder's grasp.



Avery Singer Untitled, 2018

This painting is a self-portrait in disguise: a—presumably female—figure with a cane and models from Singer's studio appear darkly silhouetted in a colorfully tiled space. Yet the picture references life by way of its negation: life figures in it as an absence that, though it casts shadows, cannot be represented as such. Representation, conversely, is revealed to be marked by retraction. Meanwhile, the grid motif in shades of pink, purple, orange, and blue quotes the emblematic articulation of the modernist ambition to sever painting's connection to life and obliterate all narrative in visual art. Yet as Singer demonstrates, even a rather blurred grid can actually accommodate narrative elements and traces of real life. For instance, the mere suggestion that it extends beyond the edges of the picture breaks the frame that seeks to contain it. Defying the modernist credo that the grid would undo the hierarchical distinction between figure and ground, the picture's deceptively compelling rendition of spatial depth creates room for a vital illusionism.

Albert Oehlen Gold zu Gelb, 2018



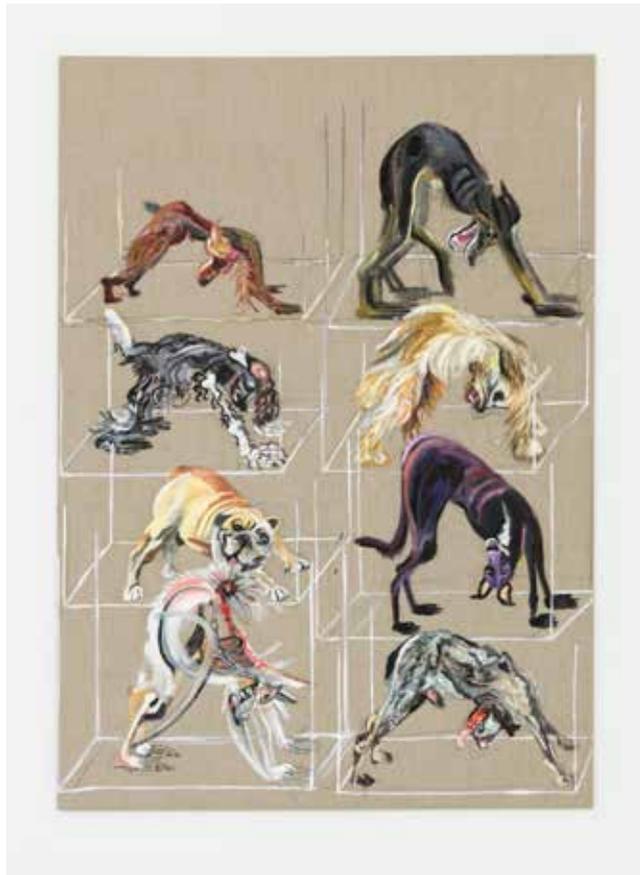
As so often in Albert Oehlen's oeuvre, the visual vocabulary of this painting is the product of an external experimental arrangement. In an echo of the Surrealist method of ceding control of the creative process to outside instructions (or dreams), the picture is a selective and formalized response to an external occasion—the present commercial exhibition of paintings. The looped shape painted in a yellow-brownish green rising from its surface may be read as a letter or a harp, but also as a thinly disguised dollar sign. The work, that is to say, is wise to the fact that it is, among other things, a commodity of a peculiar kind (and one with considerable market value), and it lets us know as much. In that sense, the hazy-milky white that seems to be oozing from its zones of color and has begun to efface them amounts to an attempt to negate its compatibility with the commodity form, as though the picture demonstratively sought to impede its commercial exploitation—a recalcitrance, needless to say, that only enhances its marketability, as the use of gold paint, a traditionally precious material, would seem to acknowledge. The brownish-green palette, which recalls Oehlen's abstract paintings from the 1990s, lends the work a conceptual air, though luminous areas in vivid oranges and yellows flash up here and there; the semblance of vitality, it appears, is permitted only in small doses. The paint runs along the bottom edge should be read less as tokens of gestural painting—as such, they have long been a mannerist device—than as effects of a procedure that quotes the rhetoric of abstract expressionism and subjects it to radical semioticization.

Jeanette Mundt Baby Like the Wind, 2018



This painting is one in a series for which Jeanette Mundt worked with JPG images of tattoos by her partner Ned Vena. The motif—a death’s head that Vena himself wears on his skin—in turn derives from a skull painting by Van Gogh. The several layers of appropriation of visual material that went into Mundt’s picture are reflected by the peculiar way in which the motif shrinks from view: it looks like a faded and soiled copy of an original that is difficult to reconstruct. The blurring of the sketched skull—paint seems to bleed through the outline—likewise signals the reference to a source in the distant past. Meanwhile, by reproducing her boyfriend’s tattoo, the artist implies that what he wears as a symbol of his singularity is in fact indefinitely reproducible. Mundt’s series acknowledges her partner’s influence in her art and at once transcends it. Read as a tribute to Vena, the picture is apt to downplay any sense of competition between them. Read as an idiosyncratic adaptation of his artistic approach, it turns the traditional hierarchy between painter and muse on its head: Mundt, it emerges, is the “winner” in this relationship.

Jana Euler in dusk dogs facing downwards, 2018



In this painting on an unprimed canvas, three-dimensional cages grow out of yoga mats, echoing the cage structures Francis Bacon similarly sketched with a few brushstrokes. Each cage holds a dog of a different breed; Euler has captured the animals in the yoga pose named after them. The painting, in other words, takes the “downward dog” metaphor from yoga literally, with almost all dogs’ eyes turned to the ground. Some of the paws more closely resemble human hands, a hybridization that conversely hints that humans are natural creatures not at all unlike dogs. Just as yoga practitioners on their mats are instructed to focus entirely on themselves and block out the world around them, each of the dogs in Euler’s picture is a singular individual, as the painterly treatment of the varying textures of their furs emphasizes. With their colorful felts and the bones and innards showing through here and there, the animals are reminiscent of the carcasses Chaim Soutine painted as emblems of the human condition. And as in a yoga class, some are entirely absorbed in themselves while others seem to be chafing against the strict exercise regime and intent on breaking out of their cages: the dogs looking the beholder in the eye are certainly straying from the rule that interaction with others should be avoided as much as possible. Yet they, too, are ultimately stuck in their cages, as though to illustrate the high degree of individualization and the fraying of social ties in our digital economy.

Birgit Megerle Recreation, 2018



In this picture, an air of Impressionism (with its emphasis on the intrinsic nature of color and the focus on leisure and private spaces) unexpectedly wafts around the depiction of a figure that reads now as female, now as male. The androgynous short haircut and the fashionable but not overly sexualizing attire contrast with the figure's placement on a bed with a coverlet that, as in comparable scenes by Édouard Manet or Berthe Morisot, blurs into a sea of colors. The outfit—a pink blouse with puffy sleeves and a 1980s-style pattern, the red fingernails—and the figure's assertive upright posture leave no doubt that she or he is both an object presented for contemplation and a subject possessed of agency. As in many of Morisot's paintings, his or her gaze fixes the eyes of a beholder standing at the foot of the bed, which is to say, in front of the picture, as though to capture and neutralize our voyeuristic interest. The expansive color gradients, especially on the bedspread, are recognizably inspired by Impressionist art, but they also exude the kind of chromatic mist that seems to hover over Gotthard Graubner's abstract paintings. The subject of this portrait is visibly enjoying the retreat into the private setting yet also poised to spring into action at any moment.

5. The delegation and return of authorship

These works were manufactured either using mechanical processes or by assistants tasked with executing them. Yet they do not undermine the principle of “authorship”—far from it: the author enters into the picture through a variety of devices such as flaws deliberately left visible, individual painterly marks, or modes of self-portraiture.



Alex Israel

Self-Portrait (Side View Mirror), 2018

Alex Israel's color self-portraits, which show him in profile wearing sunglasses, were the logo of his talk show “As It Lays” before they became the visual leitmotif of his art. For this exhibition, Israel has made a version that fuses analogue branding with the culture of the digital selfie. His trademark silhouette serves as the ground for a montage of diverse motifs: besides the self-portrait in the rear-view mirror of his Toyota Prius showing Israel with sunglasses and one of L.A.'s signature palm trees in the background, the interior of the car forms another frame around the scene enhanced by a selection of visual tokens from his art—a beach, the sea, the horizon, a volleyball net, and a pelican pasted in the sky.

The work is effectively a double self-portrait: we encounter Israel's profile as an abstract ideograph and a full-portrait selfie that, naturally enough, shows him engaged in the act of photographing himself. Yet the complex aesthetic codes and media technologies that inform this self-representation let the artist maintain his distance from us: if the self-shot in the mirror is already severely distorted and defamiliarized, the reproduction of the motif in a painting—executed in luminous acrylic paints—adds to its recoding. The artist shows himself at work and by the same token shrouds the labor expended on making the picture in mystery.

Wade Guyton Untitled, 2018



Since 2015, Wade Guyton has used an inkjet printer to reproduce selected screenshots of the opening page of the *New York Times*'s online version on canvases. He makes no effort to conceal the digital processing and conversion that went into the resulting pictures; see, in this particular work, the slippage along the central seam: the canvas was too wide for the printer, so the artist had to fold it and print the image in two steps. The slight printing ink smudges and the minor defects in the otherwise “painterly” green rectangle (another picture within the picture) on the paper’s homepage are additional evidence that this digital process, in which the physical labor of making the work is delegated to a printer, nonetheless involves subjective creative decisions. Guyton’s login name “wguyton1” can be spotted in the top right corner, underscoring that “authorship” remains a pivotal principle even when it is distributed. A brief note on the motif, which makes the picture a kind of history painting and visual record of an event with far-reaching consequences: on June 26, 2018, the Supreme Court upheld the “travel ban” on Muslim-majority countries, alarming evidence that the appointments of Trump-friendly justices to the nation’s highest court are paving the way for an autocracy in which the law will no longer act as a restraint on the president’s power.

Eliza Douglas Unbecoming, 2018



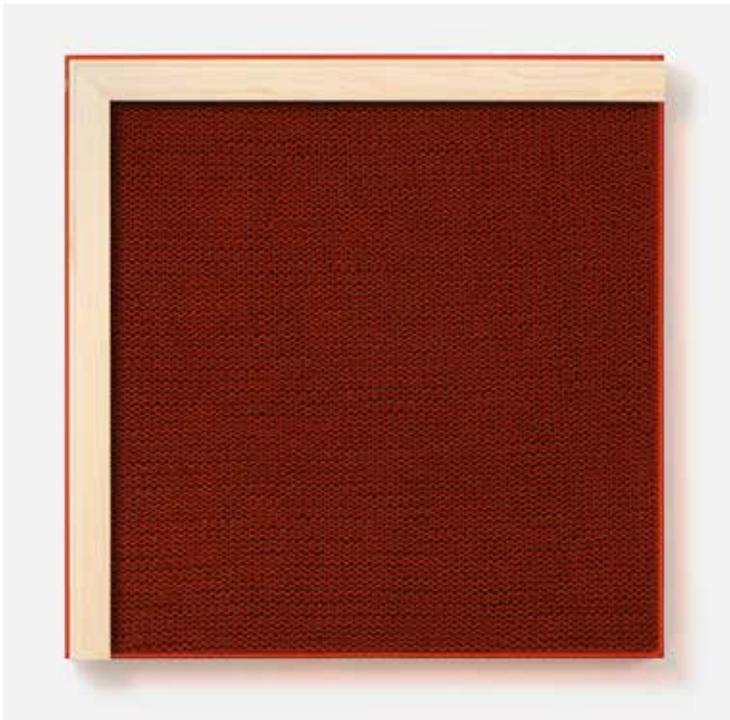
Eliza Douglas's self-portraits store up bodily presence even as they demonstratively indicate absence and highlight the semiotics of painting. The artist's photorealistically painted "hands and feet" suggest her imaginary presence, but as the omission of the head already indicates, a vital feature is missing from this portrait. The delegation of the execution—an assistant was tasked with painting the photorealistic elements—likewise reflects the artist's alienation from her own likeness. She picked up the brush herself only to fill in the gestural part of the picture, a zone of fleshy pink paint roughly sketching the torso, arms, and head. The significance of this mark-making is hinted at by the credit or business card in the subject's hand, which reminds us of the work's specific commodity form as well as the prerogative of the singular author who has left her mark on it. Then again, the card, as a blank visual medium (and stand-in for the picture), functions as a projection screen that readily absorbs the fantasies the painting stimulates in the beholder.

Ken Okiishi gesture/data (feedback), 2015



In this work, the material-physical presence of color meets the medium on which painted pictures—in the form of JPGs—often circulate today: the screen. The piece stages a trial of strength between the two flickering screens and the horizontal brushstrokes that cover them, with neither side coming out as a clear winner. The distinctive luminosity of the screen contrasts oddly with the very different luster of the paint; such interweaving of immateriality and materiality is a hallmark of ostensibly immaterial art. We might characterize the thick painterly marks, which distantly recall Joan Mitchell's brushwork, as "figures" on a ground (the screen) that, for its part, is highly dynamic and holds considerable tactile appeal, the more so since it is in constant "motion." What is more, the flickering screen ground keeps modulating the color effect of the brushstrokes on its surface. By using screens as a support medium, the artist essentially revives and radicalizes a trope that, in one version or another, has been at work in our visual culture since the early modern era: the idea of "aesthetic aliveness." The notion that this ostensibly non-painterly work undertakes to revitalize painting is buttressed by the motifs that wander across the screen: footage showing this and other pictures demonstrates that seemingly anti-painterly formats such as film and video are still in many ways governed by the conventions of painting.

Rosemarie Trockel Color assistant, 2018



In histories of contemporary art, Rosemarie Trockel's name is closely associated with the genre of the "knitted painting"—a misrepresentation that this work picks up on only to undermine it. The true-blue coarse-knit woolen fabric that plays the part of the original paint on canvas in this work is prevented from showing its true color by the acrylic glass tinted in a deep orange (a typical hue for sunglasses): the casing adulterates the impression and deprives the viewer of an authentic color sensation. Meanwhile, the stretcher-frame brackets mounted on the casing proclaim that the aspiration remains to make "painting," though it is stunted in this instance. With its frame only partially completed, the work spells out that painting is a language conjured into presence by certain signifiers and framing devices, but merely hinting at them may in fact be all it takes.

Annette Kelm Red Stripes 1, 2018



Annette Kelm's photographs speak to the media-theoretical observation that no medium has "intrinsic" qualities. In this work as in others, the interrelation with other media—in this instance, painting—is its constitutive feature. The picture's vertical red bands invoke Daniel Buren's anti-expressive striped canvases. Kelm's stripes, however, are recognizably narrower and evince illusionistic bulges, lending the picture as a whole a relief-like aspect. If the decorative side of the stripe pattern was largely latent in Buren, photography here more fully harnesses this potential. Responding to the anti-illusionistic thrust of some striped pictures, as in the early Frank Stella, Kelm insists on their effective illusionism.

6. Painting turns into sculpture, sculpture into painting

In this section, we encounter hybrid objects that bridge the gulf between the respective conventions of “painting” and “sculpture.” They serve to demonstrate the insight in media theory that every medium constitutes itself through its relation to another.



Heimo Zobernig ohne Titel, 1991

Heimo Zobernig’s cardboard objects are painted in a manner that both quotes and undercuts the laconic gesture of the coat of paint in minimal art. For example, the layer of black synthetic resin paint slathered on this cube in rough and rapid brushstrokes imitates the industrial aesthetic of minimalist objects: the viscous paint is usually reserved for interior and exterior surfaces that are exposed to a lot of wear. Not even trying to avoid blistering and drip formation, the artist actually embraces these visible traces of his painterly activity on the surface—indices of subjectivity of the sort that the minimalists sought to exorcize from art. For this exhibition, Zobernig has added a white pedestal on which his black cube is now presented; it frames the object’s sides and transmutes them into pictures. The traces of wear on the pedestal add to the sense that the work bears the imprint of the artist’s life and labor no less than a painted picture, though without being reducible to this indexical aspect.

KAYA (Kerstin Brätsch und Debo Eilers) Processione [Jake], 2017



Since 2010, Kerstin Brätsch and Debo Eilers have worked together under the label KAYA, creating hybrid objects between painting, room divider, relief, performance, and sculpture. This work, a double-sided picture, deftly crosses the boundary between painting and sculpture with protrusions that look like casts of body parts. A hidden medieval painting on its surface, colorful bathroom tiles from the KAYA studio, and the note mentioning the hours “Jake” spent working on it supplement additional references to art and life. The grid-patterned tiles boldly assert their allegiance to the modernist tradition, whereas the (fictional) record of an assistant’s labor signals that the project involved the use of hired staff. In reality, the painterly areas are Brätsch’s own work, underscoring the significance of the artist’s hand.

With the letters and digits in various colors, the note on Jake’s contribution also functions as a visual element within the pictorial mise-en-scène. Rather than offering genuine insight into the circumstances of its making, then, the picture plays with the beholder’s expectation that it on some level preserves the lived reality and labor of those who created it.

Frank Stella Dawidgrodek I, 1971



Frank Stella's "Black Paintings" (1958–1960) and, more forcefully, his "Irregular Polygon Paintings" (1965–1967) announced the ambition that has defined his career: to push the boundaries of the pictorial mode and explore its untapped potentials. This work is from the "Polish Village" series (1970–1973) of pieces named after synagogues in Poland destroyed by the Nazis. Like the "Irregular Polygon Paintings," which critics including Rosalind Krauss disliked for their illusionism, the relief presents colorful geometric forms (though their number has grown) interacting as if they were animated by humanlike energies. They form a three-dimensional—and indeed illusionistic—construction whose roots in canvas painting nonetheless remain recognizable. Painting is here revitalized by the saturated colors and vivid materiality of the geometric forms that interlock as though of their own accord. The luminous colors—a bold ochre, a dark turquoise, a deep bottle green—add to the impression that the work positively projects its presence into the space before it. In that sense, it updates the early modern trope of the self-creating picture: it seems to have conjured itself into being. Only the title notes that it was informed in part by a history of totalitarian devastation. In this light, it may be read both as an allegory of an overwhelmingly powerful and destructive system and as a plea for a painting endowed with agency that, urged forward by its intrinsic dynamic, reaches out into the third dimension.

Credits

Ellen Cantor
Death Skull, 2008
Pencil and collage on paper, 318.5 × 237 cm
Courtesy: The Estate of Ellen Cantor and
Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin.

Merlin Carpenter
TATE CAFÉ 13, 2011
Acrylic on linen, 200 × 300 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Simon Lee Gallery,
London/Hong Kong.

Eliza Douglas
Unbecoming, 2018
Oil on canvas, 210 × 180 cm
© Photo Ilan Zarantonello.
Courtesy: Air de Paris, Paris.

Jana Euler
in dusk dogs facing downwards, 2018
Oil on canvas, 210 × 150 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

Wade Guyton
Untitled, 2018
Epson UltraChrome HDX inkjet on linen,
213 × 175 cm
Photo: Ron Amstutz. Courtesy: The artist and
Captain Petzel, Berlin.

Alex Israel
Self-Portrait (Side View Mirror), 2018
Acrylic and bondo on fiberglass, 61 × 52 × 2.5 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Greene Naftali,
New York.

KAYA (Kerstin Brätsch & Debo Eilers)
Processione [JAKE], 2017
Oil, acrylic, pigment, gold leaf, silver leaf,
epoxy, plastic tiles, and token on canvas,
aluminium, 335 × 211 × 89 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie
Meyer Kainer, Vienna.

Annette Kelm
Red Stripes 1, 2018
Archival pigment print, 100 × 75 cm
Courtesy: The artist and König Galerie, Berlin.

Jutta Koether
Isabelle Bild #3, 2018
Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 100 × 4 cm
Courtesy: The artist and
Galerie Buchholz, Berlin.

Valentina Liernur
No #3, 2017 – 2018
Oil, zippers and safety pins on canvas and
gabardine, 140 × 155 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Reena Spaulings
Fine Art, New York/Los Angeles.

Eric Nathaniel Mack
Nile Born (Canadian Hockey), 2018
Microfiber blanket, acrylic, cotton, silk, satin,
burlap fiber and a hockey themed terry cloth
towel, 180 × 152 × 116 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Simon Lee Gallery,
London/Hong Kong.

René Magritte
Le Marchand d'art, 1956–1967
Film 8mm, black and white, 2:02 min
Courtesy of The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of
Belgium – Archives of Belgian Art Letters and
Documents, Brussels.

Birgit Megerle
Recreation, 2018
Oil on canvas, 165 × 125 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

Sarah Morris
Bad School, 2018
Household gloss on canvas, 214 × 214 cm
Courtesy: The artist and White Cube.

Jeanette Mundt
Baby Like the Wind, 2018
Oil on linen, 51 × 41 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Societé, Berlin.

Georgie Nettell
Radical Thinkers, 2016
Inkjet print, 102 × 77 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Reena Spaulings
Fine Art, New York/Los Angeles.

Albert Oehlen
Gold zu Gelb, 2018
Oil on canvas, 230 × 180 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Max Hetzler,
Berlin.

Ken Okiishi
gesture / data (feedback), 2015
Oil paint on flat-screen televisions,
feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), left panel:
90 × 52.5 × 5 cm, right panel: 107.5 × 62 × 5 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

Josephine Pryde
Autorenfoto: Exhibition Copy (A), 2018
Archival pigment print, 40 × 60 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

Autorenfoto: Exhibition Copy (B), 2018
Archival pigment print, 60 × 40 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

Frank Stella
Dawidgrodek I, 1971
Felt and painted canvas mounted on shaped
canvas, 274 × 210 × 10 cm
Courtesy: The artist, Marianne Boesky Gallery,
Lévy Gorvy, and Sprüth Magers.
© 2018 Frank Stella/Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Amy Sillman
Pat, 2017
Acrylic on linen, 335 × 190.5 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin.

Avery Singer
Untitled, 2018
Acrylic on canvas, 216 × 241 × 5 cm
Photo: Lance Brewer.
Courtesy: Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin.

Torey Thornton
Their's Ours (Wool in Sheep's Clothing,
Uria's Soiled Dress), 2018
Soil and glue on cotton patio furniture cushion,
197 × 61 × 11 cm
Courtesy: The artist and ESSEX STREET,
New York.

Rosemarie Trockel
Color assistant, 2018
Wool (light blue), wood, plexiglas (orange),
100 × 100 cm
Copyright Rosemarie Trockel und VG Bild-
Kunst, Bonn, 2018. Courtesy: Sprüth Magers.

Charline von Heyl
Big Joy, 2004
Oil on canvas, 208 × 198 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin.

Christopher Wool
Untitled, 2016
Enamel, oil and silkscreen on paper, 76 × 56 cm
© Christopher Wool; Courtesy of the artist
and Luhring Augustine, New York.

Heimo Zobernig
ohne Titel, 1991
Synthetic-resin varnish, cardboard,
36 × 36 × 36 cm
Courtesy: The artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

Texts:

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Translation:

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„The Vitalist Economy of Painting“

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