

REVIEWS

‘Mary Heilmann & David Reed: Two By Two’, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, 6 March–11 October 2015

Reviewed by Daniel Pettitt, Royal College of Art

Perception is geared to cancel out whatever is stray or unaccountable. “Back-ground” is characterised negatively as the unclear, indistinct, and non-articulated. But back-ground is neither the margin or fringe of the implicit. It is only through the function of its “opening out” that we are presented with a passage to the destiny of things.

(Bochner 1971: n.p.)

This joint exhibition of the Californian born New York-based painters Mary Heilmann (b. 1940, San Francisco) and David Reed (b. 1946, San Diego) opens without paintings. Instead a darkened room, two films playing at either end of the space, commence proceedings. *Her Life* (2006) by Heilmann presents a photographic montage of her own works fading in and out alongside images of: the ocean, gridlocked cars, neon advertising signs. Leitmotifs that call to mind those idiosyncratic qualities of post-war Americana and inform the optimistic palette Heilmann terms ‘Social Colour’ (Heilmann and Reed 2015). This palette has as much to do with food packaging as it does, say, De Stijl. It is this balanced dichotomy of source material and formal vocabulary that anchors Heilmann’s practice. A similarly attuned visual syntax is found opposite in Reed’s work. *In Our Solitude* (2014),



Figure 1: installation view 'Mary Heilmann & David Reed: Two By Two', Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, courtesy of the artists and Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, SMB/Thomas Bruns.

made in collaboration with his sister Pamela, comprises images of their old family house seen from inside and out through photographic stills, offering a reminisced snapshot intimacy. Reed's painterly activities are imbued with a nostalgia for the golden age of Hollywood manifested across interfaces of semi-transparent colour fields running the gambit of seemingly careless application and steely intent. Heilmann and Reed have cemented their places in developing American painting post-Abstract Expressionism by injecting narrative and emotion into the mix alongside the core tenets of figuration and abstraction.

Suitably primed by the films, the main gallery space, with some 40 paintings spanning the last four decades, comes into view. As the title of the exhibition hints, a work by each artist has been paired up with one by the other, the gallery space serving as a kind of white-cube-ark. Facing us is Heilmann's *Road Trip* (2010) alongside Reed's *#113* (1976/2005–06) with a respectfully conventional distance of wall separating them. These paintings echo one another with a sense of motion and unstable boundaries at play; Reed's dragged brush strokes are like tyre skids along Heilmann's fragmented highway. Elsewhere in the gallery, the gulf between paired works has decreased significantly and they are now all hung the same narrow distance apart. Initially mooted to be installed 'kissing', literally abutting, the paintings are now 'winking' (Heilmann and Reed 2015) at each other and the audience, simultaneously inviting us into the conversation. Curator Udo Kittelmann has worked with Heilmann and Reed to offer an exhibition infused with a vibrancy and humour not normally to be expected within institutional boundaries. Unlike recent solo European surveys of both painters, this exhibition is not confined by chronology or retrospective agendas. There is no ego here. Heilmann and Reed's friendship and admiration for each other's work is evident throughout. In an age where the influence of the 'socialmediaverse' (Jackson 2015) permeates much art production and attendant discourse, a plateauing of enquiry usually follows. Value systems ratified by a few tastemakers gain traction and tepid sublimation of a tangent is accorded value. The lack of self-consciousness found in 'Two by Two' is highly refreshing. All the works in the exhibition are imbued with a salient contemporaneity whilst seemingly sitting out-of-time in the linear progression of recent art history. The pairing of works from different decades reinforces this. Spatial areas within a painting commonly deemed to be 'negative' need not embody the connotations of that word. Rather it is both a malleable and inclusive arena with exploitable qualities. These painting pairings have become infused with a lyrical didacticism promoting the reading that both painters approach their works with a kind of musical totalism in mind. Heilmann's *Yoshimi* (2004) with Reed's *#550* (2005–08) calls out affinities in formal arrangement, restricted use of colour, displaced brushstrokes and cognitive potency. Background and foreground fuse into one flat surface, and negative space is not present. Heilmann, who has training in sculpture and ceramics, utilizes the stylistic principles of abstraction to scrutinize the blind spots in modernism. Her paintings are infused with personal memories and associations conveyed through the use of colour and titling.

Psychedelic Tube (2006) shows a predominantly white space like the aftermath of a censored battle with a standard of green, red, black and blue fluttering in the top left seen through LSD tinted glasses. Reed's practice invites reading at a slight remove. His plotted palimpsests on cinematic slivers of canvas have numbered titles, an objective device calling to mind sections of a larger sequence confirming their operation as components of a continuum. In #482 (2001–02) translucent brown arabesques writhe across a striped test card of muted tones reaching the brim of the picture plane. The same stripes appear in the lower left-hand side of the composition, on a smaller scale, as if dropped from a great height displacing whatever gestures were beneath; nothing affords easy organization here. Heilmann's *Sunny Chair no. 1-12* (2015) comprises twelve individual seats painted in an alternating sequence of lemon yellow, sea green and hot pink that have been placed together to form a bench diagonally bisecting the main gallery space, drawing our eye to a mixed media piece by each painter. *Scottie's Bedroom* (1993) by Reed presents one of his paintings hung above a rumpled double bed, alongside which a floor lamp shines, at the foot of the bed a television set plays a short looped scene from *Vertigo* (Hitchcock 1958). On closer inspection the bedroom furnishings in the gallery space mirror those presented in the clip; the same painting has been digitally inserted into the film. This appropriation and intervention in a fiction attest to Reed's interest in narrative and film, similar processes of which are echoed in the careful staging and moves executed in the creation of his paintings. Travelling along the bench across the room we are accompanied by Heilmann's sound piece *A Vertigo Moment* (2015). The ringing of the telephone from *Vertigo* is amplified and plays intermittently throughout the gallery. Commanding the far wall is Heilmann's *Good Vibrations Diptych Remembering David* (2012), a cosmology of painted ceramic wall pieces seemingly broken free from the painted diptych hung with them. Social Colour is in abundance with this extended form of painting. The mixed media pieces, like the films, act as pinpoints marking the activities of these painters, staking out the material that informs how they go about making work. It is worth noting these mixed media pieces have been afforded more room in the gallery than the 'winking' painting pairings that loop the perimeter of the space. One wonders what kind of conversation would have been promoted had these works been treated like the paintings.

But what are these pairings calling to mind? We are offered a slightly schizophrenic stereoscopic semaphore, visually consuming but a conceit that mitigates our ability to view and consider each work in its own right. Established by the films in the first room, nostalgia is the enabler for this show but not the binding agent. Rather, affection and wit drive this exhibition. For those unfamiliar with the activities of these painters it could prove a rocky introduction. By pairing up, have these paintings, videos and mixed media pieces morphed into autonomous 'third' works free from authorship of either Reed or Heilmann? No, whilst not created collaboratively, the arrangement here is a temporary union. This is not a show for soliloquies but for conversation and collision, something arrived at with

accomplished precision. Heilmann and Reed have joined in a temporary partnership to present a playful arrangement of their painterly activities over the last 40 years whilst offering a witty riposte to conventional expectations of a museum show.

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‘Niamh O’Malley: Glasshouse’, Bluecoat, Liverpool, 10 October 2015–10 January 2016

Reviewed by Lizzie Lloyd, University of the West of England

Both painting and the substance of paint come under renewed pressure in Niamh O’Malley’s show at Bluecoat. Glass dominates, sometimes framed or ringed around by scrupulously crafted wood-work or propped up by elegant steel rods. Of paint there are the merest dabs, smears or patches of black and white, on glass. Sometimes these appear more like unintentional blotches, studio splatters and spillages. Often paint appears as collateral damage, or a by-product of some other studio activity. Though given the recurrence of the motifs, if we can call abstract patches that, and given O’Malley’s meticulous attention to detail, it is clear that every mark made is deliberate.

It is the sense of mark making – whether by pencil, paint or screen print, whether by frosted, scratched or dirtied glass – rather than a narrow conception of painting, that is key to understanding O’Malley’s recent work. A field of finely scribbled pencil drawings billow like smoke across most of the expanse of a small grey board, its wiry coils giving the impression of an all over buff by wire brush. Similarly heavily laden are her mono prints that resemble multiply photocopied paper that has been overlaid to create a monochromatic irregular veil. Together, shown here for the first time, these smaller works reveal the ways in which marks, for O’Malley, are instrumental. In *Shelf* two highly polished, smooth edged wedges of amber and grey glass partially overlap in front of a foil rimmed clear glass rectangle upon which a compact growth appears to spread – like an algal bloom of paint reminiscent of her screen print series – across the pane. The cluster is set on a shallow shelf at my head height. These layers enact a visual buildup or, as O’Malley put it, in semiotic terms, they function as ‘an index of time’ (O’Malley 2015). Marks describe not only the particular bodily movements exerted to produce them but also the intuitive decision-making that takes place when one leads on from another. They also extend beyond themselves, in the physical, optical and mental adjustments that viewers make in order to metabolize these marks, to orientate themselves in relation to them.

Not only is time evidenced in the presence of marks but also in their absence. After they are cut, O’Malley’s glass works are polished by hand, their irregular edges smoothed and buffed to erase the traces of their production, their history. But marks are not always made, or made and then erased; they are also found. In her black and white double-screen film *Glasshouse* (2014), a camera – tracking the length of a decrepit greenhouse – pans the sporadically calcified, broken and mouldering glass panes as it looks out at the overgrown garden beyond. As the footage slides down the length of the greenhouse, on a loop, the passing of frames across the screen begins to resemble the experience of



Figure 1: Niamh O'Malley (2014), Shelf, beech, amber glass, acrylic, foil & solder on clear glass, foil on grey glass, 300 x 420 x 40 mm, courtesy of Bluecoat.

passing through an endless corridor of paintings. The textures and layers of accreted dirt on the surface of the glass – that we sometimes look at and sometimes through – bear the hallmarks of the weathered surface of frescoes of the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi, for example, whose blemished, painted skins are framed intermittently by real and fictional architectural structures.

O'Malley has long been interested in exploring the collision of paint and film in order to confuse the mind's eye out of complacency. This latest body of work is an expansion of her earlier, more explicitly painterly practice. In a work like *Amiens St 'Vignette'* (2007), for example, she overlaid a painted cityscape on canvas with a filmed projection of steam from a heating system that reveals and conceals the painting below. Now, however, she uses paint not as a base to be projected onto, but as a visual interruption. In *Nephin* (2014) a blob of black paint clings to a pane of glass in front of a camera as the film jerkily circles mount Nephin (a childhood haunt for O'Malley). Paint here is irksome, a black spot in our field of vision, its intransigence at odds with the orbiting film footage.

This perceived tension between movement and stasis becomes entangled in O'Malley's work. In *Window* (2013) clusters of painted leaves hover around the corner of a large glass panel set in the centre of a gallery bench. Alongside them abstract smears and semi opaque dappling of black and grey are strewn unevenly, as if battling it out on either side of the substantial toughened glass screen. Due to the thickness of the reinforced glass, daubs that appear on either side of the panes are separated both in colour and perspective. We see paint's front and its underside. We see through it to the other side of the room, while light simultaneously bounces back at us off the glass. This multiplicity of surfaces enforces a shifting, mobile gaze, neither a looking through nor a looking at but a slipping between the two.

'Surfacing', O'Malley calls it. It is her deftness with surface that, despite paint's restricted use, strains at the bounds of the medium of painting and enables her, in her words, to 'resurface your perceptions', which after all is what painting does (O'Malley 2015). This recent body of work further expands upon her earlier practice, in which paint played a more explicit part, by testing the limits that have historically been imposed upon the genre and seeing just how far she can push them. But it is also O'Malley's ongoing interest in surface, and its staged transformation, that lends her work its painterly quality. Robert Hass's poem about Gerhard Richter, without any explicit reference to the stuff of paint, describes a series of active processes that together build a painting. He writes:

To scour, to scar, to smear, to streak,
To smudge, to blur, to gouge, to scrape

'Action painting,' i.e.,
The painter gets to behave like time.

(Hass 2007: 25)

All of these processes are at play in O'Malley's work too, along with to prop, to polish, to overlap, to reflect. Accretions and patina, whether found and/or made, whether they appear by means of film, paint or in glass strata, are proof of time passed but also time passing. As you move between her screens, and your eye slides across her polished planes clawing at her surfaces in search of traction, associations come flooding. The image of whitewashed glass of derelict shop fronts reverberate. Similarly, her painted glass panels recall Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23) and her drawings, of Alfred Stieglitz's cloud photographs (1925–34) (Dillon 2016). These associations, however, never quite stick because the subject of O'Malley's work slips, once again, between itself, its own making, and its visual consumption over time.

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Contributor details

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**'Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age', Museum Brandhorst, Munich,
14 November 2015–30 April 2016; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien,
Vienna, 4 June–6 November 2016**

Reviewed by Moran Sheleg, University College London

Whether a culture succeeds in expressing in artistic form its ideas and outlook and experiences is to be determined by examining not simply the subject-matter of one art, like painting, but the totality of its arts, and including the forms as well as the themes.

(Schapiro [1957] 1978: 226)

What more can painting be today than a medium bound by its own specificity? This is the old but unspoken question underlying each of the three otherwise diverse 'chapters' that make up 'Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age' a sprawling exhibition co-curated by David Joselit, Manuela Ammer and Achim Hochdörfer. Attempting to chart the shifting relationships between networks of communication, cultural consumption, conceptions of embodiment, and 'expressive' painterly production over the past half-century, 'Painting 2.0' is a binocular project, with one eye anchored on complicating the ease with which this artistic activity and its cultural dissemination have become cynically imbricated in the critical conscience since the publication of Guy Debord's polemical text, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 1967), and the other on tracking the practical ramifications of this historical fallout.

Historicism looms large over any exhibition attempting to take the long view on a still present situation. Yet it plays a particularly provocative and strategic role within one which seeks to mine the long-standing imbrication of painting and expression as interchangeable bywords for the discredited hero myth of individual subjectivity. Following the lines of Meyer Schapiro's above dictum however, 'Painting 2.0' is not an exhibition that examines painting alone in order to do so. On the contrary, examples of painting's cultural appropriation in the form of civil protest and performance – or, rather, of painting's cultural and civic capacities for performing protest – are variously represented in both Hochdörfer's section, 'Gesture and Spectacle', and Joselit's 'Social Networks', through a range of multimedia works spanning Joseph Beuys's plaintiff placards symbolically mounted on a pair of felt slippers stuffed with his signature materials of fat and twigs (1972), Isa Genzken's plastic-and-gold-covered homage to Michael Jackson in *Wind II* (2009), Louise Fishman's *Angry Paintings* on paper (1973) and Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* (c.1964-1965) of Edie Sedgwick, Dennis Hopper and others attempting to hold the unrelenting gaze of the camera (with mixed success).

Equally conscious of the temporal links between painting's past and present tenses and tensions is Ammer's 'Eccentric Figuration' – a direct inversion of 'Eccentric Abstraction', the title of Lucy



Figure 1: (M. Baer, A. Silman, J. Koether), installation view (upper floor), 'Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age', 14 November 2015–30 April 2016, Museum Brandhorst, photo: Haydar Koyupinar © Museum Brandhorst.

Lippard's 1966 group exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery in New York, which pointedly focused on recent three-dimensional art exhibiting a more 'sensuous' use of form to that seen in other, notably Minimalist, object-based work of the time (Lippard 1966: 34). Seven works by Eva Hesse, the only artist included in both shows, completed before and during her pivotal trip to Germany c.1965, along with two paintings from Cy Twombly's contemporaneous *Roma* series and a 1964 canvas by Joan Mitchell, are here characterized as 'Affective Gestures' on the grounds that, as argued in Ammer's catalogue text, 'only when affect has been translated into a deniable assertion or attitude can there be talk of a body in the political sense' (Ammer 2015: 86). Yet 'how experience counts' in these works is suggested as dependent not upon the particular body politics animating their production but the effectual repurposing of the figure of American gestural painting which haunts much of the work on display. Two contrasting attempts to channel as well as exorcise this shared demon, as it were, appear in 'Social Networks' by way of *Play Pause* (2006), Sadie Benning's double-screen video projection showing hundreds of cartoon-like, gouache paintings that trace the interactions of her figures across a heavily urbanized, branded, and sexualized landscape, as juxtaposed with Paul McCarthy's 1995 video, *Painter*, featuring a giant-nosed-and-handed caricature reminiscent of Willem de Kooning played by McCarthy as though a manically belligerent soap opera character. Eclipsing the exhibition's many proposed taxonomies is the obvious sense of humour permeating much of its contents: from McCarthy's grotesquerie to the multiple registers of irreverence evident, for example, in works such as Joan Snyder's *Love Your Bones* (1970–71), *Kekse (Cookies)* (1964) by Sigmar Polke and *Fatso* (2009), a large, green and grey-hued canvas by Amy Sillman, all shown in separate parts of the museum. Although Tonio Kröner's short catalogue essay outlines a case for 'the ridiculous production of art' as a key facet of Michael Krebber's practice (Kröner 2015: 250), the abundance of ambiguous as well as explicit jesting encountered everywhere in the show leads one to wonder at the claims made by such a segmented survey over the social relationships embodied in, and enacted through, painting. Are we to believe that 'Painting's Body', as it is here termed, has fully 'assimilated' technological modes of identity (re)production into itself without physically, and knowingly, bearing any adverse or absurd marks of consequence and criticality?

Tacked onto the back of a dividing wall in the main room of the 'Eccentric Figuration' display, the shrouded and torn façade of David Hammons's *Untitled* (2012) suggests that, despite the attempt to dress it up otherwise, painting at any given time materializes the limits of what, and who, we can and cannot see, or name, in hindsight. To the credit of its curators, 'Painting 2.0' resists privileging any one practice over any other on the grounds of canonical precedence, despite devoting an entire room to the setting of Warhol's 'Silver Factory', replete with studio photographs by Billy Name, and another to 'Capitalist Realism' – choices balanced by showcasing Ree Morton's installation piece *Signs of Love* (1976), as well as the collaborative and individual results of the A.I.R. Gallery's feminist collective, also of the 1970s.

Yet even amongst such a varied and extensive display persists a nagging uncertainty as to what 'Painting 2.0' – echoing the computing terminology for user-generated content – might actually mean, not just historically but right now. Why continue to review the forms and themes, as well as subject matter, of painting as an expression of cultural change if not to challenge standing ideas, outlooks and experiences, rather than reassure institutions of their investments? In lieu of an answer, 'Painting 2.0' offers an impressive if overwhelming account of what expression itself might today constitute, both within and beyond the canvas, amidst the technological re-materialization of gesture as, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, the 'communication of a communicability' (Agamben [1992] 2000: 59). Yet where, and in what state, that might leave painting is far less clear to see.

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Painting 2.0 – Expression in the Information Age, Achim Hochdörfer, David Joselit and Manuela Ammer (eds) (2015)

Munich, London and New York: Delmonico/Prestel, 288 pp.,
ISBN: 9783791354910, h/bk, £45

1. Please see the review
of the exhibition in
this issue.

Reviewed by David Ryan, Anglia Ruskin University

When does an exhibition catalogue become a book in its own right? How valuable is it to separate the critical commentary or documentation of a large-scale survey show from the experience of the exhibition itself? In the case of *Painting 2.0 – Expression in the Information Age*¹ which has toured from Museum Brandhorst in Munich to mumok (Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien) in Vienna, 2015–16, there are strong arguments to see its accompanying publication as having this potential. First, each of its three curators has been actively involved in forming some of the recent debates within painting discourse: Achim Hochdörfer, curator at the Brandhorst, who wrote a compelling piece on painting's 'hidden reserve' for Artforum in 2009 (see Hochdörfer 2009); Manuela Ammer, a curator at mumok and an extensive commentator on feminist practices and painting; and David Joselit, author of the influential essay 'Painting besides Itself' (2009), and deeply engaged with ideas of how the artwork exists within network culture. Hochdörfer, Ammer and Joselit were also each involved in the symposium *Das Feld der Malerei* ('The Field of Painting') held at mumok in 2010, from which the current project grew.

As with any survey of recent painting, whether book or exhibition, it is all too easy to reflexively point to a roll call of omissions or some institutional self-interest that underpins the content and its organization. However, the curators have done that job for us in coming clean about the exhibition being substantially formed from the Brandhorst and mumok's collections and then 'amplified' and extended by numerous other exhibition loans. Its result is undeniably an American German lens through which to examine recent painting, and the curators point to this Euro-American bias as reflecting 'a highly developed tradition of expressionist modernism on the one hand and post-war "economic miracle" on the other' (11). Thankfully, though, questionable as the last comment might be, the cracks and critical fissures that exist between these geographical positions are not smoothed over and the choice of works also bring to the fore some uneasy dialogues, responses, and reactions (and all the more interesting for that we may add). Such a survey compilation of this sort will also be, of course, provisional in nature. Within the publication, the selected pieces and critical commentaries work together in order to illuminate a set of different trajectories that traverse the (often confusing) meshes and supplements that grow out of the now established modernist canonical

histories of painting. The latter are not necessarily critiqued in this book, nor are they 'superseded', but rather seen as points that will generate diverse and new interconnections within painting's recent past, which brings us to the structure of the book. Following the three larger sections of the exhibition, 'Gesture and Spectacle', 'Eccentric Figuration' and 'Social Networks', it is formed of three main curatorial essays: Hochdörfer's 'How the world came in'; Ammer's 'How's my painting?' (Judge me, please, don't judge me); and Joselit's 'Reassembling painting'. These are followed by complementary visual essays, which allow the reproduced works to exist in a visual discourse. Each of these exists within various subset headings, following the structure of the exhibition, to further articulate the dialogues (e.g., in 'Gesture and Spectacle' following Hochdörfer's essay, we also encounter reproduced works in sub-sections such as 'Mediated gestures', 'Protest painting', 'Expression as pose', 'Hacking the code', etc.). After the three essays and their corresponding visual sections come a series of short statements by critics such as Tonio Kröner, Isabelle Graw, Lynne Cooke and others. These act as a set of appendices to the main essays. Such a structure encourages a productive relationship between looking and reading, whereby the reproduced works take on independence from any interpretative reading given in the text. As I have already suggested this also reflects the provisional nature of such a survey – that the works should not simply be nailed into an ideological frame but must be given the chance to 'speak of themselves' while existing beside their potential location within a broader cultural context. This sensitivity is, to some extent, present in each of the essays, but before I discuss these it might be useful to touch on the overall intention of the project.

As this is a book exploring both 'expression' in painting and a particular timescale – 'the information age' – as denoted by its 2.0 appendage, we might ask, why reach back to the 1960s? If the 2.0 in the title relates to the growth of the Internet at the turn of the century (Web 2.0) and the ascendancy of interactivity and social media, then the choice to mark the 1960s as a starting point reflects the desire to acknowledge a deeper history of the 'information age' itself. Here, we might think of the accumulative intrusions and inter-activities, in the 1960s, of media, TV, cinema, social protest groups, McLuhan's 'technological prostheses', Buckminster Fuller's *Synergetics*, not to mention the voracious predatory nature of Pop Art, to name but a few instances, as catalysts for new sensibilities within making, thinking, and feeling. This in turn has led to a rethinking of painting and corresponding notions of 'expression' – also, of interactivity with the worlds of media, social concerns, identity, embodiment, cliché, self image, etc. As the authors suggest in the Introduction, the project demonstrates that conceptual art's "dematerialization" was complemented, and in many senses, foreclosed by painting's *rematerialization*' (11). This is a key point that runs through all of the texts. It is focused on how these individual '*rematerializations*' manifest themselves and what they might mean and insists – again, taking the longer view back to the 1960s – that painting had actually always absorbed the challenge of other media as well as its supposed nemesis, conceptual art.

In order to address these issues, each of the contributors for the main essays discusses certain key issues such as autonomy, subject-object, affect, the spatio-temporal, media environments, that make up the act of painting and its position and responses within networked interactivity. Hochdörfer looks at subject theory and its traditional relation to painting and expression, drawing on Adorno's complicated proposition of autonomy always encircling heteronomy, and then shifting notions of expression within recent network theories. Rauschenberg, unsurprisingly, is a shared point of reference in these essays, representing the formation of a burgeoning media society in the 1960s. Manuela Ammer's essay begins with a discussion of the body and affect via Deleuze's famous text on Bacon (see Deleuze 2003), and an interesting discussion of Lippard's 1966 exhibition 'Eccentric Abstraction' as a key to the choice of paintings in the section 'Eccentric Figuration'. Ammer sees Lippard's exhibition as a site where painting was both a key influence and yet also ultimately dismissed as being unable to address the kind of abstraction of sublimated affect in relation to the body's being-in-the-world that Lippard's 'Eccentric Abstraction' proposed. In effect, this whole section of the show and catalogue looks at what may well have been suppressed in Lippard: Lee Lozano's sexual and mechanized organicisms, Maria Lassnig's 'body image' paintings, Sue William's auto-erotic calligraphy, to Leidy Churchman's paintings and videos and their physical re-articulation of digital degradation of information. Although made at very different times these artists are each articulating the process of painting and embodiment as zones – and not always comfortable ones – of interaction with materiality, self and other. David Joselit's essay also looks at painting within network culture, and those who know his *Painting besides Itself* or *After Art* (see Joselit 2013) might be aware of the kind of arguments it contains, but here they are more grounded within the specificity of painting and its histories. It is certain fundamental questions that Joselit foregrounds and to which he returns. Beginning with the idea of 'passage', which, as in Hochdörfer's essay, examines subject-object relations, in what Joselit frames as 'subject-object marks' that act as vectors for a whole range of interactions, 'Establishing points along a gradient from ostensibly pure subjective expression to the elaboration of objective formal systems' (169). What ensues is an enlightening discussion of Pollock and Duchamp before looking at certain social networks of the 1960s: the Feminist collective A.I.R. Gallery in New York, Warhol's Factory, and finally to Sherrie Levine and Andrea Fraser's meta-commentaries on painting in the 1980s and 1990s. In this context if 'passage' represents a kind of subject-object force engendered through the movement of paint, then transitivity becomes another kind of passage, as he says, acting upon objects (and contexts, environments). Joselit's gradations of expression are then processed through this duality: 'Passage [...] is a form of materialized time [...] transitivity is the action of dislocation [...]' (179) As with Hochdörfer, this expanded reinvestigation of gesture points to its distancing from any purely subject-orientated model and Joselit flags up an alternative subjective-objective interplay that represents a perfect malleability for the information age, 'A period in which pictures have

dramatically proliferated in space and accelerated in time [...] Painting *embodies* dislocation, the affect of networks' (180).

What this results in, whether we agree with such conclusions or not, is a reconnection with the possibilities of what we might call 'painterly' painting. Rather than its violent critical rejection in the later 1980s (based on both tendentious arguments and a particular historicity) which saw it simply as a confectioned route to the marketplace, from today's standpoint, painting's handmade qualities and screen-like nature complicate its relation with other media, while on the other hand even the most 'de-materialized' practices are archived and commodified through the Internet. The current situation of social and imagistic interactivity and availability cries out, according to *Painting 2.0*, for new forms of responsiveness, agency and criticality. No longer is it a relation between the morally superior institutional critique and reactionary expressionist painting simply propping up an inflated market. However, what is not really broached here (although it is mentioned on several occasions) is the shift in markets due to the Twitter, Facebook, Instagram (etc.) amalgam, and what they are actually doing to market distortion and endless commercial promotion. Joselit's discussions, to be found elsewhere, about Internet intensity of distribution, 'buzz', etc., might be of some relevance here, but still fail to address this darker side of the 'information age'. But even if we are trying to think through this surplus of production and dissemination, *Painting 2.0* lets us look at questions around expanded expressivity and authenticity again within the context of information and agency, together with a whole range of painting, some familiar and others less so. For those painters who want to reflect on the nature of painterly practices in the present and their various recent histories, this book will be an important starting point in searching for some answers.

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Wimbledon Space, June Mostra, British School at Rome (2016). Screenings of his video works have taken place at Konzerthaus, Berlin, Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, Issue Project Space, New York; V22 Space, London (2012 and 2016); Logos, Ghent (2013), and Qo2 in Brussels, Belgium (2013), Teatro Pollini, Padua (2014) ICA, London (2014) and the Venice Biennale (2015). He is currently Reader in Fine Art at Cambridge School of Art.

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'Moira Dryer', 11R, New York, 7 January–11 February 2016

Reviewed by David Rhodes

11R opened its expanded Chrystie Street space in January with their second solo exhibition by Moira Dryer (1957–92). Presented, were paintings on wooden panels and works on paper from the 1980s and early 1990s. The watercolours, gouaches and collages have not previously been exhibited. Included also in a vitrine at the entrance to the gallery – before it opens up onto a high ceilinged, broad, rectangular and windowless space used for all but one of the paintings – could be seen key published texts on Dryer's fast moving but all too brief career. Opposite the vitrine were the framed works on paper that she thought of as private. There is a connection between the painting *FINGERPRINT # 2644*, 1988, and the acrylic and gouache *Untitled* 1989. The painting is patterned horizontally like a detail of a figure print; the gouache is bounded at all four edges by paint-dipped fingerprints. As a trace of the artist and a sign for identity this is an elemental as much as compositional trope. The works on paper reflect thinking on already made paintings as well those yet to come – specific paintings of Dryer's easily come to mind. The formal concerns here are close to that of Elizabeth Murray and Ross Bleckner – physicality (Murray), repetition and gesture (Bleckner). Other influences are historical, Fra Angelico, Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Goya and Velazquez – Dryer moved by the intense emotion present in this work.

Dryer created several bodies of work concurrently; within each body of work it was only later that a pattern of connection between individual pieces appeared. The paintings are not premeditated; one simply leads to the other through a personal and emotional response not initially



Figure 1: Moira Dryer (1988), FINGERPRINT #2644, casein on wood, courtesy 11R, New York.

anticipated. An insertion of found objects together with shaping of the support or making the painting freestanding added theatricality. Dryer said 'I'm beginning to see those paintings as performers. It is a theatre, and the pieces are performing. I see them as animated entities, alive and performing' (1988). Dryer was interested in Rebecca Horn's 'circus metaphors' in the exhibition 'An Art Circus' at Marion Goodman Gallery, also 1988. Though this was not applicable to her own work she did consider her own exhibitions as a 'stage' and the works themselves as performing together. This began as an observation whilst Dryer was employed in various theatres creating props and then moving them into position on set. Dryer noticed that when actors were not onstage the props had a presence of their own – and imagined that they could move around by themselves.

Dryer is not imitating classical theatre but activating a viewing space. A painting that becomes three-dimensional 'enters into its own physical arena' (Dryer 1988) with the viewer. This installation at 11R demonstrates what Dryer herself stated – that the resonance of the pieces is found in that they don't 'reaffirm', but challenge each other being equally be about joy as about grief. This contrast is dramatic. Together, a number of pieces represent a forum, even though they are still assertively singular. For Dryer, her criterion for a finished piece was whether she considered it alive or not. The freestanding pieces, or those that are vertical and curved outwards are de facto like figures, and so suggest that they are animate and figurative in this way. Dryer let a play of differences emerge between individual works that surprised her as they were distinct from the emotional origins already familiar. Take for example, *Untitled* 1987, a painting on plywood that almost reaches the gallery floor where it curves evenly outward. The painting is taller than the viewer and vertically striped in gestural black lines over an uneven grey and blue ground. A glow on the wall reveals that the back of the painting is day-glow red. The lines themselves have a slow almost imperceptible wave animating the piece like a posture thrown by a standing person. Specific significance can become something other, undermining self-expressionist conceits. It gets close to the truth of a desire to continue to make work that can confound and enlarge experience for not only the viewer, but also the artist herself. In this there is a necessarily romantic aspect in Dryer's painting, one that shares, I think, with Gerhard Richter's stated need to make 'something that I do not know, which is better and wiser than I am' (Richter [1986] 2009: 24). Dryer's paintings continue to look current, fresh and innovative on renewed viewing. This now includes young artists coming to this work for the first time and at a very different historical juncture for abstraction.

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'Basil Beattie: When Now Becomes Then: Three Decades', Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 20 February–10 June 2016

Reviewed by Stephen Moonie, Newcastle University

This excellent exhibition at MIMA presented Basil Beattie's work since the late 1980s. Beattie, who taught at Goldsmiths in the 1980s and 1990s, is associated with generational cohorts such as Gillian Ayres, John Hoyland and Albert Irvin. Beattie shares with those painters an affinity with Abstract Expressionism, but his engagement with gesture and oblique figuration recalls the late paintings of Philip Guston, which Robert Slifkin has described as a 'last shot' at action painting (Slifkin 2013). Beattie saw those paintings at Whitechapel Gallery in 1982: they emboldened him, opening up possibilities that were neither abstract nor representational. Mel Gooding claims that Beattie's work, like Guston's, compels us to ask, 'am I finished with abstraction? Is history finished with abstraction?' (Gooding in Gooding and de Ville 2016: 5).

Drawing on the Interior (1991) confronts the viewer in the impressive first room. First exhibited at Eagle Gallery (1991), this towering series of drawings, arranged in vertical columns, recalls Guston's turn to drawing around 1970. Quickly and boldly executed in India ink, Beattie notes that the drawings have functioned 'as a resource I have mined ever since' (Gooding and de Ville 2016: 5). Flanked



Figure 1: Basil Beattie, installation view 'Basil Beattie: When Now Becomes Then: Three Decades' [on display: *Hinterland* (1995), *Five Steps to Nowhere* (2002) (left), *All Ends Up* (2004) (centre), *In Sight* (2010), *Beyond the Last Thought* (2010), *Two of a Kind* (1995) (right)], Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, photo: Hynes Photography.

by the large-scale gestural paintings *When First is Last and Last is First* (1999) and *Hide and Seek* (1999), we see this resource fleshed out. Here, architectural motifs suggest the apertures, glimpsed views or passages of time intimated by his drawings. These bear upon the title of the show, *When Now Becomes Then*, which highlights Beattie's concern with existence as continuous temporal flux.

Existential concerns are also apparent in *Witness VII* (1994). The stacked, looping ziggurats evoke a bound and isolated human figure: its structure feels densely corporeal and yet psychologically precarious. In works such as these, and throughout the exhibition, Beattie favours the use of oil and wax, which lessens the oil paint's juiciness. This lends his surfaces a distinctively matt sheen which is unlike acrylic. The difference was evident in some of the denser acrylic surfaces at Hoyland's show 'Power Stations' at Newport Street Gallery (8 October–10 April 2016): they resembled slabs of vinyl, bordered by unpleasantly congealed clots of pigment.

The second room contains the largest works on show, such as *Smallness Stirs* (1987) and *Legend* (1986). These marked a decisive turn towards figuration. The grid structure of *Drawing for Interior* functions here as a pictorial motif: each compartment comprises densely worked calligraphic signs. Each sign is cryptic, but the private symbolism makes its impression upon the viewer through the relationship between the density of each part and the sheer scale of the whole, which engulfs the viewer's space.

In the third room are a series of 'steps' paintings, such as *Never Before* (2001). The use of gesture here is worth discussing. Jacques Derrida deconstructed the gesture as a unique sign of authenticity; he argued instead that the mark is a differentiated trace split between 'before' and 'after' (1976). Similarly, Beattie's paintings invite us to consider each gesture as temporally differentiated, but further, each iteration of the gesture evokes different meanings or associations. *Never Before's* luscious strokes recall Abstract Expressionism, but they are somewhat self-conscious in their placement. The diagonal 'steps' that ascend the canvas might recall Roy Lichtenstein's ironic *Brushstrokes*, or the workaday functionality of David Reed's *Untitled* paintings from the mid-1970s. However, Beattie is distinct from both. Neither spontaneous nor ironic, his 'steps' are suggestive of existential choice, marking a passage through time to an unknown destination. Gooding claims in his wall texts – that are scrupulously thoughtful and sympathetic – that the 'steps' evoke our encroaching mortality. This is evident in *Five Steps to Nowhere* (2002). Here, the comic and the grotesque coincide, as the grisly pink 'steps' lurch unsteadily upwards.

In *All Ends Up* (2004) the heavy 'steps' at the base of the canvas are juxtaposed oddly with the trowelled-in upper two-thirds of the canvas (a disjuncture which is smoothed over in reproduction). Again, Gooding interprets the stacked motifs as gravestones, and he reads the title as portending 'where we all end up'. However, the motifs resemble the apertures from *Hide and Seek*. Further, the title has a specific connotation in cricket: 'beaten all ends up'. This refers to the batsman failing to make contact with the bowler's delivery. Elsewhere, Beattie has expressed his fondness for another

cricket metaphor, 'the corridor of uncertainty', which refers to the moment during play where the batsman must decide whether or not to commit to a particularly tempting delivery. Beattie considers this to be analogous to the act of painting, where decisions cannot be prescribed in advance (Gooding and de Ville 2016: 6). The phrase also intimates the aperture motifs, which reappear in *Beyond the Last Thought* and *In Sight* (2010): this time, a series of stacked semi-circular motifs offer glimpsed journeys: the former suggesting distant horizon lines, while the latter's upturned 'V' shapes indicate recession into pictorial space. Those glimpses are inspired by the figure of Janus, who looks both forwards and backwards in time. *In Sight's* shapes suggest teacakes stacked on top of each other: the luscious streak of blue takes on an especially culinary connotation. This prosaic reading might seem naïve, but in the later works exhibited in the final room, more explicitly 'real' objects begin to appear, as Beattie's canvases become more densely populated. In *Ascent* (2012), three sets of stairs – each of varying degrees of abstraction – swirl around a black lozenge: all these elements set above an intense field of reddish umber. In *Ladder* (2015), a series of rickety steps hover over a bipartite field of brown hues. Beattie's late paintings retain their cultivated naivety: despite his experience, they have not taken on any stylish facility. However, Beattie's earthy palette of umbers and browns is astutely punctuated by zingy pinks and cadmium reds. His sense of colour and facture is carefully calibrated to impart a physical presence that coexists with the paintings' capacities to trigger associations in the viewer.

The title 'When Now Becomes Then' might succinctly encapsulate the existential and temporal commitments of Beattie's painting. More obliquely, the title intimates the historical status of Abstract Expressionism. The visitor is left to reflect upon whether Beattie's paintings embody a late flowering of gestural painting, or whether his repeated motifs of openings and passageways offer glimpses of renewed possibility. The face of Janus, turned both towards the past and the future, aptly crystallizes this two-fold nature of painting's condition.

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'Jon Pestoni: Some Years', Cleveland Museum of Art Transformer Station, Ohio, 23 April–24 July 2016

Reviewed by Matthew L. Levy, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

Jon Pestoni's show at the Cleveland Museum of Art's Transformer Station was doubly pressured. Not only was it the 47-year-old, Los Angeles-based painter's first solo museum exhibition, but it was also the first exhibition of painting at this famously conservative museum's new outpost for contemporary art. As such, it represented the most significant formulation of Pestoni's achievements to date, as well as a bellwether for contemporary painting to Cleveland audiences.

The Transformer Station's two-chambered plan made for a straightforward presentation: oil on canvas in one room, works on paper in the other. A pair of small paintings at the entrance to the former introduced the viewer to the basic tenets of Pestoni's practice. In *Left Slide* (2011), what initially appeared to be a bipartite composition of blue and white monochromatic planes revealed a more complex set of painterly operations on close viewing. Pestoni had painted the blue plane in sweeping, opaque vertical strokes over the earlier layer of white, which in turn obscured a gestural composition of pinks beneath its scrim-like translucency. What at first appeared to be a declaration of surface in the manner of Barnett Newman thus became an archaeology of hidden depths, with the painting's title evocatively suggesting the interplay between layers. *Untitled* (2012), on the opposite wall, overlaid an open, irregularly geometric blue form with broad horizontal bands of white.



Figure 1: Jon Pestoni (2015), *Inner Tube*, oil on canvas, 67 x 60 x 1.5 inches (198.1 x 152.4 x 5.1 cm), Photography: Fredrik Nilsen, Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA.

1. Rutland does not explicitly mention *The Forever Now* in his catalogue essay, but his characterization of Pestoni's unfettered historical quotation certainly conforms to that exhibition's curatorial premise.
2. The Cleveland Museum of Art purchased one painting, *Replica* (2013) from the exhibition.

The geometric form could thus be read as a partially concealed figure, as a ground for the white horizontals, and as an aperture through which one could view earlier painterly strata.

The remainder of this gallery illuminated the manifold involutions Pestoni has wrought from his palimpsestic poetics. These large paintings (all vertically oriented, none less than 67-inches in height) revealed him to be a painter of immediate visual appeal. Each work invited the rewarding exercise of mentally unearthing layer upon layer of composition, which was made all the more pleasurable by the artist's lush palette (eggplant, teal, vermilion, canary yellow) and evident facility with oil paint (single drags of the brush often transform from opaque smears into woodgrain-like diffusions of individual bristles). The even matte finish imparted by cold wax medium, coupled with his practice of sanding individual layers, resulted in a remarkably compressed pictorial space with minimal tactility – an unexpected quality given all their gestural bravura. In more recent paintings, Pestoni has marred this hard-won thinness by scattering kitty litter across his canvases, yielding skidding globs of texture. This new direction in his work has proven to be uneven. In some paintings, the presence of this foreign material seemed adventitious, working at cross-purposes with the taut push-and-pull between layers. In others, Pestoni applied the litter more strategically, as in *Accordion* (2015), where it cuts across layers to pull multi-coloured, quasi-calligraphic figures out of a black painterly morass. Several of the paintings featured figurative elements, often biomorphic in nature, rendered in a graphic style of black contours and flickering shadows. In *Underbite* (2014), for example, a gaping maw threatens to devour superimposed layers of abstraction – figuration exacting its revenge.

The looming question when confronted by Pestoni's paintings is what critical purchase on the medium do these works, which so patently thematize their own making, achieve? While their dragged surfaces and obscured depths might recall the abstractions of Gerhard Richter, Pestoni's persistence in preserving each individual layer by painting wet over dry and his foregrounding of painterly touch chart a divergent course from the senior artist's aesthetics of impersonality. In his catalogue essay, curator Beau Rutland positions Pestoni as a process artist for the *Forever Now* set, one who freely draws from the pantry of painting's past to confect an atemporal layer cake.¹ Though Pestoni was not included in the Museum of Modern Art exhibition, such rhetoric demonstrates its early influence in the historicizing (a-historicizing?) of contemporary painting. With the Cleveland Museum set to debut an Albert Oehlen survey exhibition in its main building later this year, an institutional view of the medium's current practitioners being motivated by a kind of winking eclecticism begins to come into focus (one can readily imagine an Oehlen and Pestoni hanging side-by-side in the museum's contemporary galleries at some future date, the former positioned as an eminence grise for the younger generation).²

To my eyes, however, this analytical framework did not take the full measure of the work. True, Pestoni marries disparate painterly idioms: gesture and geometry, abstraction and figuration. However, their deployment derives from his strategies for effacement as much as they do wry

historical quotation. For example, the downward-facing gestural swoops he applies as a finishing stroke to several works in the exhibition evoke expressionist painting but ultimately function as a barrier that screens underlying layers. Similarly, the thick, red gridded bars of *NYT* (2015) more resemble a cage than modernist degree zero. Pestoni stages the tropes of modern painting in a drama of mutual cancelation, as if to say that if everything is permissible, then perhaps nothing truly is.

After viewing the twelve paintings in the first gallery, in which the artist steadily mined the same turf, one might reasonably ask if his method is ultimately more restrictive than generative. This question gained urgency in the gallery of works on paper. While the oils on paper were essentially pared down versions of his works on canvas, a wall of watercolours was particularly eye opening. Here one found an inventive form maker liberated from his professional conceit. In one, he coaxed a humanoid figure out of a Rorschach blot of washes; another conjured a bird out of a flurry of abstract markings, like a representational parlour trick. Viewing these drawings, none obscured by competing layers of imagery, left me wondering if Pestoni's practice is perhaps too tailor-made for our age of cynicism towards painting, in which the medium always advances with one eye glancing backward over its shoulder. Pestoni himself might agree, for there was one work in the first gallery in which he broke with his *modus operandi* and left a form intact and unobstructed. *Inner Tube* (2015) featured a forked and twisting Möbius strip that seemed vaguely bodily in its organic irregularity. Perhaps the artist found this form's torqued spatial dynamics so arresting that he simply could not bear to cover it up. Or alternatively it could represent his view of the closed circuit of history that is the contemporary painter's plight.

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Go Figure! New Perspectives on Philip Guston, Peter Benson Miller (ed.) (2015)

New York: American Academy in Rome/New York Review Books, 156 pp., 51 colour and black & white illustrations, ISBN: 9781590178782, h/bk, £35.00

Reviewed by Jacopo Benci, The British School at Rome

This collection of essays is the outcome of a conference held at the American Academy in Rome in 2010 in connection with the exhibition 'Philip Guston, Roma' (which travelled in 2011 to the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC), that brought together for the first time the paintings and drawings Guston made during his third and last visit to Rome and Italy (October 1970–April 1971). The 'Philip Guston, Roma' exhibition, its accompanying catalogue, and this book, are the fruit of years of work that Peter Benson Miller (Heiskell Arts Director at the American Academy in Rome) has devoted to Guston's work.

Go Figure! brings together art historians and practitioners who knew Guston personally (such as Dore Ashton, Bill Berkson, Chuck Close), as well as scholars who over the last decades have investigated his work and his dialogue with ancient and modern masters, and his contemporaries. The book combines testimonies and historical and critical analyses from American and European perspectives, re-examining all phases of a career that spanned over five decades.

Several essays touch on dramatic turns in Guston's life and career, pivoting on his highly controversial exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery in New York in 1970, and his trip to Italy that immediately followed it.

The paradox of Guston – writes Robert Storr in his preface – is 'of being at once an avant-garde Old Master and a perennial beacon for emerging or re-emerging talents' (7); and adds, 'among the lessons Guston still has to teach is the necessity of constantly messing up with the tidy models of artistic "progress"' (8); Peter Benson Miller notes that Guston's late work 'has provided a road map for later artists, giving them license to combine various painterly registers deemed incompatible by many of Guston's more dogmatic contemporaries' (19).

In 'Guston and his Italian contemporaries in Rome', Barbara Drudi uncovers the network of encounters and friendships Guston forged with Roman artists from his first visit in 1948–49 onwards. Guston met De Chirico, whose work he had admired since the end of the 1920s, and several younger artists involved at that time, like him, in the transition from figuration to abstraction; in particular, Drudi examines the cases of Afro (57–59), whose transitional work at the end of the 1940s shows remarkable affinities with that of Guston, and of Toti Scialoja (59–61).

In 'Guston's Italian badness', Ara Merjian examines Guston's long-term interest for De Chirico. Guston drew upon all periods of De Chirico's painting, up to the early 1970s (whereas the majority



Go Figure! New Perspectives on Guston

Figure 1: Book cover: Go Figure! New Perspectives on Philip Guston, courtesy American Academy in Rome/New York Review Books.

1. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' [1936], in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, tr. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1970), pp. 83–110; *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1928], intr. by George Steiner, tr. J. Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977).

of critics, historians, curators dismissed all De Chirico had done after the 1920s); and Merjian notes that the relationship between the two artists was 'firmly rooted in a shared transgression' (64).

Robert Slifkin's 'Guston's modernist follies' and David Kaufmann's 'Guston's melancholy' explore the complexities of the underlying references in Guston's iconography, and shed light on the role Walter Benjamin's writings played in the final phase of Guston's work. The urge to go back to 'tell stories' is seen by Slifkin as resonating with Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* [1936], published in English in 1970 (111–12); while Kaufmann, in his examination of Guston's relationship with melancholy (particularly with the Dürer engraving) and allegory, points to the painter's awareness of Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1928] from 1977 onwards (118).¹

David Anfam tackles trauma in Guston's work, reading it through the filter of Julia Kristeva's writings on melancholy and the abject, and examines how the burden of traumatic memory (personal, social, historical) becomes for Guston 'an engine propelling [the] dichotomies in the artist's imagination' (83).

Achille Bonito Oliva summarizes how, in his view, Guston was a forerunner of the 'nomadism', 'eclecticism', and 'disinhibited' and 'permissive' freedom of the so-called trans-avant-garde (82), while Christoph Schreier discusses Guston's relationship with German painting, from the painter's interest in the work of Max Beckmann, to the influence of his abstractionist phase on Baselitz or Albert Oehlen, and of his late work on artists such as Walter Dahn.

In a conversation held in February 2011 at the Phillips Collection, Chuck Close (a student and later colleague of Guston's), Robert Storr, Susan Behrends Frank and Peter Benson Miller discussed, among other things, in what sense Guston (who notoriously painted mostly at night with artificial light) was influenced by his stay in Rome in 1970–71. In Close's view, Guston 'went out and digested what he saw as the ultimate kind of tourist, in a way, crawling all over the stuff', but back in the studio, elements of the Roman landscape would merge with hooded figures: 'he went to Rome and it had this direct effect on his work and you can trace it, and yet it is part of the fabric of his experiences woven back and forth' (132).

Around the time of his death in 1980, Guston was cast as the harbinger of what was then variously defined as bad painting, neo-expressionism, or trans-avant-garde: a hedonistic and eclectic liberation from the alleged dogmatism of 1970s art. The essays in this volume draw a much more complex, nuanced picture of the artist and his work, at the same time melancholic and playful, refined and immediate, literary and cartoonish, abstract and figurative – something that appeared very clearly to those who had the opportunity to visit major retrospectives of Guston's works such as that at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Royal Academy in London in 2003–04, which had a strong and long-lasting impact on many painters, and artists at large.

This may be one of the reasons that prompted the book's editor and publishers to opt for a large format (28.7×25.5 cm). The illustrations are closely related to the topics discussed in the essays; in

most cases they are large colour reproductions rather than just reference images. *Go Figure!* is at the same time a scholarly book, rich in insights, and a useful introduction to the complexity and originality of Philip Guston's approach to painting.

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***Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth Century Art*, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (2015)**

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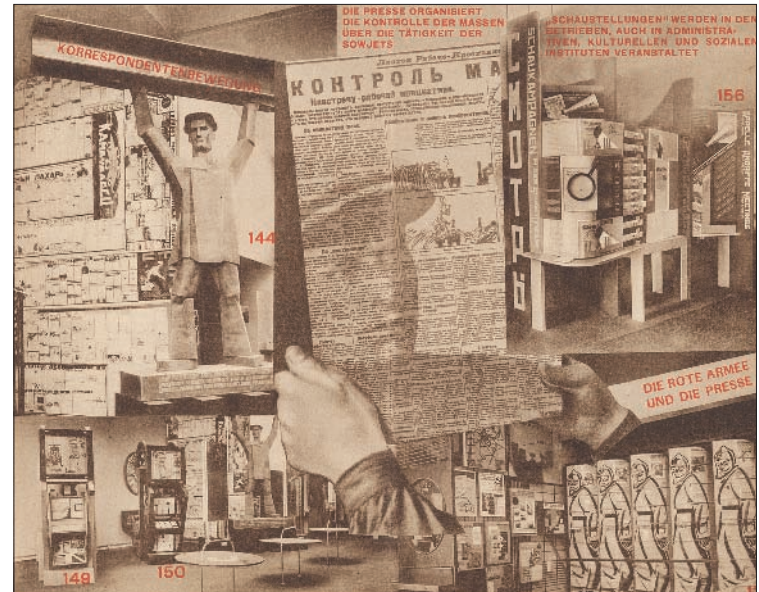
Reviewed by Edward Whittaker, University of East London

Fifteen years after the publication of *Neo-avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, (Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, October Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2000), a second volume of collected essays by the German, US-based critic and theorist, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh has been published. Spanning the years between 1977 and 1996, the new volume presents the opportunity to reevaluate the scope and quality of Buchloh's work in what is now a different historical context.

A lot has happened since Buchloh first published the essays gathered here: and whilst the essays retain their critical rigour, they also present us with a perspective determined by a tendency to

Formalism and Historicity

Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art



Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

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Figure 1: Book cover: Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth Century Art, courtesy October Books/MIT Press.

concentrate on relatively few artists. The outcome is that, despite a continued engagement with Gerhard Richter (though of rather limited scope here), there is a lack of a dialogue with the art of painting during the period covered. Of the twelve chapters here, only three are devoted to the subject, whilst there are two essays on the conceptualist, Marcel Broodthaers, alone.

The crux of this problem is set out in the very first chapter, which takes the same title as the volume (2015). It is immediately clear that Buchloh does not accept that painting has questioned its own historicity primarily because of the 'institutionalization' of its 'canon'. Whilst Buchloh is indeed correct in this assessment, the subjective possibility of painting's creative practice eludes him. Consequently the reader wanting to find out about the emerging forms of 'figural' abstraction during the period covered by the volume may be disappointed. That said, *Formalism and Historicity* is a fine collection: it shows that Buchloh has remained true to his Marxist credo and the importance of this publication, hopefully, will be to encourage reflection on the philosophical exploration of 'critical theory' in relation to advanced art.

The argument Buchloh pursues is that 'formalism', despite its claim to autonomy, was not inevitable historically, but had been instead utterly dependent upon institutional support to underline its success. For Buchloh this pact with institutional power necessitated the historical closure of formalism's own critical foundations. For Buchloh, only works referring to actual 'conditions of production and reception' could mount a challenge to aesthetic formalism, by the process of 'historicity'.

This 'dialectic' (essentially historicity is a dialectical relation and different from historicism which is not) is more clearly defined by Buchloh's revision of some of the artists discussed in the first volume of collected essays (2000). This is not to mean, however, that he attenuates his often harsh attacks on aesthetic formalism. This aesthetic is, for Buchloh, confounded by the contradiction of its assumptions, which amount to nothing less than a thinly veiled 'ideologically' motivated denial of historicity. In order to assure of the institutionalization of formalist works, so Buchloh argues, they must conform to the conditions of 'reification'.

Via Roland Barthes' concept of 'primary signs' and their subsequent 'mythologization' into ideological constructs, Buchloh arrives at the concept of reification or the commodified 'mystification' of signs. Here Buchloh puts forward a convincing argument. He is accusing ideology of supervening avant-garde art by the creation of a myth which must, of necessity reject historical materialism. To entrench his argument, he superimposes Barthes' 'mythologies' over Walter Benjamin's espousal of montage. By exemplifying the 'immediate' historicity of montaged juxtapositions, so Buchloh maintains, there remains a possibility for a critical art. His conclusion is that only by the allegorical practices of retrieval, repetition and indexicality, can truly advanced art postpone or even deny its reified fate.

Much of Buchloh's negation of formalism is directed towards art production and reception in the United States where, clearly, capitalism has monopolized conditions of production and reception. The problem, he argues, had been less acute in Europe, where at least some artists had proposed a

'self-conscious' historicity in resistance to the ideology of the market. Writing of, Marcel Broodthaers, Buchloh notes how art practice had become the 'unprecedented site of commercial speculation and museological acculturation' representing an 'ideological state apparatus'. He further adds that Broodthaers practice could only 'regain its critical role to the extent that it would recognize its alienated state'.

Formalism and Historicity also includes two very interesting, but markedly less polemical, essays, dealing with the reception of the Russian avant-gardes. Each of these, first published in 1984 and 1986 respectively, display high levels of research and scholarship. 'From faktura to factography' charts the decline of Soviet productivism into state propaganda, which occurred, apparently, with full support of the artists involved. The second essay, 'Cold War constructivism' is a quite hilarious attack on 'Greenbergian' formalism in its attempt to repackage two former Constructivists, Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, to the dictates of western cultural hegemony.

It is in the earlier 'Faktura' essay, that we get the foretaste of how Buchloh will address historical self-awareness, or lack of it, in painting. Buchloh reports how the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Alfred Barr, returned from a trip to Moscow with nothing for the Museum's collection. Though impressed by the work of El Lissitzky, Varvara Stepanova and Alexander Rodchenko, Barr had 'not found any painters'. Buchloh interprets this as indicative of a widespread acceptance of the medium's unique right to institutional legitimation.

It might be argued that the anecdote also illustrates the problem faced by the reader interested in the fate of 'serious' painting. Buchloh had reasoned that once painting achieved 'self referential epistemological consciousness' in Frank Stella's 'pin stripe' paintings of the early 1960s it had either failed to notice or, more likely, welcomed its own reification to the canon.

In fact, in the context of this volume, we could be forgiven for thinking that the fate of painting has depended upon one artist, Daniel Buren. Can he be considered a painter? This is a crucial juncture in Buchloh's account as he argues that Buren, by appropriating a singular 'analogue' of painting – stripes of a single colour separated by an equivalent in white and arranged vertically – was able to foreclose formalist reification. If Buchloh can demonstrate that Buren is successful in wholly rejecting formalism and yet retain the trace or 'truth' of painting, then the 'myth' of painting's supremacy would be negated by the artist's self-conscious and purposive act of historicity.

For Buchloh, the establishment of a 'site' made up of these stripes within the context of the museum enabled Buren to mount a 'political and ideological critique' affecting all the other objects in its proximity. Buren's tactic reached its apotheosis quite fortuitously. At the fifth Documenta in 1972 an installer had accidentally hung a Jasper Johns 'Flag' painting in an area occupied by Buren's striped 'wallpaper'. By (unintentionally) redirecting the icon of the flag, Buren's intervention rendered it the nature of a worthless product when deprived of its 'reified' status, which would be expected to assure its quality as a signature work.

The rhetorical drive of Buchloh's argument is also to be encountered in Chapter 3 of the volume. First published in 1981, 'Figures of authority, ciphers of regression: Notes on the return of representation in European painting' is a coruscating polemic against painterly 'historicism'. Buchloh claims the return to representation in painting to be motivated by two specific historical crises: the 'return to order' after World War I and the deregulation of the finance markets by Ronald Reagan in the late 1970s.

Buchloh reads these phenomena as symptomatic of an attempt to reassert the order associated with a continuum of male authorial art. Such examples of the 'new spirit' in painting, including Anselm Kiefer, Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz, are taken by Buchloh to be almost solely market driven. Yet this assertion also poses a question raised by other critics such as Donald Kuspit. Was it not the idea of artists like Kiefer and Baselitz (and Lüpertz for that matter) to produce paintings that were expressions of a subjectively referential historical crises of politics and art – that they were, if anything, anti-formalist? Baselitz et al. had surely felt it was historically necessary to rehabilitate certain 'national' images for serious painting, acting precisely as evidence of a transnational support for a resignification of painting.

Buchloh, perhaps unreasonably, rejects this possibility by merely attacking the work as stylistic 'posturing'. While displaying a seemingly seductive kind of manufacture and scale, he hastens to add, these paintings were a historicist revival and not anything to do with historicity as such. Historicism, Buchloh insists, is employed to deceive of the work's reactionary political content. In consequence of this rampant totemism, Buchloh argues – in a postscript that anticipates much of the argument put forward in the surprisingly angry polemic of the 'Introduction to an Introduction', written in 2015 and just prior to publication – that this work is historically retrograde and therefore eminently suited to the requirements of the market. He advertises his point by endorsing instead Hans Haacke's *Oil Painting in Homage of Marcel Broodthaers* from 1982, a framed 'boardroom' portrait in oil of Ronald Reagan painted by Haacke, which is accompanied in installation by the trappings of corporate fetishization.

Depending on where the reader situates herself – between Buren's subversive decor and Haacke's phony 'painting' – will, or will not, testify to a disconnect between Buchloh and painterly subjectivity in general. Any resort to painterly autonomy, it would seem, obscures any 'interlocution of production and reception'. Another example is put forward in Chapter 7 republished from 1986, 'The primary colours for the second time: A paradigm repetition of the neo-avantgarde', Buchloh here revises much of the recent history of 'self-reflexive' painting in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The work of Robert Ryman, Niele Toroni and Buren (again) shoulders the responsibility as to how painting interrogates its own material processes by what Buchloh calls 'facture'. In Ryman's case this is apparent in the use of white paint and the open undersides of the work's display, as it is also apparent in Toroni's regular dabs of colour on various surfaces and Buren's use of regulation stripes.

Buchloh is able to declare that, through the identity of the mark, the painter enters into a critical relation with the medium by 'painterly synecdoche and processual trace [...] autotelic elements of the language of painting posit their heteronomy from both laws of use value and from sign exchange value'.

Buchloh does concede, however, that such negations are themselves already deployed as the unassailable facts of life in a bureaucratic society. Exemplified by rigour and boredom, the 'governing conditions of object and time experience outside of artistic production' are here to be absorbed and attenuated by painterly reception. What Buchloh cannot resolve, however, is bureaucratic capitalism's control over 'life' and 'art'. The very concept of historicity is, in consequence, somewhat attenuated within its own parameters. And just as formalism cannot void its own relations, so Buchloh's avowed methodology cannot fully gloss its own viewpoint. The failure to tackle these contradictions, Buchloh admits, has contributed to even so-called radical art from achieving any socially 'emancipatory desublimation' as it can claim no legitimacy other than from its own reified context.

This is also the conclusion to be drawn from the oft-cited essay from 1989, 'Conceptual art 1962–1969: From the aesthetics of administration to the critique of institutions.' Again, the dependence on conceptual logic alone, Buchloh insists, merely repeats the institutional form of capitalism. Unable to provide a properly social and political basis from which to mount an attack on aesthetic formalism, Conceptual Art itself subsided into its own institutional acceptance and, in the process, surrendered its potential for 'historicity'. With such insights, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has indeed presented us with a powerful exposure of formalism, but the final reckoning with historicity continues in abeyance.

Contributor details

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