

To be continued

(The eternal quest to challenge the conventions of painting)

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“Any painting is an object and anyone who gets involved enough in this, finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever it is that he's doing. He is making a thing.. ..all I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion...What you see is what you see.”¹

-Frank Stella

“Imi Knoebel proposes painting not merely as an object, but rather as a stage set or environment, a partial or provisional room. Knoebel liberates form and color and placing it in a lower rank, making it travel from a secondary position towards something greater. Authorial arranged, compositional whole or from association with representational imagery. Alternative methods by which, in effect to redraw the line between real and painted space. Painted form with an independent existence in three-dimensional space. *-All architecture is itself an object, whatever its function.*”²

My artistic practice always relates to painting, in one way or another. A gesture against a surface, or just physical contact with any material made from human, or external forces are the foundation I choose to address as painting. Through different approaches, I try to reveal an inherent quality that blurs the path between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional. My practice revolves around methodic ways to propose painting, and a certain behavior related to the act of painting. I often leave behind traces and information that pushes different ideas rooted in minimalism, abstract painting and relational art. My practice questions architectural space, manipulation of time, authenticity and outside interaction.

¹ Questions to Stella and Judd', Bruce Glaser, Art News, September 1966

² Imi Knoebel Paperback – January 31, 2010 by Hubertus Butin (Author), Jörg Heiser (Author), Friedhelm Hütte (Author), Imi Knoebel (Artist)

“Contemporary architecture, rather than inspiring and nurturing, acted as a system of control, serving business and ultimately the forces of repression. The state of enclosure of the sealed urban box was a given in architectural practice. Like doormen at a night club, the profession said: - you are either in or out, either inside a structure or consigned to the nebulous hinterland of negative space, leaving no room for half-way or in-between states. Gordon Matta Clark’s vision was to achieve elevation, not build walls. The architectural task is to be able to sit on a platform, a calm, clear level above the ground. Not of conventional urban buildings but of watchtowers, lookout platforms, eyries from which to observe and contemplate the city below.”³



Gordon Matta-Clark *Deconstructing Reality Conical Intersect 2* (1975)

Negative space is something that captivates me, such as an open space left over after a construction. Open and closed forms define the space surrounding them. I leave the structures I work with partially unreserved and transparent so they can function as drawings and frames in the space, of the space and for the space. That again can provide and open up for the possibility to capture the unexpected, when you look through the work. I often present the canvas raw.

³ Gordon Matta-Clark: The Space Between – Mar 2003
by James Attlee (Author), Lisa Le Feuvre (Author)

This is a possible strategy to alert the viewer to look beside and around, to where you might create a set of imaginary paintings generated from the installation. I am giving the viewer permission to visualize any sort of continuation, directed from the work. For me it is important to make the work breath in the neutral, sometimes claustrophobic white cube, where the possibilities can be narrowed down to either adapting to the space or “attacking” it. I want the work to breath in the same rhythm as I do, and eliminate most of the parts that is not helping, or not carrying what is necessary in the reading of it. I eliminate more than I add, and what is not there is as important as what is. The bodily experience of encountering the work is as important as the visual. I keep marks and the accidental traces I want to keep, and change the ones I don’t get an immediate connection with. This pattern follows me in painting, building and installing, until I reach the point where I ultimately just need to let go, and let the work carry itself.

“The desire to colonise airspace while not occupying too much ground area was a given by the Russian Suprematist and Constructivist architects in the 1920s. El Lissitzky proposed to create a Soviet challenge to the American-style vertical high-rise with his *Wolkenbügel*, a horizontal skyscraper 45 meters above the ground, supported by a vertical access shaft. *-Until we achieve utterly free hovering it will be characteristic of us to move horizontally rather than vertically*, he wrote in 1926. This idea of releasing spatiality maintaining just the required amount of information without occupying too much space.”⁴ El Lissitzky brought the geometrical paintings of Malevich further and also into architecture. “Lissitzky claimed that the future of the arts lay in their potential to be integrated. The fusion of drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, could be realized with his Prouns. Lissitzky's Prouns can be considered as a precursor to modern abstract imagery and industrial modern architecture.”⁵ His paintings, had the combination of geometrical forms that shifted between the vertical and the horizontal, and this was an attempt to provide multiple perspectives beyond their two-dimensionality. In the Suprematist Proun series, Lissitzky reasoned it as the station where one changes from painting to architecture.

⁴ Gordon Matta-Clark: *The Space Between* – Mar 2003
by James Attlee (Author), Lisa Le Feuvre (Author)

⁵ <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-lissitzky-el.htm>



El Lissitzky *Proun 2C* (1920)

My contribution at the Ma1-show *Passenger* was titled *Untitled (Or Otherwise)*. I knew early on that I wanted to make a painting, or more correctly a suggestion of a painting, which could adapt to the project space at Kunsthøgskolen in Bergen (6th floor). I questioned how to make the work confrontational, and still not occupying too much of the space. I wanted the piece to unite with the wall and the floor simultaneously. The weight and shape of the steel frame locked it in my chosen position. The steel frame is influenced by one of Sol LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes*, where my starting point was to make an "incomplete open painting". The curatorial choice by Dominique Hurth was to divide the exhibition space into two sections, separating the three-dimensional works from the two-dimensional ones. This became crucial for the reading of the piece.

Untitled (Or Otherwise) played the role as a divider, separating the paintings from the sculptures. The piece functioned as a hybrid that adapted to both sections, or it struggled to fit the one or the other, depending on how you perceived it.



Untitled (Or Otherwise) (2015)

When I work with profiled steel beams I mostly treat them as precursors that somehow can end up being a framework. My intention revolves around extending a frame without pushing it too far from its material purpose. I am keeping the functionality of that material intact, underlining that it is originally manufactured for the purpose of carrying and protecting the materials I choose to add. The steel frames I build are often composed through my memory of industrial structures, supporting tools, pallets or furniture, which ends up moving towards quasi architecture. I eliminate those parts that make the pieces too associable, and reduce its functionality to make them function as free standing objects or frames that carry their own weight. I want my installation of materials to reveal an unobtainable form, a “promise” of something that surfaces from a ‘not yet certain’ stage.

The various elements can be added or eliminated from the work. Every added layer of material can easily be taken apart from each other or change form. My intention is not to activate the viewer to rearrange the work, the pieces aren't made specifically for that to happen. It deals with the possibility that I can rework the piece and reassemble it in a different way from time to time. The notion that it does not necessarily need to stay permanent in the arrangement that I have chosen, is part of the reading of the work. I am comfortable with the idea that my own work is in a state of flux, and just paused on the path to an unknown destination.

What you see is not always what you get

Lately I have been introducing wooden and aluminum bars as a substitute for the canvas, or as an expansion from the two dimensional stretcher. A pole is a cylindrical three-dimensional form regardless of how you choose to present it. It has two frontal sides and two backsides with no edge to delineate a surface. The fact that you are not able to grasp the entire "painting", is what intrigues me when I compare it to the conventions of the canvas. What you don't see, you still believe is there. You imagine the shape from previous experiences with the form, and how it is supposed to behave. The side of the pole you do not see, you will most likely take for granted. One probably will envision a similar painterly approach, as on the side you have visual access to. That uncertainty can create a curiosity that leads people to respond differently, than to a wall based canvas. The pole's comfortable grip indicates a physical interaction, if you draw a comparison towards children's climbing structures and any sort of handrails. In *Untitled (Poles)* I brought two painted wooden bars into Galleri SE, examining and trying all possible variations to make them melt into the architectonic structure of that given space. I was attracted to the windows, where you could spot some light blue tiles and metal framing with traces of paint. This industrial appearance have obviously been spared when they refurbished the space into an art gallery. With partially the same color palette I decided that the poles should be mounted at this specific site. In a subtle way they melted into the architecture that added a vague illusion of functionality. The one thing that gave this illusion a crack, was the painted gestures on the poles that struggled to fit the authenticity.



Untitled (Poles) (2015)

In the work *Untitled (Pink Poles)* I constructed a floor piece functioning as a corner structure made of welded steel. The possibility to fit the piece in any corner of the gallery was given. Pushing the piece out on the floor was a way of creating a spatial echo, to mirror the shape of the space as an imaginary cast of the closest corner. The steel frame was constructed around the two wooden poles as an extended frame to make the piece more bodily in its approach. The poles were painted with different gestures and materials that I placed to fit within the frame, just resting on the edge of the steel beams. It was important that the audience were able to move around it. The construction suggested for the audience to move in a slightly “corner rhythm”, to experience the shift from architecture to sculpture and to painting.



Untitled (P.P.) (2015)

I have always been drawn to the texture of 20th century urban life as seen in small grocery stores, gas-stations and abandoned sites with decaying facades and peculiar handwritten signs. The post-functional and post-industrial design becomes a leftover from a certain time and purpose. In autumn 2014 I welded a structure titled *Sign (Toxic throb of any hangover)* inspired by various store signs. With a “worn in” gesture, I paint to emphasize the material itself, how it is made and the quality it beholds. I often stage an authentic aesthetic that evokes a timeline of constant change. I want to challenge our habitual experiences and question how objects that are part of our daily environment affect us and our potential behavior towards them. This is to give room for alternative interpretations that are commonly overlooked.

Abandoned architecture was a given in my childhood years. Right across the street from our home an abandoned school deteriorated into a rebellious playground for misled youth, with leftovers from furniture, desks, closets and blackboards still intact. As time went by, traces of broken windows, graffiti and uninvited “house guests” appeared. Some blocks further down it was a similar environment, inside an abandoned melt-factory. Spaces that appeared empty and rejected by society, were filled with activity from my point of view. Many of these places were rapidly vanishing as a result of urban gentrification. Today those two areas are replaced by exclusive apartments with large outdoor facilities. I am drawn towards spaces with traces of pre-functionality and pre-production, where you easily can guess its history and purpose from a certain state of time. When these areas and its leftovers collides and melts with generations of interaction and entropic takeover, a play between man, weather and material occur. I am interested in relational aesthetics, not as a departure from the private studio, and not towards a participatory activity in a social context. What I am intrigued by is the formal aspect, where traces of an event, an act of violation, or accidental mishaps becomes prominent that again gets encircled by architecture, as a backdrop for human relations.



Sign (Toxic throb of any hangover) (2014)

*“Building and destroying. Whatever follows is a process of action and reaction, and then out of this “destruction” you discover a thing and build on it.”*⁶

Every structure or composition that I work with, is intended to fit with each other or to carry the components I choose to add. I never want to underline one specific layer. I use one material to highlight another material, and make them fit like they can not exist without the other. The inherent function in my work is the contradiction that every piece of material is collaborating to stand on its own. The materials originally have a hard time connecting based on their own idiosyncratic characteristics and their potential outcome. I let the materials interact with each other, often with the help of pre-existing marks that can function as compositional elements that suggests new ideas. A smudge of color can direct me into a certain material, and that material may have the ability of being manipulated. When this process occur, architectural decisions comes into play that might give the work a site specific value. At some point the material itself dictates the appearance of the sculpture, or the sculptures suggest themselves how to appear, in the sense of their own quality. Opposed to being determined solely by my intent. I am trying to retain the roughness about the various surfaces in order to trace the working process, how it is made, what is found, what is refurbished, what is authentic and what is not. I like for the work to reveal itself. I want the process to be traceable in the pieces, which in its totality tells a story about the ways the materials have been used. A story that can seem self-explanatory at a first glance, but still have a hint of surprise in the way they have been put in dialogue with each other. I try to release my structures from any beginnings or endings, and to establish a situation where the viewer can move on from my work and towards the space. Intuitively I trust the components to tell me something about their own presence, regardless of their heritage. The material elements bring associations to leftovers, or elements that are taken out from a previous functional context. Some elements are self made, and others are authentically found objects. The found elements are moved from one historically ended purpose into this new arrangement, where the composition oscillates between the familiar and the unfamiliar as well as function and anti-function.

“I’m often astonished to find how much better chance is than I am”

- Gerhard Richter ⁷

⁶ Catching The Big Fish - December 28, 2006
by David Lynch (Author)

⁷ Gerhard Richter in an Interview with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 1986

When Gerhard Richter works with chance, it is never blind. It is always planned as a way to eradicate mistakes that can open up for new possibilities, and guide him into a different painting, over and over again. He uses chance as a method to arouse the element of surprise projected back to him. Richter said once that painting has its own language directed from nature, and once you start to describe the painting, it changes its presence from where it once originated. The element of chance then turns into something else. John Cage made an impression on Richter when he at one point said: '*I have nothing to say and I am saying it.*'⁸ This phrase indicates a notion of chance, which I choose to push further - I don't want to know what I am doing, but I still want to do it. I suggest an intuition, a physical reaction that ignores the intellectual conventions. You can't label chance, yet you try. The element of chance in my practice is one factor that develops the work, and pushes the limits out of my controlled framework. A lot of the choices I make, degenerates from random objects that surrounds me at the time. This may push me into changing the whole appearance of the piece, and its entire outcome.



Gerhard Richter *Birkenau* 260 x 200 cm (2014)

⁸ Gerhard Richter in an Interview with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 1986

When Andy Warhol decided to shift from a graphic artist to painter, he marked this transition by laying a blank canvas on the floor in front of his door, so visitors would walk on it. At the Venice Biennale in 2003 Rudolf Stingel covered the walls inside the Italian pavilion with silver metallic celotex insulation boards, where he invited the public to leave their personal mark on the walls. The space developed under the period of the biennale, letting inscriptions, slogans, graffiti and pinned personal letters result in a painting of chance. Stingel left the metallic celotex surface open and untouched, with no artist direction except from the material quality of the boards, and the freedom to act. I am inspired by artists that embrace the strategy of being a director and not participating in the physical act of “painting”. Time and patience then becomes essential factors that determine the total outcome.



Rudolf Stingel detail of *Untitled*, as seen at the Venice Biennale (2003)

In Untitled *'Found leftovers with traces from coated objects'* I collected pieces of wood that I found in the spray paint booth at Kunsthøgskolen in Bergen. These pieces has been used as supporting tools in the production of more "valuable" art objects. The lengths of wood had received multiple layers of excess spray paint, and accidental traces from different coated objects. With a welded steel structure I framed them into a freestanding floor piece. It function as a painting with the weight of a sculpture. That reveals color, shapes and traces from different paintings and sculptures created by other students at one previous point. The work does not have a front or back side and can be observed from any chosen angle, given that the pieces of wood have an all over coating of different colors and stains.



Untitled 'Found Leftovers from coated objects' (2016)

*“Abstract art has its own integrity, not someone else’s ‘integrations’ with something else. Any combining, mixing, adding, diluting, exploiting, vulgarizing, popularizing abstract art deprives art of its essence and depraves the artist’s artistic consciousness. Art is free, but it is not a free-for-all.”*⁹

- Donald Judd 1965

Walead Beshty who is probably best known for his FedEx- sculptures utilizes another strategy, where he ships glass, mirror and copper boxes to be exhibited at art-galleries. With the use of FedEx packaging and services these boxes becomes shattered and scratched when they reach its final destination. Beshty often exhibits the sculptures next to the FedEx boxes they arrive in. That gives the viewer information about the travel and occasional mishaps on the way, reflecting the handling and transportation they suffered. I am attracted to this way of developing a surface through external forces. The process is happening out of your reach, where you need to face the fact of none control, and let chance run its course, as a contrast and opposite strategy to Donald Judd’s slick machine- manufactured sculptures. A lot of Judd’s aluminum objects had to be destroyed and eliminated because of human mistakes and errors, like scratches and fingerprints from the factory employees. According to Judd this had to be done to maintain his core idea; to prevent the work from shifting from object towards subject.



Walead Beshty *FedEx Large Kraft Boxes* at Konsthall Malmö (2011)

⁹ Art As Art (The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt), 1991 by Ad Reinhardt (Author), Barbara Rose (Author)

In my *Jut* series I follow my intuitive response towards every single piece of material, through composing and combining leftovers, found materials and redefined objects. The materials get mounted on the spot directly to the wall to make them unite immediately - quite similar to Robert Rauschenberg's combines. Rauschenberg wanted to bring the outside world in to his paintings. I want to show the relationship between materials, and underline their *medium specificity*. Not in the way Clement Greenberg helped popularize the term, but in an opposite order where a subtle interaction with any material can make it travel from a random object towards a painting, and not the other way around. Greenberg argued, that 'the essential conventions of painting are at the same time the limiting conditions, with which a picture must comply in order to be experienced as a picture. These conditions can be pushed almost endlessly before a painting stops being a painting and becomes a random object', as expressed in *Modernist painting*. "When these borders gets pushed they also needs to be followed."¹⁰



Untitled (Jut.1) (2016) / Untitled (Jut.2) (2016)

¹⁰ *Modernist Painting* by Clement Greenberg (Author) Originally published in *Forum Lectures* (Voice of America), Washington, D.C., 1960

According to Thierry De Duve '*Kant after Duchamp*' Michael Asher was one of the artists who came closest towards achieving the clean empty canvas. Asher stood out from other concept artists and minimalists that tried to remove those indispensable conventions a canvas carry. Asher's proposal contained; an unpainted square piece of canvas fabric buckled up on top of a stretcher. The stretcher was planed down in an oblique angle, making the work lean more towards a "specific object" rather than a painting. The piece was never exhibited. Asher considered it a students attempt to understand what was occupying the artists at that time, and their choices between formalism and minimalism.



Untitled (Orange) (2015) / Untitled (2015)

When I choose to leave the canvas unpainted, the surface represents targets for potential interaction. The aluminum sheets that I bend around the unpainted canvas, imitates protection devices. The aluminum resemble devices that are being mounted on walls where it is high traffic of interference, such as hospitals, elevators, grocery stores, parking lots and places where possible damage might occur. The most prominent traces and marks on the aluminum sheets, reveals a collection of collisions that I experience as painterly qualities. My sheets have traces of mechanical failures, various mishaps as well as painterly suggestions that emphasizes aluminum as a material, as an opposition to the canvas. The aluminum hugs the canvas and bisects the work, which adapts to the shape and adopting the potential outcome of a painted canvas.

Matta Clark's vision was to create an in-between state between the inside and outside architecture, through open up the walls and erase the notion of separation. The common denominator in my constructions are the interplay between the interior of a closed space, and the exterior of a potential architectonic facade. In the end I want to unite the inside and the outside and give the walls a layer of "transparency" that connects every single element to function together. This may open up the possibility of making the work shift from existing indoors to function as likely outdoors.

- *To be continued*

Other notes

- *Rudolf Stingel* - Francesco Bonami (Author), Chrissie Iles (Author), Reiner Zettl (Author), Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, Ill.), Whitney Museum of American Art Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007
- *Kant after Duchamp* (October Books) Paperback – February 6, 1998 by Thierry de Duve (Author)
- *Isa Genzken* (Contemporary Artists (Phaidon)) Sep 1, 2006 by Alex Farquharson (Author) and Diedrich Diedrichsen (Author)
- *Kazimir Malevich*
by Achim Borchardt-Hume (Editor) 2015