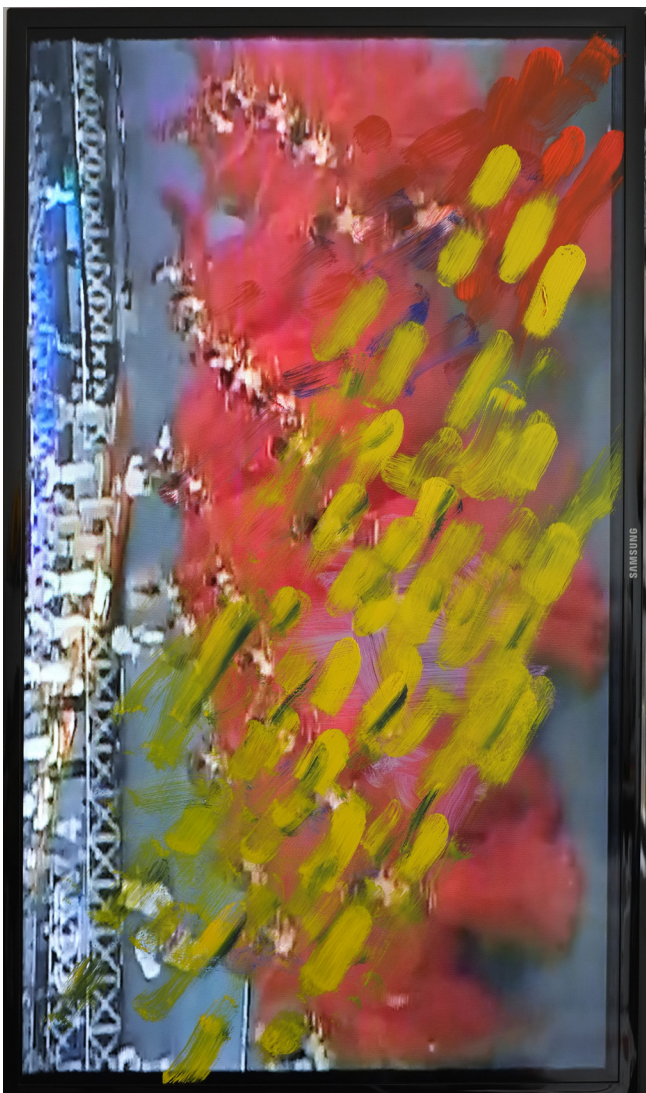
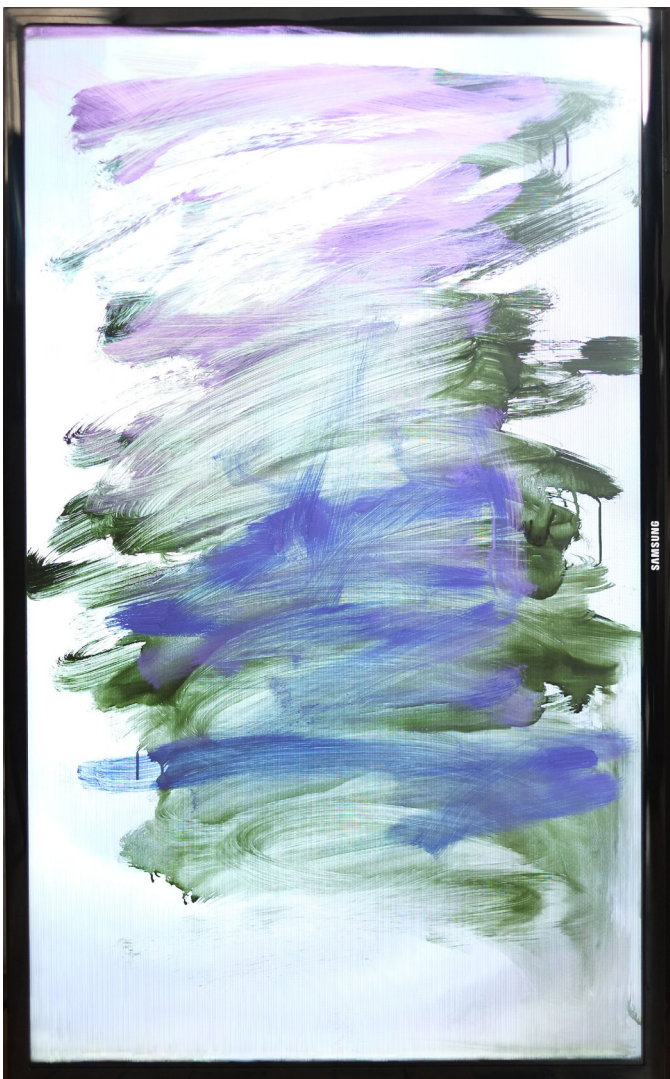


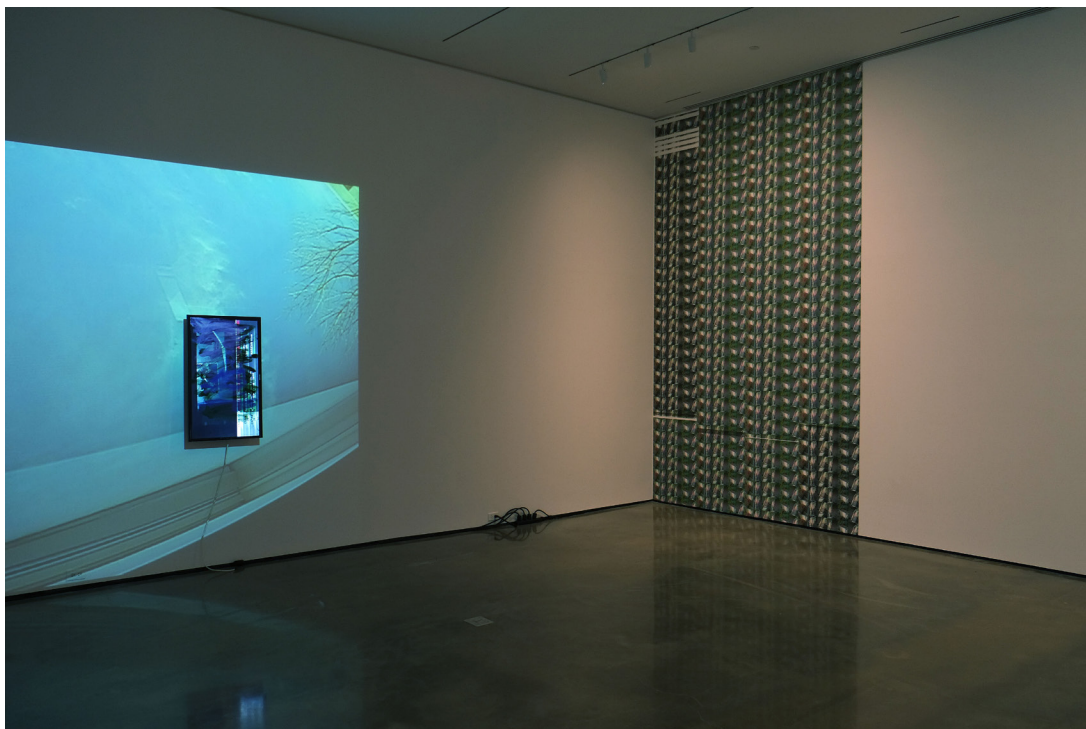
Installation views and details from solo project, *The Very Quick of the Word* (curated by Annie Godfrey Larmon), Hessel Museum of Art, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. March 24 - May 26, 2013.



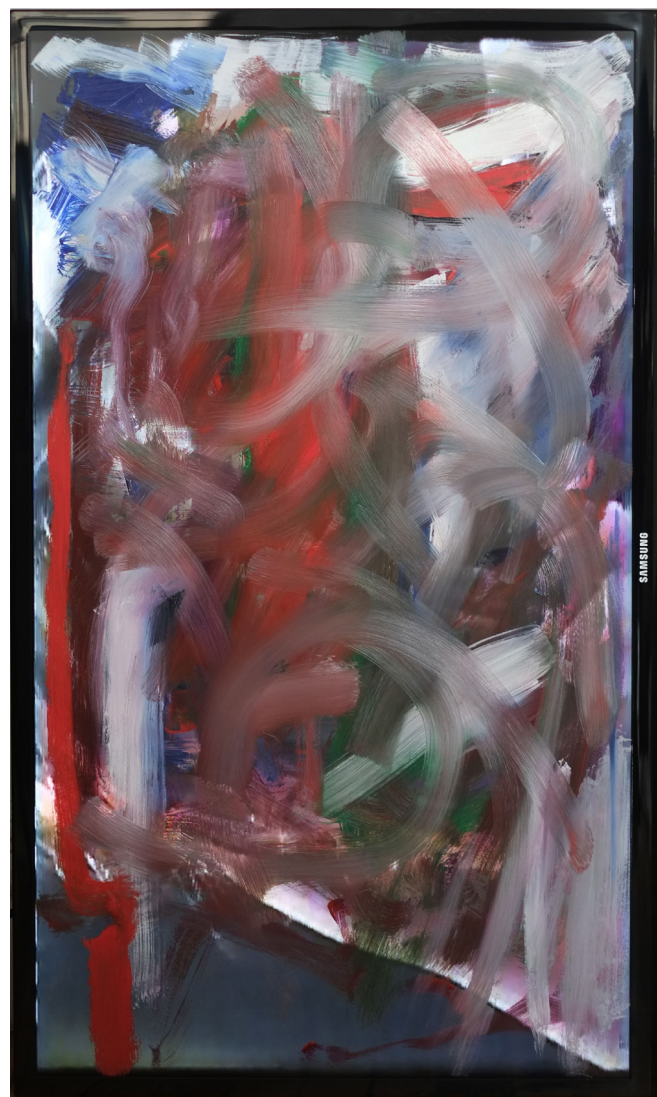
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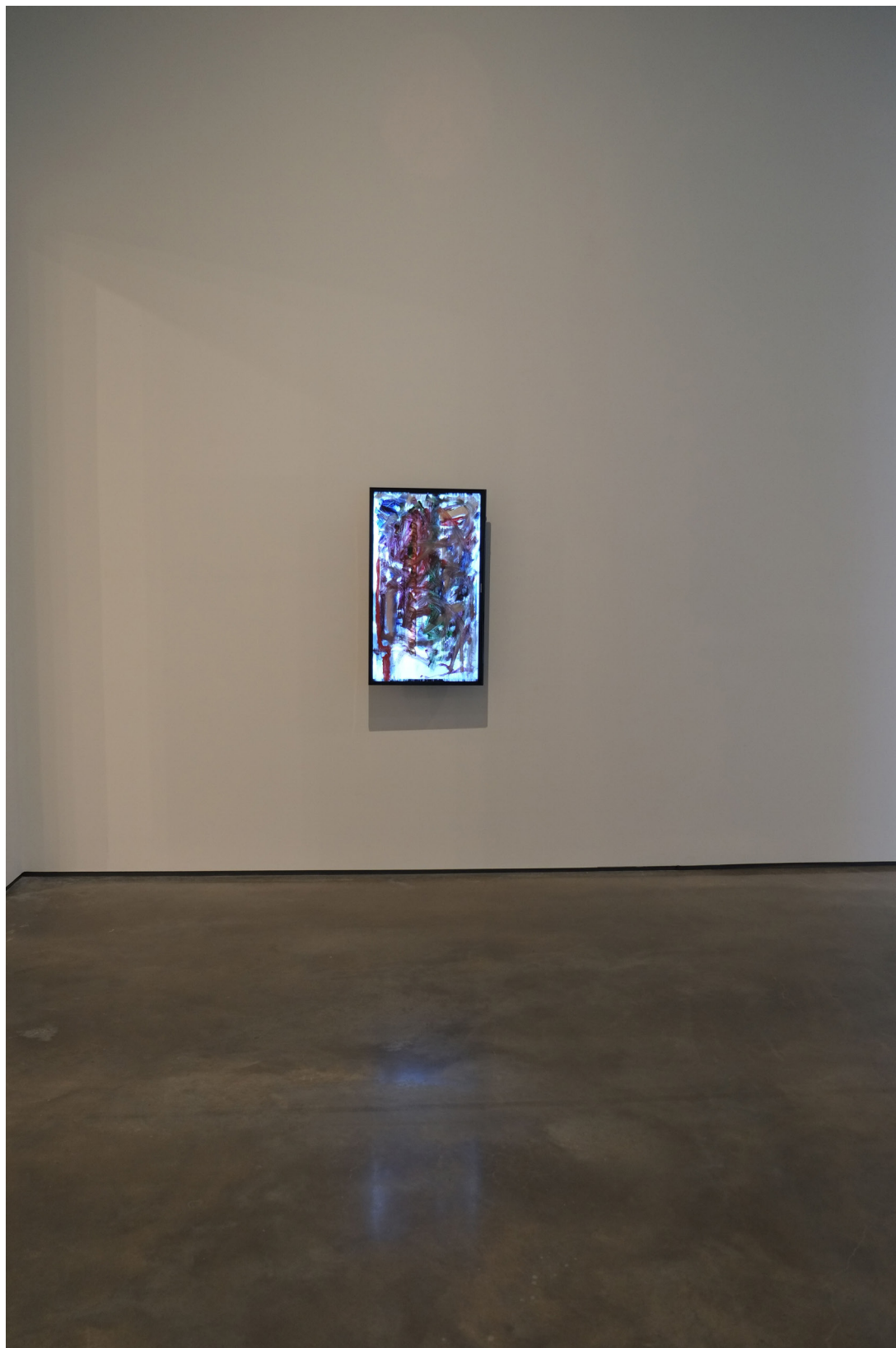
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KEN OKIISHI

FEBRUARY 17 – MARCH 23, 2014

Reena Spaulings presents eleven new works by Ken Okiishi. Painting directly onto flat screen television monitors, Okiishi instigates a situation whereby painterly gesture is put into immediate relation with media flow: home-recorded TV broadcasts serve here as under-paintings that loop continuously behind expressionist brushwork. Glimpsed through oily passages that may recall Joan Mitchell or even late Monet, digitized fragments of mid-1990s and early 2000s television (*Touched By an Angel*, random cable access transmissions, a presidential debate with loser John Kerry, a Chinese New Year pageant, old Chase bank, Quaker Oats and Frutels commercials, etc.) seem to emanate from an unreachably recent past, now fossilized on the screen and in the work. This degraded techno-cultural content brings its own glitchy action and pixilated, pre-HD palette, which Okiishi responds to while painting, always working in direct interaction with the moving image. So multiple temporalities are now communicating: the archeological time of the original broadcast, the scrambled, non-linear time of the digital edit, the programmed repetition of the loop, and the living, breathing moment of painting. The finished works compose a drifting and unstable time-image while also complicating the act of viewing (or watching). Occasionally, the artist forgoes programmed content and paints against footage of blank video-blue screens, re-entering the Kleinian void. These paintings, each branded with the Samsung logo, also come with sound: playing back simultaneously in the gallery, they produce a chance composition of murmuring broadcast noise.

Using readymade television as his canvas, Okiishi seems to compress video and abstract painting into a single aesthetic channel. He also sets up a tense, comical face-off between mediums, as brushstrokes blot out the TV image and disrupt the communicative function of the screen. A gestural relationship to touchscreens that's evolved via our interfacing with personal data is shifted back into paintjobs where it becomes strangely AbEx, but without giving up any of its everyday automaticity. What these plugged-in paintings foreground is the undecidably active/passive attitude common to every user of contemporary art and information.

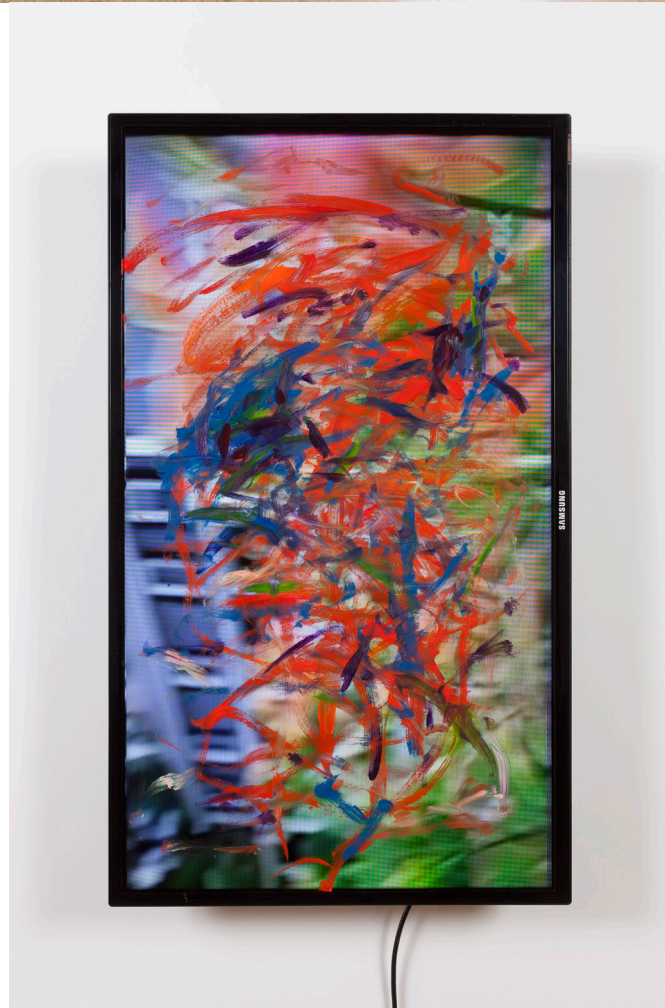
This is Ken Okiishi's first show at Reena Spaulings Fine Art. Recent solo Okiishi exhibitions include *Gino/Marcel Duchamp on Streeteasy.com* at Mathew/Berlin; *Gesture/Data* at Pillar Corrias/London, List Projects: Ken Okiishi at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, and *The Very Quick of the Word* at Bard CCS. He will also be participating in the upcoming Whitney Biennial.

Gallery Hours: Thursday through Sunday, noon to 6pm.

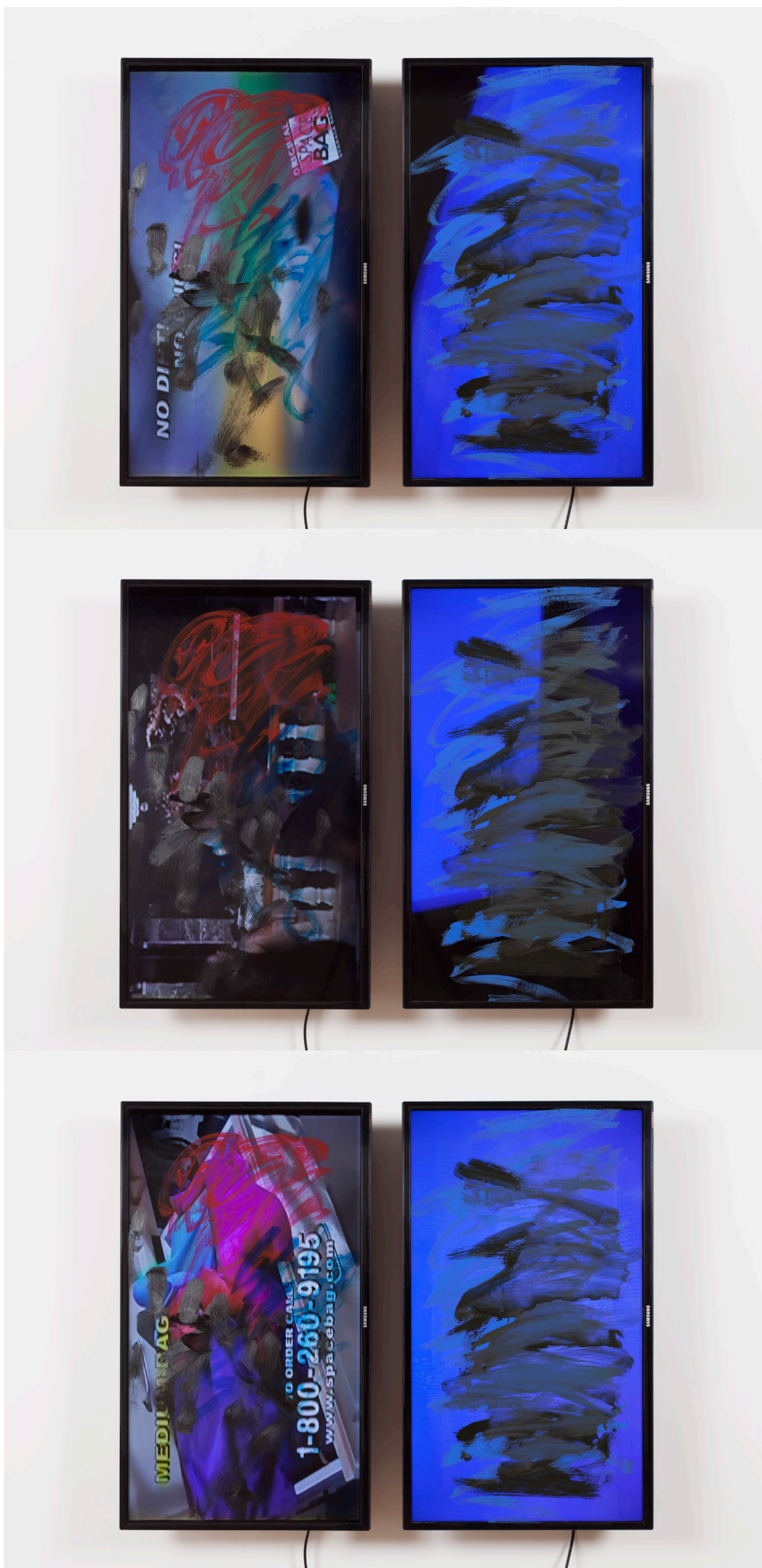
Installation views and details from *Ken Okiishi*, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, February 16 - March 23, 2014.
All works from the series *gesture/data*.



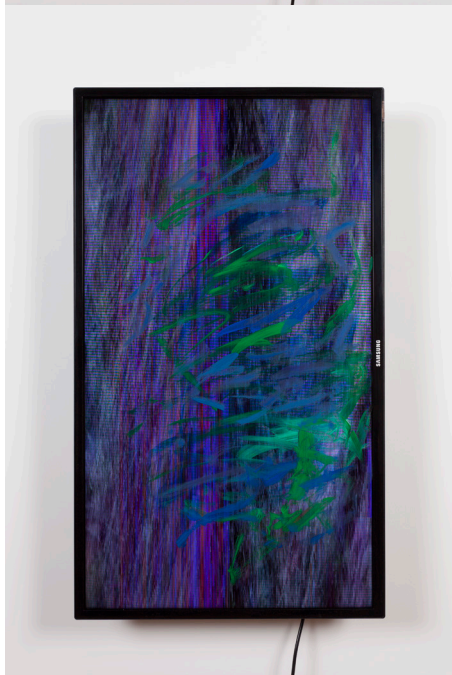
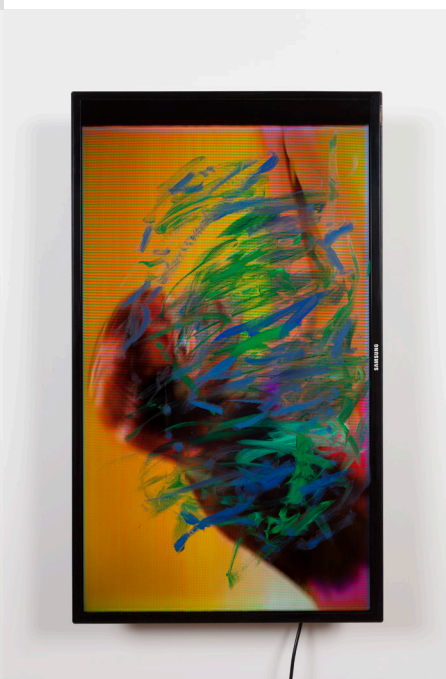
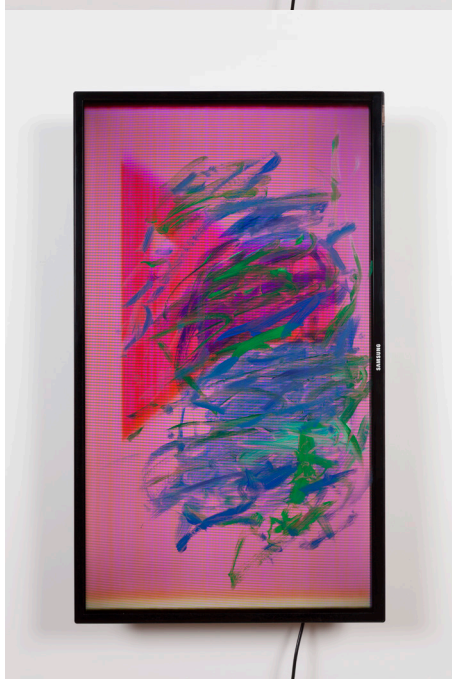
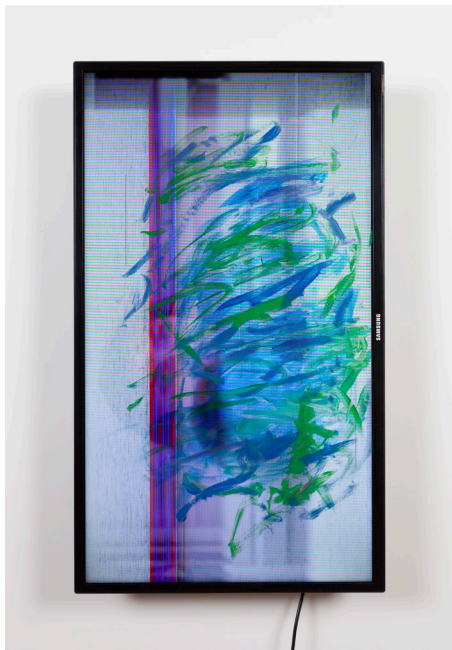
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Installation views from *gesture/data*, 2013 as installed in the Whitney Biennial 2014 (third floor, curated by Stuart Comer). March 7 - May 25, 2014.



ART IN REVIEW

Ken Okiishi: Reena Spaulings Fine Art

By **Roberta Smith**

March 13, 2014

165 East Broadway, at Rutgers Street,

Lower East Side

Through March 23

For the sake of argument, let's define a successful painting as a (reasonably) flat surface on the wall that commands our attention and ignites a desire to fathom its making and meanings. If so, then Ken Okiishi, in his own sarcastic way, is making successful paintings, at least in part. He is also concocting a hybrid of painting and video with perhaps unprecedented economy and bluntness.

For this show, Mr. Okiishi has used 11 fully operational flat-screen monitors as canvases on which to paint attractive, drippy flurries of brush strokes that recall the work of the Abstract Expressionist painter Joan Mitchell. Playing on these monitors are tired-looking moments from late-1990s and early-aughties cable television. The sound is on.

The tensions between silence and sound, painterly and digital, flickering brushwork and flickering light parody the ideal of "presence" of painting while providing a lively literal substitute. The eye is pulled back and forth between the layers of information and gesture, and among seeing, watching and looking. Adding to the confusion: The screens are turned on their sides, which makes the digital images harder to read while echoing the vertical rectangle that is painting's most conventional (and implicitly human) proportion.

Where, if anywhere, Mr. Okiishi takes this conceit remains to be seen. But, for the moment, his show is among the more uncanny, unexpectedly arresting pictorial experiences to be had in New York. Four more of these pieces stand out in the current Whitney Biennial, where they get the exhibition's relatively quiet third floor off to a rousing start.

A version of this article appears in print on March 14, 2014, Section C, Page 26 of the New York edition with the headline: Ken Okiishi: Reena Spaulings Fine Art

Notes on *gesture/data (feedback)*

Ken Okiishi, July-October 2015, NYC / Annandale-on Hudson / Orient / Venice / Ljubljana / NYC / Tokyo / NYC / London / Vienna /

One of the primary ways of feeling a threshold, in a "connected" world where all boundaries are thought of as surpassed or surpassable, is tapping, dragging, swiping, etc. on the screen. The rhythmic and often unconscious acknowledgement that there is an inside and outside to a primary experience of a supposedly boundary-less, "transparent" globe.

So many images of things in tandem with so many experiences of the material world create a counterpoint--so many people walking around looking at so many images, sometimes crossing over, or feedbacking to or across or next to each other. Messaging with someone, or seeing an Instagram post, and then suddenly bumping into that person. What that feels like. The rupture of this mental and physical boundaryless boundary. What is inside and what is outside feeds back in complex and suddenly shifting mental and haptic rewirings.

"Data" is everything that is behind the screen, meaning everything that can be viewed via a screen as making a representation out of electronic signals. Since we and everything else in the world are often also behind someone or something else's screen, and the so-called internet of things also emerges as all of these things are "talking" in electronic signals to each other. This means that data now includes the entirety of everything that can be viewed on either side of the representational support surface, e.g. the screen, or is connected via this network of signals. Walking around the museum takes on a new character of database meets "aura." But unlike canvas or paper, the screen as support surface has two dramatically different physical sides viewable from the front: a moving array of led lights that can represent anything, and the surface on the front of the led panel--where my finger leaves traces as I'm typing this sentence. It is also enmeshed in a constantly updatable and fallible mesh--a support surface that is always flowing and glitching.

On the level of painting:

When the support surface is filmed and then put on the "other" side of the support surface, re-filmed, and reinserted again; as the support surface becomes porous and the paint-gesture as well as the moving "data" gains multiple levels of visual and material properties; as the scale shifts start to produce multiple similar but also entirely different images across multiple panels. As the work is distributed, via the potential for the work to produce an infinite number of different still image files. Many works start to be painted on top of each

other, if you can describe inside/outside relationships in a constantly shifting network as having an "on top of." These systems come together on incommensurate planes--the network model (data) and the layer model (painting). All of this happens in an "air gap"--as acts made discrete, or built-up disconnected from actual networks (such as the internet) or within a purely personal and carefully shielded network of materials: video tapes from a family storage; idiosyncratic processes of digitization and transcoding and re-filming, involving multiple cameras and decks and formats and ways of giving a certain visual character to the data; paints, brushes, mediums; time in the studio, looking, thinking, approaching, stepping back; remembering, when a flash of a certain TV recording appears; walking around the flower district of New York City (amazingly still on 28th Street in Manhattan) downstairs from my studio, all of these plants and flowers everyday, moving around, constantly replenished and sold, seasons depending on the desires of a certain decoration or holiday, which is not always the same as the weather-appropriate season, but also dueling with local weather; the way the palm trees are too big to fit inside, and are kept on the sidewalk, chained up, and increasingly discounted as the first frost approaches and threatens to make them worthless.

This keeps the work--on a mental and visual level--from reaching any possibility of resolution. From the point of view of painting, it could also be called shifting relationships of "depth" and "flatness" at the same time, of ways of processing and manifesting relationships to and in an anxious world, and the impossibility of experiencing the work through representations of it; from the point of view of data, it could be the potential to generate infinite images and circulations of images as well as infinite permutations of materials.

One significant interpretation in the New York context, by the art historian and critic Michael Sanchez, of *gesture/data* (c. 2014):

"Within the very actual distribution logic of painting since the turn of the decade...painting is already made to look as much like its screen image as possible. But in order to pull off this trick, it cannot be materially identical to the screen. Painting must be separate from it in order to be mediated by it: to appear properly *on* a screen, painting cannot already *be* a screen.

[Okiishi's] crucial move is to conflate these two, fusing painting and screen together on the level of a chemical bond. This conflation unleashes a whole series of paradoxes. Where painting usually generates a single image, an infinite number of images can be taken of these screen-painting hybrids. No one jpeg can capture them. Yet their status as unique objects to be seen in person is achieved precisely by the fact that they are painted onto their medium of distribution. And even this move, perverse as it is, is complicated by the

fact that [Okiishi] retroactively displaces the IPS touchscreen back onto the HDTV, mimicking painting's mimicking of touch-sensitive gestures on a surface that cannot respond to them.

Within an art media system currently tooled for scrolling image distribution, painting that literally takes the form of a screen poses a problem. Although video footage can be taken of these works and distributed through platforms like Vine, the interaction of the paint with the screen beneath is almost impossible to capture on another screen, particularly for a viewer habituated to platforms that privilege the still jpeg. Oscillating between the painted marks on the surface and the video beneath, the eye perceives the moving video as pure information, aggregates of shapes and color, rather than people or objects. The paint changes both in relation to its backlighting and front-lighting, the screen-like fluorescent lights of the gallery complemented by warm spotlights designed to activate the effects of the paint (aptly named "interference").

The emphasis that these works place on irreproducible visual experience registers the current anxiety about a certain distribution logic that renders a visit to the gallery or museum superfluous. As such, they are products of this liminal media-historical moment, circulating in two convergent but fundamentally incommensurate systems. The oddness of these objects results from how, in moving through these systems, they rearrange their terms."

This is one series of inputs and outputs within a certain configuration. One that I particularly like, since this is a context that I also know very well--and that I share with Michael.

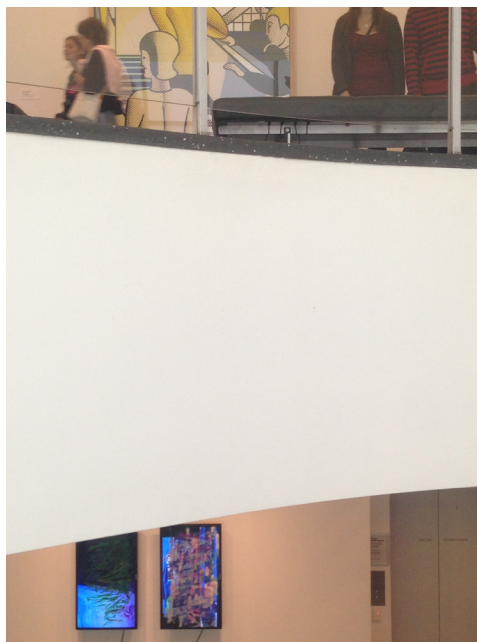
But another aspect of the work, which is in fact very important to me, is that it can potentially rearrange terms in a multiplicity of contexts--even ones unknown, in any specificity, to me at the moment of making the work.

The primary abstractness and mutability of the work (within potentially shared zones of anxiety) allows it to stretch and be stretched in perhaps unanticipated ways, to become many simultaneously different works as it is plugged into various situations. The work's output is determined by its radically different possibilities of input--as long as such extremely different situations continue to exist. The work does not seek to impose a discourse, but to be constantly re-formed by whatever surrounds it. The feedback pathways are left entirely open.

Installation views and details from *Cut to Swipe*, an exhibition of recent acquisitions, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Organized by Stuart Comer, Chief Curator, with Erica Papernik, Assistant Curator, and Leora Morinis, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art. 11 October 2014 - 22 March 2015.



Ken Okiishi. *gesture/data*. 2014. Oil and Chroma Key Video Paint on flat-screen televisions, VHS and HD video transferred to .mp4 (color, sound). Left screen: 12:21 min. loop Right screen: 75:13 min. loop. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Generosity of Jill and Peter Kraus.



ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2014

POINT IN MY
LIFE...

NATIONAL

I'M
EXACTLY

BUT
HONEY
YOU

and participatory sculptures at Documenta 12 in 2007 brought her memory roaring to life. Since then, the late German artist has been exhibited widely in Europe and the United States, celebrated as much for the way in which she married a sculptural practice to “the social” as for her work’s coolly industrial mien. But Posenenske’s sculpture is only part of the story. This small show shifted focus, presenting thirty paintings and drawings made between 1957 and 1965 that preceded her better-known output. The narrow emphasis was helpful, as it encouraged us to take in this body of work on its own merits and on its own terms. Even so, these pieces are mostly interesting insofar as we know what they lead to. Flirting with modes of anti-compositionality and desubjectification, the artist can be seen making attempts to push the mediums of painting and drawing to their limits, cycling through various strategies of mark-making before

abandoning two dimensions altogether.

Of Posenenske’s foremost instruments in this period was the dip pen. Famously deployed by Courbet in defiance of the academic mandate for absolute smoothness, the implement is used by Posenenske to rein in the gestural exuberance of art informel, which flourished in the middle of the last century. Take, for example, a drawing from 1959–60 in which the tool has been used to set rectangular marks of black and blue acrylic atop a flat white ground. There are no accidents: The result is a cluster of impassive marks, a la Joan Mitchell. Posenenske explored a more gestural mode of mark-making, too, but did so in a way that feels weirdly robotic, nearly to the point of parody. To create two drawings here, Posenenske used *Gestalt Arbeit* (Gestural Work) and made in 1963 and 1964, respectively, Posenenske appears to have coated a dip pen in black ink and brandished it with rapid, violent slashes; among the causes, traces of the implement’s use are visible where its sharp tip nearly lacerated the paper. These febrile marks bring to mind much more spontaneous expression as something more like mechanical breakdown, as if a stray tine on a malfunctioning machine, dripping with slick grease, had been running berserk next to a drop cloth

The exhibition also included Posenenske’s experiments with novel mark-making such as spray paint and felt-tip markers—moves that spoke to her assimilation of consumer culture in the 1960s—but the most prescient works were its earliest: the *Rasterbild* (Grid) series, created in 1956 and 1957 and built up from hundreds upon hundreds of small dots and circles, these drawings in ink and casein form distinct forms. In some, Posenenske disregards the grid almost entirely, making marks that are free-form, almost effervescent. In others, there’s a comparatively severe regularity, a rigid adherence to the grid structure across the full expanse of the ground. Recalling Benday printing punch cards, the latter, more than any of the works here, channel the numb repetitions of machines. In the September 2010 issue of *Artforum*, Christine Mehring notes that the *Rasterbild* pieces evoke the look of pixel arrays, an observation that rings truest with respect to the work from 1957. Executed in a gray rather than black casein, that

work is eerily lambent—it seems to glow. In the context of our moment, which sees a generation of artists fusing industrial fabrication to the tropes of modernist abstraction in order to approximate and compete with the screen, these modest works feel at once extraordinarily nuanced and profoundly contemporary.

—Lloyd Wise

Ken Okiishi

REENA SPAULINGS

In the eleven paintings that were in this show, all equal in size and in identical thin black frames, densely expressionist or allusively calligraphic brushstrokes bunch or stutter across shimmering color fields. You had to dip your head ninety degrees toward your left shoulder to read the name of the Old Master, stamped in silver and running up each frame’s right-hand edge: SAMSUNG.

For his first solo show at Reena Spaulings, Ken Okiishi executed a series of oil paintings on the surfaces of upturned flat-screen televisions. (A group of related works hung concurrently in the 2014 Whitney Biennial.) The idea is so perfectly simple and so monumentally appealing, there ought to be an app for it. And indeed, there is. There are a number of them—from Meritum Paint Pro and Adobe Ideas to FiftyThree’s Paper—all of which allow the movement of your fingertip across your mobile device’s touch screen to mimic the brushing of oil paint on canvas: swiping as painting. Designed to enhance your creative productivity, these apps allow you to capture the inspiration of the moment, on the go, in real time, immediately exportable to Facebook or Instagram.

The works in “gesture/data” dismantle that seamless prosumer immediacy by overlaying strata of disjunctive temporalities in obsolete formats. The portrait-oriented flat-screens play looped footage recorded on VHS by the artist in the late 1990s and early 2000s, transferred to digital video, and converted to .MP4, the preferred encoding standard for Net-streamed mobile video, a lossy codec that bakes in nostalgia by further degrading the originals.

They were painted as they hung, with the video running. The strokes become, like oily fingerprints, the traces of an otherwise fleeting user-screen interaction: from swiping as painting to painting as swiping. One can speculate about the point in the loop a given stroke was made, as when a Dodge minivan materializes directly under a zone of red brushwork keyed to its silhouette, or when a shift in the looped clip to a red wash makes patterns of red strokes disappear while greens darken to near black and a constellation of short white strokes aggressively glow. At some point the activity of painting had to end, though the loops inexorably continue. Okiishi’s show wittily includes airtime missed via oversaturation or disconnection. On one screen, *TV Guide*’s scrolling index registers all of the programming left unpainted while you watch. On others,

Ken Okiishi, *gesture/data*, 2014, oil paint, flat-screen television, VHS transferred to digital video, color, sound, 73 minutes 35 seconds, 36 3/8 x 21 3/8 x 4 3/4".



allover and violently gestural paintings cover the blue screens of death that once told you your cable was out or that your OS met an unhandleable exception.

Floating over all of these differently mediated temporalities is that of your own vision, split between the perception of a stilled vertical painting with active video *collé* and that of a horizontal playback interrupted by oil static, or resting uneasily somewhere between the two. When conditions are right and a moment of darkness on the flat-screen's reflective surface aligns with the gaps between brushstrokes, a painting can return your own furtive gaze, inserting the time of your looking between painted surface and looped background.

The painting bends to its video substrate; the screened images themselves are not so accommodating. A visitor born under the sign of the iPhone's internal accelerometer might find herself fighting off a manic urge to pull the screens off the wall and shake them until the snippet of a Food Network cooking show or an ad for a decade-old Honda or a few seconds of *60 Minutes* automatically rights itself. Despite the paintings' portrait-oriented similarity to comically outsize smartphones, the archive they screen stays landscape. They refuse to respond in the ways we now expect from our media technologies, not only to our desires but even to our sheer physical orientation in the world. In their literal *détournement* of the screens that facilitate our conspicuous consumption of "the present," Okiishi's paintings create a tension played out in the viewer as the wagged dog of an immediately graspable conceptual gesture—a tension that is genuinely moving and feels perversely like relief.

—Jeff Nagy

Dona Nelson

THOMAS ERBEN

In an interview twenty years ago, Dona Nelson praised the messiness of late Picasso, describing it as evidence of a "total confidence" that allowed him to do whatever without self-questioning, without looking back. And then she went on to point out that "[Sigmar] Polke has that kind of confidence." Even before I'd read that old interview, the affinity between Nelson and Polke, one very American and the other *sehr deutsch*, was nonetheless patent. Granted, Nelson lacks Polke's reach, but both artists tend to throw all caution to the wind in a way that can sometimes induce something close to pure exhilaration. How often is it, really, that you come across a painting that makes you suspect that the person who made it really didn't give a damn about how it would look? Nelson sometimes goes beyond the merely funky to plumb the depths of the truly gnarly. She delights in textures that grate—for instance, the mess of curdled cheesecloth that tangles up the cheery colors of *Orangey*, 2013, and the pocks of matter strewn across its surface like pimples; or the nastily congealed, hard, and shiny floes of opaque color that float atop the stained-in browns and greens of *Top*, 2014.

Also Polke-esque is Nelson's use of both sides of a painting. In 1989, the German artist showed a group of freestanding, two-sided paintings at Mary Boone Gallery (none of them are included in his current retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York); five of the eight paintings that were on view in Nelson's show are similarly bilateral (as are the two she showed in this year's Whitney Biennial). The presentation's odd title, "Phigor," might be an indirect allusion to this: It's not a word, but this sequence of letters does appear in the midst of the word *amphigory*, which means a piece of rigmarole or nonsense and contains the prefix *amphi-*, to which *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* gives the meanings "both, of both kinds, on both sides, about, around." But whereas Polke's duplex paintings were made on translucent material

so that one could see from either side what he had done on the other, Nelson's are on canvas: Her paint has seeped or been pushed through the membrane. The paintings often seem to promise more information than they really give—they're tricky that way. For instance, *Phigor*,



is on a canvas with a grid of crossbars on its verso, and the colors are reflected in paint on its front. But the similar stained grids that the paintings have on their verso—*Red and Green Noses*, 2013, *March Hare*, 2014, and *Orangey and Yellow*, 2013—offer clues to what's on the other side—there are no corresponding crossbars—whereas *Division Street*, 2013, does have crossbars, but the little trace of them from the front.

In the 1994 interview, Nelson spoke of how touch is more important to her working process than sight. "My hands are leading me as I paint. I feel that the room is dark while I'm painting." These days, the double-sidedness of her paintings seems to be a way of upping the ante on her game of blindness. "Soaking paint through the canvas," she explained in a self-interview this past March, "the painting on the other side comes into existence without my seeing it." Each side of the paintings functions as something like a picture of the other side, which can be seen not see simultaneously—and the picture always contains both truth and falsehood. She adds, "It's alarming to me that people look at the pictures of cornfields as if the pictures are informative, when the pictures have nothing in common with cornfields at all!" No more than one side of a painting has in common with its reverse, probably.

—Barry Schwab

Arnold Mesches

LIFE ON MARS GALLERY

Arnold Mesches had his first solo show in 1947, and according to the Life on Mars Gallery website, he has by now had 124 of them, and perhaps gives a new meaning to this one's title, "Eternal Return." His current exhibition included selections from three series of paintings, "Coming Attractions," 2003–2007; "SHOCK AND AWE," 2011; and "Eternal Return," 2013–14. As a title, "Coming Attractions" recalls that Mesches, who spent most of his career in Los Angeles before moving to New York in 1984, worked in the film industry in the 1940s and '50s. The first work in the series (not in this show) took a grand old-fashioned movie theater as its setting; projected on the screen was a scene of three waiters in an otherwise empty restaurant set out with white tablecloths, as if its clientele were about to turn up any minute.

frize



CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

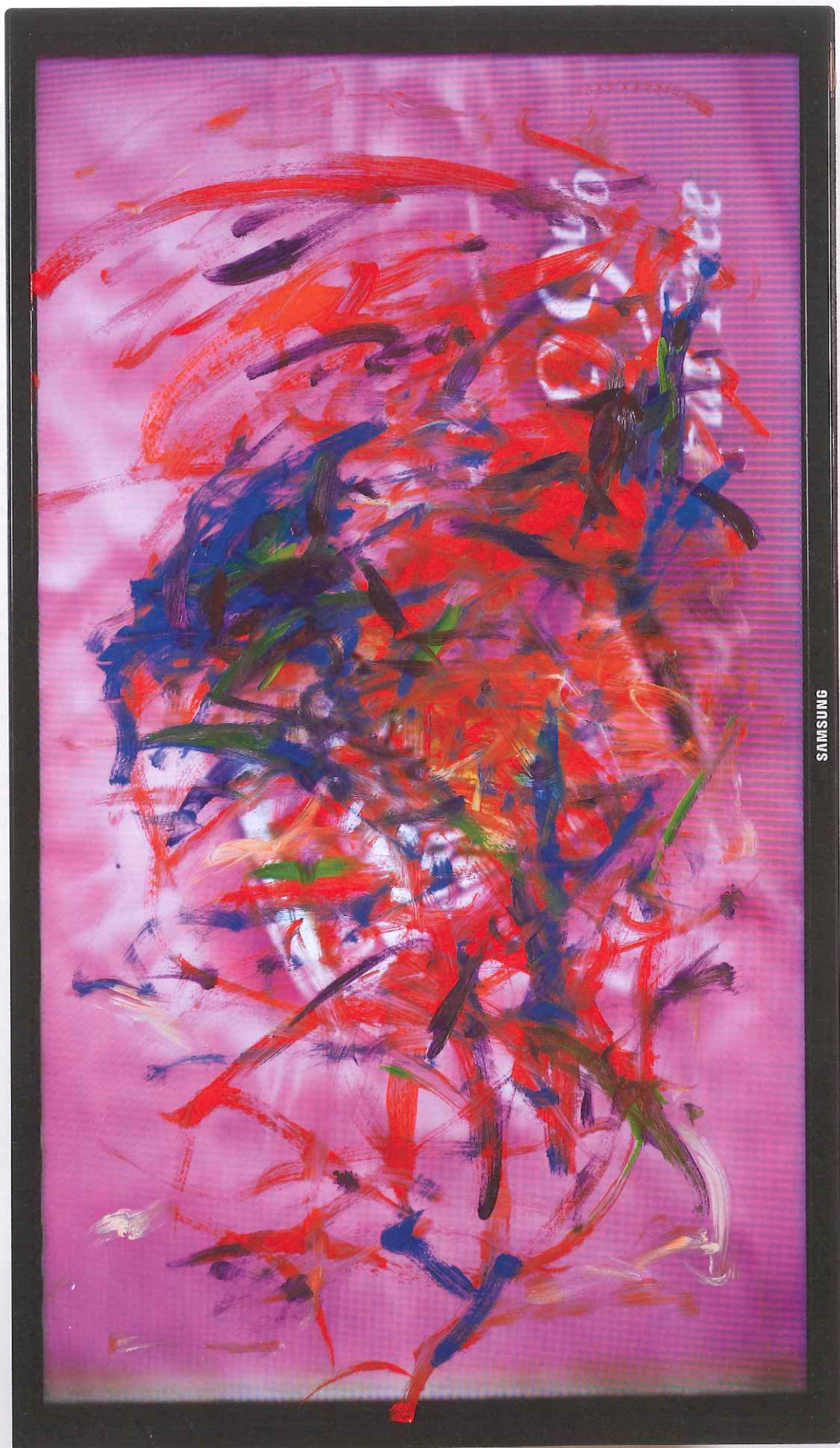
NO. 163 MAY 2014

EVERYWHERE

AT

Ken Okiishi:
painting in the age
of Instagram
by David Everitt Howe

ONCE



Gesture/data, 2014,
flat-screen television, oil paint and VHS transferred
to MP4, 91 × 53 × 10 cm

Visiting New York's Museum of Modern Art is rather like going to that creepy Madame Tussauds wax museum on 42nd street, or seeing Times Square's naked strumming cowboy, or visiting anywhere tragically touristy, really. It's to go where the iPhone – formerly that thing called a point-and-shoot camera – is interlocutor for everything around it, and obsessive picture-taking is the name of the game. People pose beside Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889) or, if they're art-historically nerdy, Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907). If you're Ken Okiishi, you stand before a far quieter painting while you're waiting to see a film, one like *Wood, Wind, No Tuba* (1980) by Joan Mitchell, and take a picture like anyone else: a keepsake for your photo archive. Mitchell's paintings, like Jackson Pollock's, are very all-over-y, with a bunch of gooey marks going everywhere with little apparent purpose. Okiishi noticed how, as a picture on a tiny, finger-greased screen, it became small and flat; how its 'screen presence' contrasted with its 'live (or material) presence'.¹ It was an image that could end up anywhere, really, such that its site specificity had little bearing. It could be Tumbled, Instagrammed, posted on Facebook, liked by a hundred strangers, blogged and re-blogged. It is the be-all and end-all of what David Joselit describes as 'saturation through mass-circulation – the status of being everywhere at once rather than belonging to a single place – that now produces value for and through images'.² This kind of auratic breakdown at the hands of smartphone technology prompted Okiishi to inspect what disservice all this digital dissemination does to painting, increasingly subject, as it is, to forms that flatten it more than Clement Greenberg could ever have dreamed.

Until recently, Okiishi was primarily known for his videos re-performing tropes of Hollywood cinema. In *(Goodbye to) Manhattan* (2010), he asked a range of other artists to restage scenes from Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979), using the imperfect Google translation of the film's German script; while for *parapluies/paraplyer/nobody can tell the why of it/1857/oslo/2011* (2011) Okiishi asked several local bands and musicians to perform the main theme from Jacques Demy's musical *Les Parapluies des Cherbours* (The Umbrellas of Cherbours, 1964) in front of two green screens, in any way they wanted. The artist then edited the video to compress the images and performances.

Literally conflating painting with screen, Okiishi recently began making Mitchell-like (or Albert Oehlen-like or Robert Motherwell-like – take your pick) brush strokes directly onto flat-screen televisions. This pitched battle between high and low culture is perhaps too literally juxtaposed, though the deadpan humour keeps things in check. What this body of work, *gesture/data* (2013–14), implies is that painting is clearly losing out to other forms of image-making. Yet, the effect is pretty comedic, as if Okiishi were kicking painting while it were down; and although the brushstrokes are visible on top of the screens – turned vertical to make them less conventionally TV-like – they only partly obscure the images beneath, such that what's playing on the monitors disturbs the painterly plane constantly. At Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, in March this year, and currently at the Whitney Biennial, where other works from *gesture/data* are showing, Okiishi's clusters of monitors compete with each other both visually and sonically, so that they become more a babble of incoherent noise and image than anything else. The clips were taken from home VHS recordings of 1990s and early 2000s TV broadcasts, which

were partially taped over by new, digital versions and then transferred to MP4. Mashed together, old and new technologies hardly dovetail. Rather, Okiishi foregrounds the degradation of old VHS footage, such that tones are rendered strangely pink and playback is marked by skittish flickers.

While a few monitors at Reena Spaulings simply played footage of a blue screen, most cycled through Okiishi's clips, which were seemingly plucked from the very deepest depths of terrible TV, where entertainment goes to die: a debate with John Kerry that no one is likely to have watched; old Chase Bank and Quaker Oats commercials; cable-access footage of a Chinese New Year parade. By painting on the flat screens while the clips played, Okiishi allowed interesting relations to pop up between paint and image. The dialectical setup is, therefore, fleetingly not so bipolar: pinkish brush strokes atop the shirtless, young Chinese men; two capricious blobs of red and blue oil paint hovering above the bed in a vacuum-cleaner commercial; a frenzy of blue marks pooling over a static blue screen – an image of nothing going nowhere fast. These moments are rare, though, and only briefly interrupt how decisively painting has to compete with what's happening beneath it – or, in a larger sense, with what's around it; it's increasingly subservient to greater forces of distribution and dissemination. Painting may be popular, and perhaps always will be, but it's not atypical for it to be theoretically framed by its obsolescence.

A case in point was Okiishi's 2013 commission for Frieze Projects London. This took the form of a translucent Perspex room with small canvases hung on the interior walls, in which sat two vaguely anthropomorphic paint guns that could be controlled remotely by viewers. The project was inspired largely by the work of Niki de Saint Phalle, whose *Shooting Pictures* of the 1960s made a very sexy circus of enacting violence against painting, where 'painting was the victim', as she noted at the time. What were the paintings symbolic stand-ins for? 'Daddy,' she continued, 'all men, small men, tall men, big men, fat men, my mother, patriarchy, society.' As a 'terrorist of painting' she struck a sultry figure, posing outdoors in front of rows of spectators, provocatively tousling her blonde hair with her rifle like a charmingly 'radical' daughter-next-door. In a way, she was a willing symbol for all the hegemonies she was railing against, her glamorous *femme fatale* offering both a product and a service to a beguiled, art-hungry public.

Substituting mechanized paint guns for Saint Phalle's female protagonist, Okiishi wanted to update *Shooting Pictures* for the 21st century, in which the terms of labour and production have, if not changed entirely, evolved to such an extreme degree that technology plays an ever-greater part in the way capital, and art, are distributed. Looking in from the outside, art fair visitors could, with the push of a button, summon the two guns to life. Dictated by a randomized algorithm, the drones would rise up, pivot, then loudly shoot a burst of paint onto different parts of the wall. It was a violent act, eliciting surprised jumps from viewers at each ear-piercing 'pop' of the paint ball. Over time, the interior of the structure came to resemble an abstract expressionist massacre, in which primary colours bled into muddy, ugly brown.

Fielding questions about whether the work was a critique of gun violence and gaming culture, Okiishi instead insisted that he meant to make a spectacle *par excellence* of painting,

one created expressly for iPhone capture. Indeed, clips of visitors going to town on Okiishi's paint booth proliferated on YouTube. In an interview published in the Frieze London catalogue, Okiishi claimed that, in contrast to Saint Phalle's model, in which the artist performs for a receptive public, he was 'thinking through other diagrams of cultural production, [in which] products and services become visible and circulate, and also how desire is calculated in complex, decentralized, real-time ways [...] On a technical as well as on a formal level, it's a piece that is designed to be photographed, posted and reposted rapidly and with great enthusiasm [...] These explosions and smears and drips that happen will become very desirable to be photographed, to be videoed, to be sent on Instagram or Vine or whatever.'

This describes a kind of contemporary economy outlined by many, from Gilles Deleuze to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in which Karl Marx's notion of concrete labour is increasingly abstracted. It has less and less to do with objects, though of course they're still there, and more to do with immaterial networks of profit, such as social media; the posting of images, the friending of friends; the way the things I regularly shop online for increasingly show up in banner ads on other websites. This private information is seemingly proprietary and autonomous but, really, it's not. Rather, it structures capital today, wed to our day-to-day living.

Painting, and art in general, is increasingly 'networked', as Joselit would term it, though not just institutionally or performatively within the world of art, as he partly theorized it, but in the way it interacts online, far from the museum. Plucked from that rarefied space, it has to compete with other images as one of many, which Okiishi's *gesture/data* illustrates handily; compressing the *gesture* of painting with the *data* of television – and, by extension, the internet – into one, painting loses its privileged position. It becomes just another byte in the digital ether, one that can be shared and liked at will. ☘

David Everitt Howe is a writer and curator based in New York, USA, and a contributing editor of ArtReview.

Ken Okiishi is based in New York, USA. Recent solo shows include: *Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York* (2014); *List Projects: Ken Okiishi* at MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, USA (2013); *The Very Quick of the Word* at Bard CCS, Amundale on Hudson, USA (2013); and *'Gesture/Data'* (2013) at Pilar Corrias, London, UK. His work was also included in the *Whitney Biennial* (2014).

1. Email to the author, March 2014.

2. David Joselit, *After Art*, 2013, Princeton University Press, p.16

1
Visitors looking at Ken Okiishi's
commission for
Frieze Projects London, 2013

2 & 3
*parapluies/paraplyer/nobody
can tell the why of it/1857/oslo/2011*,
2011, digital video stills

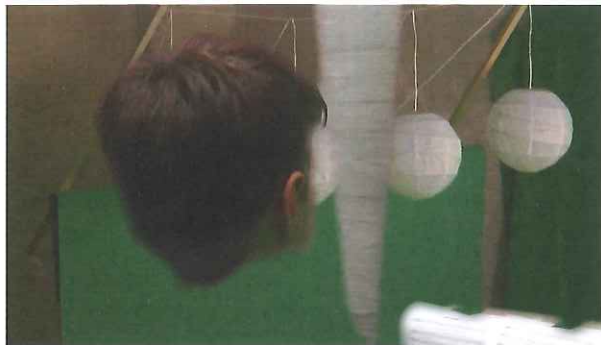
4
(Goodbye to) Manhattan, 2010,
digital video still

Painting loses its privileged position — it becomes just another byte in the digital ether, one that can be shared and liked at will.

1



2



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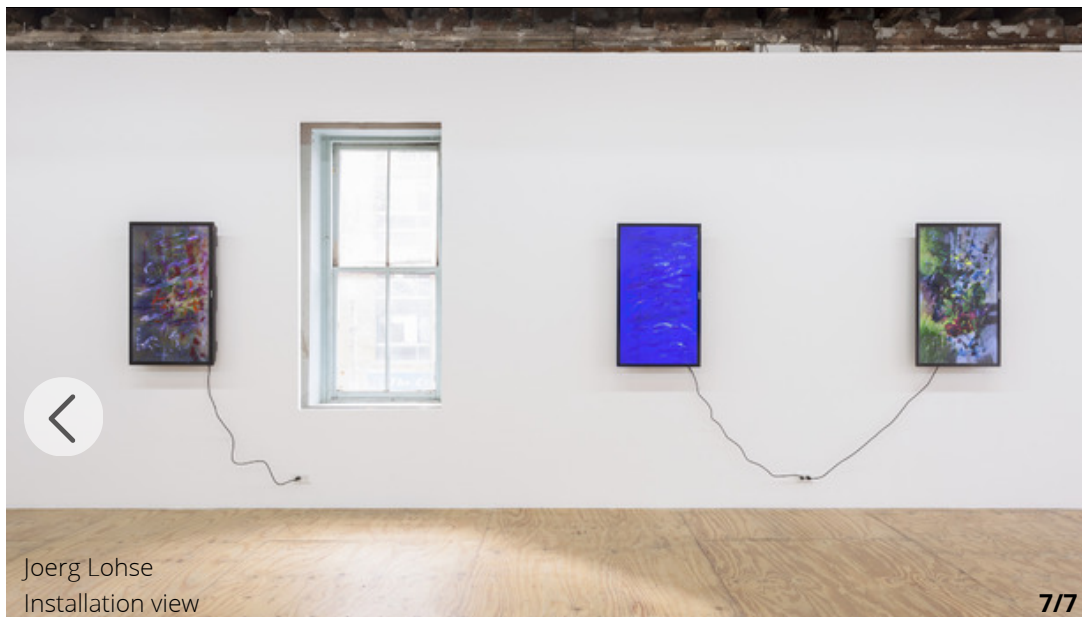
4



Ken Okiishi



ART ✓ Critics' pick



Joerg Lohse
Installation view

7/7

Joerg Lohse
Ken Okiishi, Gesture/data, 2014

FREE

TIME OUT SAYS ★★★★★

For his first solo show at Reena Spaulings, Ken Okiishi presents a suite of abstract oil compositions painted on vertically hung flatscreen monitors. Playing on each set is a different mix of vintage VHS recordings—snippets of news, reality shows, ads, etc. Reversing the figure-ground relationship, the onscreen action serves as backdrop for marks made in response to it, in a style that might be called slacker tachism. In one piece, daubs of mint green and swirls of red are applied on top of a TV Guide special about Nicole Kidman; in another, Okiishi works over the solid blue screen of a VCR on standby with slashes of darker blue.

One antecedent may be Gretchen Bender's works from the 1980s, in which televisions tuned to various channels were overlaid with phrases such as homeless and people with aids. (Like Okiishi, Bender is in this year's Whitney Biennial.) Okiishi's efforts are less political and more beautiful, but they go beyond formalism. The artist has proved himself adept at repurposing found content to humorously comment on how information flows in our globalized world—by, for instance, replacing German-dubbed dialogue for Woody Allen's *Manhattan* with a Google translation into English. Here, he's combined nondescript abstraction with outdated information to come up with works that are considerably more than the sum of their parts.—*Anne Doran*

POSTED: MONDAY MARCH 10 2014

DETAILS

INSIDE ART

The 2014 Whitney Biennial Is Taking Shape

By CAROL VOGEL
Published: November 14, 2013

The Whitney Museum of American Art announced nearly a year ago that a trio of outside curators would be organizing the 2014 Biennial, each taking a floor of the museum. Each brings a different set of eyes and interests to the show.

Enlarge This Image



Courtesy the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York

A work by Ken Okiishi, an artist who will be featured during the 2014 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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Sherrie Levine); dead artists (Sarah Charlesworth, Gretchen Bender and Tony Greene); and a hefty dose of emerging artists. There will also be more artist collectives or collaboratives than ever before, a reflection of a growing trend.

While in 2012 the curators devoted one floor solely to performance, this time around performances will pop up in different spaces throughout the entire building. "They chose a different path," said Mr. Sanders. "Each curator naturally found their own voice."

They are Stuart Comer, the chief curator of media and performance art at the Museum of Modern Art; Anthony Elms, an associate curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia; and Michelle Grabner, a professor in the painting and drawing department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as an artist with an exhibition this month at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

Elisabeth Sussman and Jay Sanders — the Whitney curators who put together the highly praised 2012 edition — will act as advisers overseeing the giant survey, which runs from March 7 through May 25 and takes the pulse of what's happening in contemporary art today.

As the biennial — the last in its Marcel Breuer building at Madison Avenue and 75th Street — takes shape, details about its content are finally emerging. For starters, the show will include the work of just over 100 artists and collectives, more than twice the number of the 2012 Biennial. And as with the previous edition there is no overarching theme.

"Each curator chose a floor and divided up the artists organically," said Mr. Sanders, adding that these decisions, as well as the content of the biennial itself, have been made by the three curators. "Having three perspectives means you will get a mix of performance and media," he said. "Visitors will also get an eye into the curatorial process."

As it has in the past, the selection of artists includes a multigenerational mix, including some whose careers span the decades (Robert Ashley, Sheila Hicks, Louise Fishman,

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Among the artists involved in dance are Miguel Gutierrez, Taisha Paggett and Yve Laris Cohen, while Kevin Beasley, Charlemagne Palestine and Sergei Tcherepnin are all doing sound pieces. There will also be contemporary “operas” from the 1970s, including one by Mr. Ashley in collaboration with Alex Waterman, and performance pieces by Ei Arakawa, working with Carissa Rodriguez, and the performance group known as My Barbarian.

In selecting the artists, certain trends are inevitably starting to emerge. Among them, Ms. Sussman and Mr. Sanders said, will be a focus on artists involved in a multiplicity of disciplines, for instance writers who paint, painters who are also poets, filmmakers who create sculptures, and photographers who draw.

Craft seems to be part of the equation too. Lisa Anne Auerbach, a conceptual artist based on the West Coast, has knitted sweaters; artists including Shio Kusaka, John Mason and Sterling Ruby have made ceramic works. There will also be textiles by Ms. Hicks; tooled leather wall pieces created by Carol Jackson and woodworking from the sculptor Alma Allen.

As was evident at this year’s Venice Biennale, there will be an emphasis on archival materials. Joseph Grigely, the artist, “got the archive of critic Gregory Battcock and will have vitrines showing all kinds of ephemera from it,” Ms. Sussman said.

Mr. Sanders added, “There’s a definite response to new media.” Triple Canopy, an online journal, will be presenting a project in the gallery and Semiotext(e) will also present a new series of publications.

In years past the Biennial has been criticized for the absence of painting, but Ms. Sussman and Mr. Sanders said there will be lots of it this year, especially works by abstract artists like Rebecca Morris, Molly Zuckerman Hartung, Laura Owens, Jacqueline Humphries, Louise Fishman, Amy Sillman, Suzanne McClelland, Etel Adnan, Dan Walsh and Elijah Burgher.

Frequently there is something outrageous to ogle. (In 2012, the Los Angeles artist Dawn Kasper [moved into the museum](#).) Mr. Sanders said it was still too early to say if there would be any off-the-wall moments because many of the performance projects are still being shaped.

There have also been years when the Biennial has extended beyond its own four walls, striking out into Central Park and once at the Park Avenue Armory. This year the multimedia artist Tony Tasset will be creating out an outdoor sculpture in Hudson River Park.

“Hudson River Park is a place people actually use,” Mr. Sanders said. “It also takes you outside the fray of the city.”

A LITTLE COLOR FOR WINTER

Two public art projects scheduled for February and March will be especially visible in the city’s bleak winter landscape.

In Madison Square Park — that six-acre swath of green between Madison and Fifth Avenues, from 23rd to 26th Streets — the Brooklyn-based Chilean artist Iván Navarro will create a site-specific installation on view from Feb. 20 through March 30. Called “This Land is Your Land,” from the 1940 Woody Guthrie folk song, it will consist of glowing neon words reflected within three water towers installed throughout the park. Seven feet in diameter and resting on eight-foot-tall supports, the water towers, an integral part of New York’s skyline repeat their neon message perpetually.

“It’s our 28th exhibition over the last 10 years,” said Debbie Landau, president of the Madison Square Park Conservancy.

Uptown, at the Doris C. Freedman Plaza at 60th street and Fifth Avenue, the Swiss-born artist Olaf Breuning has created six clouds rendered as childlike drawings and fashioned



Whitney
Biennial
2014

Ken Okiishi



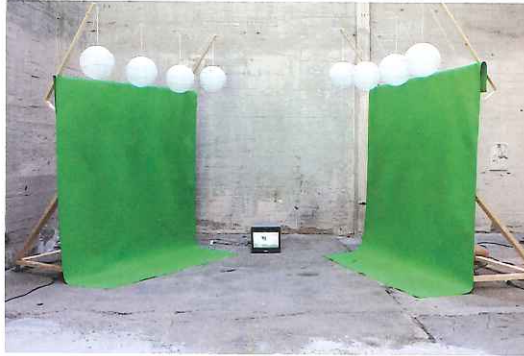
gesture/data, 2013. Oil on flat-screen television and video transferred to USB flash drive, color, sound; 35 5/16 × 21 × 3 11/16 in. (89.7 × 53.3 × 9.4 cm)

Born 1978 in
Ames, IA

Lives in New York, NY/
Berlin, Germany

Painting and Screen Otherwise

Michael Sanchez



paraphysis/paraphyer/nobody can tell the waly of it/1857/oslo/2011, 2011 (installation view, Nobody Can Tell the Why of It, 1857, Oslo, May 27–August 14, 2011). Digital video, production monitors, paper; wood; wheels; lamps; sandbags; and speakers; dimensions variable

Although painting has always accommodated the technical requirements of different media of distribution, from tapestries to engravings to photographs, the ascendant medium now is the IPS screen produced in various forms by Apple and its competitors. While historical attempts to distribute art through new media like television met with only limited success, the distribution of painting through the touch-screen interface is today largely a fait accompli.

While this shift from print to blog and feed began some time ago, the complex accommodations and counteractions of art in relation to it have only recently become visible. Painting, for example, underwent a series of mutations at about the turn of the current decade. At that time, browsing through one of the major art aggregators would have revealed a profusion of abstract, monochrome, and pattern paintings flowing through the channels of the art market, frequently in diminutive styles and formats. This is, I believe, the result of several factors. A market disproportionately concentrated on young artists demanded that these artists make small, investible works. Compounding this fact were the ways in which the market converged with the portable media technology that gained momentum at the same time.

Since the technology presents images of paintings both in a grid of thumbnails and as high-resolution images, the most successful paintings work equally well in both of these scales. The scalability of monochromes and pattern paintings

make them the most strategic forms: their scalar flexibility means that they can be viewed in any size, from thumbnail to wallpaper. They are low-information forms, which means that they function well as thumbnails. But they also accommodate large-scale viewing through both their all-over informational structure and their incorporation of subtle textural and relief effects that can only be appreciated in high-resolution, pleasantly offsetting the flatness of the touch screen.

Even the new gestural vocabulary that portable devices taught the population at about this time—tiny swipes and taps—migrated into painting. The work of the painter G. is paradigmatic here. His work is made of newspapers affixed to canvas, from which is torn a continuous gestural script of short U-shaped gestures and dots. The paintings come in different sizes but always with the same scalable motif and always in a vertical format, mirroring the default vertical orientation of the phone. The newspapers reverse-remediate the screens onto which they are distributed. Like all old media distributed through a newer medium, they provide a therapeutic visual effect. Their gray tones counteract the brightness of the screens; the layered effect of newspaper on newspaper counteracts their flatness. By staging installation shots with a gray cat roaming around his paintings, G. draws an explicit parallel between the experience of viewing his work and viewing photos of cats online (an activity that accounts for an enormous percentage of internet traffic). Paintings as cats: gray, modest, friendly, and in styles designed to

trigger the instant affective response that keeps the image in circulation; images of paintings to be petted like cats as the fingers of the viewer scroll from one gray image to the next.

In G.'s work, painting and its screen image fuse. Again, the reasons for this are both economic and media-historical. As galleries began to use tablets not only to show their inventory to collectors physically visiting their sites but also to sell works solely on the basis of JPEGs, it has become increasingly necessary that the painting and the JPEG look exactly like each other. Assuming that works are purchased solely for investment purposes on the basis of JPEGs, it is not difficult to imagine an instance in which even their buyer never sees them in person and sends them straight into storage.

The artist's palette



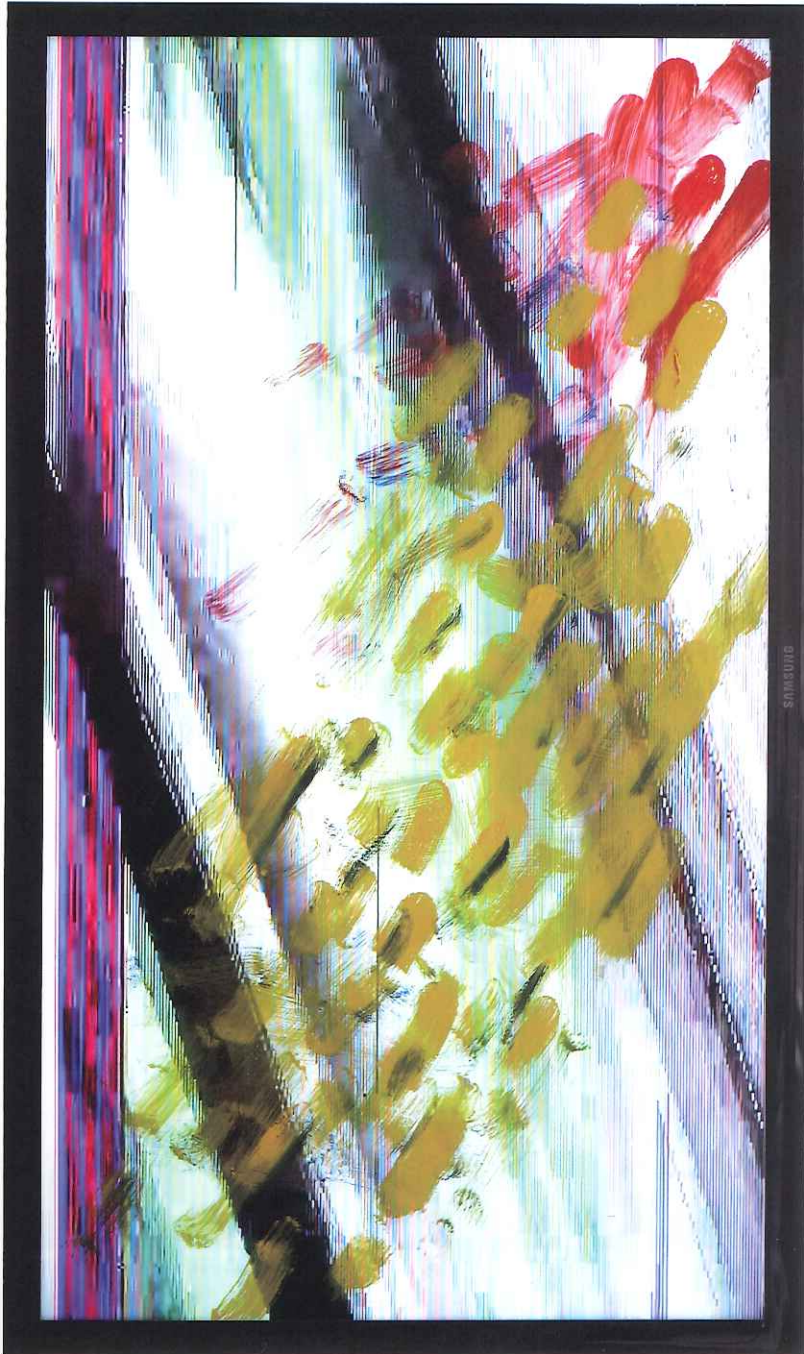
Indeed, for certain segments of the market, it seems likely that rising urban rents and the new ubiquity of internet distribution may transform the gallery in dramatic ways. At this point it is not difficult to imagine a world in which the gallery becomes the off-site digital photo studio of a more flexibly engaged advisor. Video walkthroughs of gallery shows are already becoming more common, perhaps presaging the rise of virtual-reality exhibition views in conjunction with image aggregators. We may soon find ourselves in a situation where *no one* involved in the transaction views an artwork in person. From an artist's offsite fabrication facility to an advisor's photo studio to a collector's storage unit, the object withdraws entirely from human eyes.

This is still largely hypothetical. Within the very actual distribution logic of painting since the turn of the decade, however, painting is already made to look as much like its screen image as possible. But in order to pull off this trick, it cannot be materially identical to the screen. Painting must be separate from it in order to be mediated by it: to appear properly *on* a screen, painting cannot already *be* a screen.

In a series of works on view at the Biennial, O.'s crucial move is to conflate these two, fusing painting and screen on the level of a chemical bond. This conflation unleashes a whole series of paradoxes. Whereas a painting usually generates a single image, an infinite number of images can be taken of these screen-painting hybrids. No one JPEG can capture them. Yet their status as unique objects that must be seen in person is achieved precisely by the fact that they are painted onto their medium of distribution. And even this move, perverse as it is, is complicated by the fact that O. retroactively displaces the IPS touchscreen back onto the HDTV, mimicking painting's mimicking of touch-sensitive gestures on a surface that cannot respond to them.

Within an art media system currently tooled for scrolling image distribution, painting that literally takes the form of a screen poses a problem. Although video footage can be taken of these works and distributed through platforms like Vine, the interaction of the paint with the screen beneath is almost impossible to capture on another screen, particularly for a viewer habituated to platforms that privilege the still JPEG. Oscillating between the painted marks on the surface and the video beneath, the eye perceives the moving video as pure information, aggregates of shapes and color, rather than as people or objects. The paint changes both in relation to its backlighting and frontlighting, the screen-like fluorescent lights of the gallery complemented by warm spotlights designed to activate the effects of the paint (aptly named "interference").

The emphasis that these works place on irreproducible visual experience registers the current anxiety about a certain distribution logic that renders a visit to the gallery or museum superfluous. As such, they are products of this liminal media-historical moment, circulating in two convergent but fundamentally incommensurate systems. The oddness of these objects results from how, in moving through these systems, they rearrange their terms.



gesture/data, 2013 (detail). Oil on two flat-screen televisions and video transferred to USB flash drive, color, sound;
35 3/16 × 21 × 3 1/16 in. (89.7 × 53.3 × 9.4 cm) each. Collection of Pedro Barbosa



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Sign of the Times | Look Out, It's Instagram Envy

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BY [SARAH NICOLE PRICKETT](#)

November 6, 2013 11:00 am



Gail

Albert Halaban, “Out My Window, Flatiron, Cakes And Balloons,” 2009, courtesy of Edwynn Houk Gallery. Pre-Instagram, this was the main way New Yorkers spied on the lives of their neighbors. The artist Gail Albert Halaban shot this from a nearby apartment window.

Instagram has created a new kind of voyeurism — in which you can look into the carefully curated windows of the rich, famous and stylish — and a new kind of lifestyle envy.

“The department store is the last promenade for the flâneur,” wrote Walter Benjamin, the German critic, whose impossible project — “The Arcades Project,” more precisely — documented street life in

Italy, by Rafael de Cárdenas.

All elements must be carefully staged to look happenstance. Only the crassest Instagrammer snaps a new pair of shoes in a box, or plainly on a floor. The canner, cinematic one will instead make a display of the shoes, arranging her feet on a shabby-chic desk next to a Grolsch bottle of daisies atop a stack of French translations. The writer [Stephanie LaCava](#) snaps her snakeskin Pradas opposite Audrey Gelman's funny bunny slippers at Paris Fashion Week. A few cobblestoned streets away, the swimwear designer [Lisa Marie Fernandez](#) shows off her white Manolo Blahniks next to her friend's yellow pair of Gianvito Rossis. Such Instagrams are mimetic: the contents, the casually rarefied setting, the off-kilter composition. What each says is not "this is a good shoe" or "these shoes look good on me," but "these shoes look good in my life," which is what Benjamin meant when he said goods are sold by flâneurie.

What feels new with Instagram is the mode of photography that feels most akin to the window display. [Rafael de Cárdenas](#), the architect, shows off Biarritz by way of melons and Marlboros on a snowy white cloth. [Jessica Diehl](#), Vanity Fair's style and fashion director, snaps her stay in Claridge's, the five-star hotel in London. The model-slash-writer [Laura Bailey](#) comes home from a trip with — she writes — "Paris in my bag": a strand of Chanel pearls, a Chanel stylo eyeliner, a black diamanté hairpin and a handwritten note, all displayed too well and too brightly to make anyone believe these items have ever seen the inside of a clutch.

These are technically still lifes, but in spirit they are actually the new self-portraiture. It isn't strange to say, or to hear, from an acquaintance run into on the street, "I recognized you" — not by your face or your body, but by your "style." Meaning: a hand with carmine nails holding a copy of Anne Carson's "Red Doc." A pair of Illestevas resting on the edge of a Café Gitane plate, beneath it a new issue of The Journal. "The arrangement was the meaning," Joan Didion writes in "Blue Nights." The same is as true of objects as of words, and the small compositions of personal belongings so recognizable as "Instagram" are, simply, selfies without a face.

Similar compositions can also represent others. One of my favorite recent Instagrams, by the Los Angeles artist [David Kitz](#), is of bandages, Motrin and other supplies for an injury from CVS, all heaped together on a plain white bedspread; the tag is #anklesprain, the caption is "Got the best girl in the world," and the heart melts. This is my kind of lifestyle envy. For the more aspirational, there is [Amanda Brooks](#), the American socialite who now lives in Oxfordshire, England, with two kids and a million horses. In lieu of a family portrait, Brooks will Instagram four pairs of kayaking sandals on a dock. Instead of photographing her scads of friends, she 'grams a plate heaped high with packets of quince paste, which she has made to give as gifts. In the comments, a stranger asks her for the recipe.

Belongings being so easily conflated with belonging, Instagram induces a longing to be on a scene, the scene, the next one, a better one. Some hours you can scroll without end as a long block of squares lights up in unison, every frame swinging open to a new angle on the same scene: the same Jay Z performance at Pace Gallery in Chelsea, the same Delfina Delettrez presentation in Paris, the same Ken Okiishi paint-balling robots at the Frieze Art Fair in London.

"There it was," says the narrator in the Willa Cather story "Paul's Case," looking up at a wonderland of glowing panes, "what he wanted — tangibly before him, like the fairy world of a Christmas pantomime." Close observers of Instagram may have noticed the recent rise of a conscious-or-not homage to Walter Benjamin, a snap of the modern flâneur: taken alone on the street, while looking through a store window — the most reflexive of surfaces — at oneself.

Correction: November 24, 2013

An article last Sunday about the use of Instagram as a unique form of voyeurism erroneously attributed a passage from the Willa Cather story "Paul's Case." It was the narrator — not one of the story's characters — who observed, "There it was, what he wanted — tangibly before him, like



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BENTLEY'S SANG YUP
LEE ON FORM...

by Christine Cocotte / 22 October 2013 / [add comments](#)

BAZAAR AT WORK:
ORIOLE CULLEN,
CURATOR AT THE
V&A





Christine Cocotte speaks to artist Ken Okiishi about his 2013 London Frieze Art Fair installation

Bringing the fairground fun to *London Frieze* last weekend, New York-based artist Ken Okiishi had art editors and punters alike dodging his project's frenzied paintballs. In a nod to 60s action paintings, Okiishi's robots hurled layer after layer of coloured paint within a transparent Perspex-walled booth. From a number of vantage points, Frieze attendees witnessed as the layers of paint gradually accumulated into a series of abstract paintings - or, in Okiishi's words, "a great wet mess". After prepping non-stop for the last five days, he was more than happy to take a well-deserved break and discuss the creative joys of chaos, as well as his motives for "unleashing the monster inside the fair".

What inspired your first Frieze-commissioned project?

We have this strange relationship with screens and devices, and I was trying to think through what that interactive relationship is like. I built a booth, but instead of standing inside it, you're left outside, watching. The activation button is attached to a transparent wall that acts like a crude flatscreen. When



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you press it, the inside of the screen comes to life in a monstrous explosion. You feel like you're in some sort of virtual reality, or game.



Did you design the robots to “paint” a specific work?

Once activated, they shoot paint all over the space according to a randomised algorithm - it's based on a cycle that repeats every billion years. But the funny thing is that certain people seem to activate it in a weird cosmic way. Some people get shot at. For others, it flies the other way. Of course it's all random, but you start to feel that maybe chaotic forces are converging on that dot - for or against you.

How have Frieze visitors reacted so far?

Some people screamed. When the robots fire a paintball directly at your head, I guess it's pretty scary. Other people just think it's funny. You can press the button, or just watch on the side. There's also another robotic element that works as a kind of ready-made cleaning device, moving around inside. So it all feels a bit like a robot zoo.

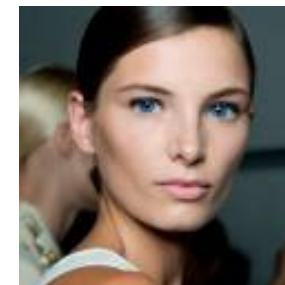
Did you originally intend for people to enter the paintball booth?



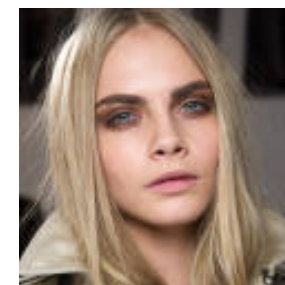
FACE MOISTURISERS



FACE POWDERS



BEST BB CREAMS



BEST SHAMPOOS



BEST DRESSED

For me, it was far more interesting to have the action mediated. As I mentioned, you are always left outside of the activated space, but you're so close to it that its physical presence is still very strong and alive. It's supposed to be simultaneously spectacular, and totally alienating!



Which artists have influenced you most?

There was a female artist in the 60s named Eileen Sturdevant who created works made of paint-filled balloons inside the canvas: she'd shoot at them or invite other people to – so this project kind of sprung out of that. The paintballing was a ready-made way of producing this kind of accumulation on the canvas with speed: I like the chaos that it brings.

Your Frieze Project reflects our society's growing dependence on technology and artificial intelligence.

Have robots replaced the artist?

For me, the interesting thing about devices is like how your phone has become an extension of your hand. That confusion isn't necessarily about a reliance on robots, but how they've become a part of our bodies.



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What can we expect from you next?

It's been a really intense time for me lately. I'm looking forward to taking it easy, then preparing for my show next spring, at Nina Spaulding's gallery in New York.

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BENTLEY'S SANG YUP
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BAZAAR AT WORK:
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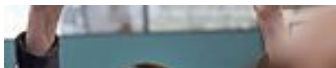
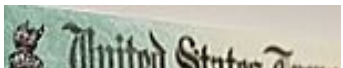


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Ken Okiishi

Ken Okiishi's work for Frieze Projects explores the poetic potential of paintball, as visitors use remote-control robots to shoot acrylic at canvases

(Goodbye to) Manhattan
2010
Digital video
72 min.
Installation view at
MD 72
Courtesy of MD 72,
Mathew and Reena
Spaulings



canvases, which were painted all white—the balloons exploded when the bullet hit them, splattering and oozing colour onto the white surface. I thought that in the context of the fair's atmosphere, something along these lines could come together. I wanted to bring in a robotic element, where the artist's body would be replaced by performing robots.

Lees Why did you choose to use robots?

Okiishi There's something about how a viewer can develop a weird affection for drones, as if they were these little creatures. When they move around a corner, or navigate around whatever impediment, it looks like they are making autonomous decisions. But we all know, of course, that these things are just moving through a series of programmed commands, reacting to obstacles in a fairly crude way. I'm also drawn to the fact that the same technology is used for both military and housecleaning operations.

Ken Okiishi (b. 1978) is an American artist who is based in New York. His recent solo exhibitions include those at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2013), Hessel Museum of Art, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson (2013), Mathew, Berlin (2012), Take Ninagawa, Tokyo (2012); Alex Zachary, New York (2010), and Mehringdamm 72, Berlin (2010). Recent group exhibitions include Artists Space, New York (2013), Arnolfini, Bristol (2013), Kunsthau Bregenz (2013), Kunsthalle Bern (2012), and White Columns, New York (2012).

Nicola Lees How did you arrive at the idea of using paintballing as part of your project for Frieze London?

Ken Okiishi As we were discussing aspects of Frieze Projects and your ideas about this section of the fair, I started to think about ways of articulating the dynamics of the images that were appearing in my mind—and the dynamics of the image in the attention economy in general—and I arrived at this image in my head of Niki de Saint Phalle's paintings from the early 1960s that were made by shooting guns at canvases. I initially had mistaken them for paintball. When looking at them again I realised she had shot actual rifles at paint-filled balloons attached to

Lees I see both similarities and differences between your work and that of De Saint Phalle. She chose to be the creator of her paintings, whereas you are one step removed from your project, which relies on audience participation: visitors control the robots, which will shoot paint at canvases in a Plexiglas-walled space. On the other hand, both her work and yours are contingent on chance: whether the bullets will puncture the containers of paint; whether the viewers will participate in the paintballing.

Okiishi If there's a diagram of production for De Saint Phalle, it is very clearly the audience watching the artist do something to create her art work, and the meaning of the action stemming from that reposed viewing. In this scenario incited in Frieze Projects, I am thinking through other diagrams of cultural production where it seems that attempts at synching data streams from all over the place have changed how products and services become visible and circulate, and also how desire is calculated in complex, decentralized, real-time ways. Digital technologies facilitate the creation of something that is really something *other* than what has come before, as images circulate around and through different devices and screens, and different channels of simultaneous feedback and transmission.

I think that a decidedly different dynamics of the image emerges in this situation in comparison to the world in which De Saint Phalle was making her work—even if some of her impulses feel prescient.

Lees What do you mean when you talk about ‘the dynamic of the image’?

Okiishi The term comes from a conversation I had with the artist Sturtevant many years ago—she kept using this word ‘dynamics’ to discuss all sorts of things. And this made a huge impression on me—as an example of what this conceptual thinking, as she would call it, made possible to think and also what that thinking made possible to do in the field of art.

Lees Your work involves a process of accumulation, with paint being shot at

the canvases for the duration of the fair. Is that a comment on excess or is it your attempt to create a new form of dynamic image?

Okiishi That’s a question I’d like to leave as open as possible.

Lees Do you regard the project’s resulting canvases as finished art works or are they the remnants of the performance?

Okiishi There are various overlays working at the same time here, the funfair—the carnival situation—being the most obvious. I’m working with this situation both literally and abstractly. With a funfair game, you either get the thing that you’re playing with inside or outside what you’re aiming at. So what I like is that the canvas-as-shooting-range can become an inside or an outside: the paint either hits the canvas or it doesn’t. And while this situation is happening, the viewer/participant probably wonders if the point of this ‘game’ is even to hit the

canvas? As paintball splats increasingly accumulate both inside and outside of the canvas-as-frame, it will be interesting to see whether hitting the canvas remains a goal for the participants, or if it is the crazy, weird fun of pushing buttons and watching things explode that drives the action.

But then, after the fair has closed, when the canvases are removed from this environment, the trace of the inside or the outside, the trace of how this thing has been produced, will also become a trace of the mental image of the situation in which it happened. I was struck that when I saw one of De Saint Phalle’s shooting pictures in a museum recently, I also saw in my mind the images that I’ve seen on YouTube of her shooting the canvases, and the other images that came up when I was Googling around.



‘On a technical as well as on a formal level, it’s a piece that is designed to be photographed, posted and reposted rapidly and with great enthusiasm.’



So I guess the short answer is, yes, the environment that is producing the work is, in the end, also a way of making paintings that become a way of talking about how images are formed.

Lees Paintballs generally only come in four rather garish colours – red, blue, yellow and green. Are you thinking of making them more bespoke, as De Saint Phalle’s were?

Okiishi My interest in colour here has two facets. There will be a number of drones filming the whole thing, and while they’re filming they’re also mopping what will eventually become a sort of mud on the floor as the colours come together and mix and mix and mix. The footage of what these little mopping camera robots ‘see’ will be broadcast in the fair itself. At the same time, an image of what is taking place will be formed by fair visitors, snapping and sending around photos or videos with their phones. As the images of what’s happening start to circulate, they initiate and become part of a process of an image-in-formation, among and through different official and unofficial image networks. But the ultimate colour that will appear as these basic, bright colours mix is basically mud.

Lees Given that the project could just as easily be realized by visitors throwing paint at the canvases, how important is this symbolism of the gun? Is it a reference to De Saint Phalle’s work or is it more of a comment on a certain genre of computer game?

Okiishi I don’t think of the gun as a symbol, but as a technology. It has an explosive velocity that affects the viewer and what is shot in particular ways.

Lees Are you concerned that the work might be misinterpreted as a glamorization of violence?

Okiishi Questions about the glamorisation of violence today seem kind of irrelevant, out-of-date or too simple, given our current situation. Contemporary violence is the simultaneity of data war and drone war and real-dead-bodies war; it is also the violence of the body attempting to cohere to all of these incoherent tracks of being.

On a technical as well as on a formal level, it’s a piece that is designed to be photographed, posted and reposted rapidly and with great enthusiasm. It’s a piece that is designed so that the participation is, of course, pushing the button to activate the paintball firing mechanism, but also these explosions and

Opposite:
Still s from *The Deleted Scene*
2012
Four-channel HD video
28 min.
Produced by AP News
Courtesy of Mathew and Reena Spaulings

Above:
‘Gino/“thinking about moving uptown”’/
Marcel Duchamp on StreetEasy.com’
2011
Exhibition view at Alex Zachary at Frame, Frieze London
Courtesy of Mathew and Reena Spaulings

smears and drips that happen will become very desirable to be photographed, to be videoed, to be sent on Instagram or Vine or whatever.

This desire to capture and transmit the image is made easier to realize because the screen itself is doubled: for example, you can hold up your phone screen to the Plexiglas and it will look like the gun is shooting directly at the viewer, as the paint accumulates directly on the back of the Plexiglas screen. There will be ‘paintings’ that appear on the canvases on the walls as well as ‘paintings’ that form inside the screen as images-in-formation.

Joan Mitchell

Retrospective
Her Life and Paintings

Herausgegeben von | Edited by
Yilmaz Dziewior

Kunsthaus Bregenz

Museum Ludwig, Köln

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Painting Paintings

Ken Okiishi

1 Irving Sandler, «Mitchell Paints a Picture,» in: *ARTnews*, vol. 56, no. 6, October 1957, p. 45.

2 *Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, directed by Marion Cajori, New York: Arthouse Films, 1992, Amazon Instant Video, <http://www.amazon.com/Joan-Mitchell-Portrait-Abstract-Painter/dp/B003ELMR8U>.

It is with jittery hesitation that I put into words my thoughts on the work of Joan Mitchell. She has been, for me, a private moment. The rare occasion of seeing one of her paintings hung at the Metropolitan Museum or MoMA has always been met with a secret, almost embarrassing joy—of being there, in this fugal array of thoughts and colors and affects (the forbidden word, «feelings,» is what really should be said here, if that word can be uttered with the friction of sensation and remembering, and as the opposite of sentimental attachment). It has been a silent transmission—of moving there, in my mind, in a rush of flushed hormonal glee, and sometimes, almost as if an invitation to dance out a relationship to the memories stored inside the body of the painting and my own being. Sadness is a form of ecstatic hyperactivity here as well. And I find myself conducting along, like when listening to Bach alone—like Tatiana Nicolaeva's melodic gravitational pull and articulation of counterpoint as a post-verbal movement of synapses and hormones and muscles freed from the frames of «bodily» being, or the way Glenn Gould can be heard in recordings singing along while playing the piano. A kind of dancing and singing alone—the kind of thing that surpasses being ashamed because it is released in these euphoric jolts of energy

where the thought of another witnessing this is expelled from fright.

When looking at a great painting by Joan Mitchell, in fact, nothing really needs to be said at all. The paintings reach a state of permanent pleasure that has no other meaning than being there with the painting and having that pleasure. But also knowing that that pleasure stays there, in the painting. Like a place that is visited—it stays there, in the brain, with that memory, like you have of a vacation place or a certain walk as a child. That kind of pleasure, that stays there, does not come with you: paradise, if that word can be uttered without sounding overwrought. But here, attached to this painting, this paint and canvas there. You can't bring paradise with you. You can't even look at photos of it, if you've never been there, and experience anything other than longing or dismissal. Mitchell «carries her landscapes with her,» but we cannot.¹

Isn't that something else about paradise—that it disorganizes your «self» as you become the same thing as, say, a blood red plant next to a bright blue bird next to a piece of dirt and the smell of lavender and manure? That these things all arrive there, somehow, next to or on top of each other and you are also there, as one thing among that composition that happens there, and it's all together, and that it happens is the way it happens and that is how it becomes that feeling of being among rather than in?

In our current hubristically cynical «art world,» where every atom of being seems to be set on constantly repositioning itself in some sort of cyberfeudal order; as everything tries to be in perfect alignment with a constantly shifting screen of infosprays that suggests that art is a purely textual form of data, and that the preferred way of looking at art is with ears peeled to gossip and eyes shut as tightly as possible; Joan Mitchell's work emerges as a counter-discourse of feelings and presence that enters the brain as shocks of color.

Looking at Joan Mitchell now, on Amazon Instant Video even, on that very «screen» that has become the agent of a flattened relationship to producing and experiencing artworks—to all objects in the world, to touch, to «life.» Joan Mitchell, the person, is irresistibly charming with her wildly magnified eyes beneath coke-bottle glasses and sardonic fowl mouth. With gleeful irony, she admits to not being able to see very well, only «from afar,» «not little things.» But then a friend sitting next to her—Joan thinks through her, about her, while walking around. She looks at the landscape and starts to see all of these little potatoes. Rotten potatoes. «Little dead potato.» She looks for that. And she starts to see other things.²



Cercando un Ago, 1957

3 I am referring the television series, *Girls*, created by Lena Dunham, as it has come to be emblematic of a «new» kind of heterosexual feminist expression in an era of increased opportunities for women and subjectivities in which being a woman can appear, but that also coincides with a frustrating reemergence of many forms of sexism that second generation feminists had hoped would be gone by now.

4 Patricia Albers, *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter*, New York, 2011, p. 289.

5 Mitchell's record, set in May 2014, was eclipsed by the sale of a Georgia O'Keeffe painting in November 2014.

6 Letter from Bill Rubin to Joan Mitchell, postmarked May 29, 1952; Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives.

7 Joan Mitchell interviewed by Linda Nochlin, Archives of American Art, April 16, 1986, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-joan-mitchell-12183>.

8 Patricia Albers, see note 4, p. 172.

Mitchell slows down what a feeling looks like, thinks like, remembers, tries to forget — nagging. But she also revs up the velocity of memories clashing. It is slow and fast at the same time, in floods of color thrown into multiversal tension — like simultaneous, multiple big bangs of remembrance, witnessing the core of the creation of multiplicity. The evasion of language. Like our brains attach to our bodies and actions as strands of untwining. At the edge of an undecidable decision. Not a direct registration of «expression» or «action.» Maybe more like a delayed response — to trauma? «Trauma» is too strong — or maybe it isn't. A traumatic response to objects, to the natural landscape, to walking around. Like the way everything that happens in a day can feel on the same painful level; and that way of lying in bed feeling everything at the same time. Or the way the trees and the grass and the water and the sky continue to flow — as clusters of cells without subjective presence — next to and on top of and into each other.

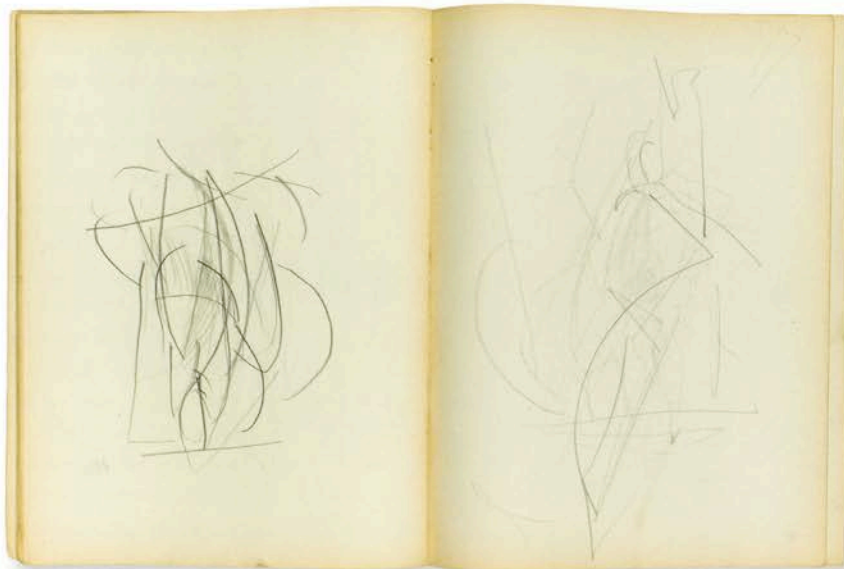
When I've tried to share these thoughts with colleagues who never really thought to spend time with a Mitchell painting, who couldn't tell a good one from a bad one, who probably think she was either overly emotional or maybe just into bright colors and «expression,» I've always tripped over the weird face people make when you say her name. You can tell immediately that she is thought of as one of those, as the horrible combination of words has come shockingly back into fashion, «woman painters.» That she is simply an exemplar of this category that is «celebrated» with no acknowledgement of its relentless categorical self-prescriptions. (It is rather depressing to go

through my mother's era of feminist concerns once again, but it seems necessary, in the age of *Girls* feminism/sexism,³ to discuss, once again, as if for the first time, a series of historical errors regarding «women» and «art careers.») If we are «honest» with ourselves, the biggest obstacle in looking at Mitchell's paintings is shedding clichés related to «expression,» «women,» and assumed techniques of «gestural abstraction» from the sensorium of the viewer.

It is either disheartening or strangely comforting as an artist (as in, through a genealogy of pain) to know that Clement Greenberg, in a role as art advisor to Lawrence Rubin's gallery in Paris, Galerie Lawrence, had Mitchell booted from the gallery right after her first — and commercially successful — exhibition there in 1962.⁴ This was already after she had had six successive solo exhibitions (Cy Twombly had had three) at The Stable Gallery in New York throughout the 1950s and had recently rather ambivalently moved to Paris to live with her boyfriend. She was also making some of the most chaotic and brilliant paintings of her entire oeuvre — works that also travelled to a show in Bern, were stored away for many years until they were exhibited in New York for the first time in 1985, and then ended up reaching her highest auction prices in 2014 (and, as is often repeated in the news, the highest figures for a «female» artist).⁵

For some more texture of the art world in the 1950s: the gallerist's brother, William Rubin, who would eventually become one of the more influential heads of Painting and Sculpture at MoMA during the 20th century, had also been a big fan of Mitchell's work in New York. Somehow he had even acquired a work of hers, and, in a bizarre letter from 1952, says how much he and his friends were enjoying the painting in his apartment but that he was very sorry that because he had not successfully pawned off two pre-war Buffet clarinets, that he was unable to pay for the painting. With the letter was enclosed a 50-dollar down payment, unnegotiated and unnegotiable, to be followed up whenever he was able to sell the clarinets for as much as he thought they were really worth.⁶ This is within the same set of family relations in which Clement Greenberg advised to «get rid of that gestural horror.»⁷ And this is also the same Greenberg who advised New York galleries in the 1950s not to exhibit women since «they'd just get pregnant.»⁸

It is important to point out that it was not only, or even primarily, a nasty mid-century sexism that blocked — or continues to block — Mitchell, but an entire set of art-historical opinions that seem, in the present day, quaint in a way that Joan Mitchell's work does not. For example, in reading Greenberg on the renewed view of «Later Monet»



Doppelseite aus Joan Mitchell's Skizzenbuch | Pages from Joan Mitchell's sketchbook, 1948

9 Clement Greenberg, «Later Monet,» in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance 1957–1969*, ed. by John O'Brian, Chicago, 1993, pp. 3–11.

10 Mitchell, during a filmed interview with Angeliki Haas in Mitchell's studio in Vétheuil, distilled the meaning of one of her «Tree» paintings (a rare occasion for Mitchell to actually state the meaning of a work) by quoting van Gogh: «[Van Gogh writes in a letter that] he gives gratitude to the sunflower because it exists. And I give gratitude to trees because they exist—and that is all that my painting is about.» In: *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell), directed and produced by Angeliki Haas, 1976.

11 Irving Sandler, see note 1, p. 45.

12 Patricia Albers, see note 4, for many stories of de Kooning and Mitchell's friendship.

13 *Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, see note 2.

in 1957, after MoMA's acquisition of *Water Lilies* (1915–1925), we arrive at a point of view that seems entirely dated and, even at the time of its writing, probably felt ham-fisted: «It may not account for, but it helps clarify an increasing dissatisfaction with van Gogh, as it helps justify impatience with an uncritical adoration of Cézanne. Van Gogh is a great artist, but Monet's example serves better even than Cézanne's to remind us that he may not have been a master. He lacked not only solidity of breadth of craft; he also lacked a settled largeness of view. In Monet, on the other hand, we enjoy a world of art, not just a vision, and that world had the variety and space, and even some of the ease, a world should have.»⁹

No wonder Mitchell found Greenberg to be so annoying. Not only was she rightfully high on her own success at the time, but the entire art-historical value matrix of «that toilet seat,» as Mitchell would later refer to him, was upside-down to hers. There isn't space in this essay to do it justice, but Mitchell's particular love of van Gogh actually makes van Gogh look new again—if you are willing to go there.¹⁰ She probably also found Greenberg to be a flat out bore, since he was wafting around in art history and trying to build consensus first around Pollock and then around «color field painting,» and she was trying to make paintings that we would now refer to, for better or worse, as «conceptual.» The same year (1957) as Greenberg's musings on *Water Lilies*, Mitchell is quoted in *ARTnews* as saying, in reference to the way in which she paints with a mind full of affectual thoughts about things in the world—and from memory, rather than working from any sort of observation or notion of direct gestural action—and it still sounds fresh in 2015: «I carry my landscapes around with me.»¹¹ His moment was then and hers is now.

In one of Mitchell's early sketchbooks (1948), from a time when she was living in Brooklyn with her husband-to-be Barney Rosset, one can already see her particular forms emerging as she works out of cubism towards the architectonic of gestures and marks that would amass in her paintings. Drawings of women that resemble Picasso's are followed by lines that bring air into the figure, stretching out the points where lines intersect to represent form, as if loosening the figure itself out of its skin. What is remarkable here is that she does not go for the angular or the jagged—or the glorious abjection of the figure of «women» like what de Kooning would do—but that the body becomes marks hanging on lyrical forms. Like her peers, she moves further and further away from mimetic forms, but in a tangential direction from either geometric abstrac-

tion or what would emerge as the brazen bravado of, say, Pollock. With Mitchell, even this early on, it is as if interstices of lines, rather than snapping to simple geometric grids or exploding out into hysterized grids, stretch the line of the grid like the branch of a tree pushing against a flexible material.

You can imagine, when she moved to New York right after art school and became a «kid» on the scene of the emergent AbEx, what a rush it must have been to talk to de Kooning, sitting on park benches in Washington Square park—or drunk out of their minds in the many opportunities to really go there both in conversation and inebriation.¹²

She had a lot of fun. Drawing oneself out of the limits of a certain expectedness. A certain lyrical gruffness. One of my favorite moments in the Marion Cajori Amazon streaming documentary is when Mitchell says, «I don't paint well out of violence or anger, Hitler doesn't inspire me,» while sitting in the offices of Robert Miller Gallery while her show is opening there wearing a «Robert Miller Gallery» logo sweatshirt and joking that she's trying to be like Jenny Holzer by wearing that sweatshirt. «I also don't like to be manipulated or powered or controlled, and someone telling me what to think ... I don't like work that tells you what to think, rather allows you to feel.»¹³

One of the most difficult aspects of looking at Joan Mitchell, in our very «post-war» inflection of Abjection, German bad-painting (which could also be nicknamed post-Nazi painting), etc., is that we assume that any good painting is a representation of modes of self-hatred, anger, guilt, violence, etc. That overlay onto Mitchell is tempting—a kind of fauvist barf interpretation—but doesn't work.

Frank O'Hara captures the brash peculiarity that was Joan Mitchell on the scene of the New York School in the 1950s in a poem that seems to have been written after saying goodbye to her in Paris, where she settled at the end of the 1950s. It has the mourning tone of celebrating the image of a friendship that can never be lived again:



14 «Far From the Porte des Lilas and the Rue Pergolesse: to Joan Mitchell», in: Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. by Donald Allen, Berkeley, 1995, p. 311. The poem was first published in 1958.

15 Joan Mitchell: *Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, see note 2.

*Ah Joan! there
you are
surrounded by paintings
as in another century you would be wearing
lipstick
(which you wear at night to be old-fashioned,
of it!
with it! out!*

*and the danger of being Proustian
and the danger of being Pasternakesque
and the cops outside the BALAJO frisking
Algerians
who'd been quietly playing «surf» with their
knuckles*

*gee, if I don't stop being so futuristic Elsa Triolet
will be after me!*

*a dream of immense sadness peers through me
as if I were an action poem that couldn't write
and I am leaving for another continent which
is the
same as this one
goodby!¹⁴*

[sic. spelling of «goodby» in original]

Rivière, 1990

The body as memory activator or becoming forms/ marks loosened from the space of the body as representation, to hanging in the air, registered on canvas. This process of being and looking over. Close and far. The painting becomes the object of looking. And memory. No longer anything «outside» of the act. The outside world shut out. Blacked out. Glowing in this room in the landscape. Not looking out. But also without an «inside.» The image of Mitchell working alone at night, glowing, in her studio in Paris. The image of the landscape, brightly lit, in the countryside in Vétheuil, in the middle of the day, totally shut out by linen canvas hung over the windows.

From lines as points of connection of the body freed into pure neural pathways, as being mashed and reformed, as new better brain matter becoming there. That being with the painting as a disappearing of the body. Purely thought energy, like the way the landscape is not one thing. But many things. That it is just there. And being there is always a surprise. Every time new. Even if you've been there a thousand times. Not looking at the landscape. Not representing the landscape. But becoming or recording the being of the landscape. In it. And then making that being become something that can be experienced not there. That being in the landscape that is also having thoughts in or with the landscape and sensations — twirling — as they do when you are alone or with a dear friend not speaking. That lyricism is always met with the interruption of a sardonic remark — so no one notices how sensitive or fragile that being is.

Joan Mitchell says, the thought appearing as if out of nowhere: «Matisse has light. He's one of the few painters with light as well as color. He's fabulous — look at it! C'mon ... Kline has light. And I'm not talking about white ... Mondrian has light. I don't think de Kooning has light, even though he is a brilliant painter.»¹⁵

And as I was walking around the Metropolitan Museum the other day, on my way to visit one of her paintings again, I realized what she was really saying. In *The Three O'Clock Sitting*, a work painted by Matisse in Nice during the winter of 1924, a remarkable light emanates from the canvas. The window overlooking the sea appears as a solid block of dark green, and the light appears miraculously as pink painted on top of this opaque square of color. What appears glowing through the pane of the window is painted on top of a total blackout: this window that is, in its process, first a solid block that arrives as light, as the delicate vibration that happens between pink and green. The winter beach light of three o'clock arrives in paint, producing light through layers of pigment.

This simple, profound lesson from Matisse prismatically thrusts itself into life in Mitchell's work. At her most garish, like in the late painting *Rivière* (1990), streaks of teal, painted after the rest of the painting had dried, rain sparks of light down, as if shocks of after-images from the pink winter afternoon light of Matisse's Nice.

With Matisse's Nice we enter a further fold in Mitchell's peculiarly «conceptual» process. She would refer to places, objects, people—and paintings—as if they were all on the same level of experience and memory. Her obsession with van Gogh is well known, but what I find particular in this often quoted gem from Mitchell—«I don't like fields of sunflowers. I like them alone or, of course, painted by van Gogh,»¹⁶—is that van Gogh is a type of real sunflower.

One of the more peculiar aspects of Joan Mitchell's working process is that she often painted at night, with «electric light.»¹⁷ And that when she eventually moved to her lush estate in Vétheuil in 1968, where Monet had spent three years working in the gardener's cottage as a studio before his eventual move to Giverny, Mitchell would block out the windows in her painting studio with canvas, so that even during the day, she could make it like the night, where nothing of the landscape outside

could be seen.¹⁸ In a 1986 interview with her favorite theorist of her work, Yves Michaud, she relayed the aporia of this process:

*I often paint during the night but I have nothing to do with night. I like the light. I prefer daylight. I also work in the afternoon, I check what I have done the night before. Certain colors change enormously with electric light. Blue is one of them. Yellow is another. They all change, but some really change. I do a bit of guessing. The next day, I walk up to the studio at noon and I am excited but also afraid: is it what I thought it was in terms of color? A painting which works in electric light does not necessarily work in the daylight. I love daylight.*¹⁹

In her blacked-out studio box, in the middle of bright Parisian countryside light, these extraordinary color relationships would emerge—to be «checked» against natural light, and then quickly closed off again from the glowing natural world outside the window. In the middle of the blacked-out night, the florescent lights would glow so harshly, and she would produce real light instead. Cut off from any external visual stimulation other than the painting itself, Mitchell would collapse the act of painting into a perfectly hermetic self-reflexive form. When confronted with the question, «But you don't paint in «series,» you paint pictures, each painting is different?» She acerbically insisted, emphasizing that she worked from paintings—such as what she could see going on in Matisse's technique of producing light—into painting: «No, I paint paintings.»²⁰

16 Yves Michaud, «Conversation with Joan Mitchell,» in: *Joan Mitchell*, New York, 1986, unpag. The original transcription of this interview, with Mitchell's edits and annotations, is in the Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives. Published in full length in: *Joan Mitchell: New Paintings*, exh. cat. Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York, 1986, in this publication see pp. 55–57.

17 Ibid.

18 *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell, see note 9.

19 Yves Michaud, see note 15, here page p. 56.

20 Ibid. The entire passage of the interview reads: «Abstract is not a style. I simply want to make a surface work. This is just a use of space and form: it's an ambivalence of forms and space. Style in paintings has to do with labels. Lots of painters are obsessed with inventing something. When I was young, it never occurred to me to invent. All I wanted to do was paint. I was so and still I am in such adulation of great painters. If you study a Matisse, the way paint is put on and the way he puts on white, that's painting technique. I wanted to put on paint like Matisse. I worked hard at that a very long time ago. Someone said to me recently with surprise: «But you don't paint in «series,» you paint pictures, each painting is different?» And I thought: no, I paint paintings.» See here p. 57.



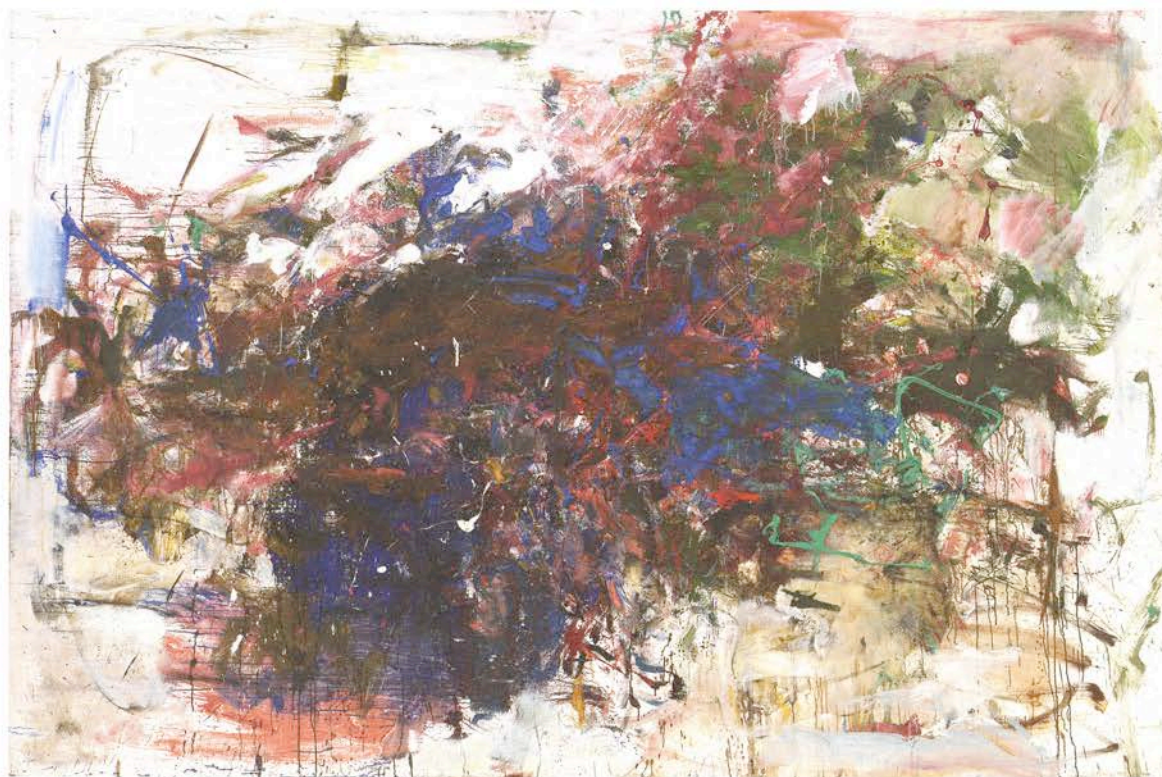
Untitled, 1961

Gemälde malen

Ken Okiishi

1 Irving Sandler, «Mitchell Paints a Picture», in: *ARTnews*, Bd. 56, Nr. 6, Oktober 1957, S. 45.

Grandes Carrières,
1961-1962



Voll zögernder Nervosität mache ich mich daran, meine Gedanken zum Werk von Joan Mitchell in Worte zu fassen. Seit jeher bedeutet ihre Arbeit für mich ein inniges Erlebnis. Die seltenen Gelegenheiten, einem ihrer Gemälde im Metropolitan Museum oder MoMA in New York zu begegnen, waren stets Momente geheimen, beinahe beschämenden puren Glücks vor dieser fugenartigen Anordnung von Gedanken und Affekten (das verbotene Wort «Gefühle» sollte hier Verwendung finden, ließe es sich mit der Spannung von Empfindung und Erinnern aussprechen, anstatt mit sentimentaler Anhänglichkeit). In stiller Anspannung bewegte ich mich im Geiste dorthin, in einem Ansturm hormongesteuerten Entzückens und wie auf Aufforderung zum Tanz mit den Erinnerungen, die im Körper des Gemäldes und zugleich in meinem eigenen Innersten eingespeichert sind. Schwermut ist hier zugleich eine Form ekstatischer Hyperaktivität. Auch ertappe ich mich dabei mit-zudirigieren, als hörte ich Bach für mich allein – wie Tatjana Nikolajewas melodische Schwerkraft und Artikulation des Kontrapunkts als postverbale Bewegung von Synapsen, Hormonen und Muskeln, befreit aus ihrem Gerüst, als «körperliche» Wesen zu verstehen sind, oder wie man Glenn Gould auf manchen Einspielungen hören kann, wenn er bei seinem eigenen Klavierspiel mitsingt. Eine Art von Tanzen mit sich selbst und ein Singen für sich selbst – etwas, das unser Schamgefühl überschreitet, weil es in diesen euphorischen

Energieschüben freigesetzt wird, bei denen der Gedanke daran, dabei beobachtet zu werden, seinen Schrecken verliert.

Beim Betrachten eines der großartigen Gemälde von Joan Mitchell bedarf es im Grunde keiner Worte. Die Gemälde erreichen ein Stadium andauernder Freude, die keine andere Bedeutung hat als die, dort zu sein, zusammen mit dem Gemälde, und teilzuhaben an dieser Freude. Doch erfahren wir dies in dem Wissen, dass die Freude dort bleibt, in dem Gemälde. Wie ein Ort, den man besucht hat, bleibt die Empfindung zusammen mit der Erinnerung dort, wie Kindheitserinnerungen an einen Ferienort oder an manche Spaziergänge. Die Art der Freude, die dort bleibt, die einen nicht begleitet: das Paradies, falls dieses Wort geäußert werden kann, ohne dass es sich pathetisch anhört. Aber es ist diesem Gemälde beigefügt, genau dieser Farbe und Leinwand dort. Das Paradies kann man nicht mitnehmen. Wenn man niemals dort gewesen ist, kann man nicht einmal Fotografien davon betrachten, ohne etwas anderes als Sehnsucht oder Abweisung zu erfahren. Mitchell «trägt ihre Landschaften in sich» – wir können dies nicht.¹

Heißt auch das Paradies: dass es das «Ich» desorganisiert, da man zum selben Ding wird, wie etwa eine blutrote Pflanze neben einem leuchtend blauen Vogel neben einem Stück Dreck und dem Geruch von Lavendel und Gülle? Dass all diese Dinge hier irgendwie zusammenkommen, nebeneinander, übereinander, und du bist auch dabei, als ein Ding mitten in dieser Anordnung, die da stattfindet, und alles ist beisammen, und dass es stattfindet ist die Art und Weise, auf die es stattfindet, und so wird es zu diesem Gefühl, eher inmitten als darin zu sein?

In unserer gegenwärtigen, hochmütig zynischen «Kunstwelt», in der jedes Atom des Seins darauf aus ist, sich in einer Art cyberfeudalen Ordnung fortwährend neu zu positionieren; in der alles danach strebt, sich perfekt einem andauernd veränderlichen Bildschirm voller Info-Sprays anzupassen, auf dem suggeriert wird, Kunst sei eine rein textuelle Form von Datenbestand, und in der die bevorzugte Weise der Kunstbetrachtung darin besteht, die Ohren für Klatsch offen zu halten und zugleich die Augen so fest wie möglich zu schließen; in dieser Welt tritt Joan Mitchells Werk als Gegendiskurs von Gefühlen und Präsenz hervor, der in Form von Farberschütterungen in das Gehirn eindringt.

Jetzt, da ich mir Joan Mitchell ansehe, ausgerechnet auf Amazon Instant Video, eben dem «Schirm», dem Agenten verflachter Beziehungen zu Kunst-Produktion und Kunst-Erleben – und überhaupt zu allen Gegenständen in der Welt,

2 Joan Mitchell: *Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, Regie: Marion Cajori, New York: Arthouse Films, 1992, Amazon Instant Video, <http://www.amazon.com/Joan-Mitchell-Portrait-Abstract-Painter/dp/B003ELMR8U>.

3 Ich beziehe mich auf die Fernsehserie *Girls* von Lena Dunham, da diese in einer Ära scheinbar wachsender Chancen und neuer Subjektrollen für Frauen geradezu emblematisch für eine «neue» Art einer heterosexuell feministischen Ausdrucksweise geworden ist, die allerdings ebenfalls eine frustrierende Wiedergeburt zahlreicher Formen von Sexismus beinhaltet, deren Überwindung Feministinnen der zweiten Generation längst erhofft hatten.

4 Patricia Albers, *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter*, New York 2011, S. 289.

5 Der Rekord vom Mai 2014 wurde im November 2014 durch den Verkauf eines Gemäldes von Georgia O'Keeffe überboten.

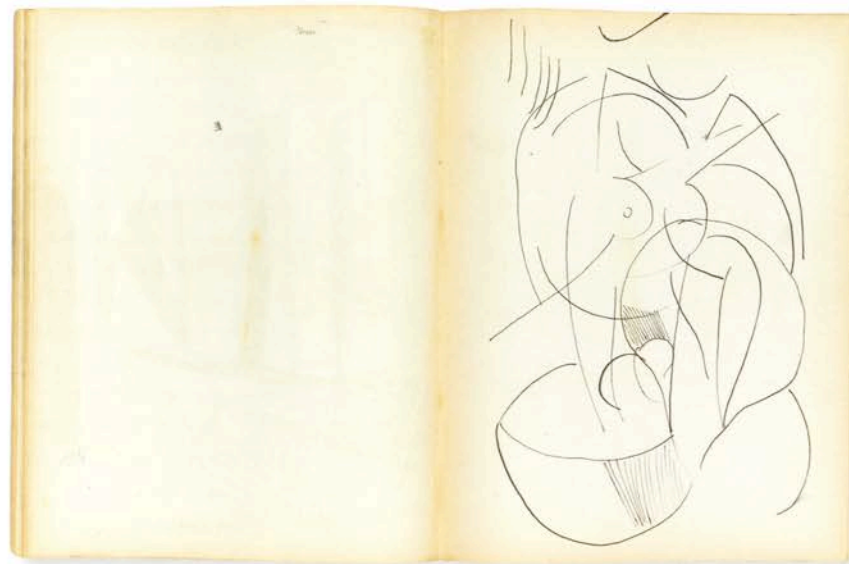
zu Berührung, zum Leben schlechthin. Als Person ist Joan Mitchell unwiderstehlich charmant mit ihren unwahrscheinlich vergrößerten Augen hinter Brillengläsern wie Colaflaschenböden und ihrer mokanten Kodderschmauze. Mit schadenfreudiger Ironie gesteht sie ein, nicht gut sehen zu können, lediglich «von Weitem», «nicht die kleinen Sachen». Es gibt jedoch eine Freundin, die neben ihr sitzt – Joan denkt durch sie und über diese nach, während sie umherläuft. Sie betrachtet die Landschaft und entdeckt nach und nach all die kleinen Kartoffeln. Faulige Kartoffeln. «Eine kleine tote Kartoffel». Danach sucht sie. Auch andere Dinge fallen ihr nach und nach auf.²

Mitchell verlangsamt, wie ein Gefühl aussieht, wie es denkt, erinnert, zu vergessen sucht – quälend. Allerdings erhöht sie auch die Geschwindigkeit aufeinanderprallender Erinnerungen. Langsam und schnell zugleich, Farbfluten, die sich zu einer mehrpoligen Spannung aufbauen – wie simultane, multiple Urknalle des Gedenkens, die den Kern der Schöpfung von Vielfältigkeit bezeugen. Die Vermeidung von Sprache. Wie unsere Hirne sich wie Fäden der Entwirrung an unsere Körper und Handlungen heften. Am Rand einer unentscheidbaren Entscheidung. Keine direkte Registrierung von «Ausdruck» oder «Handlung». Vielleicht handelt es sich eher um eine verzögerte Reaktion – auf ein Trauma? «Trauma» ist zu drastisch – vielleicht aber auch nicht. Eine traumatische Reaktion auf Gegenstände, auf die natürliche Landschaft, auf das eigene Umherlaufen. Wie es möglich ist, alle Geschehnisse eines Tages auf dieselbe schmerzhafteste Weise fühlen und, im Bett liegend, alles auf einmal spüren zu können? Oder wie Bäume und Gras und Wasser und Himmel immer weiter strömen wie Schwärme ohne subjektive Gegenwart: neben-, über- und ineinander.

Wann immer ich auch versucht habe, diese Gedanken mit Kollegen zu teilen, die nie ernsthaft Zeit mit einem Gemälde von Mitchell verbracht haben, die ein gutes nicht von einem schlechten unterscheiden können und die wahrscheinlich denken, sie wäre entweder übermäßig emotional oder habe schlicht ein Faible für leuchtende Farben und «Expressivität», so bin ich noch jedes Mal über den sonderbaren Gesichtsausdruck gestolpert, den die Leute aufsetzen, wenn Mitchells Name fällt. Sie gilt ohne Frage als das, was die grausame Doppelbeschreibung, die schockierenderweise wieder in Mode gekommen ist, besagt: als ein «weiblicher Maler». Sie ist schlicht ein Exemplar aus dieser Kategorie, noch dazu ein «gefeiertes», ohne jeden Hinweis auf die unerbittlichen kategorialen Selbst-Vorschriften. (Es ist äußerst deprimierend, die feministischen Themen der Generation meiner Mutter erneut abarbeiten zu müssen. Jedoch scheint es notwendig zu sein, in der gegenwärtigen Ära des *Girl-Feminismus/Sexismus*³ wieder Debatten über einige historische Irrtümer hinsichtlich der Begriffe «Frau» und «Künstlerkarriere» zu führen, als seien sie nie zuvor geführt worden.) Seien wir «ehrlich»: Das größte Hindernis beim Betrachten von Mitchells Gemälden besteht darin, die Klischees und Vorurteile bezüglich «Expressivität», «Frauen» und unterstellter Techniken wie «gestischer Abstraktion» aus dem Sensorium des Betrachters zu tilgen.

Als Künstler ist es entweder entmutigend oder aber seltsam tröstlich (wie durch eine Genealogie des Schmerzes) zu wissen, dass Clement Greenberg in beratender Funktion für Lawrence Rubins Pariser Galerie Mitchell nach ihrer ersten und kommerziell erfolgreichen Ausstellung in der Galerie Lawrence im Jahr 1962 dort hinauswerfen ließ.⁴ Zu diesem Zeitpunkt hatte sie in den 1950er Jahren bereits sechs aufeinanderfolgende Einzelausstellungen (Cy Twombly brachte es auf drei) in der Galerie The Stable in New York und war zunächst eher halbherzig nach Paris gezogen, um dort mit ihrem Freund zusammenzuleben. Auch stand sie im Begriff, einige der chaotischsten und zugleich brilliantesten Gemälde ihres gesamten Œuvres zu schaffen – Werke, die in einer Ausstellung in Bern gezeigt wurden, anschließend für viele Jahre in Magazinen verschwanden, bis sie 1985 in New York erstmals ausgestellt wurden und schließlich im Jahr 2014 Höchstpreise auf Auktionen erzielten (die zugleich, wie häufig in der Presse hervorgehoben wurde, die höchsten jemals von einem «weiblichen» Künstler erzielten Preise waren).⁵

Die Kunstwelt der 1950er Jahre hat noch mehr zu bieten: Der Bruder des Galeristen, William Rubin, der letztlich zu einem der einflussreichsten



Doppelseite aus Joan Mitchells Skizzenbuch | Pages from Joan Mitchell's sketchbook, 1948

6 Brief von William (Bill) Rubin an Joan Mitchell, Poststempel vom 29. Mai 1952; Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives.

7 Joan Mitchell im Interview mit Linda Nochlin, Archives of American Art, 16. April 1986, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-joan-mitchell-12183>.

8 Patricia Albers, wie Anm. 4, S.172.

Untitled,
1954



Leiter der Abteilung Malerei und Skulptur am MoMA im 20. Jahrhundert wurde, war ebenfalls ein großer Befürworter von Mitchells Arbeit, solange sie noch in New York lebte. Auf unerfindliche Weise hatte er sogar eines ihrer Gemälde erworben. In einem skurrilen Brief aus dem Jahr 1952 berichtet er, wie sehr er und seine Freunde es genossen haben, das Gemälde in seiner Wohnung zu haben, und wie leid es ihm täte, dass es ihm nicht gelungen sei, die zwei Buffet-Klarinetten aus der Vorkriegszeit zu verkaufen, und er deswegen das Bild nicht bezahlen könne. Dem Brief lag eine Anzahlung von 50 Dollar bei, nicht vereinbart und nicht verhandelbar, mehr werde folgen, sobald er die Klarinetten zu dem seiner Meinung nach richtigen Preis veräußert habe.⁶ Das spielte sich in demselben Netz von Familienbanden ab, in dem Clement Greenberg den Ratschlag erteilte, «diesen gestischen Horror loszuwerden».⁷ Und es handelt sich um denselben Greenberg, der New Yorker Galerien in den 1950er Jahren riet, keine Frauen auszustellen, weil «sie doch nur schwanger werden».⁸

Es war nicht ausschließlich, nicht einmal vorwiegend, ein um die Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts vorherrschender hässlicher Sexismus, der Mitchell im Wege stand (oder noch heute im Weg steht), sondern vielmehr eine komplette Klasse von kunsthistorischen Meinungen, die heute auf eine Weise altertümlich anmuten, wie es Joan Mitchells Werk nicht tut. Liest man zum Beispiel Greenbergs erneuerte Sichtweise auf den «späten Monet» aus dem Jahr 1957, nachdem das MoMA dessen *Seerosen* (1915–1925) erworben hatte, so finden wir eine Perspektive, die vollkommen veraltet erscheint und vermutlich schon zur Zeit ihrer Abfassung ungenau wirkte: «Auch wenn sie die wachsende Unzufriedenheit mit van Gogh nicht begründen kann, trägt sie doch dazu bei, sie zu erklären, und sie trägt auch dazu bei, die Ungeduld angesichts der unkritischen Bewunderung Cézannes zu begründen. Van Gogh war ein großer Künstler, doch das Beispiel Monets kann uns noch besser als dasjenige Cézannes vor Augen führen, dass er nicht unbedingt ein Meister war. Ihm mangelte nicht nur die solide und umfassende handwerkliche Technik, sondern auch eine ruhige Weite des Blicks. Monet dagegen gibt uns nicht nur eine Vision, sondern eine Welt der Kunst, und diese Welt besitzt die Vielfalt und die Geräumigkeit, und auch etwas von der Leichtigkeit, die eine Welt besitzen sollte.»⁹

Es erstaunt nicht, dass Mitchell Greenberg als äußerst ärgerlich empfand. Nicht nur schwebte sie zu Recht auf der Wolke ihres damaligen Erfolgs, auch stand die Wertematrix «dieser Toilettenbrille», wie Mitchell ihn später titulierte, in diametralem Gegensatz zu der ihren. Es führte über den Rahmen dieses Essays hinaus, dem gerecht zu werden, aber Mitchells besondere Liebe zu van Gogh lässt van Gogh in einem neuen Licht erscheinen – so man gewillt ist, sich darauf einzulassen.¹⁰ Wahrscheinlich hielt sie Greenberg auch schlicht für einen Langweiler, weil dieser in der Kunstgeschichte umherschwadronierte und versuchte, einen Konsens für Jackson Pollock und alsbald für die «Farbfeldmalerei» zu stiften, wohingegen sie den Versuch unternahm, Gemälde zu schaffen, die wir heute – wohl oder übel – als «konzeptuell» bezeichnen würden. Ebenfalls 1957, als Greenberg seine Gedankenspiele zu den *Seerosen* veröffentlichte, wird Mitchell in *ARTnews* zitiert, und zwar mit Blick auf ihre Malweise, die darlegt, wie ihr Verstand eher mit affektgesteuerten Gedanken über die Dinge in der Welt und aus der Erinnerung schafft und eben nicht aus der Beobachtung oder Vorstellung direkter, gestischer Ausführung. Ihre Aussage hat bis ins Jahr 2015 nichts von ihrer Frische eingebüßt: «Ich trage meine Landschaften in mir.»¹¹ Er hatte damals seine Zeit, ihre ist heute gekommen.

9 Clement Greenberg, «Der späte Monet», in: *Die Essenz der Moderne. Ausgewählte Essays und Kritiken*, hg. von Karlheinz Lüdeking, Hamburg 2009, S. 238.

10 Während eines Film-Interviews mit Angeliki Haas in Mitchells Atelier in Vétheuil hat Mitchell die Bedeutung eines ihrer *Tree*-Gemälde (eine der seltenen Gelegenheiten, bei denen sie tatsächlich die Bedeutung einer Arbeit erklärt) auf den Punkt gebracht, indem sie van Gogh zitiert: «[Van Gogh schreibt in einem Brief, dass] er der Sonnenblume Dankbarkeit entgegenbringt, weil sie existiert. Und ich bin den Bäumen dankbar, weil sie existieren – und nur darum geht es in meiner Malerei.» In: *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell), Regie und Produktion: Angeliki Haas, 1976.

11 Irving Sandler, wie Anm. 1, S. 45.

12 Siehe Patricia Albers, wie Anm. 4, für zahlreiche Anekdoten zur Freundschaft zwischen de Kooning und Mitchell.

13 *Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, wie Anm. 2.

14 «Far From the Porte des Lilas and the Rue Pergolèse: to Joan Mitchell», in: Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, hg. von Donald Allen, Berkeley 1995, S. 311. Das Gedicht wurde erstmals 1958 veröffentlicht. (Übers. V. E.)

In einem der frühen Skizzenbücher Mitchells, entstanden 1948 zu einer Zeit, zu der sie mit ihrem späteren Ehemann Barney Rosset in Brooklyn lebte, sind bereits die Ansätze der charakteristischen Formen zu erkennen, die sie aus dem Kubismus herausgearbeitet und zu einer Architektonik der Gesten verarbeitet hat. Auf Zeichnungen von Frauen, die denen Picassos ähneln, folgen Linien, die Luft in die Figur bringen, indem die Schnittpunkte der Linien so gestreckt werden, dass sie Formen darstellen – als lösten sie die Figur als solche aus ihrer Haut. Bemerkenswert daran ist, dass sie sich nicht für das Kantige oder das Gezackte entscheidet – oder gar die ruhmreiche Abjektion (Abject art) der Figur der «Frauen», wie sie de Kooning pflegte –, sondern dass die Körper zu Zeichen werden, gehalten von lyrischen Formen. Wie ihre Kollegen entfernt sie sich zusehends von der mimetischen Form, allerdings in eine Richtung, die eher tangential zur geometrischen Abstraktion zu betrachten ist oder zu dem, was sich als dreister Wagemut etwa eines Pollock herausstellen sollte. Bei Mitchell ist bereits zu diesem frühen Zeitpunkt zu erkennen, wie Fügen von Linien, die weder in geometrische Muster einrasten noch in hysterisierte Gitternetze explodieren, die Linien eines Rasters dehnen wie Zweige eines Baums, der gegen ein nachgiebiges Material schlägt.

Man kann sich vorstellen, was für ein Rausch es für die junge Künstlerin gewesen sein muss, die nach abgeschlossener Hochschulausbildung nach New York gezogen war und nun als «kid» die Bühne des aufkommenden Abstrakten Expressionismus betrat, sich mit de Kooning auf einer Parkbank am Washington Square unterhielt oder im Gespräch oder Rausch trunken die Möglichkeiten spürte, an ihre Grenzen und darüber hinaus zu gehen.¹²

Sie hatte jede Menge Spaß. Es ging darum, sich den Grenzen einer gewissen Erwartungshaltung zu entziehen, es ging um eine bestimmte lyrische Ruppigkeit. Eine meiner Lieblingsszenen in der Dokumentation von Marion Cajori auf Amazon Instant Video ist die, in der Mitchell sagt: «Ich male nicht gut aus einer Stimmung der Gewalttätigkeit oder des Zorns heraus; Hitler inspiriert mich nicht.» Dabei sitzt sie anlässlich ihrer Eröffnung ihrer dortigen Ausstellung in einem Büroraum der Robert Miller Gallery in einem Sweatshirt mit einem Robert-Miller-Gallery-Logo und scherzt, dass sie, indem sie das Sweatshirt trägt, versuchte, Jenny Holzer zu sein. «Auch mag ich es nicht, manipuliert, in Machtspiele verwickelt, kontrolliert zu werden oder wenn mir jemand sagt, was ich zu tun und zu lassen habe ... Ich mag keine Kunst,

die einem sagt, was man zu denken hat, sondern eine, die es einem erlaubt zu fühlen.»¹³

Einer der schwierigsten Aspekte bei der Betrachtung von Joan Mitchell – in unserer allzu sehr von der Nachkriegszeit geprägten Abjektion, der schlechten deutschen Malerei (die den Spitznamen Post-Nazi-Malerei führen könnte) usw. – besteht darin, dass wir davon ausgehen, dass gute Malerei immer eine Darstellung möglicher Varianten von Selbsthass, Zorn, Schuld, Gewalt usw. beinhaltet. Wir sind versucht, Mitchell damit zu überlagern – in einer Art fauvistischer Kotz-Interpretation –, doch greift dies nicht.

Frank O'Hara trifft die forsche Eigenart, die Joan Mitchell in der Szene um die New York School in den 1950er Jahren zeigte, bestens in einem Gedicht, das daherkommt, als sei es nach ihrem Abschied aus New York und ihrem Umzug nach Paris Ende der 1950er geschrieben worden. Das Gedicht ist im Ton der Trauer verfasst, der das Bild einer Freundschaft zelebriert, die nie wieder gelebt werden kann:

*Ah, Joan! da bist du
umgeben von Gemälden
wie in einem anderen Jahrhundert, in dem du
Lippenstift trügest
(den du des Nachts trägst, um altmodisch zu
sein, davon! dabei! fort!*

*und auf die Gefahr hin, Proustisch zu sein
und auf die Gefahr hin, Pasternakesk zu sein
und die Bullen draußen vor dem BALAJO filzen
Algerier die still vor sich hin mit ihren
Fingerknöcheln «Surf» spielen*

*jemine, wenn ich weiter so futuristisch bin, ist
Elsa Triolet
bald hinter mir her!*

*ein Traum von immenser Traurigkeit durch-
dringt mich mit seinem Blick
als sei ich ein Aktionsgedicht das nicht schreiben
könnte
und ich mache mich auf den Weg zu einem
anderen Kontinent der
derselbe ist wie dieser
goodby¹⁴*

[sic. Schreibweise von «goodby» im Original]

15 Joan Mitchell: *Portrait of an Abstract Painter*, wie Anm. 2.

16 Yves Michaud, «Conversation with Joan Mitchell», in: *Joan Mitchell*, New York 1986, unpag. Die originale Transkription dieses Interviews, die auch Mitchells Bearbeitungen und Anmerkungen enthält, befindet sich im Archiv der Joan Mitchell Foundation; Joan Mitchell Papers, Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives. In dieser Publikation erstmals vollständig in deutscher Übersetzung, siehe S. 51–53.

Der Körper in der Rolle, das Gedächtnis in Gang zu setzen oder das Werden von Formen/Zeichen, die aus dem Raum des Körpers als Repräsentation gelöst werden, in der Luft hängend, eingeschrieben, in die Leinwand eingetragen. Es ist der Prozess des Seins und des Prüfens. Nah und fern. Das Gemälde wird zum Objekt des Sehens. Und des Gedächtnisses. Nicht mehr etwas «außerhalb» der Handlung. Die Außenwelt ausgeschlossen. Verdunkelt. Glühend in jenem Zimmer in der Landschaft. Ohne einen Blick nach draußen. Doch auch ohne ein «Innen». Das Bild einer einsam arbeitenden Mitchell, bei Nacht, glühend in ihrem Atelier in Paris. Das Bild der Landschaft, hell erleuchtet, auf dem Land bei Vétheuil, am helllichten Tag, vollkommen ausgesperrt von der über die Fenster gehängten Leinwand.

Von Linien als Anknüpfungspunkten des Körpers, entlassen in die Freiheit reiner, neuraler Pfade, als vermischte und neu gebildete, als neue, bessere Hirnmasse, die dort entsteht. Jenes Zusammensein mit dem Gemalten als ein Verschwinden des Körpers. Rein gedachte Energie, wie eine Landschaft nicht ein einzelnes Ding ist. Sondern viele Dinge. Die einfach da ist. Und das Da-Sein ist immer eine Überraschung. Jedes Mal neu. Auch wenn man schon tausendmal da gewesen ist. Die Landschaft nicht betrachtend. Die Landschaft nicht darstellend. Sondern das Sein der Landschaft werdend oder verzeichnend. In ihr. Und es dann erreichen, dass jenes Sein zu etwas wird, das nicht dort erfahren werden kann. Dass in der Landschaft zu sein heißt, auch Gedanken zu haben in oder mit der Landschaft und Empfindungen – wirbelnd –, wie sie das tun, wenn man allein ist oder

bei einer guten Freundin, die gerade nicht spricht. Jene Lyrik wird stets mit einer mokanten Bemerkung unterbrochen – damit niemand bemerkt, wie empfindlich oder zerbrechlich jenes Sein ist.

Joan Mitchell sagt, der Gedanke taucht wie aus dem Nichts auf: «Matisse hat Licht. Er ist einer der wenigen Maler, die sowohl über Licht als auch über Farbe verfügen. Er ist sagenhaft – schau dir das an! Komm schon ... Kline hat Licht. Und ich spreche nicht vom Weiß ... Mondrian hat Licht. Ich denke nicht, dass de Kooning Licht hat, obwohl er ein ausgezeichnete Maler ist.»¹⁵

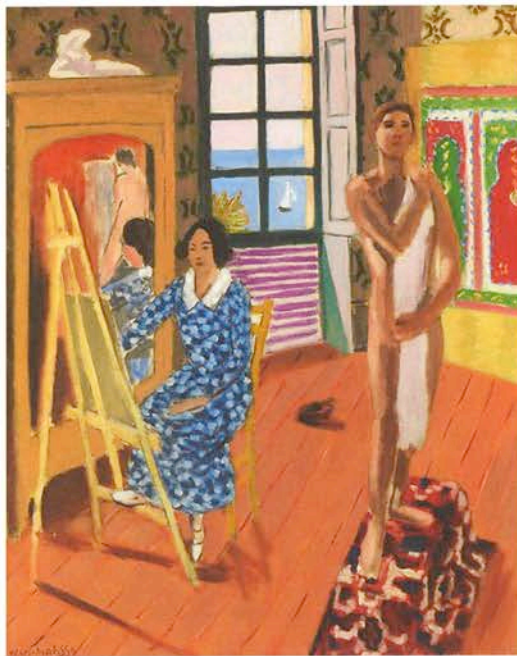
Als ich also durch das Metropolitan Museum schlenderte, unterwegs zu meinem neuerlichen Besuch eines ihrer Gemälde, ging mir auf, was sie da eigentlich gesagt hatte. *Die Drei-Uhr-Sitzung*, ein Gemälde von Matisse, gemalt im Winter 1924 in Nizza, verströmt ein bemerkenswertes Licht. Das Fenster aufs Meer erscheint als ein fester Block aus Dunkelgrün, und das Licht taucht wundersam als Pink auf, das oberhalb dieses undurchsichtigen Rechtecks aus Farbe aufgetragen ist. Was durch die Fensterscheibe zu glühen scheint, ist in Wirklichkeit oberhalb einer kompletten Verdunkelung gemalt worden: das Fenster, welches während dieses Prozesses zunächst ein fester Block ist, der sodann als Licht daherkommt, als die zarte Schwingung, die zwischen Pink und Grün stattfindet. Das winterliche Strandlicht von drei Uhr am Nachmittag kommt in der Farbe an und erzeugt Licht durch Lagen von Pigment hindurch.

Matisse' einfache und doch tief greifende Lektion drängt prismatisch durch das Werk von Joan Mitchell zu neuem Leben. In ihren grellsten Momenten, wie etwa in dem späten Gemälde *Rivière* (1990), regnet es Streifen aus Blaugrün über das ansonsten bereits getrocknete Bild: Lichtfunken, als handelte es sich um Stöße von Nachbildern jenes pinken winterlichen Nachmittagslichts aus Matisse' Nizza.

Mit dem Nizza, in dem Matisse gemalt hat, betreten wir eine weitere Stufe in Mitchells eigenem «konzeptuellem» Prozess. Sie pflegt Verweise auf Orte, Gegenstände und Menschen – aber auch Gemälde – zu geben, als befänden sich diese sämtlich auf derselben Erfahrungs- und Gedächtnisebene. Ihre Obsession mit van Gogh ist bekannt, dennoch finde ich an diesem Kleinod von einem Zitat – «Ich mag keine Sonnenblumenfelder. Ich mag sie einzeln oder, selbstverständlich, wenn sie von van Gogh gemalt sind»¹⁶ – besonders bemerkenswert, dass eine Sonnenblume von van Gogh demnach eine Spezies wirklicher Sonnenblumen ist.

Einer der eigenartigen Aspekte an Mitchells Arbeitsweise ist, dass sie oft nachts und bei

Henri Matisse,
Die Drei-Uhr-Sitzung |
The Three O'Clock
Sitting, 1924



17 Ebda.

18 *American Artists in Europe* (Alice Hutchins, Douglas James Johnson, Joan Mitchell), wie Anm. 9, 1976.

19 Yves Michaud, wie Anm. 16, hier S. 52. (Übers. V.E.)

20 Ebda. Der gesamte Abschnitt aus dem Interview lautet: «Abstraktion ist kein Stil. Ich möchte schlicht eine Oberflächenarbeit schaffen. Das beinhaltet nur die Verwendung von Raum und Form: Es ist eine Ambivalenz von Formen und Raum. Stil in der Malerei hat mit Etiketten zu tun. Viele Maler sind von dem Gedanken besessen, etwas erfinden zu müssen. Als ich jung war, ist es mir nie in den Sinn gekommen zu erfinden. Alles, was ich wollte, war malen. Ich habe die großen Maler so verehrt und tue das noch immer. Wenn man Matisse studiert, die Art und Weise, wie die Farbe aufgetragen wird, und die Art, wie er Weiß aufträgt, das ist Maltechnik. Ich wollte Farbe auftragen wie Matisse. Ich habe hart daran gearbeitet – vor sehr langer Zeit. Vor Kurzem sagte jemand zu mir voller Überraschung: «Aber Sie malen nicht in «Serien», Sie malen Bilder – ist jedes Gemälde anders?» Und ich dachte: Nein, ich male «Gemälde.» Hier S. 53.

«elektrischem Licht» gemalt hat;¹⁷ aber auch, dass sie, als sie schließlich im Jahr 1968 auf ihr Landgut in Vétheuil zog – wo Monet drei Jahre die Gärtnerhütte als Atelier genutzt hatte, bevor er schließlich nach Giverny wechselte –, wiederum ihre Atelierfenster mit Leinwand verhängte, auf dass sie auch bei Tag nächtliche Verhältnisse herstellen konnte und die Landschaft draußen vor den Fenstern nicht zu sehen war.¹⁸ In einem Interview aus dem Jahr 1986 mit dem von ihr bevorzugten Theoretiker ihrer Arbeit, Yves Michaud, hat sie die Aporie dieses Arbeitsprozesses erläutert:

Ich male häufig nachts, aber um die Nacht als solche geht es mir nicht. Ich mag das Licht. Ich bevorzuge Tageslicht. Ich arbeite auch am Nachmittag, dann prüfe ich, was ich in der Nacht zuvor gemalt habe. Bestimmte Farben ändern sich enorm in elektrischem Licht. Blau ist eine davon. Gelb ist eine andere. Sie wechseln alle, aber manche verändern sich richtiggehend. So muss ich ein bisschen raten. Am Tag darauf laufe ich mittags in mein Atelier, aufgeregt, aber auch ängstlich: Sind die Farben so, wie ich gedacht habe? Ein Gemälde, das bei elektrischem Licht stimmig ist, muss deswegen bei Tageslicht noch lange nicht stimmig sein. Ich liebe Tageslicht.¹⁹

In ihrem abgedunkelten Atelierkasten, inmitten des hellen Lichts der Landschaft der Pariser Umgebung, treten diese außerordentlichen Farbbeziehungen zutage, werden bei Tageslicht «geprüft» und sodann rasch wieder von der glühenden natürlichen Außenwelt jenseits des Fensters abgeschottet. Mitten in der abgedunkelten Nacht leuchten die Neonröhren grell, und genau unter diesen Umständen stellte sie immer wieder wirkliches Licht her. Abgeschnitten von jeglichen Reizen von außen faltete Mitchell immer wieder den Malakt zu einer vollendet hermetischen, selbstreflexiven Form zusammen. Auf die Frage: «Aber Sie malen nicht in «Serien», Sie malen Bilder – ist jedes Gemälde anders?», insistierte sie bissig, dass sie nach Gemälden arbeite, verwies auf ihre Erkenntnisse über Matisse' Technik der Lichterzeugung, und wie sie diese in ihren Gemälden verarbeite: «Nein, ich male Gemälde.»²⁰

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Ken Okiishi und Kirsty Bell
im Gespräch

KB Tell me a bit about the background and context of the “Porous Feedback” project at the Arbeiterkammer in Vienna.

KO The Arbeiterkammer is a place where everyone employed in Austria can go if they have problems in their job situation, but they also have a cultural mission and commission artists to make projects. It’s a complicated space, but I wanted to use this as an opportunity. I had just done a solo booth with Pilar Corrias at the Frieze Art Fair in London, and was then going directly into this very different, completely non-commercial context to produce this artwork. I wanted to see how far the different contexts can stretch the perception and reading of the “gesture/data” (2013–ongoing) work. In terms of my personal history, my family are psychologists over three generations, so the specific context of the Arbeiterkammer was interesting to me as a social service, in its relationship to this larger project that I was doing. “gesture/data” had become something like an anthropology of the circulation of images and the changes in our perception to things, as the inside and outside of the screen surfaces we are always tapping and sliding has become a dominant mode. In the art fair context, it’s the financialised circulation of paintings and affects—or something like that—whereas in this Arbeiterkammer frame it’s the psychological state, and also a specific financial precarity.

KB Is it in a lobby waiting room area?

KO Yes. One of the specific architectural issues of the Arbeiterkammer space is that it’s very compressed. It’s also very difficult because it was the original site of the Rothschild mansion, a Jewish Austrian family—some of them escaped, but some of them were murdered. And—this is the part that is impossible to deal with—it was the site where, during the Nazi time, Jewish families would be processed for sending to concentration camps. Because of the way history is done now, when you walk in into the building, the information is fairly visible—it is not hidden. It’s a subject that I felt I couldn’t really deal with, but on all of its different levels it’s a very charged site. So one of my ideas was to create porosity visually, and formally, and architecturally through using this screen medium that I’ve been working with.

KB Am I right in saying that rather than working with found footage or footage that you’d previously accumulated, you generated content specifically for these works?

KO The entire series of works that fall into “gesture/data”—the project at the Museum Ludwig in 2014 was also under this umbrella—keep shifting contexts and the potential of what they’re doing. The base form is a bunch of VHS tapes that were in my parents’ basement. They would record TV shows in the 1980s and 90s, but would never watch them. On a formal level, when you play them back twenty years later, these VHS tapes are quite beautiful: the red and green separate and make these beautiful colours, for example. I started looking at them and working on them, and recording over different sections with cable TV in New York. It was a digital recording coming through cable, which had a certain kind of surface quality, very luminescent. So I took the original footage and recorded over it in sections, and basically created these collages while watching television.

KB Is it a kind of painterly process for you?

KO Exactly, it is watching television as painting! The screens I eventually used—industrial digital display signage—can’t read an enormous file cleanly, so I had to transfer them to DV tape and then

Übersetzt von Wilfried Prantner

KB Erzähl mir ein wenig vom Hintergrund und Kontext des Projekts »Porous Feedback«¹ in der Wiener Arbeiterkammer.

KO Die Arbeiterkammer ist eine Interessenvertretung und Beratungsstelle für alle Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer in Österreich. Aber sie hat auch eine kulturelle Mission und vergibt Projektaufträge an Künstlerinnen und Künstler. Es ist ein schwieriger Raum, aber ich wollte ihn als Gelegenheit nutzen. Ich hatte gerade einen Solostand bei Pilar Corrias auf der Frieze Art Fair in London gemacht und sollte nun diese Arbeit in diesem ganz anderen, völlig unkommerziellen Kontext zeigen. Ich wollte ausloten, wie weit diese unterschiedlichen Kontexte die Wahrnehmung und Interpretation der Werkgruppe »gesture/data« (seit 2013) erweitern können. Von meiner persönlichen Geschichte her – meine Familie besteht seit drei Generationen aus Psychologen – interessierte mich, wie sich dieser spezifische Kontext einer Sozialberatungsstelle zu diesem größeren Projekt verhält, an dem ich arbeite. »gesture/data« hatte sich zu einer Art Anthropologie der Bildzirkulation und der Veränderung unseres Verhältnisses zu den Dingen entwickelt, da das Innere und Äußere der Bildschirme, auf die wir ständig tippen und über die wir ständig wischen, zur vorherrschenden Wahrnehmungsweise geworden sind. Im Kunstmessenkontext geht es um die finanzialisierte Zirkulation von Gemälden und Affekten oder etwas in der Art, im Arbeiterkammerkontext dagegen eher um den psychologischen Zustand, aber auch um eine bestimmte finanzielle Prekarität.

KB War es eine Art Wartebereich?

KO Ja. Eines der architektonischen Probleme des Arbeiterkammeraums ist, dass alles sehr nah beisammen liegt. Der Raum ist auch deshalb schwierig, weil sich die Arbeiterkammer an der Stelle befindet, wo früher das Palais des österreichischen Zweigs der Rothschildfamilie stand, die zum Teil fliehen konnte, zum Teil aber auch ermordet wurde. Überdies – und damit einen Umgang zu finden, ist praktisch unmöglich – war es auch der Ort, an dem die Deportation jüdischer Familien in die Konzentrationslager organisiert wurde. Aufgrund der heute üblichen Aufarbeitung von Geschichte bekommt man das schon beim Betreten des Gebäudes ziemlich deutlich mitgeteilt – es wird jedenfalls nicht versteckt. Dieser Aspekt ist etwas, womit ich keinen wirklichen Umgang finden konnte, aber klar ist, es handelt sich um einen auf allen Ebenen ungemein aufgeladenen Ort. Einer meiner Gedanken war daher, mithilfe dieses Mediums Bildschirm, mit dem ich seit längerem arbeite, eine gewisse Porosität zu schaffen – visuell, formal und architektonisch.

KB Gehe ich recht in der Annahme, dass du für diese Arbeiten nicht mit Found Footage oder früher gesammeltem Material gearbeitet, sondern Content eigens dafür geschaffen hast?

KO Die gesamte Werkserie »gesture/data« – das Projekt am Museum Ludwig 2014 lief ja auch unter diesem Oberbegriff – wechselt immer wieder den Kontext und damit das den Arbeiten inwohnende Potenzial. Grundlage ist eine Reihe von VHS-Kassetten, die ich im Keller meiner Eltern fand. Sie zeichneten in den 1980er und 1990er Jahren immer wieder Fernsehsendungen auf, die sie sich aber nie ansahen. Formal gesehen sind diese VHS-Tapes ziemlich schön, wenn man sie zwanzig Jahre später wieder abspielt: so

werden zum Beispiel Rot und Grün separiert, wodurch diese herrlichen Farben entstehen. Ich begann, sie mir anzusehen und mit ihnen zu arbeiten, verschiedene Teile mit New Yorker Kabel-TV zu überspielen – einer digitalen Aufnahme mit sehr leuchtender Oberflächenqualität. Ich nahm das ursprüngliche Footage und überspielte Teile davon, schuf also quasi beim Fernsehen diese Collagen.

KB Ist das für dich eine Art Malprozess?

KO Genau. Es ist Fernsehen als Malen! Die Bildschirme, die ich schließlich verwendete – digitale Industriedisplays – können große Dateien nicht sauber lesen, also musste ich sie auf DV transferieren und dann zu kleineren Dateien komprimieren, aber unter Beibehaltung der verschiedenen Oberflächenqualitäten. Was auf diese Weise entstand, ist zwar gepixelt, besitzt aber immer noch die Oberfläche des rohen, beschädigten und überspielten Originalfootage. Dasselbe Material verwendete ich schon 2007 in dieser Performance bei Gavin Brown's. Ich spielte Klavier, eine Schubertsonate – die Art Musik, die zu ihrer Entstehungszeit als Hausmusik aufgeführt worden wäre – in einem kleinen Raum, vor kleinem Publikum. Aber die Rückseite des Klaviers war in einen Fernseher umgewandelt worden, auf dem dieses Material lief. Das war das erste Mal, dass ich es verwendete.

KB Es war ein Bildschirm in die Rückseite des Klaviers eingelassen?

KO Ja, und ich zeichnete mein Live-Spiel auf und verwendete die Bild- und Tonaufzeichnung dann später im selben Jahr in einem ähnlichen Setup im Künstlerhaus Stuttgart und ein weiteres Mal 2008 im Ludlow 38 in New York. Dort spielte ich dasselbe Stück wieder live am Piano, aber es überschneidet sich mit dem aufgenommenen und verstärkten Sound, der dann – in sich – wieder und wieder aufgenommen wurde. Zu der Zeit benutzte ich auch diese Greenscreen-Farbe für meine Videoarbeiten und experimentierte erstmals damit, sie außen auf den Bildschirm aufzutragen und ein blaues Signal hindurchzuschicken; ich wollte sehen was passiert, weil der blaue Bildschirm und die grüne Farbe vibrieren. Schließlich brachte ich auch das andere Videomaterial ins Spiel und begann in dieser gestischen Malweise damit zu arbeiten.

KB Die »gesture/data«-Arbeiten entsprangen also dem Versuch, den Fernsehmonitor in einen Greenscreen zu verwandeln?

KO Im Grunde genommen in eine Leinwand. Wobei ich einerseits den Bildschirm zu einem Greenscreen machte, um ihn sozusagen auszuknocken, ihn andererseits aber auch als Bildträger für die Arbeit im Atelier verwendete.

KB Das ganze Format ist überaus konzise, es sagt eine Menge über die Zeit, in der wir leben, und über den aktuellen Stand der Kunst: wie sich die Malerei verhält, wie Bildschirme funktionieren. Es ist fast das perfekte Format, und das erscheint zugleich aufregend und beängstigend.

KO Es war tatsächlich erschreckend und aufregend, als ich sah, dass es auf der technischen Ebene funktionieren könnte. Denn man weiß ja nie. Mein Malerestudium lag lange zurück, und es war aufregend, die verdrängte Praxis wieder hervorzuholen, die richtigen Farben und Pigmente zu finden und zu mischen, all das eben, was zum Malen gehört und in meiner Videoarbeit verloren gegangen war. Doch als ich die visuelle Interaktion – das Pigment, die Farbe und die Farben, die vom Bildschirm ausgingen – zum ersten Mal sah, war es für mich auch ein Schock. Es war wie eine Rekalibrierung des Auges. So sehr sind wir es gewohnt, das auf Bildschirmen Gesehene für real oder eine reale Repräsentation der Dinge zu halten.

KB Das adaptierbare Format der Arbeiten erinnerte mich an Wade Guytons frühe Printer-»Gemälde«. Auch sie waren »zu einfach«.

KO Richtig, es ist in vieler Hinsicht zu einfach, aber fundamental. Ich betrachte es heute als ein fundamentales Problem des Sehens und der Erfahrung. Es hebt die Art und Weise, wie sich unsere Augen und unser Körper auf das Erleben dieser Dinge, dieser verschiedenen Formate einstellen, immer wieder aus und ersetzt sie zugleich.

KB Die Erfahrung der Gleichzeitigkeit ist heute überhaupt zum vorherrschenden Erfahrungsmodus geworden. Man kann ihr nicht entkommen.

compress them to make these smaller files, but still maintain the different surface qualities. What was produced is pixelated, but it still has the kind of surface of the original rough, degraded, and taped-over footage. I used the same footage in a performance at Gavin Brown's in 2007. I was playing piano music, a Schubert sonata – the kind of thing that would have been performed in someone's home when the music was written – in a small space, with a small audience. But the back of the upright piano was turned into a television, with this footage playing on it – that was the first time I used it.

KB There was a screen inserted into the back of the piano?

KO Yes, while I was playing the music live I recorded it and then projected the recorded image/sound in a similar setup at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart later that year, and then at Ludlow 38 in New York in 2008, where I would play the same music live on the piano, but it would go in and out of synch with the recorded amplified sound, which was re-recorded again and again, inside of itself, and then inside of itself again. I was also using this green screen paint to make videos at the time, and I first experimented with putting that on the outside of the television, with a blue signal coming through, to see what would happen visually because the blue screen and green paint vibrate. But then I brought the other footage in and started working on that with this gestural painting mode.

KB So the "gesture/data" works came out of trying to turn the TV screen into a green screen?

KO Into a canvas, basically – turning the screen into a green screen on the one hand, to kind of knock it out, and on the other hand, working in the studio with these as a support surface.

KB The format itself is so concise, it says a lot about a moment we are in and also about the nature of art right now: how painting operates, how screens function. It is almost the perfect format, which seems exciting and scary at the same time.

KO There was something terrifying and exciting when I saw that on a technical level it could work, because you never know. I had studied painting a long time ago, so it was exciting to bring out this repressed practice, to find the right paints, and pigments and mixing, all these kind of things that are a painterly process that had been absorbed into my video process. But when I first saw the visual interaction – this pigment, the paint and the colours coming from the screen – it was shocking for me. It was like recalibrating the eye. We are so used to thinking of things we see on screens as real, or as a real representation of the thing.

KB The work's adaptable format made me think of Wade Guyton's early printer paintings; they were also "too simple".

KO Exactly, because it is in many ways so basic, but fundamental. I see it as a fundamental problem of both vision and experience now, that it constantly displaces and replaces and displaces and replaces the way your eyes and body are attuned to experiencing these things, these different formats.

KB The experience of simultaneity has now become the dominant mode of experiencing anything. You can't get away from that.

KO For me, the pleasure of looking at the works when I'm working is that I can't believe that both are happening at the same time. It registers in your brain in a very direct way. So you look at certain areas, but the footage is internal and it just plays, like a series of unconscious thoughts. That's why I obsessively work with exactly the same footage over and over again. But to get back to the context of the Arbeiterkammer, I started filming the screen and putting that footage back inside, and filming it and putting it back inside, so the paint or mirror or whatever's on the surface ...

KB ... gets sucked into the interior of the screen?

KO Exactly. It's put up against its own image of itself. It starts to have a sort of trompe l'oeil feeling: on the one hand, the interior footage stops being either just TV or just abstract or something, but on the other it starts to disappear and reappear and flicker.

KB And then the work itself, the object, gets consumed again as an image? The image, after all, is how things are digested and enter the cultural stream today. It makes me think of Mark Leckey and his theory about how three dimensions can only really be comprehended once they become a screen image.

KO This is like the upside-down version of that: the screen image can only be consumed when it's seen in three dimensions. You can only properly digest this image in person. You always have to test these things out, experiment. In the Museum Ludwig show I would wander around and see how people were absorbing or interacting, and I saw that the actions and the understanding were quite immediate on some level.

KB They were hung amongst the originals—in the same room with the Günther Uecker that they picture?

KO Exactly, the work was intended as an intervention into the permanent collection, and one of the works was hung directly across from the Uecker and next to an Yves Klein. Some of the other works in the collection were framed and had reflective surfaces, which of course you're not supposed to see, but it brings out a layer of reflections on top of the artwork. I watched people walk in, and they see the Uecker and then they see the screen which probably first registers as the kind of info-screen you often find in museums, some sort of educational device. They see that it's the same work, and that there are nails on the surface, and this epoxy that looks like finger smears and refracts the RGB into this kind of prism. This whole series of thoughts was happening.

KB There's a book about your work with the subtitle *Congestion and Porosity*²—it's a great pair of words to apply, not just to the newer works, but to your work in general. You seem to talk a lot about this idea of the “glitch”, of finding ways to harness it and make it a generative, driving component. “Congestion” is a bit like the idea of the glitch, while “porosity” refers to the idea of multiple layers and simultaneity as a contemporary condition. I was thinking that porosity in your work is like some kind of bleed or leakage, but also refers to the nature of experience, even on a very basic everyday level.

KO I like to open up these channels of feedback between, for example, the processes of really painting and really making video—so a painting process becomes a recording of watching television. They infect each other in a way where the hybrid process is upside-down or impossible, dense and fully embedded, though materially they seem to have nothing to do with each other. Those grey areas, the glitch and the ... even as we're talking, I'm having too many thoughts at the same time, I'm leaking all over the place! Can I even think through this? There is so much leakage between the two things that I can't form a sentence! Which is great! Actually, in “painting”—if you want to use that category—in that process, leakage is totally necessary in order to do the work.

KB Right, but it becomes non-verbal.

KO Yeah, exactly. This can also happen with music. I was recently asked to write something on Pierre Boulez. I hadn't actually thought or read anything or looked at the scores since I was a teenager, when I had studied music very seriously. I had forgotten how influential his aesthetics and theories were, these kind of music processes, as I had unconsciously translated them into a visual level. It was fascinating to recognise this musical thinking on a theoretical level. Deleuze and Guattari actually took the idea of smooth space and striated space specifically from Boulez. This idea of the counting or not counting of the beat, in terms of rhythm, is really a musical thing. Boulez was seeking out these tensions, where there would be moments of not counting, or where the music would enter zones of amorphousness.

KB That kind of thinking happens in your film “(Goodbye to) Manhattan” (2010).

KO Exactly. To me, it had just been absorbed. I'm naturally attracted to these zones where you don't know how time or space or language or any of these things work. There is no beat.

KB When I was watching it I experienced this feeling of frustration, because time becomes so amorphous. You don't know what's happening or where it's going, there's no rhythm anymore. But I was also thinking that in that film the composition reads in terms of a musical score with many different parts that may or may not be working harmoniously or even moving in the same direction.

KO That's the thing—it's very simple. With a single-channel video,

KO Für mich besteht das Schauvergnügen während des Arbeitens darin, dass ich nicht glauben kann, dass beides gleichzeitig geschieht. Das bildet sich im Kopf ganz direkt ab. Man betrachtet gewisse Bereiche, aber das Filmmaterial befindet sich im Inneren und läuft einfach ab wie eine unbewusste Gedankenkette. Darum arbeite ich auch so obsessiv mit dem immer gleichen Material. Um aber auf deine Frage bezüglich des Arbeiterkammerkontexts zurückzukommen – ich begann, den Bildschirm zu filmen und dieses Material wieder einzuspeisen, dann ein weiteres Mal zu filmen und erneut einzuspeisen, so dass die Farbe oder was immer sich an der Oberfläche befindet ...

KB ... ins Innere des Bildschirms gelangt?

KO Richtig. Es wird gegen sein eigenes Abbild in Stellung gebracht. So stellt sich eine Art Trompe-l'œil-Wirkung ein: Einerseits ist das Filmmaterial im Inneren nicht mehr nur Fernsehen oder nur abstrakt oder so, andererseits beginnt es auch zu verschwinden und wiederaufzutauchen und zu flimmern.

KB Und die Arbeit selbst, das Objekt, wird dann erneut als Bild konsumiert? Das Bild ist heute schließlich die Art, wie Dinge verdaut werden, in den Strom der Kultur einfließen. Ich denke hier an Mark Leckey und seine Theorie, dass drei Dimensionen eigentlich erst als Bildschirmbild begreifbar werden.

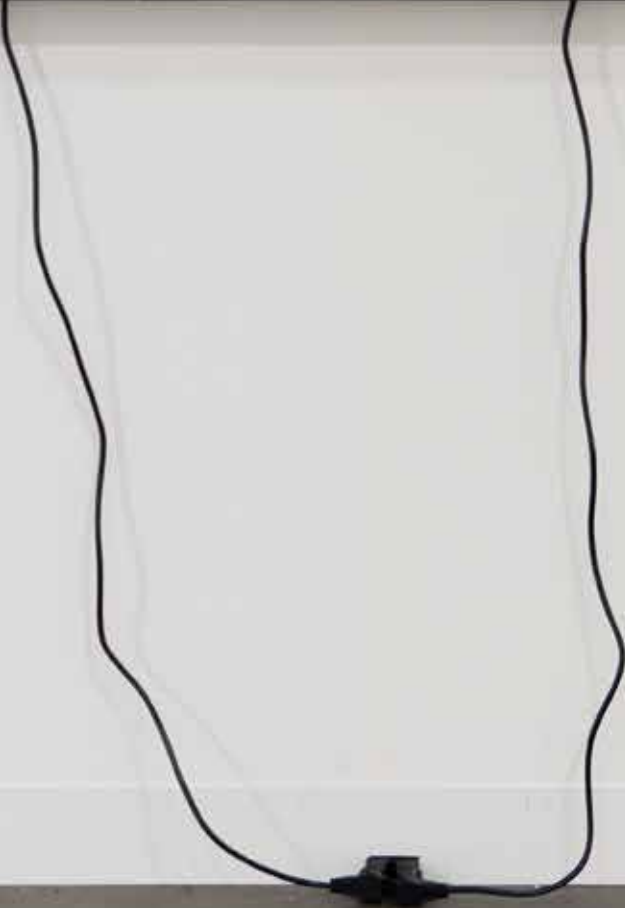
KO Es ist wie eine umgekehrte Version davon: Das Bildschirmbild wird erst konsumierbar, wenn man es in drei Dimensionen sieht. Richtig verdauen kann man dieses Bild nur, wenn man persönlich davorsteht. Man muss so was immer austesten, damit experimentieren. Bei der Ausstellung im Museum Ludwig streifte ich häufig herum und beobachtete, wie die Leute aufnehmen oder interagieren, und mir fiel auf, dass ihre Handlungen und ihr Verstehen in gewisser Weise ganz unmittelbar waren.

KB Die Arbeiten wurden zwischen die Originale gehängt – im selben Raum wie der Günther Uecker, den sie ins Bild setzen?

KO Richtig, die Arbeiten waren als eine Art Intervention in die permanente Sammlung gedacht; eine hing zum Beispiel direkt gegenüber dem Uecker und neben einem Yves Klein. Einige andere Werke der Sammlung waren gerahmt und hatten spiegelnde Oberflächen, was man natürlich nicht sehen sollte, aber das legte eine zusätzliche Reflexionsschicht über sie. Ich beobachtete, wie die Leute hereinkamen und den Uecker sahen, und dann den Bildschirm, den sie vermutlich für eine Art Infoscreen hielten, wie man sie häufig in Museen findet, ein pädagogisches Hilfsmittel. Dann erkennen sie, dass es die gleiche Arbeit ist, und dass sich Nägel auf der Oberfläche befinden, und dieses Epoxy, das wie Wischspuren aussieht und das RGB prismatisch zerlegt. Diese ganze Gedankenkette lief da ab.

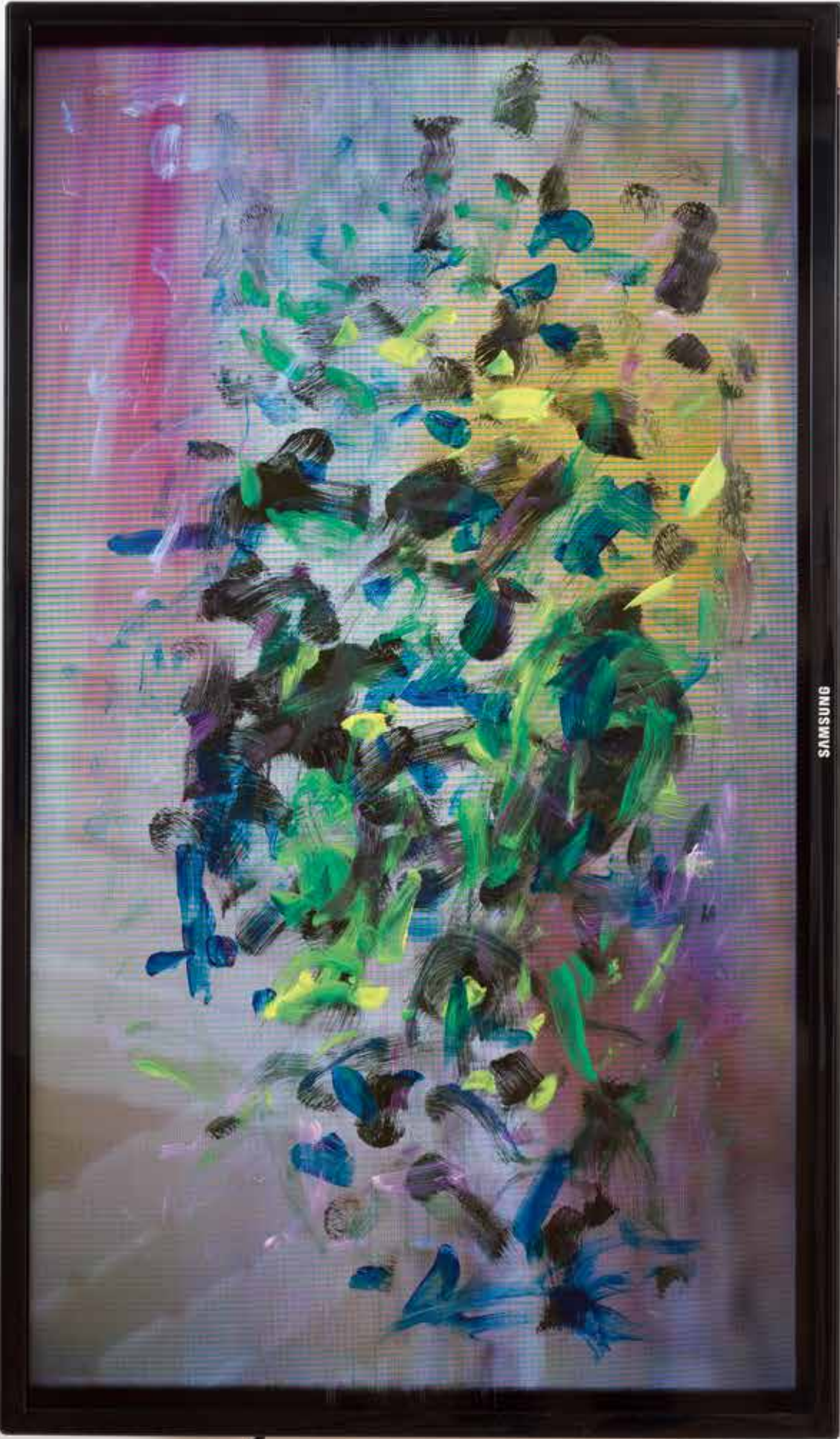
KB Es gibt ein Buch über deine Arbeit, in dessen Untertitel von *Congestion and Porosity*² die Rede ist. Ich finde, das ist ein großartiges Wortpaar, nicht nur für deine neueren Arbeiten, sondern überhaupt für dein Werk. Dir scheint die Idee des »Glitch« sehr wichtig zu sein, wie du Störungen nutzbar und generativ machen kannst, zu einer treibenden Kraft. Die »congestion«, die Verstopfung, gleicht ein wenig dem Glitch, wogegen »porosity« auf Mehrfachschichten und Gleichzeitigkeit als zeitgenössische *Conditio* verweist. Mir erscheint Porosität in deinem Werk als eine Art undichte Stelle, doch der Begriff verweist auch auf das Wesen der Erfahrung, sogar auf einer ganz simplen Alltagsebene.

KO Ich öffne gerne diese Feedbackkanäle – zum Beispiel zwischen den Prozessen des eigentlichen Malens und des eigentlichen Videomachens, so dass etwa das Malen zu einer Aufzeichnung des Fernsehschauens wird. Die beiden Prozesse stecken sich auf eine Weise an, bei der die Hybridisierung verkehrt rum läuft oder unmöglich ist, komprimiert und vollkommen eingebettet, obwohl sie materiell scheinbar nichts miteinander zu tun haben. Diese Grauzonen, der Glitch und die ... selbst während wir hier sprechen, geht mir zu viel auf einmal durch den Kopf, es sprudelt nur so aus mir raus! Kann ich das überhaupt durchdenken? Es sickert so viel durch zwischen den beiden Dingen, dass ich nicht einmal einen Satz zustande bringe! Was großartig ist! In der »Malerei«, wenn man bei dieser Kategorie bleiben will, ist Durchlässigkeit geradezu eine Voraussetzung, um die Arbeit machen zu können.



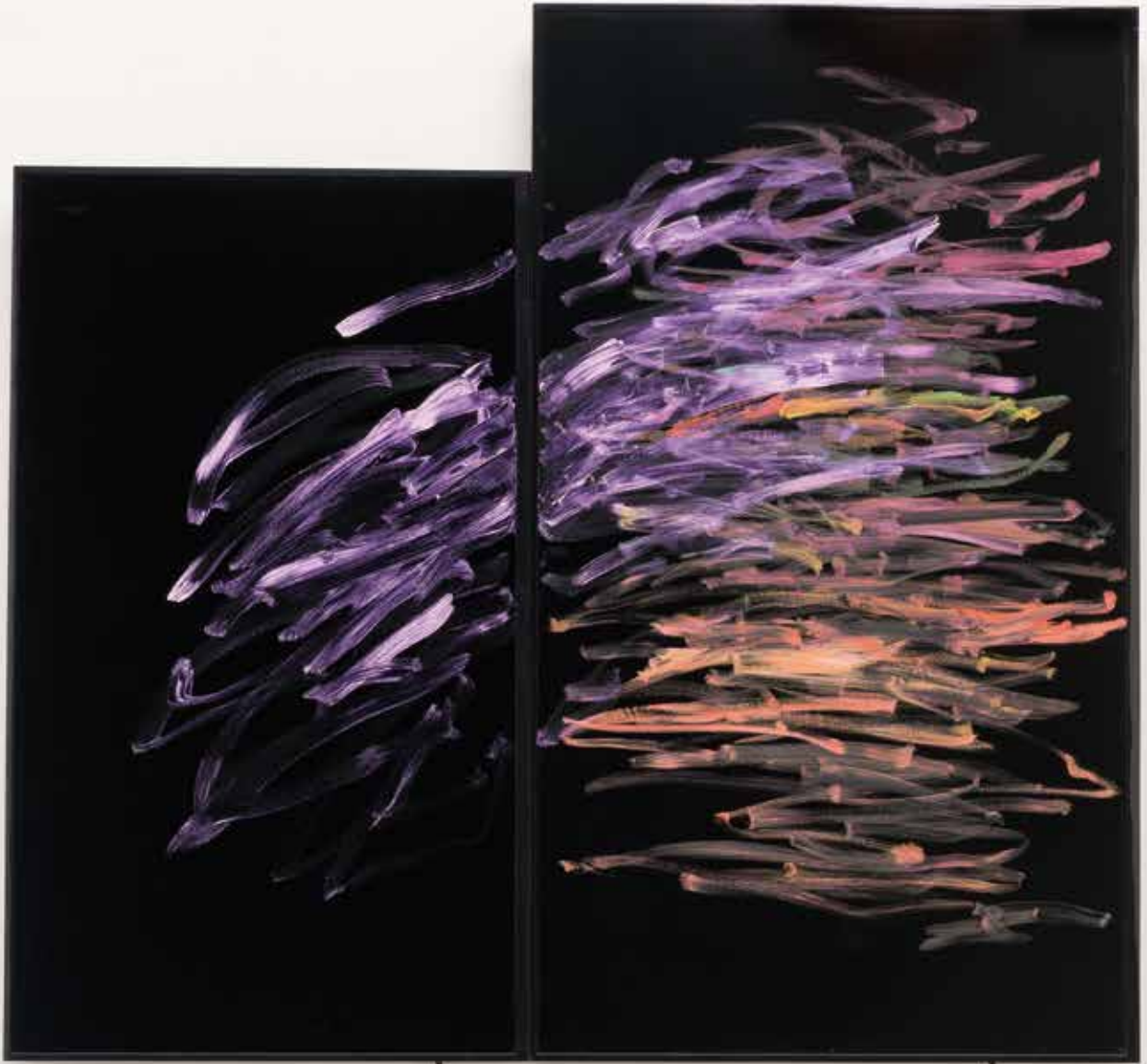


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KB Richtig, aber sie wird nonverbal.

KO Ganz genau. Und dasselbe passiert auch in der Musik. Ich wurde kürzlich gebeten, etwas über Pierre Boulez zu schreiben. Ich hatte mir seit meiner Teenagerzeit, als ich ernsthaft Musik studierte, nichts mehr dazu überlegt oder darüber gelesen oder mir die Partituren angesehen. Ich hatte vergessen, wie einflussreich seine Ästhetik und seine Theorien waren, diese Musikprozesse, da ich sie unbewusst ins Visuelle übersetzt hatte. Es war faszinierend, dieses musikalische Denken auf einer theoretischen Ebene wiederzufinden. Deleuze und Guattari bezogen speziell die Idee des glatten und gekerbten Raums von Boulez. Diese Idee des Zählens oder Nichtzählens von Takten ist ja etwas Musikalisches. Boulez suchte nach Spannungen, in denen es zu Momenten des Nichtzählens kommt oder die Musik in amorphe Zonen eintritt.

KB Dieses Denken findet in deinem Film »(Goodbye to) Manhattan« (2010) statt.

KO Richtig. Für mich ist das einfach da eingeflossen. Ich fühle mich natürlich zu diesen Zonen hingezogen, in denen man nicht mehr weiß, wie Zeit, Raum, Sprache oder das alles funktionieren. Es gibt keinen Takt.

KB Als ich ihn sah, empfand ich dieses Gefühl der Frustration, weil die Zeit so amorph wird. Man weiß nicht, was abgeht oder worauf es hinausläuft, es gibt keinen Rhythmus mehr. Aber ich dachte mir auch, dass die Komposition des Films als eine Partitur mit vielen Teilen zu lesen ist, die sich nicht harmonisch verbinden oder auch nur in die gleiche Richtung bewegen.

KO Genau das ist es, es ist sehr einfach. Bei einem Einkanal-Video ist das Schnittprogramm im Grunde eine Partitur, zu der man immer weitere »Instrumente« hinzufügen kann. Ich war mir dessen nicht bewusst, aber meine natürliche Schnitttechnik neigt zur Schaffung sehr komplexer Zeit-Räume, die hin und wieder voranzuschreiten oder zusammenzuhängen scheinen. Psychologisch gesprochen ähneln sie den Identitätssträngen – Sprache, körperliche Präsenz, soziales Skript, Scripting bestimmter Verhaltensweisen – ich liebe diese Momente, in denen man die alle neben- und gegeneinander treiben sieht. Ich habe diese Vorstellung, wie großartig es wäre, wenn mich jemand ein Drehbuch verfilmen ließe und ich käme zum Set, ohne zu wissen worum es in dem Buch geht, und alle stünden da und warteten, und ich müsste einfach loslegen und schauen was passiert.

KB Und aktiv Missverständnisse hervorrufen: Man könnte auch die neueren Arbeiten im Licht dieser Vorstellung sehen.

KO Ja, sie sind interessant als Verbindung zu einigen früheren Arbeiten, denn »gesture/data« ist meine erste Arbeit – ich weiß nie, ob ich das sagen soll oder nicht –, die sehr erfolgreich in einen Markt eindringt. Es war nicht wirklich beabsichtigt.

KB Du wärst nie darauf gekommen, wenn du es versucht hättest, sie ist zu einfach, und darum geht sie vielen bestimmt auf die Nerven.

KO Ich bin der Meinung, dass sie immer noch Missverständnisse hervorruft.

KB Richtig. Und das heißt, dass sie funktioniert! Ging es in »(Goodbye to) Manhattan« speziell um die urbane Erfahrung von Berlin und Manhattan oder eher um den Gegensatz zwischen amerikanischer und europäischer Erfahrung?

KO Die wahre, psychologische Antwort ist, dass mein Vater als Japano-Amerikaner in Vietnam diente und dort Woody Allens Film »What's Up Tiger Lily« (1966) sah, bei dem Allen einen japanischen Spionagefilm mit einer Off-Stimme versah, die etwas komplett anderes erzählt. Mein Vater war Soldat, weil seine Eltern kein Geld hatten, auf diese Weise bezahlte er die Uni. Aber er war auch ein Japaner in Amerika zur Zeit des Zweiten Weltkriegs, als all diese Geschichten passierten. Allens Film wurde einer seiner Lieblingsfilme. Worauf ich hinaus will – ich liebe es, die Ästhetik des Missverständnisses und komplizierter Identitäten in andere Kontexte zu übersetzen, und darum hatte meine Gruppe amerikanischer Freunde in Berlin, die ebenfalls aus New York geflohen waren, etwas Faszinierendes für mich. Es war die Zeit nach 9/11, und dieses spezielle Interface, das auf wirklich reizvolle Weise vor Missverständnissen und Fehlübersetzungen strotzte, hatte etwas; diesen komplizierten

the editing programme is basically a score, you can keep on adding "instruments". It wasn't conscious, but my natural way of editing tends towards creating very complex time-spaces that every once in a while have a feeling of moving forward, or cohesion. To talk about it in psychological terms, it's like the tracks of identity – language, physical presence, social script, scripting of certain kinds of behaviour – I really like those moments when you can see them all floating next to and against each other. I have this idea that it would be great if someone told me to direct a script, and I'd walk on the set without knowing what the script was, with all the people there and everything, and I'd just have to start and see what would happen.

KB To actively generate misunderstanding ... you can also think about the more recent works in terms of that idea.

KO Yes, it's interesting as a connection to some past work, because "gesture/data" is the first work of mine – I never know if I'm supposed to say this or not – but it's the first work of mine that very successfully enters a market. It wasn't really an intention.

KB You would never have come up with it if you had tried, it's too simple, and that's why I'm sure it really gets on people's nerves.

KO I do find that it continues to generate misunderstandings.

KB Right, which means it's working! Was "(Goodbye to) Manhattan" specifically about the urban experience of Berlin and Manhattan, or did it have to do with the American versus European experience?

KO The real psychological answer is that my father, as a Japanese American, was a soldier in Vietnam, and he saw Woody Allen's "What's Up Tiger Lily" (1966) there – where Allen takes a Japanese spy movie and dubs it with a voice-over of a completely different thing for the entire movie. My father was a soldier because his parents didn't have any money, and so that's how he paid for college. But he was also a Japanese American at the time of WWII, when all of these things were happening. This became one of his favourite movies. The point is that I love translating the aesthetics of misunderstanding and complicated identity into third contexts, so there was something fascinating about my group of American friends in Berlin who were escaping New York. It was the post-9/11 time. There was something about that specific interface that was full of misunderstanding and mistranslation in a really decorative way, and a lot of the aesthetics that emerged came out of these complicated misunderstandings.

KB Sometimes there's a work that occurs quite early on in an artist's career that seems to touch on many subjects that continue as a thread throughout the subsequent work. That really seems to be the case with "David Wojnarowicz in New York" (1999–2001), this idea of mapping urban experience and its relation to history.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Acrylic paint, epoxy, two-way acrylic mirrors on flat-screen televisions, feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 124 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data, 2014. Oil paint on flat-screen television, .mp4 file (colour, sound), 92.5 × 54.1 × 9.4 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

← gesture/data, 2014. Oil paint on flat-screen television, .mp4 file (color, sound), 92.5 × 54.1 × 9.4 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Oil paint on flat-screen televisions, .mp4 files (colour, silent) and feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 114.6 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Oil paint on flat-screen televisions, .mp4 files (colour, silent) and feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 114.6 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Oil paint on flat-screen television, .mp4 file (colour, silent) and feedback .mp4 file (colour, sound), 107.4 × 62 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo. Photo: Kei Okano.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Acrylic paint, epoxy, two-way acrylic mirrors on flat-screen televisions, feedback .mp4 files (colour, sound), 107.4 × 124 × 5.1 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

← gesture/data (feedback), 2015. Acrylic paint and mirrors on flat-screen televisions, .mp4 files (colour, silent), 2 panels, 107.4 × 73.1 × 5.1 cm each. Installation view from "Ken Okiishi: Porous Feedback", Arbeiterkammer Wien, Vienna, 22.11.2015 – 29.4.2016. Courtesy: the artist and Arbeiterkammer Wien Kultur, Vienna.

KO I was studying in the East Village, at Cooper Union, and just walking around the city a lot. At that particular moment, which was 1997, everyone was saying NY was over. This was also before the Internet was such a thing. You couldn't search for real estate on the Internet — those rapid ways of reorganising the city were not possible yet. But there was this digital camera which was light and newish; the images that it made were very pixelated, but beautiful; and there was also this machine where you could take the digital image and put it onto negative film, and then print them in the darkroom. There was this paper that was like Cibachrome, but it was a negative process rather than a positive process, called Fujiflex. My favourite thing to do was just walk around the Meatpacking District. In terms of gay history, mine is the worst generation for sexuality — ten years old and you're going through the AIDS crisis, all that Reagan stuff on the negative side, Act Up on the positive side, etc., these were the things that formed sexuality. So the specific history of the cruising areas, this free open zone, was also tinged with the potential for anger and death and exclusion, all these different things. Politically, it was a very loaded topic, but there's also a kind of nostalgia tinged with a lot of fear. I think the anticipation of digitisation was more intuitive; I didn't even have a cell phone. So the Wojnarowicz works were charged with all of these things. I find the photos very melancholy, like huge question marks. It was also a different time in terms of gay identity, it was pre-gay marriage, etc. — before it was even an idea. At that point, the idea was that corporatism was going to destroy the city and turn it into a suburban shopping mall. Little did we know that the Internet and digitisation were the mechanisms for making that happen.

KB There's a feeling of belatedness when I look at those pictures.

KO Yes, the feeling that you've missed out. The other thing about NY is that I had missed out on the trauma, as well — as a young gay man in NY in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was a different situation, so even the negativity had a positive side, but it still felt weird.

KB It is interesting to think about that shift of geography, how those two different things are mapped, the change of mapping through the Internet. I thought that piece had so much to do with a remapping of territory, as did "(Goodbye to) Manhattan", how you can reorient yourself. And now there's this other digital layer ...

KO ... yes, there is literally the map, the Google Map.

KB Yes, and also the Grindr map, the Social Media Map ...

KO ... exactly, which is constantly shifting — live data points, the proximity map. Those different layers of mapping in those particular photographs are right before this other layer started to emerge — or came to dominate us.

1 "Ken Okiishi: Porous Feedback", Arbeiterkammer Wien, Vienna, 22.11.2015 – 29.4.2016.

2 Ken Okiishi, Annie Godfrey Larmon, Alise Uptis (eds.), *The Very Quick of the Word: [Congestion and Porosity in the Work of Ken Okiishi?]* (Berlin: Sternberg Press 2014).

Missverständnissen entsprang ein großer Teil der Ästhetik, die sich da herausbildete.

KB Manchmal entsteht ziemlich am Anfang einer Künstlerkarriere eine Arbeit, die bereits viele das spätere Werk durchziehende Themen berührt. Das scheint bei dir auf »David Wojnarowicz in New York« (1999–2001) zuzutreffen, dieser Kartierung einer urbanen Erfahrung und ihrer Beziehung zur Geschichte.

KO Ich studierte im East Village an der Cooper Union und trieb mich einfach viel in der Stadt herum. Damals, 1997, sagten alle, New York sei gegessen. Es war auch die Zeit, bevor das Internet so ein großes Ding wurde. Man konnte nicht im Internet nach Immobilien suchen, diese raschen Möglichkeiten der Stadtreorganisation gab es noch nicht. Aber es gab diese Digitalkamera, die leicht und neuartig war und deren Bilder zwar gepixelt, aber schön waren. Und es gab diese Maschine, mit der man das digitale Bild auf Negativfilm übertragen konnte, um in der Dunkelkammer Abzüge davon zu fertigen. Und es gab auch dieses cibachrome-artige Papier namens Fujiflex, dem aber kein Positiv- sondern ein Negativprozess zugrunde lag. Meine Lieblingsbeschäftigung war, mich einfach treiben zu lassen, im Meatpacking District. Was die Schwulengeschichte betrifft, war meine Generation sexualitätsmäßig am schlimmsten dran – du bist zehn Jahre alt und durchläufst die Aids-Krise, mitsamt diesem ganzen Reagan-Kram auf der Negativ- und Act Up usw. auf der Positivseite. In diesem Umfeld wurde die Sexualität geformt. Die Geschichte der Cruising Areas, dieser freien, offenen Zonen, hatte also das Potenzial für Ärger, Tod und Ausgrenzung, all diese verschiedenen Dinge. Es war eine politisch hochbrisante Angelegenheit, aber es ist auch eine gewisse, mit viel Angst behaftete Nostalgie damit verbunden. Das Antizipieren der Digitalisierung war, glaube ich, intuitiver; ich besaß nicht einmal ein Handy. Die Wojnarowicz-Arbeiten waren von alldem geprägt. Ich empfinde die Fotos als sehr melancholisch, wie riesige Fragezeichen. Es war auch eine andere Zeit in Bezug auf schwule Identität, die Zeit vor der Schwulenehe usw., bevor sie überhaupt in Betracht gezogen wurde. Damals dachten wir, die Konzerne würden die Stadt zerstören und in eine suburbane Shopping Mall verwandeln. Wir ahnten noch nicht, dass Internet und Digitalisierung die Mechanismen sein würden, die das ermöglichen.

KB Beim Betrachten dieser Bilder stellt sich ein Gefühl des Zuspätkommenseins ein.

KO Ja, das Gefühl, etwas versäumt zu haben. Dazu kommt, dass ich das Trauma ebenfalls versäumt habe – als junger Schwuler im New York der 1990er und 2000er Jahre war man in einer anderen Situation, insofern hatte auch das Negative seine positive Seite, aber es erschien trotzdem unheimlich.

KB Es ist interessant, über diese geografische Verschiebung nachzudenken, wie diese verschiedenen Dinge kartiert werden, die Veränderung des Kartierens durch das Internet. Mir schien diese Arbeit viel mit einer Neukartierung eines Geländes zu tun zu haben, wie bereits »(Goodbye to) Manhattan«, mit der Möglichkeit der Umorientierung. Und nun gibt es diese andere digitale Schicht ...

KO ... ja, es ist buchstäblich eine Karte: die Google Map.

KB Ja, und auch die Grindr map, die Social Media Map ...

KO ... genau, die sich ständig verschiebt – Live-Datenpunkte, die Proximity Map. All die verschiedenen Kartierungsebenen in diesen Fotos sind hier in einem Zustand, unmittelbar bevor diese andere Schicht aufzutauchen – beziehungsweise uns zu beherrschen – begann.

1 »Ken Okiishi. Porous Feedback«, Arbeiterkammer Wien, 22.11.2015 – 29.4.2016.

2 Ken Okiishi, Annie Godfrey Larmon, Alise Uptis (Hg.), *The Very Quick of the Word. [Congestion and Porosity in the Work of Ken Okiishi?]*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014.