

## FrameWork 2/12

### Saelan Twerdy on Althea Thauberger



Althea Thauberger's latest major work is a large-scale photomural that documents re-enacted scenes from a public performance of *King Lear* by a Bhand Pather theater group in the Kashmiri village of Akingam. In its current installation at Susan Hobbs Gallery, it sprawls from wall to wall and floor to ceiling along one side of the gallery's main space, bursting with a colourful profusion of figures who confront the viewer at nearly life-size. Its title, "*Who Is It That Can Tell Me Who I Am?*" is a quotation from Shakespeare's play, but it names a preoccupation that is central to Thauberger's oeuvre as a whole: who is the author of the roles we must play?

Her work, which revolves around developing and documenting creative projects with specific communities of participants, often uses performance as a vehicle for dramatizing the mechanics of relations between individuals and the larger collective units (families, cultures, nations) to which they belong. In dramas that they co-create, Thauberger's subjects play allegorical versions of themselves. Appearing before her lens as they wish to be seen, they are caught between the sincerity of their own convictions and the detachment that comes with self-awareness. Naturally, this can be an awkward position, and it has made some of Thauberger's works controversial – despite the co-authorship she grants them, she has on occasion been accused of exploiting her subjects.

In her early works, Thauberger made this ambiguity, awkwardness, and discomfort her main themes by focusing on youth and adolescence. In their own ways, *Songstress* (2002), *A Memory Lasts Forever* (2004), and *Zivildienst ≠ Kunstprojekt* (2006) all represent the "transition from powerless adolescent to autonomous adult," as one commentator put it. The dramatic action of these film works is the traumatic process of self-discovery through individuation, in which Thauberger's young actors struggle to define themselves in relation to their community, whether it be the adult world (*A Memory Lasts Forever*), the civil state (*Zivildienst ≠ Kunstprojekt*), or the industry of pop culture (*Songstress*). In their inevitable amateurism, these works demonstrate that self-presentation is, to some extent, always theatrical, always predictable. Despite our relative freedom and our desire to distinguish ourselves, we are nevertheless constrained by certain limitations. Again and again, we find ourselves, often against our will, playing roles that strike us as intolerably cliché, pre-scripted, corny, or melodramatic.

But these are the vicissitudes of individuality. In her more recent works, Thauberger's interest has moved away, thematically, from the conflicts of young people trying to find their place in the world and towards groups of adults in situations of conflict -- in fact, the majority of her recent projects have involved communities involved with or affected by military actions. *The Art of Seeing Without Being Seen* aroused controversy when it was displayed at the University of British Columbia's Koerner Library in 2008. The piece, a large-scale photomural almost as big as "*Who Is It That Can Tell Me Who I Am?*", depicted a group of Canadian soldiers re-enacting a military exercise in a fake Afghan village (actually in B.C.). Guns in hand, they

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confront the viewer at life-size, as if you were their target. Whether the work was pro- or anti-war was a topic of much consternation, but while her work may be politically loaded, Thauberger is not interested in making art that can be reduced to a slogan. Rather, by working *with* groups of people in fraught situations, she is able to give visual form to complex human bonds that can too easily disappear when reduced to abstract issues of power and ideology.

Though her latest work is her first artistic venture into a non-Western culture (something she says she wouldn't have been comfortable with earlier in her career), her commitment to avoiding reductive positions remains. Learning that Bhand Pather theater is a satirical form that blends traditional stories with improvisation to comment on current politics, and then finding that Bhand Pather has been suppressed in Kashmir since the beginning of the militancy and military crackdown over 20 years ago, one might assume that a staging of *King Lear* in Kashmir by such a troupe would be a resistant act. But, as with most of Thauberger's works, "*Who Is It That Can Tell Me Who I Am?*" does not lead viewers by the hand to any particular reading. Instead, it presents a riot of incident and pageantry, and a complex play of gestures and gazes worthy of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century history painting. What we encounter is a web of cultural negotiations that can't be easily untangled: a Canadian artist documenting a Kashmiri adaptation of a Hindi translation of a canonical English play about disputed territory, in a disputed territory.

In the outdoor scene of the village square in which the play is being performed, ringed by brick houses with thatch and tin roofs, a large group of onlookers has gathered. Apparently, their curiosity has been drawn more by the photography than the play, since the majority of the several-dozen figures in the image (including the actors) are looking at the camera. Their reactions vary. Some of the children look bored or glum, or challenging, as do some of their mothers – a woman in an orange headscarf on the upper left looks particularly displeased, as if she was examining someone in order to determine why they smell so bad. Other are laughing or smiling. The actors (incidentally all men, even those in traditionally female roles, just as in Shakespeare's era) are enjoying themselves: Sikander (Edmund) grins and grimaces on the ground as he is "fatally stabbed," mugging cheerfully for the camera. One woman in a turquoise scarf appears to be taking a picture of her own, pointing her mobile phone in the direction of the viewer.

The image itself is so large that taking it all in at once is impossible. Instead, one looks at it episodically as one proceeds along the panorama. In fact, the picture depicts several scenes from the play, combined digitally so as to appear synchronous. It is also relevant that, while the staging of the photo was a collaborative effort, the production of the play itself preceded Thauberger's arrival. Despite the sophisticated staging and digital collage that went into it, "*Who Is It That Can Tell Me Who I Am?*" has more in common with "straight" documentary and journalistic photography than most of her previous works. Moreover, the actors this time are professionals performing a classic (if adapted) text rather than amateurs acting out a work of their own co-creation -- though of course the picture is also full of village onlookers who "play" themselves for the viewer's benefit. This work is thus one of Thauberger's most hands-off creations in terms of her negotiations with its subjects (perhaps appropriate to her outsider status), even though it is among her richest and densest visually.

This hands-off approach is also mirrored in the suite of small, black-and-white photographs in the upper gallery, though otherwise they differ in almost every way from "*Who Is It That Can Tell Me Who I Am?*". Collectively titled *Recovered Gelatin Dry Plates (Unknown American Nudist Colony)* ca. 1935/2012, these prints were produced from scans of the titular glass plates, which Thauberger purchased on ebay. The pictures, taken by an unknown photographer, show groups of men, women, and children at leisure in indoor and outdoor settings, all nude, though Thauberger's prints are victim to the chemical decay of the original plates, resulting in blotchy stains and corrosions of the images that are often striking in their organic complexity and necrotic beauty. Small-scale while "*Who Is It That Can Tell Me Who I Am?*" is huge, black-and-white while the

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latter is vibrantly polychrome, found while the other is painstakingly constructed, corroded and worn instead of professionally finished, and historically distant rather than contemporary, these photos nevertheless share Thauberger's preoccupation with the relation of the individual to the community and the world.

While present-day Kashmir offers us a spectacle of globalized cultural exchange in the face of territorial struggle, these nudist colony snapshots present an Edenic vision of a community that has isolated itself in order to enjoy a utopian existence of holistic naturalism. It is tempting to imagine that these Americans, when they face the camera for a casual portrait, arms linked, smiling wholesomely (or knowingly), are absolutely themselves, shameless and without mediation. At the same time, in an image of nude aerobics showing heroically fit bodies with arms extended upwards, balanced on their toes (some barefoot, some in socks or canvas sneakers), one woman seems to suppress a laugh, hinting at an awareness of the inherent ridiculousness of corporeality in its flopping, fleshy glory.



Still, many of these images possess a haunting innocence that derives from the subjects' seeming ignorance of the camera and freedom from self-consciousness. In certain classically pastoral shots, men and women lounge in grassy areas while processions of their carefree fellow nudists wind in a row towards a shadowy wood (or out of it, towards the foreground). In the last image in the series, a single woman surrounded by foliage turns away from the camera, reaching up, palms out, towards a leafy branch – perhaps grasping for an unseen fruit or absorbed in a prayer of nature worship. Like all of these pictures, however, this one is corrupted by spots of blooming darkness that suggest the irrecoverable nature of any past paradise. This is most

dramatic in the first image, in which a stern middle aged man, emerging from a stand of trees, raises his left arm in a bold fist only to be consumed from the chest down by a flowering cloud of chemical pollution – a *vanitas* image even more potent than the juxtaposition of young and old naked bodies.

Of course, while we cannot recover the past, nor any real or mythical state of perfectly harmonious coexistence, Thauberger's works demonstrate that we can, however provisionally, recover the *images* of history – which is all the more reason to be attentive in our documentation of the present. Furthermore, her works show that performance and representation not only mirror our real-life acts of self-presentation and role-play, but help to articulate those acts: to clarify their stakes and make their consequences and participants more visible and present. Some roles we must write ourselves; others are imposed upon us. Whichever kind we face, Thauberger's art reminds us that we do not mount the stage alone.

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### Renée van der Avoird on Kevin Yates

While visiting New Orleans with his brother in 2010, Kevin Yates witnessed the effects of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico first hand. The devastation of the spill, set against the backdrop of a city still reeling from Hurricane Katrina, formed the impetus for Yates' latest body of work. Currently installed at Susan Hobbs Gallery, the exhibition consists of two highly realistic miniature ship models, as well as two experimental video works that the artist produced in collaboration with his brother, Robert. Yates' new works use water as a platform to collectively conjure up notions of ecological disaster, environmental exploitation and, ultimately, the precariousness of the human condition.

Yates has garnered a great deal of attention for his highly realistic miniatures and, in this exhibition, showcases his technical merit with two perfectly crafted model ships. In an ambitious work entitled *Emma Maersk*, Yates has recreated the largest container ship ever built. Modeled after a commercial ship of the same name, *Emma Maersk* is a commandingly powerful and strangely compelling sculptural work. Rarely do we see modern commercial sea vessels as models, especially in a gallery setting. As Yates explains, a certain mystique surrounds the Maersk fleet in the world of scale modeling. Blue prints are not released to the public and model-makers must base their plans on photos and visual memory. Creating a model version of one of the largest objects in the world is a massive undertaking and serious commitment – one that, according to Yates, has been attempted by many but never fully completed.



Living up to the challenge, Yates has produced a model that is at once simple and complex. The miniature is flawlessly hand crafted but deliberately crude and weathered – a feat of remarkable technical expertise masquerading as a commercially manufactured object. The sheer number of cast aluminum containers on the vessel point to issues of consumerism and mass consumption, global trade and population growth. As Yates explains, “I was thinking a lot about the movement of things around the world, and how amazing and absurd it all is, similar to my experience living on the west coast and seeing logging trucks travel with loads both north and south.” Evidently, the proliferation of overseas shipping during the past century has affected the human relationship with water, transforming it from one of necessity to one of convenience. “Being in the Gulf,” Yates continues, “and more recently in the inland sea in Japan, I was reflecting on how we navigate the world on this mass scale, and the negative consequence to this.”

Disaster scenarios are a notable theme in Yates' work. His 2009 exhibition at Susan Hobbs, for example, addressed the issue of flooding. The installation featured a series of miniature, dilapidated clapboard houses aligned along an invisible horizon. Yates carefully sculpted reflections of the abandoned homes to give the impression that each was partially submerged in water, in what appeared to be the aftermath of a natural disaster. Similarly, in the current exhibition, Yates has painstakingly created mirrored reflections of the ships along their horizontal axes. The reflected forms give the impression that the vessels are afloat, but also become something more than just reflections as seen in photos or painting. The reflections transform the miniatures from singular objects into hermetic cells or worlds, shrouding the vessels in mystery and suspense.

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Optically, the three dimensional form of object and reflection becomes one, referencing notions of above and below, up and down, and the very subtle differences between the object and its reflection.

The miniature *Emma Maersk*—which is actually quite large— sits in a dramatically lit display case in the lower gallery, measuring close to the average body height. The display case, which is a departure from traditional cases for model ships, is sandwiched between two large tables. These heavy looking tables, hand-crafted by the artist, mimic the visual weight and pressure of the ship. At the same time, the table on top is upside down and seems to float above the case, intentionally contributing to the whole form as not just an object, but an object *and* its mirror image. By adding the upside down table, Yates turns the case into sculpture as well, and flips the overall reflection once again so that nothing quite makes sense.



*Ship In a Bottle*, a wall-mounted miniature model in the upper gallery, is much smaller in scale than *Emma Maersk*, but no less impressive. Sculpted in bronze, *Ship In a Bottle* exemplifies the artist's flawless technical skill and offers a vague scenario, open for interpretation. The ship appears rusty, abandoned and derelict, yet bears no signs of damage or shipwreck. Again, Yates does not sate the viewers' curiosity, intentionally concealing details about the story of the ship, thus leaving plenty of room for wonder and reverie. The glass bottle that contains the small ship is also mirrored along a

horizontal axis, becoming part of the sculpture itself and reinforcing work's hermetic nature. The object and its container are flipped onto themselves to create a visual effect that is both chaotic and controlled.

In addition to the mysterious and forlorn qualities of Yates' miniatures, there is also a decidedly theatrical element that permeates his work. Similar to film stills, Yates' sculptures freeze time and hold space, offering the viewer an opportunity to quietly examine and inspect the object as a "paused" image. By reducing monumental ships to diminutive specimens, Yates presents a unique opportunity to contemplate some of humankind's most massive creations at a safe and comfortable distance. While commercial sea vessels are purely utilitarian in function, model versions take on a theatrical role, embodying staged scenes that invoke our imaginations and invite us to veil them in our own stories.

Given the cinematic nature of Yates' miniatures, not to mention his previous work with fictional film (*HOT HAIL*, his 2008 show at Susan Hobbs based on the 1980 Flash Gordon movie, for example), the combination of video work with sculpture in this exhibition seems only natural. The video works *Pond with Stones* and *Stones on Ice* engage directly with the surface of water itself, investigating its ability to reflect what looks into it and conceal what lies below.

Yates affirmed that although he and his brother have always offered advice and support to each other's projects, this is the first time they have worked collaboratively. "Coming together is exciting, we are close enough and similarly minded that we are both on the same path. [Robert] brings new skills and insight, and a childhood sense of play and support," says Yates. The sense of play is certainly visible in *Stones on Ice*, a video in which the brothers slid rocks onto a barely frozen pond. With ice so thin that it is barely visible, the rocks appear to be floating; however, as the camera keeps rolling and we see the rocks drop through the ice one by one, we are reminded of the evanescence of water and the fragility of the natural world. In the video's post-production phase, the brothers edited the footage to reverse the sinking of the stones, which creates additional mirrored effects and carries us even farther into a world of uncertainty and dislocation.

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Yates' latest body of work continuously confounds our expectations, and challenges our usual mode of knowing-through-seeing. The reflected forms that thread together the works in the exhibition create a mysterious, dreamlike atmosphere, and remind us of water's power to reflect reality and to reveal truths about ourselves. While Yates' artwork communicates a profound respect for the natural world, it also raises serious concerns about the tenuous relationship between humans and water, and ultimately, the future of life on this planet.



# FrameWork 9/12

## Benjamin Tong on Krista Buecking

Good jokes depend on a kind of compression. Things are left out in such a way that produce an explosion of associations. There is a form of pressure, kPa, that exists inside all of us that is released when provoked by the forces interacting between various levels condensed in a joke. The best jokes are economical.



In her installation *WE THING*, Krista Buecking borrows the comedic device of the light bulb joke. The signature punch line almost always involves targeting certain traits of a defined group, revealed in their quest to screw in a light bulb. Take for example the jokes playing on one of the monitors within the space of the gallery. Targeted are various schools of economic theory – the punch lines revealing principles attributed to a particular school of thought.

Q: HOW MANY MARXISTS DOES IT TAKE TO SCREW IN A LIGHT BULB?

A: NONE. THE BULB CONTAINS WITHIN IT THE SEEDS OF ITS OWN REVOLUTION.

These jokes set up a dialectics of expectation and failure within a structure of question and answer, problem and solution. Abstract models, like those employed in economic theories, attempt to describe and forecast features of the real world. Sometimes these models fail to account for the suppleness of reality. Sometimes with unintended consequences – as is historically the case when people have placed too much faith and mistaken the abstract for the concrete. In the context of the more recent economic situation, the economist light bulb jokes illuminate (sorry) yet another instance wherein no absurdly complex model of analysis could have predicted more less prevented, what with ethics and common sense out the window and all.

Perhaps the psychology of the joke can account for part of the modality of reading Buecking's work. We know, there's nothing that halts a joke's intended effect quicker than trying to explain it. To submit the work to the mechanisms of the analytical machine, to break down themes and decode symbols, to come up with the logic of an argument, will undoubtedly inhibit laughter. Here I must admit that my endeavor to write about her art is partly complicit. We have a strong desire as a culture, I think, always to arrest the movement of artworks within an apparatus of capture. But I also believe that this irony is not lost on the artist. Rigidity applied to the mobility of life, an awkward attempt to follow its lines and counterfeit its suppleness, after all is a target and source of good laughter in Buecking's work. I am thinking here about another video sequence playing on a flatscreen monitor affixed to the gallery wall, featuring sequences of a live body interacting with the various forms found in the installation. Something lifeless in the living is evoked when this human body repeatedly attempts to merge with the red pyramid. Or when the same character is seen twitching inside the giant GAP bag – a digital animism effected through post production editing. Or once again in the unflinching rigidity of the figure who is atop the vanilla upholstered wedge, eyes to the television set, spellbound by her communion with the bi-valent drama of the light bulb jokes – blissful catatonia. There is a comic element of such rigidity in the face of the supposed mobility of life. This is awkward – we laugh. But this is because we recognize some thing in ourselves, a parody of modern consciousness. People are living beings. Things are mechanical arrangements. When people become things – consider this image – we laugh because we ourselves are complicit. Because we recognize ourselves – psychic automata as we – within a society that has become mechanized. Living beings mimicking inhuman traits. We things.

Through its iconic and then somewhat more subtle references to past tastes, the outward signifiers in the installation employ an anachronistic temporality. I'm thinking 80's or early 90's. It is during this period when the retail brand the GAP – referred to by the giant replica – strategically corralled a market, and wall-to-wall carpeting – the post-shag type that covers the stage structures – marked middle-class comfort and stability. In the present these trends have lost their mass-flavor-of-the-moment-ness. It is from this critical distance from prevailing taste and trend that the work produces a consciousness of time. Take for instance the example of the trademark ad campaign put on by the retail brand the GAP which assaulted us in the 90's. The tagline involved the statement “everybody in khaki!” or “everybody in vests!” and involved groups of young ‘individuals’ dressed in similar outfits.<sup>1</sup> Implied in this imitation is a suggestion of social equalization. But the paradox is that fashion helps to facilitate the process in which temporal and social divisions are made – a process that quickens with the increase of wealth.<sup>2</sup> Anachronism becomes a method to feel a series of form through a historical time. Furthermore temporal distance evoked in the forms throughout the exhibition facilitates a reflection on the way external forms have been employed in an agenda of social division. Past tastes evoked by carpeting or the GAP clothing reference, point to a process in which a form is covered or veiled for the dual purpose of distinction and obliteration between social hierarchies. Individuals are presented with an illusion of being able to close this gap, for example by mimicking what is in-fashion. However they become subject to mechanical cycles – conspicuous consumption – which reify social divisions. This distancing becomes more palpable as taste and styles are abandoned, thrown into the ever accumulating debris of the trash heap. More fashion victims. The infra-distance between one's skin and clothing becomes greater as the form that functioned as the veil can be objectified in the course of time. On an earlier note, there is also an aspect of the humorous in this perception. Only when we are set at a distance do we perceive an element of the ridiculous or laughable in yesterday's fashion – remember shoulder pads and parachute pants?



The process in which material are draped and then pulled taut over the various geometric forms in the installation inspire some thoughts on the significance of this particular treatment. An image begins to condense around nature and culture. This particular distinction makes it possible to perceive a parallel series; matter or things, and the cultural activity of inscription unto things. Not unlike the previous examples of fashion that become dated and thus amenable to a perception of shifting cultural temporality, the ‘skins’ that are pulled taut and made to form around the geometric shapes in the installation can be peeled off – imagine this – revealing a once infra-thin distance between skin and naked form. This back and forth evokes Kant's description of epistemology wherein experience of things in the world is not given but arises because it is structured according to a priori patterns the mind imposes. Through this framework Buecking's platoideal forms can be read as the internal analytic structure, intertwined with the external synthetic experience – applied as red latex or carpeting material. This structure reflects how the particularities of experience or subjectivity are linked to existence within an exterior culture – culture is made intelligible from the conditions of cognition and vice-versa. Moreover the possibility of experience is a function of the distance, between the internal and external, subject and object. It is the gap that produces a desire to close a distance, between myself and a some-thing other. And this desire itself is nothing other than a meaning or a value. Influenced by Kant, George Simmel's theory of value in *The Philosophy of Money* analyses this relationship between cognition, value, and socio-economic activities. Here he shows how selfhood and modern economic

<sup>1</sup> There's a spoof somewhere in here that includes nineties GAP ads and the more recent subprime mortgage situation; “Everybody in a McMansion!” would be the tagline. And of course in a video sequence the human figure is literally in the GAP Bag!

<sup>2</sup> Georg Simmel, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume LXII, May 1957



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existence are intertwined. Simmel writes that cognition and value have similar structures because it is the gap between consciousness and its object which makes something meaningful or valuable: “The possibility of desire is the possibility of objects of desire. The object thus formed, which is characterized by its separation from the subject, who at the same time establishes it and seeks to overcome it by his desire, is for us a value.” Therefore distance is not a principle of alienation but one of motivation and integration. And so money can come into being as an independent system of exchange that nevertheless extends our potential for activity in the world.<sup>3</sup>

The abstract geometric shapes employed in the installation evoke what in modernist and Kantian aesthetics regards as purposive<sup>4</sup> form. It is precisely this quality which leads us to a desire or aesthetic ‘interest’ in these forms. Whereas the skin applied to these forms – the carpet or the vinyl – brings us back to the way in which these forms are made ‘useful’ within a particular discourse around class and taste. The “economist jokes” provide another structure that point to the way theories of economic exchange become so abstract that they become detached from having any practical value. However, it can be precisely this distance which potentiates activity in the world; between aesthetic forms or economic abstractions and their particular uses within culture and society. This is an interaction between things and individuals in society, catalyzed through distance.



The work suggests a ‘bad’ gap and a ‘good’ gap. There is a warning in the work that proposes a distance which creates unjust conditions within society. We see this in the example of light bulb jokes where science fails to relate to concrete reality, or in the way the inclusion of the GAP bag shows a facet of how style reifies class divisions, or when money becomes an abstract amount that the greedy begin to hoard, creating a one percent. There is another seemingly insurmountable distance – let’s call it an ontological distance – between a subject and an object, a distance which makes experience possible. It is our longing for what separates us from things that leads us back to a practical

engagement with things. Thus distance not only makes experience possible but is how things, taken in this sense, can be said to provoke change. The forms in the work draw on a language of modernist aesthetics, historically argued to be autonomous, and complicates this by proposing how the very distance of these things can be a critical element in effecting a politics of change.

Influenced by another reference in Buecking’s installation, I’d like to borrow a meteorological metaphor to conclude. Karl Popper once said that “clocks are neat, orderly systems that can be solved through reduction; clouds are an epistemic mess, highly irregular, disorderly, and more or less unpredictable.” The work acknowledges this complication and proposes, not a science of being able to forecast change, but rather, moves towards clouds. Things in their potential to encourage growth.

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<sup>3</sup> Continental Aesthetics Reader, ed. Clive Cazeux, p298

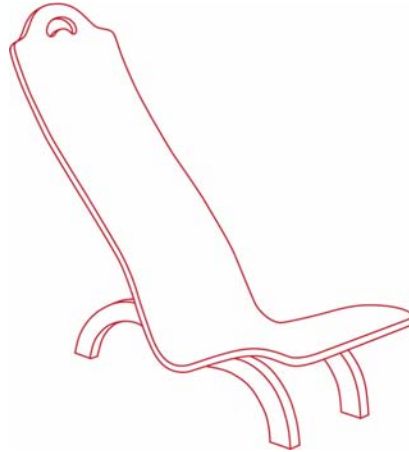
<sup>4</sup> The experience of beautiful objects, Kant argues, that they should affect us as if they had a purpose, although no particular purpose can be found.

# FrameWork 11/12

Joel Herman on Brian Groombridge

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## FLORILEGIUM FOR BRIAN GROOMBRIDGE



*The chair has always looked a little out of place in the library. If only Lotberton had an observatory – but it hasn't and the Gascoigne family who lived here doesn't seem to have had any interest in stargazing. The chair is so interesting and unusual that we couldn't possibly just leave it in store. Perhaps if we had a telescope to show alongside it...?¹*



East

Q.

A. There are some movements, but you do not sense them. I tried to give the impression of relief or perspective through the static shot. I did not even change lenses. If you change lenses, you change everything: your chair no longer looks the same, the difference between objects is altered, and space itself changes. If I photograph you with one lens, for example, and change to another when I come closer, I make the surface of your seatback larger: it is therefore no longer the same chair. In color this is even more obvious, because the shapes change but the salient colors remain the same. What is also important in the use of colour is not to put colours in places where people shouldn't be looking. If the main actor wears a dark gray or ivory necktie and a meaningless extra wears a blue one, automatically people will focus on the extra and will consequently miss something that the main character does or says. You must always increase the importance of a character through colour.<sup>2</sup>

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North

On either side the Axis ends in two Poles, but thereof the one is not seen, whereas the other faces us in the north high above the ocean. Encompassing it two Bears [Ursa Major and Minor] wheel together – wherefore they are also called the Wains. Now they ever hold their heads each toward the flank of the other, and are borne along always shoulder-wise, turned alternate on their shoulders. If, indeed, the tale be true, from Crete they by the will of mighty Zeus entered up into heaven, for that when in olden days he played as a child in fragrant Dicton, near the hill of Ida, they set him in a cave and nurtured him for the space of a year, what time the Dictaeon Curetes were deceiving Cronus. Now the one men call by name Cynosura and the other Helice. It is by Helice that the Achaeans on the sea divine which way to steer their ships, but in the other the Phoenicians put their trust when they cross the sea. But Helice, appearing large at earliest night, is bright and easy to mark; but the other is small, yet better for sailors: for in a smaller orbit wheel all her stars. By her guidance, then, the men of Sidon steer the straightest course.<sup>3</sup>



West

Observer: Lew Gramer  
Your skills: Intermediate  
Date and UT of Observation: 1996-07-21, 07:25 UT  
Location: Savoy, MA, USA (42N)  
Site classification: rural  
Limiting magnitude: 7.3  
Seeing: 4 - poor  
Moon up: no  
Instrument: Newtonian 12.5" f/4.8  
Magnification: 55x, 122x  
Filters used: none  
Object: M45, NGC1435, NGC1432,  
IC Category: Open cluster with Nebulosity  
Constellation: Tau  
Data: mag 1.2 size 100'  
RA/DE: 03h47m +24o07m

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Description: This outrageously bright clustering of stars is worth a look, not only for its beauty in even the smallest of instruments, but also for the challenge to even more experienced amateurs of seeing the delicate patches of nebulosity which are associated with it. At the altitude I saw it at on this morning (< 25 degs), with astronomical twilight already fast approaching, three and possibly four blurs could be distinguished around some of the stars in the Seven Sisters: the central 3 bright stars, Alcyone, Electra, and Maya showed a pale hint of nebulosities merging into each other, while the southernmost bright star, Merope, had its own thin patch of haze. The object as a whole, with just the brightest 30 stars or so, barely fits into a wider-field view, while higher power will bring a more definite impression of the nebulosity out.<sup>4</sup>



South

1. a puzzling or difficult problem: an unsolved question
2. an essential point requiring resolution or resolving an outcome “the *crux* of the problem”
3. a main or central feature (as of an argument)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <http://secretlivesofobjects.blogspot.ca/2011/09/victorian-astronomers-chair.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Jacques Tati in Cardullo, Bert ed. *World Directors in Dialogue: Conversations on Cinema*. Scarecrow Press: 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Callimachus, Hymns and Epigrams. Lycophron. Aratus. Translated by Mair, A. W. & G. R. Loeb Classical Library Volume 129. London: William Heinemann, 1921.

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.visualdeepsky.org/netastrocatalog/msg00071.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

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Kim Neudorf on Patrick Howlett



A sketch, a drawing, shavings of colour floating across a crammed shape of wood. Blinking, tiny with eyes glazed in the knot-hole of a naked expanse of white wall.

An arrow shape of flag. Plain fruit. Plastic blues and curving snips of green. Edges held fast. Flue closed. Soup tin and the slope of water. Balanced, hunched forward. Flat-rinse, watery lens. Get inside the shape, inside the outline of a thought.

Slow going. Ice cream pool, scraped back surface. Playing-cards on a mobile surface, papery corners trembling. Pull purple into pink, pulled and closed into the weave. Wax melts, its skin folding. Pinned in place. Held shut with a rubber band, snipped sharp. Shaved edges. Plain fruit meets dirty floor.

Sugary, marbled surfaces. Knives scraping across toast. Crumbs in the seams. Taking corners like an etch-a-sketch. Industrial day-glow against a film of mud, or fluorescent rinds and crusts in take-out white.

These paintings trace a tightly woven path, only to pull predictions sharply into the intimate space of labour. What appears as one surface expertly mimics the residual effects of another, as if saying “it could be this way, and also this way”. Mind following matter.

Any instant associations to art history – a more hygienic, un-embellished, crisp or harmonious abstraction – deviate. A fussy Cubist bouquet, a Bonnard bath, a Stuart Davis eggbeater-glove-fan, a Mel Blanc cartoon backdrop. Systems, premises, intuitive or process-based. Are these set-ups? Staged expressions? Even if they are, what artist isn't also “in libidinous relations to their systems”?<sup>1</sup> For *these* paintings, what is being suggested, asked, transformed, and not necessarily on behalf of *painting*?

There is a pattern of compositional choices, a familiar stage. Careful shapes are flattened and stretched into a kind of skin of angles. Each shape is not so much fused but growing directly out from one another's edges, most often in the closeness of mark-making. Centrally-focused areas of tension are often diffused in the moment of viewing, entering into a space of collaboration between control and a quietly defiant materiality. This happens through a careful, skilled modulation of the physical qualities of medium, colour, texture and line under the unique conditions of each painting.



## FrameWork 1/13

Otherwise self-contained works lose territorial power through close proximity to other paintings. Solitary, tiny works which appear like studies are well spaced from other clusters, their physicality quietly, almost imperceptibly influencing one another. The suggestion is that of a working influence – that which has surrounded the life of each work, and that which surrounds it now – and that of an ability to place familiar decisions (or familiar thought) under new, even risky conditions.

There are moments when these paintings completely lose their own train of thought, seemingly pulled outside of themselves, awkward and charged with vulnerability. Proximal space creates porous space.



Symbolist curves and orbs and the carved, icy scratches of shallow marks co-author a startling transformation: a hell/heaven sunset eye evokes a silent film villain (the word *villain* forming the folded shapes of an insect's limbs or the dip of a tooth) in the vicinity of brittle cross-hatching stretched taut over white.

The texture and colour of a line pulls itself through a hole into a pursed point. Another *line* about matter reaching out to represent; asking what kind of matter, what “being” of the painting itself would *picture* such an object through this pointing towards?<sup>2</sup>

Seemingly fully-formed shapes of texture emerge impossibly from shallow surfaces, suggesting thickness while simultaneously slick and concise. A residual image draws back like a snake upon the woolen surface of the painting across from it. Bruised, dislodged, jagged shapes are softened into the worried paths of burrowing cracks and furrows. Pleasant pinks and oranges nestle, then burn, casting themselves into the next room. A kind of materiality as a shifting, errant field, matter which “simply, arbitrarily, but politely...take the minimum angle necessary to veer away – prefer not to go with the flow.”<sup>3</sup>

Glaring shapes of acid-yellow-green. The upturned corner of an eye fused with its eyelid of crawling curls of stains. Planar meets intersection. An inwardly-curved wash changes direction to meet scribbly fits and the peeled tufts of papery fur. Glass shards are eye crusts.

Stories of objects left inside tree hollows. Tin foil and string. Sealed with cement, eyes shut.

Stories of rusty bicycles fueled by yellowy glue, trailing greenish from pipes. Nail soup. Morning spots.

*How hummingbirds choose flowers* has something to do with these. Scanning through paragraphs to find the instance. First the blink of tin foil, chewing gum. The tree-knot. The knot-hole.

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<sup>1</sup> Isabelle Graw. “Conceptual Expression: On Conceptual Gestures in Allegedly Expressive Painting, Traces of Expression in Proto-Conceptual Works, and the Significance of Artistic Procedures.” *Art After Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; Vienna, Austria: Generali Foundation, 2006), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Shiff. “Cezanne’s Physicality: the politics of touch.” *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 138.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Bennett. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 100.

# FrameWork 2/13:1

Sandra Meigs on Simple Present Future Anterior

*A Powder of Feelings*



Charles S. Peirce writes: “Time consists in a regularity in the relations of interacting feelings. Like begins to produce like. Then even pairs of unlike feelings begin to have similarity and then these begin to generalize... All this goes on in ways I cannot detail until the feelings are so bound together that a passable approximation to a real time is established. Unrelated feelings are like a powder of matter, psychically imbued. This powder is fine, rare, and evenly distributed.” A life in art is equally rare and equally full of feeling. The artist experiences the chaos of rare feeling brought to some eventual cohesion in form then bound together in works of art.

Both my daughter, Evelyn Feldman, and Susan Hobbs Gallery were born in February, 1993. I conflate these two events in a giant spiral of love, art, life, and business. It is rare and enormous. Here are some entries from my journals over the years.





## FrameWork 2/13:1

February 27, 1993

Inaugural Opening today at Susan Hobbs. Sent in the two framed gouaches from the Red Deer River. “Mary take the child; the river’s rising. Muddy water changing all I know.” Sorry I can’t be there. The baby’s so exhausting.

March 23, 1993

Evelyn slept the longest ever in her life. 5 1/2 hours. And she is taking a rare nap now-- no telling how long-- it could be over any minute now. I think her sleeping ability is developing. If only we could get her to take the bottle. I fear that she never will. Joe keeps trying but she won’t swallow the milk from it. -----I have ideas for new paintings, but I think about the production with fear – when will I ever have time? Evelyn is very beautiful and can be extremely charming.

October 24, 1993

Joe and I took Evelyn for her 9-month check-up. There was a routine weighing, measuring, chest check and questions. Dr. Doyle was concerned about Ev’s lack of weight gain (about 14 3/4 lbs. now) and said we should “force some food down her”. Ev has an ear infection in her right ear. But Dr. Doyle couldn’t tell if the infection was from ear picking or if the ear picking was from the infection. She’s been waking at 4:30 AM, which seems like the middle of the night. I’ve been trying to feed her breakfast twice, once when she first gets up, alternating with the bottle, and an hour later in the high chair. So far I’m able to get a whole jar of cereal and fruit down her, quite a lot more than before. She seems to call everything either Ga or Ba but understands a lot of words like bottle, duck, fan, show, book, juice, bath, bed, dance, and Mommy and Daddy of course. She’s a happy baby and learning new things every day.



June 2, 1994

I opened Baby at the gallery. When she was only 4 weeks old, I took the baby on my research trip to Utah but could not do the drawing that I wanted to because the baby never slept so I wrote the story instead and then put the story of with a long run on panorama painting about a woman who drops her baby and the baby dies and the woman cannot get over her grief ever, cannot stop seeing the baby’s face, even when she closes her eyes. I have heard that Rock-a-Bye Baby is a wish song for respite from the ever-needy infant. A revenge song. I had my text engraved on the frames. Perhaps it is revenge, but I love that I am able to put my love and exhaustion into this painting. It’s very funny I think. An epic comic tragedy.

## FrameWork 2/13:1

June 20, 1995

The baby is off on her own more. Happy to play with friends and read books. We can hardly call her a baby anymore. Sometimes she seems capable of looking after herself. All of a sudden my inner thoughts seem inconsequential. Whereas before I had the baby they were the most important things in the world. Perhaps I'll never paint again. Nothing is ever enough. I try not making a picture and I try making a very distinct picture. I cannot get it right either way.

July 8, 1995

Evy saw the photograph I had taken of myself when I was pregnant. When she asked me about it I told her it was me with her inside. She told me then that she wishes I would eat her up again. I so think that inside and outside are the same. My art is like the baby too. I have all her dollies and I do collages of them with her scrappy craft stuff. They are all sleeping on flat hard beds.

July – October, 1995

And then I made Canadian: a scatology of paint forms swirling outward from the canvas. Texts in round yellow disks float out from the frames.



September 1, 1999

JOYJOYSORROW. Susan picked me up at the airport. She seemed rushed, wired, upset. The police called her about a fire at her house. No details. On the way in she talks about Pamela. Pamela is her new assistant. It's her first day at the gallery. We arrive at the gallery. It's a hot Toronto day. Pamela comes out to the car and talks to Susan. Something serious. It's about the fire. The fire department wants her to get home right away. Pamela looks kind of white and is very quiet. We get my suitcase out of the car. Pamela and I go in. Susan drives off, looking very shaky. We go ahead installing the work, a big job and not much time. I am suddenly bound to Pamela when I want Susan to be there. I want the pieces to be installed crooked, tipsy-like. It is a wave, a big sea enveloping the gallery. JOYJOYSORROW. The work looks so great. I am stunned.

September 2, 1999

The house fire was extensive. Lots of fire damage and smoke damage. I didn't get many details out of Susan. At the opening, Susan doesn't want people to discuss her house fire. There's a weird kind of hush. I don't even think she is telling anyone. It was weird not talking about the elephant in the room. I don't even think it was mentioned at the opening and if it was, it was like a death. She wouldn't be able to sleep there again for many months. Of course I am preoccupied with the show, which was a major production.

## FrameWork 2/13:1

JOYJOYSORROW is so mesmerizing. The wall-to-wall carpet has a sinking effect. The gallery has become a sea upon which the doleful-eyed heads are floating. Upstairs, Scenes on a Sea of Joy and Sorrow.

January 26, 2013

Susan lights the shows. I can't get up on that ladder. Susan twists around up there with the wires, beams and lights, her feet on the top rung of the 9' ladder. Sometimes she curses and swears.

Susan has exacting respect for her artists and her clients. I admire her discretion and business acumen. The Solo Show is prime time for each of us respectively. She does not express her passion or dispassion for the work. I think that, in a strange way, this gives her focus and authority. It shows a kind of respect for the long-term work of the artists. She believes in and understands that making art is a journey.

This is like the powder of feeling. The art comes together not one particular artwork being fixed, until the Life of Art is rarified. Then it becomes the Time of the Artist, in one whole. The baby is born, then you don't talk about this moment or that moment as the best, and not all moments stand out. It is a continuum. A life.

Titles

I have had 11 Solo Shows at the gallery in the past 20 years plus some in the upstairs space at the same time:

Baby, Canadian, Dummies, Resin Heads, JOYJOYSORROW, Swoon, The Newborn, Bump, Ride, Its, The Fold Heads, The Giants, Strange Loop, Scenes on a Sea of Joy and Sorrow, Three Places, What the Inside Sees, Sleeping Dollies.

## FrameWork 2/13:2

### Liz Magor on Simple Present Future Anterior

I'm sure that all the artists who work with Susan have experienced her ability to provide unusual support for projects and passions. She's concierge-like in her arrangements for securing funding, making donations or finding a seat sale. She's paralegal in pursuing insurance claims, getting into or out of contracts, and checking the fine print.

I have learned to value her input on both professional and personal matters and absolutely trust her discretion and fairness. More than once I have leaned on her with problems so pathetic that I choose to suppress them from memory. On the occasion of celebrating 20 years of partnership with Susan I involuntarily recall this story.

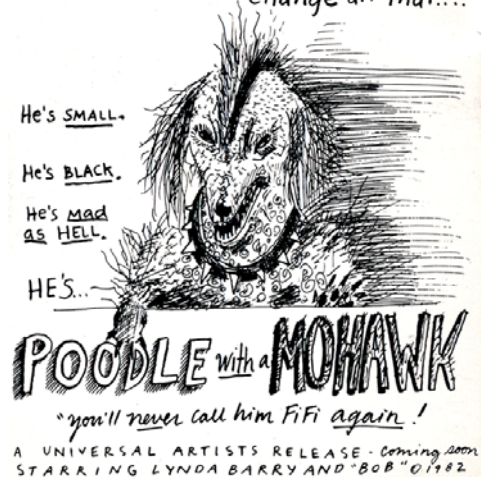


At some point in the mid- 1990's I developed a passion for poodles. Not the big ones with their classy continental cuts, or the tiny toys sitting in tea-cups. My focus was on the mid-size version, the "French Poodle", called miniature by their breeders. This interest was triggered by a Lynda Barry comic strip featuring a poodle with a spikey haircut; "he's small, he's black, he's mad as hell, he's Poodle with a Mohawk!" and confirmed by a sighting in Trinity Bellwood Park of a ragged-coated miniature giving the rout to a bruiser of a Rottweiler.

It wasn't until I moved back to Vancouver that my obsession really bit. A fascination with the history of bloodlines led me to pedigree charts which I cross-referenced with listings in the breeder section of dog magazines. Eventually I came to the conclusion that the epi-center of miniature poodle production was in a swath of townships just north of Toronto where two kennels based their breeding program on direct descendants of the American champions of the 1940's. No doubt the inaccessibility of these places honed my imagination as I pictured the rolling hills of Bobcaygeon populated with frolicking, collectible poodles all tricked out like the vintage dogs in the old books.

In 1996, on the occasion of my third exhibition at the gallery, I begged Hobbs to help me get up there, just for a look. This was too embarrassing a request to lay at any other door, and even Hobbs sounded worried at the weirdness of it, but she picked me up at the airport and we headed straight to King City in dark, nasty weather. I had contacted a kennel famous for developing a line of "red" dogs and the only one with bloodlines from the original imports from France. The breeder reluctantly agreed to let us visit at night, no doubt hoping to "place" one of her less than perfect pups.

He knew what people thought of his kind:  
"High Strung." Spoiled Rotten." French."  
But in the next 24 hours, He's going  
change all that...

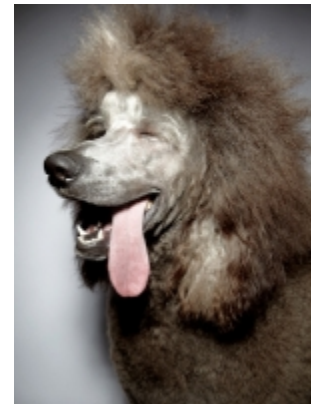


## FrameWork 2/13:2

In a rural area zoned for acreage we found the house at the end of a long, unlighted driveway. We were ushered in through a door at the side of the building straight into some sort of rumpus room thick with the scent of urine and cluttered with dogs. This room operated as the infirmary/boarding kennel/family room, where old dogs spent their declining years and boarding dogs strained at leashes tied to doorknobs. It was outfitted with two Lazi-boys, a television set, and a rudimentary kitchenette.



I guess I was expecting something like a tour of a wine cellar, so I knew immediately that this visit was a mistake. As the dogs came to greet us in good poodle fashion I could feel Hobbs pull herself in tight, hoping to avoid contact with the moth-eaten reception line. One old girl had mucky, bug-eyes and a tongue stuck permanently out of the side of her mouth. All the dogs were geriatric; faded, matted and ungroomed, skittering across the floor on long horny toenails. Except for a chestnut coloured dog who appeared young and handsome. He rolled up, staring at us with eyes as white as marble, the victim of a tragic, genetic disease particular to poodles, rendering the afflicted stone blind by the age of 3. We were surely in the land of the damned.



I couldn't help Hobbs. I know she is fastidious and this scene was the opposite of that. I was obliged to proceed with the basic requirements of a visit, asking questions and making positive sounds at the story of the breeding program. I remember a nursing dam was brought in from the kennel for my inspection; named 'Tia Maria. I imagine this was in reference to her liqueur-coloured coat. I was offered a place on the "waiting list" for one of her pups; sired by Jazzy Jake. I expressed appreciation for this privilege and used the transaction to move Hobbs toward the door. With promises of follow-up we slipped out of the house, ran to her Probe, and locked ourselves in. I loved the smell of vinyl we found there. We were saved.

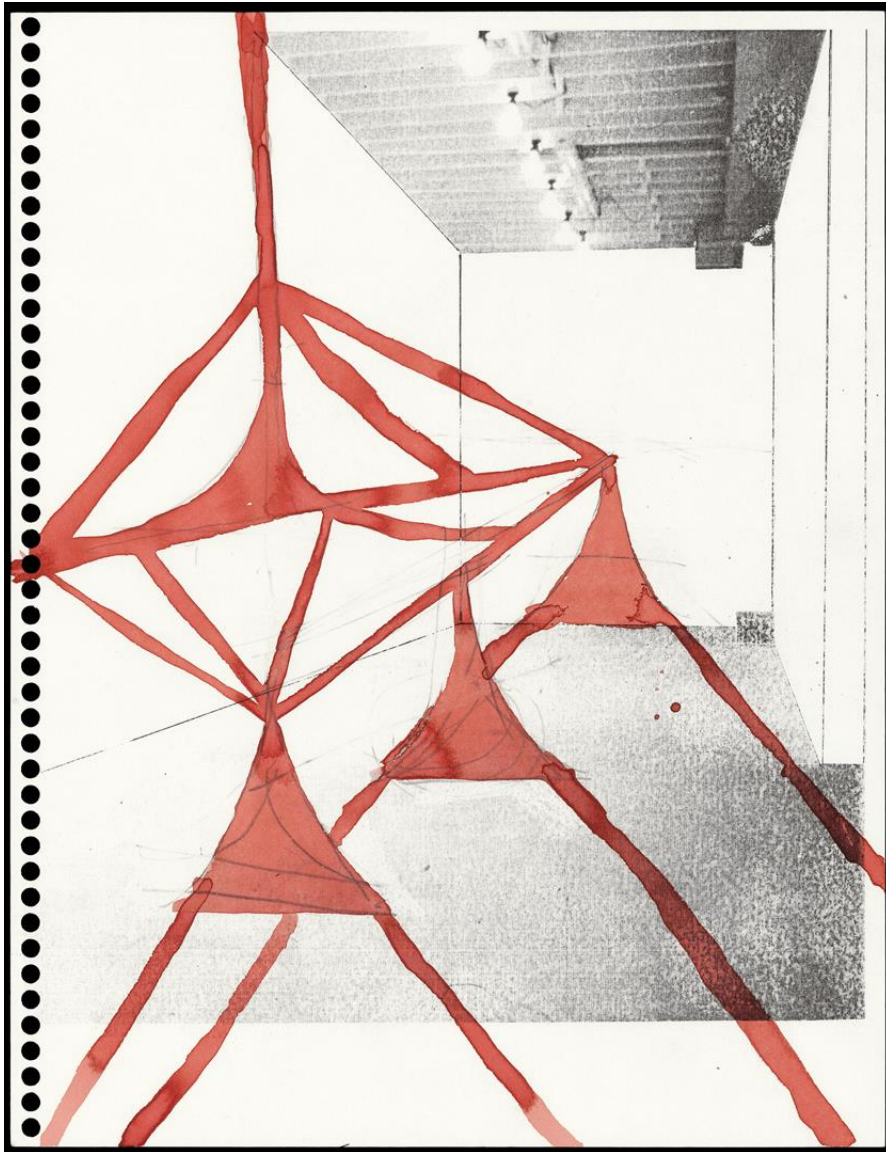
## FrameWork 2/13:3

### Brian Groombridge on Simple Present Future Anterior

Twenty years ago I was lucky enough to have Susan ask me to be part of her new gallery.

When we talked about exhibiting, most times I would not have a particular idea of what I wanted to present. If I did put shape to an idea, by the time the show happened, it bore little resemblance to the initial idea. Something else always seemed to happen along the way. Susan allowing that complete freedom to do anything was remarkably generous.

As for the physical gallery space - it's been small enough, big enough, polished enough, rough enough, odd enough.



## FrameWork 3/13:1

Ian Carr-Harris on Simple Present Future Anterior



### Ten Sentences on Susan Hobbs: courtesy of Sol Lewitt

Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.

Irrational judgements lead to new experience.

When words such as painting and sculpture are used, they connote a whole tradition and imply a consequent acceptance of this tradition, thus placing limitations on the artist who would be reluctant to make art that goes beyond the limitations.

Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words (written or spoken) to physical reality, equally.

If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature; numbers are not mathematics.

All ideas are art if they are concerned with art and fall within the conventions of art.

The conventions of art are altered by works of art.

Successful art changes our understanding of the conventions by altering our perceptions.

There are many elements involved in a work of art. The most important are the most obvious.

Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution.

*From Sentences on Conceptual Art, by Sol Lewitt, 1969;*

*Adapted by Ian Carr-Harris, 2013 on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Susan Hobbs Gallery*

## FrameWork 3/13:2

### Patrick Howlett on Simple Present Future Anterior

I made two works for *Simple Present Future Anterior*. One is called *you can always come back (but you can't come back all the way)*.



The title comes from the last verse of a song by Bob Dylan called *Mississippi*. It's a looking back-travel song, with a litany of mistakes and troublesome observations balanced with a defiant and brazen will to press on. Paradox is built into each verse:

*Well my ship's been split to splinters and it's sinkin' fast  
I'm drownin' in the poison, got no future, got no past  
But my heart is not weary, it's light and it's free  
I've got nothin' but affection for all those who've sailed with me*

and later

*Well, the emptiness is endless, cold as the clay  
You can always come back, but you can't come back all the way  
Only one thing I did wrong  
Stayed in Mississippi a day too long*

You can always come back from where? What is time to a work of art?



## FrameWork 3/13:2

Time is a subject Dylan tackles with dogged attention and it tends to be more interesting when approached from multiple perspectives. I read somewhere that he developed a non-linear approach to narrative from a painter, allowing images and moments culled from very different situations and places to exist simultaneously, or at least unfold in the moment created by a single song. The song, the work, the art, the performance, is the place where time tangles with the present. That is to say, one foot is in the past and one foot is in the future.

*the future for me is already a thing of the past*



is the name of my other painting in the show which takes its title from the song *Bye and Bye*, also from Dylan's 2001 album *Love and Theft*. One thing that amazes me with Dylan's later work is that it is possible to imagine the singer singing to a lover, or to his current self, or to a younger self, all at the same time. The expressive power becomes exponential and it manages a reflection on the past that is completely alive, resisting nostalgia even while revisiting traditional musical forms and styles (as *Bye and Bye* does).

I am beginning to be impressed with how quickly time is moving.

The paintings are not about the Dylan songs, but they are about having one foot in the past and one foot in the future.

## FrameWork 3/13:3

Didier Courbot on Simple Present Future Anterior



A few years ago I was preparing a show at Susan's gallery. During the week of the installation I was invited for dinner at the French consulate in Toronto. While Susan drove me to the consulate that evening I started to talk about the fact that I was badly dressed to meet diplomats and government officials - I was in dirty working clothes that I had been wearing during the set up. As usual, Susan found the right words: "Didier, you don't have to worry, you're the artist you can do anything."

These were very simple words. But I can still see the situation and hear her words. I understood so much at that moment.

Just one word: Merci.

## FrameWork 4/13

Lee Henderson on Ian Carr-Harris

From Sea and Sky:

A True Diary Covering the Period of March 21<sup>st</sup> to April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Containing Several Fictions.



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*March 21, 2013*

Three books, three tables, three ships, three oceans.

A variable edition or a tripartite object with variation built into its singular makeup.

*Three epochs of exploration are invoked by galleon, corsair, and steamer (Forgive me for getting the types of ship horribly wrong, as I suspect I have; a gap in my boyhood education, owing to a prairie context. But I can tell you about various cloud formations or grasshopper, should you be so interested).*

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*March 22, 2013*

*What is a model?*

A model is a replica or representation of a thing or a process.

If someone points a finger at a window, you look at the window. You know the finger still exists, but you follow its path anyway. It could be a particularly beautiful finger, perhaps the finger of your beloved, even, but you follow its pointing because you following the learned code that tells you that the index finger must be an index to something outside itself.

## FrameWork 4/13

A model is this kind of index, but rather than operating spatially, it operates through resemblance or depiction. It often has enough resemblance, in fact, that when we observe such a model we say, “here is an aircraft carrier”, rather than the more precise, “here is a model of an aircraft carrier.” That is, we assume the indexical nature of the model to be made evident by its difference from its original (it is smaller, made of other materials, etc.), but its similarity to the original is what makes it useful.

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March 23, 2013

The book is also a form of index. Whether fiction or non-fiction (whatever that distinction means), the book points to a set of ideas or perspectives. And the quality of this pointing is dependent on the quality of the index.

Memorization seems to have a bad reputation, seen as the chief tactic of only the most outdated and draconian systems of education. And yet, I recall hearing once that under fascist regimes and in times of political upheaval, memory was all that could be relied upon. “If you memorize a poem,” I think it went, “they can never take it from you. It’s yours. And you can distribute it for free.” Our ability to memorize is therefore the seed that ultimately ensures the possibility of democracy. Memorization is the antidote to book-burning.

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March 25, 2013

A poem I remember, even as I forget the author:

*I really hate this damn machine*

*I wish that they would sell it.*

*It never does quite what I want*

*But only what I tell it.*

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March 26, 2013

In staring down at the text of John Masefield’s poem *Cargoes*, reproduced in a book (or a model of a book), I notice the annotation that takes up half of one page. It contains:

A citation of the poem’s source

A short biography of the poet, touching upon his mid-life, his old-age, and his posthumous reputation

Six namings of years to ground something in an historical timeline (1944, 1902, 1878, 1967, 1930, 1967)

The exposure of two historical errors contained in the poem

God, as it were, is in the footnotes. What the poem performs in its repeated invocation of various points in seafaring history, the annotation to its side does by referring coolly to biographical and historic information. The rhetoric is different, but the friction of temporal juxtaposition remains. It

## FrameWork 4/13

points us towards a reconsideration of the poetic in light of the historical (after the reconsideration, by Masfield, of the historic via the poetic).

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March 27, 2013

In school once, as a child, I noticed how readily the construction paper sheets were transformed into convincing waves when cut into curves and slid back and forth against each other—a believable and thoroughly enjoyable lie that could make a landlocked prairie boy feel adrift at sea. I can't see such constructed waves without thinking about that primary experience, suggesting that maybe one can't ever jump into the same river twice.



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March 29, 2013

What is a kit?

A kit is a model you build, according to instructions that can be implicit or explicit. Culture is carried in these instructions (the technical manual is a literary genre all its own).

With a kit, you feel that you've done something, completed a task, made an object yourself, created... but you've also executed something, been the functionary of a mechanism, performed a program, run an algorithm. You've made the code of the kit manifest but the code predates you.

The kit—as manufactured fragments designed for compilation or assembly—possesses the potential of the model. But just as the model-that-points (as index) to its originary parent of The Original, so does the kit-that-waits (as index) point to both its originary grandparent of The Original, and its eventual reiteration as The Assembled Model.

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March 31, 2013

ITERATION: An obvious cornerstone of design and architecture; a secret cornerstone of art. Iteration, as a noun, can mean both a step in that process of development and change, or it can mean the process itself. This is confusing, but offers rich ontological territory.

The role of iteration in working towards an objective is difficult to comprehend unless one has access to the iterative process itself (and could only have been more difficult to understand before Darwin, I must imagine). But perhaps the problem lies in defining an “objective” point in time at all, rather than seeing iteration itself as the objective; a process-based object is a suspicious one... perhaps we should instead think of process-based processes.

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April 1, 2013

*AN INTERJECTION:*

*I am watching my son play with some ants (he is six). He coaxes a few of them onto a leaf, and places it in the stream that runs next to the curb and towards the storm drain. The loaded leaf floats away; he plucks another, returns to his laboratory, and loads it with slightly more ants than before. Again he places it into the stream, and again it floats away. I gather this will continue until a leaf sinks under the weight, or until he runs out of ants.*

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April 3, 2013

Iteration can exist in time or in space... usually in both. We might imagine a structure of utility—a barn, for instance—that gets slowly dismantled. At each step of this taking-apart, an onlooker would be presented with a new manifestation of the barn’s program, albeit in the reverse order from the process that led to the barn’s construction—these are iterations in time.

Amid this process, the onlooker might wonder at what point the barn ceases to be a barn—is it when three beams are removed? Or five? Or when the first wall comes down? Does the structure remain “a barn” until the last scrap is removed from the ground, or did it cease to perform barn-ness the moment it fell out of use?

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April 4, 2013

Now imagine a new structure emerging where the barn once stood, or very nearby. Such a structure would have to go through its own processes of iteration, even if built according to the basic program of the original barn. It would be designed, planned for; each alteration to the design being its own version of the structure. We might picture texts or drawings on tables or on a wall, plans for a thing that is on its way but has already happened. Then it would find another, more three-dimensional manifestation, perhaps first as a maquette (a special kind of model that points to both its origin and its eventual construction), perhaps even several maquettes—these are iterations in space.

And finally, imagine that the new structure is lived in, is occupied—it is now both house and home. Even if its construction is finished (a dubious suggestion at best), each new use of its interiors, each new modification to its exteriors, each new social engagement for which it provides the context offers, too, an iteration of the house. As a process in progress, it is philosophically clean, tidy... it does not assume some messy point of completion that will then need to be interrogated when further iteration proves unavoidable.

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April 5, 2013

I wonder often about the thing-ness of an art work. It seems to me that an installation, for instance, ceases to exist when it is packed away for shipping, only to spring back into existence when re-installed. Not so for the crated painting (Schrödinger's riddling aside), which is no longer "on view" but is not fundamentally changed by mere storage.

Perhaps all art works have three alternating (or simultaneous) versions of themselves... not their three Platono-mimetic possibilities, tempting and comforting an old model as that may be; nor, indeed, the Kosuthian variation of text/image/object chair(s). Rather, if art is a context and not a set of materials or methods of imaging, the three versions of the art work are defined contextually, too—the work as it exists inside the space of art, outside the space of art, and finally *as* the space of art. The artist's studio is already both the site of the work, and work itself.

## FrameWork 5/13

Kathleen Smith on Oliver Husain

*gebimsel* = in German, domestic decorations hanging from the walls or ceiling.  
A word is a feeling is a lifestyle is a socio-political analysis.

On a day filled with wandering and shopping and lunching you may find yourself at Susan Hobbs Gallery just south of the Queen West strip on Tecumseth. In a skinny re-purposed building – a remnant of Toronto’s industrial past – is a tiny door set back from the sidewalk. Duck and enter.



On the walls of the ground floor space large hand-dyed silk squares flutter gently whenever the gallery door to the street opens and closes. *facade (1)* and *facade (2)* are deep yellow, superimposed with sobering grey grids. *facade (3)* is more muted in tone, presenting hints of light blue and cloud white and red brick in what must be the reflections of the sky in the windows of a tall building.

On the wall opposite a large vinyl poster advertises *Pandan Cake Mix* – a cooing Audrey Hepburn lookalike admires the lime-green fluffiness that results from someone’s efforts in the kitchen. Your lips involuntarily purse as you decide the icing on the cake is likely coconut.

These works are your entrée into Oliver Husain’s *Gebimsel* – you can see the installation and its objects laid out before you, if not the invisible path that beckons you to examine each object. There is a sense of flotsam and jetsam, the bits and bobs that litter this route. But this is not rubbish – these are precisely positioned artifacts, some constructed, some deconstructed, some found and others halfway to being lost. The embodiment of the viewer moving through their midst causes them to radiate briefly. They have been waiting for you.



## FrameWork 5/13

A few steps and you are face to face with two works that feature bendy pieces constructed from dowels, springs and ribbon. *Collapsables/Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* sits on a wide plinth. Pick up one of the 4 X 5 digital prints littering the base if no one's looking. Put it back, they are all the same image. Oh, but wait – they are not all the same! You can tell they are stills from a film, in this case it's a 1984 Indian cult comedy about real estate corruption. In the scene depicted construction cranes toil away on a job-site while a developer and a politician in the foreground seal a deal with handshakes and smiles. In each print the two villains express a minutely different level of glee while the cranes do their elegant building dance in the background.

Nearby *Pandy Ramada's Bendable Displex* stands solid; it's a screen that obscures exactly nothing, made from sheets of laminated corrugated plastic held together with zip ties. *Collapsables Duo* is visible just beyond - repeating and distilling the vibratory quality of *Collapsables/Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* times two. Flick the elements and they bounce, wait for an extremely heavy person to pass by (or rush past the work yourself, stepping hard) and you will see them tremble.



Continue on to the back of the gallery. A tall rolling display stand supports a mass of bundled felt. It looks like a brain and, indeed, it might as well be since this is a bundle of felt words. Husain has painstakingly cut out a portion of *Vorbemerkung (Preliminary Remark)*, the Rolf Dieter Brinkmann text from 1974 that inspired and anchors the *Gebimisel* installation.

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“The storytellers continue, the automotive industry continues, the workers continue, the governments continue, the rock ’n’ roll singers continue, the prices continue, paper continues, the animals and trees continue, day and night continue, the moon rises, the sun rises, eyes open, doors open, the mouth opens, one speaks, one makes signs, signs on the facades, signs on the street, signs on machines, which are being moved, movements in rooms, through an apartment, when no one but oneself is there, wind blows old newspapers over an empty grey parking lot, wild bushes and grass grow over the abandoned lots full of rubble, right downtown, a construction hoarding is painted blue, a sign is nailed to the blue hoarding, Post No Bills, the hoardings, the posters, the No’s continue, the elevators continue, the facades continue, downtown continues, the suburbs continue.

What a delight to walk down a street in the sunshine. The poems I have assembled here were written between 1970 and 1974, for various occasions, in various places, are they any good? You ask. They are poems. All the questions continue just like all answers continue. Space continues. I’m opening my eyes and looking at a white sheet of paper.”

~ *Vorbemerkung (Preliminary Remark)* by Rolf Dieter Brinkmann (1974), translated from German by Oliver Husain and Ken McKerrow.

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Look carefully – you can see the final word of the original German paragraph ‘papier’ dangling there.

The text continues too, literally, in the *continued* series of eight drawings lining the back wall. The ink on paper drawings trace the shapes and shadows generated by another felt word cutting-out and folding project, the word manipulated here: ‘continued’.

In this part of the room (if the gallery is quiet and you are there at the right time) romantic music insinuates itself. This is *Illusionen once per hour*. As the title suggests, this piece consists of the melodramatic folk-pop song *Illusionen* by German singer Alexandra (who died in the sixties) played in its entirety once every hour: “Illusions hover, summer blue, in the sky above your life – but you know for sure: this cloudless dream image of your fantasy will never come true.” The sound issues from a round boom box set on the floor near the staircase to the gallery’s upper level.

Float upstairs in slow motion admiring the narrowness of the stairwell (so high the risers! so sturdy the wood!), lovingly fingering the bumpy whiteness of the not quite pristine drywall. In the second-floor aerie the installation continues, sharing space with books for sale, and the business hub of the gallery.

Here you can slide behind another corrugated plastic screen – a double of the one downstairs – to sit on a plastic chair and watch the video *PARADE*. Watch it several times in order to fully understand its damning secrets or to calm down from your busy day or if you are planning to write about it. A fan will blow air down the back of your neck, a bit noisily. It’s a white noise so not disruptive.



The ideas of the first floor are reiterated and encapsulated in this 11-minute work. Husain deploys condominium sales fly-throughs (CGI promotional videos designed to seduce potential buyers by illustrating dreamy and uncluttered domestic and social scenarios), projecting and re-shooting the images on fluttering fabric to suggest pristine lives lived in elegant and austere boxes in the sky.

At times the video is populated by alternately beautiful and creepy computer-enhanced urbanites, composite characters who go from work to shopping to working out to groomed perfection to ground-floor lounge drinks with compatriots, without stepping outside – though they may gaze longingly at the moon through a window or briefly traverse a manicured courtyard. At other times, the video clips resemble an unpeopled video or computer game – *Myst*, for example – in which the viewer wanders/drives/skates through architectures and landscapes designed for people but devoid of life. These scenes are at once dystopian and deeply alluring.

In program notes written for the gallery, Husain's video is linked with French writer Marguerite Duras' concept of the *image passe-partout* (an image designed as a container or envelope for an infinite number of texts) from her 1978 film *Les mains négatives*. This linkage invites multiple readings of the material presented yet the same gloomy questions prevail – questions about human habitation patterns and how they reflect societal values. Husain's historical strategy of connecting cultural relics from the sixties, seventies and eighties with the concerns of today solidifies on the screen, these digital images making the point even more firmly than the material objects that have been teasing the viewer on the journey across the ground floor and upstairs. The Brinkmann text returns here too, further anchoring Husain's video dream of a manufactured world ready and waiting for visitors, tenants, owners, inhabitants. A continuance, since we have learned nothing.

## FrameWork 5/13

Retrace your steps now and notice a new weight in the delicate components of this *Gebimsel*. The objects may flutter and tremble and cast shadows for you now in a slightly more sinister way.

As you waft downstairs, out the front door (past the book for signing) and into the empty street, you feel light and unencumbered, as if you have left something heavy behind. The almost-black silk square *facade (4)* waves good-bye, darkly. The sun-dappled day stretches out before you.

# FrameWork 8/13

Althea Thauberger on Duane Linklater



## A STORY

Upon stepping off Tecumseth Street and entering the gallery, a massive diagonal graphic stretching from ceiling to floor, like a cartoon lightning bolt, startles. It seems a bit funny. Overly dramatic or inappropriate. It is a bright, sunny, psycho yellow,<sup>1</sup> and sings, or zings, against the white. In the far corner, hang two prints with images you know. Out of habit, you glance left (where there is a framed print),<sup>2</sup> hesitate for a second, and walk towards it. The mat and frame are unfashionable. The image is perfectly familiar. Two stylized Canada geese: a parent, with a small gosling at its feet. Both look upward, the goose at the sky, the baby at the parent.<sup>3</sup> Their wings move upward as elegant flowing lines. The print is marked 181/495 and signed by the artist Benjamin Chee Chee, or is the signature also printed? The print's title, "Learning," is not indicated.

I remember similar mattes and frames in my family home when I was a child. The image is beautiful and deeply touching, stranded and honoured by its place on the wall. I remember it as an emblem, an aesthetic, a feeling. Perversely, I remember it as palpably "Canadian" or, as palpable Canadiana, as a visual emblem.<sup>4</sup>

The painted yellow stripes that slice the gallery shift perspective when you move towards them. Directly facing the head-height zigzag which optically quivers, you are brought back to ideas in painting. You are reminded of chevrons<sup>5</sup> in Aboriginal design and as military insignia. You are reminded of the Janus head: a simultaneous regard towards the past and future, and an opening in a time of war.<sup>6</sup>

Forward or backward, towards the photographs<sup>7</sup> that hang next to each other and define a corner, you register first the image of the Mohawk Warrior. The image is absolutely familiar. It shows a camouflage-clad man with a bandanna tied over his nose and mouth standing on one of the *Sûreté du Québec* vehicles abandoned and turned into barricades after the July 11, 1990 standoff in which more than one hundred police officers fired tear gas and automatic weapons into a Mohawk blockade set up to defend Kanasatake territory from development, and during which a Québec officer was shot and killed. The man holds a rifle over his head in a gesture of struggle, resistance, victory, or defiance. You admire the photographer's<sup>8</sup> choices for a moment. An upside down *fleur-de-lys* insignia painted on the police vehicle door, hovering over the ground, seems to suggest that a fucking of the land is either imminent, or has been averted. Next to the symbol, the vehicle manufacturer's name plate, RAM, echoes this sentiment.

I recall that summer, my 19<sup>th</sup>, when my identifications were radically changing. I am the daughter of grandchildren of German and Scandinavian immigrant farmers who settled in rural Saskatchewan. I was raised in various towns and suburbs in central and western Canada in a religious family. Before following the Oka Crisis on TV, and radio, I'd had little consciousness of Canada as an antagonistic colonial state.

You turn to the perpendicular Cobain. The image is unpleasantly familiar. You are aware that the photograph is from Nirvana's Unplugged in New York concert on November 18, 1993. Cobain starts to look strange, frozen in an earnest gesture of song speech; small, white, hunched and fuzzy in sweater. A vulnerable creature.

Both photographs were shot on film, then colour separated and printed using a commercial litho dot matrix process, then scanned, then web optimized with a jpeg algorithm, then photographed from a computer screen, including parts of the image window's grey background<sup>9</sup> and surface smears, and

then printed in a digital photographic process. Both betray each constitutive layer as traces or even documents of moments between the then and the now, and as metaphors not for remove but connective tissue. Perhaps because of their familiarity, both images still strangely convey something of what might be described as their aura, the figures hovering and coherent from beyond the grave within the matrixes that have constituted their visibility.

You notice the emphatic formal triangularity of both compositions. This echoes the other “threes” in the gallery. You project a sense of vehemence toward the depicted phalluses (microphone, guitar, gun) and see the perpendicular figures as role models of masculinity in direct comparison and confrontation. Cobain is the expressive, sensitive and affected individualist slacker exuding anger with a kind of ‘whateverness’.<sup>10</sup> The warrior is the resolute, seemingly anonymous, affected collectivist in an exaggerated gesture of struggle for recognition and autonomy. They make each other awkward.

On the stairs, I hear another voice, from memory, perhaps as an unconscious way of exorcising the whiny Cobain. It is a few words of a Don Freed song that I must have heard him perform live in a pub in Saskatoon more than twenty years ago:

“So you want to go golfing/  
On Sacred Land...”

On Sacred Land...”

I couldn’t remember the rest.

Upstairs you are met with artefacts related to the corporate visibility of the Ontario Northland Rail Service, whose chevron logo has been re-purposed in the lower gallery.<sup>11</sup>

Ontario Northland discontinued its southern line, “The Northlander,” (connecting Toronto with North Bay) in September 2012, due to its unprofitability.<sup>12</sup> Presumably, the railway, constructed in 1902 in large part to facilitate the extraction of resources and wealth from the Treaty Lands around Hudson Bay (going on to include, most likely, diamonds from the De Beers mine, ninety kilometers from Attawapiskat) was no longer “financially viable”. Freight shipping was facilitated by other means, and the railway had become primarily a passenger service.

The artefacts are displayed in two vitrines. In one is a handwritten note to Duane from Rebecca, the evidently enthusiastic and helpful marketing manager of Ontario Northland, and original Pantone-like blue and yellow paint swatches, arranged in a pattern. In the second are two colour photocopies of a statement provided to the Ontario Northland Rail Company in 1975 by an unknown design firm who developed the Railway’s corporate identity. The written rationale is oddly generous, describing, with care, a successful identity expressed in colour and line, and the relationship of this identity to the land.

The documents make me think of the years leading up to 1975 as a time of emphatic structural change in Canada when the visual, graphic, and pictorial identity of the nation and its national infrastructure was part of “post-colonial” rebranding.<sup>13</sup> This first involved replacing the British National flag in 1965. This vision was not only symbolic. Four years later, against the backdrop of the American Indian Movement, the Trudeau administration unilaterally attempted to divest Aboriginal peoples of their legal status with the White Paper proposal. The rationale was that by eliminating the Indian Act, treaties, and allowing Reserve Lands to be sold, “equality” amongst citizens would result.

I mentally compare events associated with the late 1980’s to mid-1990’s—the other period evoked in the exhibition. I think of the struggles, betrayals, and resistance in Aboriginal and Canadian politics

and identity that occurred in the twenty-some years in between. I recall that Elijah Harper died a few months ago, after Theresa Spence's hunger strike and the snowballing events of Idle No More, which began shortly after the death of the Northlander.

You glance again at the documents displayed in the two vitrines before you, including the logo reproductions.<sup>14</sup> You reflect again on the ease with which the distinctive visual style of Benjamin Chee Chee's paintings became domesticated to a national aesthetic,<sup>15</sup> and that his works are often theorized in close proximity to psychological and biographical readings. Chee Chee was, in a sense, killed by the state, then dissected by biographers, and in the encompassing project of Canadian national identity,<sup>16</sup> his work also taken.

Walking out of the gallery and past *Je me souviens*, you pause again for the chevrons. You see *The Chevrons* as a ground. You see their form as a figure stretching up or down, an un-easy identity, or as a diagram of a life lived. You see "movement" as collective or simultaneous, as co-existing action.<sup>17</sup> On the way out you stop by the Chee Chee reproduction. You notice its comparative fluidity and promise of flight, and you remember him in movement, on an Ontario Northlands train, focusing and unfocusing on the lands it passed through.



A CONVERSATION

<sup>1</sup> Northland Yellow: Yellow was chosen as the principal color because it allows for maximum contrast during any season in the north. (The north tends to be all white, all brown or all green. It doesn't, for example, have the multi-colored autumn of southern Ontario.) Yellow has the best visibility under most conditions and is now universally accepted as a safety color. The diversity of equipment called for highly visible color: ships in a mist; trucks at night, buses in a snowstorm, trains at a crossing, planes in a descent. The color chosen is close to the traditional school bus yellow and close to the standard Ontario Ministry of Transportation and Communications yellow. The yellow had to be dark enough to allow white to be reversed from it and able to stand on its own in printing work. Yellow is also a 'happy' color-vibrant, a color of life. (Excerpt from logo justification, *Ease of Identity*, 2013.)

<sup>2</sup> *Learning*, 2013, ink on paper, frame

<sup>3</sup> The Life and Death of Benjamin Chee Chee

...The serene, spare elegance of Ojibway painter Benjamin Chee Chee was probably my first consciousness of art. I babysat the neighbour kids, amazingly named the Friends, and loved going to their house, which was free of the clutter that defined our home. The clarity and breathing room there was a safe haven from the manic pace I came from. Mom was a compulsive hoarder, but the closest thing we had to art were Old Testament felt storyboards and macaroni fridge magnets. While there were countless wonderful things about my own home, there was also much chaos. The Friend family had selective, neatly laid out objects. I felt safe and calm in that atmosphere. And it was the minimalist lines of Chee Chee's bird paintings that mesmerized me most. I stared at their artful flight for hours after the kids went to bed. Of course, I knew then very little of art or of Indians or even Benjamin Chee Chee's name, but those stunning paintings stayed in my mind's eye. I forever associated peaceful serenity with the Temagami artist's monochromatic and linear style.....

Yes.....Benjamin Chee Chee needs to be honoured. I was in a shop....full of indian paintings and prints. I was immediately drawn to the prints of Chee Chee and purchased three. They have been framed and hung. Everytime I look at them I am enlightened....such simple lines, yet spectacular in appearance.....very spiritual. Having become a widow in the last five months, most days are filled with loss of a really wonderful person, but when I look at these prints.....a smile comes to my face. Having read the bio on the reverse of the prints, I was shocked to read of this young man's life, but can understand it....because we all need love.

*Comment by Thea | November 7, 2008*

I have an original Ben Chee Chee acrylic. It depicts a walrus in front of the sun or moon. I'm not really sure though.

Marcel

*Comment by Marcel | December 30, 2009*

You can buy a mug with Benjamin Chee Chee's drawings on it, if you can't afford the whole canvas. Or cloth bag.

<http://www.whetung.com/chee.html>

Or buy a group of 6 prints for \$5400.

Go see.

And thank you for writing this bio on Ben

*Comment by Cyn*

I have just bought a 24×18 inch print of “Learning” at a garage sale. It is in what looks like original frame, on reverse is label with Title Learning CODE CP-032 59-H3, 2/87mm  
Does anyone know if this is an original or what the code means, and possible value? I am in Sydney Australia. 11 Jan 2011

*Comment by Cemal Yavas | January 11, 2011*

(<http://www.touchedbyfire.ca/the-life-and-death-of-benjamin-chee-chee/>)

<sup>4</sup> In a 1984 catalogue, curator Elizabeth McLuhan introduced Chee Chee as someone who, “above all, stripped Indian Art of its ‘legend painting’ trappings and returned to it the rigors of strong design and structural minimalism. ‘Less was more’ and his paintings evince a tireless interest in abstracting the essence of the image. (Elizabeth McLuhan. *Painting and the Prints in the Collection of the Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art*, Quoted in Al Evans\*, *Chee Chee: A Study of Aboriginal Suicide*. Montreal / Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010.)

<sup>5</sup> AT: Hello Rolande! I hope this finds you really well. I write with a question. I am wondering about the use of chevrons in your work—of course I’m thinking specifically about the wall work you installed at The Power Plant—and also the significance of chevrons for you personally and culturally. If you are inclined, could you share some information about these things? Best, and big thanks, a.

RS: Sure. Basically, I am interested in chevrons because their resemblance to First Nation beadwork designs, their connection to modern and contemporary art (for example Kenneth Noland has done a series of paintings depicting chevrons), but most importantly as a metaphor to address governments’ involvement in Indigenous affairs. As you may know chevrons are used to guide drivers on the road, well when placed in a gallery setting it does a couple of things. Firstly the tapes used are the colors of the four directions, so that’s a point of reference. Secondly, the visibility of the tape changes depending on where one enters the space. This emphasises how perception of boundaries shift according to one’s perspective- specifically how indigenous art has been kept out of main art institutions due to its non-art classifications and also the play on the word ‘caution’. The tape is known as caution tape here in Sydney and I associate this with how First Nation people were prevented from issuing ‘Caution on title’ so that buyers were aware that the land they were considering buying was under a land claim. An example of this is the Temagami case in 1994 and the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that a First Nation cannot register a caution on title to prevent the sale of land. This case affected the band I am affiliated with- Michipicoten First Nation. Needless to say a few years back Michipicoten won the 2nd largest land claim in Canadian history!

AT: Thanks so much! May I ask something more? I’ve been thinking about chevron designs as a diagram of time—of a pointing or movement towards the future and past as interlocking and part of the same schema—or as a map of historical movement. (Very different than notion of the forward movement of time/history). Have you thought of chevrons in this way? Esp. in relation to your own work?

RS: Yes, and this is reflected in my how chevrons bring me back to my culture eg. beadwork and also that indigenous people do not see ‘time and space’ as linear or static. In fact is it the opposite indigenous see it as non-linear. The construct of time is a modernist notion and continues to be problematic in western art discourse when writing about indigenous art and the categorisation of it. Traditional verses the contemporary. The chevron is as much as a link to the past as it is to the present and hopefully the future. Hope this answers your ?s. (Facebook exchange between Althea Thauberger and Rolande Souliere, August 2013.)

<sup>6</sup> Now that war is being forced upon us, we will turn our hearts and minds to war and it too we will wage with all our might... Our Spirits are strong. We are together at last with ourselves and the world of our ancestors; we are proud before our children and our generations unborn... We are free. No yoke of white government oppression can contain us. We are free." (Mohawk Nation Office, August 27, 1990. Quoted in: Gord Hill. *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance*. Oakland: PM Press. 2009, 66.)

<sup>7</sup> *Je me souviens*, 2013, two chromira prints mounted on aluminum

<sup>8</sup> MONTREAL – In one of his most iconic photos, Canadian Press photojournalist Tom Hanson captured a defiant Mohawk warrior – arm raised, rifle in hand, standing atop an overturned police van – during a tense standoff with police in Oka, Que., in 1990.

Remarkably, the lives of Hanson and his masked Mohawk subject, Richard Livingston Nicholas, converged again this week when they both died suddenly, in separate incidents, on the same day. They were both 41 years old.

"At that pinnacle moment in 1990 they crossed paths, and then they crossed paths again," Sonya Gagnier, Nicholas's cousin and a Kanesatake band chief, said yesterday.

"It's another pinnacle point – they crossed paths in death."

Hanson, an award-winning photojournalist who was known as a passionate defender of journalistic rights, died on Tuesday night after collapsing while playing hockey.

Nicholas, a proud, lifelong champion of his nation's land-claim rights, died the same day in a three-vehicle accident near the village of Oka, west of Montreal. Police said he lost control of his tow truck moments before the collision. (Andy Blachford. *Photographer, his subject cross paths again in death*. 14 March 2009, The Toronto Star.)

<sup>9</sup> The ability of the photograph to give a factual document or trace the real as an image meant that the reality principle automatically became part of the objective language and the subject of my work. Through the use of the photograph I saw the opportunity to create a link between the intellectual, literary and idealistic biases of the purest forms of conceptual art and the concrete, factual pragmatic recognition of the objectness of minimal sculpture. While the photograph provided an abstract linguistic sign for subject matter, an indicator as it were, it also, in its direct connectedness to the reality of that subject, functioned as a concrete element in the objective material sense, as an industrial component in the construction of a statement. In my more recent works, the photograph is a kind of slab of reality riveted to the symbolic space of ideality, the blank field of the monochrome canvas upon which it is laminated. The images of construction sites in my work thus play on an ironic metaphor for the idea of constructivism in my aesthetics.

These subjects are outer-directed, and thus engaged with the world, and even the distancing and passivity of my work is reflective of a social and historical condition that is symptomatic of more than my condition alone. I believe that it is not merely my own expressive problem, but is in fact my reflection, through what is possible in the language and medium of art, on the condition of meaning. That is, through the economy of art, through its technical language and expressive themes, a

reflection is offered on the general economy and its limits, and that this political dimension of the photographic is also a reflection on the limits of aesthetic judgment and what is possible as a work of art. In this sense, I think of my work as unreservedly modernist. In effect this work is constructed out of a recognition of the condition of crisis—a crisis of meaning, a crisis that also emerges from the inertia of skepticism in face of the rhetorical power of photography; of the insufficiency of this inertia as well as the compromised nature of its rhetoric.

In part, at least, it was this crisis that led me to a reconsideration of the monochrome and its place in the history of the crisis in painting. Throughout my work in the 1970's, the monochrome remained as a latent theme developed only within the photographic subject, often as a Mallarméan metaphor of silence. During this period the support surface of the white wall of the gallery or the white page of the book had displaced the support of primed canvas of the painting. But since about 1980, when I enfolded my photographic practice back onto the ground of painting, the monochrome has returned as a dialectical field of opposition in relation to the photographic image and subject. This has to do with the relation that the monochrome has with the crisis of Modernism and its position as the critical fulcrum in the dialectic of painting and photography. By intersecting the field of ideality of monochrome painting with the photographic 'speech of the world', the historical function and the fetish value of this ideality is alternately refused and reified. Painting becomes secularized. (-Ian Wallace, "Photography and the Monochrome: An Apologia, an Exegesis, an Interrogation." *Ian Wallace At the Intersection of Painting and Photography*. London/Vancouver: Black Dog Publishing. Vancouver Art Gallery, 2012, 67-68.

First published in *Càmeres indiscretas*, ed. José Lebrero Stals, exh. Cat. Barcelona: Centre d'art Santa Monica and Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992, 55, 119.)

<sup>10</sup> Dear Empty TV

the entity of all Corporate Gods

We will survive without you easily -- the oldschool is going DOWN FAST

My lifes Dedication is Now to Do Nothing But SLAG something

Kurdt Kobain xxx

Professional Rock musician

<sup>11</sup> The problem was not only one of clarifying the identity of Ontario Northland and relating it to the North and to the Government of the province, but also to bring visual order to a system which had evolved in a diversity of services and which obviously needed a comprehensive and unified corporate identity.

*(Ease of Identity)*

<sup>12</sup>TORONTO-Ontario has chosen to take a new approach to regional transportation in northeastern Ontario by winding down the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC).

This decision will allow the government to protect investments in northerners' health and education systems while balancing the budget by 2017-18.

3 Responses to "Cancellation of Northlander Train Service announced"

Chris Mong says:

March 23, 2012 at 11:21 am

Amazingly this all could have been avoided. The government making this discussion did not fight to maintain provincial work to a provincial government agency. Then details then comes out that the

Quebec firm awarded the contract was sold for pennies on the difference the contract was awarded for. Also...

There was no fight for mandating the transportation of the big boom up north. The ring of fire is in Ontario, the Ontario government owns transportation resources to move the product. I suppose the bigger picture isn't for the Ontario people...It all just doesn't make sense!

Mark Dowling says:

March 25, 2012 at 1:03 pm

Why can't VIA Rail be requested to run the Northlander train at a cost recovery rate to the Province between North Bay and Toronto? If having access to the booking system, points scheme and general economies of scale meant VIA needed less subsidy than forecast then this could be reviewed at intervals. It seems crazy that the Province's first public announcement is closure and meanwhile there is the national operator for whom adding the service could be done without hiring on ONTC's CEO, VP of this, that and the other and Director of so forth.

Ida Hilson says:

April 1, 2012 at 8:45 pm

My name is Ida Hilson I do feel that we need the ontario Northerland train for people to travel to Toronto and me myself I like taking the train and I always did take the train in summertime because I likw train I do feel we need the train and I don;t want the train Cancelled and I hope all you fright for the train to stay on North Bay Nipissing March 23, 2012

(<http://www.northbaynipissing.com/2012/03/cancellation-of-northlander-train-service-announced/>)

<sup>13</sup> AT: Annabel, your comments about Duane's exhibition have influenced my thinking a lot, especially about the graphic identity of Canada in relation to his use of the Ontario Northlands logo. Can I ask you to repeat some of that, so I can write it down to quote in the text I am working on?

AV: Yes, I had a conversation with Duane at the opening about his research on the Northland logo. I have not been able to find any information on the original graphic designer. The graphics at that time were so influenced by the national competition and the redesign of the Canadian Flag that was inaugurated in 1965, under Pearson. I think it was. The design that incorporated the British Flag was rejected. Shortly afterwards, and through all the iconography of Expo 67, the new graphic identity for Canada in the 70's emerged, and this plays into the way the colonial outpost rebranded itself as an independent, contemporary and "just" nation.

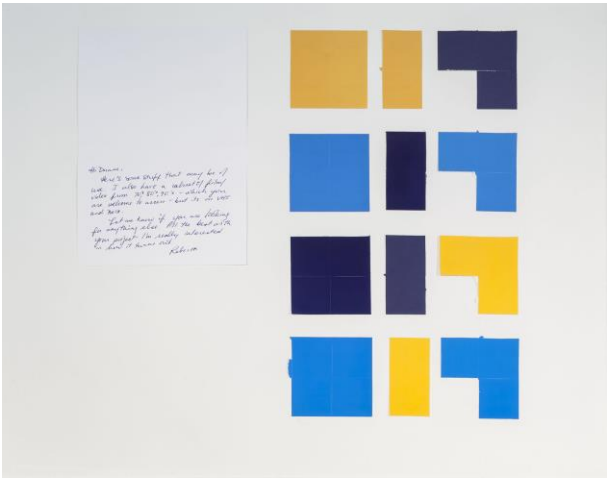
AT: I was also thinking about the Ontario Northlands logo and its use of chevrons which have an association with certain aboriginal designs. In this moment of Canadian re-branding, also Native imagery was appropriated. Did you notice however that the Northlands logo is similar to the British Rail Service?

AV: Yes, and chevrons are also a military design, they are used to indicate rank on uniforms. But many other logos that came out of that time. I'm thinking of Burton Kramer's work. He did the new CBC logo in the 70s— also look at the Air Canada and CN logos. You can see the graphic moment and identity rolling across Canada, and it has so much to do with the notion of how we want to see ourselves as a post-colonial state. (ranscription of phone conversation between Althea Thauberger and Annabel Vaughan, August 2013.)

<sup>14</sup> *Ease of Identity*, 2013, ink on paper, paint on paper, printed paper

<sup>15</sup> ....It is a telling phrase, suggesting that art took hold of Chee Chee and offered him a way of leading to wholeness and away from lostness and confusion. Art held out to him the promise of an identity. He told an interviewer: "I wanted to be my own man. I wanted to develop a style that was so much my own that anyone looking at a painting by me would say at once, even if the work was unsigned, "Now that was done by Benjamin Chee Chee." (Ottawa Journal, 31 August 1974. Quoted in Evans, 35.)

<sup>16</sup> We cannot share the world as it already is, with the exception of the natural world. The world that we can share is always and still to be elaborated by us and between us starting from the perception and affirmation of what and who we are as humans here and now. (Luce Irigaray. *Sharing the World*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008, 136.)



# FrameWork 9/13

## Sabrina Maher on Kevin Yates

No one thought it was going to be that bad.

Blame could be pointed in numerous directions. State and national officials were late in calling for the evacuation of New Orleans. Once the evacuation call was sounded, not enough residents followed orders. Others simply did not have the means to leave. Living on the Gulf, many had become immune to the threats of tropical storms and hurricanes. They reasoned that they managed last time, and the time before that one, as well as back in 1992 with Andrew. Those who were old enough remembered Camille. They survived in 1969.

There were levees protecting the city.

The levees on the Industrial Canal failed under the combination of strong winds, heavy rainfall and storm surges. The flood walls and levee broke and storm surges of 30 feet poured over the city.

Katrina was deceiving. She tricked everyone. Originating in the waters off the Bahamas, the tropical storm developed into a Category 1 hurricane by the time it hit Florida. She lost intensity as she moved across the state, until hitting the Gulf of Mexico she was re-invigorated by the warm waters.

She became the deadliest hurricane to strike the U.S. in over a hundred years.

It's estimated that 80 percent of New Orleans was submerged under floodwater after Katrina hit in 2005. Transformed into a buried city, with flooding measured up to 20 feet in some places, it took weeks for the water to recede. Hundreds were missing, thousands dead and hundreds of thousands of homeless and displaced. There was no electricity. No drinking water. No food. Hospitals were crippled. Violence, looting and crime overtook the ravaged city. There simply was not enough help. No hope. Nothing but the ruins and their reflections in the water.<sup>1</sup>



Kevin Yates' exhibition *Usher the Fall of the House* takes its titular inspiration from an Edgar Allan Poe story. In Poe's story *The Fall of the House of Usher* an anonymous narrator recounts his journey to visit his childhood friend, Roderick Usher, whom he finds ill and tormented by some unnamed mental affliction. Suffering away in his family home, a spooky and forbidden estate surrounded by a macabre lake, Usher spends his days racked with fear and anxiety about his imminent doom. During the narrator's troubling stay at the House of Usher, he bears witness to increasingly disturbing events culminating in the mistaken entombment of Usher's sister and her ghostly rising from the grave to collect her brother.

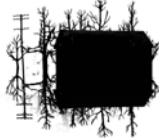
Poe was a master of Gothic literature, employing the literary trope of the Doppelgänger to construct his tales of terror. Allusions to the Doppelgänger are littered throughout *The Fall of the House of Usher* in the employment of doubles and inverse reflections. The appearance of the Doppelgänger represents a split in a

<sup>1</sup> All data and facts on Hurricane Katrina were sourced from the National Climatic Data Center (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/extremeevents/specialreports/Hurricane-Katrina.pdf>) and FEMA (<http://www.fema.gov/response-recovery/about-hurricane-katrina>).



subject that occurs when the defective element is separated from the original, resulting in an exact replica.<sup>2</sup> This double often signifies destructive and evil and infects the audience with a sense of eeriness and fear. This feeling, which Freud called “the uncanny”, is the result of witnessing the duplication of the familiar and its resultant double existing outside the regular order of things.

Yates’ most recent works takes direct inspiration from the themes presented in Poe’s work of doubling, impending doom, claustrophobic isolation, and anxiety. Yet the artist modernizes the Gothic themes by filtering them through the events of Hurricane Katrina. When Poe’s tale of personal anxiety and individual struggle with death becomes refracted through the lens of Hurricane Katrina, the works that are the outcome help amplify the author’s themes and make them relevant across a contemporary social context.



Yates’ first personal encounter with the effects of Katrina occurred in 2005 while teaching at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Like most people, he had watched the events unfold on television and in the media. The feeling of horror caused by the tragic events was eclipsed only by the anger and frustration at the inaction and apathy of the government in dealing with the hurricane’s aftermath. Katrina faded into the background, with the plight of the residents of Louisiana and Alabama being eclipsed by George W. Bush’s “War on Terror”. While teaching, Yates began meeting students from New Orleans who encountered problems with enrolment due to their relocation without access to records. Spurred by his interactions with these students, Yates travelled to Louisiana and started collecting materials that would eventually inspire the works in *Usher the Fall of the House*.

*Usher the Fall of the House*, a striking sculptural object that shares its name with the title of the exhibition, is remarkable for its ability to impose a sense of anxiety and trepidation in the viewer. Two wooden chests of drawers – one found, the other sculpted by Yates to be its exact replica – are flipped vertically, sandwiching a small glass aquarium that encloses a bronze sculpture. The size and weight of the wooden pieces seem set to crush the delicate glass at any moment. The viewer watches with a sense of unease, waiting for the fine balance to be tipped and the structure to implode. The threat of imminent collapse is heightened by the nature of the enclosed bronze sculpture. Hermetically sealed and oppressively contained, it depicts a skeleton reclining on a rock formation with a plant growing at its feet. Once again, a double is presented with the exact copy of the bronze sculpture looming overhead. Yates alludes to water and its reflective nature in multiple ways: the aquarium structure, the inclusion of colourful pebbles used to line fish tanks, and the addition of an etched line running along the middle of the glass structure referencing the water’s surface. Suddenly, the skeleton and its Doppelgänger can be understood as entombed within a watery grave, at once silent and somber while simultaneously echoing the memory of Poe’s tale and the deadly outcome of Katrina.



<sup>2</sup> Dimitris Vardoulakis, “The Return of Negation: The Doppelgänger in Freud’s ‘The Uncanny’,” *SubStance* 35, no. 2, issue 110: Nothing (2006): 100.

In 2010, Yates made the first of what would be two trips to Louisiana to document the aftereffects of Hurricane Katrina. During this inaugural visit, Yates' focus was on the domestic buildings of the area; vacated homes, emptied of human inhabitation due to the severity of the damage inflicted by the storm. It was from this material that several of the pieces from the exhibition found their inspiration.

Displayed on the same wall, *9<sup>th</sup> Street*, *Camp Street* and *Chestnut Street* present as an eerie alliteration of domestic culture. The model homes are quintessentially suburban yet communicate a sense of the uncanny in their duplicity. The artist chose the models based on their utter ordinariness to create a sense of familiarity that would resonate with his audience. While the homes could be from anywhere in North America, the titles refer to streets in New Orleans. Suddenly the models become more sinister, as their doubling can be seen as representing watery reflections in floodwater, their innate stillness as signs of abandonment and vacancy.

With *Waterline*, Yates, working in collaboration with his brother, experimental filmmaker Robert Yates, moves his lens to the interior of the abandoned homes. The video work presents the interior of a flood-ravaged house culled during their visit to New Orleans in 2010. The frame depicts the kitchen of a home obviously abandoned: walls with peeling paint, cabinets thrown open to show bare shelves and water damage, ceiling buckling and collapsing with the guts of the house spilling forth. Though a still shot, a feeling of claustrophobic oppression is intimated by inversely doubling the scene and having the twinned images rise and sink from an implied water line. The effect places the viewer in a setting that mimics the swelling and receding movement of water. The oppressive scene is heightened by the eeriness of the contradiction between the interior tableaux with the snapshot of the exterior visible in the rear: sun-drenched, abundantly foliated, green and alive.

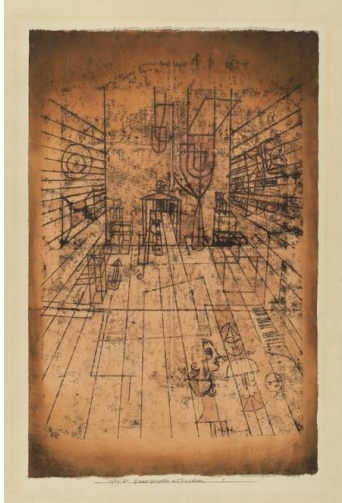
Yates returned to New Orleans in the spring of 2013 to study historical wallpaper patterns and the migratory habits of birds inhabiting in Grand Isle, Louisiana. This seemingly incongruous research is merged in another film project created in collaboration with Robert Yates. Filmed footage of the birds, sweetly chirping and lightly skittering, is overlaid on fragments of damask wallpaper decorated with arabesque leaves. Mirrored across the patterned backdrop, the dancing birds have a hypnotizing effect that would be calming if not for their uncanny resemblance to black blinking eyes. Similar to the other works in *Usher the Fall of the House*, the act of doubling brings out the sinister in the ordinary.

Yates' art harnesses Poe's literary mechanism of the Doppelgänger to help make visible the traumas of Hurricane Katrina. The devastating loss of life and property inflicted by the storm was shouldered primarily by the poor and marginalized communities of the region, further handicapping those already at a disadvantage. It was the low-income survivors who to this day continue to try and cope with the long-term effects of Katrina; these communities saw the rates of serious mental illness, PTSD and suicide rise to staggering levels.<sup>3</sup>In this way the works in *Usher the Fall of the House* collectively act as a pointed social commentary of the social and economic tragedy that befell the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Yet they also act as an intimate and personal reflection of inner anxiety and individual fear, pushing the viewers to confront themselves by asking what they see in the reflections.

<sup>3</sup> For more information mental and physical health problems in low-income Hurricane Katrina survivors please see: National Institute of Health study (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3276074/>) and the World Health Organization bulletin (<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/84/12/06-033019ab/en/>).

# FrameWork 10/13

## Patrick Howlett on THE ROOM AND ITS INHABITANTS



NOTES FROM A ROOM

A constructed space, often purpose built. I suppose something similar could be found in a cave or under the umbrella of tree branches. Shelter of some kind; a structure ends up serving a specific purpose.

The idea for the show was something very basic, somewhat obvious perhaps in the hope to get across something of the complexity and richness of a painting made with an awareness of the connectedness of form and content within an emergent process.

The artists in the show all excel at creating precisely ambiguous images. One artist that helps me unpack that idea is Paul Klee. The breadth and focus of his achievement in particular is useful for finding examples of what I am thinking.

When we opened the box and took off the wrapping of Robert Bordo's *lights out*, the dynamic texture of the surface and the decisive quality of the marks, completely knocked me out, seduced me. I had to rethink the painting I had looked at dozens of times on a screen. This is an experience I have had repeatedly with Klee and I probably can't and don't want to over-analyze it, but basically the painting is alive and playing itself out in front of you. It has to do with, I think, honing the syntax of form. As an image, *lights out* might not seem like a 'new' form, but as a painting, the relationship between the space and the elements within make you feel it.

Line, as Klee saw it, is active and it determines form. "Genesis as formal motion is the essential thing in a work".<sup>1</sup> Early last year, the artist and writer Robert Linsley and I were discussing what might make Klee relevant to artists today. One aspect, we determined, was the intellectual nature of his use of form and the concrete, specific quality of the results. Not that subject and form are a resolved unit, because when he is good the paintings are completely open and generative. This is opposed to what Linsley called the "general effects" of certain contemporary work.

Shape can be unstable, or perhaps one's ability to see a stable shape is dependent on fixing it as a figure in relation to its context. One of the great things about Klee is that he works with instabilities. An active, independent ground supports the active line of a figure, which then inhabits the two spaces. Justin Stephens' paintings also do this with a flat wit and a casual rigour that put the room in the painting and inhabit the space between. There might be a little of Boris Groys' 'weak gesture' wisdom informing Stephens' approach to composition or maybe the non-paint additions are figures of protection.

Richard Sennett writes about walls as sites of resistance, inert boundaries separating interior and exterior.<sup>ii</sup> More positively, they act as borders. While borders and edges seem inherent in conventional painting, recent discourses have attributed paintings current relevance as having to do with its ability to transcend those limits into an expanded field. But is this the only recourse for painting to let in the everyday?

In Roger White's painting the wall is particularly present. Containing a variety of fragmented and/or incomplete sketches, some with their own boundaries, the painting is an ambiguous collection of images on a white ground, stopped in mid-translation, keeping to the edges of representation. The focus becomes the formation of images themselves and what their abstraction infers to the viewer looking in.

"Today is a transition from yesterday. In the great pit of forms lie broken fragments to some of which we still cling. They provide abstraction with its material. A junkyard of unauthentic elements for the creation of impure crystals".<sup>iii</sup>

I can't help but think of Sandra Meigs' inclusions in the show, *Twitter* and *Facebook*, as two of these 'impure crystals'. These embodied characters come off the wall to flaunt their figurative duality and recall Klee's positive approach to abstraction and its generative possibilities. But they also share a provocative spirit that collapses the beautiful and the terrible: "the more horrible this world (as today, for instance), the more abstract our art, whereas a happy world brings forth an art of the here and now"<sup>iv</sup>

In keeping with the theme, painting may be thought of as a working space. In *The Craftsman*, Sennett writes about the use of ambiguity, anticipating it, using it as a tool. With edges, one must improvise and ambiguity is useful here. In Kim Neudorf's painting, the relation of figure and ground is a somewhat porous negotiation, as is the edge. The evocation of a space or figure is tempered by a tentative approach to surface. Like the texture created by Klee's oil transfers (as in *Room perspective with inhabitants* from 1921) or by many of his mixed media surfaces, Neudorf's suspension of paint creates a space for figurations repeated appearance and disappearance.

Something about Klee and much of the work in THE ROOM is that the work is self-revelatory but not self-reflexive. In Merlin James' paintings the image is constructed on layers of previous paint and canvas, with bristle traces and curls of plastic making their presence felt like they might on the shelves or doorframes of an old house. On the surface, the composition is divided into planes of subdued colour that cut right through the silhouetted figures. At once a formal device to emphasize flatness, it simultaneously produces a space that might suggest windows or light sources, generating imaginative relations between ground and figure.

Precision in Klee is revealed by both hand and mind, but not in the same place or the same moment. The way they impact one another suggests the intellectual and intensive nature of his work.

“When is the spirit at its purist? In the beginning.

Here, work that becomes (dual). There, work that is.”<sup>v</sup>

A similar duality can be found in the work of Allison Katz, though not as formally reductive. There is a consciousness of design working on both a formal and iconographic registers. Though she allows it migrate to other works, each work is imbued with that duality. Picabia also split form and content in precise ways.

That is one reason why Klee’s work is so generative and keeps on giving. Another, as Adrian Searle recently wrote in The Guardian about the 1938 work *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, is the movement created by Klee’s use of the elements: “the circles never hold their place. They seem to approach and recede, attack and decay as you look. It is a painting that keeps on happening as you look. It is happening still”<sup>vi</sup>.

Rebecca Morris’s watercolours also depict the moment of happening, thereby presenting it as part of their subject. Though her large compositions are usually built by arranging a wide range of fragmented shapes into specific formal designs, her watercolours make composing look instantaneous. Together, the five works in THE ROOM are spaces where the grid is both emergent and imposed, lost and found. Like Klee, I think, she uses it as a design trope with an awareness of its structural and theoretical import, but not reducible to a single history.

“Dream: I find my house: empty, the wine drunk, the river diverted, my naked one stolen, the epitaph erased. White on white.”<sup>vii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Klee, Paul. *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898-1918*, trans. Pierre B. Schneider, R.Y. Zachary, Max Knight (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p.310

<sup>ii</sup> Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)

<sup>iii</sup> Klee, p.313

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*, p.313

<sup>v</sup> *ibid*. p.312

<sup>vi</sup> Searle, Adrian. “Paul Klee at Tate Modern: More! More! More!”, in *The Guardian* (posted Monday 14 October 2013)

<sup>vii</sup> Klee, p.312

# FrameWork 12/13

Liza Eurich on Didier Courbot



## Notes

*Description.* Each of the five sculptures in Didier Courbot's *Table works* series, presented at Susan Hobbs Gallery this fall, consist of only two components. A seemingly simplistic premise. The first is an intricately crafted geometrically shaped brass base. The material of the second portion varies, but it could be characterized as a single plane or ground. In this installation: foam core, paper, book cloth, ribbon and then foam core again.

*The Provisional Parts.* The two components are not fixed together, but rather rely on positioning and similar form. The secondary material, or top portion, is balanced precariously on its brass counterpart – notably the rigidity of these material choices differs. While in each instance the foam core exists only as a single uniform shape, the paper, book cloth, and ribbon pieces bend at points of contact with their base. For example the book cloth in *Table works (14)* flexes over a brass bar that acts as a fulcrum, directing the ends of the cloth towards each other, though they remain sprung apart.

The paper component of *Table works (13)* hangs from its brass stand and extends beyond the length of it, so that it gathers at the base. The tension from the paper reaching past this point causes it to bend or curve, buckling outwards like two outstretched arms. Even more pliable than this is the ribbon in *Table works (4)*, draped vertically, it abides the pull of gravity most, and its ends rest more flatly.

The tentative materiality of these grounds illustrates their provisional qualities most readily. A

## FrameWork 12/13

balancing act, subtle shifts in their positioning can occur as a result of movement in the space around them. In line with this, their malleability makes ensuring bends and curves behave consistently each time the work is installed challenging. For these reasons, *Table works* extends the boundaries of what might be considered sculptural, so that it is not defined by a singular notion of permanence or stasis.



From left to right: *Table works* (9), *Table works* (13), *Table works* (14), *Table works* (4), *Table works* (17)

*Making Things for Other Things, Sometimes Incidentally*. Each of the delicate brass components in Courbot's *Table works* convey a sense of refinement and craftsmanship. Such careful construction is suggestive of a planned design, inferring that each of these parts was intended to fit a previously existing complement – their width, length, height, and shape a configuration of it, set to mimic or accentuate.

The complements: foam core, paper, book cloth and ribbon are defined by a different economy, their construction appears to be more happenstance and their materiality vernacular. Peering closely at these pieces yields evidence that portions have been carefully excised. For example, a single confident pencil line remains, having delineated a path for a pair of scissors in *Table works* (13). There is a slight extension of equally spaced incisions on a portion of the foam core in *Table works* (17), showing where the removal of several uniform rectangular pieces occurred. Both the preliminary drawing and careful plotting in these implies that the removed portions are not arbitrary, but were done with the intention of using them to construct something else. Subsequently, we can contend

## FrameWork 12/13

that the counterparts featured so prominently here were at one time discards, leftovers from the construction of other projects.

The assured marks and excisions of a task, later act as a means of highlighting material qualities – an incidental aesthetic, torn frayed edges, indented foam core, drooping paper and odd shapes. These now become generative. In doing so, this approach brings two seemingly disparate material registers and methods of production into proximity.

*Meeting. See: FrameWork 3/13:3 Didier Courbot on Simple Present Future Anterior.*

*A Kind of Drawing, A Type of Sculpture.* These works demarcate space without mass. In many ways their immediacy, informality, and provisional characteristics align them with a language of drawing. On the level of surface alone: there are the pencil lines of *Table works (13)*, the cut marks of *Table works (17)* and *(9)*, the contours of thread in *Table works (4)*, as well as the creases and band of blue in *Table works (14)*.

Once each flat plane is joined with its brass counterpart it becomes object-like. This is most pronounced in the works that allow these flat planes to contort around their brass armature, producing pockets of negative space. As the viewer encounters and moves around them their dimensionality falters, they become seemingly flat for a moment until these pockets become visible again, giving form and separation to shapes. The bifurcation of these flat planes has other effects: in *Table works (13)* it produces shadows that emulate subtly painted tonal gradations from white to off-white or cream; in *Table works (4)*, the doubling creates a denser blue in areas that overlap, a result of the ribbons slight transparency.

*Title.* The title alone suggests an identifiable scale, one that is intimate and handheld, an object that seems at home on a tabletop. It also conjures up a sense of space, both familiar and domestic. These illusions to a particular scale and a particular space imply a sense of casual utility, something that we might hold or use in the comfort of our own home – a bowl, a glass, or a utensil. Contrary to this though, the delicate appearance and precarious nature of these sculptures does not invite grasping. Instead this idea of casual utility does not relate to the sculptural objects as a whole, but rather to one of the components. In each pairing, the brass portion enacts this, a table or a stand, customized to hold their balancing counterparts.

Of the five included, *Table works (17)* suggest there are at least twelve others.