

Staying Specific

Konstfack 2017
Master of Fine Arts

DINNIS VAN DIJKEN

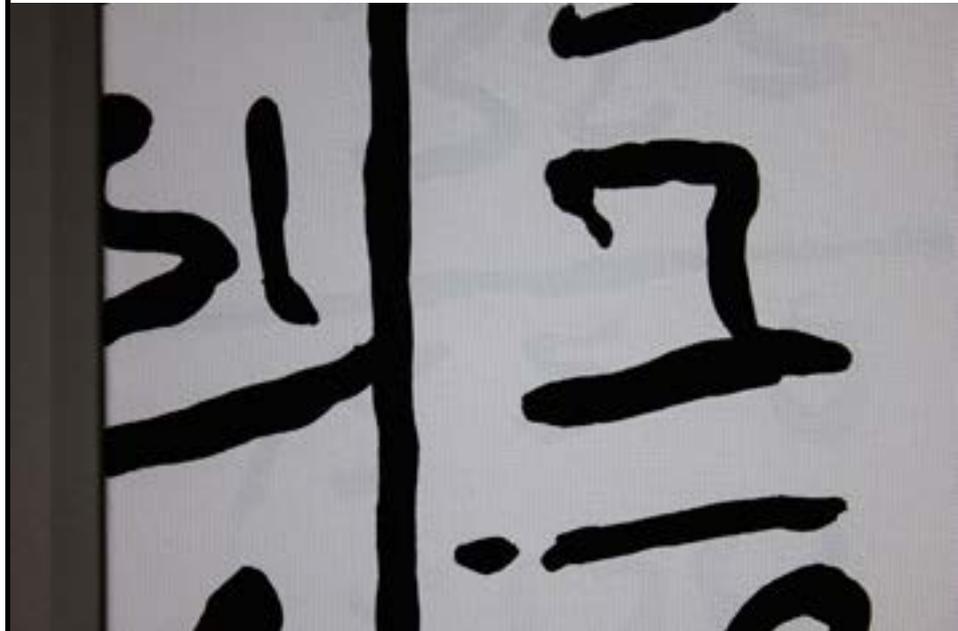


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FOREWORD

It might be good to clarify something up front. No matter how this may come across, it is not a plea for painting or its “superiority”. I think such a thing would be an irrelevant thing to do. Rather, I am here to note a different account of what might still be specific to painting today. For the rest, all I can say is that painting is just my language and my way of relating to things. It has been my introduction to art and it is still the foundation that shapes my frame of reference.

Yet I have always felt very ambiguous towards painting. I simultaneously cherish a deep, passionate love and severe criticality and suspicion for the subject of painting. I find all other things but painting particularly exciting in the art world because they offer ways of thinking that painting can't. Nevertheless, painting has seemed to have something extra to it for me, something that feels almost magical. The very act of painting is something transcendental, and while painting, I truly get in a trance. Despite its object-like state and essentially “simplistic” setup, it is something electric for me to deal with. It is charged with intentionality, signification, virtuosity, performativity. It is a medium that has been continuously reassessed and examined, and yet has always remained vital. It embodies the old and the new at the same time.

Painting has a massive legacy to deal with, it tells stories of legends and artists that have forever changed what art is. Still today, that rectangular field of paint on canvas is a medium that can lead to fierce discussions.^{1 2}

Yet despite my love for this medium, I will always be extremely critical and quickly irritable towards the general issue of painting and other people that work on any sort of notion of what painting is, even though we probably share a passionate love for the same thing. This is because painting can sometimes feel a bit naive in comparison to other practises within contemporary art. On top of that there are also the people that relish the mindset that painting is somehow outside of and superior to contemporary art and they maintain that naive and ignorant mindset rather proudly. Of course you will find those people in any walk of life, but any artist that deals with some notion of painting will be alert to the subject.

To be fair, to be a painter in the world of today, you must be a bit of an oddball. It's a troublesome medium with a long standing tradition to try and differentiate oneself in. It has been deemed dead and obsolete so many times even in recent times that it is hard to even keep track.³ There are just so many sides to the same story, a whole spectrum of ways to relating to the same bloody thing. It is troublesome at best and I love it because of that.

¹ Priscilla Frank, “A White Artist's Painting of Emmett Till Sparks Protest, Controversy And A Viral Hoax”, 23rd of March 2017, as featured in The Huffington Post.

² Roberta Smith, “Should Art That Infuriates Be Removed?”, 27th of March, 2017, as featured in The NY Times.

³ Corinna Kirsch, “The “Painting Is Dead” Versus “Painting Is Back” List”, 4th of February 2014, as featured on Art F City.

<http://artfcity.com/2014/02/04/the-painting-is-dead-versus-painting-is-back-list/>

INTRODUCTION

Faced with an omnipresence of painterly codes and conventions it seems tempting to opt for a highly elastic notion of painting, to detect it everywhere. [...] but instead of working with an endlessly flexible and arbitrary notion of painting, I would like to propose an idea of painting that, on the one hand, acknowledges painting's manifold historical expansions, while on the other hand, grasps its residual specificity. If it were not for this specificity, it wouldn't make sense to speak of painting at all. [...] since we still encounter variations of the picture on canvas in the midst of its de-specification we can assume that painting continues to accomplish something that is specific to it.⁴

In this essay I intend to indicate a direction and highlight issues within my own practice and in modern painting, in which I think that painting can continue to accomplish something that is specific to it. We still encounter variations of the picture on canvas today and personally that particular rectangular field resonates strongly with me. As Donald Judd once stated; *some things can be done only on a flat surface.*⁵ This is certainly true for me.

Most of David Joselit's and Isabelle Graw's arguments when it comes to what is specific to contemporary painting rest upon a phenomenological approach to painting, which is similar to the way that I tend to approach art. This has to do with maintaining a certain mindset which for me is not exclusive to the way I see art, but to the way I stand in life in general. This way of phenomenologically approaching painting brings the subjective experience strongly to question, emphasizing the tendency of painting as a critical and reflective medium to facilitate mediation and reassessment.

Isabella Graw argues that the sense of liveliness in painting mostly has to do with the idea that painting can somehow store or be saturated with life and labour time of the artist. While I certainly can agree with a lot of this suggestion, I also want to highlight some other ways that the issue of time in painting raises further questions that are specific to the medium at hand. Namely, the way time and performativity is present or sensed through painting, which is strongly linked to current interests that define the field of contemporary art.

⁴ Isabelle Graw, "The Value of Liveliness", as featured in; Isabelle Graw & Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, 2016, ISBN 978-3-95679-007-2, p. 89-90

⁵ Donald Judd, "Specific Objects", *Arts Yearbook* 8, 1965

LIFE, PHENOMENOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

"Look at this arrow" says Zeno of Elea. "It looks as if it is flying through the air, but in each moment, it is at rest. It is easy to see this must be the case. In an infinitely short moment it has no time to get anywhere, which is to say it does not move. Wherever it is, it is motionless, the movement you think you see cannot be real, it is just an illusion of the senses."

"You are wrong," I answer Zeno. "Even in the briefest of moments, the arrow moves. The shorter the moment, the shorter the distance it covers, but it still flying. At each point along its path it has a velocity, even if it appears to be still. It's as simple as that."⁶

Life, phenomenologically speaking, is just a chaos of things passing by, with us trying to figure out how to relate to it in a multitude of ways. The way I relate to life itself is maybe not surprisingly one of a phenomenological nature;⁷ first comes the empirical relationship of phenomena to each other and then how they relate to me; factual perception and the subjective experience. This probably explains something of the critical nature by which I approach art as well. A lot of my beliefs stem from fundamental theories of time, space and movement. Lately, more and more of the work in my practice started to revolve around those topics as well, questioning more and more how I relate to things.

Whenever I witness anything, in the back of my head I keep thinking about how things look in the deeper sense of time. Not only relating to how I stand here and perceive the things that around me, but how I might perceive them in a larger frame of time. I never have the idea that anything is stationary, ever. Everything moves, even at the briefest of moments. It is as simple as that. Even paintings move, travel and change over time. Everything we see in the landscape of time that passes by us are just shapes cut out of chaos. The world around us is just things coming together at the moment we happen to witness them. When it comes to paintings, they maintain their shapes much longer than we maintain our bodily selves.⁸

Chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes. It is a void that is not a nothingness but a virtual, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence. Chaos is an infinite speed of birth and disappearance.⁹

⁶ Peter Nilson, "A Labyrinth In Which We Are All Lost", as featured in; ON KAWARA *continuity/discontinuity* 1963 – 1979, ISBN 91 7100 179 4.

⁷ A phenomenological model is a scientific model that describes the empirical relationship of phenomena to each other, in a way which is consistent with fundamental theory, but is not directly derived from theory.

⁸ Merleau Ponty, "Phenomenology of Perception", 1945, ISBN 0-415-27841-4, p. 477

⁹ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, "What is philosophy?", 1994, ISBN 0-231-07989-3, p.188

Usually, the idea that everything is just a massive chaos means that there is no bigger plan to life, and there is not. I do not believe so at least. This, however, does not mean that there is no meaning to it for us. Things and events outside of us affect us not only physically, but psychologically.¹⁰ Our internal world is just as real as anything around us. Love might just be a hormonal thing, but this only confirms that love is a real thing. It is in the same way that Deleuze explains the concept of the virtual; *it is the virtual insofar as it is actualized, in the course of being actualized, it is inseparable from the movement of its actualization.*¹¹ In the same way he continues to explain immanence; *immanence means that the mind is part of reality and unfolds as an activity within the force field of reality as a whole. There is no subject situated outside of the natural system of causes.*¹² This just means that our mental world is as real as anything outside of ourselves; it is part of it and subject to it.

This is where maybe strangely enough, painting comes into play for me. Painting is a very definite part of reality; it is material and it is subject to the laws of physics as much as anything else in this universe. Like any other thing, it is a very particular shape cut out of the chaos, but one that we have shaped ourselves. It follows as much the rules of our thoughts and society as it does to the rules of nature, and painting thrives on the dynamic balance between the two.

Painting is the residual evidence of when we interacted with the material world for a bit, and we imply our social construct as a layer to it. Just as much as painting can represent our material and bodily interaction with the world, it also functions to reflect the “mental” constructions of our internal world. This is part of what I consider the magic of painting. Though thoughts might develop alongside reality, painting also develops alongside thoughts. This makes a phenomenological approach so interesting. Because not only are we witnessing someone interacting with the world in a highly specific way, we also gain notions about how they relate to it, their subjective experiences.

This subjective experience in the phenomenological sense is something I feel is very prominent in painting and photography. As both are agencies of manifestation¹³, they are strongly reflective of and entangled with how we relate to the world; bodily and mentally.

¹⁰ Brian Massumi, “The autonomy of Affect”, 1995, as featured in; Cultural Critique, No. 31, The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II (Autumm, 1995), p.83-109

¹¹ Reidar Due, “Deleuze”, 2007, ISBN 978-0745630359, p.21

¹² Reidar Due, “Deleuze”, 2007, ISBN 978-0745630359, p.21

¹³ Isabelle Graw, “The Value of Liveliness”, as featured in; Isabelle Graw & Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition, 2016, ISBN 978-3-95679-007-2. p.92



Dinnis van Dijken
Untitled
 2013
 21,9 x 42,0 cm
 oil paint on panel

INDEXICALITY OF PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

In his text *Marking, Scoring, Storing and Speculating (on Time)* David Joselit gave what I think is an apt definition of modern painting’s specificity, which was akin to the title of said text; *it marks, stores, scores and speculates on time.*¹⁴ I must agree with that. Like Joselit, I believe that time is the issue right now in contemporary painting. It certainly is a major theme within my own practice.

From earlier on in my practice, I think that I was already getting to this issue in relationship to painting. During my bachelor studies, I spend a lot of time coming up with ways to render my paintings pointless. Putting loads and loads of effort into painstakingly mimicking blank pieces of paper that once had been folded and flattened again, and I really went all *trompe l’oeil* on these paintings, only to leave edges and corners unpainted. Reminding (mostly myself) that it is the issue of painting we are dealing with in these works, I liked the idea of simultaneously allowing transcendence into the painting, while maintaining a notion of the concrete materialism that creates it. Also, I liked the blank

¹⁴ Peter Nilson, “A Labyrinth In Which We Are All Lost”, as featured in; ON KAWARA continuity/discontinuity 1963 – 1979, ISBN 91 7100 179 4.

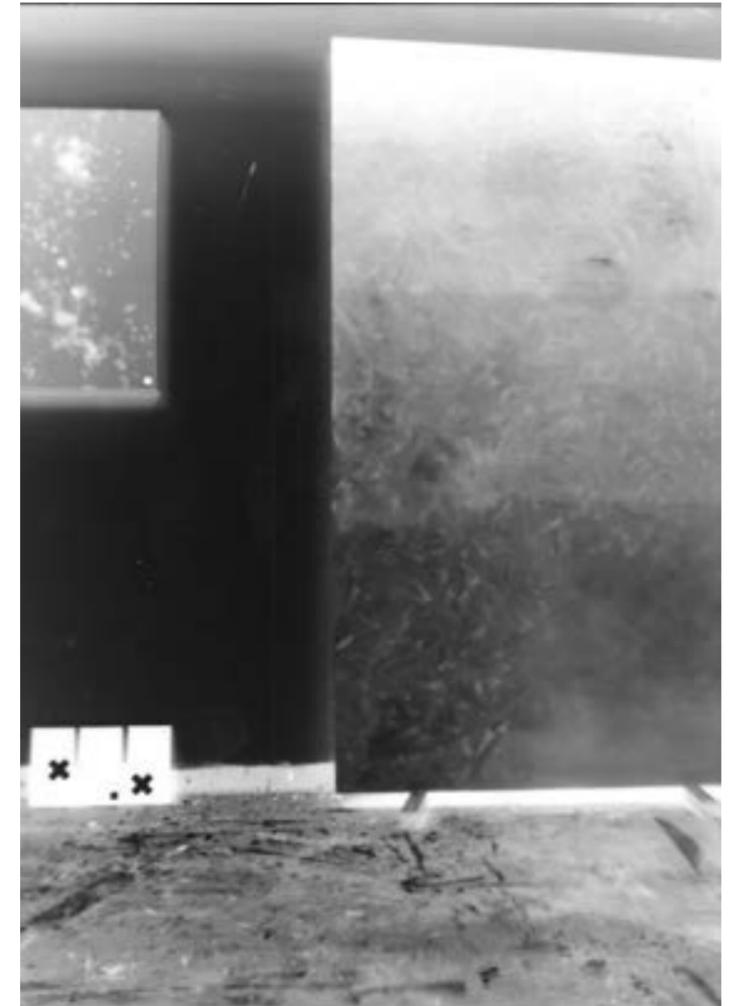
pieces of paper very much because they are very calming and soothing to look at. Their crumbled surfaces suggested space, if only little. It was like painting a very materialistic slice of space in time.

This issue has recently become more strongly emphasized in my work because of the inclusion of photography. The reason for including photography in my practice was because I always thought that in painting, the object-like state of them was somewhat troublesome. Once you finish a painting, every gesture captured by paint is exposed as finite movement on the surface; the whole surface suggests a series of definite decisions and movements made by the artist. When confronted with a painting, you automatically look for all of these decisions, they add a sense of liveliness to the painting, a sense of the artist.

I felt that whenever a painting was discussed, everyone was always pointing at individual decisions made within the surface of the painting; a brushstroke, a field of colour juxtaposed to another, etc. excavating that whole field of captured gestures. I wanted to see how every gesture related to one another over the whole period of time it took to create the painting. Photography allows me to show this. Thanks to long exposures, it has the ability to show everything in between the beginning and the end.

The surface of painting is, in contrast, a rather binary one; showing only what's mediated through paint, anything else is left out. Photography can show the fluidity of the whole process. With painting, all you can see is when the artist decided to interact with the material. With photography, the movements, the hesitations, all become exposed, showing more of the way that painting is connected to the world of thought, and exposing what it means to have a body in relationship to the material world. We move, perceive, hesitate, anticipate and respond to the landscape of time and things passing by us. In my work, painting is the imprint of all of this, and photography shows the choreography of it. Time is the binding factor, it is captured and experienced differently in each medium. When we let photography and painting talk about each other, we see a world of interactions over time. It exposes the otherwise absent body of the artist.

This thought on how photography's indexicality is akin to painting, but embodies another sense of time, was one of the reasons why I included pinhole cameras, or camera obscuras, in my work. My work *No.1-No2* was a first attempt to try and let the two mediums reflect upon one another. Reducing the gestures made on the canvas to just one; painting from top-left to bottom-right in one continuous flow. Consistently performing one gesture over time. Allowing for the change of the painting to be completely linear and letting the daylight and exposure times needed for the pinhole camera to work dictate how much time I had to fully cover the painting's surface. The end result is two works which both have been created in the same time frame within the same place. Each of them a material recording of me interacting with the space and materials over time.



Dinnis van Dijken,
No.1-No.2
06/03/16
11:35:00 – 14:59:08
13 x 18cm
B/W pinhole photograph

I think time has always been an issue within painting. It certainly makes up most of the foundation of what Isabelle Graw refers to as painting's specificity. The arguments to support this come down to the idea of traces and indexicality. As stated by Hubert Damisch, painting reveals nothing but *traces of an activity to the eyes*.¹⁵ No matter how one goes about painting; it's always an accumulation of marks and traces provided by someone on a very particular type of surface. On the other hand, it is good to realise that the formal character of the photograph is a result of a range of physical, chemical and optical factors.¹⁶ So an analogue photograph is the result and reflection of a very specific light situation at a very specific moment in time. Which means that analogue photography relates just as strongly to a specific moment in time and space as painting does. It is what Roland Barthes refers to as *certificate of presence*.¹⁷ But the way it functions results in a very different perception of that moment of time. Photography has more of a passive sense of agency to it. It resembles looking at something, rather than interacting with something (e.g. painting). While both function with an indexicality that relates strongly to the artist being at a certain place and a time, their sense of agency is different.

¹⁵ Hubert Damisch, "Im Zugzwang: Delacroix, Malerei, Photographie", 2006, ISBN 9783935300773

¹⁶ Stephen Shore, *The Nature of Photography*, 1998, ISBN 0-8018-5720-1, p55

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1980, ISBN 13: 978-0374532338, p.87

Anything seen as an image is also, simultaneously, known to be happening in real time and space.¹⁸

Roland Barthes exemplifies this with the photograph of an 1865 photograph of Lewis Payne, who is about to be hanged for an attempted assassination, and sees there *at the same time; this will be and this has been*. At the moment that Roland Barthes was looking at the photograph in 1979, Payne is already long dead, but at the moment the photograph was taken, he is still yet to die.¹⁹

Both photography and painting always speak about specific moments in time. They are the fixed point in time that capture brief moments when forms take shape. When captured, these moments start to step outside of the ordinary flow of time. They are granted an extraordinary lifespan, some of which trump ours. As Roland Barthes depressingly puts it; *although a “still”, every photograph always represents this passing of time from past to future and therefore always also signals the eventual passing of the person looking at it.*²⁰

Since the canvas is a social construct with a manifold history and massive legacy, we cannot help but read the surface as charged with intentionality. It being a hands-on type of medium as well, it will also always echo the physical presence of the artist. Though many artists tried to avoid that, being prominent in the surface, the idea of the artist-subject will always find its way through the back door.²¹

¹⁸ Ian White, *Camera Obscura*.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero*, 2009, ISBN 9-780262-013253, p.13

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1980, ISBN 13: 978-0374532338, p.87

²¹ Isabelle Graw, “The Value of Liveliness”, as featured in; Isabella Graw & Ewa Lajer-Burchard, *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, 2016, ISBN 978-3-95679-007-2, p.96



Dinnis van Dijken
No.1-No.2
 2016
 122x244cm
 oil paint on panel



Jan Schoonhoven
 DETAILSHOT
R71-20
 1971
 Latex, papermaché, paint on panel
 Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, the Netherlands
 source; <http://www.stedelijkmuseumschiedam.nl/nl/tentoonstellingen/archief/445-de-werkelijkheid-van-jan-schoonhoven>

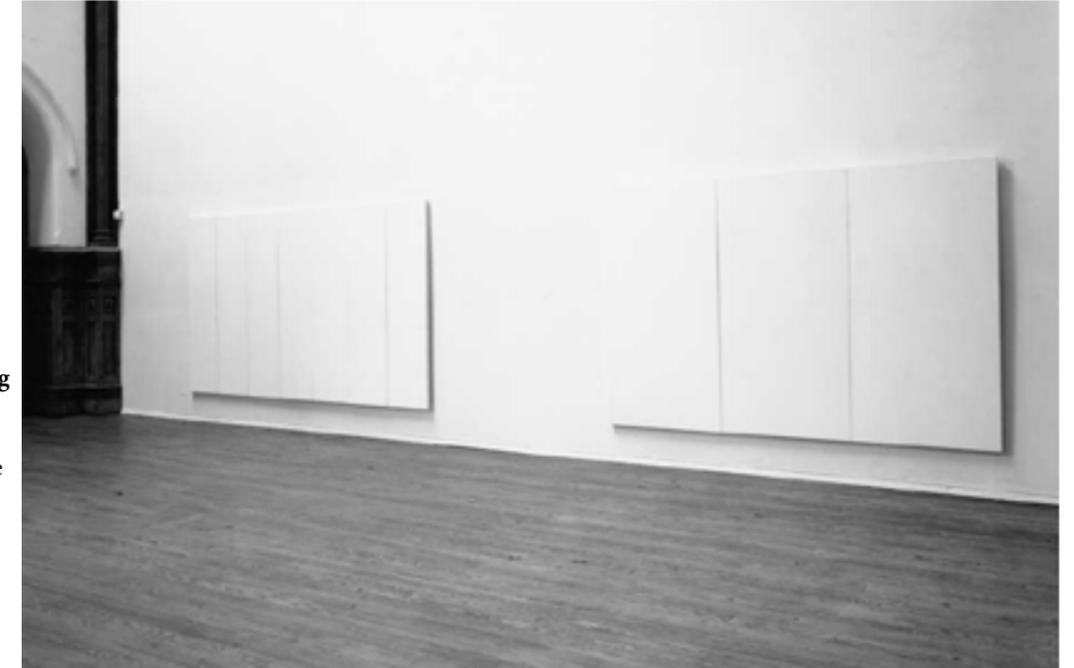
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SENSE OF TIME EXPERIENCED THROUGH PAINTING

Something that I *have* to point out is that there is one way that one can sense time in painting, a way that might be akin to the feeling of photography. This first occurred to me when I was introduced to paintings by the ZERO movement, even though at the time I didn't relate any of it to photography at all. It was mostly the idea of time that for me, permeated many of their works.

The reason for that is that I felt it was with the ZERO movement that the surface of painting was constructed in a way that resonated with the present world of the spectator. The works, instead of being references to absent moments, function mostly in the now.

ZERO's search for "pure light"²² and the use of sculptural elements gave painting the simplicity it needed to function like it does. The simplicity in the way these works functioned has, ever since being introduced to ZERO, shifted my focus to everything between me and the painting. Which is a world of light oscillating between objects. Their pursuit of the ideal of "pure light" meant that the painting became a pure catalyst in directing and reflecting the world around us. Like Jan Schoonhoven's use of relief, Lucio Fontana's cuts or Piero Manzoni's *Achromes*. Of course, there are many more things to these works other than the idea of time and the photographic sense of time, but this is just another possible way of looking at them. Especially when we are trying to re-establish what is specific to modern painting.

²² Irmgard Berner, "ARTIST GROUP ZERO; THE IDEAL OF PURE LIGHT", January 2013, as featured on the Goethe Institut, <https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/bku/20372381.html>



Robert Rauschenberg
 INSTALLATION
 VIEW
White Painting [Three
 Panel] in the artist's
 studio, 1991

source: <https://www.sfmoma.org/art-work/98.308.A-C>

There is a specific work that originated outside of the ZERO movement, yet is very relatable to it; the *White Paintings* (1951) by Robert Rauschenberg. This work has been especially important to me. It is 'point zero' in my framework of reference. It is where my phenomenological roots got started.

The beauty lies, of course and again, within the simplicity. It is just some white rectangles, really. It is a work that is completely dependent on everything that happens around it. Direct light, reflected light and shadows passing and reflecting on those pristine white surfaces. It gives importance to the play of light between and around the work and the spectator. Despite the extremely reductive nature of its aesthetics, it doesn't exclude anything. If anything, it references and reflects everything outside of itself. To relate to that work we must relate to everything around us.

What struck me the most, and has stuck with me ever since, is how much time is and was of importance in this work. Again, this is just one of the ways in which I propose that there is another notion of time that is specific to painting.

The pristine white surfaces clear our minds and the passing lights and shadows allow us to meditate on everything outside of us and the work. If you focus on the work, it feels like you and the work are stationary within time and space, and everything else moves. Like being in Plato's cave and thinking about the world outside that creates the shadows. Lights and shadows move around, between, over and on the spectator and the work. Meditating in front of that work is a pure time-lapse experience. The work shows everything that oscillates between and around the work and the spectator. It gives an idea of the photographic sense of time.

The photographic sense of time is that of being receptive within a certain moment of time. The photographic image used to be nothing but a plate of chemicals that captured light bouncing around between a formation of objects in space, within a certain frame of time. And photography has maintained much of this feeling towards the medium. It still is a *certificate of presence*, even though photography has developed way beyond that throughout history. Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* show that world of light bouncing around between objects. Yet, rather than capturing it, it functions to facilitate this idea, rendering the spectator to witness the world like photography does, which allows an experience of time that is much akin to that of photography. It even offers a rectangular field to frame it in. Yet the frame of time is as long as the *White Paintings* are shown, allowing the work an indefinite functionality, which adds to a deep sense of time.

Another way that demonstrates how painting relates to time is by discussing the work of On Kawara, whose oeuvre is the best example of meditations on time, and the issue of painting in relationship to time. One example would be his series of *Date Paintings*. Thanks to a strict set of guidelines, no painting ever contains more than one day's worth of labour. They embody specific labour invested on a specific day and a certain surface. On Kawara goes as far as to state this in one of his *Date Paintings* from January 15, 1966; *this painting itself is January 15, 1966*²³. But marking out one specific bit of time, one day, we cannot help but think about its relation and significance to all of time, or at least, I can't help but to think about such things. Most of On Kawara's strategies are designed to make us question human time versus all of time.

The setup behind the *Date Paintings* is a similar to my *No.1-No.2* work, where the labour is also restricted to a certain measure of time. In my case, I linked this idea directly to photography; where the amount of light determines the shutter speed, limiting what can be captured, which gives sense to the idea of a 'certificate of presence'.

On Kawara,
DETAILSHOT
MAY 20, 1981
("Wednesday"). New
York. From *Today*,
1966–2013.
Acrylic on canvas, 18
x 24 inches (45.7 x 61
cm). Pictured with
artist-made cardboard
storage box, 18 5/8 x 25
x 2 inches (47.3 x 62.5
x 5 cm).

source; <https://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/paintings-today-series-date-paintings>



²³ Björn Springfeldt, "ON KAWARA; continuity/discontinuity 1963 – 1979", 1980, ISBN 91-7100-179-4, p.52



Saburo Murakami,
DETAILSHOT
*Muttso no Ana (six
holes)*
1955

source;
<http://www.moder-namuseet.se/stock-holm/en/exhibitions/painting-as-action/works-in-the-exhibition/>

THE ARTIST IS PRESENT

*The visual arts, and painting in particular, presents liveliness in the form of material object, which is not reducible to this aspect, and that non-reducibility might be its special attraction. Painting's capacity to appear particularly saturated with the life- and labor time of its author, while remaining distinct from it.*²⁴

Painting is a place where we know something interesting will happen. We approach it as such. It is a theater; a place of performance. Abstract Expressionism already gave rise to the idea that painting was an arena in which to act. The canvas needed to contain not a picture, but an event.²⁵ Ever since Abstract Expressionism we have been able to read the pictorial plane as such and with the appropriate vocabulary as well. This was the vocabulary of action; inception, duration, direction. Differentiating between the automatic, the spontaneous and the evoked.²⁶

*The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.*²⁷

A very notable thing is that, in this case, material has been turned into a passive medium. There is no ambition to transform the material for it to depict something that it is not, by which I mean that the canvas was not a space to reproduce, redesign, analyze or express objects from our reality anymore. Rather, they left material to be material. They harmonized material and human interactions while keeping a distance from each other, rendering canvas and paint almost as "passive" as the photographic plate. This echoed through with the Gutai movement, stating in their manifesto;

²⁴ Isabelle Graw, "The Value of Liveliness", as featured in; Isabella Graw & Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, 2016, ISBN 978-3-95679-007-2, p.100-101

²⁵ Robert Slifkin, "The Tragic Image: Action Painting Refigured", 2011, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 2, p.227-246

²⁶ Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters", 1952, *Art News* 51/8, p.22

²⁷ Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters", 1952, *Art News* 51/8, p.22

Gutai Art does not alter matter. Gutai Art imparts life to matter. Gutai Art does not distort matter.²⁸

So it is true that painting represents liveliness in the way that it is the negative of it, which adds to the idea that the act of painting is a performance. It is labour that is performed to result into a negative image of it.

Performance is the moment when the performer with his own idea, steps into his own mental and physical construction in front of the audience in a particular time.²⁹

In the case of painting, the rectangular field of canvas on a frame, is the mental and physical construction which is brought to the audience. Painting is the material imprint of presence. Yves Klein, with the Anthropométrie series, would be an example of this; where naked women covered in blue paint become his brushes and painting is the field of interaction. Klein is said to have got the idea of painting as a direct imprint of the body from seeing a stone in Hiroshima with the shadow of a human being burned into it by the atom bomb.³⁰

The idea of the artist's presence echoing through is a big part in painting. Sometimes the marks left on the canvas become like a choreography, like with Bernard Frize's work. His paintings are close to pure choreography. The brushstrokes act as an index of carefully constructed choreographed rituals, sometimes requiring multiple people to make his paintings in one go. His paintings are an example of when material and human interaction perfectly harmonize with one another. The patterns, like in the painting *Caisse* (1997), are intricate and impossible to recreate. Trust me. I tried.

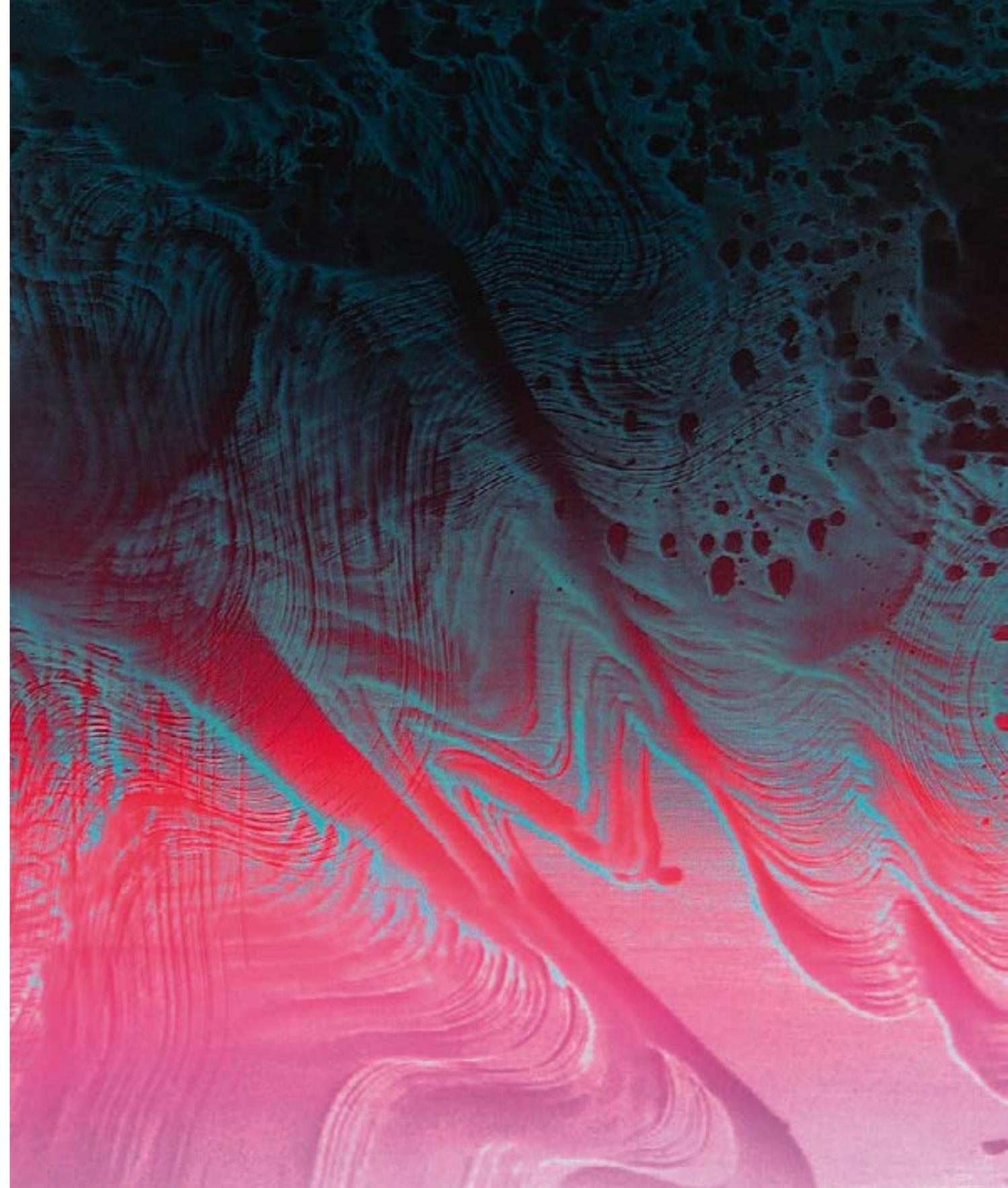
I have tried to copy many artists' work to gain a deeper sense of their works. It allows me to scan the surface of a painting in a way that they would have done. Which is not always a conscious one, but usually more of a bodily sensation. Re-staging their works, or rather their trademark gestures, is a meditative thing for me. It allows me to interpret their works by reconstructing their surfaces precisely how they were made over time. The devil is in the detail.

I have tried to copy Martijn Schuppers' work a few times during the last year. He is a former teacher from my bachelor studies and someone who has mastered a precise technique to come to a very particular painterly texture. The thing about his work was that I knew it was highly performative, like that of Bernard Frize or Jackson Pollock. Yet his paintings don't show that performative act as directly. They remind me of images we know from molecular imagery. He uses brooms, bottles and buckets to make his paintings. It all comes down to knowing precisely how the paint dries and reacts to gestures over time. It is moving, dripping, scraping, acting, reacting and waiting. So not only is there the performative act, how paint behaves over time also dictates the way he can perform. By blurring and fading the brushstrokes, he simultaneously blurs any direct

²⁸ Yoshihara Jiro, Gutai Art Manifesto, December 1956, as featured in the exhibition "Gutai: Splendid Playground", 13th of February - 8th of May, 2013, Guggenheim Museum

²⁹ Marina Abramović, "The Artist is Present", 2012, Documentary

³⁰ Crosby, Eric. "Painting on, or as, Film: Yves Klein's Suiare de Mondo Cane (Mondo Cane Shroud).", 2014, In On Performativity, edited by Elizabeth Carpenter. Vol. 1 of Living Collections Catalogue. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/yves-klein>.

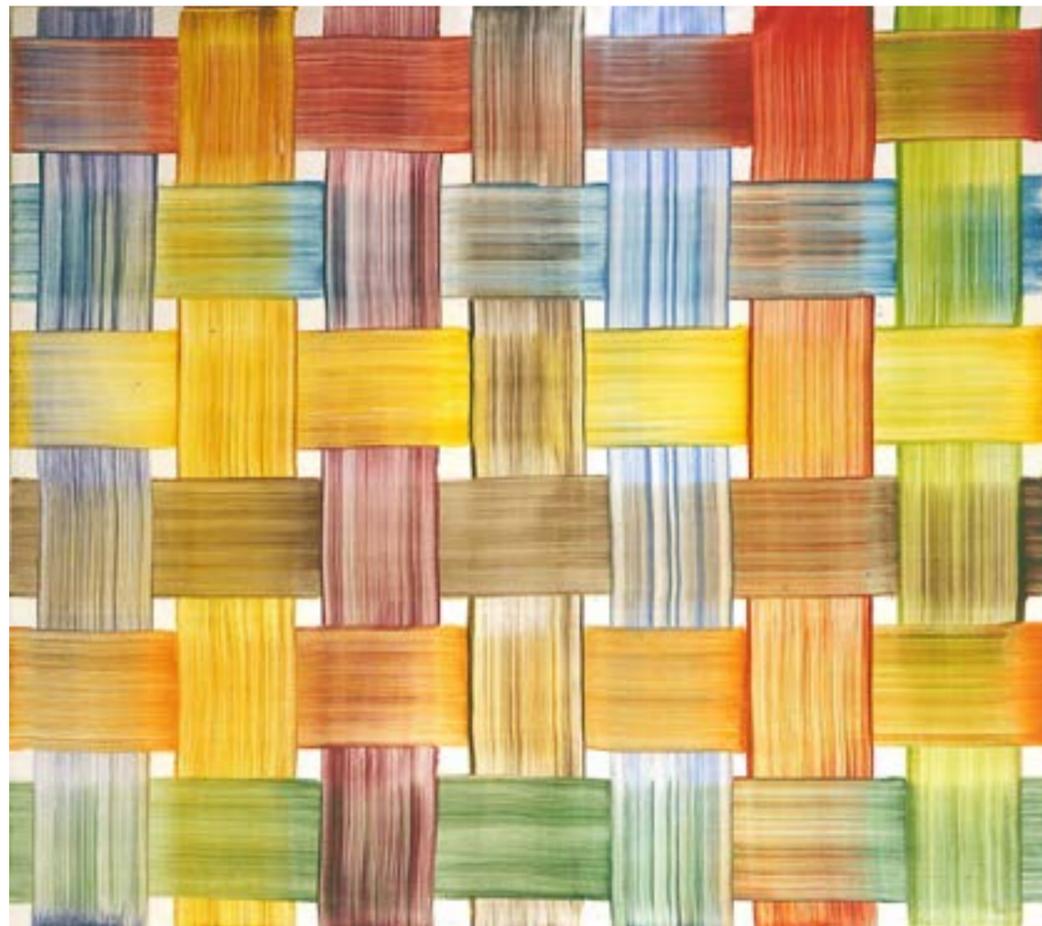


Martijn Schuppers,
#0616
2006
200 x 180 cm. Acrylic, alkyd and oil on polyester

source; <https://www.schuppers.com/works/2006/pages/07.html>

evidence of an action in time. Which is much like the way Gerhard Richter applied the use of fades and blurs in his paintings, although in his case I have always interpreted it as a way for him to claim authorship. What mostly sprung to my mind is the idea that the artist's presence was only more strongly felt. It is an acknowledgment of the artist that he was involved in creating and choosing this picture. The blurring, in contrast to Schuppers' work, acts as a way to reinforce himself over the pictorial plane and make his presence known.

Unlike Joselit³¹ I do not believe that painting stores labour or accumulates it. Whatever labour is performed on or in front of the canvas, the painterly residue, the brushstroke is nothing but an imprint, a negative of it. Painting functions mostly as an etching plate for performed labour; where life scratches the surface of painting. A compilation of fragmented imprints. Only the fluidity of Frize is maybe the most continuous; we can read the whole choreography of his performance as one decisive fluid movement.



Bernard Frize
Caisse
 1997
 Acrylic and resin on
 canvas
 64 x 51 inches \ 162 x
 130 cm
 Perrotin, Paris, France

source; https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Bernard_Frize/4/caisse/2995

So it is true that painting represents liveliness in the way that it is the negative of it, which adds to the idea that the act of painting is a performance. It is labour that is performed to result into a negative image of it. The painterly surface functions to mediate this performative act and negotiate this.

³¹ David Joselit, "Painting Beyond Itself", as featured in; Isabella Graw & Ewa Lajer-Burchard, *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, 2016, ISBN 978-3-95679-007-2, p.20

Jutta Koether,
 INSTALLATION
 VIEW
Lux Interior
 2009
 Reena Spaulings, New
 York, USA

source; <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2009/05/jutta-koether-at-reena-spaulings/>



STAYING SPECIFIC

Right now, in contemporary art, I think the performative aspect has become more and more important in painting, which is most likely linked to the ever increasing interest in performance art over the recent years.³²

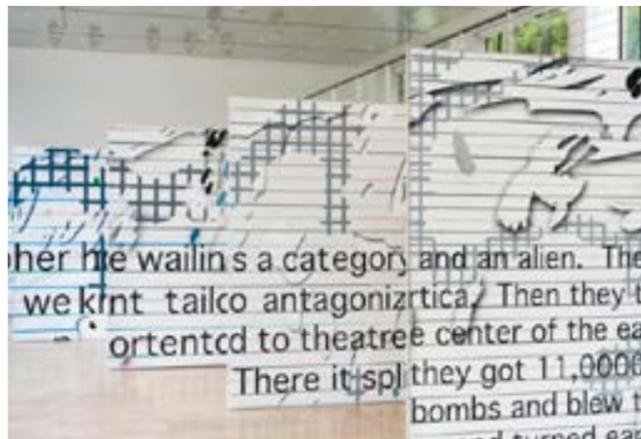
Jutta Koether has been mentioned in this context a few times and David Joselit already features her and her work *Lux Interior*³³ in the text *Painting besides itself*.³⁴ Yet I would argue that this piece in particular is very ambiguous when it comes to the discussion of what is still specific to painting. The way the painting *Hot Rod (After Poussin)* functions in the performance is what Isabella Graw talks about when she speaks of flexible notion of painting, given that in Koether's performances the painting serves only as a prop. On the other hand it might be noteworthy that the way the painting *Hot Rod (After Poussin)* is installed adds to a particular sense of temporality. With one leg on and one leg off stage, it seems like this painting is there on a temporary basis. Despite the prop-like role it plays in Koether's performances, it has a very definite presence on its own, which is down to the way it has been installed. It might not be so much part of the pictorial plane, yet it is definitely part of the inherent structures of painting. You get the sense that the

³² Daniel Penny, "The Irrelevant and the Contemporary", as featured in, *THE NEW ENQUIRY*, 2 August 2016

³³ The work *Lux Interior* features a single painting *Hot Rod (After Poussin)* 2009, the artist's to-scale remake of Poussin's *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, 1651 – it receives extra illumination from a vintage scoop light (salvaged from *The Saint*, an ex-Manhattan night club). [...] *Lux Interior* also references previous one-painting shows by Koether: the dialogically-structured exhibition *The Inside Job* (1991), and koether- need change unseen nightlong new york interior construction of mediality of painting (2001-2002), a series of by-appointment viewings of a single work in the artist's apartment. Poussin's painting was made for a specific client, Cassiano dal Pozzo, for a specific room in his estate, and with a particular discussion in mind. For *Lux Interior*, Koether has scheduled three separate talks in the gallery.

<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2009/05/jutta-koether-at-reena-spaulings/>

³⁴ David Joselit, "Painting besides itself", 2009, *OCTOBER* 130, Fall 2009, p.125–134.



Laura Owens,
INSTALLATION
VIEW
Untitled
2015
Oil, Flashe, acrylic,
silkscreen inks, and
gesso on linen, 108 x 84
inches / 274.3 x 213.4

source; <http://www.captainpetzel.de/exhibitions/laura-owens/>

painting moves through the world, that it has a life of its own, that painting has a continuous presence in our world and the exhibition is just a coming together that we happen to witness. Koether's performances coincide with that moment, which emphasizes the temporal aspect of the exhibition and reinforces the artist's presence in relation to the painting.

I think that the way that Koether installed *Hot Rod (after Poussin)* is interesting because it transcends the idea of marking and scoring of time that is formally present in the pictorial plane while remaining specific to the inherent laws of painting. David Joselit looked at it in a way that actualized the behaviour of objects in a network.³⁵ While this is certainly one way of looking at it, I am personally more interested in exploring painting and the actualization of its behavior in the world.

Laura Owens installation *Untitled (2015)*³⁶ exemplifies this idea even further. Everything in the featured installation is specific to painting; it is paint and canvas on frames and even their backsides are painted. The paintings are freestanding in the space and the way that the paintings are aligned in that space allows the spectator to only be able to read the painted texts from a specific angle. The same goes for the backside of the paintings; one can only see a coherent and aligned composition from a specific angle in the space.

³⁵ David Joselit, "Painting besides itself", 2009, OCTOBER 130, Fall 2009, p.125-134.

³⁶ Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2015, Oil, Flashe, acrylic, silkscreen inks, and gesso on linen, 108 x 84 inches / 274.3 x 213.4 cm as featured in Captain Petzel, Berlin, Germany during the 1st of May - 13th of July, 2015

This all brings me back to my experience of the *White Paintings* by Rauschenberg. With Owens' installation I get the same sense of time passing by with these paintings, but unlike the *White Paintings*, here I become more aware of their materialistic presence in relationship to the world. The canvas seems relatively flimsy when compared to the big space it is in, the stretchers bars are echoed on the back surface, reinforcing their role as the main support for the whole structure of the painting. Continuously the spectator becomes aware of his bodily presence in the space in relation to the flimsy presence of the paintings. This method of presenting or installing paintings reexamines how painting relates to the material world while maintaining specific to itself.

In my practice I have always shied away from mounting paintings on the wall. Until recently I had never articulated why I felt this tendency; it was just that mounting a painting on the wall felt so definite, so stationary. Now I think it was because it felt contrary to my fundamental belief that paintings are transitory in their very essence. I believe that paintings move and change over time just like anything else, even if they do so over a very long time. However, the nature of their construction is a pragmatic one³⁷ and allows for a high mobility.

In my recent installation *Another Flow of the River (2016)* and in the installation of *No.1-No.2* in the group show *It Felt So Good Up There (2016)* the paintings are installed in a similar manner to Koether's and Owens'. This was because I felt that the temporal aspect of the contemporary exhibition space had become more emphasized with the recent increased interest in poetry and performance.³⁸

³⁷ Painting on stretched canvases is pragmatic because it is a very light construction. This allows for easy transport and storage, which is very convenient when it comes to exhibitions.

³⁸ Daniel Penny, "The Irrelevant and the Contemporary", as featured in, THE NEW ENQUIRY, 2 August 2016



Dinnis van Dijken
INSTALLATION
VIEW of *No.1-No2*
as part of the group
exhibition *It Felt So
Good Up There (2016)*
Platform. Stockholm,
Sweden

The durational performance finds a new form of reception at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The return of the body and of prolonged time resists the dematerialized, agitated nature of the current era.³⁹

I think that this emphasized temporal structure of the exhibition space calls for a re-assessment of how painting functions specifically in this environment. Koether's and Owens' installations already map out some of the parameters of this discussion. As for myself, this is a continuous investigation within my practice. I like to try out different ways of installing my works in exhibitions to get a better understanding of how painting functions in the current exhibition spaces. Lately I have developed a preference for propping up my paintings so they become freestanding in the space, allowing for another sense of temporality to enter into the realm of painting, emphasizing the performative aspect that is present in it and specific to it.

³⁹ Nato Thompson, "Contradictions of Time: On Social Practice from a Temporal Perspective". 2010, Eflux Journal #20 – November 2010

CONCLUSION

As David Joselit said, modern painting does speculate on time and so do I in my practice. I think time is the binding factor in most of modern painting because we have become more aware of its temporality. I would argue that we can find this temporality in the formal aspects of painting and in the act of it

The formal aspects of painting give way to ideas of time and presence through what Joselit and Graw describe as part of painting's indexicality, yet I would argue that there is another sense of time present within those formal aspects. It was because I started including photography into my practice that I have become more aware of how the world oscillates between the spectator and a painting. It allowed painting to be the backdrop or catalyst of experiencing time that is much like what I call the photographic sense of time; that of being receptive of the fluidity of time between the spectator and painting. When in front of a painting, we are not only looking at what Roland Barthes refers to as certificates of presence, we can actually witness time passing by. If we think about how photography formally shows changes of light and movement, and bring that mindset to the subject of painting, we enable another way of sensing time within painting.

Being confronted with the current omnipresence of performance art has made me reconsider what it means to have a body as an artist and what it means to perform, realizing that it is in the act of painting that I personally experience the "alchemy" of painting the most. Performance art has emphasized the exhibition space as a temporal event and with the idea of a bodily presence. Abstract Expressionism and the Gutai Movement already gave way to the idea of painting as a field in which to act. Like with Abstract Expressionism, performance art gives us an alternative vocabulary to reexamine painting as a mental and physical structure.

In the end we can conclude that there are many ways that painting is still achieving something that is specific to it and that contemporary painting speculates on time in a multitude of ways. I think my practice is a strong reflection of my engagement to this discussion. The discourse on what has remained specific to painting feeds directly into my work. As I follow the discussions, my work tends to meander along the same paths. It is the search for the alchemy in painting while simultaneously dealing with the issue of what has remained specific to painting.