

ABSTRACT POSSIBLE : THE TRAILER

Malmö Konsthall's Project Space
10 November 2010–16 January 2011

Artists
Doug Ashford
Claire Barclay
Goldin+Senneby
Wade Guyton
Mai-Thu Perret

Abstract Possible is a research project that aims to explore notions of abstraction, taking contemporary art as its starting point. It will develop in various locations over the course of two years, starting with a "trailer exhibition" in the project space of Malmö Konsthall 10 November 2010–16 January 2011.

Clandestine, opaque, hermetic and abstract are all buzzwords frequently used in discussions of contemporary art over the last decade. A plethora of examples of formal abstraction, both geometric and expressive, is visible in exhibitions, site-specific installations, publications and other projects. In addition to the many cases where geometric abstraction in art and design becomes a lifestyle indicator, artists contemplate and engage with the legacy of modernist abstraction as the result of highly specific artistic and ideological trajectories. But what does it mean to revisit these trajectories from the point of view of today? And yet abstraction is not purely a formal construction. The concept of abstraction has also—within a Marxist framework—been applied to describe all relations within a capitalist system. As of late, this has been extended to the logic and distortion of scale engendered by the post-Fordist/late capitalist economy. Working conditions, and conditions of production, are other pertinent points of reference here. All this is happening within a culture and an economy in which we literally "live under abstraction", although the economic recession has more recently put such abstraction into relief. Or as the art critic and theoretician Sven Lütticken recently put it: "We are the natives of abstraction". In that case we have to acknowledge abstraction as omnipresent, not unlike the ideal of transparency in liberal democracies. What is the potential of abstraction in such a contested territory?

At the same time it is easy to observe yet another manifestation of abstraction, namely in strategies of withdrawal (*abstrahere*, to withdraw) used by artists and other cultural producers. It is abstraction as a conscious means to obscure and enter this formal terrain "at an angle", often with the aim of creating more space for manoeuvring through self-organised initiatives. These developments have been discussed in terms of "strategic essentialism" as well as "strategic separatism". Sometimes it seems to be a reaction to pressures of spectacularization and access, at other times it seems to draw on specific art historical developments. Perhaps we can begin to think of these abstract/opaque strategies and tactics as a different critical paradigm based on the enlightenment paradigm such as off-shore finance and its enactment of virtual space within a real economy, and outsourcing and other post-Fordist ways of organising work. The other hand the project refers to Georges Bataille and the secret society Acéphale, which he co-founded, whose symbol was a decapitated man. Employing among other things a ghostwriter who conducts research on an off-shore company in the Bahamas called Headless Ltd. (asked to write a novel chapter by chapter about the various manifestations of *Headless* of fact and fiction. Real events are fictionalised and fiction has palpable effects on people. *The Decapitation of Money*, part of *Headless* is an installation based on a talk by economic geographer Angus Cameron tracing the progressive levels of abstraction money has undergone since the Middle Ages and the direct and concrete relations between people and money. The talk was made and recorded during a walk in the Marly Forest in Paris, where Bataille and his friends purportedly met in the 1930s. On the wall in the exhibition space is a map outlining the forest, a reproduction of one of the few surviving documents belonging to the members of Acéphale.

Further manifestations of *Abstract Possible* will take place at the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City (26 March – 14 August, 2011), the exhibition space of the Postgraduate Program in Curating, Zurich University of the Arts (6–26 May, 2011), etc.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Doug Ashford
Two Pools, 31.5h x 35.5 cm, tempera on board, 2009
Old Pool, 45 x 45 cm, tempera on board, 2009
Purple Crowd, 25 x 25 cm, acrylic and paper on board, 2010
Ordinariness 1, 25 x 25 cm, tempera on board, 2010
Ordinariness 2, 25 x 25 cm, tempera on board, 2010
Ordinariness 3, 25 x 25 cm, tempera on board, 2010
As part of the "ensemble" *The Ordinary*, all paintings.

With layer painted upon layer using the ancient medium of tempera, these intimate paintings come about slowly in the relative isolation of the studio space. The surfaces are even and rarely do they betray strokes of the brush. The colors are subdued and, together with the method that is reminiscent of icon painting, they create a somewhat meditative air around them. These paintings originally evolved out of diagrams mapping people in the New York art world involved with political and social activism. Documented and translated by an individual whose subjectivity spans from the sharing of groups to solitary reflection. Like Gilles Deleuze's "abstract machines", the resulting delicate diagrams show relations between forces, charting powers—pictorial and others.

Claire Barclay
New Flesh 2010 part 1, painted wood, glass, machined brass, ink, card, powder coated steel, leather, 2010

The functional and dysfunctional nature of objects often act as triggers for Claire Barclay's own objects and installations, which draw on sophisticated and primal understandings of the world we inhabit. Intense attention to specific materials, their qualities and connotations, play not least their unexpected combinations both in the studio and in the exhibition space before the moment of display. This gives the work a sense of being in the middle of an on-going process that involves intention as well as improvisation. Elements of slick manufacturing are combined with the handmade and improvised, creating a hybrid that tends to be at the same time abstracted and concrete. Like many of Barclay's works, *New Flesh 2010 part 1* contains a wide range of materials shaped to appear like found objects but which in fact are all constructed by the artist. Reminiscent of a prop that alludes to basic printing techniques, this sculpture hovers between the familiar and the foreign, allowing a wide range of possible and imagined interpretations, interactions and scenarios.

Goldin+Senneby
The Decapitation of Money, set design, audio recording (28 min), publication, Goldin+Senneby with Angus Cameron (economic geographer), K.D. (fictional author), Anna Heymowska (set designer), Johan Hjerpe (graphic designer), Kerwin Rolland (sound designer), 2010, originally produced for Kadist Art Foundation, Paris

Headless is Goldin+Senneby's multi-formal project which started in 2007. On the one hand it looks at late capitalist phenomena such as off-shore finance and its enactment of virtual space within a real economy, and outsourcing and other post-Fordist ways of organising work. The other hand the project refers to Georges Bataille and the secret society Acéphale, which he co-founded, whose symbol was a decapitated man. Employing among other things a ghostwriter who conducts research on an off-shore company in the Bahamas called Headless Ltd. (asked to write a novel chapter by chapter about the various manifestations of *Headless* of fact and fiction. Real events are fictionalised and fiction has palpable effects on people. *The Decapitation of Money*, part of *Headless* is an installation based on a talk by economic geographer Angus Cameron tracing the progressive levels of abstraction money has undergone since the Middle Ages and the direct and concrete relations between people and money. The talk was made and recorded during a walk in the Marly Forest in Paris, where Bataille and his friends purportedly met in the 1930s. On the wall in the exhibition space is a map outlining the forest, a reproduction of one of the few surviving documents belonging to the members of Acéphale.

Mai-Thu Perret
An Evening of the Book, three films by Mai-Thu Perret (*Holes* and *Neon*, 19.28 min; *The Book*, 15.33 min; *Dance of the Commas*, 10.44 min; with Fia Backström; Tara Lee Burns, Faye Driscoll, Lesley Garrison, Amy Granat, Roche Janken, Emily McKinnon, Maiko Ota, Elizabeth Valdez; filmed at The Kitchen, New York; music *The Spider Song*; lyrics by Mai-Thu Perret; music by Steven Parrino), 2007, a trailer is shown as part of the exhibition.

Screening: *An Evening of the Book* at Biograf Spegeln Tuesday 9 November, 7 pm and Tuesday 11 January 2011, 7 pm. Introduction by Maria Lind. Mai-Thu Perret will be present 9 November. Limited number of seats. Book your ticket at: info.konsthall@malmö.se

Untitled, block printed wallpaper, dimensions variable, 2008
Bake and sale theory, diptych, two framed silkscreens, edition of 6 plus 2aps, 2004
Fabric designs, diptych, two framed silkscreens, edition of 6 plus 2aps, 2005
No more city, framed silkscreen, 2006
Drain, silkscreen on paper, unframed, 2008
Society is a hole, silkscreen on paper, unframed, 2008

Early 20th century avant-garde practices and their employment for the work of Mai-Thu Perret. In paintings, sculptures, installations, textile banners, wallpapers, etc. she refers to works by artists such as Alexander Rodchenko, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Francis Picabia and - more than anyone else – Varvara Stepanova. Their versions of abstraction developed as a reaction to the materialism and naturalism of previous generations and expressed a desire to create a new language suiting a new society. Stepanova was a pioneer of textile, fashion and set design, as well as polygraphy, who was not only engaged with but also embedded in concrete industrial production. Conditions of production are also central to the work of Perret who since 1999 has worked on a fictive "master narrative" entitled *The Crystal Frontier* which deals with a group of young women who form a self-sustained commune in the Southwest of the United States. *The Crystal Frontier* is manifested in a variety of forms such as a longer text, excerpts of the text printed on posters, sculptures, garments and installations. *An Evening of the Book* is a series of three films restaging an agitprop play from 1924 for which Stepanova made the set and the costumes. The play itself juxtaposes literary heroes from the pre-revolutionary period with contemporary ones and aims at stimulating interest in books and literacy. In Perret's black and white films, props reminiscent of the originals, for example Stepanova's famous sport costumes, are used together with new additions such as a specific choreography performed by an all-female cast.

Wade Guyton
Untitled, plywood and paint, 2010

The very means of artistic production, particularly painting, are the focus of many of Wade Guyton's works. Standardized procedures such as printing with basic commercial printers have been appropriated in order to generate paintings where the mechanical meets the incidental with wrinkles, blurs and other "errors", not unlike in any office environment. The resulting paintings are minimal and abstract, as in "non-representational". At the same time they evoke the emergence of mass media, and therefore popular culture, in print workshops. The *Untitled* is a remake of the floor in Guyton's former studio. Cheap, and therefore rough, plywood was painted glossy black, thereby creating a large abstract sculpture as the very support of all work taking place in the studio. The first three times the floor sculpture was shown it was combined with the printed "paintings" that had made indexical marks on the surfaces of the floor wherever they landed immediately after their printing. In *Abstract Possible* the floor sculpture has been released from this context and it has been introduced in a new environment.

SELF-PRESENTATIONS

Doug Ashford is an artist, teacher and writer. Since 1989 he has taught design, sculpture and theory at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, where he is now Associate Professor. The collaboratively organized Interdisciplinary Seminar and Lecture Series at The Cooper Union continues to provide public platforms for rethinking art across media and discipline. Ashford's principle art practice from 1982 to 1996 was as a member of Group Material, who collectively sought to transform the production, presentation and learning of contemporary culture through artistic intervention. Since those years he has gone on to make paintings, write and produce public projects, all engaged with the social imagination. His most recent dialogic project was *Who Cares* (Creative Time, 2006), a book built from a series of conversations between Ashford and an assembly of other cultural practitioners on public expression, ethics and beauty. His work with Group Material has been recently compiled in the book *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (Four Corners Books, 2010).

Claire Barclay lives and works in Glasgow and graduated from the vibrant Art School there in the early 1990s. Since then she has exhibited widely, and is recognized for her large-scale sculptural installations. Her works investigate the connection between making and thinking which underlies sculptural exploration. How material affects the viewer both physically and psychologically has been a central theme within her practice. In 2003 she represented Scotland at the Venice Biennale (alongside Simon Starling and Jim Lambie), she represented Scotland at the Palazzo Giustinian Lolin. Last year she exhibited her first retrospective exhibition at The Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh. She has recently been a recipient of a Paul Hamlyn Award and is currently exhibiting at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London as the recipient of this year's Bloomberg Commission. Although known for her exhibition projects, her career has involved teaching art in the UK, Australia and Sweden. She has also produced a number of public art commissions. Claire Barclay is represented by Stephen Friedman Gallery in London and Doggerfisher in Edinburgh.

Goldin+Senneby (since 2004) is a framework for collaboration set up by artists Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby exploring juridical, financial and spatial constructs through notions of the performative and the virtual. Their collaboration started with *The Port* (2004-06), acting in an emerging public sphere constructed through digital code. In their more recent body of work, known as *Headless* (2007 -), they approach the sphere of offshore finance and its production of virtual space through legal code. Looking at strategies of withdrawal and secrecy, they trace an offshore company on the Bahamas called Headless Ltd. A ghostwritten detective novel continuously narrates their investigations. Solo exhibitions: *The Decapitation of Money*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2010); *Headless. From the Public Record*, Index, Stockholm (2009); Goldin+Senneby: Headless, The Power Plant, Toronto (2008). Recent group exhibitions include The Moderna Exhibition, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2010); Uneven Geographies, Nottingham Contemporary (2010); In Living Contact, 28th Biennial de Sao Paulo (2008). Residencies include: Kadist, Paris (2010); Gasworks, London (2008); IASPIS, Stockholm (2007).

Wade Guyton (b. 1972) lives and works in New York. He has had solo exhibitions at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in Dourle, at Portikus in Frankfurt and at the Kunstverein in Hamburg. His work has been shown in the Whitney Biennial of 2004, the Lyon Biennial of 2007 and the Torino Triennale of 2009. Upcoming solo exhibitions include the Vienna Secession and the Kunsthalle Zurich. Guyton works in many media including drawing, photography, sculpture, painting and installation. His works on linen made with an inkjet printer are notable for straddling the categories of digital media, photography and painting. In his recent exhibitions Guyton presents these works as paintings, but he also engages with the architecture of the galleries in which they are hung, for example either by laying a painted false floor over the existing floor or by altering the scale of the paintings to adapt to the pre-existing architectural constraints. Guyton also collaborates with Kelley Walker as Guyton/Walker, whose work has been shown at the Venice Biennale Of 2009, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Serpentine Gallery, Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna-Mambo and is a member of the publishing and performance collective Continuous Project who have presented work at Modern Art Oxford and MUMOK, Vienna.

Mai-Thu Perret was born in Geneva in 1976 and studied at Cambridge University and the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York. Her work combines radical feminist politics with utopian literary texts, homemade crafts and 20th century avant-garde aesthetics. Her multidisciplinary practice encompasses sculpture, painting, video and installation. Perret's recent solo exhibitions have included: Aspen Art Museum, 2009; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2008; *An Evening of the Book*, 2008; *The Stories at The Kitchen* in New York, 2008; *The Crystal Frontier* at Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, 2008; and Maastricht's Bonnetanten Museum, 2007. In December 2010 Perret's solo exhibition, *An Ideal for Living*, opens at University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor. In 2011 Perret will have solo exhibitions at Mamco, Geneva; Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau; and Le Magasin, Grenoble. Perret is currently making the dance work *Lettres d'amour en brique ancienne* which will be premiered in Geneva on March 17, 2011.

