

**GAMBAROFF
KREBBER
QUAYTMAN
RAYNE**

BERGEN KUNSTHALL

NIKOLAS GAMBAROFF MICHAEL KREBBER R.H. QUAYTMAN BLAKE RAYNE

BY THOMAS DUNCAN, STEINAR SEKKINGSTAD AND SOLVEIG ØVSTEBØ

As painting is an art form in constant flux, any exhibition of paintings can be justified simply by saying that the medium ‘merits a continuous critical inquiry and thorough investigation’. So when we assert that the heading for this exhibition is not ‘painting today’ or ‘what counts as painting’ but that it is instead based on a dialogue that manifests constellations, both planned and spontaneous, of four artists and their individual approaches to painting, this solidifies the claim that the exhibition has a different objective.

The exhibition begins with the recognition that the concept of painting is virtually as broad and all-encompassing as the concept of art. The exhibition is therefore not about what *can be* painting and what is *not*. Rather, it elucidates how four artists pass their distinctive artistry through a filter we can call ‘painting’; a filter whose complexity we as curators acknowledge equally with the artists, and only fragments of which will be touched upon in the exhibition. Thus the exhibition does not set out to define the position of painting within the current art scene – a definition that would in that case only contribute yet another component to this filter. Instead we want to shift the focus from the filter itself (the classificatory activity surrounding painting) to what comes out at the other end: a constellation of works by artists who are all aware of the filter of art theory that the concept of ‘painting’ constitutes today in the art field.

Although painting enjoys a position in the history of art that overshadows all other artistic media, painting has

almost been viewed as a *controversial activity* since the 1990s, in the sense that there often appears to be a need or a demand to justify the use of painting as a medium.¹ Like any other contentious endeavour, painting involves various systems of belief that are formulated and practiced by their adherents. This is one of the focal points of the exhibition: the jettisoning of any unifying theme and the concentration of attention on these four individual artists, whose praxes are informed by their respective ideas about painting. The four artists in the exhibition have been chosen because painting as an idea and its myriad complexities influence many aspects of their output and serves as an instrument for the presentation of the underlying references and the range of content in these works. Their overall activity weaves in and out of a conception of the *category of painting*, a conception that also allows for historical, discursive, material and social interchanges.

In recent times we have seen a number of exhibitions and articles that have attempted to actualize and elucidate the concept of painting, but often the result has only helped to obfuscate matters further. Nevertheless the response to some of these attempts has been a kind of canonization, instead of seeing them for what they really are – a series of investigations; and it is here, in this unexplored territory, that we want to situate this exhibition. The exhibition makes no attempt to be didactic, or to let a thematizing or explanatory attitude shine through. This is why we do not use a title or associate the exhibition with a

generalized, defined content or theme within which the artists are to structure their work. And since no unequivocal definition of contemporary painting has determined the linkage of these artists either, we are left with an open space without firm categories for classification.²

Despite these initial curatorial reflections on the pretensions of the exhibition or its alleged lack of them, this essay will still attempt to illuminate this ‘open space’ and the various aspects that have arisen in the work with such an exhibition. Painting as an aesthetic, practical and theoretical entity in contemporary art will therefore be a pivotal concern of the text. The remarks on painting that appear here can be viewed as an independent component in the exhibition project, a voice that moves through and among the works, rather than over them like a didactic narrator’s voice. The dialogue that arises in the exhibition space is the foundation on which the exhibition builds, and the project has been created against the background of an understanding that the concept ‘painting’ has now completely exploded. The result is that myriad elements can enter into this ‘equation’ before any definition can sum them up. And often this is just what happens. A wide range of elements can physically materialize in artworks in which three-dimensionality, sculptural elements and architectural structures are incorporated; and in some cases the whole format of painting as we normally know it has perhaps been quite abandoned.

Several of the artists in the exhibition engage in a praxis where as-

- ¹ An interview with the artist Mel Bochner from 1993 can be used to illustrate this point, and shows how such a demand for justification was prevalent in the 1990s. In a conversation about Bochner’s ‘return’ to painting the central issue was how this could be ‘defended’ artistically. See James Meyer and Mel Bochner, “How Can You Defend Making Paintings Now”, in Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon and Stephen Melville (eds.), *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, MIT Press, 2001.
- ² The choice of four artists rather than a larger group permits a considerable emphasis on the qualities of precisely these artists, thus opening up the potential for meaningful dialogue among the works.
- ³ Joselit’s essay is an example of the experimental reformulation of theoretical perspectives on contemporary painting that is in progress today, and of which this exhibition can also be seen as an example. David Joselit, “Painting Beside Itself”, *October* 130, autumn 2009, pp. 125-134.
- ⁴ For a balanced discussion of these themes, see *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 77 (March 2010). This issue of the magazine was dedicated to a renewal of the theoretical discussions surrounding painting. It uses exactly the concepts we repeat here. In the introduction it is claimed that painting is an *institution* “that casts long shadows” and at the same time that this is what enables “the painterly apparatus” that can today be perceived as liberating and fruitful for painting. See the introduction by the editors Isabelle Graw and André Rottman, pp. 106-107, and Helmut Draxler, “Painting as apparatus. Twelve theses”, pp. 108-111.
- ⁵ See for example Douglas Crimp, “The End of Painting” (1981) for insight into the discussion as it developed at the start of the 1980s, or Sven-Olov Wallensten, *Den sista bilden: det moderna måleriets kriser och förvandlingar* (2001), for a retrospective review of the almost chronic crisis of painting during and after modernism.
- ⁶ *Doubt* as a qualitative potential for painting has been expressed repeatedly in encounters with Michael Krebber’s works. See for example Adrian Searle, “Never trust a painter”, in *The Guardian*, September 25, 2001.
- ⁷ The series was shown in three different exhibitions in 2007: *Respect Frischlinge* at Galerie Daniel Buchholz, *Je suis la chaise* at Galerie Chantal Crousel and *London Condom* at Maureen Paley.
- ⁸ Michael Krebber, *Here It Is: The Painting Machine* at the Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, 2003.
- ⁹ *Miami City Ballet IV*, 2010.

pects *outside* the physical painting factor into the equation, such that a whole range of supplementary information, anecdotes, references and social networks become an integrated, visible part of the work. This lies close to what the theorist David Joselit has recently called “transitive painting”, which according to Joselit comprises paintings that attempt

to reveal the networks and surrounding structures that lie outside the production of painting itself.³

PAINTING AS INSTITUTION AND THE PERIODIC DEATH OF PAINTING

It has often been asserted that painting is an institution in itself, precisely because it is so saturated by art history, theoretical guidelines and institutional implications. The predominance of painting in the history of art, and later its salience as a target for attacks, is indisputable. However, one possible risk in attributing such historical weight to painting is that we may appear to reduce its options rather than identify the *potential* the medium can have in contemporary art. Painting is turned into a passive historical category with a great future behind it with which everything is compared. Is it instead possible to operate with a concept of painting that functions actively? Such a concept would be an entity that is mobile and flexible, and which can itself be used as a medium for criticizing/discussing both conceptual and institutional strategies.⁴ The artists in this exhibition can all be viewed in relation to such an ‘active’ concept of painting. However, this activation need not take place ‘outside’ painting, as Joselit’s above-mentioned concept implies. In this exhibition a broader contextual reading is activated equally often *through* the act of painting.

What has probably been the most frequently repeated framework for any critical discussion of painting over the past forty years has revolved around ‘the death of painting’, and any possibilities for its rebirth. One common feature of these discussions has been a claim that the essence of painting is either imperilled, transcended or dead and put behind us – as if painting were the art form that had to be eliminated before new art forms could take over.⁵ The artists in this exhibition have all lived through the recent history of art, with its repeated proclamations and prophecies of doom and rebirth on behalf of painting. Today this is no longer a theme that actively determines the thinking of most artists. But this history has laid the basis for a deeply internalized form of

self-reflexivity among artists who work with a critical type of painting which is palpably different from the more bombastic painting one could often see among some of the painters of the 1980s; or masculine, ‘cocksure’ painting – a category that has prevailed from Abstract Expressionism to postmodern painting. Perhaps it is rather *doubt*, as a hesitant and tentative quality, that enables the artists we are dealing with here to employ painting more flexibly and contextually than before, without necessarily having to break with recognizable strategies where the formalistic and even the decorative are valid.

MICHAEL KREBBER AND SELF-REFLEXIVE PAINTING

Michael Krebber expresses this kind of self-reflexivity through an almost nervously self-conscious and evasive painterly praxis.⁶ In the exhibition Krebber is represented by a selection of works from the last seven years. In a series of untitled paintings from 2007 one finds what are perhaps the most explicitly self-reflexive paintings in the exhibition: black-and-white canvases, all with comic-strip motifs that look like a xeroxed fanzine version of the Pop Art of the sixties, all overpainted with extracts from one of Krebber’s own lectures on painting.⁷ Other canvases consist of cloth stretched on a frame. Colourful bed-linen becomes a patterned surface where Krebber’s brush has added this or that stroke with a minimal use of color. In addition, all the canvases had attached to them the same invitation poster that was printed for the exhibition in which the works were shown for the first time, in 2003.⁸ The latest works include one where a similar gesture is made. But this time we are confronted by three canvases covered by a loosely enveloping piece of bed-linen. Here too the textile has been furnished with a very cautious trace of a ‘painterly gesture’ in the form of a single stroke in black paint.⁹

For several decades Krebber has investigated painterly issues, but his praxis is far from the bravura and self-assurance that formalist painting has traditionally represented. Instead of attacking – with full force, so to speak –

selected painterly issues, Krebber takes a far more subtle, careful approach where strategies like deferral, hesitation and even artistic failure are applied. Throughout his highly influential career Krebber has maintained a relatively limited production and has constantly avoided pigeonholing within a particular style or mode of production. His whole oeuvre takes the form of a long succession of digressions or evasive actions, where the *lack* of focus and stability may seem to be the only unifying criterion one can find.

The self-reflexivity we are talking about here is of course something quite different from the modernist medium-specificity where the painting became self-reflexive in the light of a particular view of what were and what were not the medium's own defining qualities. On the contrary, Krebber's art is perhaps the best example of how painting is woven into an intricate system of external references. In most cases these references are not directly apparent in the works themselves. In one of his latest exhibitions this is well exemplified.¹⁰ The press release for the exhibition, authored by the artist himself, directs our attention away from the works exhibited, towards things that ostensibly have little to do with the exhibition – but there is a tangible sense that a complex of secret codes is being kept from us. However, what one actually encountered in the exhibition was a series of works which, if one was given the necessary background information, referred both to Krebber's own early youth and to a specific exhibition of the work of his onetime mentor and employer Martin Kippenberger.¹¹ The work *Die Hundejahre sind vorbei* (2010) (The Dog Years Are Over) from this exhibition is also exhibited in Bergen Kunsthall. It consists of three neon text sculptures. The sculptures themselves are partially destroyed. The neon signs are broken, and each lies in its own transport crate with the lid lifted off – a clear reference to the title of Kippenberger's exhibition *Broken Neon* from 1987 – in which Krebber himself participated. The Dog Years to which the title of the work refers are harder to decode. In German *Hundejahre* can mean a period of apprenticeship. So

it is perhaps the 'hard years' that are over – with an allusion to the period as Kippenberger's assistant. The work can also be seen as an almost over-obvious comment on the kind of self-reflexivity we are talking about here. The ruined works, lying in their crates, manifest aspects of their own production and the artwork as commodity and *thing*.¹²

RECUPERATION

In the light of the above-mentioned attitude to painting, where history has weighed down the vessel at the stern – in some cases even sunk it – one can glimpse among the artists in this exhibition the contours of a project that is rather about *recuperating* the relevance of painting.¹³ The idea of a recuperation can be seen as pivotal to the exhibition. All four artists employ approaches and methods that have been extensively used before. When a historical idea has been accepted and then gradually exhausted, rejected and put behind us, one can later claim that the same idea has recuperated and regained its strength. One example of an idea that has later recuperated could be the Marxist idea that an artwork must always be in opposition to the system that distributes it (whether this is a matter of buying and selling, commodity exchanges or asset speculation). Andy Warhol and Martin Kippenberger are just two instances of artists who took such realities at face value: as essential to all production and distribution of art. If we look at artists like Robert Rauschenberg or Jasper Johns, who revolutionized the idea of what could be called painting in the 1950s, these are also ideas that have been recuperated.

The point in this context is not to pontificate on the vagaries of the art market, or to repeat the lessons of art history, but to emphasize how such notions and widespread 'truths' have their own chequered careers. Today, when one can perhaps claim that a whole range of historical and discursive views of painting are met with acceptance rather than rejection, or are even taken for granted and no longer need justifying – one can perhaps say that the four artists in the exhibition build their praxis on a *foundation of recuperation* within a

field that has been blasted open for new possibilities in terms of how one can engage in painterly activity.

PAINTING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CRITIQUE

Instead of starting with a view of painting as an institution in itself, we can see painting as any category within the general institutional framework of art. The painters in this exhibition are less concerned with painting as an *apparatus* in its own right than with expressing a fine-tuned sensitivity to the apparatus within which painting navigates. In the exhibition painting is understood not only as autonomous artworks, but also as *objects* – physical *things* – in a cycle. The works emphasize their own context of production and reception, and the distribution cycle in which painting is involved: from the genesis of the work in a studio to a nomadic existence in transit among different exhibitions, hanging on gallery walls or in the homes of collectors, perhaps ending up hidden away in a museum basement. A number of contemporary painters have absorbed this institutional framework and made it part of their painterly praxis. By assimilating all these contexts painting can form a basis for multiple readings of the way we view art today.

In this perspective painting functions as one possible resource among others, well suited to illuminating the institutional framework that surrounds art – from exhibition conventions to art history and sociocultural surroundings. In such cases painting lies closer to something perhaps more often practiced through photography or other media. We can for example see similar strategies in Christopher Williams' photographs, where the individual images unlock floodgates with many channels to surrounding contexts, and thus elucidate different aspects of the whole chain of events that leads to a finished exhibition.¹⁴

An artist like Stephen Prina has for his part almost perfected this kind of 'postconceptual' strategy, where the dialectic between the specific exhibition's experience of 'here and now' is associated with a specific body of historical material and opens up a network of connections, links, references and threads

10 Michael Krebber, *Miami City Ballet*, Galerie Daniel Buchholz, July 2 – August 21, 2010.

11 All these layers of references appear to establish a barricade of impenetrable codes that result in a pattern of manic compulsions with endless chains of self-reference. The codes seem confirmatory for 'insiders' – while for the rest of us the experience may seem like a secret club of which we crave membership. John Kelsey has described this as an evasive strategy where Krebber himself becomes difficult to pin down through the works: "For New Yorkers, Krebber is first of all something overheard, a rumor – maybe too good to be true. He's a story told by others (Germans mostly) to each other. The story has no point and no end." John Kelsey, "Stop Painting Painting", *Artforum*, October 2005, pp. 222-223.

12 The crate can almost be said to have become an established convention in the exhibition praxis of recent years – a visual sign reflecting this very aspect, the artwork's prosaic context as object or commodity. Blake Rayne, for example, has exhibited the crates for the paintings, both as spatial-sculptural elements and hung on the walls as painterly works in their own right.

13 This although Michael Krebber has often been invoked in support of an artistic position that argues *against* painting.

14 In a fresh article in the magazine *Frieze* Christopher Williams cites part of a conversation that revolves around just this type of referentialism in art. It is even hinted here that referentialism has gone from being critical-polemic potential to orthodox praxis in contemporary art. See Jörg Heiser in an interview with Christopher Williams and Willem de Rooij, "As we speak", *Frieze* no. 134, October 2010, pp. 178-187.

15 Stephen Prina showed a selection of paintings from this series at Bergen Kunsthall in the spring of 2009.

16 From the press release for *Dust of Suns*, a solo exhibition at the Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York, March 23 – May 18 2008.

17 *Dust of Suns*, solo exhibition at the Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York, March 23 – May 18 2008.

18 Blake Rayne, *Folder and Application*, Miguel Abreu Gallery, May 9 – June 26, 2010.

spun from it. In his series in progress, *Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet* (1988–) Prina executes adaptations of all Edouard Manet's 556 catalogued paintings. Prina's versions have no direct formal similarities but have been executed in exactly the same dimensions as the individual Manet paintings to which they relate. Each time extracts from this series are shown, the paintings are accompanied by a framed, wallchart-like print showing a cataloguing of the series in its entirety.¹⁵ In several of his projects Prina suggests that all art production today is about

an ongoing dialogue among artists from different epochs – and he makes this same dialogue the point of departure for his own praxis.

The artists in this exhibition can be said to work in the gap between such referentiality, with a clear legacy from institutional critique and a far more formalist artistic praxis where the purely contemplative, formal and aesthetic also have a distinct value.

Blake Rayne works with painting more or less as a site of conflict somewhere between an "impossible autonomy and a dispersed referentiality".¹⁶ His exhibitions manifest a heightened attention to both the show context and the production context that surround the paintings. In one case he opened an exhibition only to close it again and reopen the same exhibition a week later. The contextual framework constituted by the conventions of the exhibition was thus highlighted in a single gesture supported by the way in the same exhibition he moved the gallery's reception and staff from the entrance hall to the middle of the exhibition space.¹⁷ The paintings that were shown were undoubtedly the primary artworks in the exhibition, but by underlining the exhibition apparatus around the art objects Rayne was also pointing to the complex character of the paintings as marketable commodities, visual signs and aesthetic objects in their own right. Similarly, Rayne often shows the production process that *precedes the exhibition*. The production process is present as verifiable signs, visible in the surface of the paintings. Among other things he has used a process where large linen cloths are turned up and folded, spray-painted, cut up and finally tacked together into new large canvases. In so doing he achieves a transparency where the choices and processes underlying the genesis of the paintings are made explicit on the surface. Rayne's new works in Bergen Kunsthall are similarly built up from a series of visible, overlapping layers in and on the picture surface. The first layer has been produced as a print, generated by a chemical process in the encounter between the dye and the untreated linen, ostensibly making the dye part of the linen substrate. Over this

lie several layers of silk-screened images in addition to laser-cut textile elements which have been draped over the surface like ribbons.

SYSTEMS OF BELIEF, SYSTEMS OF OPERATION

Out of the dialogue of the four artists comes a gradual unveiling of these artists' own working methods: what painting means to them personally, and sporadic insights into why, independently of one another, they make their artistic choices. Every artist has his or her own personal history with its background in training and practice, which influences what they create as cultural producers. But what happens here serves primarily as an example of how different 'painterly belief systems' function as guiding principles. With all the recuperated methods and stylistic impulses at their disposition, how do artists adhere to specific methodological systems without having personal systems of belief? How does an artist commit to any particular set of ideas? For the production of art to be at all possible, it may be necessary to have a range of methods to build on and launch into life.

For example, even though Blake Rayne has for the time being moved away from the use of overtly representative imagery, he still uses what one could call 'stand-ins' for the conventions of painterly production – as in his most recent exhibition, *Folder and Application*, where he took real-world cues from the prosaic elements of an artist's everyday life, such as having to fill out application forms for grants or jobs.¹⁸ Interestingly, Rayne here evokes such cognitive associations while simultaneously disavowing them. The exhibition was not about how one writes an application or the strain and boredom that this kind of thing can entail; instead Rayne chose to harness this situation as a tool and a site of potential, which was then launched into real life as a means of production.

R.H. Quaytman uses a far more regimented system to achieve methodically produced results. The artist's "use of wood panel as material support and (...) frequent grounding of the picture plane in photo-based silk screening underscore the perceptual, perspectival and

durational experience of painting as an assessment of the larger social, historical, personal and architectural contexts in which Quaytman’s work appears”.¹⁹

Besides the consistent use of wooden panels as support material, the artist also has a meticulously laid-out system of sizes for the paintings, all based on the golden mean, the only exception being the panels that are 20 x 20 inches.

Quaytman’s paintings never rest in themselves, they constantly point to something outside the frame of the picture. Small distractions in and around the pictures help us to find underlying references and elements in the pictures that draw the attention away, often to many different places at once. There is always something that disturbs the immediacy of the paintings and their potential for contemplative calm – despite the fact that Quaytman’s paintings are among the most stylistically seductive in the exhibition. Nevertheless the artist works *against* the old myth of the iconic image and its ahistorical contemplation. And this is precisely where Quaytman demonstrates the subtle intermediate position that sequesters these artists from other painterly stances through the use of formal strategies combined with an insistence on relevance and active discursivity.²⁰

With their modest formats and sophisticated surface treatment, Quaytman’s pictures take on the character of *objects* with clear parallels to the American painting of the 1960s. At first glance the paintings can easily be associated with early minimalism. Nevertheless, Frank Stella’s statement “what you see is what you get” is a world away from the way Quaytman builds up pictures. Although using a similar formal idiom, Quaytman, unlike the artist’s predecessors, fills it to the brim with narratives, references and connotations.

Here it is the layers *beneath* the surface of the painting that emerge to the surface on closer examination. What you get is never only what you see.

Quaytman often bases pictures on elements in our culture that otherwise seem to elude us (for example artists whose names are not generally known but who have still been significant in a field or school). The artist strongly opposes the near-mythical linkage be-

tween painting and the artist as subject, which is also one of the reasons for organizing the paintings as a continuously growing book where each exhibition forms a new chapter. Without thinking of the context of the pictures as explicitly biographical, Quaytman is preoccupied with creating a kind of home-made or personally defined art history within which the references of the paintings can be located.

The contextual framework that Quaytman builds up around the paintings thus draws on a partly biographical and personal level, and at the same time on an art-institutional level. In a painting one could potentially find allusions to the specific museum or city where the artist is exhibiting, to architectural anecdotes and the artistic choices of the museum directors – all woven into the vocabulary of artistic output. At other times other artists are used as subjects in Quaytman’s own works. This can be seen as a kind of institutional analysis, more than as traditional appropriation or quotation strategies. The artist’s colleagues and friends are acknowledged as part of the institutional ‘game’ within which the paintings themselves are situated.

The exhibition in Bergen Kunsthall presents *Beard, Chapter 19* which completes a decade’s work on the artist’s ‘Chapter’ project. Here Quaytman uses as a foundation a nude photograph of Thomas Beard, a male homosexual friend of the artist, known for his project *Light Industry* in New York. The photographs simultaneously exemplify and disrupt historical notions of painterly processes. The set of paintings presents the figure as a vessel of possibility: the figure as a viewer, as an artist, as an object and also as a site of contemplation. In addition, the chapter weaves linguistic and societal constructs into the fold of art-historical discourse; for example, ‘beard’ is a term which describes a person who masks or conceals secrets for another person, whether they be someone’s illicit affairs or, more likely, one’s sexual orientation. Considering how Quaytman’s paintings always reflect their own exhibition context, it is also tempting to see the motif of the rear end of a gay friend as a kind of (humorous)

response to a group exhibition where the other artists are straight men. By fusing historical and societal concepts in this way the artist is making overt statements and subtle observations concurrently.

While also presenting photographic imagery in the form of newspapers stuck to canvas, Nikolas Gambaroff’s works make no direct comment here on the images represented in the works themselves; rather, the works can be seen as intentionally bearing the evidence of their own construction. In some examples presented here Gambaroff affixed newspaper to primed linen then created an intentionally illegible script by directly squeezing the paint out of the tube. While this paint was still wet he applied another layer of newspaper so that when it dried he could remove the top layer, leaving a material trace of his process in the form of a superimposed script. Even though the artist presents not only single canvases but also various assemblages and constructions that use painted canvases, not every work incorporates photographic images or newspaper. In fact, a good majority of Gambaroff’s works are produced through a process of assembling found objects that engage and interact with his painting process.

IMBRICATION

In the preceding paragraphs we have seen how these four artists employ painting as a type of institution-critical praxis, and incorporate their personal positions on painting. The work of all four artists can be said to navigate within a larger institutional and socio-cultural framework. David Joselit’s aforementioned article calls such forms of painterly praxis “transitive painting”.²¹ In this context the *transitive* could be explained as a conduit from the individual artwork out to a wider surrounding universe. These artists all use a visual rhetoric that clearly connects with the history of modern painting, but they apply this imagery in a way that guides the viewer over to the social networks that surround the work itself. The tensions that arise between viewer and work thus no longer function only at the individual and perceptual level (confronted with a

¹⁹ From the press release for the exhibition “Chapter 12: iamb”, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, December 14 – February 1 2009.

²⁰ This kind of recycling of formalism in art, not as repetitions of historical ‘style categories’, but as fertile ground for an active, discursive artistic praxis, is not only happening in painting, it can be seen as a general tendency in contemporary artistic practice. See for example Solveig Øvstebø and Steinar Sekkingstad, “Looking is Political” in the catalogue of the exhibition *Looking is Political: Ane Hjort Guttu, Nairy Baghramian, Bojan Sarcevic*, Bergen Kunsthall, January 16 – February 19, 2009.

²¹ Joselit, op. cit.

²² In Norwegian one could perhaps formulate this by saying that the painting is *ute av seg* (“out of itself”). This is how Ika Kaminka recently formulated the title of David Joselit’s article (“Painting Beside Itself”). The Norwegian concept, like the English one, involves a duality: the painting is actually about what happens *outside* the canvas, but the painting is also beside itself in the sense of ‘desperate/at its wits’ end’, a concept that harmonizes with the doubts and ordeals one finds for example in Michael Krebber’s work. Kaminka’s translation was formulated in Caoimhin Mac Giolla Leith, “I.E”, in the catalogue of the exhibition of Ida Ekblad, *Poem Percussion*, Bergen Kunsthall, 2010.

²³ For example in his solo exhibition at Galerie Balice Hertling in Paris in 2008, where the paintings were among other things physically used as props by the performance artist Ei Arakawa.

²⁴ Joselit, op. cit.

painterly object of contemplation); instead the work directs attention beyond this to quite different networks.²²

All the same, if one were to use a spatial metaphor for this exhibition, a concept like *imbrication* would be more relevant than transitivity. Imbrication is the kind of overlapping pattern one gets with tiles or roofing shingles – in other words a series of underpinnings with elements of self-exposure. In relation to the above-mentioned foundation of *recuperation* one can sense that these artists are all well versed not only in the history of painting, but in contemporary art history as a whole. The resultant artworks are examples of imbricated aspects of historical, personal and social discourses. The most obvious example here would be the works of Nikolas Gambaroff in this exhibition. In his own description (sent to Bergen Kunsthall in connection with the exhibition) he says the following about his production: “Utilizing the medium of painting as a theoretical and physical support,

Nikolas Gambaroff concerns himself with questions of authorship, display, distribution and reception. Gambaroff approaches questions of the social and economic value of painting and the different processes of its construction through tropes of subjective painterly self-expression, juxtaposed with a supposedly objective conceptual practice and standardized procedures. The result becomes a re-questioning of old and new myths of artistic production.”

As touched on earlier, at Bergen Kunsthall Gambaroff is showing a series of new works where the painting forms part of a multi-access complex. In some places the paintings are mounted traditionally on the wall, while other paintings (clearly meant to be perceived as elements in the same series) form part of sculptural works where the physical framing of the canvas consists of bearing and constructional elements in a kind of furniture-like assemblages. At other times the paintings are displayed on shelves in similar furniture constructions. Gambaroff has also earlier drawn attention to the object-character of the paintings, among other ways by physically incorporating the canvases as props or as utility objects for both the visitors and invited performance artists.²³

Against the background of Gambaroff’s statement about his own praxis one can draw a distinction between the concept of ‘imbrication’ as we use it here and ‘transitive painting’ as David Joselit describes it.²⁴ In our context we can claim that a production based on ‘imbrication’ differs from transitive painting, for example, in the way Gambaroff’s praxis is a fusion of historical and methodological tropes that are not meant to reference *external networks* but exist rather in the form of a ‘multivalent’ platform of informants that physically manifests itself through Gambaroff’s imbricated methods of executing the ‘painterly’. As in Joselit’s article, Gambaroff’s can certainly be said also to involve transitive qualities. However, his overlapping praxis – with its turning back, pressing forward and overtly self-reflexive methods of working – is much more imbricative than transitive.

These reflections on the artists in the exhibition, and on painting in contem-

porary art, show how painting today is a medium that cannot be pinned down in unambiguous categories. The situation which we have called recuperation in this text, and the renewed potential for painterly strategies, help painting to regain a position as something *unresolved*; a space for testing, doubt and experimenting, but never severed either from the history of the medium or from the institutional context in which it exists.