# A Genealogy of Bad Painting: Legacies, Soft Objects and Networks

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**Declaration**

Declaration of Authorship I Alexander Pollard hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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**Abstract**

The thesis re-examines and re-configures the category of Bad Painting. By selecting a disparate group of Bad Painters, explored in the form of small case studies, the research creates an imaginary, timeless peer group that crosses over the genre. This imagined group includes Martin Kippenberger, Philip Guston, Rene Magritte, – especially of the *Période vache* – Lee Lozano, Sandy Guy, and Andreas Schulze. The thesis proposes a new model for understanding Bad Painting in relation to both networked painting (as advocated by David Joselit in his "Painting Beside Itself") and new materialisms. The resonances of the latter are reflected back through Bad Painting in terms of what the thesis describes as "Soft Object Painting". By supplying an idiosyncratic contextual framework, these case studies enabled the production of a body of Bad Paintings made over several years at Goldsmiths. These works borrowed strategies, tactics, attitudes and styles from multiple approaches. Many things entered the practice as a result, including: the outsourcing of painting labour in Chinese workshops as a form of networked production influenced by the networked production of Lee Lozano and the theories of David Joselit; overpainting commissioned paintings; colliding styles and themes in unexpected combinations, such as the juxtaposition of illustrational techniques with the conservative brushwork of painterly abstraction, in the manner of Ivon Hitchens or Howard Hodgkin; use of found images that refer to other areas and histories of cultural production. Through both the practice and the written element, the research proposes to update the genre of Bad Painting. This is largely done by associating the two ideas of "painting as network" and "soft object painting" with the notion of "flattened ontologies". The research attempts to forge a fresh pathway for Bad Painting, allowing for the continuation of a slippery, de-centred, timeless and rhizomatically structured genre.

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**Introduction**

> The party and the government have given us everything, but have deprived
> us of one privilege. A very important privilege, comrades, has been taken
> away from you. That of writing badly.[1]

The quote above by Isaac Babel was used by the artist Philip Guston at the end of a
lecture he gave to students at the University of Minnesota in 1978.  One could
argue that the greatest freedom that one could have is the freedom to "screw up",
to do something deliberately badly. This is perhaps one of the most important
factors within the genre of Bad Painting.

Excelling in the practice of Bad Painting entails jettisoning a certain type of
technical skill. Deskilling as a strategy is a form of artistic enlightenment that a lot
of practitioners of painting never even attempt. To have the confidence to be "bad"
one needs to understand the rules for being "good" in order to break them.



fig. 1. Philip Guston, *Painter's Table*, 1973, oil on canvas, 195cm × 228.5cm

One of the reasons why I am interested in Bad Painting is that I still believe it is full
of potential as a strategy. In the right hands Bad Painting is able to index
contemporary networks of style that have reached the limit condition of their own
rhetoric and break them open. Taste is contextually formed and is forever
changing - therefore I believe there is no fixed idea of taste. The limit conditions for

each new generation changes massively and seeking out this type of contextual information is part of the hard work (and fun) of being a Bad Painter today.

Part of the mood or attitude of Bad Painting is formed by the presence of dumbness, clumsiness, the unwanted, the disregarded, the unacceptable and the marginalized within its structure. These positions are of course adopted to problematize any established notion of "correctness".

Seemingly no painter in history has ever devoted his or her entire life work to the Bad Painting genre, but many artists have adopted badness as a strategy at specific intervals in their career. Bad Painting has historically stood in opposition to forms of traditionalism and conservatism, but has also taken a critical stance towards strategies of the avant-garde itself, especially at times when the avant-garde has become presumptuous, snobbish or lazy.

Genuine Bad Painter skills are learnt from hours spent at the coalface painting. A taste for "bad" can slowly develop over time after an artist has sufficiently experimented. This is often the result of sheer boredom or an increasing lack of satisfaction with what one arrives at first in painting and in picture making. Often it can be the skill of recognising something truly awkward and unusual in a painting that marks a Bad Painting out as being special or interesting. Being able to twist this awkwardness into something that "works" as a picture is what makes a true Bad Painting "good". Good practice as a Bad Painter seems to occur when an artist tests what she can get away with, the more outrageously bad the work is, the more of a risk the practitioner has taken in letting it out of the studio. There is a tightrope that one walks with this, and it is quite possible to end up looking stupid if one makes incorrect decisions.

I would say that a good Bad Painter must be prepared to embrace embarrassment. To eat humble pie as an artist from time to time is good as it keeps you grounded. Legend has it that Kippenberger once said "It's Important for me to be embarrassed at my own openings", here he shows us that he understands that ending up with egg on your face during the art making process is necessary if one is taking sufficient risks. He understood that "anxiety is an essential part of the

creative process"[2] and without this feeling of anxiety being present he was probably missing the mark by some way. Kippenberger's "embarrassment" was caused by producing something that exposed the limit conditions of his time. All Bad Painters must respond to their own eras limit conditions. This is why I feel that a revised history of Bad Painting could well be a continuous process.

The curator Marcia Tucker originally coined the term "Bad" Painting in 1978 for an exhibition of the same name she curated at New York's newly opened New Museum.[3] Tucker penned an interesting catalogue essay for the show which has been a benchmark for the genre ever since.



fig. 2. Marcia Tucker at the opening of *"Bad" Painting* 1978

Tucker felt that Bad Painting was essentially more human, more able to show feelings of tenderness, melancholia and humour than many of the alienating forms of contemporary art current at the time, as it displayed a "tragi-comic" quality and had an idiosyncratic charm in place of the austere and pretentious face of highbrow modernism or conceptualism. To Tucker Bad Painting was in fact an ironic sign of good taste characterized by key elements such as the use of distorted figures, the blending of high and low cultural references and the inclusion of fantastical themes, almost a form of magical realism that defied the rational logic of conventional narrative structure.

Once the Greenbergian version of modernism had started to crumble by the end of the 70s, painters increasingly felt that they had to reflect a less assured state of play, continuing the same sentiment that Philip Guston had previously explored in

the late sixties and early seventies that rejected the idea of "progress". As Tucker states:

> The freedom with which these artists mix classical and popular art-historical sources, kitsch and traditional images, archetypal and personal fantasies, constitutes a rejection of the concept of progress per se. . . . It would seem that, without a specific idea of progress toward a goal, the traditional means of valuing and validating works of art are useless. Bypassing the idea of progress implies an extraordinary freedom to do and to be whatever you want. In part, this is one of the most appealing aspects of "bad" painting - that the ideas of good and bad are flexible and subject to both the immediate and the larger context in which the work is seen.[4]

Tucker's Bad Painting exhibition seemed to foresee the start of the Neo-Expressionist turn that occurred in the eighties shortly afterwards. However there were some key differences to these two strands of painting. The differences can be identified in the type of mark making, scale, intention and contextual framing of the paintings to name but a few. Bad Painting was simply more awkward than Neo-Expressionist painting, as it didn't play at being lyrical but instead embraced a "problem perspective".[5] Stylistically the "lyrical" qualities of Neo-Expressionism manifested itself in the rough and splodgy mark making that became so common in the eighties. Bad Painters were different mainly because they were genuinely a motley crew. This was mainly down to the fact that the artists came from diverse backgrounds and were different ages. In some instances they had already had a lifetime to develop their brand of badness in idiosyncratic bubbles outside of New York. In this sense Tucker embraced a rhizomatic handling of curation, gathering artists from differing demographics, which is incidentally one of the reasons why I have decided to work in a similar vein in compiling my genealogy of Bad Painting.

The most recent prominent museum version of a Bad Painting show was the 2008 European touring exhibition *Bad Painting - Good Art*, curated by Eva Badura-Triska and Susanne Neuburger[6]. In her catalogue essay for the show Eva Badura-Triska makes an interesting point relating to Bad Painting's ability to reoccur in differing eras:

> Bad Painters reject all rules of conduct. They generally refuse to submit to artistic canons and oppose not only traditional academic concepts and rules, but also – and this is crucial here – the concepts and rules established by the avant-gardes and isms of the twentieth century, which ultimately threw old dogmas overboard only to replace them with new ones.[7]

There is something refreshingly radical about the way that practitioners of Bad Painting remove the novelty of new media from their work. It is healthy to reject any potentially lazy pat on the back that one might receive from an artistic version of a technological determinist. Why bother to embrace new technology just for the sake of it when painting in the right hands can quite clearly articulate its own condition? The infantile posturing of the recent 2016 Berlin Biennale, which was curated by hipster normcore bores DIS that was characterized by post-internet bandwagon-jumping, only makes this point more pertinent.

Again to quote Eva Badura-Triska in the same essay:

> bad painters reflect on and criticize the ability of painting, and ultimately of art in general, in a far more fundamental sense, and thus, logically enough, their attention is focused on the history of painting as a whole. In many cases, their own painting is a reflection on the potential and possibilities of the medium, but instead of entertaining illusions, they aim to ruthlessly reveal the incapacity of painting and the impossibility of the expectations placed in it – which are in fact the weaknesses and limits of all art. Consequently, they also see no sense in switching to a different medium, as this would be of no use. The realization that all such claims are futile can be expressed just as well in the medium of painting and is in fact often a key theme of their work.[8]

The fact that Bad Painting is a genre that crosses over time lines is fascinating to me as I see positive attributes in non-linear readings of art history, helping to problematize any claims made for the existence of an over-arching meta-narrative of art. Eva Badura-Triska and Susanne Neuburger's exhibition and publication for *Bad Painting – Good Art* brilliantly answered the renewed need for an updated

non-linear history of Bad Painting. Their selection of artists was interesting and their project in general was highly credible, however *Bad Painting – Good Art* was also lacking in some respects. It did not attempt to discuss Bad Painting's relationship with social networks, Institutional Critique, New Materialist philosophy or even Bad Painting's response to new developments in technology (only a cursory mention was made in Eva Badura-Triska's essay from the show catalogue). In this sense my updated genealogy of Bad Painting picks up on these omissions and shows a different side to Bad Painting that reflects the concerns of a post-digital world.

One of the defining qualities that links all forms of Bad Painting active within the non-linear histories I have described above is "vulgarity". I say 'qualities' as vulgarity in this context is not meant to function as a pejorative term.

In TJ Clarke's essay *In Defence of Abstract Expressionism*[9] Clarke makes the comparison between the work of the American Abstract Expressionists and the work of their contemporary Asger Jorn. Here Clarke pits Europe against America stating that Jorn's work can be "garish, florid, tasteless, forced, cute, flatulent, overemphatic: it can never be vulgar."[10]

Clarke's essay identifies Abstract Expressionism as an effect of a transition in bourgeois class formation and taste. He goes on to contrast it with European painting:

> European painting after the war, alas, comes out of a very different set of class formations. Vulgarity is not its problem. In Asger Jorn, for example – to turn for a moment to the greatest painter of the 1950s – what painting confronts as its limit condition is always refinement.'[11]

Here Clarke is referring in particular to Asger Jorn's "Modification" paintings, which are a fairly nuanced sub-section of Jorn's oeuvre. The Modification paintings he produced in the mid to late 1950s were influenced by Jorn's involvement with the Situationist International, which Jorn co-founded in 1957 along with Guy Debord and others. The paintings are a great example of visual detournment, which is a politicized hi-jacking technique historically very influential on adapted

forms of practice such as collage. In these paintings Jorn adds grotesque and sometimes abstractly dripped passages of painting on top of amateur-made academic style paintings he had found in flea markets. The collision of techniques is at times mesmerizing, as Jorn displays superb pictorial judgment in just doing enough with his interventions to create an odd pictorial atmosphere whilst retaining a bat's squeak of subversion and anger at its core. In *Evening Serenade* of 1960 (below) Jorn almost makes a total mess of the top left hand corner. Bad scraping marks are left in a very raw state, despite being positioned in a place conventionally awarded to a clearly defined focal point. To the right of this is a yellow bird-like form that seems to somehow engage in a confrontation with the blue mass. The two forms are observed creepily by faciality symbols painted into the rocks surrounding them. One looks at the action unfolding and the other looks at us the viewer.

The composition is simple and the painting on the whole is direct and uncluttered. This appears very easy to do, but writing from a practitioner's perspective I must say that Jorn makes this look easy when in fact there is ample opportunity to fail with this work. Doing too much is often the problem – where one loses the painting in an attempt to avoid stopping too early. The "have I done enough" mentality is one that dogged English painting since the dawn of time. Labour is of course linked to slave ethics, which of course is linked to Protestantism. If there is one thing I detest about the English it is this brand of conservativism!



fig. 3. Asger Jorn, *Evening Serenade*, 1960, oil on canvas

Moving back to T J Clarke's interpretation of Jorn I feel that Clarke sees an end game played out in his work that is very different in character to the American Abstract Expressionists. Jorn's work being more refined and therefore more precious, and according to Clarke: "It turns out that preciousness and dross are the same thing".[12]

There are differences between European and American sensibilities in painting, however the snobbery towards the new world's contributions to art history has curtailed in recent times.

Ultimately I agree with Clarke in that art has to agitate the 'limit condition of its own rhetoric'[13] otherwise art becomes somewhat stale. The idea that Jorn's practice is an example of good taste obviously would not make sense. What Clarke perhaps means is that by the late 1950s the shock tactics that modernist painters sort was no longer to be found in the output of the refined European modern painters who had ascended to prominence. Jorn's work started to comfortably sit inside the limit conditions of European modernisms own rhetoric.

In his essay *In Defence of Abstract Expressionism* Clarke refers to a binary opposition formed between the modernism of Europe and that of the US. The era of Picasso and Matisse is defined by a European classiness and the American Abstract Expressionist large-scale bravado that followed it was more monumental (although at times also elegant!). Clarke's point is that in order for modern painting to move forward it had to embrace vulgarity. Pushing the boundaries of acceptability is in the modern art avant-garde DNA. If one considers the huge works of Jackson Pollock or Clifford Still one can see evidence that there was vastly more emphasis placed on scale in the US version of modernism. Scale and brashness in general allowed US artists in the 1940s and 50s to move beyond the confines of good taste, which is something that seems to have continued to this day - if one considers the scale of Julian Schnabel's paintings for instance.

Looking back at an artist such as Manet might be useful at this point. Manet is an artist who had the ability to shock without having to enlarge the scale of his work. Manet employed a harsh realism typical within the canon of modern art and

reflected the contemporary moment rather brutally. The harsh mirror he held up to modern Paris provided him with a different type of vulgarity to exploit. He was an inspirational father figure to the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists due to his loose handling of paint and has now subsequently become something of a grandfather figure to Bad Painters.

The use of vulgarity as a method to shock is exactly the strategy that Manet was employing when he painted Olympia back in 1863. Many scholars believe Manet was the first artist to handle paint in a modern manner – painting quickly using an *alla prima* technique as well as leaving large areas of flatness visible in the final piece.

Even though his paintings are obviously technically superb Manet was described in his day as something of a vandal due to his use of loose paint handling and sexual provocation.

However Manet did want to be accepted by the establishment, as Clarke states he "seems always to be worried a great deal about the salon"[14]. He also wanted to paint in a manner that reflected his life with brutal honesty.



fig. 4. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas, 130.5cm x 190cm

Manet's Olympia was derided by the critics of the day who considered the artist's realism and directness disgraceful. Critic Louis Auvray wrote in La Revue Artistique et Littérataire that:

> never has a painting excited so much laughter, mockery, and catcalls as this Olympia. On Sundays in particular the crowd was so great that one could

not get close to it, or circulate at all in room M; everyone was astonished at
the jury for admitting Monsieur Manet's two pictures in the first place.[15]

Manet had the temerity to take a sacred art historical scene borrowed from Titian,
replacing the voluptuous female subject of the original renaissance masterpiece
with a pale skinned prostitute. Manet's Olympia used the academy and it's
traditions as a fall guy to do something strikingly modern. Part of the contextual
research that Manet would have intuitively made for this work would have been to
establish what the limit conditions were within the salon network he wanted to
shock. This is a classic Bad Painter mind-set, examples of which we will see echoed
throughout my updated Bad Painter genealogy.



fig. 5. Edouard Manet, *Bunch of Asparagus*, 1880, oil on canvas, 46cm x 55cm

One could also look at Manet's Asparagus paintings and the well-known story
behind them as a proto-type example of Bad Painter activity.

The delightful story of this painting is well known: Manet sold Charles
Ephrussi *A Bunch of Asparagus* for eight hundred francs. But Ephrussi sent
him a thousand francs, and Manet, who was a master of elegance and wit,
painted this asparagus and sent it to him with a note saying: "There was one
missing from your bunch".[16]

fig. 6. Edouard Manet, *Asparagus*, 1880, Oil on canvas, 16cm x 21cm

Manet's game playing with the pricing of the Asparagus paintings is pure Bad Painting. One can see echoes of Manet's strategies in Kippenberger's comedic form of institutional and market critique. It is possible to compare the Asparagus paintings with Kippenberger's *Preis Bilder* (Prize Paintings) in that the *Preis Bilder* works play similar games with the market and pricing. Kippenberger understood that at auction the no 1. Preis paintings would inevitably go for more money than Preis Painting no. 17. To add to the joviality of this project it is significant that the German word "Preis" has a double meaning, it also means "price".

Below is an illustration of a collection of Kippenberger's Preis paintings. The paintings on the whole are unremarkable. They are finished in basic primaries and are divided up like any other generic abstract paintings that have been made before many times.

The formal arrangements of the *Preis Bilder* vary somewhat but all echo the appearance of art made with high modernist concerns, e.g. flat squares of colour suggestive of the most formal era of Greenbergian modernism and the modernist grid. The double coded "joke" that Kippenberger employs here shatters any sense that the artist may be engaged with a genuinely formal practice. The coloured squares are suggestive of restaurant tablecloths one finds in very cheap establishments across continental Europe. Far from being merely suggestive of Greenbergian notions of high art the formal link to cheap tablecloths drags the work back down to earth.

The formal variety Kippenberger displays within this series is tongue and cheek. He sarcastically mimics the behavior of painters who, when preparing a solo show for a commercial gallery, make basic tokenistic formal variations across a collection of abstract works. These are all tropes one associates with the market and Kippenberger was highly aware of how these mannerisms play out within art markets. It obviously becomes absurd to suggest that one of these paintings is better than any other one, and therefore blindly trusting the number awarded to them becomes an act of bad faith. The cheekiness of this gesture and the direct reference to the market within the work, more than anything else, is the characteristic that links these works to Manet's Asparagus of 1880.
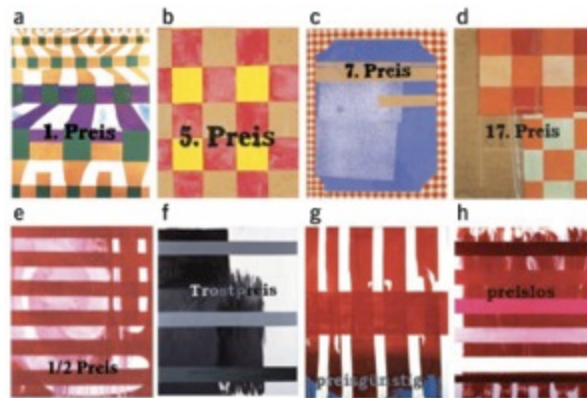


fig. 7. This montage shows eight of the paintings from Martin Kippenberger's *Preis Bilder* series of abstract paintings from 1987, oil on canvas

I have searched for a genealogy of Bad Painting and I have not found one that is adequate to our current times. The attempts produced so far are either very dated now such as "Bad Painting" at the New Museum from 1978, curated by Marcia Tucker or they leave out crucial parts of recent art history pivotal to recent developments in Bad Painting. Upon realizing this I decided to write my own genealogy, one that will deliberately include painters who are currently out of fashion as I am conscious that a genealogy of Bad Painting is different in character to a straight "history of". The point being that one looks to undisclosed histories and un-realised connections between under-recognised practices. Therefore this thesis is not meant to be a definitive guide to Bad Painting as such. It is an exercise in making an imaginary, timeless peer group of Bad Painting that includes obscure alternatives[17]. This grouping is made up of a motley collection of Bad Painters who

all pass through the genre, but do so through their own contexts – having their own limit conditions. My history of Bad Painting draws links and asserts differences between members of the Bad Painting family tree network, unpacking the contextual conditions and nuances that have shaped and influenced Bad Painting throughout history, whilst expanding on key concepts, philosophies and themes typical within the genre.

I intend to open up a new path for Bad Painting, which responds to the numerous false endings prophesized by the anti-realist philosophical positions of post-structuralism. In order to do this I will discuss the basic ideas associated with New Materialism and show how the history of Bad Painting can be re-examined with humans shifted away from the centre of ontological importance.

I will discuss David Joselit's idea of transitive painting in his essay *Painting Beside Itself* in order to help visualize my updated Bad Painting network and show how the painted object itself can function as a social actant in a network of affect, exchange, distribution and interpretation.

Joselit's text will help me to establish a distinction between two strands of Bad Painting that both respond to the idea of flattened ontologies. Network Painting being concerned with how the object functions as an actor within a network, taking on issues relating to globalization, digitalization and the changing face of labour conditions created by the enforced bio-political conditions of post-Fordist and post-industrial realities. This will be compared to Soft-Object Painting, which is more withdrawn and shifts attention away from the cult of the artist's persona which Bad Painting narratives have historically been aligned with.

My updated genealogy of Bad Painting must find a way of utilizing the strategies of deskilling, incompetence, bad taste, dumbness and vulgarity for the post-digital age, responding to technological determinism, Institutional critique, New Materialist philosophy, and transitive or network painting precisely because these are the things that have either challenged Bad Painting as a radical art form in recent times or they have deeply changed the context in which Bad Painting continues to work within.

**Painting After the Non-Human Turn**

Anti-realist linguistic postmodernism is a heavily influential idea pervasive across all forms of art practices from the late 1970s onwards. Anti-realist linguistic postmodernism can be summarized as the view that any experience remains within representation, and is therefore a construction of language. Further, that any critique of representation also remains within representation. I would describe this position as anti-realist because it does not recognize any "real" that a sign could correspond to.

An example of anti-realist linguistic postmodernism can be seen in the philosophy of Jean Baudrillard. Three short essays titled *The Gulf War will not take place, The Gulf War is not really taking place* and *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*[18] by Jean Baudrillard, written in 1991 are a particularly pertinent examples of this.

The titles of Baudrillard's essays are inflammatory in a manner that is similar to a provocative Warholian statement. Baudrillard tends to exaggerate his point in the titles of his texts in order to drive the idea home. Baudrillard does accept that the Gulf War was an event that actually took place, however he feels that the Gulf War was a "phoney" war, a one-sided atrocity dressed up to represent a war. Using overwhelmingly advanced weaponry such as highly technologically advanced airpower, the American military managed to strike from a distance – without getting their hands dirty with their own casualties. During much of the war the American army did not engage directly with the Iraqi army and in the Western media almost nothing was made known about Iraqi army and civilian deaths. Thus, the war never occurred from the point of view of the West and what we consumed was put through a propaganda machine becoming highly stylized simulacra or hyper-real representations. Although I feel that Baudrillard's project is interesting and certainly pertinent for the time, there are perhaps some difficult issues with his ideas. To begin with it is apparent that this form of linguistic critique seems to swallow its own tail by setting up a philosophical position that appears to remain rooted within representation itself. If we buy into Baudrillard's hyper-real world it

is a complete end game, a dead end as any cultural text or representation enters into an inescapable free fall of unlimited semiosis.

One of my main claims in this thesis is that the dead end of anti-realist linguistic postmodernism has been problematised by New Materialist positions and this subsequently has a bearing on the antimodernisms located in Bad Painting. Therefore it is relevant to begin by discussing some of the theoretical background to New Materialism so that I may be able to better contextualize my points.

Like Actor Network Theory (ANT) New Materialism puts objects or things at the centre of its study. The New Materialist thinkers associated with these ideas state that nothing has a special or privileged status. This creates a new panorama where humans are not ascribed a privileged position within the world as they had been before. In philosophical terms humans were at the centre of a Kantian philosophical tradition.

Ontology is the philosophical study of being. When one treats everything as ontologically equal, from humans to objects, one has to reassess the significance of the human. New Materialism brings a de-centering of the human into the study of existence, pushing beyond the Kantian subject/object divide of "correlationism".

> In this term Meillassoux summarises the generalised antirealist stance of all of continental philosophy in its understanding of all perception as being always already *correlated* with a human, and therefore subjectivist, perspective.[19]

Correlationism refers to a Kantian tradition of correlating to the human, where our knowledge of existence ends at the point of human finitude and fails to speculate from an object's position. New Materialism sees the Kantian influence on Western philosophy as the main barrier. Why, for instance, place human experience at the centre of philosophy? The default setting of Western philosophy, which is guilty of this, traps thought into a narrow world of anthropocentric relations.

The concept of correlationism was first identified by French theorist Quentin Meillassoux. Meillassoux is hugely influential with New Materialist thinkers. In *After Finitude* Meillassoux defines correlationism as a correlation between thinking and being. Correlationists believe that thinking or being simply cannot be considered apart from each other, or to put it another way: in any form of correlationism we encounter the Kantian claim that being cannot be thought apart from a subject, language or power.

New Materialism reconsiders the boundaries of existence as outside of human experience. It focuses on the materiality of the "noumenal" world beyond the finitude of our human perception. To give a practical example it is interesting here to bring in the work of American philosopher Graham Harman who states that in Heidegger's "Tool Analysis" the object (a hammer) only becomes interesting after it is broken. Once it is broken we suddenly start to see the hammer outside of a human-centred correlationalist perspective.

If I take a fork as a case study this could be a useful exercise. One could start considering how the fork was made. General knowledge tells us that it was likely to be made in a mold using a casting process. One could also consider the design of the fork – what era is it from? Who designed it? What style is it designed in? What are the connotations of the style? What era is it from? What class does it appear to signify? For example if the fork is ornate and made of silver then it may suggest a history that is very different from a fork one would buy from Woolworths. These factors are all significant but they are all questions and observations taken from a human-centred perspective. To think about the fork from the outside of a human-centred perspective is interesting. Where did the metal come from in the first place? Did it arrive on Earth from a meteorite? What was its original form? How was it created? Ultimately the material that forms the fork has had a much longer history outside of the fork form it currently occupies. There is of course potential for the fork to be melted down to form another tool such as a hammer or a warplane, or it may even be returned to the ground to form part of a much bigger object – the Earth itself.

These issues seem to become increasingly pertinent if one considers the length of time that the metal has spent as raw material in the ground or even the time it has spent floating in space before being made into a fork by humans. In the wider scheme of things this time span is massive compared to the fork's life as a human tool – so why should we be so arrogant as to ascribe the human influenced part of the material's life it's most significant chapter?

The first question in response to this is often: "How do we know what it is like to think from the perspective of the material that constitutes a fork?" This is where the speculation part of Speculative Realism happens[20]. New Materialism, which is in the same materialist family as Speculative Realism uses speculation to characterize how objects exist and interact.

The dualistic distinction between nature and culture made by modernity is somewhat problematized by the non-human turn. In Bruno Latour's book *We Have Never Been Modern*[21] the author states that within primitive societies this distinction did not exist. He claims that in order to move away from this false compartmentalization we must embrace a more hybridized way of thinking or a "parliament of things" that does not separate social and natural phenomena.

In *The Cultural Biography of Things – Commoditization as Process* Igor Kopytoff outlines some interesting points concerning the social life of objects. His opinion seems to sit outside a conventional Marxist analysis of the object as purely being defined by the realms of economic exchange value. In this text Kopytoff describes what a traditional economist's evaluation of an objects value and relations would look like:

> For the economist, commodities simply are. That is, certain things and rights to things are produced, exist, and can be seen to circulate through the economic system as they are being exchanged for other things, usually in exchange for money. This view, of course, frames the commonsensical definition of a commodity: an item with use value that also has exchange value.[22]

Kopytoff problematizes Marx's analysis of commodities by questioning the established Westernised notion that there is a barrier between objects and humans. By treating objects more like humans it is possible to move away from a static or reified treatment of objects and their relations. For instance, relations and values can change over time with objects as much as they can with humans.

In his text Kopytoff uses the example of a headdress called a "Calabash" that he observed in Cameroon. The Calabash in question had been idiosyncratically embellished by a tribeswomen and upon asking to purchase the headdress from the women Kopytoff's offer was refused, even though Kopytoff offered way over the going rate for the Calabash. The additional labour and care invested into the object contributed to the calabash's symbolic value – therefore it had become an object associated with ritual that rendered the calabash "priceless" or turned it into a "terminal commodity"[23]. Here Kopytoff shows us that objects can obtain something more complex than economic value. Under the influence of capitalism the West has continuously denied the potential power that objects have in "less sophisticated" cultures. In "primitive" cultures the barrier between human and object was never thought of in such a clear-cut manner, one has only to look at voodoo dolls or shamanistic effigies to observe this in practice.

Kopytoff also shows us that humans can become commodities themselves and subject to value fluctuation like any other object. He uses the example of human slaves who obviously hold a commodity value, but he reveals that their status is forever in flux and cannot be determined solely on economic grounds as context shifts change the status of a slave from commodity to singularized individual or a decommoditized being over time.

> Slavery begins with capture or sale, when the individual is stripped of his previous social identity and becomes a non-person, indeed an object and an actual or potential commodity. But the process continues. The slave is acquired by a person or group and is reinserted into the host group, within which he is resocialized and rehumanized by being given a new social identity. The commodity-slave becomes in effect reindividualized by acquiring new statuses (by no means always lowly ones) and a unique

configuration of personal relationships. In brief, the process has moved the slave away from the simple status of exchangeable commodity and towards that of a singular individual occupying a particular social and personal niche. But the slave usually remains a potential commodity: he or she continues to have a potential exchange value that may be realized by resale. In many societies, this was also true of the "free", who were subject to sale under certain defined circumstances. To the extent that in such societies all persons possessed an exchange value and were commoditizable, commoditization in them was clearly not culturally confined to the world of things.[24]

So far I have taken time to outline the basic principles of New Materialist philosophy and have given some examples of how our understanding of objects can change when we move outside of a correlationist mind-set.

A reader may be surprised to hear that the trajectory of Bad Painting could be influenced by New Materialist thought, as works from the Bad Painting canon are usually indexical to the human hand and the label of "bad" is judged very much from a human perspective. However a New Materialist take on Bad Painting could shed new light on older paintings from the canon of Bad Painting even though some of the works from this genre I will discuss were made well before key works of New Materialist philosophy came into circulation. In *We Have Never Been Modern* Bruno Latour states:

> As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change. At the same time, we stop having been modern, because we become retrospectively aware that the two sets of practices have always already been at work in the historical period that is ending. Our past begins to change.[25]

By "purification" Latour is referring to a separation of the scientific and artistic/expressive parts of culture and by "hybridization" he means the opposite

to this. Throughout *We Have Never Been Modern* Latour makes the case that the two falsely separated fields of science and human expression have always been colliding in an impure synthesis – upon realizing this Latour claims that it becomes apparent that modernism never actually occurred in the first place.

Practitioners of Bad Painting in the past have frequently portrayed objects within their paintings as if they were alive or even as if they had a soul. I believe that the characteristics of non-western animism that lead to commodity pathway diversion as described by Kopytoff in the *The Cultural Biography of Things* are present in the objects represented in Bad Painting, revealing a counter-voice to the very cerebral and rational voices within modernist and postmodernist canons of painting. Despite postmodernism's rhetoric concerning difference one could argue that Western cultures continue to engage with colonialist visions of the world as ultimately the West considers the idea of animism as backward and primitive.

New Materialist thinking is useful for my genealogy of Bad Painting in two important ways. The first reason would be that it establishes and contextualizes a critical value for an affirmative animism and the second reason would be that it helps to contextualize a critical discourse of flattened ontologies which will allow me to think about how paintings can operate as "actants" or nodal points within networks of affect, exchange, distribution and interpretation.  Both of these strands will be elaborated further below.

## Soft Object Painting

There is a particular branch of Bad Painting that sees objects portrayed as soft, squidgy entities. This grouping is not an "ism" that has existed in a particular era. The candidates nominated to form this grouping all come from different scenes, contexts and chronological periods and are gathered here to form a grouping called "Soft Object Painting" (SOP). SOP is the nickname that I have chosen to give a particular type of Bad Painting that features soft or spongy objects isolated within the frame of the canvas, often centrally as "anti-compositions". Philip Guston's Shoe of 1968, seen in the illustration below, is a prime example of SOP.

fig. 8. Philip Guston, *Shoe*, 1968. Acrylic on panel, 76.2cm x 81.28cm

It might be helpful here to give some background as to why Philip Guston moved from making his "Abstract Impressionist" works of the 1960s to the more figurative pictures that I associate with SOP shown in his famous Marlborough show, as this work signifies a leap into SOP and animism.

Guston's infamous Marlborough Gallery show in 1970 was greeted with general uproar and stinging criticism mainly due to the fact that the older generation of Abstract Expressionists (and critics) felt betrayed by Guston's return to figuration. Willem De Kooning had himself embraced figuration in his "Women" series of the early 1950s so figuration was not unacceptable to the older generation. However it was more the manner in which it was done. Guston's works were clearly pop cultural as they referenced cartoon imagery, which was a form of sacrilege towards the high art sensibilities of the Abstract Expressionists. Subsequently Guston was ostracised by many of the New York art scenes most influential players. One of the only artists not to castigate Guston was De Kooning himself who famously said upon seeing his famous Marlborough show of 1970: "You know, Philip, what your real subject is? It's freedom!"[26].

De Kooning understood that the next generation of artists must produce works that question what has happened before - essentially the new generation must commit a form of patricide if they want to produce something interesting – something free. Others were not as generous as De Kooning. The poison directed at him after his opening was epitomized by the critic Hilton Kramer's comments in the *New York Times* review of the exhibition from October 25th, 1970. In his piece

he stated that Guston was "A Mandarin pretending to be a Stumblebum".[27] The Marlborough show perhaps says something about Guston's strange relationship to pop. He hated it! Yet somehow he felt he had to respond to it by incorporating some of Pop Art's tactics and strategies within his schema.

Guston could have quite easily carried on making his "Abstract Impressionist" works of the mid-1950s. These paintings had brought him a lot of success, however Guston had a nagging doubt that he should be searching for more, he felt that too many artists were making abstract paintings under the overbearing influence of Clement Greenberg who had created a hegemony across New York that was completely focused on autonomous abstraction. Guston decided to smash things open by re-introducing objects and "stories" back into his work, albeit rendered through a wobbly and cartoonish use of line and a brilliantly cack-handed handling of paint. Guston learnt a lot about paint handling from his time as a New York school abstractionist, juxtaposing these skills with figurative motifs that re-surfaced from earlier obsessions. As we can see from the illustrations of *Drawing for Conspirators* from 1930 and *Martial Memories* of 1941 Guston's dark themes were evident in his much earlier output. They needed time to resurface. On their return the "hoods" were not always committing atrocities as they are in these earlier works – sometimes they were just hanging out, bored or going through their daily banal routines. Somehow this made the works more disturbing as it exaggerated the fact that the people behind the hoods were also "just people" themselves and not monsters.



fig. 9. Philip Guston, *Martial Memory*, 1941, oil on canvas, 40.12cm x 32.25cm

fig. 10. Philip Guston, *Drawing for Conspirators*, 1930, graphite, ink, colored pencil and crayon on paper, 57.15cm x 36.83 cm

Some of the motifs Guston employed, such as the clunky pieces of wood with crooked nails protruding out of them, light bulbs and old shoes represented what he called his "crapola" - a nickname he gave them. Piles of this useless crapola compositionally frame his melancholic "hoods" within De Chirico-like panoramas, echoing the emptiness that the Italian master was so drawn to. This characteristic is born out of a lineage that stretches back to the Renaissance with Piero Della Francesca and it is one that Guston was not shy to reveal.



fig. 11. Philip Guston, *Pantheon*, 1973, oil on canvas, 114.3cm x 121.92cm

Guston's move away from a pure form of autonomous abstraction is often explained in autobiographical and very human terms. For instance his father was a rag and bone man. This seems to offer an explanation in some versions of art history as to why objects litter his compositions. However rather than backing up these human centric associations I wish to look upon Guston's preoccupation with

objects in a slightly different manner. The Greenbergian idea that painting should just be flat, pure and solely about itself had started to grate at Guston – he claimed that instead: "Pictures should tell stories"[28]. There are different tensions in Guston's late paintings, as well as being concerned with doubt, guilt, the holocaust, Vietnam, evil, the artist as conspirator and human moral-political relationships in general his works begin to visualise a dialogue between objects. Guston is alleged to have told his daughter Musa Mayer that a loosely painted thought bubble that he painted above a coffee cup in *Language 2* of 1973 represented: "a cup of coffee dreaming of a cigarette"[29].



fig. 12. Philip Guston, *Language 2*, 1973, oil on canvas

Guston's *Shoe* of 1968 is chunkier than the shoes we use in every day "reality", looking soft to the touch, as if it is from a dream or a cartoon in which everything is slightly squidgy. One could imagine an eye or a mouth appearing on the shoe and engaging us in conversation. In fact in this work a face appears to form on the right-hand side of the sole made of seemingly random marks, which move in and out of facial signification. In this instance it appears that Guston's faciality symbol was unintentional, however because everything that Guston produces has an animistic quality we start to observe 'faces in the flames' where perhaps there isn't anything at all.

fig. 13. Philip Guston, *By the Window*, 1969, oil on canvas, 198cm x 205cm

The objects in his paintings are treated with equal importance to the figures. In *By the Window* of 1969 the painting on the wall has equal presence to the hooded figure smoking, the smoke from the cigarette rendered in grey speaks to the painting on the wall also rendered in grey. One could argue that this is merely a formal relationship between colours, but with Guston it suggests more, grey becomes a doorway into which we start to view the world differently. In Guston's universe we suddenly see the potential to witness a flattened ontological realm, which subsequently makes us consider our world and the world in which the painting itself hangs. The painting that Guston depicts hanging on the wall within his composition feels as if it could break into conversation with the lampshade, the ochre chair or the hooded figure. This animism is present in everything that Guston painted from a sandwich to a nail to a car. In some of Guston's paintings depicting automobiles the wheels sigh and become misshapen under the pressure of the load they carry. This quality is best seen in *City Limits* of 1969, which is a masterpiece of this era of Guston's practice.

fig. 14. Philip Guston, *City Limits*, 1969, oil on canvas, 195.6cm x 262.2cm

Guston seems to be able to find a way of injecting life into things where lesser artists would find nothing. Buildings are chunky slabs of matter with windows that punctuate their form. These buildings seem strangely unoccupied with humans somehow. In fact they seem to stand in for a human presence. The dashes that represent windows echo both the seams of the klansman's hoods and the marks used to represent the words written in one of Guston's chunky books.

Guston reveals a pleasure in representing the material world of substances in his pictures. His works ask a set of "what if" questions, for instance, what if I was inside hood? Or as Guston himself stated: "what would it be like to be evil? To plan, to plot?"[30] Both the sensitivity to the material world and the adoption of evil as an act of implied authorship is evidence of Guston asking his viewer to think outside of the clichéd subjective frameworks that we are often forced to engage with through avant-garde models of artistic subjectivity.



fig. 15. Philip Guston, *The Canvas*, 1973, oil on canvas

In *Language 2* of 1973 Guston paints a selection of objects on a pink ground. This work sets up a hieroglyphic key, legend or index to his past lexicon of motifs. Most of his favourite objects are featured in this painting, a shoe, a wheel, a lamp, a picture and perhaps most significantly a cup with a thought bubble above it painted in white with the outline of a vague form suggestive of a cigarette inside it. As previously mentioned Guston is alleged to have told his daughter Musa Mayer that it represented: "a cup of coffee dreaming of a cigarette"[31]. Looking back at this quote it now reads as a spontaneous verbalisation of a New Materialist animistic attitude. Guston opens up New Materialist serendipities through praxis and the shear bloody-mindedness of making painting after painting.

Another example of a SOP painter would be German artist Andreas Schulze. Schulze's *Untitled* of 2014 depicts a camper van with the similar soft properties to Guston's objects. The objects are in a slightly different register but there is certainly a relationship here, which is worth discussing for a while.

Looking at Schulze's oeuvre it is clear to see that the depiction of soft objects is in fact a lifetime's work for the German painter. Schulze's camper van is too soft to be functional, looking friendly and inviting to touch, as if it is squeezable or made of a squashy material like foam.



fig. 16. Andreas Schulze, *Untitled (New Jersey Sheep)*, 2014. Acrylic on nettle cloth, 200cm × 220cm

It doesn't appear to be hard or metallic in the way a "real" camper van's properties are. The camper van's animistic qualities recall children's TV shows like *Thomas*

*the Tank Engine*, one expects the van to have a face and a harmless character suggestive of the cutesy and infantilized distortion Schulze uses.

The wheels of Schulze's automobiles sit on the bottom edge of the canvas, and as we all know from our schooling experiences, this is the first thing to be drummed out of children by teachers trying to "improve" their students skills in drawing and painting skills, after taking on board the rules of perspective and foreshortening.

Like Guston Schulze reengages with how things were to us in childhood. Some painters are able to stay in touch with a childlike voice that has not yet been eroded by the dreary practical concerns of everyday life. The skill of being able to remain imaginative and capable of creating enchanting art, whilst earning money for the gas and electricity bills is massively under rated. It takes a long time to understand just how indoctrinated we are by the practicalities of society and learn how to re-connect with creativity and playfulness. Harold Rosenberg touched on this when he once cited something that Pablo Picasso was alleged to have said: "When I (Picasso) was a kid, I drew like Michelangelo. It took me years to learn to draw like a kid."[32]

Schulze's vehicle paintings give characters to machines, breaking down oppositional structures between life and death, organic and inorganic, subject and object, and the animate and inanimate that normalize rational mind-sets within Western culture. Schulze's cars force us to reconsider a world that preceded these distinctions.

If one dismisses Schulze's cars as inanimate one declares a disbelief in the mythic. Our Western minds have been conditioned to believe that our "progressive and advanced" culture, built around the invention of the automobile, is in opposition to the darkness of "savage" nature. This generalization can be linked to a racialized and evolutionary-driven concepts of "primitiveness".

fig. 17. Alexander Guy, *Painting Trousers*, 1989, oil on canvas

A similar observation can be made when considering the Scottish painter Alexander Guy who I would also place in my list of Soft Object Painters. Though currently very unfashionable, Guy has been a prominent and singular artist since the 1980s. Guy has been predominantly based in Scotland throughout his career, however he has had spells being based in London, during the 90s, and has also lived and worked in Germany, once at the end of the 90s (Karlsruhe) and also in 2014 (Berlin). His paintings are usually large format and have a deliberately unappealing flattened matte oil surface.

Guy's entire oeuvre is filled with chunky objects placed in "un-artful" yet strangely satisfying centralized compositions. One might describe these works as anti-compositions as they contradict the rules of the Golden Section or the Golden Mean. Guy's paintings contravene the expectations of good taste that one associates with late modernism, some forms of postmodernism and even more recent postinternet art.



fig. 18. Alexander Guy, *The Torment of Elvis*, 1993, oil on canvas

Within Guy's paintings there is an unusual collision between the signs of modern pop culture and medievalist or premodern forms. The Elvis suit as a medieval iron-maiden is a typical Guy motif, it hints at a deconstruction of the "civilized" cultural world of the "enlightened" West and projects Elvis as a strange type of pre-modern archetype. Although intuitively generated his paintings draw out an anti-rationalist position in relation to modernism that has critical currency. He opposes the normalized view that the modern world is a "free" world, emancipating the subject from a "naïve" and "ignorant" premodern consciousness.  The objects he paints do not appear to be observed from real life, yet they playfully suggest a verisimilitude that flirts with the still life genre. The forms are mannered and derived from the imagination, drawing a link between objects in the real world whilst pulling back from the type of realism associated with the Cezanne school of painting. Because the work is semi-fantastical at times we leave the sober and rational realm of Cezanne. Guys' irrational imaginings are similar at times to William Burroughs' objects in his novel *Naked Lunch*. Within Burroughs' *Interzone*, an imagined setting in his 1959 novel, typewriters morph into insects and dreams melt into reality and back again, although Guy is not a Surrealist as such there is a voice within his work that is sympathetic to dream logic and chaos.



fig. 19. Lee Lozano, *No title,* 1963, oil on canvas, 238cm x 254cm

A further example of SOP can be seen in the tool paintings painted by Lee Lozano. Since her death in 1999 interest in Lozano's practice has increased ten-fold. Lozano self-consciously referenced the sexism of the art world with brutal honesty,

her total declaration of the unfair facts of a male-centric art scene enter her paintings into the field of institutional and market critique.



fig. 20. Lee Lozano, *Ohne Titel*, 1962, oil on canvas

Her objects, like Guy's, are placed unapologetically in the centre of each of her compositions. Some of her objects appear like chunky shaded forms from Ferdinand Leger's paintings, in the sense that they are modern but on the whole weighty and cumbersome. The works suggest both early computer graphics shaded with basic gradients to show volume as well as various forms of avant-garde painting from the twentieth century. The irony present in the paintings leaves one with the sense that she is less enamored with technology and technological determinism than Leger was.

She is also equally un-enamored with the rationalism of the male mind/ego and the mess it has created throughout modern history. This is what makes her overidentification with male objects and signs so humorous.



fig. 21. Lee Lozano, *No title* , 1964, oil on canvas, 2 parts, 274cm x 335cm

fig. 22. Lee Lozano, *No title,* 1964, oil on canvas, 2 parts (installation shot), 274cm x 335cm

Compositionally her paintings are fascinating, being almost too big for the frame. The clamp featured in *'No Title'* of 1964 leaves one feeling claustrophobic. Her deadpan humour comes through in the banality of what is depicted. Her works don't appear to be made by a woman in the sense that they appear ironically rational yet oddly useless in their distortion. Lozano suggests that there is nothing duller than a practical man's perspective on the world, so when she depicts objects such as hammers and clamps one senses that there has to be a strong degree of sarcasm at play. Lozano allows an oddness to flourish in a manner that foresees much of Guston's later and much more appreciated paintings. When you consider when she painted these canvases it is easy to see just how underrated she was as an artist until now.



fig. 23. Lee Lozano, *No title* , 1963 oil on canvas, 165cm x 203cm

Lozano's objects seem to say something equally pertinent about New Materialist ideas as they do about feminism and the biased patriarchal networks she brutally sends up. In her depiction of a three-headed anthropomorphic hammer the object appears to be engaging in an impossible erotic act. The hammer's head appear to part like legs and the neck of a second hammer penetrates the first. Somehow the cold hard metal of the hammer is transformed corporeally into either one of a copulating beast or a three- headed gorgon. This is a portrait of tools behaving like bodies, and bodies behaving like tools.

<center>The Trans-organic Object and Tool Analysis</center>

The sexuality present in Lozano's depiction of inanimate objects predicts the inevitable amalgamation of technology and the body. An example of the transorganic in objecthood can be seen in David Cronenberg's film Existenz from 1999. The film features an odd gun made from bones, which the lead protagonist Ted Pikul, played by the actor Jude Law, uses to carry out an assassination. In one scene the gun is assembled by Ted Pikul out of bones he finds in his soup. During the narrative the gun appears to be sentient, making noises of approval and disapproval as the story unfolds. The presence of the gun within the narrative helps to break down the traditional barriers between bodies and technology, and the distinction between the organic and the inorganic. This is a general theme within the film, which features "Bio-Pods" a form of organic looking technology that is plugged directly in to the base of the spine.

fig. 24. The gun used by lead character Ted Pikul in David Cronenberg's film *Existenz* of 1999

Lozano's objects twist and curl and appear sentient in the same way as Cronenberg's gun. The hammer that features in Lozano's *No Title* of 1963 is an absurd tool that couldn't possibly work, it has three heads that render it useless for most acts. Experience of existence informs us that this just wouldn't be practical. Lozano's mutant tool is interesting in relation to New Materialism as in Graham Harman's discussion of Heidegger's tool analysis he states that the "hammer only becomes interesting when it has been broken".[33]

Heidegger's famous tool-analysis ideas were first discussed in *Being and Time* published in 1927, however Heidegger first outlined these ideas in 1919 in a text presented to his Freiburg students. A brief summary of tool-analysis is useful at this point.

According to Heidegger we are not overtly conscious of things around us in everyday life. The entities that are present in our consciousness make up just a small proportion of that which we are involved with. We breathe air, walk on the floor, our organs inside our bodies help keep us fit, healthy and in good working order. Likewise a hammer does its job so that we can carry out our day-to-day business. When the hammer is working it is defined by its relationality. Heidegger's theory of Dasein is linked to praxis and how we intuitively use tools around us. However both Heidegger and Harman become interested in the hammer when it brakes – but for different reasons. According to Heidegger the broken hammer makes us consider it individually as the hammer enters our present-at-hand consciousness in place of its previous condition: the ready-to-hand.  However Harman takes Heidegger's thought experiment further, Harman's project starts by pushing Heidegger further than Heidegger wanted to go with his tool analysis idea. Harman shows how Heidegger's tool analysis can be used to show how a limitation of relationality between objects exists and that objects in fact withdraw from each other, and this subsequently "turns causality into a serious philosophical problem. For if objects cannot touch directly how do they affect each other?"[34] There must be a third realm or a medium where they somehow interact, meaning that "Causation must be indirect or vicarious rather than direct and immediate"[35]. According to Harman objects in the world are

therefore withdrawn. This of course is somewhat contradictory to Heidegger's ideas relating to Dasein in *Being and Time,* where he portrayed tools as all coming together in an intuitive melting pot.



fig. 25. Lee Lozano, *No title [hammer diptych]*, no date, oil on canvas, two parts, 175.3 x 254 cm

This is useful for understanding Lee Lozano's paintings on a different level to the way in which they are usually presented and talked about – essentially through feminist critique. One of the greatest qualities of painting is that it is a superb medium for representing what isn't possible in terms of our basic human understanding of things in the world. If an artist wanted to "accurately" paint a "real" hammer it would be quite a straightforward act of translation. Lozano's hammer seems to be something else. It's a hammer that doesn't exist in a human realm and this appears to join up with Guston's animism simply by painting the hammer as a withdrawn mutant object.

To summarise, in all of the objects featured in SOP there is a sense that the artists are trying to represent the thinginess of things. This suggests that although we look at a Guston shoe or a Lozano hammer or Sandy Guy's trousers as objects that have arrived into the world via humans, there is a quality in how they are painted

that allows us access to something alluring, a world that lies beneath their basic physical properties. There is the basic presence of animism in the forms that occupy Philip Guston's work. These objects seem to have equal ontological status to humans within his compositions. Objects represented in Guston's paintings wobble with life and literally look back at the viewer. Andreas Schulze on the other hand gives us access to an infantilised universe of animistic identification. We are invited to reacquaint ourselves with our childhood sensibilities where cars speak with one another. In these works Schulze unlearns the skills of perspective and foreshortening. This is also Schulze's way of representing what is impossible, life-size spongy cars rule a world that features no human beings to drive them. Lozano's tools are sexualised which activates at least two potential readings – the first being a direct feminist statement of critique and the second being the birth of the trans-organic object that sexualises objects via a trans-humanist take on withdrawn objects. These SOP voices all reject the subject/object distinction associated with Enlightenment and modernist thinking and force us to consider the painted object itself as a potential commodity pathway diversion, capable of shifting meanings and values throughout the life of the painting.

The cultural theorist Anselm Franke's project on animism is interesting to bring in at this point. In *Animism Volume 1* Franke problematizes the normalising of rationalism in Western modern Enlightenment thinking, making a case for the opposition of this position. Franke makes the case throughout his study that there is a colonial agenda to the structures we have inherited from modernism and like colonialism modernity involved a radical disrespect or violence towards superstition and animistic patterns of thought:

> Modernity is modern insofar as the destruction of superstition and its embodiments (exemplary in the figure of the fetish) resulted in the establishment of a triumphal world of indisputable facts brought to light by the power of reason applied in the sciences. As long as objects were endowed and animated by social representations and subjective projections, they annihilate the subject; only the destruction of those ignorant ties emancipates the subject and raises it to the status of the "free" modern self.[36]

Like Latour in *We have Never Been Modern*, Franke suggests that our notion of the "free" modern self is located in a presumption that nature is unsophisticated and dark and evil and culture is cerebral, rational, civilized, inherently good and white. The premodernism located in animism erodes the nature/culture divide and the subject/object divide forcing us to adapt, interrelate and amalgamate with objects.

It could be argued that SOP is a form of still life painting that relies on depicting what is beneath the surface. In comparison to SOP, one can take the example of Paul Cezanne's still-life paintings, which treat the genre very differently. Cezanne records exactly what is visible on the surface of the canvas. The objects in Cezanne's paintings are treated as cold and dead objects of study. They lack the wobbly character and dark humour of Guston's objects. Within the height of modernism Cezanne's cold objectification of objects fitted with the subject/object divide normalized during its height. By arranging the fruits, vessels and table-clothes in a cold analytical way he paints his objects as if they are secondary to the human. Cezanne himself is said to have said that: "Monet is only an eye, but my God what an eye!"[37] In SOP the artist does not rely on faithfully describing the source in the same way, what is actually there in a retinal sense is not where the interest lies.

## Painting Beside Itself

David Joselit's highly visible essay titled *Painting Beside Itself*[38] has inspired a lot of contemporary painting practices in recent years*.*

In this text Joselit doesn't ever directly mention New Materialism or ANT but I would suggest that there is a link as Joselit describes how a painting or art object can operate as an actant within networks of affect, exchange, distribution and interpretation.

The ideas and work discussed in *Painting Beside Itself* are relational and networked in character. One criticism of Relational Art is that it is structured around the interactivity between humans and it ignores material relations.[39]

However Joselit's text outlines how paintings might start to function as equal players in a network of things.

David Joselit frames his entire *Painting Beside Itself* idea around this Martin Kippenberger quote:

> Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful. The whole network is important! Even Spaghettini…When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it.[40]

In this text Joselit asks an important question: How can painting belong to a network? Joselit regards this question as "the most important question to be addressed on canvas since Warhol", identifying Kippenberger as a key node within the network of artists who have begun to understand the importance and relevance of visualizing networks. It is significant that Kippenberger was on to this idea well before the Internet had even become live.[41] Joselit who is keen to bring painting up to date with our networked and digitized era has identified a strand of transitive painting that operates or expands outside of the picture plane, offering painting a way out of what he describes as the "reification trap". Painting's Achilles heel, according to Joselit, is it's static nature, perhaps something that has always been regarded as a strength within the field of painting during modernism? The reification of painting can therefore be linked to Latour's claim referred to earlier in this text that: "Our past begins to change".

Joselit appears to be stating that reified paintings are subject to change in the same way. The question that Joselit asks: "how painting can belong to a network?" - seems to have arisen due to the increased importance placed on static objects in a post-correlationist world. The subsequent issues that arise join a series of concerns that date back to the modernist era of painting:

> How does painting signify in the semiotic aporias of Cubism or the non-objective utopias of the historical avant-gardes? How can the status of painting as matter be made explicit (i.e. through the incorporation of

readymades, and the rise of the monochrome and seriality as well as the gestural techniques of dripping, pouring, and staining)? And how might painting meet the challenge of mechanical reproduction (as in strategies of appropriation spanning Pop's silkscreens of the 1960s and the Pictures generation's return to painting in the 1980s)? None of these problems exists in isolation or ever disappears; instead, there are shifts in emphasis in which earlier questions are reformulated through newer ones.[42]

Joselit sees the most interesting contemporary painting as "transitive". According to him transitive painting behaves as if it is a screen in relation to networks of information. To Joselit a painting is a virtual terminal, a point of access to vast and uneven systems of knowledge. Paintings are actants that are forever shifting their position within an actor network, painting's non-reified state means that the material value (economic, cultural, material) is restless, opening up the potential for painters to contextually re-animate form and create new and unexpected meanings and combinations.

Both the artist's persona and the networks around objects are interesting to consider here. Bruno Latour believes that some objects are more "real" if they are more connected within networks. This rings true if one marries it up with the idea of art practices being similar to viral contagions. The most virally contagious art and therefore the most "real" is the art that one sees on social media, magazines, newspapers, art fairs, art galleries and by word of mouth online.

The title of Joselit's essay: *Painting Beside Itself* suggests that the painting itself as an object is equally as influential as the artist herself once we embrace a flattened ontological plane. In this text he uses the term "reification" as a way of defining what he sees as the main weakness of painting:

> The problem with the term "reification" is that it connotes the permanent arrest of an object's circulation within a network: it is halted, paid for, put on a wall, or sent to storage, therefore permanently crystallizing a particular social relation. Transitive painting, on the other hand, invents forms and structures whose purpose is to demonstrate that once an object

enters a network, it can never be fully stilled, but only subjected to different material states and speeds of circulation ranging from the geologically slow (cold storage) to the infinitely fast. A Poussin might land in the hands of Jutta Koether, or Stephen Prina might seize the entire oeuvre of Manet.[43]

Joselit believes that the networks that art objects belong to make them potentially fluid, interesting and active beyond their consumption as commodities in a singular own-able network. Essentially the bigger picture or wider context associated with an artwork actually keeps it open and malleable. This realisation is interesting for contemporary practitioners of painting but it is also fascinating for how we treat objects from the past as they continue to change.

## Magritte and the Pre-History of Networked Painting



fig. 26. René Magritte, *L'Ellipse*, 1948, oil on canvas, 50.3cm x 73cm

If, as Bruno Latour claims, "our past begins to change" because we have never been modern I would like to look back at painting from history that could be potentially linked to the Network Painting that Joselit describes in *Painting Beside Itself*.

René Magritte's *Période vache* exhibition of 1948 was his first (and last) solo exhibition held in a small Paris gallery called Galerie du Faubourg. The show was by all accounts a critical and commercial disaster. This exhibition qualifies as being one of the great examples of Bad Painting because Magritte's paintings were so antagonistic and odd that they have become legendary. The paintings were clearly a gesture of defiance towards a French art world that had for many years ignored Magritte completely and it is my opinion that these works were some of the first paintings to activate contextual critique in the way that "Network Painting" claims it does in today's art world.

Living and working in Paris from around 1927 until the early-1930s Magritte had been a leading light within the Surrealist group, However the Surrealist establishment including André Breton had eventually snubbed him, and in fact had thrown him out of the Surrealist group the year preceding the show. Breton's well publicised rejection of Magritte and the general sense that the Belgian artist was somewhat undervalued in Paris resulted in Magritte making a series of thirty paintings in oil and gouache that were cheeky and at points vitriolic. The works were almost schizophrenic in character, seemingly critical of the inventory of styles and content of French modernism. The works were contextualised alongside a satirical text written by Magritte's close poet friend Louis Scutenaire that left no doubt as to which direction the critique was aimed at:

> The exhibition was accompanied by a small catalogue with a preface by the poet Louis Scutenaire, bearing an evocative title ("Les pieds dans le plat" – Putting one's foot in it) and written in a slangy style, which is clearly in line with Magritte's intentions. Moreover, Scutenaire would admit as much some years later: "The important thing was not to enchant the Parisians, but outrage them." The triviality of the works actually wrong-foots Surrealist good taste. Both text and images are placed on a deliberately rustic and provincial register. "We'd been fed-up for a good long time, we had, deep in our forests, in our green pastures." Traditionally, the Belgians are seen as coarse peasants by the French, including the intellectuals (in about 1865 Charles Baudelaire had written his pamphlet Poor Belgium). This chauvinism, still a prevalent event among the holiest of holies of Parisian Surrealism, is here in a sense returned to sender, "We'd like to say shit politely to you, in your false language," Scutenaire goes on to write. "Because we bumpkins, we yokels, have absolutely no manners, you realise."[44]

fig. 27. Rene Magritte, *Seasickness,* 1948, oil on canvas, 54cm x 65cm

Magritte felt that the treatment he had received had not been befitting of a man of his talents. The paintings he made in response turned out to be by far his best work from his long and illustrious career as the works have a directness and looseness that his other more famous and more illustrative works do not possess. They are critical of the scene around them and therefore incredibly contextually sensitive, in this sense they foresee the works of Martin Kippenberger in the sense that they use very direct painting techniques to discuss the panorama of the art world itself. The *Période vache* paintings have a self-aware humour that is playful and chaotic throwing caution to the wind in their recklessness. The subjects and themes within the paintings go off on tangents and reveal a mind unconstrained by the shackles of financial concern. The works caused outrage with the public and critics alike who hated them and alongside this Magritte didn't actually sell a single painting from the series. How sad it is in retrospect that the Parisian art world did not see that this was in fact the Belgian artist's finest body of work.

Directly after the show Magritte's New York based dealer Alexander Iolas put pressure on him to return to the style of painting that made him his bread and butter. Magritte's wife Georgette Magritte also applied a similar pressure, forcing him to return to making variations of bankable Magritte-like scenes. The subsequent paintings made after the *Période vache* series were potboilers echoing the previous highlights from his back catalogue.

The *Période vache* paintings were banished for years after their first airing. However in 1978 (the same year that Marcia Tucker curated "Bad" Painting at the New Museum) five of them resurfaced at Magritte's retrospective at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels curated by David Sylvester and Gérard Régnier. This was a high profile exhibition that subsequently and rather ironically travelled to the

Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1979. Sadly though this was not the moment of their rediscovery as the *Période vache* paintings went unnoticed. The press in fact were largely unimpressed by their inclusion.

Their next outing was at a major exhibition - a survey of Western art since 1939 held in 1981 in the German city of Cologne. The show curated by the infamous Kasper König was titled *Westkunst*. Nine of the *Période vache* paintings were showcased together for the first time since the original exhibition in 1948.

The name of Magritte's show is intriguing. In French, "vache" means cow, however the work clearly doesn't feature any cows. Things become a little clearer when one realises that "vache" also means "mean" or "nasty". In fact "vacherie" signifies a mean trick of sorts, thus the title does indeed relate to the spikiness at the heart of the works sentiment.

One could certainly make the claim that the eclecticism seen in the sampling in the *Période vache* paintings prefigures aspects of postmodernism.

> Regarding both their motifs and their style, the works of Magritte's *Période vache* do not constitute a consistent ensemble but rather present themselves as a patchwork of different pseudo-styles borrowing more or less openly from other artists and drawing on the artist's own earlier works. These elements are transformed into something comic, trivial, or grotesque by being blended with aspects of popular visual culture. With numerous art historical references to James Ensor, whose grotesque physiognomies are given another turn of the screw, to Henri Matisse, whose colourful ornaments are degraded to wallpaper-like décor, or to Joan Miró, who, as we know, was not held in high regard by the artist.[45]

Magritte was a borrower in the classic postmodern sense way before it was a self-conscious strategy within art. This is impressive to some extent as his works seem to suggest some of the well-worn strategies associated with postmodernism such as reducing signs to signifiers, having no fixed signified or meaning (basic postmodern semiotic theory). However the critical voice in the pictures is very specific and one could argue a lot more sophisticated than certain examples of

cartoon postmodernism that appeared in the 1980s (practices like Mark Tansey spring to mind) due to the extent that the work is located in a localized context and not a generic internationalist postmodernism.



fig. 28. René Magritte, *Le Stropiat (The Cripple)*, 1948, gouache, pencil, gold colour on paper, 55cm x 46cm

Magritte sets up an idiosyncratic world within the *Période vache* paintings, one in which the viewer must become involved if she wants to unpack the critical issues discussed within the work, understanding the context of his back catalogue and his ill treatment within the Parisian art scene becomes essential. It is this factor more than any other that links Magritte to the likes of Martin Kippenberger who relied on a sense of total disclosure of all the contextual facts in order to make the audience laugh (and sometimes cringe!). This intentionality and critical antagonism suggests the opposite to the presentation of unlimited semiosis principles typical of postmodern painting. "Unlimited semiosis" being the condition that exists in semiotic free-fall if we are to believe or buy into the anti-realist world of post-structuralist theorists of the "hyper-real" such as Jean Baudrillard.

The genealogical link from Rene Magritte's *Période vache* paintings to more recent artist's practices is noted in Bernard Marcadé's observations:

> In the context of the 1980s' Post-Conceptual painting, the strategies Magritte had relied on for subverting the prevailing standards of painting in the medium itself appeared both exemplary and highly topical. Today, about forty years after Magritte's death, contemporary artists such as John

Currin or Sean Landers often come to understand his oeuvre by making themselves familiar with the works of his *Période vache* at first. The works' humour, spontaneous style, and daring bad taste provide an example for a form of painting deriving its momentum from the apparent meaninglessness of its subjects in order to refute the clichés of today's world of images. With his manifesto-like protest against all varieties of arrogance and reprimands in the arts, Magritte has become a model for the artist's triumph over the workings of an art scene that seem to be more overpowering today than they ever were.[46]



fig. 29. René Magritte, *Le Stropiat (The Cripple)*, 1948, oil on canvas affixed to plywood, 59.5cm x 49.5cm

Magritte's *Période vache* paintings contain a vast amount of self-satire and critical awareness of the workings and limitations of the art market and the conservative pressures that it places on artists. The humorously positioned smoking pipes in *Le Stropiat* (The Cripple) of 1948 are hilarious. 'Le Stropiat' is said to be a neologism based on the verb ''estropier", which means "to mangle". Magritte appears to over-identify with his own signature motif, exaggerating, overloading and mangling the pipe motif to the point of absurdity.

The pipe is of course an extremely significant motif in Magritte's work. One of the artist's most famous paintings *The Treachery of Images* of 1928-29 features a single pipe with the text "This is not a Pipe" written underneath it. The painting was made ten years previously to the *Le Stropiat* and appears to be a frustrated reaction to a form of contractual slavery. The market was crippling the artist by

forcing him to repeat motifs for commercial purposes and like any self-respecting artist Magritte dutifully responded with a critical reaction.

The *Période vache* paintings give us a superb window into Magritte's thoughts and frustrations. It could be suggested that these works predict a form of social network painting. Like Kippenberger years later, Magritte brings the localised conditions of the art scene into the work as a humorous declaration of total disclosure. Although the work does not appear so in form it may in fact be closely linked to Institutional Critique, if one considers the embarrassment of a total disclosure of the facts[47] used in the post-Kippenberger practices of both Andrea Fraser and Merlin Carpenter.

Asger Jorn's Modification Paintings



fig. 30. Asger Jorn, *Modifications: The Disquieting Duck*, 1959, oil on mass-produced painting, 144.5cm x 85cm

To expand on the pre-history of network painting I want to look at the Modification paintings of Asger Jorn for slightly different reasons to Magritte's *Période vache* paintings. Jorn was involved with the Situationist International led by Guy Debord but his first and last love was clearly painting.

fig. 31. Asger Jorn, *The Double Face*, 1960, oil on canvas

His COBRA group paintings use a range of child-like abstract languages and forms, often portraying messy faciality symbols or visages daubed in heavily impastoed paint. These works appeal to the "outsider" mentality within Art Brut crossing over at times with the work of French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) – an artist who studied the art of psychiatric patients and minors.

The artworks by Asger Jorn that I am interested in discussing here are his Modification paintings. As already mentioned above this strand of Jorn's work was discussed by T J Clarke as a critique of refinement in: *In Defence of Abstract Expressionism* published in *Farewell to an Idea* of 1999. The Modification paintings were produced on top of already existing paintings bought at flea markets and thrift stores. Having been made by "amateurs" the originals are always fascinating precisely because they have an untutored charm, which is so refreshing in the highly self-conscious art world we experience today. Jorn was not mocking the original artists who had produced these idiosyncratic works. He recognised that the raw untrained charm of their painterly touch and at times baffling compositional decisions and eccentric themes were refreshingly unpretentious, reconnecting the viewer with an art that is genuinely rich with a passion for creativity. In fact Jorn said:

Anyone who tries to fight against the production of these bright, appealing, carefully executed pictures is an enemy of the best contemporary art.[48]



fig. 32. Asger Jorn, *Modifications: Temptation*, 1960, oil on found painting

Jorn's decision to modify found thrift store paintings questioned both conservative and avant-garde sensibilities, opening up questions relating to authorship and originality, which became big themes that were later further discussed or questioned throughout postmodernism.

There is a socialist angle to Jorn's work that often gets swept under the carpet. His detourned Modification paintings are clearly influenced by the political ideology of Situationism but remain rooted in the heart of painting and picture making. Historically commentators seem to be reluctant to discuss his works in this way. But ultimately taste is linked to class and Jorn's unapologetic appropriation of junk shop paintings reveals a class tension simply because he embraces the marginal voices of the unrecognised and untutored who are unacceptable to both the old guard of the establishment salons as well as the avant-garde circles that breed their own brands of elitism.

In some way there is a similar sentiment in Jorn's modification paintings to the work of director John Waters. By working with the marginalised who represent the "unacceptable" face of eccentricity or madness in contemporary culture Waters like Jorn finds beauty "from the gutter".[49]

The wonderful élan present in Jorn's paintings reveals his skill at making unconventional pictures with limited means. Some works only have a few well

positioned marks on them, however the results are often jaw dropping in their beauty, the playful visual experimentation with scale and mark making turns our preconceptions upside down. All the rules of pictorial space are thrown out of the window in these paintings, allowing an effortless playfulness to override any linear message.

Jorn's modification paintings say more about Joselit's reification claim than many of the practices that he discusses in his text. Jorn also paves the way for some of Julian Schnabel's strongest work made in the 1980s: the Kubuki Theatre Paintings that were over painted onto old Kubuki Theatre backdrops.



fig. 33. Julian Schnabel, *Rebirth I: (The Last View of Camiliano Cien Fuegos)*, 1986, oil and tempera on Kubuki Theatre backdrop, 375.92cm x 340.36cm

Through his practice Jorn foresees the shifting nature of objects/paintings. Intuitively he took it upon himself to treat existing works of art as malleable sites for re-negotiation, and this in tern influenced a whole series of later practitioners to do the same. Helping us to understand the act of creativity as an additive process rather than "original" one. Jorn and Schnabel both add their voice to their respective modifications but leave the majority of the work as it stands. The object itself has a voice in the end result.

### **Martin Kippenberger**

It is widely appreciated that Martin Kippenberger was one of the most sociable artists in recent art history. He was famous for being a ball of energy that just couldn't stop making art, socializing or drinking alcohol. At some point

Kippenberger must have seen Rene Magritte's *Période vache* paintings, as the tone in his work is so similar. The wit and recklessness of the Belgian's coded critique foresees Kippenberger's practice by many years.

Kippenberger literally made an artistic position out of being a "big kid". He would make nicknames up and use personalised slang amongst his entourage generating in-jokes that seeped into his art. This allowed him to form a type of world that had its own values, attitude and mood.

Kippenberger once said: "What I'm working on is for people to be able to say that Kippenberger had this really good mood"[50] and looking back at his oeuvre today this is still readable in the work.

During the postmodern 1980s the collapse of any long-term teleological goal after the failure of modernism had resulted in a linguistic free fall in art, which by the eighties and nineties had gone into hyper-drive. Deconstruction had hit the art world by storm. The presentation of empty signs varied from standard postmodernist double coding[51] to a Baudrillardian inspired condition of hyper-reality[52]. Art had become more and more emptied out, and although this was often done under the guise of being a Warholian complicity strategy, the mirror had started to crack or at least had become old and jaded as a radical strategy earlier than the art market wanted to admit.

It called for someone with the charisma of Kippenberger to find a way forward for art in uncertain times. His idiosyncratic sensibility and, if anything, anti-postmodern explicitness was rather eloquently linked to the artist's Punk roots by Diedrich Diederichsen in his speech on the night of the opening of *Martin Kippenberger – The Problem Perspective* at MOCA in 2008.

> There was a very important part of punk culture that was crucial for Martin Kippenberger. That was a return or a reinforcement of semantics or semanticity of art. A route insisting on the codedness of the visual and on explicitness – insisting the visual is meaningful. It's not a way to get out of

meaning, to leave meaning. He did this both by producing explicit works in several ways and also by insisting in a critical way, inside and outside of their own work on the semanticity of other people's work.[53]

Diederichsen goes on to say in the same lecture:

He talked in a very private language - and in later years an increasingly private language, and you had to know him very well or concentrate very closely in order to understand him. Basically he gave everything a nickname - any object or any public affair and he would only refer to them by that nickname or neologism, never explaining anything. He would talk extremely elliptically and he would treat most of his speaking partners as if they were the same person. So whatever he had told one of them in the last 24 hours he would also expect the next person he met to know what he was referring to.[54]

Kippenberger's youthful spirit should not be seen as a negative thing. Kippenberger's playfulness is perhaps better explained as a way of cutting through some of the fluff and pomposity that comes with being overly indoctrinated into art world systems. Kippenberger behaved as if he were a special case, almost as if the rules in art and life did not fully apply to him. The titles of his works back this theory up. They often strike me as illogical, awkward and even at times slightly dyslexic in form. His sentence-structures are odd, almost backward in character but somehow just right for setting a tone.

Magritte's *Période vache* works purposefully highlight the limited range of meaning possibilities available to the Belgian artist at the time of their making. This allowed him to undermine his own signature style and essentially buy himself some freedom. All artists face pressures to stick to a particular signature style within their career but Kippenberger's brazen personality allowed him to shift more than most. Being consistently mediocre happened to be something that deeply frustrated the restless Kippenberger and as a result he always pushed himself to make a pertinent comment that was contextually apt and concise. In fact he often commented on his lack of a signature and restlessness: "Assuming roles is

something that simply won't work for me, since I don't have a style. None at all."[55]
At times in interviews he almost seemed slightly envious of artists like Gerhard
Richter who had such a strong, bankable and recognisable signature. Ultimately he
just didn't want to play the game in the same way, he wanted to adopt the
"problem perspective" simply because he wanted to be free.

Kippenberger loved to home in on contradictions, absurdities or any form of
hypocrisy. He would often exaggerate something to the point of total collapse,
overidentifying with pomposity. He would have loved Magritte's *Le Stropiat* as it
overidentifies with Surrealism to the point of its collapse.

One of Kippenberger's main methodologies was to deal very directly with the
conditions of art's production, what was happening at that particular moment in
time in the art world was a form of material for Kippenberger to utilise. The
Cologne panorama in the nineteen eighties and nineties gave Kippenberger and his
collaborators fuel for their respective fires. Context became a massive part of his
work and his collaborators alike, being fuelled socially out of a scene in the same
way that Andy Warhol generated his output from his Factory. The work essentially
came out of discursive engagement, or to put it another way: drunken arguments
he had with his entourage. Kippenberger's socially minded approach to art
production has been described by Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen as Kippenberger's
most important gift to art:

> The recycling of visual motifs Kippenberger organizes in his photographs,
> books, posters and paintings matches the way culture is produced outside
> the domain of autonomous art. He thus transgresses a quite essential
> boundary, that between the making of art and collective production, which
> had, in the capitalist society, assumed the form of consumption. This, I
> think, is Martin Kippenberger's true art-historical significance.[56]

Kippenberger was obviously aware of international art discussions and audiences
but he deliberately emphasised a localism and idiosyncracy in his work. His works
often directly attacked globalisation in the art world. One only has to look at his
Metro stations, which were installed in various countries all over the world. They

seem to be both global and local at the same time. Global in the sense that he foresaw how important a connected world-wide-web would be and local in the sense that he understood how important regionalism and difference is.



fig. 34. Martin Kippenberger, *Metro-Net,* Syros, Greece, 1997

When asked what he thought of Kippenberger's *Metro-Net* the architect Lukas Baumewerd who collaborated with Kippenberger on numerous projects stated that:

> Kippenberger's Metro-Net is brilliant. It builds an interconnection between sculptures that are both extremely site-specific and networked by cross-references to existing sculptures. The variable placement of the ventilation shafts emphasizes the idea of global virtual networking.[57]

In the nineteen eighties Neo-Expressionism had an odd relationship to globalisation, internationalism and notions of difference. Perhaps to some degree it was slightly misguided of cultural commentators to associate Neo-Expressionist painting with difference and marginality as the Neo-Expressionist painters who achieved success were largely made up of white heterosexual men. Nation states are all different but this is not the same issue as the celebration of difference as a political form of postmodern critique. Nationalism was easily hi-jacked by conservative forces; which helped to sell it to dubious collectors with more money than sense.

On the surface of things the Neo-Expressionist painting juggernaut was aligned with a Lyotardian form of postmodernism. Lyotard's most influential contribution to postmodernism was his opposition to metanarratives, grand narratives or universal generalities. This included a critical response to the project of the

Enlightenment and modernism in general. In his writings Lyotard makes a case that we no longer need metanarratives due to our technological advancement, which has led us to question older established truth claims. In *The Postmodern Condition - a Report on Knowledge* of 1979[58], Lyotard makes the case that the large scale theories and ideas that have shaped our world such as the provability of truth through science, the journey or progress of history and ultimately the possibility of utopian emancipation have all been broken apart. He argues against an Enlightenment narrative of merging disciplines such as science and culture into a universal narrative, and makes the case that micro-narratives have now become more useful in describing the way that things really are. As the large metanarratives fade, claims to truth are also problematised and the controllers of information become the legitimisers of the day over the teleological vision of the Enlightenment.

Essentially Neo-Expressionism was a symptom of the breaking down of the grand narrative of modernism. Lyotard's realisation that the teleological vision of the Enlightenment had collapsed was crucial in opening the door for this type of regionalist and neo-figurative postmodernism. This "political" postmodernism was hi-jacked by the market, and one of the only artists witty enough to say anything worthwhile about the genuine conditions of production was of course Martin Kippenberger.

Again in Diedrich Diedrichsen's lecture on the opening night of *Martin Kippenberger – The Problem Perspective* at MOCA in 2008 he makes reference to this context:

> This painting boom in the late seventies and early eighties (Neo-Expressionism) had a lot to do with some kind of device or global trend to re-nationalize art production. There was a widespread discourse that through these different types of painting, art production was reconstructed as nationally specific, or nationally culturally specific, and this had nothing to do with Martin Kippenberger.[59]

The German artist Anselm Kiefer who had gained mega stardom in the nineteen-eighties can most certainly be linked to the "nationally culturally specific" practices associated with Neo-Expressionism that Diederich Diederichsen identifies in his MOCA lecture. For this reason Kiefer found himself in the critical firing line of Kippenberger and his close friend and collaborator Albert Oehlen.

At this stage it is important to point out the distinction I am making between regional difference and the more generalized or bogus "nationally culturally specific" art that Diederichsen mentions. I believe one is concerned with a specific regional conversation and the other is far more generalized or cartoonish version of regionalism. Kippenberger took on this issue in his work critiquing a market friendly form of national specificity. The subsequent work that he made I would claim becomes the genuine expression of artistic difference.

In 1982 Martin Kippenberger and his long-term friend Albert Oehlen produced two collaborative works called *Capri by Night* and *Orgone by Night*. *Capri by Night* involved the artists covering a Ford Capri car with a mixture of oatmeal and reddish brown paint. The paint mixture was intended to recall the signature methods used by the German artist Anselm Kiefer, where he would typically use straw mixed with paint on the surfaces of his works. Kiefer's large-scale, masculine and often, somber works explicitly took on the subject of Germany's post-war guilt and angst, but he exaggerated it without any irony.



fig. 35. Martin Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen, *Capri by Night* and *Orgone by Night*, 1982, Ford Capri car, oatmeal, brown household paint

Frustrated by the lack of self-awareness or self-criticality in Kiefer's work Kippenberger and Oehlen's decided to create a "tarred and feathered"[60] Ford Capri sculpture intended as a sly and savvy gesture of over-identification with Kiefer's art. The Capri model was at the time something of a bourgeois status symbol amongst aspirational Germans. The Capri was produced by Ford Motors for a European market becoming a simulacral representation of European-ness as seen through the eyes of American car designers.



fig. 36. Anselm Kiefer, *Die Meistersinger*, 1982, oil, acrylic, straw and cardboard on canvas, 280cm x 381cm

Kiefer's work seemed to be appealing largely to an American collector market keen to swallow up German stereotypes. In *Capri by Night* Kippenberger and Oehlen cheekily re-present Kiefer's strategies with a slapstick, deadpan and absurdist exaggeration. Kippenberger and Oehlen set up a series of carnivalesque ripostes toward the rather pompous presumptions of Kiefer's "German-ness". *Capri by Night* has always seemed to me like a dandyish and witty response to the cartoonish and clichéd identity tags created by the older artist.

Only a few people understood or "got" this work around the Cologne art scene at the time of its initial presentation. Like Magritte's *Période vache* paintings, the audience would have initially been perplexed by what they were looking at. At first the piece must have seemed ridiculous or absurd to most viewers, but on further inspection a complex contextual layering of meaning appears to surface, which bypasses the grand statements one associates with modernism, placing importance on a more localized or realist set of concerns. Kippenberger's down to earth humour is ultimately closer to the German character than the huge morose pomposity of Kiefer's "serious" statement paintings. Most significantly the piece

forms an alternative narrative outside of the bland internationalism of the mainstream global art circuit, reawakening a space for a contextual and site-specific sensitivity to reappear, albeit within the chaotic, irrational and a somewhat carnivalesque character of Kippenberger's logic.

Kiefer's works can be understood quite quickly in a more journalistic sense. However Kippenberger's works take longer to sink in, in fact his works only really make sense when viewed in multiple - as an entire practice over time.

Kippenberger forms a regional discussion that undermines the lazy assumptions of the international art world, and as Diedrich Diederichsen has identified in his MOCA lecture mentioned above, his slang is a very significant weapon for forming an alternative voice. What is formulated in *Capri by Night* appears to be something akin to a visual slang or argot, as crucially the work asks that the viewer becomes aware of contextual information relating to the local scene and the discussion amongst the community. As Andy Warhol said, as a strategy this is interesting purely because: "You have to do stuff that average people don't understand because those are the only good things."[61] Although Warhol's work obviously appeals to "average" people it is possible to detect the presence of in-jokes in his choice of imagery, which essentially amounts to a general abrasiveness towards the assumptions made by an older generation of artists that must of annoyed Warhol and to some extent held him back creatively.

The word Argot is a French word for a slang language spoken by a small group of initiates who use disguised words, symbols and references to communicate within their group. Contextual information is crucial in understanding *Capri by Night,* much in the same way that it is required to de-code or understand any secret language or argot created by any subcultural group. Like Polari[62] or Victorian thief cant[63], *Capri by Night* uses a subtle form of détournment to undermine the values of an official hegemonic code, flying under the radar (or by night) by temporarily avoiding its successful decoding by a mainstream audience.

The suggested critique in Capri by Night is played out in disguise under a form of absurdist camouflage, only those within the community who are tapped into the argot are able to access the nuanced tone of the work. Any new viewer or audience for this work is required to uncover some of the conceptual underpinnings or contextual nuances within it.

Discussing Kippenberger's solo practice in *Nach Kippenberger* the Scottish artist Lucy Mackenzie makes this very succinct point in relation to argots and internationalism:

> The intention is to try to give a voice to the argot of anti-internationalism, because ultimately it is worth trying to turn the art world into somewhere you would want to be rather than submitting to an existing idea of its limitations.[64]

Lucy McKenzie also discusses the notion of the politically correct "good guy" in art in the same essay in *Nach Kippenberger*[65]. Here she states that Kippenberger showed her that:

> Being socially committed does not necessarily mean that you have to feel smug or like a 'good guy', which is always the worry.

She goes on to say in the same piece of writing that:

> He (Kippenberger) shows that letting dissidence have dissonance is as powerful as anything political.[66]

The subtlety of a barbed or cloaked put down can often be lost when crossing international borders, the international quagmire of contemporary art has hardly any room for cloaked humour, it's far more in love with the clumsy irony of Jeff Koons or the boring art fair friendly sarcasm of David Shrigley, resulting in many young artists opting out of producing multi-layered work that requires contextual detail in order to understand it.

Very often an artist who is well respected in his or her homeland amongst a localized scene can sometimes fail to cross-continents. According to his sister Susanne Kippenberger in *Kippenberger and His Families* the young Kippenberger really struggled to make international curators understand his position at the beginning of his career.

Writing in *The Problem Perspective*[67] Ann Goldstein touches on the issue of clichéd identity tags and internationalism:

> The reception of the work – both the German work in the United States and vice-versa – was also telling. As Kelley noted about Kippenberger in relation to his own work:

> All countries have their own takes on the work of other countries' artists. Americans for example, praise Anselm Kiefer because, I believe, his work reinforces our clichéd notions of German identity. His work is "heavy" and dark; it's often interpreted as referencing the Holocaust. In Germany, he's not held in much high regard. I was embraced by the Germans in the eighties when I wasn't successful at all in the United States. My work was understood as a comment on "bad America". I never thought of my work as specifically addressing the horrors of American mass-cultural imperialism. I was simply referencing regionalist tropes in my work that the Germans did not understand. This was exotic to them.

> That notion of a regionalism that cannot be fully understood is particularly important to consider, as it pertains to differences in the roles of the artist, as well as the varied history and reception of the work in the United States and Europe. In his own distinctive shifting roles, Kippenberger constructed and reconstructed himself as an artist, and each body of work bears an exhaustive series of sources and references that are interconnected throughout his oeuvre.'[68]

One of the reasons Kippenberger has become such an important artist after his tragically early death is that he opened up a more nuanced and contextually specific way for art to proceed. One of the potential criticisms of a global and internationalist form of postmodernism is that it was complicit with the same universalization that the modernist project was guilty of, producing a globalized style or logic that was reproduced all over the world with little attention paid to the subtleties of site or context. Kenneth Frampton's *'Towards a Critical Regionalism – Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance'[69]* provided a critical voice against this breed of internationalist postmodernism. Frampton discussed the response to these issues within the field of architecture, stating that Critical Regionalism responded critically to the non-places created by postmodernist architects and formed a stance against the subsequent removal of local identity and character within architecture. For instance the materials used within Critical Regionalist architecture would often reflect the context or history of the building in question, the geographical location of the building could also be reflected in the shapes and contours of the building itself, possibly echoing the surrounding landscape or pre-existing buildings in the vicinity. Critical Regionalism also completely rejected the modish quotation and appropriation associated with the self-conscious ornamentation of postmodernism, which clearly identified it as a "style" in a linear art-historical sense.

The contextually sensitive discussions formed by Kippenberger echo Critical Regionalist ideas but as always with Kippenberger it's not simple, he wasn't interested in a dry site-specific approach, he embraced Critical Regionalism with a typically boisterous and humorous sensibility.

In Susanne Neuburger's short essay on Kippenberger's subway entrances in Nach Kippenberger she states that:

> In September 1993, the first metro entrance was opened at Würthle's place in Syros: a stairway leading down to a closed grid bearing the emblem of the Lord Jim Loge. It consists of the concrete stairway and railings, with the

materials and construction techniques reflecting the architectural forms of
the Greek islands.

Whereas the first METRO entrance was a concrete structure, the second, in
Dawson City, was built of wood, reflecting the environment.[70]

Neuburger's observation reveals a concern with the effects of globalization on art
and suggests that Kippenberger offered (as usual) no easy answers to this
contradictory subject. I use the word contradictory as I feel that Kippenberger both
wanted to be an internationally famous art star with a practice that could be
appreciated and recognized globally, but he also craved to be a cult figure who
would offer a critical perspective on globalization, opening up alternative
pathways for international art.

Although Kippenberger's frameworks are complex and sometimes convoluted, the
artist himself was blessed with a charismatic personality, which helped him push
into the art world A-league, despite his claim that he only ever wanted to be "the
best in the B-league". The cult of Kippenberger's persona is the subject of an
artwork by Andrea Fraser in a performance piece from 2001 called *Art Must Hang*.



fig. 37. Andrea Fraser, *Art Must Hang*, 2001, DVD 32.55 mins

In 2001 Fraser put on *Art Must Hang*, a performance in which she enlisted
the aid of video documentation to recreate an impromptu speech given by
Martin Kippenberger at the opening of an exhibition of works by Michel
Würthle, the owner of the Paris Bar in Berlin. She imitated both

Kippenberger's body language and his speech, presented in a language foreign to her. The video of this performance reveals how twentieth-century artists developed a public persona as a kind of trade-mark.[71]

Fraser showed this piece at Galerie Christian Nagel, Nagel being the gallerist who originally put on the Michael Würthle exhibition and subsequent after show dinner Fraser references. Fraser's practice, which is associated with institutional critique, takes on the history and context of the institutions in which she shows. This is of course linked to the spirit of Kippenberger's work, which Fraser appears to deeply respect.

Fraser may well have chosen Kippenberger as a reference in 2001 as this was the time when the Kippenberger trademark went stellar. Right around this time Kippenberger's work started selling for huge sums and his stock and presence within museum collections increased dramatically. It became apparent that Kippenberger's "in-jokes" had moved from marginalized to mainstream. Fraser also knew that she could use Kippenberger's persona as a way to discuss the role of social labour within the art world and critique the use of persona and celebrity as a central theme in an economic network of affirmation. At this point the act of total declaration or exposure of the conditions that characterized Kippenberger and then subsequently Fraser's work felt radical and fresh, however as with any artistic strategy there is a shelf life and Kippenberger's legacy was to lock those whom he influenced into a self-referential and somewhat human-centric value network for some time to come.

## **Michael Krebber**

In an attempt to move away from the idea of the static art object artists have historically attempted to blend their life with their artwork, moving away from the production of isolated objects by blending performance events with objects.

Michael Krebber could perhaps be labeled as one such artist. Krebber is notoriously difficult to pin down as he is somewhat of a shape shifter, an artist who it is often claimed has "no style", although this is increasingly debatable as his

works become ever more recognizable as he matures. His signature style can be identified as a deliberately undercooked form of abstraction, utilizing thin washes of paint. The style of his paintings appear incredibly knowing as they project an air of "under performance"[72] or "awkward authenticity"[73] projecting a self-consciously casual demeanor.



fig. 38. Michael Krebber, *MP-KREBM-00072,* 2013, acrylic on canvas

The ground of a typical Krebber painting appears silky smooth and seductive, his paint slips about on the surface of the work without sinking into the canvas. The stark harshness of the white ground underneath makes the thin veils of colour glow, revealing gradient tones of pigment that fool the eye into seeing space and form inside of brush marks. This stark quality can be seen as something of a zeitgeist look, as this trait appears throughout Merlin Carpenter's and Richard Aldridge's oeuvres. The "classic Krebber" look has been stylistically influential on a

younger generation of painters such as David Ostrowski and Michiel Ceulers who have taken the "I don't give a shit" under-performing attitude to new levels.



fig. 39. David Ostrowski, *F (A Thing Is A Thing In A Hole Which Its Not)*
2014, oil and oil bar on canvas



fig. 40. Michiel Ceulers, *My Name is not a Game (Old School)*, 2012, oil and spray paint on canvas, 90cm x 59cm

Perhaps there is slightly more painting going on in Krebber's works than in Ostrowski or Ceulers works? The marks that Krebber makes are often achieved with a square tipped brush, recalling the uniform and rather ironically soulless quality of Luc Tuymans' paintings from the late eighties/early nineties. A square tip brush mark seems more "filled in" somehow, and this helps to generate a detached attitude within the work. The broken paint marks across the surface of these works suggest a general deadpan knowingness.
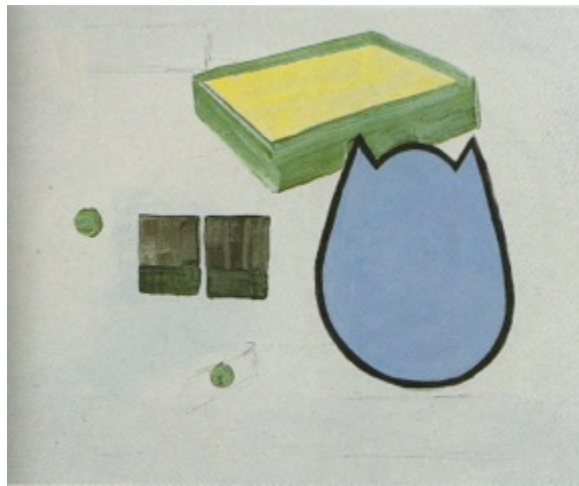


fig. 41. Luc Tuymans, *Child Abuse,* 1989, oil on canvas

Whenever Krebber's name is mentioned in anything – a catalogue essay, an article or a show text he is always framed as Kippenberger's ex-assistant. This must to some extent annoy him, as by now he really is an established artist in his own right. Perhaps the only option for Krebber to cope with his imposing art father was to be open about it and make their relationship a theme of his work? Which in itself is the kind of strategy one associates with Kippenberger himself. Rather than committing patricide Krebber has adapted and moved away from the areas that the older artist probed. As Merlin Carpenter has put it:

> At the most basic level Kippenberger was producing Marxist
> deconstructions of art's range of meaning possibilities. Krebber was not. He
> was engaged in roughly the same type of thing he is now – working inside a
> frame that contains nothing. This position is more Freudian than Marxist. It
> implies a deeper and dirtier psychology. Whilst both Kippenberger and

> Krebber offer a 'dirty reading', a dialectical German antidote to the more theoretically located work of Mike Kelley, Krebber might in the end be closer to Kelley in this regard. But in Krebber's case the repression is actualized, played out rather than described… or one could say, the repression is repressed. [74]

Here Carpenter hints at the levels of self-referentiality present in Krebber's output and this starts to become the crucial difference between the strategies of Kippenberger and Krebber. Kippenberger famously relied on discourse with his studio assistants and this often took place with the aid of alcohol, enhancing the jovial and carnivalesque nature of his work. He and his drinking entourage became a kind of gesampkunstwerk as Kippenberger instinctually knew that accelerating the erosion of private and public time would produce interesting results. Through the filters of "Büro-Kippenberger" the works always managed to signify outside of themselves – if nobody laughs then it just isn't funny! The participants were not content with staying inside a hermetic bubble of self-righteousness.

Krebber has courted a more private practice than that of Kippenberger, often contextualizing his work with the subject or theme of dandyism, which one could argue is Krebber's attempt to make painting within quotation marks. To understand why Krebber might do this it is useful to unpack dandyism a little bit. Here is a quote from a famous passage of text by Charles Baudelaire on dandyism:

> Dandyism appears especially in the transitory periods when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and when aristocracy is only partially unsettled and depreciated. Dandyism is the last splendor of heroism in decadence. Dandyism is a setting sun; like the star in its decline, it is superb, without heat and full of melancholy.[75]

The author James Lavar has also made some interesting observations about dandyism:

> Clothes are never a frivolity. They are always an expression of the
> fundamental social and economic pressures of the time.[76]

The dirt of life is something that both Kippenberger and Krebber alike were naturally attracted to. Krebber no doubt saw Kippenberger as a type of dandy, however he also felt that he wanted to outdo Kippenberger with his own brand of dandyism that moved into an increasingly self-conscious position.

Kippenberger has, since his death in 1994, become art world royalty. If there is one major thing that Krebber has learnt from the older artist it is the necessity to move with the times, to not have a fixed position or be too static, allowing him to adapt to sudden shifts in consciousness or context that every artist has to negotiate. This is perhaps increasingly important in a hyper accelerated art world that chews up and spits out artistic positions faster than ever before.

The Regency era dandy George Beau Brummell born 1778 and died 1840 is considered by many to be the very first dandy. We hear many historical accounts of Brummell's gestures that could easily double as performance art. His sartorial tone and gestures map out an abrasive critique of regal power, which in the case of Brummell were always wonderfully lightened with a lightening quick wit. One such story is highly amusing:

> One day, strolling down Bond Street with a friend Brummell came face to face with the Prince on the arm of Lord Moira. His Royal Highness stopped to talk to Brummell's friend but pointedly ignored Brummell himself. As they parted Brummell was heard to murmur to his companion: "Who's your fat friend?"[77]

The debonair cheek of Brummell is what is significant here. His attitude becomes useful as a mode of critique. Ultimately this is what Krebber is courting. The dandy is quite quintessentially English in character as the dandy's subversion is cloaked or reserved somewhat. Brummell's manner is polite and gentlemanly but bitingly critical in the same instance. Painters from the eighties onwards (some might even

say post-Warhol) began to consider the medium of painting as a form of camouflage, this manifested itself in postmodern strategies such as double coding[78], therefore the highly self-conscious gestures of Brummell the dandy chimed with Krebber the painter.

By adapting the role of the dandy Krebber self-reflexively refers to his own history as a practitioner yet subsequently attempts to free himself from any overbearing influence from Kippenberger.

The quote below by James Lavar sums up the basic premise of Brummell's abrasiveness perfectly and helps to give us some insight into why Krebber may have adopted the dandy as a mantra in relation to Kippenberger:

> Perhaps we shall best understand the importance of Brummell (a Regency era dandy) if we realize that the revolution he symbolized was essentially a conspiracy against aristocracy. Brummell saw instinctively that the day of aristocracy was over and that the day of gentility had arrived. There were to be no more peers wearing their Orders proudly on their embroidered coats, but only gentlemen in plain cloth and immaculate linen. There were to be no more be-plumed and gold-laced tricornes, but only well-brushed top hats. The top hat was indeed a symbol of the new dispensation. On this flat but exalted plateau, it seemed to say, all gentlemen are equal, even if one of them was called George, Prince of Wales, and the other is called George Brummell. Indeed there was nothing to distinguish them except that Brummell's cravat was more carefully tied and his coat better fitting.[79]

Krebber forms an affinity with the historical figure of the dandy precisely because he has to deal with his own fat friend: Kippenberger. And like Kippenberger Krebber deals with this head on by making their relationship a central theme of his work – again this is a form of total declaration. However it is not a straight-forward Oedipal slaying, as Diedrich Diederichsen states in *Radicalism as Ego Ideal: Oedipus and Narcissus,*[80] some artists are simply not suitable candidates for patricide in the same way in which Guston slayed the Abstract Expressionist painters of the New

York School. In his essay Diederichsen states that he believes that a dandified artist such as Andy Warhol isn't suitable for patricide precisely because he is so narcissistic, and my thoughts are that this must also crossover to Kippenberger as the two figures are so closely related in terms of how they used social scenes and swarm authorship to generate work. Warhol's Factory is after all very similar to Büro Kippenberger for instance. Perhaps there is also a sense that within the family of Bad Painting there is a lineage of respect paid to the legends of the genre and this makes patricide almost impossible. Certainly this is something that seems to be acknowledged by Eva Badura-Triska in *Bad Painting – Good Art.*

> As with any exhibition, the list of featured artists makes no claim to completeness, merely picking out several especially striking positions. Significantly, however, there is something akin to a (loose-knit) "family" or genealogy of Bad Painters insofar as those whose work fulfills the criteria for Bad Painting named here very often express their admiration for others whose work also fulfills these criteria. Baselitz's early enthusiasm for Picabia, Oehlen's for Jorn, and Currin's interest in Picabia, Polke, and Guston are just a few examples.[81]

Apart from patricide there are other reasons as to why dandyism is significant for Krebber. For instance in keeping with Kippenberger and critical art discourses in general Krebber plays lip service to the importance of immaterial actions over static objects. Dandyism as a strategy is in keeping with collapsing the gap between life world and market and therefore could have some critical purpose. This performativity moves Krebber's work into a form of expanded painting or performative painting, where the significant action is shifted outside of the conventional painting frame. It is understandable how dandyism could play a role in this debate as the dandy is extremely self-conscious and socially minded, being all-encompassing as a project, and perhaps most significantly there is never an off switch with dandyism, reflecting our "always on" world as described by the thinker/author Howard Rheingold[82]. One cannot help but see social networks as being of paramount importance to the dandified artist who utilizes art's social networks just like any other material or medium.

The figure of the Dandy becomes even more of an intriguing choice for Krebber when one considers who Krebber is and how he comes across in his personal appearance and mannerisms. He is essentially an understated character, quite unlike Kippenberger in this sense.

However it is a popular misconception that dandyism is about being the most flamboyantly dressed young man possible. The Macaronis of the mid eighteenth century England, were effete fashionistas that had no real relation to Beau Brummell and his refined taste. Real dandies, the ones whose lineage has derived from Beau Brummell, are actually respectfully understated. Brummell had the dignity that comes with classy understatement. As this quote by him suggests: "If people turn to look at you on the street, you are not well dressed, but either too stiff, too tight, or too fashionable."[83]

The collapse of the distinction between the artist's everyday life and business life has resulted in Krebber self-consciously referring to dandyism as a way of responding to the basic erosion of human rights that these conditions deliver.

If dandyism is as melancholic as Charles Baudelaire makes out then becoming a dandy is somewhat of a romantic yet futile gesture. The self-consciousness of dandyism has chimed with Krebber, the inauthenticity of dandyism seemed to be the only authentic position left for him to take. If free time has become work-time then living out pure theatre is a way of over-identifying with the infiltration of leisure time with that of work becomes an attempt at a critical artistic strategy for Krebber.
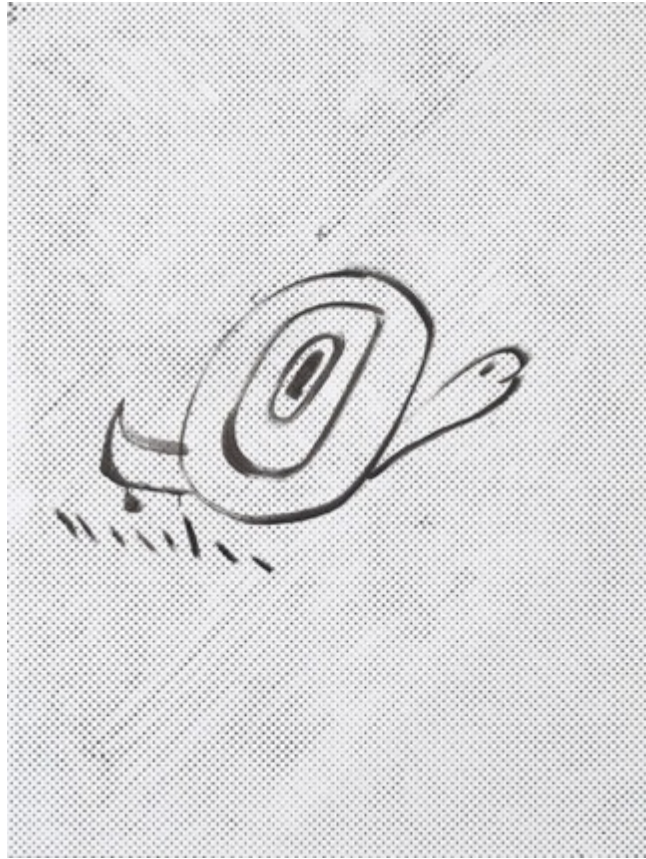
fig. 42. Michael Krebber *MK.281*, 2015, Lacquer on canvas, 200cm x 150.2cm

When one looks at Krebber's *Ground Floor,* a solo show at Green Naftali Gallery held in 2015 one can see a direct quotation to the work of Sigmar Polke. This is most apparent in the use of Polke's signature benday dots used as a ground for most of the paintings on display. Interspersed alongside these Polke tributes are examples of Krebber's "awkwardly authentic" abstract paintings used as a kind of concept break within the show.
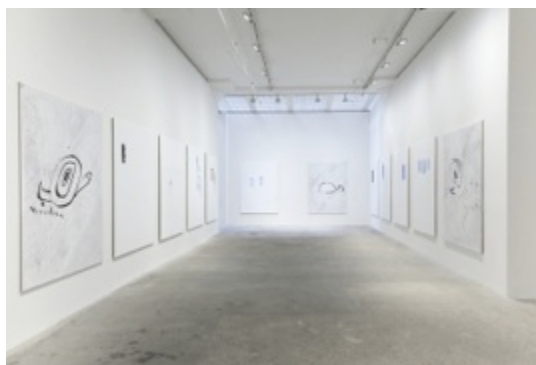


fig. 43. Michael Krebber, Installation View, *Ground Floor,* Greene Naftali, New York, 2015

The paintings in Krebber's *Ground Floor* all reference a snail painting produced by the Duchess of York, Kate Middleton in 2011 on a visit to an arts charity set up to help under-privileged children in Los Angeles. During this visit she was asked to paint a picture with the children as a photo opportunity for the gathered media. Her subsequent picture was ultra-self-conscious. The image appeared to have been work-shopped by a team of think-tank advisors to be non-offensive yet art historical – referencing Henri Matisse. Nothing was left to chance by the background staff.



fig. 44. Kate Middleton painting at the charity event photo opportunity in 2011

A celebrity like Middleton generates a similar immaterial value to that of the dandy. If the distinction between life world and market has now been eroded, then the most pure manifestation of the artist as life world actor is seen in the figure of the celebrity. Middleton is the perfect example of the modern celebrity, never putting a step out of place.

Rather than being a brilliant critique of the celebrification of art Krebber may well be exacerbating the problem. Krebber wants to make the viewer think that he is one step ahead of the game, an ultra-self-reflexive artist paralyzed by self-consciousness but somehow managing to remain critical in the spotlight. However the referencing Krebber sets up is entirely based on a network of association. In the worst possible sense he seems to trade off his relationships with the "legends" of the Cologne art world he is associated with. In many ways Krebber's work epitomizes an end point in self-aware art from this era. His practice ends up being a type of human centred naval-gazing as it ascribes too much importance to human social networks and fame structures that have formed around his persona. Krebber's work is perhaps an end point in ultra-self-conscious painting. The

internal critiques of the Cologne set are just in-jokes between the knowledge aristocrats of the day, controllers of information capital. One now has to start to view this as a cul-de-sac of self-referentiality that must be broken open again by a new generation.



fig. 45. Merlin Carpenter, *Fantasy of Cologne*, 2006, oil on canvas, 96.5cm x 144 cm

## Conclusion

In writing this thesis I have attempted to outline a revised genealogy of Bad Painting that takes into account my desire to form an imaginary peer group of Bad Painters from different time periods and geographical locations. This thesis has allowed me to respond intuitively and reflectively to the strategies and tactics employed by Bad Painters and subsequently has helped me to formulate a methodology and context from which to produce a body of Bad Paintings, of which I include images here in the appendix of this study.

In the thesis I took the time to revisit works from the Bad Painting canon in order to forge new relationships with them, ultimately problematizing their status as static reified objects within private collections of art.  It was my intention to attempt to update the genre of Bad Painting since the last time a history of Bad Painting was attempted in 2008, by discussing Bad Painting in relation to New Materialist philosophy and Network Painting. A key binding or galvanizing text was David Joselit's *Painting Beside Itself*. Joselit's text allowed me to link both of the strands of Bad Painting that I identified in the title of the thesis. These strands being: "Network Painting" and "Soft Object Painting". Rather than creating some kind of false opposition between these two categories Joselit's text taught me that

in fact these strands were linked. Joselit's text and a rudimentary understanding of New Materialism allowed me to show how these strands were related through the consequences of a flattened ontological panorama. In terms of how this research fed into my practice: rather than illustrating a rudimentary understanding of theory my intention was to simply build a contextual platform as background research.

I had for a long time wondered why I was seeing a lot of what I have called "Soft-Object-Painting" being made by painters. As we move further into the digital or virtual realms the objects in many artists' paintings get wider, fatter and softer. This is what drew me to look again at the work of Guston, Lozano, Schulze and Guy in the first place. Looking at Speculative Realism allowed me to make a creative association between this branch of philosophy and their paintings. I did not intend to suggest that this was the only way of reading what these artists were attempting to do within their practices but only one potential reading. This philosophy allowed me to show how this strange mannerism might be linked to wider cultural, social and philosophical developments.

fig. 46. Ginny Casey, Broken Vase, 2015, oil on canvas

If one looks at a lot of paintings uploaded on Instagram at present one can see that Soft-Object-Painting continues to flourish in the work of many younger artists. One could refer to Ginny Casey, Austin Lee or Avery Singer as prime examples of the continued pursuit of the soft object in contemporary painting practice.



fig. 47. Austin Lee, Kitten Study, 2017, oil on canvas

These artists draw on the same Soft Object Painters who I identify in this study in order to exaggerate a feeling for animistic materiality in a digital age. This may seem nostalgic to some but it is curiously interesting that after the dematerialized moment of postinternet art (online or virtual projects) many young artists are now re-engaging with the fictional yet material worlds of Soft-Object-Painters like Guston, Lozano, Schulze and Guy. This idea starting as a hunch but the more I have researched it the more convinced I am that there is something original in this intuitive thought experiment.

The paintings that I produced during this practice-led research also embraced intuition precisely because I identified early on that working from a watertight and thoroughly resolved theoretical position was not an option that was available to me or that worked for me. A study that is practice-led sometimes inevitably walks blindfolded into unfamiliar areas. Therefore working with blind spots is something I have grown to be familiar with. This is part of the reason why the practice of Bad Painting attracts me in the first place. It is greater than the sum of its parts, it goes

somewhere unforeseen and it allows the practitioner the license to make work that the viewer may return to over and over again to see something different each time.

The role of the Bad Painter as outsider is also significant. If I am honest I have felt like an outsider at all times during my period of study at Goldsmiths and gravitated towards Bad Painting precisely because it was the "wrong" thing to do within the hegemony of the tidied up and (ostensibly) rationally critical biennale circuit that dominates current art discourses. It is perhaps this realization that led me to the *Période vache work* of Rene Magritte. I felt that I identified with Magritte as I could see value in his contrariness. To produce something so wildly under-valued and deliberately "wrong" within his network was attractive to me. This was also the quality that I saw in the work of Martin Kippenberger. These two artists in particular gave me the confidence to appropriate the "worst" possible painting language that one could quote within the current critical expectations of contemporary art. This being the conservative British painterly look of Ivon Hitchens or Howard Hodgkin's paintings. Obviously these artists are seen within vanguard contemporary art networks as embarrassing traditional establishment artists. But like a painterly Brownfield site, what was once contaminated and derelict can then become useful as interesting things lie in areas that have not been accessed for a while. The completely desperate status of this painterly signature meant that it was perfect for me to appropriate, as it had less than zero credibility. If I was going to be labeled as a bad artist I wanted to be really bad. Like Jean Genet embracing his status as a thief, I embraced my status as a 'conservative bad artist' with open arms.

Along this journey I feel that I have learnt a lot about Bad Painting and its histories. I feel that in conclusion I have ended up forming an opinion that beforehand I did not have: that the Cologne strand of Bad Painting, born out of Martin Kippenberger's practice, has now dried up for the time being as a creative node. Both Michael Krebber and Merlin Carpenter were Kippenberger's assistants and have traded off this for years to the point where anecdotal associations with Kippenberger now provide the only fuel for their careers. I feel that I learnt a lot

from Martin Kippenberger. His choices of things to work with are always so darkly funny and articulate. In Hitchcock's *Rear Window* an amateur artist working in a back garden makes derivative Henry Moore sculptures with a holes in their stomach. Kippenberger appropriated this filmic prop for a series of sculptural works entitled "Hunger". This gesture inspired me to do something similar with David Shepherd's "Wise Old Elephant" painting. Upon seeing it in British sitcom *"Only Fools and Horses"*, I decided to appropriate it via Chinese outsourcing factories. I felt that my gesture echoed the spirit of Kippenberger's outward facing mentality – it was a choice that was bad but also interesting on a number of different levels. These "levels" touch on class, colonialism, taste, high and low statuses, the environment, ecological concerns, animal rights and so fourth without overly projecting an over-determined position within any of these themes. It was however, outward facing, and this is significant. If Bad Painting is to continue to be a relevant and an interesting pathway within art then it must work against the paranoia and the narcissism that it has at times reflected. The endless self-referentiality associated with late, mannered Cologne scene painting by the likes of Krebber and Carpenter has now reached its nadir. The knowing gestures of "total declaration" so typical of Institutional critique has started to look jaded as a strategy when it merely reflects internal problems within the art scene – "painting about painting" etc. Bad Painting needs to move forward out of these circles of association or the danger might be that it will end up becoming too hermetic. Becoming known as a genre associated with knowledge aristocrats who merely act out social hierarchies. Instinct tells me that this isn't in the spirit of Bad Painting as it becomes too elitist and private in outlook.

It will be interesting to see how Bad Painting will be re-framed in the future. We will I am sure, continue to find new associations between Bad Paintings from history, finding new ways to re-contextualize old Bad Painting to fit new theories, issues and contexts yet to be identified.

There are many contemporary artists who are currently exploring network painting. These practitioners pivot off David Joselit's 'Painting Beside Itself" text. However, something that has not been articulated within these practices is that

Bad Painting could offer something fresh within these discussions. Bad Painting is able to be more agile, articulate and less rational within these structures. It's important to be embarrassed within networks. The network painting that has formed around Joselit's writing is limited, and can be extended and re-positioned in a more affirmatively irrational spirit through Bad Painting.

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[1] Musa Meyer, Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston, Sieveking, 2016, page 204

[2] The fashion designer Michael Kors often uses this phrase on the reality TV show Project Runway

[3] The artists selected for "Bad" Painting included James Albertson (1944–2015), Joan Brown (1938–1990), Eduardo Carrillo (1937–1997), James Chatelain (b. 1947), Cply (alias William Copley) (1919–1996), Charles Garabedian (1923–2016), Robert Chambless Hendon (1936–2014), Joseph Hilton (b. 1946), Neil Jenney (b. 1945), Judith Linhares (b. 1940), P. Walter Siler (b. 1939), Earl Staley (b. 1938), Shari Urquhart (b. 1938), and William Wegman (b. 1943).

[4] Marcia Tucker, "Bad" Painting, New York, New Museum, 1978

[5] "The Problem Perspective" is a very apt title for a publication printed in 2008 on the life and work of Martin Kippenberger. Ann Goldstein and Lisa Mark, Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective, MIT Press, 2008

[6] 'Bad Painting – Good Art' was held at Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien between June 6th - October 12th 2008

[7] Eva Badura-Triska, 'Who Becomes a Bad Painter, When, Why and in What Sense?', from 'Bad Painting – Good Art', DuMont Buchverlag GmbH and Co. KG, Koln, 2008, page 48

[8] Eva Badura-Triska, 'Who Becomes a Bad Painter, When, Why and in What Sense?', from 'Bad Painting – Good Art', DuMont Buchverlag GmbH and Co. KG, Koln, 2008, page 48

[9] T J Clarke, Farewell to an Idea – Episodes from a History of Modernism, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999

[10] T J Clarke, Farewell to an Idea – Episodes from a History of Modernism, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, p 390

[11] T J Clarke, Farewell to an Idea – Episodes from a History of Modernism, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, p 389

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[14] T J Clarke, The Painting of Modern Life, (Olympia's Choice), Princeton University Press, 1999, p 80

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[16] Anonymous, 'Manet Dossier', Musée d'Orsay [n.d]. Web. http://www.musee-orsay.fr/index.php?id=851&L=1&tx_commentaire_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=18315

[17] Obscure Alternatives is an album title by the British New Romantic band Japan from 1978, the same year the show "Bad Painting" opened at the New Museum, curated by Marica Tucker

[18] All three of these essays were published in Libération and The Guardian Newspapers between January-March 1991.

[19] Bromberg, Svenja - http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anti-political-aesthetics-objects-and-worlds-beyond

[20] Speculative Realism and Object Orientated Ontology are closely linked to New Materialist ideas.

[21] Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, Harvard University Press, 1991

[22] Igor Kopytoff, The Cultural Biography of Things – Commoditization as a Process, (an essay from The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective), Cambridge University Press, 1986, page 64

[23] Igor Kopytoff, The Cultural Biography of Things – Commoditization as a Process, (an essay from The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective), Cambridge University Press, 1986, page 75

[24] Igor Kopytoff, The Cultural Biography of Things – Commoditization as a Process, (an essay from The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective), Cambridge University Press, 1986, page 65

[25] Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, Harvard University Press, 1991, page 11

[26] Musa Meyer, Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston, Sieveking, 2016, page 217

[27] http://www.nytimes.com/1970/10/25/archives/a-mandarin-pretending-to-be-a-stumblebum.html?_r=0

[28] Musa Meyer, Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston, Sieveking, 2016, page 204

[29] Musa Meyer, Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston, Sieveking, 2016, page 268

[30] Musa Meyer, Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston, Sieveking, 2016, page 204

[31] Musa Meyer, Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston, Sieveking, 2016, page 268

[32] Musa Meyer, Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston, Sieveking, 2016, page 218

[33] Graham Harman discusses the broken hammer of Heidegger in this lecture delivered to PNCA in 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W93DtzHCcnM&t=9s

[34] Graham Harman, The Road to Objects, Continent, Issue 1.3 / 2011: 171-179

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[36] Anselm Franke, Animism Volume 1, Sternberg Press, 2010, Berlin, page 15

[37] Douglas Cooper, Claude Monet: An Exhibition of Paintings at the Tate Gallery 1957, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1957, page 24

[38] David Joselit, Painting Beside Itself, October journal 130, Fall 2009

[39] Graham Harman, Art Without Relations, https://artreview.com/features/september_2014_graham_harman_relations/

[40] Martin Kippenberger quoted by David Joselit, Painting Beside Itself, October journal 130, Fall 2009

[41] Kippenberger first verbalised these ideas in an interview with Jutta Koether in 1990-91

[42] David Joselit, Painting Beside Itself, October journal 130, Fall 2009

[43] David Joselit, Painting Beside Itself, October journal 130, Fall 2009

[44] Bernard Marcadé, http://www.mattesonart.com/la-p%C3%A9riode-vache-1948.aspx

[45] Anonymous, Press release for La Periode Vache at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, November 9th, 2008. http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/38735/rene-magritte-la-periode-vache/

[46] Bernard Marcadé, http://www.mattesonart.com/la-p%C3%A9riode-vache-1948.aspx

[47] "Total disclosure" is a strategy often used within Institutional Critique art practices. The artwork of the German artist Hans Haacke (born 1936) is the most obvious example.

[48] Eva Badura-Triska, 'Who Becomes a Bad Painter, When, Why and in What Sense?', from 'Bad Painting – Good Art', DuMont Buchverlag GmbH and Co. KG, Koln, 2008, page 60

[49] A reference to a quote from Oscar Wilde (1854-1900): "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars" taken from the play *Lady Windermere's Fan* of 1892

[50] www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/martin_kippenberger.html

[51] Charles Jencks, Postmodernsim: New Classicism in Art and Architecture, John Wiley & Sons, 1987

[52] Jean Baudrillard, From Hyperreality to Disappearance – Uncollected Essays, Edinburgh University Press, 2015

[53] Diedrich Diederichsen, Lecture for the opening of Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspetive at MOCA 2008, https://vimeo.com/1870323

[54] Diedrich Diederichsen, Lecture for the opening of Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspetive at MOCA 2008, https://vimeo.com/1871037

[55] www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/martin_kippenberger.html

[56] Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, Kippenberger and Friends: Conversations on Martin Kippenberger, Von Perfall Josephine, Distanz, Berlin 2012, Page 134

[57] Lukas Baumewerd interviewed in Kippenberger and Friends – Conversations on Martin Kippenberger, Von Perfall Josephine, Distanz, Berlin 2012, Page 29

[58] Jean-Francois Lyotard, La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport Sur Le Savoir, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979

[59] Diedrich Diederichsen, Lecture for the opening of Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective at MOCA 2008, https://vimeo.com/1870323

[60] Robert Ohrt 'Touch Down in the Land of Super Heroes', Martin Kippenberger –The Last Stop West, Hatje Cantz; 01 edition 1999, page 46

[61] Warhol, Andy - http://flavorwire.com/262468/25-of-our-favorite-andy-warholisms

[62] Polari was a secret homosexual language used in London largely up until the 1960s

[63] Thieves' cant or Rogues' cant was a secret language devised around 1530, which was used by thieves, beggars and hustlers of various kinds in Great Britain and to a lesser extent in other English-speaking countries.

[64] Lucy Mckenzie, Nach Kippenberger, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 1999, page 197

[65] Lucy Mackenzie, Nach Kippenberger, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 1999, page 197

[66] Lucy Mackenzie, Nach Kippenberger Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 1999, page 197

[67] Ann Goldstein, The Problem Perspective, MIT Press, 2008, page 40

[68] Ann Goldstein, The Problem Perspective, MIT Press, 2008, page 40

[69] Kenneth Frampton, Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an architecture of resistance, in Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983

[70] Susanne Neuburger, Nach Kippenberger, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 1999, page 183

[71] http://www.museum-ludwig.de/en/exhibitions/archive/2013/andrea-fraser.html

[72] In 2016 the artist Alan Michael discussed the notion of 'under-achievement' in a lecture on his work at Brighton University organized and attended by the author

[73] 'Awkward authenticity' is a term coined by Dr Neil Mulholland in 'Awkward Relations', 2012, 'awkward authenticity' (is) a major trope of Glaswegian urban culture spanning music, fashion, art, literature and film.' Page 7 http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7415

[74] Merlin Carpenter, The Sound of Bamboo – Michael Krebber: Apothekerman, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Stadtische Galerie Wolfsburg, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, Koln, page 29

[75] Charles Baudelaire quoted on the introductory page of – Dandies, Lavar, James – Weidenfeld and Nicholson Limited, London 1968

[76] James Lavar, Dandies, Weidenfeld and Nicholson Limited, London, 1968, page 10

[77] James Lavar, Dandies, Weidenfeld and Nicholson Limited, London 1968, page 134

[78] "Double coding" is a term coined by Charles Jencks in his book *Postmodernsim: New Classicism in Art and Architecture*, John Wiley & Sons, 1987, suggesting that language depends on a double interpretation, comparable to irony.

[79] James Lavar, Dandies, Weidenfeld and Nicholson Limited, London 1968, page 134

[80] Diederich Diederichsen, Radicalism as Ego Ideal: Oedipus and Narcissus – E-Flux journal - http://www.e-flux.com/journal/radicalism-as-ego-ideal-oedipus-and-narcissus/

[81] Eva Badura-Triska, 'Who Becomes a Bad Painter, When, Why and in What Sense?', 'Bad Painting – Good Art', page 52, DuMont Buchverlag GmbH and Co. KG, Koln, 2008

[82] Howard Rheingold, Smart Mobs, Perseus Books, 2003

[83] George 'Beau' Brummell quoted on http://uk.complex.com/style/2013/01/the-25-best-fashion-quotes/beau-brummel

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# Alexander James Pollard

# Jungle

## Celine Gallery, Glasgow

April 20th – May 13th 2017

ElePhants and Water Melons, 132cm x 149cm, oil on linen, 2017

**White Horse and Blue Snail, 106.5cm x 122cm, oil on linen, 2017**

One Hundred and Ten on Fire, 150cm x 132cm, oil on linen, 2017

Baby Fox, 103cm x 124.5cm, oil on linen, 2017

Flamingos, 125 cm x 95 cm, oil on linen, 2017

Lion, 134cm x 168cm, oil on linen, 2017

Stone Heads and Wolves, 105cm x 122cm, oil on linen, 2017

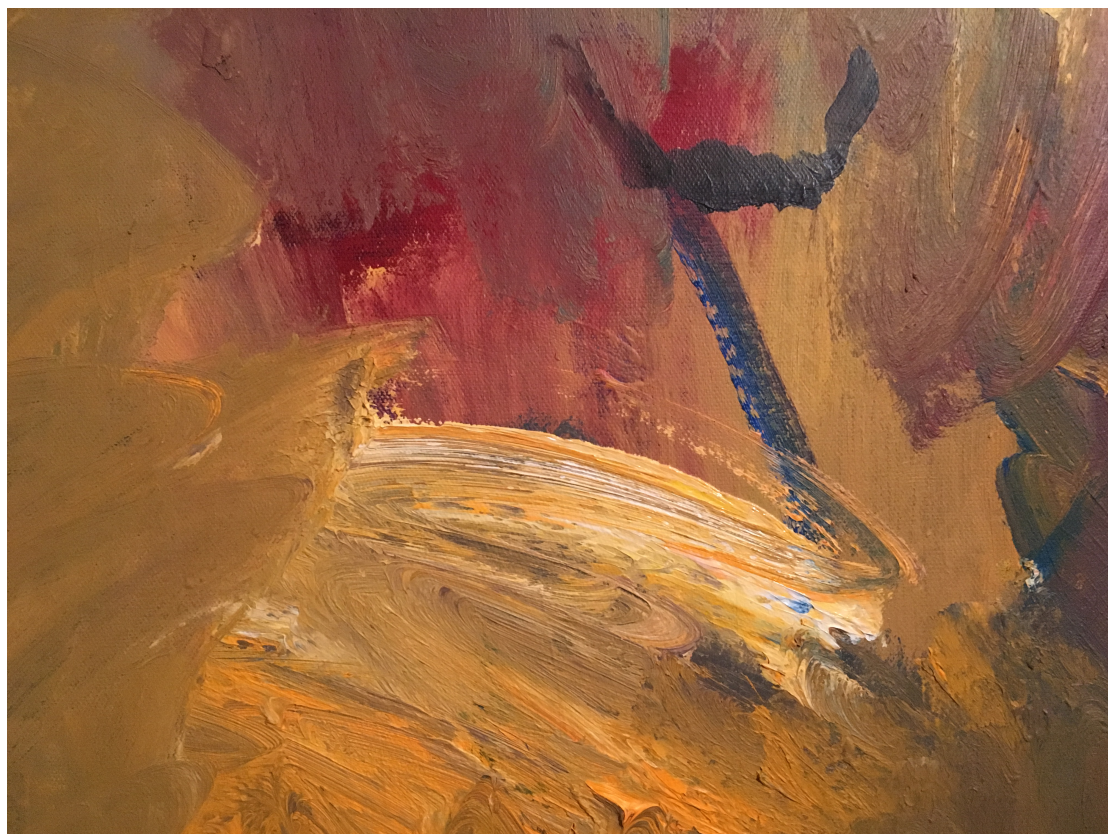Giraffe with Noughts and Crosses, 113cm x 120cm, oil on linen, 2017

**Parrot and Wolves, 107cm x 125cm, oil on linen, 2017**

# Install Shots - Celine Gallery, Glasgow

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