

THE OBJECT THE HOST THE TERRAIN

**Richard Bryant, Patrick Lundberg
and Oliver Perkins.**

Introduction

Painting is expansive. Its discourse is unhinged. We have a painting 2.0.¹ It envelopes a circuit of production. It is responsive to its own condition. It is enmeshed in productions of the self. It is an antidote to the weariness of other people's logos. It is expressive in an age of too much expression, and yet it is still reticent as well. Painting is often withdrawn if not outright exhausted. And yet painting doesn't seem to mind. Painting suffers from profusion. It goes in every direction all at once. Abstraction, figurative. It doesn't seem to matter anymore. Painting today can be jeans spliced together, or pools of poured paint dried as interchangeable portions of paint. Even lumpen objects methodically spray painted or hand drawn illustrations seem to be a form of painting. Don't we have a categorical problem? Don't we have a profusion of stylisation that escapes comprehension? John Kelsey once said that the problem today isn't what to paint but how to paint.² No wonder we have so many answers, so much willingness to manufacture yet another solution. But to what end?

1 Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdorfer and David Joselit, *Painting 2.0 Expression in the Information Age; Gesture and Spectacle, Eccentric Figuration, Social Networks* (Munich, London, New York, DelMonico Books, 2016).

2 John Kelsey, *Rich Texts* (Frankfurt: Sternberg Press, 2011); 33.

This essay isn't really concerned with paintings' crisis. In fact, it takes it as a precondition, as though the crisis exists merely to market painting, to provide it with an internalised dialogue that merely exacerbates its suffuse condition. Instead, this essay looks at *how* three abstract painters from Aotearoa paint. It looks particularly at them through their relationship to the reserve, that idea that an object always contains a withdrawn quality that cannot be approached. So yes, it is an essay that oddly talks about what abstraction represents. In the case of Patrick Lundberg, we find the perfect foil to introduce this concept of the reserve, particularly through his productive disavowal of correlationism and his breaking of the frame to produce what will seem at face value a paradoxically naïve, dispersive cohesion. This is a commonality he shares with Oliver Perkins, who similarly turns to the withdrawn qualities of an object as both a source of opacity and novelty, that is as a site in which the reserves' reticence serves as both a withdrawn object beyond reach and as a site capable of provoking inspiration. This is particularly evident in Perkins' practice, preoccupied as he is with paintings' volatility, its endless occupation, as both a form of writing and a body of work in and of itself. Providing a discursive practice through which to demonstrate the combinative power of the reserve as both life's surplus and its generative power, Lundberg and Perkins' practices provide a valuable nexus upon which to situate Richard Bryant's radical enframing, that territorial compulsion that accompanies his recent woven works. Indeed, Bryant's

embellishment of the reserve through his use of an absorbent liquid frame, opens up this dual treatment of the reserve that all three painters share, to territorial considerations that expand the possibilities of painting as a contrapuntal metamorphosis. That is, Bryant's relation to the reserve enables him to propose a form of map making that is alert to the enchainment of forms we all pass through, enlivening painting to considerations that it never dared possess.

The Object

Typically one reads Patrick Lundberg's work in relation to object-orientated-ontology, particularly in its focus on the object's reserve, that irreducible quality that obviates a form of correlationism.³ This is a particularly apt reading given Lundberg's turn to sets, those collections of small hand painted objects dispersed and pinned into the wall. These constellations, these dispersions of pin-works are always read as a collection of objects, a multitude of that reserve that doubles down on this disavowal of correlationism, this misnomer that we come into realisation through a dependent, reciprocity on another object to take on form. Granted this disavowal, Lundberg's sets, especially given their unique hand-painted surfaces, appear as savoury

³ Correlationism is the doctrine according to which "we never grasp an object 'in itself,' in isolation from its relation to the subject", See: Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. (Trans. Ray Brassier. New York: Continuum, 2008); 5.



Patrick Lundberg, No title, 2019, acrylic on wood, 16 parts (dimensions variable), each part 10–20 mm diameter

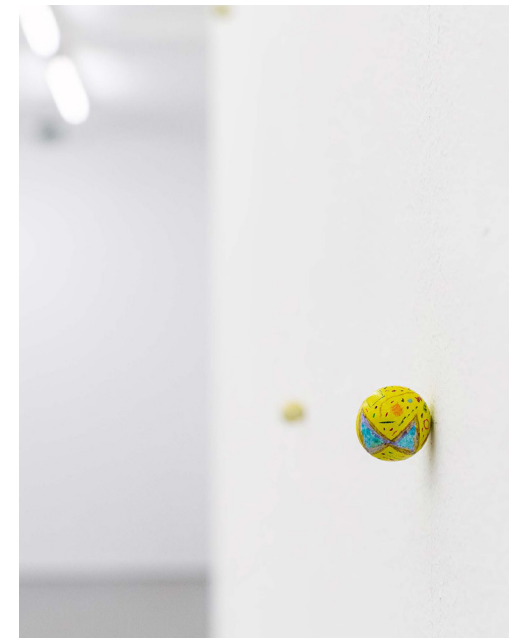
delectations that over awe correlationism's stupefying correspondence, that tendency to not only mute the relational object in a moment of narcissistic awakening, but to also aggrandise a haptic experience that valorises the human as the discerning subject. Consequently, we can look to Lundberg's sets as a collection of objects that share a correspondence that isn't overtly dependent on the other. There is of course a serial relation but each object remains aloof from the other, it holds a reserve that speaks for itself.

This phenomenological reading of Lundberg's work is quick to stress the delectation of viewership. Witness the overburdening of the senses by Alan Smith who describes Lundberg's sets as having an "extreme gravitational density" whose pulling power is "out of all proportion to their actual size".⁴ Of course we could invert Smith's reading so that it doesn't centre on his own over powering of the senses but rather the cohesion of the fragmented frame, to speak instead of the sets' own form of cohesion. Here it is useful to recall Richard Killeen's fragmented frame as an important prefigure to the dispersive cohesion Lundberg achieves. After all, Killeen's cut-outs, famously turned their arrangement over to their owner in what Francis Pound described as a "radical pictorial democracy"⁵ that only works because the set itself is so carefully apportioned. And yet as Pound also points out, Killeen's cut-outs opened up a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of meanings, none of them original, blend and clash".⁶ Of course, Pound is borrowing heavily here

4 Allan Smith, "Little by Little, Soon a Rich Cloth: Painting Everywhere and Everytime", *Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2016); 34.

5 Francis Pound, *Stories We Tell Ourselves; The Paintings of Richard Killeen*, (Auckland, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and David Bateman, 1999); 43.

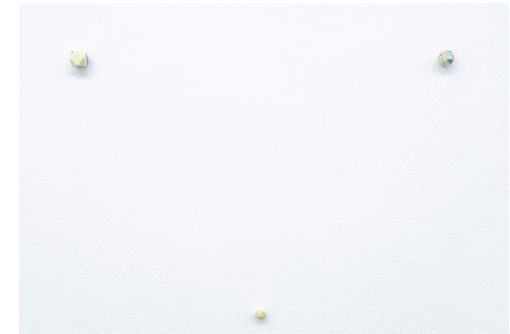
6 Pound, 43.



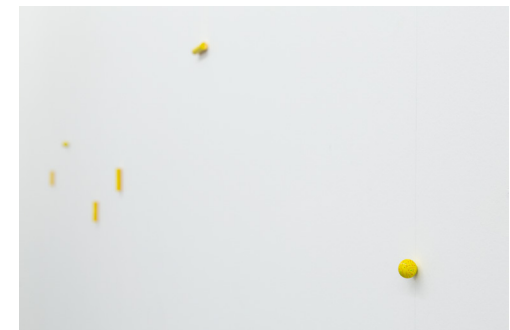
Patrick Lundberg, *No title (detail)*, 2018, acrylic and varnish on wood, 15 parts

from Roland Barthes' death of the author essay, which in Killeen's case, where the images are sampled as fluid pictorial iconography, makes perfect sense. With Lundberg though we shift from this pictorialism towards something much more abstract, much more concerned with a kind of inscription, or mark-making that is less decipherable as iconography. However, like Killeen before him, what we witness is the cohesion of the set, of the multiple. How we read this, whether as a form of serialism devoid of an author function, or as a multi-dimensional space capable of generating meaning, is of course determined not just by any one of the objects but by all the objects, both individually and collectively as a dispersed set. Which, of course, points towards the cohesion achieved by both Killeen and Lundberg, for the objects themselves multiply meaning. Their dispersion only exaggerates this cohesion, applying an internal torque that develops through our reading of one object to the next.

This logic of cohesion tends to become lost when we speak of the object's reserve, favouring instead a reading of Lundberg's pins as objects that can be savoured, as delectations whose mark marking belie a considered process orientated speculation on that reserve, that irreducible quality of an object outside circulation. This disavowal of correlationism is of course an incredible useful quality of Lundberg's practice but it isn't the only one, and indeed the sole focus on this reading begins to open it up to accusations that aren't quite warranted. For instance, we might say that this focus on the reserve may



Patrick Lundberg, No title (detail), 2019,
acrylic on wood, 16 parts (dimensions
variable), each part 10–20 mm diameter

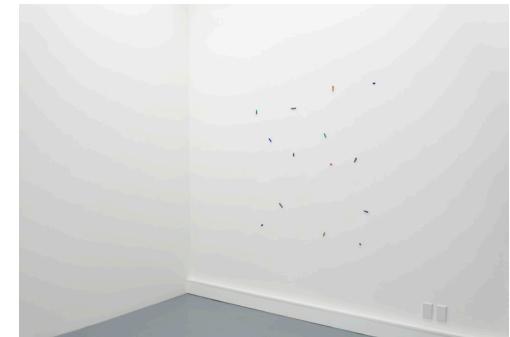


Patrick Lundberg, No title (detail), 2018,
acrylic, gold leaf and varnish on wood,
14 parts (dimensions variable)

continue to render the object inert, exacerbating the reserve's aloofness into mute reductionism. Such a reading would miss the very vitality of the reserve not just as an object outside of circulation but as a volatile object with its own independent qualities and meaning capable of provoking surprise. Worse yet, to focus solely on this aloofness also risks sustaining correlationism's worst traits, namely that common lament for the diminished role of human autonomy especially as it is besmirched by the idea of an autonomous object. Which is to say that we fear that an object may indeed circumvent us, when merely we want to say that we are all objects in circulation. Which is of course the power of Lundberg's sets. They are constellations whose cohesion accrues from the object's reserve, but also from their serial relation to one another. Here then we might point to an alternate reading of Lundberg's practice, which whilst it doesn't obviate this disavowal of correlationism, also develops it into a form of circulation, or better yet, distribution.

To start with distribution is also to start with dispersal, which is of course to start with Seth Price's updating of Barthes' death of the author to more accurately account for a mode of artistic practice that not only "depends on reproduction and distribution for its sustenance" but also "encourages contamination".⁷ Price's interest in cultural transmission though is probably better suited to an exploration of Killeen's work, particularly given his trafficking in iconographic transcription, than Lundberg's orbs, which resist

7 Seth Price, *Dispersion* (2002); np. Available here: <http://www.distributedhistory.com/Dispersion2007.comp.pdf> Accessed 11 April 2020.



Patrick Lundberg, No title, 2015, gesso, acrylic, coloured pencil and varnish on clay, 14 parts, dimensions variable

this contiguity with contemporary images or cultural locution. Indeed, it's possible to say that Lundberg's orbs annul this pictorial trafficking, in which an image's dissemination can trace a certain cultural logic, or flexibility which is keenly on display in the absorbent images Killen propagates. For the same reasons then we should neither suggest that Lundberg's distribution is tied to the sorts of networks that inform David Joselit's reading of a contemporary painting geared towards circulation.⁸ Rather, what we see in Lundberg's sets is a different kind of volatility, a distribution geared towards that gravitational impulse Allan Smith was so keenly over awed by. Indeed we might think here of the sorts of distribution at work in the motile objects of Jane Bennett who writes of a distributive agency, in which the agility of an object is compounded by their hybridity in sets or co-joined realities.⁹ This distributive agency, a shared agency is perfectly suited to Lundberg's sets, which establish a series of connections across what Bennett would call a "material configuration" that treats "materiality [as] a rubric that tends to horizontalise relations".¹⁰

The non-hierarchal actants of Bennett's distributive agency is of course geared towards an understanding of how humans operate in connection to a range of biotic and non-biotic actors. This webbing of a hybrid agency may indeed expand the possibilities of nonhuman consideration, but it is not necessarily an agenda that Lundberg's sets evoke. That said, Bennett's conception of materiality as a rubric, composed of multiple actors distributed

8 David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 125–134.

9 Jane Bennett *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2010).

10 Bennett; 112.

across a field is perfectly suited to explaining the cohesion of his pieces. Indeed, given Lundberg's use of aleatory strategies to devise these sets' compositions, we can see that their actual positional play is less important than the relationship that accrues across the set. To return to Alan Smith's phenomenological reading of these works we can see that this "extreme gravitational density" is directly attributable to this rubric of materiality, rather than their individualised appearance, particularly as we might evince this materiality as distributed throughout the set. Perhaps then we can say that no one singular pin is irreducible to the set, that it is indeed the multiplicity, divergence or consistency between pins that is the sustaining interest of these works.

Here then I think it's worth thinking about Lundberg's sets in relation to Herman Hesse's novel, *The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)*.¹¹ Centring on a game that acts as a synthesis of all knowledge through abstract forms, Hesse's glass bead game provides a remarkable coherent way of thinking about the rubric of materiality that Lundberg's sets provoke. Linking connections across disparate disciplines, language, arts, science, the glass bead game seeks to combine all knowledge as a quantifiable mass. In fact, the game is the centre piece of a society and culture that privileges a rational mindset, a world in which dialogue is finally free of those externalities that lead to competition and war, enabling a generations long period of peace of prosperity. Hesse's novel focuses on the source of this speculative society, the enclave of glass

¹¹ Herman Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)* (Trans. Richard And Clara Winston, London: Vintage Books, 2000).



Patrick Lundberg, No title, 2018, acrylic, gold leaf and varnish on wood, 14 parts (dimensions variable)

bead players who continue to expand the game, once played with beads but having long since moved on to other more elaborate abstractions all still aimed at the ultimate synthesis of all knowledge. However, Hesse's protagonist the Majister Ludi, the game master, comes to the gradual realisation that such synthesis would ultimately not just nullify the very game itself but also isolate the players from the very joy of the world. As Hesse writes, "one who had experienced the ultimate meaning of the Game... would no longer dwell in the world of multiplicity and would no longer be able to delight in invention, construction, and combination".¹² In other words, the Majister Ludi becomes disillusioned with the reductionist approach, recognising that the world doesn't just resist reduction, but that it is, to use a Latourian term, irreducible.¹³ That is, that knowledge itself doesn't exist to be synthesised for its own sake, but to function as a kind of multiplier, an agent of change. We can see a clear example of this logic in Lundberg's sets where that rubric of materiality resists quantification, it is ever shifting, so that the correspondence of the spheres within a set always resists reduction to its position within a set. Obviously then, what we get with Lundberg is an ever-expanding potentiality, a materialism that is not just mobile but highly articulate. Which is to say we might finally talk of Lundberg's work as being concerned with distribution.

Lundberg's sets are works of correspondence. But they are still a tableaux of objects. They are still very much objects enmeshed in patterns, or rubrics.

¹² Hesse; *III*.

¹³ Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).



Patrick Lundberg, No title, 2015, gesso, acrylic, coloured pencil and varnish on clay, 14 parts, dimensions variable

They share a kind of affinity and yet they are all still singular objects that refuse this reduction to being simply one part of a cohesive whole. Indeed, we might say they are embroiled in a materiality that is shared, that is distributed, but that this cohesion is paradoxically dispersive, that they connect through division, through dispersal. And yet, as the typical non-correlational reading of Lundberg's sets invoke, these individual objects hold a reserve, they are objects that are opaque and fully capable of provoking surprise. We can see similar conceits involved in earlier works of Lundberg's in which he inscribed onto various found surfaces, whether used kitchen cupboards, gallery walls, or remnant pieces of wood. What is important here, is that it begins with an object that is already in circulation, it is already host to an array of marks that Lundberg could be thought to be simply augmenting. This use of the vernacular, or incidental mark, could be thought of as host body, an expansive field, which bolsters a kind of dispersed cohesion for the mark marking Lundberg will productively overwrite onto these surfaces. This is certainly how Jan Bryant frames these works suggesting they highlight Lundberg's preference to occupy "the middle ground [as] a radical position, not simply [as] a neutral place from which to negotiate the fault lines of an argument" but because it is "closer to the rough edges of [a] perforation that might agitate ways of thinking/making".¹⁴ Bryant's perforation is in fact that articulated facet of an object's reserve, its quality that resists reduction and yet allows it to partake

14 Jan Bryant, "Snow Falls on Mountains without Wind", PX/ Thoughts on Painting (Auckland: Clouds, AUT, 2011); 102–103.



Patrick Lundberg, No title, 2014, incised found paint on board, 42 x 42 x 1.7cm

in combinations that continue to surprise. We can of course extrapolate this reading onto Lundberg's more recent sets, recognising in his earlier works the foundation through which the arbitrary spatial arrangements of the latter pin works will form a similar kind of encounter, whereby the cohesion of the piece relies entirely on this middle-ground as a site combinatory capability.

It's clear then that Lundberg's practice has a marked concern for what Cary Wolfe calls the "material promise" of the "outside of a diagram".¹⁵ At its simplest we can see that any diagram is also a kind of circumference, a fencing in. It is a demarcation that by its very nature creates a zone of exclusion and inclusion. This is of course to stretch our description of a diagram into a kind of border, but what else might a diagram insist upon, especially once we start to attend to what a diagram inevitably leaves outside. There is then in any diagram a zone of indiscernibility, a mediation that as Wolfe suggests is prime for exploration. In many ways we can think of this as being internalised in Lundberg's practice something ably highlighted by the exhibition *On Emptiness* (Fold Gallery, 2019), which paired Lundberg's sets with string and dowel works by Oliver Perkins that similarly emphasised an empty core. Structured around Renaud Barbaras' critique of the idea of nothingness as the absence of being, a "crude distinction between positive being and negative nothingness",¹⁶ *On Emptiness* brought together two bodies of work that constantly played on the negative space of the gallery wall

¹⁵ Cary Wolfe actually says 'the materialist promise of Deleuze and Foucault's work is that it foregrounds the outside of any social practice or diagram'. See, *Critical Environments: Postmodern Theory and The Pragmatics of the "Outside"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); 150.

¹⁶ See the Fold Gallery's press release: <http://www.foldgallery.com/exhibition/on-emptiness-3/> accessed 11 April 2020.



Oliver Perkins (left), *Untitled*, 2019, ink, rabbit skin glue, canvas, dowel, rope and staples, 189 x 70 x 3.5 cm, and Patrick Lundberg (right), *No title (detail)*, 2019, acrylic on wood, 16 parts (dimensions variable), each part 10–20 mm diameter

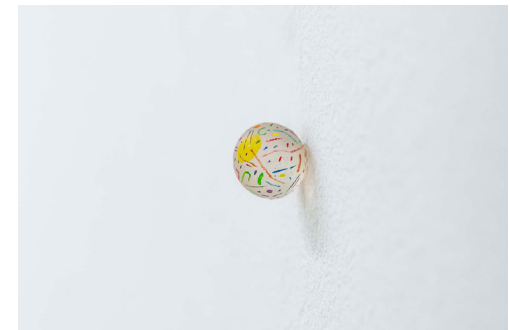
and the empathic objects the artists both put into circulation. Whether it was Lundberg's painted orbs, or Perkins' striated rods, both artists' objects blur with and announce themselves against this host body, expanding the possibilities of a phenomenological perception that has only ever allowed nothingness to be the negation of everything, the nullity of an absolute void.

This idea that the negative space of Lundberg's sets is an internal element of the works further accentuates Bryant's suggestion that Lundberg finds in the middle ground a radical perforation conducive to the production of new work. In many ways we can think of this perforation as an internal mechanism within Lundberg's practice, something that propels the dispersive cohesion of his sets. With this in mind it is worth exploring the mechanics of this perforation in the rather different practice of Robert Hood, particularly through a work like, *The Wrecked Kilometre* (2009), a collection of broken road side markers that mimicking Walter De Maria's *Broken Kilometre* (1979), internalises the very real error of a motor vehicle's erratic navigation as an expansive subject precisely because it turns in on itself. Indeed Hood's overlay of De Maria's *Broken Kilometre*, as "Wrecked Kilometre" only further highlights how the types of perforation Lundberg' internalises can be a productive force, especially when we see that Hood's "Wrecked Kilometre" is no longer about the specificity of any one particular error, as it is the likelihood of error in any model, making the accidental seem entirely predictable. Which is to say

that this model internalises its faults, making it as much a componentry as any other mechanism. This internal error is then that material promise, that outside of a diagram that we similarly see in Lundberg's sets. In fact, to be clear this promise is not the gravitational order of the negative space through which the objects set themselves apart, but rather the productive paradigm, this gradation of absence warrants. It is, to return to the examples from *On Emptiness*, no longer so simply the negation of nothingness but its embellishment, its zone of indiscernibility in which novelty might appear. As mentioned, Lundberg's sets are primed to take advantage of this space, specifically because they are crafted with an eye towards articulation. They are objects whose reserve isn't just a form of obfuscation, but the very source of their novelty.

Keenly then, Lundberg's sets embrace what Graham Harman calls the "surprise and opacity" of an object.¹⁷ Its ability both to withdraw from us and to continue to embark on new endeavours. We can see this in Lundberg's use of the set to both isolate and sustain links between these objects, whether they're spherical pins, cuboid shapes or multivalent objects. Take the spheres in *On Emptiness*. Were these not painted on translucent epoxy, so that their marks took on a vivacity that allowed the works to translate that emptiness with more ambivalence than ever. Conversely, look again at the gold leaf works from Lundberg's show, *The Science of Light* (Robert Heald, 2019), where the spheres were over-emphasised objects, the gold leaf demarcating their emphatic

¹⁷ Graham Harman, *Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2016); 19.



Patrick Lundberg, No title (detail), 2017, acrylic on resin, 21 parts (dimensions variable), each part 15 mm diameter



Patrick Lundberg, No title (detail), 2018, acrylic, gold leaf and varnish on wood, 14 parts (dimensions variable)

occupation so much more stridently. Both exhibition strategies were enabled by that productive perforation, the radical democracy Lundberg inherits from Killeen's fractured frame, and yet, these pins continue to inspire new readings, new limits to their reductive bias as simple objects. In this way we can talk of Lundberg's work being characterised by motility, Jane Bennett's word for the conative drive of proto-bodies who have a tendency to form agentic assemblages.¹⁸ Such logic would certainly explain the productive output of these works, not just to self-multiply as a series that seems incapable of being exhausted but as objects in their own right, motile agents of a paradoxical dispersion that is as cohesive as it is extensible. As explained, this dual quality is a direct attribute of how Lundberg treats the object, not just as something that is aloof from us, but equally as articulate in the right circumstances.

We can explore the motile quality of Lundberg's set pieces in relation to Kate Newby's pocket works her collection of replica pocket debris (can-tabs, bottle caps, matchsticks, drawing pin's tops, miscellany pebbles). Cast in silver, these replicas are a corollary to her fabricated puddle works, both of which consolidate a vernacular idiom from these provisional, even, marginal phenomenon, elevating these overlooked, transient, moments into something vastly more specific. To borrow Jane Bennett's terminology Newby is casting these "contingent tableaux" as representational objects,¹⁹ mementos of the motility of everyday objects to shift through landscapes with an agency that no

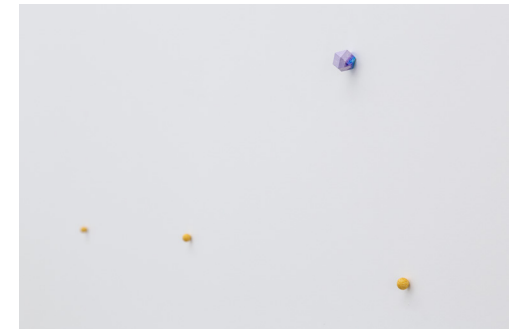
¹⁸ Bennett, 53.

¹⁹ Bennett, 5.

longer needs to be accounted for in terms of intentionality. Effectively Newby's pocket works are an attentive proposition, objects that point to the transient and dispersive effects of the miscellany of everyday life. Clearly then this is a very different motility to what Lundberg achieves with his sets, works that are not so fixated on the everyday. As Lundberg has previously mentioned the everyday is a problematic form of address which tends to totalise the multiplicity of vernaculars and idioms that comprise such an extensible category.²⁰ With this in mind it's better to turn to Lundberg's work as alert to this multiplicity, not as a totalisable form but as a combinatory excess. To return to the example of the glass bead game, it is better to think of Lundberg's use of motility as the expressive function of a world that delights in "invention, construction, and combination". Such sentiment would certainly explain the ever-expanding notation of Lundberg's spheres. These are after all objects that don't just multiply but shift shape, sometimes cubic, sometimes smooth, often elongated, opaque or translucent. This listing is of course endless, it is that novelty, that element of surprise that Lundberg's motile objects actively revel in.

This inexhaustible character of the motile object is clearly what Lundberg's sets celebrate. His embrace of an internalised perforation within his practice, not just the absence of form his fractured frame requires, but the productive problem solving his attention to the outside of a diagram warrants, allows this material promise to manifest itself in a unique phenomenology that prioritises

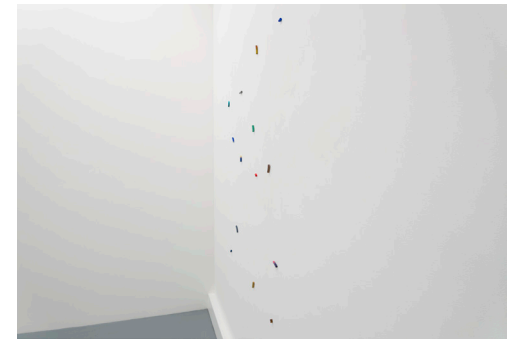
²⁰ See, Harold Grievess, Patrick Lundberg and Oliver Perkins, "Accordion Folds" *The John Dory Report* 34 (2011); np.



Patrick Lundberg, No title, 2018, acrylic and varnish on wood, 16 parts, dimensions variable

both an object's reserve and its unhindered ability to articulate itself, for itself. In this way we can see how Lundberg's practice backs onto Harman's suggestion that reality is itself a kind of surplus, not a passive back drop that exists for the world to announce itself upon, but an extensive surfeit which agglomerates actions of every scale.²¹ It's important to stress here just how vast Harman thinks of this scale in both macro and micro terms, but it is also equally important to realise just how expansive the concept is as well. Given this expansive realism it's obvious why Harman will stress an object beyond intentionality, so that what we are given is only ever the aloofness we can't fathom, a reserve that suffuses the surfeit of a realism best described as a surplus. This alone should explain the muteness of Lundberg's work, something we can see in the diminutive scale of his practice, not as a form of humbleness but as a proposition that is attentive to this vast scale. In fact, we might think of his practice as a kind of adjudication, an indirect measuring of the extensibility of life, particularly as it concerns this aloofness. Indeed, we might think of Lundberg's practice as highlighting a phenomenological experience that is not just enduring, but immersed in the productive capacity of this diagram, one that exemplifies the reserve as the combinatory source of life's endless multiplicity.

²¹ See Harman, 16–20.



Patrick Lundberg, No title, 2015, gesso, acrylic, coloured pencil and varnish on clay, 14 parts, dimensions variable

The Host

The paradoxical dispersion Lundberg's sets promote, clearly establishes a mode of painting that relishes an extensibility that is both aloof and articulate. As suggested, this oxymoronic condition is enabled by Lundberg's treatment of an objects' aloofness, allowing this opacity to be a productive paradigm. Internalised within his work as a generative perforation, this treatment of the object's reserve as a source of novelty enables Lundberg to develop a practice that opens onto a phenomenological experience that embraces this aloofness as a combinatory source. This turn towards reticence is a characteristic Lundberg shares with a number of artists, but I want to explore it here more fully in relation to the work of Oliver Perkins. In the previous discussion of the show *On Emptiness*, we have already mentioned their shared interest in an internalised negative space. What interests me here though is not this internalised absence, but rather Perkins' own use of the reserve as a productive perforation, one literalised in his host paintings, whereby he inserts one painting inside another. This is best exemplified by his show *Bleeding Edge* (Hopkinson Mossman, 2018) where he showed a number of these paintings, all of which allowed a monochrome to host another painting made from his studio's surplus of remnant canvas.



Oliver Perkins, *Bleeding Edge*, 2018, installation
view: Hopkinson Mossman, Wellington

These inserted monochromes are made through an application of pigmented rabbit skin glue so that as these dry, the apertures Perkins slashes into these canvases, grows increasingly taut so that he might insert another painting into the fold, into the torn canvas. It's important to realise that this isn't just a repetition of Luciano Fontana's aggressive act which begs the frisson of modernity's masochistic violence, but rather a more subtle addition, of a shifting in, of a painting taking up residence in another. This is less an act of destruction the more it is a sort of symbiotic twinning, a relation of abuse recognised in its archaic form as what Michel Serres points out is simply making use of what we are near too.²² Which is to say these paintings are parasitic. One is the body. The other an interjection. They are a componentry of parts whose assignations swap readily. After all, it is equally important to realise that the monochromes are the newer of the paintings and that these tears envelop an older remnant taken up from the canvas surplus of the artists' studio. With such chronology, boundaries blur. Where does the host start and the parasite begin? And why the host and not the hostage? Who is the parasite in this equation, the painting that is inserted, or the other painting that holds, that claims the other? Or is it more maternal, like the little joey tucked into the marsupial's pouch? Who can forget Serres' commentary on the infant who suckles at the breast? Who would call the child a parasite, one that interrupts?

22 Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Trans. Lawrence Schehr, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); 7.



Oliver Perkins, *Untitled*, 2018, acrylic, rabbit skin glue, ink, canvas, pine stretchers and staples, 800 x 650 mm

From the outset Perkins' insert paintings contain a play of components oscillating about position. One is the remnant, the other newly forged. One hosts. One claims. One takes up a position. One inserts itself. Perhaps then the host is too much of a contested term. Better then to look to the newer painting, the monochromes in terms of hospitality. Does it not take the older, remnant painting in, like a waiter would guide the guest to their table. Better yet, could we not point to the monochrome's neutral comportment, its fuzzy welcoming tones, as a sign of cordiality, as a hospitality that makes it available to others. Indeed, could we not say that like the hotel room the monochrome's palette is intentionally wiped clean, it erases any element of surprise and in doing so it makes itself open. It takes up the role of host by becoming the environment that can accommodate us.

Could we not though be more macabre, more insidious, more vindictive in our description of these paintings? Perhaps this hosting is really like Serres' snake who is found frozen and taken in, hosted in front of the fire to thaw out, to achieve restitution, only to wake, indignant, twice over, not only for having been moved, being shifted against one's will, but chastised for not being grateful enough, for not evincing a certain gratitude towards the host.²³ Perhaps this is how we might account for the kind of fervour that is so evident in Perkins' insert paintings. After all, this series multiplies. There are so many paintings that play host to another. Is this not evidence of a kind of archive fever, of a settling

23 Serres, 22–23.



Oliver Perkins, *Untitled*, 2017/2018, acrylic, rabbit skin glue, ink, canvas, pine stretchers and staples, 650 x 600 mm

of scores, of an amendment being tabled, being filed away, of so many remnants and fragments, of older paintings being finally sorted away. This accounting, this storing of the studio's remnants, now carefully partitioned, is indeed put forward as a proposition. But is there not also a certain chagrin of false gratitude, in the sense that they too have been imposed upon, guided unwittingly into a final resting place.

Clearly then there is a contraction at work. The fragment is decisively apportioned, resolutely taken out of circulation. These remnants are transposed, rent asunder from their own field. They will no longer accumulate so many marks, so many accidental scuffs, those indentations of wear, of playing host themselves to the thousand operations of the studio. And yet this interjection, this inserted painting is suffused with a range of arbitrary marks, in which the intention of the craftsman is marginalised so that what we have is neither a found text, nor the careful composition of a type of abstraction we would reduce to its symbolic field. Indeed, think how easily we proclaim these arbitrary marks, where intent is so marginalised simply because they are no longer authored by any one composer, as multi-various compositions that are suffused with an avarice we cannot name. Are these remnants that Perkins inserts into the monochrome not also hosts themselves? Do they not take advantage of a position, just as the author, who ultimately scoops them up, only to proportion them, to fix them, would also be? Could we not say that they are all both host *and* parasite?



Oliver Perkins, Untitled, 2015/2018, acrylic, rabbit skin glue, ink, canvas, pine stretchers and staples, 650 x 500 mm

Clearly then we have a shifting position. The monochrome hosts, it is like a waiter that takes in the older painting. It makes itself available. And yet it plays host to the smelly remnant from the studio floor. A painting that has annoyingly, played host as well. That has accumulated so many incidental marks. Does this parasite also accrue its own unintended status as host. How can we circle around this format so endlessly without getting to the point? That the host isn't static. That the host isn't a demarcated position we take up at will. Indeed, the host interchanges, like the child who suckles, who later nurtures, who later takes according to her needs. Always the host shifts according to their position. One moment you are the parasite, the next the hostage, and later perhaps the host. Always turning, always changing. Like this remnant, this offcut from the studio, which once escaped its consolidation as a position, only to be inserted finally into a symbiotic painting that makes the logic clear. Could we not have a better insinuation of contemporary painting's crisis than Perkins' interjection, this hosting of one parasite by another. Do we not have a constant tension, oscillating between its state of purification, and its feasible motility? Did we not see how Lundberg could use this motility to create an extensible form of painting that privileges a phenomenological experience that turns to the reserve as both a source of reticence and articulation?

Perkins' use of the monochrome as hospitable slate echoes Lundberg's handling of the motile object. In fact, Perkins may even take this methodology



Oliver Perkins, *Untitled*, 2018, acrylic, rabbit skin glue, ink, canvas, pine stretchers and staples, 650 x 550 mm

a step further by internalising the outside of the diagram literally by enfolding the motile object within a host body. Surely this overlap between the two practices points to the productive anomaly such a contradiction inspires. Moreover, Perkins use of this reserve allows him to develop a form of painting in which the very arbitration of abstraction intercedes with its sign, not its semiotic, not its figurative device, but its sign of life. This liquidity could indeed be mistaken for the “vitalistic fantasy” Isabella Crow maligns contemporary painting with,²⁴ but its more beneficial to think about how this motility shares its causality with an artist’s handling of the reserve. As we have seen, Lundberg’s diminutive strategy unleashes this motility through his fractured frame and his notation of these objects as sets that are highly individualised and collective. Likewise, Perkins, especially with these monochromatic host works, similarly privileges the reserve as a foundational combinatory site, a reserve that is at once opaque and yet a source of excess. Such handling of the novelty and opacity of the reserve enables both artists to create work that is alert to the very volatility of life. Theirs is a practice charted by pure causality, that symptom of life’s contiguity which sweeps us all along. No wonder both artists produce artwork that is no longer susceptible to the sheer reductionism of a symbolism that would endorse a clean monad, that independent unit of control and mastery. This is of course much more recognisable in Perkins’ practice where we witness both the host and the abuser in total enthrallment

²⁴ Graw’s reading of a vitalistic fantasy epitomises the worst of a reductive reading of an objects’ reserve, fearing the autonomy of an object to outstrip the human, rather than recognising that we are all objects together. See, Isabella Graw, *The Love of Painting, Genealogy of a Success Medium* (Trans. Brian Hanrahan, Gerrit Jackson, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018).



Oliver Perkins, *Untitled*, 2018, pre-primed canvas, rabbit skin glue, ink, canvas, pine stretchers and staples, 750 x 700 mm

of the other, both interchangeable, both indecipherable. All of which amounts to a kind of equation without end, of a kind of arrow which propels the viewer. It's not simply a trick of optics, but a matter of sensibility. Not just a final condition, but a kind of affinity that foments a vitality of its own kind.

It may indeed be possible to read Perkins' embrace of motility as an antecedent to what Serres calls soft pollution, that coercive manipulative noise that surrounds us.²⁵ Think how easily the world is demarcated by visual, oral, and written semiotics that staunch the flow of life's contiguity so that what surrounds us is the fragmentary bombastic of a refrain that would fix us before a screen. This divisive marshalling aims to staunch the very motility of life, suffusing us with refrains that lean heavily into what Felix Guattari calls mass-serialisation, that condition in which one uniform is so alike another.²⁶ Given this undercutting of choice it should be no surprise that the arbitrary mark has so much sway in contemporary painting. Nor, that we lurk under the sign of precarity, labouring under the entirely predictable conditions of a facile curation or a pivotal entrepreneurship. All presume a kind of resilience, if not adaption to this unconditional pollution which marshals the asymmetrical use value of abuse, of one being used by those who are near. Under such pressure is it still a surprise that painting would turn to a kind of weariness, to a wry reckoning of soft pollutions' symbolism, not attacking it forth-rightly but gentle probing, assuming the very conditions

25 Michel Serres, *Malfeasance: Appropriation Through Pollution* (Trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011).

26 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (Trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, London: Bloomsbury 2014); 18.

of a weakened subject, one preyed upon. Surely, we see this in Perkins' practice, especially in these monochrome works in which we find this embrace of reticence bear fruit by turning in on itself. Does the monochrome not envelop the remnant precisely because they are so interchangeable? Does the host not become the parasite, the parasite the host?

Of course, such strategies amount to a reclamation of the stream of symbolism that Serres' soft pollution excretes. To do this painting needs to adopt a conditional materiality, it needs a guise in order to interject into soft pollutions' mass-serialisation. We can clearly see such tactics in the work of Merlin Carpenter, particularly his recent series of portraits that offer up a bleak second order reflection on the age of celebrity.²⁷ And yet, as Carpenter himself makes clear, such tactics often risk outright co-option something also evident in the accelerated reading of David Joselit's essay "Painting beside itself" which charts the reflexive condition of a painting alert to its own social mobility.²⁸ Under such conditions painting becomes at best a social object that courses through exchanges, a blank screen offering respite amongst others. Nothing seems to exemplify this more than Jef Geys' bubble paintings, those packaged works that traverse from one exhibition to another, slowly accumulating their own sociality, their own legible movement. Closer to home we might see in Julian Daspher's exhibition curriculum vitae another similar adaption to this soft pollution, as a means through which to navigate the redundancy of paint-

²⁷ See Carpenter's interview with Isabelle Graw in *The Love Of Painting*; 182–199.

²⁸ *Op Cit.*

ing's figurative symbolism in an age of too many images. Of course, such tactics also explain why we suffer from a kind of muting of painting, a predilection less for what a painting is, the more it is for *how* a painting is made. Which justifies why practitioners like Wade Guyton and Josh Smith thrive, precisely because they expose the very condition of *how* their paintings are made. In this ilk Perkins' hosted paintings are no different. They display so evidently exactly where and how they come into being, ingenious even in their presumption to unite two wholly othered paintings, to be so disjunctive in an age in which contiguous surfaces so casually ease our passage.

It's worth here looking at other aspects of Perkins' practice, particularly at his string and dowel works, to see the ways in which he augments the indecisiveness of these hosted paintings. Take for instance the small string and rod work he showed in *Bleeding Edge*. Hung at the gallery's entrance, this work, painted a greyish hue also blurred entirely into the wall. This modesty was in fact the perfect introductory foil for the more bombastic monochrome works around the corner, but it was not just this contrast that mattered. After all, was not the shape of the work itself a kind of ladder, a utilitarian semiotic we might be tempted to turn into a kind of introductory symbol. Or perhaps it's better to think of this work as a kind of mechanism, less a sign than the thing itself. Indeed, this string and dowel work is a very specific diagram of things that join. Clearly there is a lucid self-explanatory logic to the work. It is, to put



Oliver Perkins, *Untitled*, 2017, acrylic, cord, dowel and staples, 435 x 320 mm

it simply, a kind of abacus, focused less on the ability to solve a problem the more it presents the very means through which a problem might be paced. In this sense we might think of this abacus as a kind of host to how thought works. We can project not only onto it but through it. Does it not invoke a mesmerising lucid structure of addition, its propensity to suggest yet another ladder, yet another loop of string, as so many contiguous bodies could. Which is not to point to a hybrid object but to point to a body that collapses distinctions of near-and-far, to an object that is contiguous with a stream of bodies. Which is to say it is an object that is adaptive and adjudicative. We can see such logic return in another of Perkins' string and dowel works, this time the much larger one he makes for *On Emptiness*, whose black demarcations, those small flecks on the white horizontal rods signal a kind of hatching, a methodical numbering that is as independent as it is continuous. Indeed, could we not point to these black marks as a form of serialisation that actively literalises the very logic of the apparatus, highlighting its extremely articulate surfaces that are ready to play host precisely because it is a kind of platform.

This literal aspect of Perkins' practice mirrors Lundberg's use of the sphere as an object of dispersal. Both practices mine these associative qualities precisely because it imbricates a phenomenological reading of the work that occurs in situ. With Perkins' abacus style works we can see this logic quite readily but it is also there in his combinatory paintings, those paintings composed from



Oliver Perkins, *Untitled*, 2019, ink, rabbit skin glue, canvas, dowel, rope and staples, 1890 x 700 x 35 cm

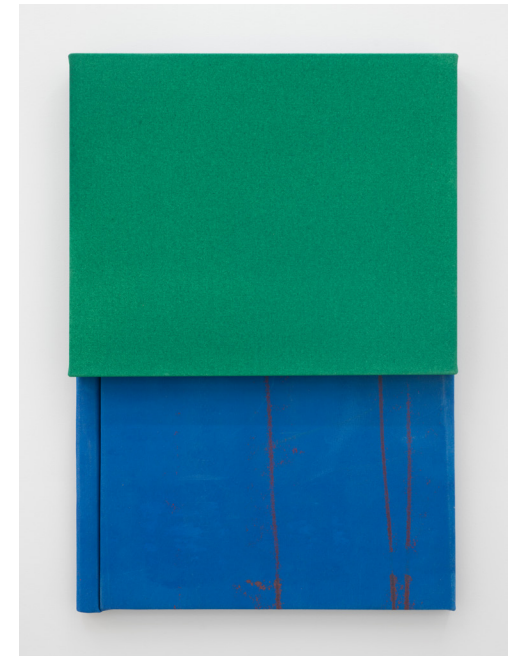
studio fragments, so that you get paintings that are more like compilations or complications of other paintings. These paintings all actively revel in the process of revealing and concealing, they veil certain conditions, only to open up other incidental marks for discovery. In fact, it may be better to think of these paintings as intermediary objects, precisely because they privilege folds, absences, and adjustments. They are after all, always adjudications on a theme, not just the arbitrary mark, but the arbitrary mark across an array of surfaces, both hosted on it and yet performative of the platform. Surely such a strategy echoes that formalisation of the reserve that Lundberg's orbs make plain. Both practices embellish a practice that is both host and prey. Both focus on a vitality that is embedded in the reticence of an object's reserve. Do they not both internalise these conditions, turning to a productive perforation to unleash practices that are marked by a volatility that isn't just reflexive but without end. This volatility is of course the dominant characteristic of Perkins' practice. It is after all, the trait in which his painting is recognised, but it serves a more literal convention as well. For much like his rope and dowel works aren't just a symbol for how thought works but a clear demonstration of it, we might similarly say that his handling of paintings' volatility isn't merely symbolic but the thing-in-itself. Which is to say that in Perkins' hands this volatility is so fecund with its own logic that what we evince isn't the tablature of paintings' sign but instead its procreational idiom.



Oliver Perkins, I:P:024.12, 2012, ink, rabbit skin glue, canvas, staples, 305 x 210 mm

The Terrain

In undertaking a painting that is so notarised by its own making, Perkins expounds a condition of the reserve that Lundberg's sets lay prone. In fact, if we can say that Lundberg's sets elaborate a paradoxical, cohesive dispersion, we can also see how Perkins turns to this site as the source of his procreational idiom, that mobility without end. And yet as discussed Perkins' oscillation over the abuse of the parasite also shows that his works are also grimly deterministic. They always retain something of their origin. This is particularly evident in his combinatory paintings, those that recycle the remnant with utmost care, never simply overwriting but always adjudicating, reflexively speculating on not just where they are going but where they have been. In this way we can think of Perkins' practice as being involved with the withdrawn element of painting itself. Indeed, if Perkins' paintings highlight a procreational idiom it is precisely because it is so alert to a mode of writing that always loses something of itself in expression. We can see this in the traces and ghostings that populate Perkins' paintings, just as we sense it in the correlation of Lundberg's sets which always refuse totalisation. This withdrawn quality is what propels Perkins' work, and it is what attunes him to that combinatory source of the reserve as a space not just of novelty but also continuity. We see an entirely similar strategy in



Oliver Perkins, *Untitled*, 2018, acrylic, rabbit skin glue, ink, canvas, dowel and pine stretchers, 620 x 430 mm

the work of Richard Bryant, and yet just as Perkins extends upon Lundberg's treatment of an objects' motility, Bryant extends again the fertile possibilities of this type of writing, of this articulation or dispersal of paintings' reserve as a territorial enframement we might actually occupy.

Let us begin with Bryant's popular monochromes, particularly those made between 2010 and 2014. Constructed from found cardboard these works all highlighted an aloofness, a withdrawn quality as potential site of speculation. Eschewing bright colours in favour of a palette that was muted and sedate, these works which hosted a concoction of the arbitrary mark slip easily into that reclamation of soft pollution's refrain as already discussed. Indeed, focusing on the resilience of a found aesthetic that ranged over the deliberated possibilities of painting as a meditative sojourn, these monochromatic works align with that narrative of paintings' retreat. And yet, as I've stated elsewhere Bryant's monochromes were decidedly indifferent to those practices which exploited a language of exhaustion, preferring instead to reshape this refusal as instead a caesura, or a pause of content.²⁹ This is evident in Bryant's handling of the monochrome, particularly as it relied upon the arbitration of the found adjacencies of his collages, turning to the incidental mark as a compositional resource that would ultimately provide a combinatory vector that would transform itself. Consequently, we might suggest that these works of Bryant's concocted a formal reading

²⁹ I've written previously about Bryant's monochromes, specifically about their relation to this poetics of exhaustion. See "It may gild poverty, but it cannot transcend it" *UN Magazine* 6.1 (June, 2012); 26–31.



Richard Bryant, No title, 2011, gesso and gouache on paper, 25.5 x 21.4 cm

of paintings' reserve, noting in its withdrawn qualities the very vitalism that would provide its language of continuity.

It is a mistake then to read Bryant's earlier monochromes as a kind of design flare, even if today we come to recognise those muted monochromatic fields in so many designer-lite interiors as textual backdrops. How easily we slip into the world of polished concrete floors and mid-century furniture, sipping from rustic crockery whilst wearing faded cottons like so many artisanal offerings. Does this ruse of authenticity never run dry? Indeed in Bryant's hands this textural poetics, this rhythm of adjacencies that his monochromes introduce, finds a different kind of vector, a different narrative impulse, not towards a definitive mark making, a declaration of style as something to be adopted, but rather as a way of looking, a way of framing. Here we should heed Elizabeth Grosz's suggestion that all art is a matter of framing, of extenuating the circumstances upon which arts' sensation might be plied.³⁰ I'll return to this skeletal proposition later, but for now it's worth noting that Bryant was often doing little more than framing the found remnant, putting one in connection to the latent object as a kind of quotidian sensibility. In this way we might think of his work as discursive rather than stylistic, not so much an adjudication on taste, the more it was a paradigmatic act that enabled new forms to emerge.

Bryant's exhibition *Knuckle Tree* (Robert Heald, 2016) marked the beginning of this emergence in which his treatment of the reserve bore territorial fruition.

³⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).



Richard Bryant, No title, 2012, found paper and archival tape, 27.5 x 23 cm

Indeed, the paintings in *Knuckle Tree* abandoned all such aloofness, these were large, unwieldy paintings, weird paintings. They were cumbersome tangles, knots upon knots, weaving a different kind of aesthetic, less meditative the more it was a kind of demarcation, a ramping up or acceleration of the found aesthetics. They no longer simply observed paintings' reserve as so many vernacular latencies but begin to stake out, much as Perkins similarly elaborates, the percussive proclivity of painting's withdrawn qualities. It's no surprise then that the most recognisable of Bryant's paintings from this series are his nest-like concoctions, all of which extenuate the framing of his monochromes into a territorial demarcation, that stakes out a privation we dare not cross. Look for instance at *Swale* (2016) that small portrait shaped rectangle of yellow thread, interweaved and entangled so that it is pock marked with minute flares of brown and green. These territorial markings on an expanse are similarly repeated in *Crest* (2016), only there the luminescent green verbiage of its expanse gives way to the demarcation of bluish undertones that undertake a more subtle demarcation of habitat. Such logic is similarly seen in the leopard-esque under-patching of *Paw* (2016) that punctuates that expanse of desert yellow hatching whose interweaving green needle threads demand an organisational capacity that is no longer just an explication of paintings' proclivity but its contrapuntal reflexiveness. In short these paintings stake out a radical aesthetic all too similar to those infamous bower birds, whose nests



Richard Bryant, *Swale*, 2016, acrylic on fabric,
53 x 41 cm

Bryant's paintings so blatantly echo. Indeed, like the bower birds who so willingly incorporate the blues tones of human waste, Bryant's paintings also display a similar kind of resourcefulness, turning to this use of a novel surplus as the paradigmatic act for the way paintings' reserve might retuned as a display of conquest.

The territorialising refrains evident in the demarcations of Bryant's nest works suggest a practice that is no longer content to accede to the habituation of a dominant paradigm. Instead, these nest-like paintings radically reorient paintings' reserve. No longer does it simply turn to the arbitrary mark as something to be adjudicated but rather, as it is in Perkins' practice as well, becomes a preliminary condition, one that provides a procreational medium in which to mark out a new mode of occupation. Consequently, we might think of Bryant's paintings as enlivening the contrapuntal limit in which the reserve has always been defined. Indeed, in Bryant's hands this treatment of the reserve has enabled him to dramatise that diagram as a liquid frame we might take up. Surely this fluidity highlights the procreational idiom that moves through the body of Bryant's paintings, turning them into a refrain that so clearly echoes an avian nest-work. This is of course a counter narrative to the excretions of a soft pollution that views demarcations of private property as so many stylisations to be adjudicated upon. On the contrary these nest works, *Paw*, *Crest* and *Swale* favour such demarcations as a discursive foment. They are



Richard Bryant, *Paw*, 2016, acrylic on fabric, twine, 42 x 31.5 cm

propositions that mark a concussively ingenious propensity to become entangled, to weave a nest of our own.

Given this productive entreaty we might begin to think of these works as a productive kind of map-making that points to a dwelling practice that is deliberately undertaken. Not only does such a phrasing conjure up the routines we ensnare ourselves in, but it also highlights something of the constraining features of such a life. In short, we might say that this enframing of life is contrapuntal. It is lived not just in relation to its environment, but is predetermined, patterned, and indeed regulated by it. Take for instance Grosz's exploration of the contrapuntal relation of a spider's web that is composed as a "spatial counterpoint to the movements of the fly". As Grosz writes:

the threads of the web must be both strong enough to capture the spider's prey, [and] yet invisible enough for the prey to be unable to see them. There are, for example, two kinds of thread in every web: smooth radial threads that the spider is able to stand on and spin from and sticky parallel threads that function to catch flies.

Consequently the "size of the net, its holes and gridding, is an exact measure of the size of the fly" which leads to the idea that "the fly is contrapuntal to the web". Which is to say that the fly, the web, and the spider not only exist in counterpoint to each other, but that "the fly is already mapped...before any

31 Grosz; 44–45.



Richard Bryant, *Lunate*, 2018, acrylic on found fabric, 41 x 32 cm

particular spider has encountered any particular fly”!³¹ This overlapping is a brilliant example of the enchainment of forms that Jean Baudrillard suggests is so characteristic of animal life,³² a mode of life we might include the unexpected human within. Indeed to rid ourselves of the hubris of exceptionalism would mean mitigating the power we give to so called authored works, so that what we recognise in them is less the talent of any particular individual the more it is a cultural sensibility, a mapping that is at once contrapuntal as it is divergent of the refrain we inhabit.

It is worth pausing here to think about how the recycling impulses at work in Bryant’s practice aligns with Baudrillard’s enchainment of forms as a site of interdependent exchange that thoroughly penetrates animal life. For Baudrillard, an animal is contrapuntal with their terroir, they exist as an expression or characteristic of its milieu. Consequently, this enframing of animal life is not linked to the individual but rather to “the perpetuation of the species” so that they are deposited within this “total reversibility”. Significantly, this encoding of animal life with its terroir makes life no longer exceptional, for “nothing stops the enchainment of forms”. It is said to be a life without death, without property, and by extension, without politics. Surely then this reversibility is the very sign of Bryant’s treatment of the fragment, of the arbitrary mark not as something simply to be adjudicated but as something to be used, to be articulated. This is of course the genius of his liquid frames in that they allow a cumulative practice

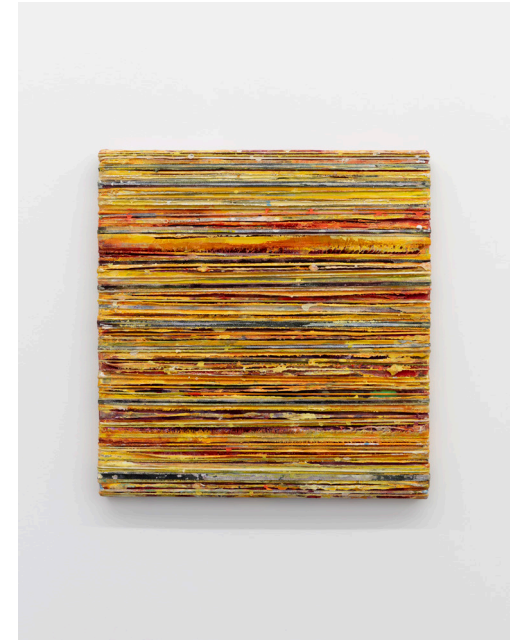
32 Jean Baudrillard, “The Animals: Territory and Metamorphoses”, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Trans. Sheila Glaser, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); 129–141.



Richard Bryant, *Ulna*, 2018, acrylic on found fabric, 36 x 31 cm

to take hold. Indeed, this treatment of the fragment by Bryant not only explains why these works are so totemic, but it is also a clear demarcation of their entangled relation to the soft pollution that suffuses us. Afterall, Bryant's is a radical tableaux style of painting that points towards that enchainment of forms, posing a different kind of metamorphosis, not just of the fragmentary qualities of his cumulative practice, but to the very aesthetic it undertakes to present. Indeed, what we get in Bryant's cumulative painting isn't so much a regenerative mulching of the fragment as it is a complete regurgitation, a manifestly different function in which painting's manufacture isn't so much its content but its emblematic paradigm.

That Bryant's paintings aren't just a discursive proposition but a radical enframing that enacts its own logic is an aspect he shares with Perkins' who similarly conceives of a painting that is no longer just symbolic but paradigmatic. This treatment goes some way to explaining why the paintings in Bryant's subsequent exhibition *Extract, Withdraw Earthwards* (Robert Heald, 2018) were so grim, especially those thick impasto paintings, those bondage numbers which are so restrictive they might be maligned as a sort of impasse. However, it's worth asking here, whether these paintings were a counterweight to the freedom the nest-like paintings invoked. Afterall, if, as Groz suggests, arts' frame allows the refrain to find its expression, is there not an elemental quality to this pairing, to this continuation, so that the two styles of paintings balance

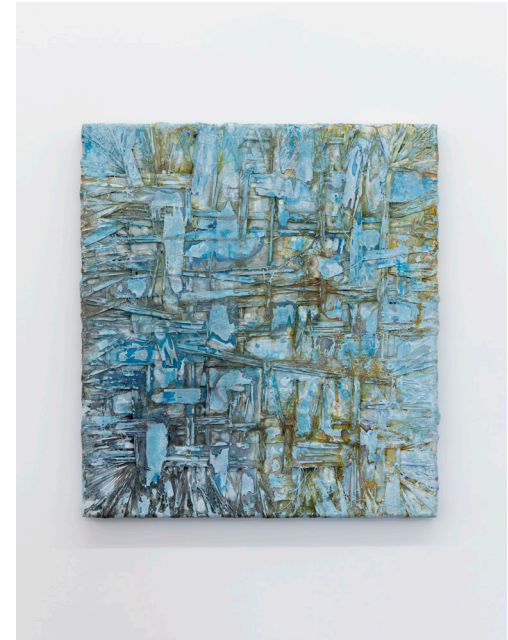


Richard Bryant, *Clasp*, 2018, acrylic on found fabric, 37.5 x 35.5 cm

each other out? On the one hand we have a kind of ingenious fluid internal framing open to demarcation, the second is deeply restrictive, an impasto plied upon the frame, suggesting not just a limit but a privation we dare not cross. And yet why this dichotomy, why are we presented with a toning down of the intricate fragile nest works for something more stolid, more subdued, even more grim. Look closer though and those striations are a more exacting bandage, no longer the symbol, but the sign itself. Are they not aggressively wound around the frame? Is this not a restrictive sort of painting, one that is pared back to a subdued pallet, a tableaux scrapped clean. There is then a sort of melancholy that is cathartic if not consolatory. No wonder the titles of these works all seem to suggest a quotidian surrender. The nouns *Atlas* (2018), *Sone* (2018), *Ulna* (2018) all point to a reserved formality, a supportive mechanism, whereas the verbs, *Clip* (2018), *Clasp* (2018), *Ward* (2018) all suggest a defensive mentality.

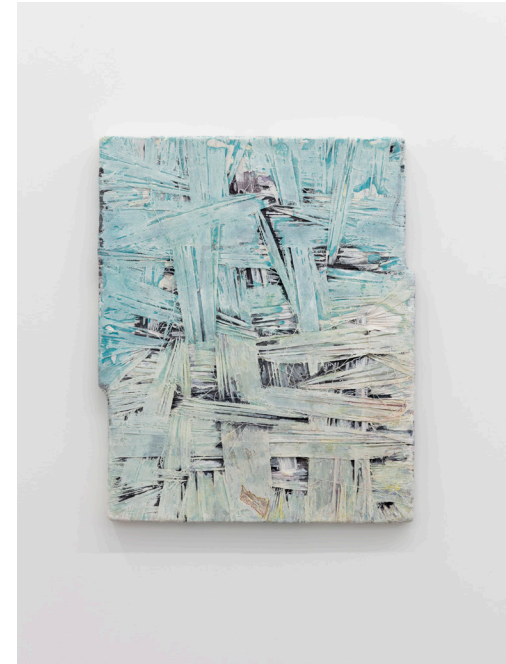
These works of Bryant's may be sombre, but they are not pessimistically so. They no longer seem to weld that unwieldy power their first iteration made so manifest, but rather stage a different kind of framework, one that is still host to an accumulative impulse. Indeed we might say that Bryant's work is still marked by routines of nest work, of a disciplinary impulse to gather together, to encircle like some livid game of weiqi, in which the ko, the emptiness of what is contained is less a weakness the more it is a potent

33 Serres, The Parasite; 180.



Richard Bryant, *Atlas*, 2018, acrylic on found fabric, 50 x 45.5 cm

strength. Indeed with these newer works we can see that Bryant deploys inside this tableaux something like the emptiness of Serres' white square, his blank domino that marks a break in the chain of contiguity, offering continuity *and* divergence.³³ This is of course a characteristic Bryant shares with both Perkins and Lundberg, especially given those artists elaboration of an internalised perforation that allow them to turn to the withdrawn qualities of the arbitrary mark as a source of opacity *and* novelty. However, in Bryant's hands this withdrawn space, this internalised break allows him to develop a reflexive territorialising impulse, a contrapuntal mapping of a territory that for once includes us. Of course, it should be obvious that such a mapping points directly to the soft pollution that surrounds us to the point of exhaustion. It should also be obvious that it is no longer enough to simply acquiesce to this exhaustive refrain. Surely that is what got us into the redundancy of too many stylisations? No! What we might suggest is that Bryant's paintings are right at home in this contrapuntal relation, letting loose a metamorphic compulsion that spins that soft pollution into new territorial possibilities. Indeed, in Bryant's hands painting never looked so fertile, especially given this potential to produce new paradigms in which we might make a home in the world we already inhabit.



Richard Bryant, *Sone*, 2018, acrylic on found fabric, 45.5 x 37 cm

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Text by Hamish Win

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