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Resurrecting the Dead Artforum 1978 Review

Nicole Sansone '08

Art

This paper examines the evolution of painting throughout 1978 citing various reviews from Artforum magazine to mark the transitions and progress in paint theory. The conclusion helps stifle a long running debate on the objecthood and purity of paintings.

The art of painting seemed doomed at the end of Modernism when reactionary theories to Abstract Expressionism drained painting of its content¹. Not content to settle with such a fate, artists in the late 70's made concerted efforts to utilize the void of content in painting as an opportunity to reevaluate what painting is. Reviewing journal articles from 1978 most evidently confirms this as painting is encouraged to evolve from an exploration of all its mediums, the range of which starting with the stretcher and ending with the placement of the painting on the wall². The artists of 1978 return to a place in paint theory pre-modernism and reassert the vitality of the paint discipline through treatment of form, space, and new interpretations of nonobjective content. Through these practices the artists reconcile painting and objecthood as a symbiotic relationship that does not extricate these kinds of work from the discipline of painting. On the contrary, this specific type of objecthood is redefined to become synonymous with the essence of painting.

When Greenburg proposed that "Purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art"³ he put forth a dangerous path on which painting would later be crucified. Accepting the limitations of painting meant that the artist was confined to working solely within a two-dimensional plane. Any departure from this flat area into an additional plane would transform the work into sculpture and the painting would cease to exist. However the reality of painting is that it does exist on a kind of three dimensional plane; the construction of the canvas alone results in a three dimensional object as evident by the edges of a canvas, and the layering of paint upon the surface of the canvas inevitably results in a making something that is not just seen but that also has a measured depth in terms of background, foreground, and middle ground. When post-modernist painters began their reevaluation of painting they began at this point, and made the conscious decision to accept the undeniable objecthood of

painting as Marcia Hafif explains in her essay *Beginning Again*, "...the painting exists physically, as an object in the world which can be responded to directly; it is tactile, visual, retinal."⁴ This decision now posed the new challenge of distinguishing the painting object from the sculpture object. In trying to solve this problem the artists worked through what made painting distinct from other art disciplines to arrive at conclusions about what painting was in the post-modern context.

Not venturing far from previous theories, the artists realized that the uniqueness of the painting object came from its materials. Artists "turn[ed] inward to the means of art, the materials and techniques with which art is made,"⁵ in this case the means and materials of the art being the canvas, stretcher, paint, and tools for paint application. The work of Dennis Masback testifies to the dual existence of the painting object as both an object and simultaneously an uncompromised expression of the discipline of painting. Both the process by which the works are made and the finished result shamelessly put forth the painting's objecthood, however the way at which such an assertion is made could only be possible through the process of painting. Masback:

...pours the medium in the middle of the canvas and spreads it with the edger out to the sides in random directions...The persistent pressure of the edger on Masback's canvas causes the transverse stretcher bar which bisects the painting to appear as a faint, ghostlike image in the finished work. What is behind the canvas presents itself on the surface...⁶

The finished product results in a "graphic impression of the stretcher bars [as] as much part of the actual physical substance of the painting as the stretcher bars themselves." The

superficial impression of what is behind the canvas alludes to the viewer a physical depth to the work, thereby confirming its three-dimensionality. The integrity of the work as a painting however is kept in tact insofar as the graphic impression of the stretcher bars also creates a false sense of formal representation, despite the form not having actually been depicted. All at once the work, "satisfies a traditional craving for internal pictorial incident, not violating but in fact reinforcing modern canonic objectness."⁷ Masback's coupled approach to redefining the painting object as a painting set the course for how the artists of the late seventies were to go about revitalizing painting.

The graphic impression of the stretcher on Masback's canvas gives way to another issue that was covered in the agenda of the artists at this time. Masback's work, while it asserted the objectness of the painting as a whole in accordance with the theory at the time, was also created through a process of layering colors, the effect of which was an absence of depth within the image. The flatness of Masback's image helped to make his work relevant to the realm of painting, and this was achieved by the absence of form within his image. Although the impression of the stretcher bar did create a degree of visual stimuli within the image, the impression itself was not a product of the hand of the artist. By virtue of the definition of a form the impression of the stretcher bar remains only an impression – not a form. This concern with the flatness of an image departs from modernist goals for a flatter surface in painting but parallels a similar idea: though the entirety of a painting can be considered an object, the essence of painting still dictates some expression of

¹ Hafif, Marcia. "Beginning Again." *Artforum* XVII (1978): 39.

² Hafif, *Beginning Again*: 34.

³ Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocöon." From *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Copyright ©1940 University of Chicago Press. Reprinted with Permission.

⁴ Hafif, *Beginning Again*: 39.

⁵ Hafif, *Beginning Again*: 34.

⁶ Neher, Ross. "Dennis Masback's Paintings." *Artforum* XVI (1978): 50.

⁷ Neher, *Dennis Masback*: 51.

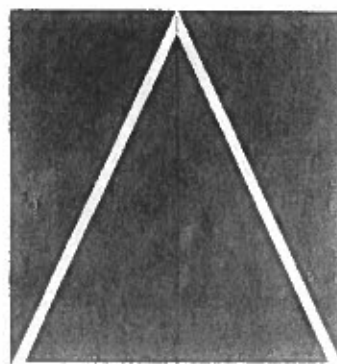
two-dimensionality: "Paintings were once seen as surfaces on which were created illusions representing real life...The experience of seeing such works is very different from the earlier way of looking. The eye stops on the surface, where once it expected to go within...This work accepts the objectness of the painting." This idea becomes the driving force of many other works in the late seventies.

Howard Buchwald was similarly influenced by this concept of painting; however he expanded upon the theory in his piece *Untitled*. Building off of the bisected triangle composition found in Barnett Newman's *Jericho*, Buchwald gears *Untitled* to answer the contemporary discourse on painting and objecthood. Buchwald paints the outline of a triangle contained within the uniformly colored form of the rectangular canvas. Bisecting the triangle is an actual cut into the canvas, stopping just short of the triangle's bottom line. Whereas Masback alluded to his canvas stretchers via their impression on the canvas from behind, Buchwald literally displays the stretcher's edge through the unharmed base of the triangle: "...the cut stops only as short of the lower edge as the width of the...band...If it extended any further, it would physically divide the piece into two separate canvases."⁸ By stopping at the bottom band of the triangle and keeping the canvas in tact, Buchwald's cut becomes an "internal [edge],"⁹ representing an extension of the canvas into the image. Although the cut also physically makes a linear form by virtue of the line of the cut and its intersection with the form of the color field, neither the cut—nor any of the forms that result as a consequence of the presence of the cut—can be seen as a form because it has already been designated as part of the canvas.

⁸ Masheck, Joseph. "Hard-Core Painting." *Artforum* XVI (1978): 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Untitled accomplishes similar feats as Masback's stretcher impressions insofar as both works assert the objectness of the painting object and yet remain faithful to the flatness of the discipline of painting in their images' lack of visual depth. However, *Untitled* can also be said to have chartered new territories in form overlay and visual depth. Masback's work with stretcher impressions participates in the discourse about painting relevant to this time period however his contributions are the result of the process of painting. Though application of paint is a technique specific to the genre of painting, and therefore one of the paths by which the artists of the late seventies were to use to revitalize painting, there were limited options left for innovation since the modernists had already done quite a bit of experimentation with paint's application and color. Buchwald's *Untitled*, on the other hand, makes a similar statement to that of Masback's paintings however it is only as a result of the mediums involved in painting that Buchwald is able to do this: "[the] cuts would be impossible if Buchwald's paintings were not painted (in oil) on linen stretched over and glued to board, giving something to *saw* into."¹⁰ Painters found more success in exploiting their mediums to reaffirm the nature of painting and therefore put their trust in the mediums entirely. This notion became the spring board upon with other painters expanded their exploration of painting.



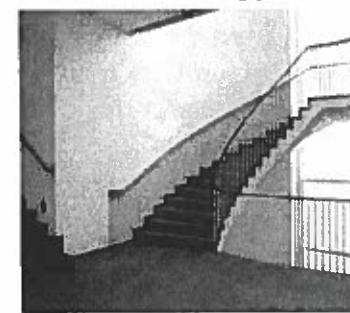
Howard Buchwald, *Untitled*, 1974, oil on canvas, 64 x 64"

Howard Buchwald, *Untitled*, 1974, oil on canvas, 64 x 64"

¹⁰ Masheck, *Hard-Core*: 51.

When painters began to deliberate about the potential of the painting mediums it became apparent that the new direction of painting should allow the meaning of the work to be communicated largely through characteristics inherent in the mediums themselves. Marcia Hafif explains that "An examination of the essences of paint materials and methods was expected to release new subject matter," the larger implication being that the paint object was to be an un-predetermined product of the process of painting¹¹. By extension, this also placed the burden of communicating with the viewer—whether the dialogue is a visual one or one of the paint object's meaning—on the results of process with the medium.

Though the painter's role was not totally eradicated from the creation of the paint object, his/her voice was fully immersed in the mediums they worked with. The work of Blinky Palermo is the most radical example of finished art objects coming out of the process of working with a medium. The most initially alarming aspect of Palermo's *Treppenhaus II/Experimenta 4*



Blinky Palermo, *Treppenhaus II/Experimenta 4 (Rekonstruktion)*.

is Palermo's decision to bypasses the process of constructing the ground¹² of the painting object, conventionally this would be the canvas, and apply the paint directly on the wall. In the photograph provided, there is a staircase with a standard railing on the right side and Palermo's painting on the left. Through this process the wall becomes the ground of the work, freeing its internal contents from the constraints of a rectangular canvas.

¹¹ Hafif, *Beginning Again*: 35.

¹² Hafif, *Beginning Again*: 37.

Palermo's inclusion of the architectural space of the Frankfurter Kunstverein's¹³ display area shifts our understanding of the painting not solely in the sense that the wall has now replaced the canvas. The color that distinguishes the area opposite of the hand rail, and the only indication of the presence of a painting, visually reads as an irregular shape or form.¹⁴ However, "Palermo neither originated the form nor imposed it on a secondary surface;" writes Anne Rorimer in her article *Blinky Palermo: Objects, 'Stoffbilder,' Wall Paintings*, "by covering the rectangular area with paint, he 'uncovered' the work of art, revealing a preexisting form in the given architectural context."¹⁵ In this process the medium of paint is used as a highlight, where the "form evolves out of, and in response to, the dictates of architectural space," resulting in a suffusion of painted space and actual space.¹⁶ Palermo's wall painting challenges the idea of the painting object insofar as the ground for his painting is allied with literal space.¹⁷ Were someone to measure the sum parts of Palermo's painting, they would be left with only the paint on the wall and, because the ground belongs in the realm of the display area, no ground for the painting. The colored area of Palermo's painting literally mimics the stair case and in doing so seemingly exists as a representation of the staircase. However, none of these visual statements can be confirmed because Palermo's colored reflection of the stair case would not have existence in any

¹³ Rorimer, Anne. "Blinky Palermo: Objects, 'Stoffbilder,' Wall Paintings." *Artforum* XVII (1978): 31.

¹⁴ Rorimer, *Blinky Palermo*: 31.

¹⁵ Rorimer, *Blinky Palermo*: 32.

¹⁶ Rorimer, *Blinky Palermo*: 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

other context – that is to say, it is entirely dependent upon this exact display area.

Palermo's work with painting the wall opposite the staircase joins the ranks of Masback's work with stretcher impressions and Buchwald's cut composition insofar as it presents to the viewer both a literal and implied form. Through this presentation these artists use the medium of paint in a way specific to its characteristics to create a visual provocation that alludes to form without actually being the artists' depicted form. These works all put forth the objecthood of the painting object, however because their implied forms result from the process of painting the artists qualify where the objecthood of painting is rooted, and that is in the paint itself. When Palermo took his painting off the canvas and put it on the wall he reaffirmed the notion of the objecthood of the medium of paint in a painting work: "A reduced rectangle on a wall sets up a composition with any other paintings which may be on the wall, with the rectangle of the wall itself, with any other physical elements present."¹⁸ Palermo's other work reflects this notion when he actually made paint objects that represented the objectness of paint on a canvas in *Schmetterling*. Using fabrics and paints to cover wood, "colors in the [*Schmetterling*], like form in the Objects, function as themselves."¹⁹ The tension here between implied and literal form also gives way to the visualization of paint as the object of paintings because the literal forms can be taken off the wall thereby altering the implied composition of the work entirely: "the existence of a surface onto which paint can be added or subtracted is denied and the painting is conceived of as an 'object.'"²⁰ *Schmetterling* itself is an object however in its relation to the wall it takes on the role of the painted; an inverse relationship to what was

seen in the works of Masback and Buchwald. In Buchwald's cut composition, the cut takes on the role of the painted only visually as it presents an inflection from the overall composition of the painting. In actuality, however, it is an expression of the objectness of the painting object in its representation of the ground object of the painting. *Shmetterling* inverts this by visually existing as an object yet in actuality being the literal form of Palermo's painting.

Palermo's experimentation with objectness and actual space is reflected also in the work of Jake Berthot. In a rather conventional manner of working Berthot presents a sort of abstract landscape in which he "encourag[es] [the viewer] to read 'figure' and 'field' rather literally, as person-in-landscape."²¹ Berthot departs from the work of Palermo in "choos[ing] to un-flatten the picture plane"²² but it is precisely this choice that illuminates both Berthot and Palermo's concept of space. Steven Kasher articulates the pivot upon which Berthot and Palermo's work achieves success in explaining that "The key concept for Berthot's recent work is what he calls 'painted space.' This dovetails with the notion of 'pictorial space.'"²³ Berthot un-flattens the pictorial plane in dividing the plane into the background and the foreground through the manipulation of color field and bar-like forms. The canvas of his works are an uninterrupted color



Blinky Palermo, *Schmetterling* (Butterfly), 1978, oil, canvas, wood, 82 x 7 x 1 1/3"

field with the bar-form superimposed on top, in this way presenting a clear landscape relationship between the two components of the pictorial image. The bars read as complete works in themselves since the process by which Berthot paints the bars is such that he completes the bar before moving on to any other part of the painting proportions. The proportions of the bars as "a one-to-seven, or -eight, width-to-height [reflect] the stereotype in the depiction of people"²⁴ and make a further argument for their autonomy from the



color field on the canvas. To this end Berthot's paintings are abstract representations of real landscape, that is the actual scene

of a figure in a three dimensional area. In actuality the painting only depicts a pictorial space that leads us to this reading of the landscape-figure/color field-bar reading of the painting. Kasher notes that Berthot's painted space, "mediates between ideal flatness and the full roundness of the world."²⁵ Berthot maintains the flatness of his paintings by treating the painted space of the pictorial image as a solid. The bars help to affirm the solidity of the pictorial space while simultaneously implying the depth and that is characteristic of a three dimensional landscape space in their distancing. Berthot explains, "To measure distance I need form, something concrete."²⁶ Whereas Palermo translated the pictorial space between pictorial content and its relation to the canvas onto the actual space of the gallery wall, Berthot inverts this process to translate actual space onto the pictorial plane. Berthot's consideration of the depicted actual space on his canvas as a solid in and of

itself maintains the flatness of the painting in its literal depiction of two objects: the bars and the space as a solid. Because of the literal flatness of the painting, the two objects can be regarded as coexisting on the same 2D plane since we see neither object obstruct the other. In this Berthot restores the possibility of depth to pictorial content in painting without raising further questions of the appropriateness of objecthood in painting.

The path towards resurrecting painting in the late seventies was predicated on certain distinct principles. Similar to explorations of painting in the modernist context, painters reexamined painting and tried to articulate the defining factors that made an object a painting. In contrast to the modernists, however, they no longer denied the objecthood of the painting as a work itself. This freed the artists to explore the mediums of painting without being preoccupied with whether or not they were in violation of the two dimensionality of painting. In the works of Masback, Buchwald, Palermo and Berthot the focus on the mediums of painting was the driving force that created their ultimate work of art. In all of these works the pictorial content and forms resulted from the process of painting and the characteristics inherent in the paint and paint tool relationship. As a byproduct of this process these artists, with the exception of Berthot, created pictorial content not merely by depicting a form but rather by uncovering the form through their use of paint. This gave way to a shift in the view of objecthood in painting: whereas once we saw the entire painting as an object now we were viewing only the paint as an object. The paint became the object of the painting because in uncovering the preexisting forms it denied the existence of

¹⁸ Hafif, *Beginning Again*: 38.

¹⁹ Rorimer, *Blinky Palermo*: 31.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kasher, Steven. "Jake Berthot's Recent Work."

Artforum XVII (1978): 68.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kasher, *Jake Berthot*: 69.

²⁴ Kasher, *Jake Berthot*: 70.

²⁵ Kasher, *Jake Berthot*: 69.

²⁶ Ibid.

objecthood of the ground of a painting, this concept made most lucid in the wall paintings of Blinky Palermo. The forms in Palermo's wall paintings belonged to the realm of real space insofar as the wall was a part of the architecture of the gallery. In discussing Palermo's painting alone we are forbidden to include the wall without first identifying it as an object outside of the painting that is only included into the painting after the paint's process of "discovery" of the preexisting form. Either way, the most basic discourse on Palermo's painting includes nothing but the paint and the paint tools, thereby returning the objecthood of painting where it belongs – to its medium.

When the objecthood of painting was clarified and assigned to only the medium of paint, the modernist question of where to draw the line between a painting and a sculpture was set to rest. This most crucial point in the history of painting restored the liberties of depth exploration to both the painter and the canvas – a liberty most notably taken advantage of by Berthot. Berthot's work is a perfect culminating point in a review of painting in 1978 because it represents a simultaneous win for both painters and painting. In displaying the specific visual effects that are only made possible through the process of painting and through its mediums, as we saw in Masback's work, painters reaffirmed the relevance of the discipline of painting. The deductive process by which the work of Palermo arrives at the conclusion of where to assign the objectness of painting subsequently solidifies the difference between the painting as a real life object and a sculpture. With these two major developments in the theory of painting, the liberty to explore painting for the sake of exploring – and not to prove the self worth of painting, as painters have been for the larger part of this century – was made possible. In the progression of paint theory

the point at which questions of painting's irrelevance and integrity were laid to rest is the precise moment in which the artistic discipline of painting was resurrected from the corroding forces of erasure²⁷ and given a second chance at the life that it formerly assumed as an honorable and distinguished discipline.

²⁷ Hafif, *Beginning Again*: 34.

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Trace Metal Trends in Payne Creek**Douglas Collins****GEOL 203**

Payne Creek, located in Hamilton, NY, runs through both the Seven Oaks Golf Course and the grounds of Colgate University before being subjected to the effluent of the municipal sewage treatment facility. Trace metal analysis was performed using ICP-MS to identify contamination sources. The golf course and the fields of Colgate University were identified as a non-point sources, due to fertilizers. At a site on the golf course, cadmium was recorded at 0.6 ppb ± 0.1 ppb, and nickel at 10.2 ppb ± 0.1 ppb. All measurements yielded concentrations below NYSDEC surface water limits except for one; cobalt (6.7 ppb ± 0.3 ppb) exceeded the state limit of 5 ppb. The water treatment plant was an expected point source, and yielded relatively elevated concentrations of zinc (26.8 ppb ± 0.9 ppb), copper (16.6 ppb ± 0.3 ppb), lead (2.0 ppb ± 0.4 ppb), and chromium (2 ppb ± 1 ppb). This analysis provides a basis for understanding the effect of landscape management and anthropogenic interaction with surface waters. Trend analysis shows distinct areas of pollution, and more detailed sampling and analysis could yield accurate identification of pollution sources.

Introduction

Aqueous trace metals may occur naturally or come from anthropogenic sources. Some of these metals are biological nutrients, while others are considered toxic.(Bunce, 1994a) The EPA has set distinct limits for many metals and contaminants in drinking water, but leaves determination of environmental hazard to individual states to determine on a case-by-case basis.(Turner, 2005)

Presence of certain heavy metals like cadmium or lead in surface water can indicate anthropogenic contamination, due to the scarcity of these metals in nature.(Bunce, 1994a) Identifying sources and confirming with trace metal analysis provides confident identification of pollutant origin. Many fertilizers and household chemicals contain metal complexes, where the ligand is the active ingredient and the metal center is something of a spectator.

This study quantifies the concentration of a set dissolved solids in the Payne Creek system in Hamilton, NY. This stream system runs through the Seven Oaks Golf Course, the heavily-groomed grounds of Colgate University, and is subjected to effluent from the municipal sewage treatment facility. Each of these areas is a possible source of trace metal contamination. In some cases, the presence of the metals suggest the presence of other contaminants that are more directly harmful to the environment.

Analysis of these waters by inductively coupled plasma mass spectroscopy (ICP-MS) seeks to identify sources along the stream and the contribution of each. Concentrations of naturally occurring macro-nutrients and micro-nutrients, as well as toxic heavy