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Nick Oberthaler
M_O_B
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SOME NOTES ABOUT M_O_B

“Mobile” is the name of an important book written in 1962 by Michel Butor, a major writer of the *Nouveau Roman*, which breaks the rules of the romantic novel. “Mobile” maps the United States of America through a car journey. Collecting elements of American culture: flyers from hotels, diners, and bird names, Butor assigns each state by the brandnames of its gas stations: Mobile, Exxon, Shell... and through this constant movement across invisible borders, fake lines on an invented map, Butor reinvents a story of migration. In constant movement, like a concrete poem using natural facts as events, “Mobile” creates a new geography of mundane life. It also deals with old stories, the Salem witch trials, sundown towns, the reverse of the ideal postcard.

What could a contemporary landscape look like? What form does the postcard take today? Instant visions through iPhones, Macbooks, iPads, the new birdsongs are Tweets, Google colors supply our daily palette....

By drawing an oblique line on his canvases, Nick Oberthaler twists the orthogonal structure. While the axis of the world is shifting, the one on the canvas is moving. Under the colorful pattern, there is a construction. This is an operational structure, in movement. It reflects the structure of the world, of our world, of a dysfunctional Europe looking for direction. The squares create a chessboard, cut in half into a triangle. Two triangles make a square. A square is a specific kind of rectangle. Like in Flatland, geometric shapes can be metaphors for human conditions. Strident colors, acid lemon, metallic blue, rusty orange, intercut by shiny grey: this is a computer palette applied to canvas. The ensemble makes a stage set, installed on an expanded open grid, which creates its own structure inside the superstructure of the gallery, an open work. Polysemic and polymeric, the work is like a polysphere which can be seen as a group of different moments, fractions of time, as painting is time made into image. This is possible only by moving around in between the pictures, at the pace of bodies. Each painting is a fragment of a whole, and the Movement of Bodies creates a response to the Movement of Borders, we feel it as a question of vision, decision, and taking a stand, choosing your position, here and now. One dice won't change the randomness of the order, but if we are two, a pair of dice, we can create a new map. As one is foul, two is humanity, we can choose the diagonal and shake the chessboard, move across the borders.

The strangeness of tones, according to Neo-mannerism, reveals the revolutionary capacity of colors, of paint as a joyful flag in the wind. The paint is a “macula”, a spot, as well as the make up. The brush touch gives breath to the flatness and shows how instability can be a vibrant quality.

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CRAZY DIAGONAL

It is as if the painting has been folded and unfolded like a page, leaving a mark. The grey part, shiny, with its metallic reflections, creates a distance with the quality of the work itself. Is it “paint”? The dialectic of color/shade nevertheless exposes the plan to a strategy of division. But an “inclusive division” which reveals the ontological ambiguity of painting today. Among the stacks of “things” produced for the art market, standing in front of a painting might be a challenge, against the latest academic, bad, pseudo-“post internet” images. Then the painting might be a flag, but an anarchist one, which is a kind of oxymoron.

MAPPING THE STUDIO

The green cross saying EXIT might be read as an example of Nick Oberthaler's capacity to translate from one field (flat screens and Indesign or simply the computer keyboard) to the canvas space. Marking a cross is a starting point for preparing a surface, a portion, on the screen. In the history of painting and representation, a portion of nature was a “landscape”. Here, a “land-scope” arises on the surface of the paint. The cross has the proportion of the kind we see in the viewfinder of a telescope or a rifle sight. Here the abstraction of shapes is a symptom of the *pensée sauvage* at stake in Oberthaler's work. S.O., cross, red google map pins, are decoys. They can be seen first as landmarks, but they are much more illusionist than compositional. Non-representational, or beyond the idea of representation, this is not a map, this is a plight. The *Frankfurter Rundschau*, saved from insolvency in 2013, is one of the few remaining leftist newspapers. On the board, we see first a staircase which can be read as half empty/half full, going upstairs/downstairs. The paper newspapers can be read, folded and carried with us. They are held in our hands and read vertically. Most of the news comes horizontally today, on phones and tactile tools, we swipe images, no folding/unfolding anymore.

The black image background and text under the fluorescent red layer of paint reads: “generation of decay”. In these times of the *uberization* of work, what “remains”, the slags produced by the division of labor create piles of leftovers. The leftover leftist papers become a pattern and a rebus. Decay is decoy: a fake, flat image, which Nick Oberthaler reuses. He transforms obsolete forms (newspapers, anarchic ideology) by the act of painting, he makes revolutionary tools. Red and black are the colors of revolution. Then the sight, the red google pins, the green cross are motives rather than signs. They are beyond pattern and decoration. They are the clues of the paintings. Nick Oberthaler constructs his paintings in a dialectical way: in the tension between the facts, events and structures. There is no color field in one part and the objects of the world on another level, paint is not a re-presentation of figures, it is figures on the move. They EXIST.

Marie de Brugerolle