

On the raw left canvas top right is the word "caviar". Below, overlapping, the prefix "RE-" is repeated in orange and pink colors. The question what "Kaviar" has to do with time - one of the main themes of the exhibition "never odd or even" in the *ALTEFABRIK - is answered by Aramis Navarro (*1991, lives and works in St. Gallen and Rapperswil-Jona) two weeks before the opening, first with a smile, then with a sure and convincing voice: "It is the memory of a previous life from the painting". Welcome to the linguistic cosmos of Aramis Navarro!

A meticulous preoccupation with language, phonetics and writing, as well as a keen interest in substances and materials of various kinds, form the most important components of Navarro's artistic practice. In a constant exploration of art history, culture and socially relevant issues, he creates paintings, sculptures, installations and texts that are characterized by poetry, humor and a casual lightness. In the exhibition "never odd or even", in addition to the structure of language, the nature of time plays a fundamental role. On a tightrope walk between personal feelings and scientific findings, Navarro approaches the dimension of time and explores it from different perspectives. In parallel, he explores the question of the visual representability of time in painting and examines it within his own artistic production.

Timestudy n°60 "RE-" (2023) abruptly immerses visitors in Aramis Navarro's multi-layered and symbolically rich work as soon as they enter the exhibition. The painting consists of several parts sewn together, including sections of older paintings by the artist that have been painted over or developed further, various textiles from Navarro's fabric archive, and fragments of damaged oil paintings from the Brockenhaus. On the surface composed in this way, in addition to the linguistic elements mentioned at the beginning, other objects can be seen: a blue chair, a brick wall with incompletely defined contours, and an image of Eugène Delacroix's (1798 -1863) *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830), digitally processed by the artist, which stands out from the foreground in garish green. The material diversity here goes hand in hand with the complexity of the work's content, whereby the process of creation is more like an intuitive game than a subtle preoccupation with forms and meanings.

In Navarro's visual language, the subject of the chair is a recurring theme that also appears in the exhibition at *ALTEFABRIK in different variations, as a wooden chair, a monobloc, or a stool. While an occupied chair symbolizes the stopping of time for the artist, a free chair triggers feelings of expectation, especially because it has been intentionally aligned with the viewers or placed in an imbalance by the artist. Navarro's interest in this design object par excellence is not only shared by the designers. In linguistic semantics, too, the chair, as object, word, or concept, is central and is encountered in numerous texts on the referential, materialistic, or conventionalistic content of its meaning. Expressions like "chair" are ascribed a certain uniformity there, although completely different objects fall under the term "chair".

According to the artist, the situation is similar with time: although there seems to be a generally valid idea of the nature of time, opinions differ as soon as a definition is attempted. "What, then, is time?" asks the philosopher and church father Augustine in the *Confessions* at the beginning of the 5th century. "If no one asks me about it, I know; but if I try to explain it to someone in answer to his question, I do not know."

In our traditional view, time is an independent physical quantity that passes uniformly from the past into the future. In between, in unstoppable movement, there is the present, the intangible *now*, which is already no more as soon as it is about to be. A straight line of shiny play foil running along the interior walls of the exhibition space reflects the *now*, symbolizing time as a simple linear succession of moments. Under the line one can imagine the memories directed to the past, above it the thoughts about the future connected with ignorance, wishful thinking but also apprehension.

The Dutch bricks (*Overcome Obstacles* and *Forthcoming Obstacles*, both 2023), neatly lined up on the floor along a curved line, evoking associations with a causal chain or possible domino effect, can also be perceived as symbolizing the flow of time with which we are familiar. Using brushes, black paint, and stencils for each letter, Navarro has added the cheerful exclamation "yeah" or the wistful "sigh" to the top of the bricks. Both inscriptions create an immediate connection to the human perception of time, which, far from being objective, always depends on situation and emotion.

Navarro purposefully uses different building materials to represent our conception of time as a human construct. Together with the scaffolding—which also serves as a display for the presentation of works from the *Time Studies* series, begun in 2019 and continuously expanded—the bricks form the shape of the mathematical sign for infinity, whose shape resembles a lying eight. A grasping hand made of yellow shuttering panels closes the implied endless loop that runs through the entire exhibition space, disregarding the paths and walls. Borrowing from the archetype of the ouroboros (the snake consuming its own tail) as a symbol of eternity, the grasping hand often appears in Navarro's work and can be understood as representing a circular vision of time.

In *Time Study n° 57 "Renaissance"* (2022), the theme of the infinite circle is taken up from a completely different perspective. Visually, it is associated with the recycling symbol, and in terms of content with the recycling cycle of resources, the problem of which is of central importance in Navarro's way of working. The painting *Twelve Sunflowers in a Vase* (1888) by Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) is clearly visible in the foreground. The references to traditional motifs of classical painting are unmistakable. Vanitas motifs, such as withering flowers or hourglasses, often represent transience on the two-dimensional surface of the canvas and can thus be perceived as an attempt to depict an important aspect of the dimension of time in painting.

But it was different for van Gogh, one of the fathers of modernism: for him, the sunflower symbolized the sun and stood for the joyful life that van Gogh hoped for from Paul Gauguin's invitation to Arles. The speed with which the flowers wither forced van Gogh to paint the images in a single stroke, as if he had wanted to capture the moment rather than the transience. The image of this iconic Still Life is also interesting in the context of Navarro's exhibition because it raises the question of temporality in the process of making paintings. The question of when a painting can be considered finished is one of the fundamental questions in painting and cannot be answered uniformly. Aramis Navarro's attitude to this is very pragmatic: Only when a painting is sold and, as a result, finally leaves the artist's studio, can it be considered finished. As long as it remains in Navarro's studio, there is still the possibility that it will be cut up again, sewn together with other canvases and fabrics, and worked on again, whereby the painting serves on the one hand as a resource, but on the other hand also experiences a real "Renaissance".

Although our idea of time works very well in everyday life, we know at the latest since Albert Einstein's theory of relativity that time is not absolute, but depends on the position and speed of an object or an event. This insight could be empirically proven in the 1970s by means of precision clocks and is nowadays regarded as an accepted fact. Since then, at the latest, the image of time familiar to us has been gradually crumbling. That knowledge is always to be understood in a temporally defined context is obviously expressed by the neon work *knowledge* (2023), in which Navarro extrapolates the word "now" and makes it shine bright red.

Perhaps even less than about time itself, there is agreement about what is meant by "now." Even the existence of a "now" is disputed. A note dipped in yellow epoxy resin (*Inflected Introspection "now,"* 2022) reads: "Now was five words ago. Another one reads "simultaneity now" (*Inflected Introspection "simultaneity,"* 2022), with the bush letters of "now" composed of several NOWs. Navarro regularly uses the format of Inflected Introspections in his practice, which can be found in the *ALTEFABRIK on several metal pillars in the exhibition space. They mark the moment when a work emerges from an initial idea. After completion of the working process, the initial notes are soaked in colored epoxy resin and preserved in this way.

To become aware of the nature of "now," Navarro wrote the English word "now" 300 times on 300 sheets of white paper. Inspired by the fact that the human brain needs between 24 and 25 frames per second to perceive a flowing movement, he processed the resulting images into a short video (*The Length of the Short,* 2022) in which the word "now" first accelerates and then slows down. To achieve the effect, Navarro used different frame rates for each second: one frame of "now" for the first second of the video, two frames for the second second, three frames for the third, and so on until the 24th second, which consists of 24 frames. The second part of the video is built backwards, decreasing the number of frames per second.

The exhibition's examination of the relativistic notion of time is particularly evident in the site-specific work *Back to the Future* (2023), which Navarro mounted on a wall over 10 meters long in the back of the exhibition space. Here, the future and the past do not extend space-fillingly above

and below an uninterrupted straight line, but-inspired by representations of the temporal structure of the universe that derive directly from physics-they are depicted in the form of independent cones of light that, starting from defined events, expand in two opposite directions. The rotation of the different cones of light, reminiscent of hourglasses, results in overlaps between the respective future and past cones, so that there are moments to be found in the wall painting that, depending on the perspective, can be perceived as future, present or past at the same time. The numerous directions in which the time arrows point indicate that the one particular direction in our traditional conception of time is in reality only one among many other possibilities.

This is an idea that is already contained in the title of the exhibition "never odd or even" and is taken up again in the exhibition in the work *Timestudy n° 52 "Reviver"* (2022), among others. Both titles are palindromes - words or sentences that, when read forwards and backwards, produce exactly the same text - and question the concept of time that points in only one direction.

In the mural *Back to the Future* Navarro obviously also plays with the idea that it is quite possible to assume the existence of closed timelines in which the future leads back to the past. *Time Machine part I* and *part II* (both 2023) tell of this notion and invite the visitor to an intimate journey through time into the shared past of the artist and the exhibition venue *ALTEFABRIK. Aramis Navarro has been very familiar with the premises of the *ALTEFABRIK since his childhood, when his father ran a bistro in part of the exhibition space from 1996 to 2007.

In the place where the restaurant *El Candil* once stood, Navarro has placed a replica of a classic bistro table, which he made from shuttering panels and covered with a worn ceiling, another reminder of his own childhood. A ladder made of the same material next door leads to a flying carpet, the artist's unconditional childhood wish, while a quote from T.S. Eliot on the floor unobtrusively hints at the idea of the circularity of time. "We shall not cease from exploration, and at the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time."

Pointing to the distinction between quantitative and qualitative senses of time is the painting *Timestudy n° 43 HUH*, on the foreground of which is an orange, monochrome image of Edward Munch's expressionist painting *The Scream* (1893). A large white tongue surrounded by numerous curved arms protrudes above it, while on the right side of the painting two muscular arms intertwine in a sign-like salute. Unlike in German, the word for "language" and "tongue" are identical in many languages. This detail is a remnant of an earlier painting in which Navarro addressed this very issue, using the motif of the tongue to represent the cultural relativity of language use. In addition to the clear physical component, the large tongue at this point allegorically represents the cultural relativity of time perception, suggesting that it too is always mediated by language.

Since language strongly influences our sense and understanding of time, three statements by the artist can be read directly on the walls in the exhibition. The writings, which Navarro calls *affidavits*, accompany his visual language and accentuate it in different ways. That Navarro explores time in depth in *ALTEFABRIK seems inscribed in the linguistic derivation of the word "time" itself. The Latin word *tempus* for "time" goes back to the Indo-European root *di* or *dai* for "divide." In the exhibition "never odd or even" it becomes clear that division is one of the fundamental processes underlying Navarro's working practice. This becomes evident on the back of *Timestudy n° 62 "la primavera"* (2023). With a scene from the well-known painting by the Italian Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli, Navarro has painted over his own picture *BROTJOB FÜR KAVIAR* and brought it to new life. A reminder of the painting's previous life remains: next to Delacroix's *July Revolution*, at upper right on the canvas left raw.

- Irene Grillo, February 2023