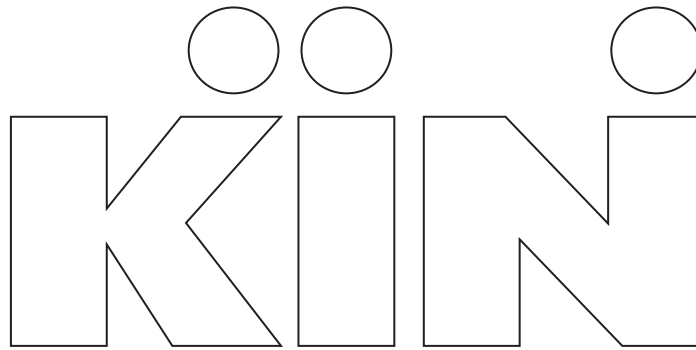


**Michael Van den Abeele**  
***and amputate myself from every function***

23/04/24, 6 pm - 11/06/24



*Sloughing the swamp*

Buy the bag, open the bag, eat what's in the bag. Then turn the bag inside out, reveals its inside and prove its frame. In *and amputate myself from every function*, Michael Van den Abeele unites chip bags, bleached denim, fingers, an iPhone video suspended within an aluminium structure and a single watercolour in a unique almost mannerist rhapsody. It is a tendency that we can see in fingers that belong to no hand or to the ornate arrangement of chip bags. Mannerism was an artistic style that borrowed from critical understandings of form born and canonised in the Renaissance. At its peak, proportion, balance and beauty were its holy trinity.

But the Mannerists were less convinced, favouring decadence and abundance over relative form, they were drawn to exaggeration. They prioritised asymmetry, elegance that was unnatural and environments built around the spectre of artifice. In this pursuit, they christened the possibilities of form beyond its purpose and disposed of functional representation at the hands of something less knowable, more decorative: a new drama.

Emancipating function from form is a recurring motif in Michael Van den Abeele's artistic practice. Often, he begins with a material so wedded to its economic value that their separation comes with tricky conditions. The flat iron is tired of working, the jeans take leave from the domain of workwear and turn to ornament. In a single motion, Van den Abeele unlatches the commodity from the throes of its market and ushers it into a new arena where eros, excess, and mythology prevail. Here, the possibility of a given thing renews itself in desire, decadence and a romance for discernible things.

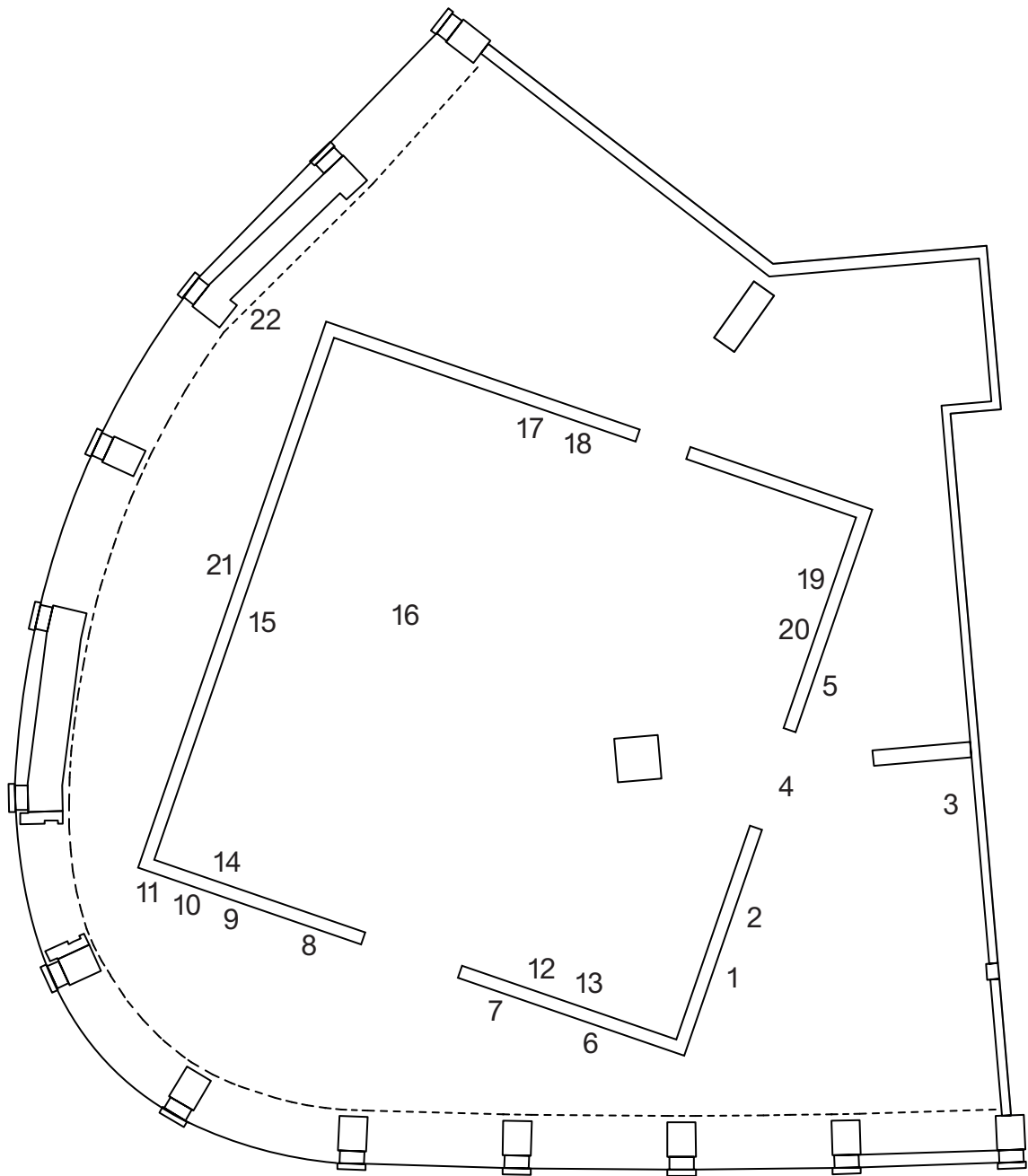
Still, it is with some hesitancy that Van den Abeele approaches the possibility of total renewal. Rather than dancing in duplicity, he exaggerates the

possibility of their decor but prolongs their existing corporeality. Whether through bleaching or exposure, the image produced is often a feature of subtraction. Already hereditary to its host, its substance is a minus - but one that comes to represent an economy of insides where critical organs have lost their function and their technicality is translated into a new object of desire. Optical illusions, pasta squiggles and imperfect eggs become mirrors in a funhouse, they distort our sense of reality but intend on keeping a playful view.

Last time we saw Van den Abeele, he was dealing in cupids, therapy and cowboys. This time, the script favours a more florid inclination. The jeans drop their function in favour of ornament, the chip bags beam like low-cost jewellery, the fingers no longer belong to the hand, the flat iron becomes aware of its own image. Elsewhere, an aluminium sculpture revokes the phone from the hand, and returns the image to us through a sliced mirror suspended at a 45 degree angle: the performance of social media suspended in slap-stick. Together, their past lives as everyday commodities become monuments of desire and deficit and their materiality is made concrete in a vernacular idiom that can never become completely obsolete.

Perhaps the quality that comes to define its contemporaneity is patented in the approach to form that favours substance. Though this new body of work is self-governed and sensitive, it negotiates with the rules of consumption that reign over our epoch. Van den Abeele's works highlight the conditions of its production at a time when our capacity to remain functional is our principal value. In the final act, the myth of productivity becomes camp, the idea that chip bags, flat irons, phones, and even cats could be subjects of utility becomes laughable and what's left is cultivated into something entirely - and unproductively - 'cultural'.

Micaela Dixon



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|----|--|----|--|
| 1  | <i>(Slender Squiggly Grey)</i> , 2024, bleached denim, 65.5 x 235 cm | 11 | <i>(Slender Squiggly Blue)</i> , 2024, bleached denim, 52 x 270 cm                         |
| 2  | <i>(Dancing Eggs)</i> , 2024, bleached denim, 100 x 240 cm           | 12 | <i>Only Rhetoric (Blue Canvas)</i> , 2022, laser print on Canvas, 60 x 85 cm               |
| 3  | <i>(Eggs)</i> , 2024, bleached denim, 270 x 52 cm                    | 13 | <i>Left To My Own Devices</i> , 2022, watercolour on paper, 53.5 x 72 cm                   |
| 4  | <i>(Biggest Circle)</i> , 2024, bleach denim, 230 x 230 cm           | 14 | <i>Finger (1)</i> , 2023, steel, 3 x 3 x 7 cm  |
| 5  | <i>Only Rhetoric (Green)</i> , 2024, vinyl adhesive, 60 x 80.5 cm    | 15 | <i>Against Nutrition (Small)</i> , 2024, crisp bags, metal, 56.5 x 4.5 x 63.5 cm           |
| 6  | <i>(Small Square Squiggly)</i> , 2024, bleached denim, 120 x 120 cm  | 16 | <i>Against Nutrition (Big)</i> , 2024, crisp bags, metal, 51 x 315 cm                      |
| 7  | <i>(Bigger Circle)</i> , 2022, bleached denim, 200 x 200 cm          | 17 | <i>Fingers (2)</i> , 2023, steel, 7 x 3 x 8 cm   |
| 8  | <i>(Big Circle)</i> , 2022, bleached denim, 185 x 185 cm             | 18 | <i>Finger (1)</i> , 2023, steel, 3 x 3 x 8 cm  |
| 9  | <i>(Eggs/Draped)</i> , 2024, bleached denim, 115x255cm               | 19 | <i>Fingers (2)</i> , 2023, steel, 3 x 3 x 17 cm  |
| 10 | <i>(Big Square Squiggly)</i> , 2024, bleached denim, 185 x 185 cm    | 20 | <i>Against Nutrition (Small)</i> , 2024, crisp bags, metal, 50 x 9.5 x 60 cm               |
|    |  | 21 | <i>Physical Comedy</i> , 2024, Aluminium, mirror, metal, phone, video, dimensions variable |
|    |  | 22 | <i>Cat (Left To My Own Devices)</i> , 2023, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm                      |