

Ádám Varga

Mapping

21 May – 28 June 2024

In 2019, after a six-month collection period, I created a book titled *1.5:10*. For this publication, I made several series of identical proportions, divisible into different thematic groups, which functioned as miniature equivalents of paintings that at the time I envisioned potentially creating in the future. The concepts of digital image editing, appropriation, transformation and the reproducibility of painting provided a comprehensive theoretical framework. Visually, I related to the formal world of video games, diagrams, engines, motion graphics and abstract signs. In a system of diverse visual solutions running throughout the book, I sought to create an inverted situation: the painting plans in digital and print form represented the original artworks and I regarded the paintings to be created as their reproduced versions.

In order to render a technically reproducible series of movements in the course of executing the paintings, I manually assigned vector shapes to each image in Adobe Illustrator. Later, I used these shapes in the painting process with a foil cutting machine. Much like the printing block in graphic techniques, in my case it is the foil cutting machine that provides the frame for the possibilities of reproducibility. By using it I try to understand the rules of the technique and at the same time exploit its inherent theoretical and practical problems.

The four paintings I am showing at Vintage Gallery are related to this conceptual sphere and to one of the series published in the book. They are presented as enlarged versions of the four levels of the *Tomcat* video game – *Levels 1-4* – that debuted in the late 1980s. Each of the levels follows vertical proportions where the player's position manifests in bird's-eye view – similar to cartography. The player progresses through the map by gradually moving upwards, starting at the bottom, until they reach the top. In order to reach the next level, they must overcome every obstacle – towers, cannons, barracks. However, the full map remains hidden throughout the game, as we only see the overall structure unfold through one framed detail at a time.

In creating these works, I aimed to capture the player's position on the one hand, while on the other hand, I focused on the attitude of a cartographer with their desire to map an entire area. Executed from this double position, the active-internal process performed by the player and the passive-external process performed by the cartographer combined can be called *mapping*, which in the context of this exhibition also functions as an umbrella term that can be interpreted in multiple ways.

The vertical arrangement of the four levels is presented in enlarged and distorted form, where the square pixel structure of the tracks is transformed into a rectangular system. The elongated images seem like a kind of defective anamorphosis or projection, in which we can recognize the objects resembling landscape elements from the side instead of the frontal perspective. This distortion can also be associated with the well-known projection problems of world maps. The spatiality of a globe must be represented on a flat surface in such a way as to achieve the smallest possible difference in proportion, while remaining as faithfully informative as possible. One of the paradoxes of such maps is that it is impossible to create a projection without distortion, so the units and parameters of the image will never be the equivalent to the area surveyed or mapped.

The specificity of the technical procedure is also related to the concept of *mapping*. The plotter machine cuts out four templates per painting – following a mechanical path – and each template takes around 7-9 hours to complete. After this several days long process, the shapes that will be covered in paint must be manually removed from the resulting template. Moreover, the remaining template parts must in turn also be removed from the surface after painting. In this sense, the machine itself plots the maps once, and then I plot them twice more during the painting process, surveying them and familiarising myself with their every proportion and detail.

Thirdly, the concept of *mapping* also metaphorically implies the process of attention: the process of mapping the scene emerging before us step by step – or in this case pixel by pixel. This is similar to what Vilém Flusser mentions in his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* in relation to "scanning"; our gaze wanders over the surface of the image, we identify the sight, and it is by combining different associations and abstract elements that we can recognise the properties of the image we see.

Ádám Varga

Ádám Varga (1995) studied painting at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts between 2014 and 2019 and was a visiting student at the Art Academy of Latvia in Riga in 2017. In 2019 he was an intern at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig. He was awarded the Derkovits Scholarship between 2021 and 2024, and in 2022 he was shortlisted for the MODEM prize by the MODEM Center for Modern and Contemporary Art in Debrecen. In addition to his artistic activities, he is a member of the PINCE artist-run space in Budapest and has helped in the realisation of several independent exhibitions and projects.

The focus of his work is on the role of production and reproduction in art by means of diverse painting projects, shedding light on the dialectical relationship between the two concepts and the irresolvable nature of their various contradictions. He seeks to develop contexts that are closely related to the neutrality of the process of production, the role of digitalisation in painting, and the questioning of authenticity. He uses definitions, files, digital images, computer games and diagrams as his sources. In recent years, he has been using a plotter to assist him in creating his paintings. In addition to the plotter's use for its intended purpose, experimentation with additional functions is also an important factor. His work can also be seen as a questioning of the very nature of painting, where the aim is to map out a technical and conceptual spectrum that exposes the tension between the reproduced character of the mass-produced product and the uniqueness of the original artwork.

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Tomcat – Level 3, 2024
acrylic on canvas, 185x145cm

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Tomcat – Level 2, 2024
acrylic on canvas, 185x145cm

Tomcat – Level 4, 2024
acrylic on canvas, 185x145cm

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Tomcat – Level 1, 2024
acrylic on canvas, 185x145cm