

# Keeping Painting in its Place: The refusal of the expanded field

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Whilst the proliferation of media and alternative spaces of/for art has allowed sculpture to become an important player within the 'expanded field', it seems that painting remains stubbornly 'fixed' within its own physical and material limitations. Unable to fully move away from the application of paint onto a flat surface, especially when attempting to blur its own frame to move beyond it into the temporal and environmental spaces of the viewer, painting often finds itself in an uneasy alliance with film, installation or performance; to the point of being absorbed by the 'other' and obliterated as painting. A result of such encounters is that painting fails to locate its own threshold and falls into the category of 'not-painting'. Instead of the old adage 'But this is not art!', we increasingly have 'But this is not painting!'.

Consequently, as artists and historians, when we do attempt to question what painting is, or what it could possibly become, we are pulled right back into the 'frame'. Painting, it seems, is becoming the last bastion of 'true' art for some, and is frustratingly confined to outmoded classificatory systems for others.

This session thereby invites historians, curators and practitioners to investigate the ways in which painting has historically been kept in its 'place', or within the 'frame', whilst also thinking about how it can move into an expanded field without losing its integrity as 'painting'.

## Speakers and Abstracts

### **Painting: Expansion, translation and excess**

*Magnus Quaife (Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University)*

Borrowing from Kate Briggs' (2018) essay on translation, 'This Little Art', this paper uses Barthes' research methodology of starting with a fantasy: the fantastical analogy that painting's expansion is an act of translation. It suggests that expanded painting relies on the master narratives of formalism from Bell and Fry to Greenberg that culminated in an attempt to bring 'clarity to painting's norms and uniqueness' (Greenberg 1960). It is precisely in translating these norms, often with a rationale of liberation (both metaphorically and literally), into new material possibilities that master narratives are reinforced. This is because painting's expansion relies on a set of recognisable norms to test 'the limiting conditions with which a picture must comply in order to be experienced as a picture' (Greenberg 1960).

Then, using examples of expanded translation (Anne Carson, Paul Legault) alongside artists whose work has been critiqued in terms of painting and sculpture (Rachel Harrison, Kaari Upson) the paper takes ideas from Byung-Chul Han's writing to re-contextualise the notion of expanded painting as translation and asks if this expansion is an indulgence in the culture of excess through an excess of the grammar of painting.

The paper questions the potential of painting's expansion, asking if it is compliant to contemporary cultural norms and hegemonic master narratives or a radical reinvention of medium in the post-medium age, thus contributing to a framework for wondering whether or not the expanded field should be embraced or rejected.

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### **Minimum Security Painting: Increased dimensionalities and the expanded field**

*Craig Staff (University of Northampton)*

In *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967–1975* (2006) Katy Siegel noted that the lifting of prohibitions in the late 1960s brought with it the demise of "maximum security painting", a term she uses to describe the modernist abstraction of Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitiski and Morris Louis. However "painting wasn't at an end...but only a certain definition of painting..." Siegel's admission denotes the fact that the reductivism of this approach to painting was at odds with, and ran counter to, what one might describe was a minimum-security version of the medium, a version that, during the period in question, gained a measure of critical purchase. Marked by an "increased dimensionality," (Carolee Schneemann), the work of Sam Gilliam, Lynda Benglis and Karen Carson nevertheless foregrounded its relationship to, if not its identification as painting.

This paper will explore the historical moment during which artists sought to extend the parameters of the medium beyond formalist abstraction and beyond the perceived reductivism of Greenberg's criticism. Moreover, and echoing Siegel, what will be claimed is that although the lifting of prohibitions heralded the demise of a particular approach to abstraction and, by extension, the topology of modernism, it had become most readily associated with a certain definition of painting and, by extension, a certain definition of modernism remained. The aim of this paper, then, will be to examine a historical moment wherein a minimum-security version of the medium sought to reconsider its position in relation to a more discursively expanded field of production.

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### **Painting Expanded through including Spectators**

*Helen Westgeest (Leiden University, Netherlands)*

Painters discovered the floor's potential in their efforts to intensify interaction with their public. Horizontality, according to Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, was a response to modernist paintings, which caused viewers to forget they were standing on their feet. Horizontality also underscores the materiality of paint and pictorial surfaces, due to their subordination to gravity when bound to the floor. Extending painting by physically including spectators differs from 3D-experiments, whereby painting is not expanded, but diluted in spatial arts.

Serbian artist Ivan Grubanov's *United Dead Nations* (2015), for instance, has visitors walk over paintings made of partly dissolved flags of no-longer-existing nations. Pakistani artist Imran Qureshi produces floor paintings in public spaces by splashing blood-red paint, which he reworks through detailed brushstrokes in the style of traditional miniaturists. If Qureshi's and Grubanov's paintings would look like decorative murals when presented vertically, their horizontal display encourages spectators to contemplate them as remnants of violent events turned into silent socio-critical paintings.

Artur Zmijewski's *Them* (2007), in which social interactions on the floor turned into paintings, serves as an insightful counterpart. This Polish artist invited representatives of social groups to create paintings collectively. These became part of their ideologies, most literally by wearing their own paintings on their shirts as "frames".

In her 'Expanded Field' essay, Krauss suggests that contemporary painting "would probably turn on the opposition uniqueness-reproducibility". I argue that these socio-critical paintings interrogate repetition and uniqueness, while expanding through inclusion of their spectators.

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### **Painting Between Personhood and Objecthood, the Premises for an Expanded Painting's Medium**

*Stefania Laccu (De Montford University, Leicester)*

In 1960, in the second volume of the magazine *Azimuth*, the Italian artist Piero Manzoni claimed that we cannot detach ourselves from the ground by jumping, rather, we have to fly. Similarly, in order to achieve real progress within the arts, the Italian artist said that it is necessary to operate radical transformation. What are the possible implications that this statement raises for art practitioners who want to approach the medium of painting today? What does it really mean to paint in the liquid space of the expanded field? How should a painting look to demonstrate its engagement with and adequacy to the allegedly post-medium condition we apparently inhabit?

In this paper, I will present the recent reflections that I am elaborating as a practitioner and researcher, thinking of the painting's medium as a heterogeneous agglomerate of events, rather than a mere union of material components, which inevitably account as specific for the painting's medium as a relational phenomenon. Within the expanded field, I regard painting as an intramedium, an interstitial and vibrant entanglement among the painter's minded body, the material's surface such as paints and the surface itself. By allowing the painter's agency to perform as an active component of the medium, a painting emerges as an alter corpus provided with a psychosomatic skin. To defend my hypothesis, a series of arguments will be presented, drawing on the theories of 'material engagement' (Malafouris: 2018),

'thinking-through-making' (Ingold: 2012), 'brain's body maps' (Damasio: 2017), 'Ego-skin' (Anzieu: 1985) and the 'liveness' of painting (Graw: 2013).

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### **Expanded 'Field': Painting, pigment, powder**

*Rachel Magdenberg (University of Wolverhampton)*

This paper is oriented around the suggestion that expanded painting practice through temporal, spatial and material registers, and the maintaining of painting's integrity could perhaps be pursued in light of the 'geologic turn' through use of natural pigments, powders or site-specific material that connects to an expanded 'field' but also painting's conventional framing.

Focusing on material of 'paint' from the 'field' (natural minerals, chemicals and synthetics) this 'geology' of painting (Parikka, 2015) can be evidenced in contemporary practices such as those of Sigrid Holmwood, Onya McCausland, Polly Apfelbaum, Rodney Harris, Lionel Playford, Maria Lalić, Selma Parlour, Liz Elton, Alexis Rockman and herman de vries.

I will consider whether matter should be kept in its place and not mined, extracted or invented, and whether localised, handmade and low-impact labour can bypass the capitalist system to which painting belongs. Waste, contamination, distribution methods, labour ethics and the volatility of substances and practices will be noted. I will observe artistic practices and propose these as expanded 'fields': in a metaphorical way, as material insertion/collage of 'readymade' landscape, textural dimensions, and 'land art' and 'earthworks' that enable painting in two spaces – wall and field/land.

I will observe time-based activity (deep time formulation, prehistoric painting, accumulation, deposits, and artistic application) and the Anthropocene's temporal, ecological and geological challenges. I will refer to *A Geology of Media* (Parikka, 2015), *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, art and the chemical industry* (Leslie, 2005) and *The Field to Palette: Dialogues on soil and art in the Anthropocene* (Toland, Noller and Wessolek, 2018).