

**On the network of painting and its activation. A study in two parts**

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## Introduction. Setting the intentions

The present thesis is a personal study on the network of painting and its activation. The project aims to explore painting as an active object connected with the world around it and is driven by my interest and work with painting in my practice as an artist. The thesis is in two parts. The first is a theoretical investigation of the meaning and declinations of the network's concept within painting. The second is a practical implementation of the same idea through a field experiment consisting of a journey with one painting<sup>1</sup>.

My use of the term “network” originates from American art historian and curator David Joselit, who frames the concept concerning painting in his essay *Painting Beside Itself*, published in *October* no. 130 in 2009. He derives the notion of the network from the German artist Martin Kippenberger, who addresses it in an interview with German artist Jutta Koether from 1990-1991: “Simply to hang a painting on a wall and say that it’s art is dreadful. The whole network is important! Even spaghetti... When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it. In a gallery that is also the floor, the architecture, the color of the walls.”<sup>2</sup> According to Joselit, with these words Kippenberger “identified the most important problem to be addressed on canvas since Warhol.”<sup>3</sup>

Beyond the hyperbolic tone willingly employed by Joselit, the question is of crucial importance, at least for an artist who, like myself, is actively working in the field of painting. What I find most interesting in this vision is the conceptualization of painting as a network in a series of transitive actions and behaviours. For Joselit, painting can no longer be thought of as a static object which one gazes upon, but instead as an active entity, continuously networking between

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- 1 The two parts are here divided for better clarity; however, I have in fact often jumped from one part to the other while developing the thesis.
  - 2 Ann Goldstein, ed., *Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective*, (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 316.
  - 3 David Joselit, “Painting Beside Itself,” *October*, no. 130 (Fall 2009): 125–134.

multiple fields of objects and subjects, which one follows. In other words, painting is a social object that affects and is affected by all the elements that belong to its context.

Based on the interest in how a painting enters into society, circulates, and is treated, I decided to initiate a project where I could stress not only how I look at painting but also how I interact with it. Inspired by British writer T.J. Clark's writings in ways I will elaborate on shortly, I came up with the idea to study how a continually changing context could affect a painting and its relations. I became very fascinated by the thought of creating a dynamic relationship with one single picture, where I would use the artwork like I use any other everyday object.

I decided to follow this fascination and to initiate a daily rhythm in which the painting follows me in all my activities. I follow it (as Joselit suggests) in all its interactions. The way to translate this flow into writing is through a daily diary, which I present in Chapter 5.

The inspiration to use the diary format comes from British Writer T.J. Clark, who in his book *The Sight of Death* from 2006 takes upon an exciting experiment in art-writing. Here, he starts keeping a diary on two paintings by French painter Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* and *Landscape with a Calm*, which at that time were both displayed at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Over time, Clark returns to the gallery day after day to look at these paintings, and notes his impressions down in his diary. Along with his investigation, the focus slowly starts moving away from the two masterpieces as such and pointing towards his relationship with them: "Writing came easily, for the most part – more easily than I ever remember. The process was a pleasure. I could hardly believe that each morning there were new things to see in the pictures, new things to think about, words for them ready to hand."<sup>4</sup> The book gradually develops beyond Nicolas Poussin's pieces and into a study on the nature of painting's complexity.

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4 T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death*, (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 8

An element that I find fascinating in Clark's narration is that his primary job while visiting L.A. wasn't clear from the beginning: "Early in January 2000 I arrived for a six-month stint at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. (...) It was not clear what would occupy my time in Los Angeles, but the most likely bet was Picasso between the wars."<sup>5</sup> He continues: "All I can offer by way of excuse is that this happened, or seemed to happen, involuntarily. I certainly did not think, when I made my first diary entry on *Landscape with a Calm* a day or so after coming across it in these new circumstances."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, chance and uncertainty have shaped my studies as well. The sight of Death was introduced to me by Professor Emily Apter during her seminar at EGS in August 2018 - a session I was offered as a substitute for a cancelled session by art critic and philosopher Boris Groys<sup>7</sup>. Most importantly, the flow of Clark's investigation reflects how I have carried on my thesis, where reading, writing, imaging, and experimenting on the field have been organically influencing each other.

To sum up my intentions and my wishes for this thesis, my main aim is to understand and frame the concept of the painting network concerning art history in contemporary times and my artistic practice. Hopefully, a red line will show up to help identify different nuances on this topic and clarify why it is an important matter.

Through my practical investigation, I hope to stress how we usually install, see and use painting. By carrying one single painting around with me in my daily doings over some time, I wish to take away the artwork from its standard height – away from its safe and almost sacred position on the wall. I also hope that the experiment will cast a different light on the aura that often connects to painting due to its economic value while letting my deep, almost visceral love for the medium shine through

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5 T.J. Clark, *Ibid.*, 1.

6 T.J. Clark, *Ibid.*, 4.

7 The possibility to study with Boris Groys was the main reason behind my initial decision to enroll at EGS, but I never had the chance to attend any of his seminars due to his health conditions. Nevertheless, despite his absence, he seems to have defined the course of my studies in the end.

## PART 1. INVESTIGATION

### Chapter 1. Stepping into the network. References and examples in art

As mentioned in the introduction, the main idea for the practical part of my thesis is to investigate the network of painting based upon one single artwork. Here, I will bring a painting on a daily journey and place it in different settings to observe and study its relation to its network. To prepare me for this experiment's launch, I have researched art projects that could relate to the topic and shape my investigation. The collection and formalization of the research phase constitute the theoretical part of my thesis that I will present in the present and following chapters.

The first doubt I need to resolve is which painting I should choose for my experiment. In my practice as a painter, I tend to come back to the same artwork multiple times; selecting an image of my own would raise the question of when the work could adequately be considered finished, which would weaken the project's core purpose. Like Robert Rauschenberg needed another artist's work for his *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953), I needed to look beyond my studio for a painting to suit my project. Rauschenberg found from his process that he needed the work he erased to be declared art before he started to erase it. "Rauschenberg first tried erasing his drawings but ultimately decided that for the experiment to succeed, he had to begin with an artwork that was undeniably significant in its own right."<sup>8</sup>

Rauschenberg choose a work by another artist he admired and respected, and he finally selected a piece by Willem de Kooning, who was one of the most successful abstract expressionists at that time<sup>9</sup>. The two artists were also good friends, and Rauschenberg often visited de Kooning at his

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8 "Erased de Kooning Drawing," SF MoMA, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.sfmoma.org/essay/erased-de-kooning-drawing/>

9 "Robert Rauschenberg - Erased De Kooning," YouTube, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpCWh3IFtDQ>

studio on Fourth Avenue. The same year Rauschenberg did the *Automobile Tire Print* with John Cage: a work that, together with *Erased de Koonig Drawing*, has later proved his most influential works.

The *Automobile Tire Print* is a print consisting of the mark left on a roll of paper by car tires - more precisely, by the Ford Model A owned and driven by Cage on occasion. Rauschenberg often installed the print on the floor, meaning at the same level where it was produced. About this placement, art critic and historian Leo Steinberg declared that “the tilt of the picture plane from vertical to horizontal” is “the most radical shift in the subject matter of art”<sup>10</sup>. In his text, Steinberg refers to the fact that Rauschenberg often installed his painting or prints on the floor. And in this specific case, the horizontal position on the ground level acquired even more sense since it reflected how they had produced the artwork.

This example is meaningful for me because it stresses the importance of placement and the power of habits: you don’t have to visit many museums/galleries before you quickly see that all paintings almost hang at the same height all over the world<sup>11</sup>. Interestingly, this very impersonal and standardized way of watching painting is accepted and rarely tested when visiting a museum or gallery. So one could argue that there still is a need to question the placement of the work. *Automobile Tire Print*’s installation has later changed after Rauschenberg’s fame and the piece’s acquisition by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. As seen in an interview with Robert Rauschenberg produced by SF MoMa, the artwork is now hanging on the wall<sup>12</sup>.

Also, in the way paintings are typically used, they barely bear any sign of their viewers (users). A painting and any artwork in a museum or gallery circulating within the art world, entering in

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10 Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1972), 84.

11 “Installing an exhibition,” Purdue University, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/rueffschool/rueffgalleries/Forms/HangingGuide.pdf>

12 “Robert Rauschenberg to John Cage: “Be careful and drive straight”,” YouTube, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7M6LQJnGcA>

and out of exhibitions or collections, should not show signs of handling or any other activity it has been part of through its life. If it does so, it can have a crucial effect on the piece's value. In my case, it is clear that at one point, the artwork I will use in my experiment will start to show signs of the use – like a shoe that gets worn out. This parallel to a shoe brings about some interesting reflections on the project. Though I would intend to enjoy and reflect on the painting, I will bring about. I would also find it more interesting if the work is not wrapped or protected and will start to bear its usage.

A friend of mine has described the project as a documentary on a painting, and my professor Carlos Amoraes used the word “road trip” last time we discussed my thesis.

In recent art history, there are several examples where usage, handling, or more direct relationships or actions with an artwork question how the painting is created and how we look at the authorship within art. I want to bring a few examples of this notion to add more nuances to my project.

I like to start by discussing the work *Airmail from Venice* (2000) by Danish lens-based artist Myne Søe-Pedersen. The work consists of “a series of unexposed 4x5” film sent via airmail from Venice to Amsterdam. [...] The images are the results of the exposure of light onto the negatives during the shipping. Every letter took three to four days to reach their destination”<sup>13</sup>.

Søe-Pedersen creates a photographic series reflecting on time, light, and distance in a very delicate way. The series is a vital conceptual photographic piece where the artist only prepares the material for the mailman. He does all the rest until she brings the films into the darkroom and develops them. After the prints are produced and fixed, the circle is closed, and next time the work travels for a show or similar, it will probably be wrapped and protected differently.

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13 “Airmail from Venice” Myne Søe Pedersens website, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://mynesoe.net/Airmail-from-Venice>



*Airmail from Venice*, Myne Sjøe-Pedersen, 2000. 4x5" B/W analogue contact print. Edition of 20.

Another artwork related to Sjøe-Pedersen's *Airmail from Venice* and that I would like to bring as an example is the *FedEx Project* that spanned nearly a decade (2007-2014), by LA-based artist Walead Beshty. Similar to Sjøe-Pedersen, Beshty takes his point of departure from the notion of shipping and handling. For over seven years, Beshty has been shipping laminate glass objects, which perfectly fit inside different standard FedEx boxes. The boxes are then sent to galleries to be displayed in exhibitions and shipped back when the show is over. During their travel, the fragile glass boxes often crack or break, which is the work's core meaning. A sign of life, a scar from the journey left behind. As the artist himself declared in an interview with Danish artist and

curator Mikkel Carl: “I was interested in how art objects acquire meaning through their context and travel”<sup>14</sup>.



Installation view of the *FedEx project* series. From Walead Beshty’s solo show at Musée d’art moderne et contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland, 2019.

In the examples mentioned above, the artwork is not created in the artist’s hands but within a shipping and handling network. Though both works are manifested through their movement from one place to another, *Airmail from Venice* refers to Venice and Amsterdam’s specific distance, whereas the *FedEx Project* is continuously traveling. *Airmail from Venice* transfers from being an active film in an envelope to a developed photo mounted on glass, while the *FedEx Project*

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14 Walead Beshty, interview by Mikkel Carl, *Interview: Walead Beshty*, Malmö Konsthall, 2011

keeps on traveling as long as people want to exhibit it. I am curious to know what happens with the artworks in the series after they get sold. One can only imagine the stagnation after it has been permanently relocated to a museum's collection. From this point on, it will never be shipped with FedEx again, but only with some high-end art logistics company.

These two examples are significant to me concerning my experiment. I was interested in if my project could inform my mind during the whole journey like the light informs the film on its travel from Venice to Amsterdam as we see in *Airmail from Venice*. At the same time, I wished to create a project without an end, where the continually changing context would continue to make its mark on the painting as in the FedEx project.

Last but not least, I would like to bring attention to the work *The marriage and honeymoon in Portugal* (1992) by German artist Yvonne Dröge Wendel: a project that, in my opinion, reflects on the network and rituals humans live under. "In the summer of 1992, the artist Yvonne Dröge Wendel married Wendel, a cabinet that was in her mother's bedroom where her mother kept her jewelry and other beloved items. Yvonne subsequently took Wendel's name, and they both embarked on a honeymoon trekking on donkeys in Portugal."<sup>15</sup>

As for Søe-Pedersen and Beshty, Dröge Wendel believes that "the surroundings produce the work in a new way, each time"<sup>16</sup>. The main difference from the previous two examples is that Dröge Wendel is the direct informer, or should we say, the "artist that touches the artwork." In contrast, Søe-Pedersen and Beshty left their work in the hands of the postal company and FedEx. Moreover, in Dröge Wendel's case, the cabinet is not the work, but the engine that starts the artwork. It is clear that *The marriage and honeymoon in Portugal* differ from Søe-Pedersen's and Beshty's projects on the object's matter and how it is used. While the last two exhibit the results/marks embedded in an object (with the glass box or the print in focus), Dröge Wendel is interested in how the activation of the cabinet through the marriage and the honeymoon

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15 "My MacGuffin – Discussions around a cabinet," The Aarhus School of Architecture, accessed February 5, 2021. [https://kadk.dk/sites/default/files/chris\\_thurlbourne.pdf](https://kadk.dk/sites/default/files/chris_thurlbourne.pdf)

16 "Yvonne Dröge Wendel, Heineken Prizes Presentation, 29 September, 2016," YouTube, accessed February 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0II6EGUrrAk>

influences the way she acts and interacts with the cabinet and other people. I think it is a brilliant thought to have the excuse to travel (honeymoon), so she doesn't need to carry out this project in her town and look like an idiot in the eyes of the people she knows. I think the shift of location can help a lot on how she can act with the cabinet in the end.

The experiment I wish to undertake references all the examples mentioned above and could be shaped like a cocktail with small elements from all of them. I want to carry out the project with an artwork from an artist that I admire and respect, like in Robert Rauschenberg's case. Similar to S e-Pedersen's project, the artwork will travel in space; it will be transformed and very probably damaged, like in Beshty's case. And as it happens for Dr ge Wendel, I will establish a relationship with the artwork, which will influence how I interact with the artwork itself and other people around me.

Later in my research, I have stumbled upon a particular body of works titled *Mailed Paintings* by German artist Karin Sander. As in Beshty's case, this work deals with the concept of transport, but here it is stretched white primed canvas that are shipped, without any cover or wrapping. In the press release for her *show Gast: On Kawara*, at Sassa Tr lzsch in Berlin, 2011 it reads: "Without prior manipulation the primed canvases are mailed unwrapped to various exhibitions. Along the way their unprotected surfaces are covered by marks that visually transcribe the distance they traveled. The Mailed Paintings absorb the patina of their postal route. The monochromatic white surfaces act as self-writing diaries that record the journey of the work. The collected patina exaggerates and mirrors the effect of the passage of time on the surface of the painting and emphasis on the environment of the exhibition and the circumstances surrounding it. Thereby the artwork is constantly in the mode of being exhibited."<sup>17</sup>

Differently from Beshty, that ships his glass boxes wrapped into a package, Karin Sander founds her project on a white primed canvas that is left naked. In this way, the painting becomes the surface that bears all the marks left from the several contexts it encounters along its travel towards us.

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<sup>17</sup> "Mail Paintings" from Karin Sanders website, accessed April 9, 2021, <http://www.karinsander.de/en/work/mailed-paintings>

## Chapter 2. “How does painting belong to a network?”

In the introduction, I have tried to define what the term network refers to and how it has entered the art world. In the first chapter, I focused on examples related to the notion of the network from the art world at large. In this chapter, I wish to touch specifically upon how a painting belongs to a network. To do so, I will discuss a few notions I have become aware of along my research. I will particularly underline how emotional kinship and economic value are two fundamental elements of the network that dictate the way we interact with painting.

I want to start with Martin Kippenberger’s interviewer from his 1990-1991 interview, German artist and writer Jutta Koether, who has produced several exciting projects relating to the network’s idea. I would especially like to discuss two of them: *Inside job* from 1992 and *Lux Interior* from 2009.

In her interview with art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Koether tells about *Inside job*: “I never looked at painting as some masterful thing one would want to reinstall, but instead as a platform, a potential, an island, a lifeboat, a discipline to negotiate life... a performance. An attempt at something impossible, a reinvention of painting through painting. I wanted to make it a temporary site, which I took literally. There was this large painting I made in 1992 called Inside Job. It was a work that I made in New York before I showed in a gallery. I placed the painting in an apartment on the floor and invited people to view it.

I used it as a frame for experimenting with my own thing and inviting guests/visitors myself. I had these small rooms: one with a painting on the floor, the other with a desk. I asked people one-on-one to come and look at the painting in progress, and then to sit with me and speak about the experience of seeing the painting”<sup>18</sup>.

Koether here gives her own story on one of her early works from her period in New York. She presents her idea that painting is a platform to perform with: a potential that invites the artist to

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18 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “A Conversation with Jutta Koether,” *October Magazine*, no. 157 (Summer 2016): 15-33

experiment with the work-frame. The critical feature here is not the painting's subject, but everything that takes place around it. The picture becomes the thing people visit to see and discuss. The core of the project for Koether is the activation that happens when the painting enters into the network where it belongs, other than just hanging it on the wall, as Kippenberger says. At this stage of my research, I can only guess why the focus on the network has become a prime interest for artists such as Koether, but it might come from the burden of painting's long history.

An example from Koether's practice that could confirm my intuition is *Lux Interior* from 2009 at Reena Paulings in New York: a solo show consisting of one single painting installed on a wall in the middle of the room, with one foot on the stage and one foot off. The painting is titled *Hot Rod (after Poussin)* and is a remake of Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* from 1651. In the press release from the exhibition, we can read that "Koether's practice has often involved appropriations and distortions of male masters such as Manet and Cézanne. Her recent encounter with Poussin – via T.J. Clark's study *The Sight of Death* – has evolved into an experimental movement between reading and painting, an exploration of the relations between language and pictures (and their reciprocal mistreatments of each other). Accompanying the exhibition's single painting is an archive compiled by the artist, a sort of extended footnote comprising her readings on the reintroduction of Poussin into modern art historical interpretation, preparatory sketches made while planning the exhibition, and song lyrics by The Cramps (the exhibition is named after the horror-punk band's front man who passed away this February)."<sup>19</sup>

As we can grasp by this description, Koether seems to be willing to shake the heavy legacy of Poussin's art (and, together with him, of the history of painting at large) by activating her painting, presented with one foot on stage entering into the spotlight.

This action is relatively coherent with what she affirms in her interview with Buchloh, where she states that she "never looked at painting as some masterful thing one would want to reinstall"<sup>20</sup>.

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19 "Press release of the solo show *Lux Interior* by Jutta Koether," Contemporary Art Daily, accessed February 5, 2021. <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2009/05/jutta-koether-at-reena-paulings/>

20 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Ibid.*



Jutta Koether's *Hot Rod (after Poussin)* as seen at her solo show *Lux Interior* at Reena Spaulings, New York, 2009.

In *Lux Interior*, the painting is installed like it's a living being comprising of two legs and caught in the act of taking the spotlight. On top of that, she spins a web of connections around the painting by performing a series of readings in front it<sup>21</sup>. It becomes clear that Koether is not interested in presenting that specific painting as such, but rather in discussing what painting, in general, is made of and where it's able to travel - the network.

This project is an example of the artist's emotional kinship with painting that informs an essential part of her practice. Especially in the book *f* (first published in German in 1987 and successively published in English by Sternberg Press in 2014) and in the article *Beyond, Beyond! Two Years after the Conference* (where she recalls the lecture she presented at Harvard University in 2013), Koether opens the door into her love for the medium. Talking in third

21 Ana Cardosa, "The Staging of Restricted Means in the Landscape Redefines the Terms of Pleasure of Painting...", YouTube. Accessed February 5, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRt0xMTHcTc>

person about herself and sharing her doubts on being on top of the academic situation, she writes: “The only thing she could rely on was a kind of particular faith in/love for painting (...)”<sup>22</sup>. And she continues: “Therefore, thoroughly questioning and existentially critiquing the making of one’s love is not easy”<sup>23</sup>. I am thankful for her honest approach to painting that shines through these quotes. Addressing painting with the words “love” and “faith”, terms rarely used within the context of the art world, lends a hand to the unexplainable and the irrational that can be a motor behind many of our actions in our lives—a rare entrance in our academic approach to the material.

Koether’s poetic approach reaches its peak in her book *f*. Here, Koether obsessively goes through the things that in her eyes make art/make paintings and the things that art make: something that can be anything from social connections to flowers or plastic bags. To underline her religious dedication to painting, she writes: “I believe in paints like the eco-freak believes in his homeopathic medicine”<sup>24</sup>.

Part of the book is divided into different chapters entitled as the various materials that, in her opinion, make art, such as *Velvet Blanket*, *Coral Necklace*, *Orange*, *Curtain*, *Fountain Pen*, and *Lipstick* amongst others. Here she wanders into the emotional abyss of material love, and we grasp how connections are built based on affection and dedication. Links that don’t need all the art theory and history we are normally exposed to, and that can nevertheless be transformed into art. The chapter *Lipstick*, has a clear reference to the action of painting and applying paint. Here she writes about a visit to a museum: “When she hunkered down in front of a painting like this and her gaze was directed solely towards the appraisal of surfaces covered in lipstick color she

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22 Jutta Koether, “Beyond, Beyond! Two Years after the Conference,” in *Painting beyond Itself*, edited by Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 55

23 Jutta Koether, *Ibid.*, 56

24 Jutta Koether, *f* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).

knew it was not the way she had been taught to look at painting in museums. So she said to herself that she was regarding these paintings in an illegal manner.”<sup>25</sup>

Here she wants to show us that education, lust, and looking at paintings are three things that can go hand in hand or the opposite, as in this case. By introducing the idea of an “illegal manner of looking at paintings”, she brings in the perspective of education: the specific way we are being taught to look at painting. Since early childhood, we are subjected to restrictions regulating how one should and shouldn’t look at painting. It’s mandatory information when you visit a museum with children: Don’t touch, don’t go too close, no running, etc. For the respect of the art and fear of its high prices, what would happen if a child destroyed a valuable painting.

Koether crosses the barriers and explores painting in a way that goes beyond what you are allowed to do in a museum. Here the exciting thing about painting or art, in general, is that it is thought of as a free material. We learn in school that a work of art is open for interpretations, but at the same time, education narrows our spectrum of possible connections with the artwork.

If we go back to *f*, she continues, “she had never been much interested in questions of sense because she had seen that the conditions under which things are seen and named are crucial to their sense and that for her these were conditions of art, and that was obvious anyway.”<sup>26</sup>

Now we start to get hold of the network that she describes as a set of “conditions” and how these can affect the gaze.

In the mentioned examples, Koether shows different ways of addressing and experimenting with and through painting as a medium. Interestingly, in the interview with Buchloh she doesn’t even mention what the painting in *Inside job* depicts or is about. What is in focus is the viewer’s thoughts on the painting, and it seems like the actual work is the whole setting where the canvas is only one of the many elements. At this point, one might want to question: is the problem addressed on canvas, as Joselit claims, or via the canvas?

In *Lux Interior*, Koether spreads out several connections: firstly, through her reference and rework of Poussin’s legacy; secondly, through her installation and title; and lastly, but not less

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25 Jutta Koether, *Ibid.*

26 Jutta Koether, *Ibid.*

importantly, through her performance in front and around the painting. As Joselit points out, *Lux Interior* offered a sophisticated response to his question: “How does painting belong to a network?”<sup>27</sup> And he continues: “Koether approaches the problem in a different way. Instead of attempting to visualize the overall contours of a network, she actualizes the behavior of objects within networks by demonstrating what I would like to call their transitivity. The Oxford English Dictionary gives one definition of “transitive” as “expressing an action which passes over to an object.” I can think of no better term to capture the status of objects within networks - which are defined by their circulation from place to place and their subsequent translation into new contexts - than this notion of passage.”<sup>28</sup>

In defining the notion of transitivity, Joselit looks back to Marcel Duchamp “Given Marcel Duchamp’s fascination with passage within painting, not only in works such as *Passage from Virgin to Bride* (1912) but in *The Large Glass* (1915–23) and even through the peregrinations of the readymades over their “lives” this seems a good moment to acknowledge the importance of Dada painting to the contemporary development I am sketching out. Whether the influence is direct or not, and I’m somewhat doubtful it is, both Dada and so-called neo-Dada artists were exploring how painting might embrace networks beyond itself.”<sup>29</sup>

Without any doubt, Duchamp was fully aware of the network and its importance in art, not only as an artist but also in his practice as a curator, where he explored his interest in linking artworks to ordinary objects. Curating was his income for quite some time, and he often refused to take part in the shows he organized, leaving the exhibition’s spotlight to his artist friends - a practice he often referred to as “the art game.”<sup>30</sup>

The example I would especially like to mention is his delicate touch on the surrealist exhibition he organized in New York together with André Breton titled *First Papers of Surrealism*. Here

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27 David Joselit, “Painting Beside Itself,” *October Magazine*, no. 130 (Fall 2009): 125–134

28 David Joselit, *Ibid.*

29 David Joselit, *Ibid.*

30 Caroline Cros, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 88.

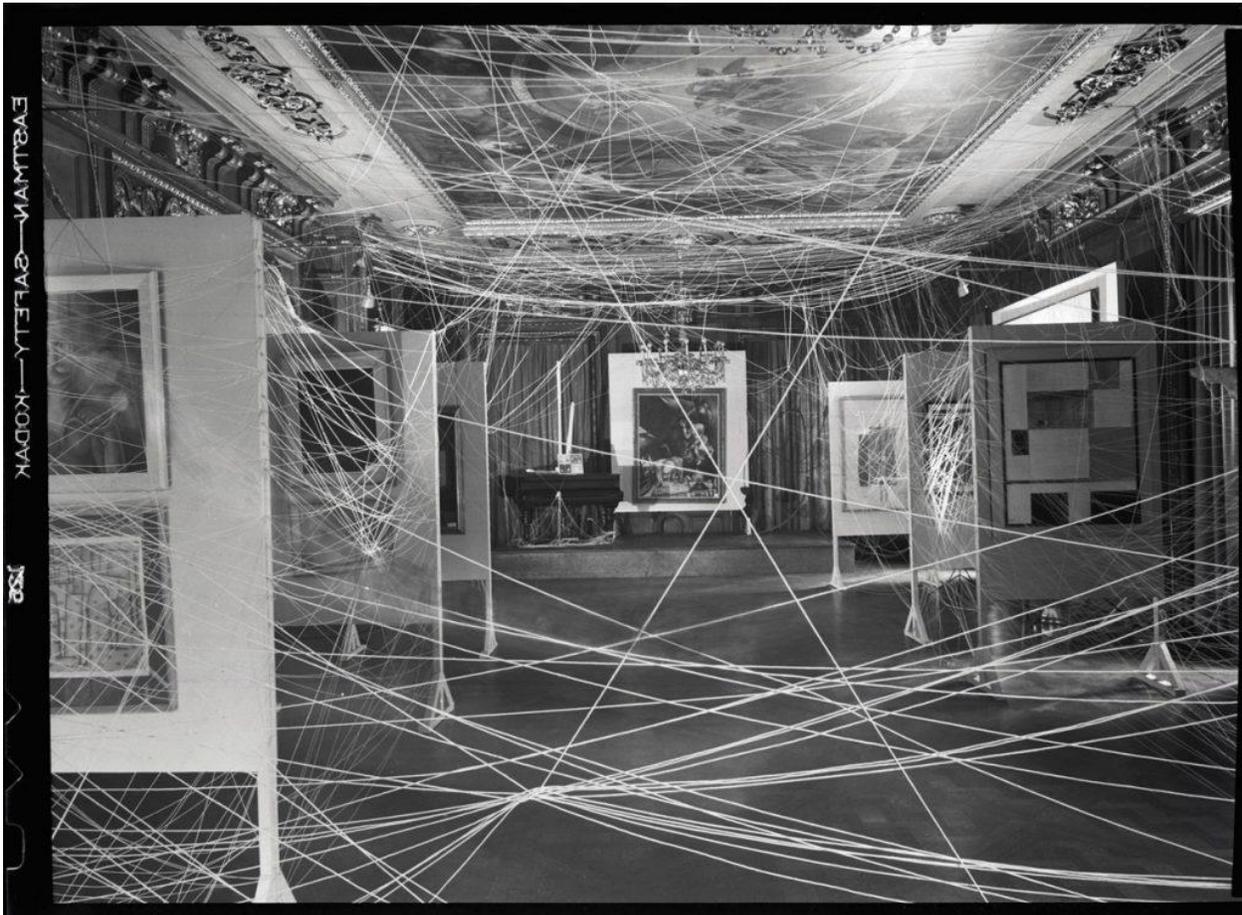
Duchamp stretched eight kilometers of string throughout the exhibition space, from floor to ceiling, creating a vast spider web linking the show together with everything else in the room. For the exhibition's opening, he didn't attend, Duchamp organized a happening where he invited six children to mingle with the audience and play following his instructions. In her book on Duchamp, art critic and curator Caroline Cros report the experience as recalled by one of the performing children: "We were encouraged to run about and I remember feeling somewhat uncomfortable, both because I didn't think it was proper behavior and also because I sensed that some of the guests were of the same opinion!" Duchamp also instructed them that, if they were chastised, they should say they were playing on his behalf: 'we had all the huge rooms to ourselves and we started throwing balls. Just kept on through the whole evening and it got so crowded and we kept playing. Our instructions were to ignore everybody and just play to our heart's content. We just loved it!.'<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting to underline that both Duchamp and Koether insist on the notion of proper behavior linked to art, which they wish to transgress in their work. Using appropriate behavior concerning artists and their work, we are already applying a frame for stagnation. A standing still, without relation to time and space. I see both Koether and Duchamp's need to avoid stagnation by activation through the network; in Koether's case, by performing with and around the painting.

Like in her show *Lux Interior*, where she presents an image of this activation, with the painting caught in the action of stepping on stage.

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31 Caroline Cros , *Ibid.*, 103.



Installation view of the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, showing Duchamp's string installation, 1942. Photo by John Schiff. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy the Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

Same counts for Duchamp in his contribution to *First Papers of Surrealism*, where he employs the string to point to all possible surfaces and objects in the room that artworks connect with like it was an active gaze frozen in a slit. Similar to Koether, Duchamp activates the works of art through the performance of the children playing. These examples show both an “active” and what I would call a “passive” connection to the network, made visible by installing the works.

I would now like to fill up the gap I took by jumping from 2009 to 1942 by introducing some thoughts linked to relational aesthetics: a concept introduced a few years earlier than Joselit's text and a few years after Kippenberger's interview with Koether.

The term “relational aesthetics” was coined by the French art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud in 1998. Here he defined it as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.”<sup>32</sup> Bourriaud here postulates that the posing of artist-constructed social experiences is art-making. Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its context, relational art is entirely beholden to its environment and audience’s contingencies.

Relational aesthetics differ from Joselit’s notion of the network because it seems to be much broader, whereas Joselit is specific about painting. Nevertheless, what we are presented to in Nicolas Bourriaud’s book isn’t that far from the examples we looked at earlier, trying to visualize artists who are said to work within the network of painting.

In her article *WTF is... Relational Aesthetics?*, Chayka points out that “Relational aesthetics takes as its subject the entirety of life as it is lived, or the dynamic social environment, rather than attempting mimetic representation of object removed from daily life.”<sup>33</sup>

In Chayka’s opinion, the most famous work, probably the most renowned practitioner of relational aesthetics, is Argentinean-born Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija’s first solo show *Untitled (Free)* at 303 Gallery, New York in 1992. During the exhibition’s length, Tiravanija cooked Thai food for visitors in a kitchen set up within the gallery. The food is the art, but not in the fine cuisine sense, and in the words of Tiravanija himself, “it is not what you see that is important but what takes place between people”<sup>34</sup>. The communal experience of cooking and eating the food becomes the object on display, under the artist’s direction, who acts as a sort of incident “curator,” or maybe “ringmaster”. And she continues: “In even simpler terms, the goal of most relational aesthetics art is to create a social circumstance; the viewer experience of the constructed social environment becomes the art.”<sup>35</sup>

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32 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Pres du Réel, 2002 (English edition)), 113.

33 “WTF is... Relational Aesthetics?”, Hyperalergic, accessed February 5, 2021, <https://hyperalergic.com/18426/wtf-is-relational-aesthetics/>

34 Kyle Chayka, *Ibid.*

35 Kyle Chayka, *Ibid.*

The clear difference between this example and Koether's *Inside job* or Duchamp's *First Papers of Surrealism* is the lack of a painting, a sculpture, or any other traditional artwork that enters into a network presented at the gallery. Though being aware that Tiravanija starting point is not a painter's practice, I find similarities in creating an outer frame where the final focus is not on a masterpiece or a body of works, but the whole setting is the work. In *Untitled (Free)*, we witness a network of cooking equipment, food, and dining guests presented in an art context within a gallery, which all add to the final work. Furthermore, Tiravanija moved everything he found in the gallery office and storeroom into the main exhibition space, including the director, who was obliged to work in public, among cooking smells and diners.

In the approach adopted by relational artists, as Bourriard writes in his book, human interactions in the gallery or museum space becomes the "raw matter for an artistic work"<sup>36</sup>. From his point of view, the interactivity of relational art is considered "superior to optical contemplation of an object, which is assumed to be passive and disengaged, because the work of art is a "social form" capable of producing positive human relationships"<sup>37</sup>.

While looking for similarities and differences to help me understand the term of the network in painting, I found a few thoughts from the critique of relational aesthetics worth sharing. In the essay *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, published in 2004 in *October*, Claire Bishop describes the new trend in the formats and structures of contemporary art venues inaugurated by Palais de Tokyo in 2002 due to the emergence of relational aesthetics in art. Bishop writes: "The Palais de Tokyo's improvised relationship to its surroundings has subsequently become paradigmatic of a visible tendency among European art venues to reconceptualize the "white cube" model of displaying contemporary art as a studio or experimental laboratory."<sup>38</sup> Bishop identifies Bourriard's book as an essential first step in identifying tendencies in the art of the

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36 Nicolas Bourriard, *Ibid.*, 37.

37 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October Magazine*, no.110 (Fall 2004): 51-79.

38 Claire Bishop, *Ibid.*

1990s. However, Bishop, also asks “if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?”<sup>39</sup> She continues that “the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness.”<sup>40</sup>

If, on the one hand, it is true that relational artworks seek to establish intersubjective encounters in which meaning is elaborated collectively rather than in the privatized space of individual consumption, on the other, these encounters do not fall outside the rules of the market. They are, therefore, less “idealistic” than how they could appear at first sight.

In other words, Bishop argues that the innovations brought by relational aesthetics reflect a shift towards an “experience economy”: the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences.

One artist whose practice I would like to use as an example concerning the painting network’s value is Merlin Carpenter. Carpenter worked as Kippenberger’s assistant in the early ’90s, deep in the almost legendary Cologne art scene’s ferment. There, he developed a distinctive style that bears his mentor’s mark in its use of sharp humor directed at the gallery system and his commentary on the generation of surplus value in the contemporary art world.

From 2007-2009 Carpenter held seven shows (all titled a variation on *The Opening*) across Western Europe and the USA. Here various slogans – such as “Die Collector Scum”, “Simon Lee utter swine” and “Cunts” – were painted onto pre-hung blank canvases in front of an audience at the private view of each exhibition. At Galerie Christian Nagel in 2008, one of these involved the artist arriving in and painting from a white Mercedes.

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39 Claire Bishop, *Ibid.*

40 Claire Bishop, *Ibid.*



Merlin Carpenter painting from a Mercedes during the opening of his solo exhibition *The Opening*, 2008 at Mercedes-Welt am Salzufer, Berlin.

As art critic Caroline Busta notices in her text published in the catalogue of *The Opening*, “it soon became apparent that it wasn’t so much the canvases, but his guests and gallerists—the social body in attendance—that he saw as readymade.”<sup>41</sup> Carpenter offered his viewers little more than the usual event of an opening with nothing to open. After all, “people go to art openings...because, more than the art, the occasion itself offers them the valuable prospect of increased social connectivity and the enrichment of whatever it is they personally produce. An opening is a group fantasy.”<sup>42</sup>

This is reflected in the catalogue’s design, which presents hundreds of photos from the opening

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41 Caroline Busta, “The Opening” in *Merlin Carpenter: The Opening*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), No page numbers.

42 Caroline Busta, *Ibid.*

events. The focus of the documentation is not on the artworks but instead on the audience. Each person who appears in the pictures is cited by their name, and in case the name is unknown to Carpenter, he uses a description such as “that woman who does watercolors”. In this particular catalogue, people attending the openings are treated and documented as artworks usually appear in art publications: photographed, reproduced, and accompanied by a caption.

If compared to the previously mentioned examples belonging to relational art, it becomes clear how different Carpenter’s approach is. The network still plays a crucial role, but while Tiravanija employs it to celebrate the gift, Carpenter seems to state no such thing as a “free service”.

Everything and everyone has a price: the artist offers the extravagance of his artistic activities, the audience offers their presence back. Adopting the terminology of a capitalistic economy, Carpenter gave a reading of his work as demonstrating that “there is a potential to extract surplus value from social relations.”<sup>43</sup>

The interesting point of Carpenter’s approach regarding my research is that the surplus value generated by the network falls back to the painting itself, to the artwork seen as a commodity. As described by Busta in her analysis of Carpenter’s shows, he “transparently exploited those who showed up, cultivating their unpaid surplus “labour” so that the paintings might be said to have value - a value that would cost him nothing, and from which he would profit.”<sup>44</sup>

*The Opening* works might be painting beyond itself at its most hyperbolic: it is the painting that openly capitalizes on the network for its own sake.

I don’t fully endorse Carpenter’s cynical approach, which wishes to erase any possibility of the artwork being a site for creating “positive human relationships” as theorized by Bourriaud. Still, I find his take on the creation of value in contemporary painting very fascinating. His point of view suggests that artworks (particularly paintings) are fetishes of actants, things that perform and determine and, for this reason, acquire value. This point of view has its roots in Karl Marx’s

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43 Merlin Carpenter, *The Outside Can’t Go Outside*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018) 14.

44 Caroline Busta, *Ibid.*

theories and his emphasis that no commodity is valuable in itself, that value is a “purely social” phenomenon. In her contribution to the book *Thinking through Painting*, published by Sternberg Press in 2012. German critic, professor, and editor Isabelle Graw shares this position and adds that the same is also true for artworks: “No artwork is valuable per se – its value is the result of an ongoing and never-ending social negotiation.”<sup>45</sup>

Graw goes further in explaining why painting is exceptionally well equipped to make space for the creation of value and satisfy the longing for substance in value. In her opinion, painting can suggest a strong bond between the product and “the absent person of its maker”. In other words, “painting’s capacity to appear particularly saturated with the lifetime of its author makes it the ideal candidate for value production.”<sup>46</sup>

The painting’s liveliness in the absence of its creator is a fundamental element in my research. I will develop an intimate relationship with a painting created by another artist (“the absent maker”) in my experiment. It will follow me in all my daily doings. It will be observed, showed, talked about, written about, and used every day. The painting, which has a value in itself, will acquire a new value from the relations it will enter in contact with, while at the same time getting worn out and damaged by them.

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45 Isabelle Graw “45 The Value of Painting: Notes on Unspecificity, Indecallty, and Highly Valuable Quasi-Persons” in *Thinking through Painting. Reflexivity and Agency beyond the Canvas*, edited by Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum and Nikolaus Hirsch (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 55.

46 Isabelle Graw, *Ibid.*

### Chapter 3. Why even bother. Painting and network in my artistic practice

After exploring the concept of the network in painting through theory and examples by other artists, in this chapter, I will explore my relationship with the topic by presenting three projects taken from my practice as an artist. This chapter wants to be a transition from the research-based part of my thesis to the practical one.

My interest in experimenting with a painting from another artist, is strictly linked to issues arising from my painterly practice. In the past few years, I have been asking myself many questions concerning how we produce, treat, and look at painting. Such questions have brought me to investigate the network of painting and, ultimately, explore it through my studies at EGS and the present thesis.

For this reason, I think it makes sense to mention the projects that, in my opinion, are the most meaningful to the topics and theories discussed so far, and the most adapt to function as a bridge towards the second and more practical part of this treatise.

The first example I want to present is the group exhibition *Landscape Modern Oil Painting Canvas Painting Abstract Oil Painting Wall Hanging* that I co-curated with Mads Lindberg. It took place in June 2017 at Galeri Benoni in Copenhagen.

Around a hundred paintings by twenty-four artists were installed in the main gallery room with pieces of furniture, electronics, handling materials, and storage elements. Given the overabundance of objects in relation to the space's size, only a few of the artworks were displayed on the walls, while the majority of them remained wrapped and piled up. The visitors could consult an inventory of the paintings included in the show and, in case they wished to see a specific one, the gallery owner took care of unpacking and displaying it for them.

Touching upon how we use and see painting, this curated project was one of my early steps into exploring painting within its network on several levels.

First of all, I was interested in observing how many paintings selected based on attraction and intuition could work together and communicate. The question was: is it possible to create an

exhibition that gathers artworks belonging to different styles, genres, countries, and generations without having a specific topic or conceptual thread linking them all? In my vision, the answer was yes as soon as the paintings belonged to a particular setting. As in Duchamp's string installation from 1942, all the artworks in the room were connected, but in my case, through invisible threads. How the crisscrossing twine changed the standard conditions of engagement with the art on show is also reflected in *Landscape Modern Oil Painting Canvas Painting Abstract Oil Painting Wall Hanging*. Here most of the pieces were not displayed, and their experience is thus limited.

Another aspect the exhibition explored was the absence of hierarchy among the artworks and between the paintings and the other elements. What is usually hidden in the white-cube setting was here literally brought to the centre of attention, creating an island in the middle of the room. As Paola Paleari noticed in the text accompanying the show, "the scope of the exhibition is not to use the gallery space to present "something else" than art, but instead to show the backstage of art itself - a condition of apparently causal assemblage of artworks and senseless coexistence of art and real-life elements that can be found in the restricted access areas of art galleries and museums."<sup>47</sup>

This aspect is connected to the value of painting and how it is reflected in and by its network. With this idea in mind, the catalogue for *Landscape Modern Oil Painting Canvas Painting Abstract Oil Painting Wall Hanging* was produced: a newspaper-like publication, featuring all the artworks included in the show together with the advertisements that paid for its creation and print. The publication's layout was based on two layers - one for the artworks, one for the ads - with the latter placed on top of the former, meaning that the biggest and most expensive ads would partially or entirely cover the artworks beneath.

As in Carpenter's catalogue *The Opening*, the focus point is shifted from the paintings to the surroundings, which often influences their very own legitimacy and existence: the buzz from the

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47 "Landscape Modern Oil Painting Canvas Painting Abstract Oil Painting Wall Hanging," Jir Sandel, accessed February 5, 2021, [http://jirsandel.net/press\\_landscape.pdf](http://jirsandel.net/press_landscape.pdf)

audience, vital to the artworks' production, in Carpenter's case; and the profit from the ads, necessary to their reproduction, in mine.

The second project I would like to discuss as an example of my interest in the network of the painting is the solo show *Subheads* that I presented at JIR SANDEL in 2018.

While the previous exhibition explored the acts of selecting, displaying, and storing paintings by implementing an "additional" strategy, in *Subheads*, I employed a "subtractive" method to comment on the paintings' creation and circulation within their network.

Using my atelier as a setting, I displayed three sculptures that I created by wrapping together all the materials, tools, books, and works present in my studio at the time of the show: three giant black monoliths whose content was declared and yet impossible to decipher. Inspired by shrink wrap's shiny opacity and its uses in the logistics of the art world, with this project, I wanted to draw attention to the things paintings are composed of within their ecosystem "at large". An approach similar to Jutta Koether, who in her book *f*, entitles several chapters with the names of various materials that - in her opinion - art is made of, such as *Velvet Blanket*, *Coral Necklace*, *Orange*, *Curtain*, *Fountain Pen*, and *Lipstick*.

Similarly, the main question that I wanted to raise with this project was: what makes a painting? Is painting just color on canvas, or is it something more, or something else? To find an answer to this question, I had to focus on the context where I primarily produce my paintings: my atelier. All the objects present in my studio are marked by a connection with my life as a painter: both traditional painterly materials (such as tools, pencils, stretcher bars, canvases, and so on) and bizarre objects I collect and store, and sometimes apply to my artworks. Plus, of course, all the art books that I consult as inspiration and the notebooks that I use for quick sketches. All these things inform my practice, and without them, my paintings would not be what they are. It is not references from outside that are pulled into the canvas here. Instead, the attempt to see the paintings from different positions results in an experimental arrangement, where the whole network of painting is condensed into itself.

My choice of using the black shrink wrap derives, once again, from my desire to include the backstage life of paintings in the exhibition and to offer a glimpse of how they look like when no one is watching, and the art gallery or fair's lights are turned off.

To some extent, this project goes against the division between "art" and "objecthood," as theorized by Michael Fried in his famous 1967 essay.

Contrasting Minimalists' work such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris against high Modernist painting and sculpture, Fried finds that Minimalism - or "literalist art", as he calls it - seeks to avoid being classified as either painting or sculpture. By flirting with the appearance of "objecthood" (the quality that all non-art objects have), literalist art deliberately blurs categorical definitions, confusing the distinction between painting and sculpture and between art and non-art.

In line with the same erosion of the distinction between art and non-art, and as an essential counterbalance to the three sculptures, I decided to display on the wall two readymade works, that is, two maple leaves painted by a child. I wanted to use them as an absolute symbol of the act of painting, where a canvas is prepared, stretched, and then covered with color. The child follows the same procedure of picking up a leaf, drying it, and then painting it, but without knowledge of his action's significance. For me, the leaf paintings are the icon of the painting at its primordial stage, and their relation with the sculpture is one of compensation rather than antagonism.

Another point in Fried's objection to Minimalism worth mentioning revolves around the fact that it is relational. Unlike Modernist painting and sculpture, where relationships are all internal, Minimalism initiates relationships both between media and with elements outside of the work altogether. These elements include the architectural setting – the space and ambient effects in which the work is displayed – and the audience: "Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work [...] the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation – one which, virtually by definition, includes the beholder"<sup>48</sup>.

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48 Fried, Michael, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* issue #5, June 1967, 15.

The concept of objecthood and theatricality leads me to the last project I would like to discuss concerning the network of painting within my practice: the exhibition *RAL 6002* at CGK in Copenhagen in 2018.



Installation view of *RAL 6002*, at CGK, Copenhagen, 2018.

In the summer of 2011, seventeen construction sites for the new metro line were established throughout Copenhagen. For this exhibition, which took place when the metro building was still ongoing, I produced a 1:1 replica of two green wooden fence fragments used to shield off the

construction sites. The name of the piece, which is also the show's title, derives from the fence's shade of Green in the RAL color chart, also called Leaf green: "Green, a color of life, represents freshness and security. While it creates a restful atmosphere, it also possesses the intense power of nature."<sup>49</sup>

The choice of color so strongly connected to nature is quite ironic if we think that the activity hidden behind it was far from restful and natural and completely embedded in the urban landscape. Among the aims of the show, there was my desire to comment on the dynamics of gentrification. Primarily how low-income artists and creative communities are often used to increase the attractiveness of semi-peripheral areas until the moment when, due to the city's unstoppable expansion, they become too expensive for their budget.

But let's bring the discourse back to painting, network, objecthood, and theatricality. In my eyes, the green fence appeared as a readymade painting - a colossal monochrome - scattered extensively around the city. The shape and the appearance of this object are enough to call it "painting". As noted by Paola Paleari in the text for the exhibition, "the ability of modest objects to carry meaning, and to appear familiar and yet so radically alien when displaced - with the addition that the object is here not appropriated but mocked, and located in a room that is far from being a white-cube."<sup>50</sup>

An essential element that influenced the idea and informed this project's realization is the screen concept - primarily as theorized by film and television theorist Francesco Casetti.

Casetti affirms that specific objects (such as a shield, a wall, a piece of paper, or a canvas) can exploit some of their characteristics to acquire a new aptitude. What was first identified as a device for warding off the heat of a fire or a draft of air, or for dividing a room, or for hiding a construction site - as in the case of the Copenhagen metro fence - can become a surface that addresses the eye and implies visual data. Surfaces that previously were aimed at other purposes can turn into an optical dispositive. In that sense, the metro fence and the canvas act in the same way and possess the same transformation power from "object" to "dispositive".

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49 "RAL 6002," JOTUN, accessed February 5, 2021, [https://www.jotun.com/fi/en/b2b/colours/Powder-colours/RAL/RAL\\_6002.aspx](https://www.jotun.com/fi/en/b2b/colours/Powder-colours/RAL/RAL_6002.aspx)

50 "Ral 6002," Jir Sandel, accessed February 5, 2021, [http://jirsandel.net/press\\_ral6002.pdf](http://jirsandel.net/press_ral6002.pdf)

The most exciting point in this theory is that everything within this field of transformation - including elements borrowed from its network - converge toward and become functional to the screen's presence. As pointed out by Casetti, the screen is a relational object: "we cannot delineate a screen "as such", as if it were a freestanding and self-contained device existing independently of its context. A screen always materializes as part of a dispositive; it becomes a screen in the framework of an assemblage of objects, needs, practices, actors, and circumstances that produce it as a screen".<sup>51</sup>

To conclude this chapter, before passing to the second part of this thesis, I would like to mention a concept belonging to the realm of psychology called "set and settings". American psychologist Timothy Francis Leary introduced the idea in the '60s to describe the physical, mental, social, and environmental context that an individual brings into a psychedelic experience. The idea that it is the dose or type of drug alone defines the effect on the person and the person's mindset and the context in which the drug is assumed. As Leary affirmed in the introduction of the book *The Psychedelic Experience*, "the drug dose does not produce the transcendent experience. It merely acts as a chemical key — it opens the mind, frees the nervous system of its common patterns and structures. The nature of the experience depends almost entirely on set and setting. Set denotes the preparation of the individual, including his personality structure and his mood at the time. The setting is physical — the weather, the room's atmosphere; social — feelings of persons present towards one another; and cultural — prevailing views as to what is real."<sup>52</sup>

In my opinion, this theory perfectly explains how differently we experience the same object in different contexts and can lead to exciting thoughts if applied to painting and its network. When a picture is presented within the traditional gallery system, it is hanged at standard height with its back against a white wall. Both in my practice (through my art) and in this thesis (through artwork by another artist), my wish is to challenge the current standard and experiment with different "set and settings" that could expand the experience and notion of painting. By bringing

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51 Francesco Casetti et al, *Screen Genealogies: From Optical Device to Environmental Medium*, (Amsterdam: University Press, 2019), 27–50.

52 Timothy Leary, Metzner and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1964), The Introduction.

a painting with me in all my daily errands for a specific time, I will change both the mental attitude (the set) and the physical and social environment (the setting) in which both myself and other viewers will encounter the painting.

Part 2 of the thesis is dedicated to describing the implementation of this experiment in all its phases, followed by a conclusion gathering the reflections that have arisen in the process.

## PART 2. IMPLEMENTATION

### Chapter 4. The Letters

To carry on my research on the painting and its network, I needed a “finished” artwork. A painting that I could see as concluded and not open for further development and possibilities within itself, but only in its relations with the various mindsets and environments it is supposed to interact with. Such a level of finishness is hard to find in my own paintings, as I often conceived them as “works in progress” that are never really concluded<sup>53</sup>. Therefore, as mentioned in Chapter 1, I needed to come into possession of a painting by another artist - possibly an artist whose practice I admired, exactly as Robert Rauschenberg needed another artist’s work for his *Erased de Koonig Drawing*.

At the beginning of my research, there was one artist whose practice kept haunting me: one of my painting heroes, the American artist Peter Acheson<sup>54</sup>. Since he is not known for working directly with the “network” in the way expressed by David Joselit, I was at first not thinking of him concerning the main topic of my thesis. Bringing Acheson’s painterly practice into the thesis made sense to me on a different level, grounded in what painting is and can do. His semi-childish approach to painting defines a path I can rely on to continually search and explore the medium,

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53 The question of when an artwork is finished, and what the definition of “finishness” is when applied to art, is a dilemma shared by many artists. Painters such as Raoul De Keyser, Albert Oehlen and Christopher Wool have made their signature out of works that look tentative, unfinished or self-cancelling. In 1928, Joan Miró confessed to his friend, the writer Francesc Trabal i Benessat, that after completing a painting he had his dealer take it away as quickly as possible: “I can’t bear to have it there in front of me... [When] I’ve finished something I discover it’s just a basis for what I’ve got to do next. It’s never anything more than a point of departure. [...] Do I have to remind you that what I detest most is lasting?”

Anne Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 91.

54 Born in Washington, D.C. in 1954, lives and works in Ghent, New York. Acheson was an early member of the Williamsburg art scene of the 1980’s, together with names such as Katherine Bradford and Chris Martin. Solo exhibitions include Brennan & Griffin, NY (2017), Thompson/Giroux Gallery, NY (2016), Novella Gallery, NYC (2013), John Davis Gallery NYC (2010), Elizabeth Harris Galley, NYC (2007).

combined with a fascination and love for the material. When I see his paintings, I feel like I'm witnessing works that are not based on particular skills or abilities but stem from curiosity and fascination.

How to get hold of an artwork has since the beginning been, that I would swap the painting I needed for my thesis for one of my paintings. This idea is connected with the conception of a painting's value, as discussed in Chapter 2: a notion oscillating between two opposite poles: love and money.

Having narrowed down my research to Peter Acheson's work, I started formulating a letter to him where I explained the project in the hope of getting hold of one of his paintings. As mentioned, the plan was not to buy it from him nor his dealer but to persuade him into a painting swap (a kind of economy that is common amongst artists and that I usually use with many of my colleagues<sup>55</sup>). I would add the formulation of a whole thesis revolving around one of his works: a generous gesture, I imagined.

My first contact with Peter Acheson's paintings happened in the group show Landscape Modern Oil Painting Canvas Painting Abstract Oil Painting Wall Hanging that I co-curated in 2017 in Copenhagen that I mention in Chapter 3 of this thesis. For the show, I had borrowed three paintings by Peter Acheson through his dealer Brennan & Griffin. Though none of Acheson's paintings did sell, the show was successfully received both in Denmark and abroad and praised for its curatorial concept and installation. For this reason, I had high hopes about the possibility of getting hold of yet another work by Peter Acheson for my project. Peter Acheson's dealer answered my email and redirected me to the director of the gallery representing him, who responded enthusiastically to my idea and put me in direct contact with Peter Acheson. Next step, I sent him my letter and waited.

Three months, two emails (and a third email to Acheson from his dealer) later, I still had no answer. I was warned in the beginning by Acheson's dealer that he was not an email person and that it could take long for him to answer. In the end, I decided that I must look around for another

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55 The topic of trade within art is so complex that its exploration would require a whole new thesis. Therefore, I will not go deeper into its analysis in this context. I would anyway recommend to read Megan O'Grady article *Cash, Credit or Painting? How, and Why, Artists Exchange Work*, published in 2019 on The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/08/t-magazine/artist-trades.html>

painter to include in my project. Maybe I could have used this difficulty in reaching Acheson in the project, or I could have continued my pursue by, for example, visiting him in person.

Nevertheless, as things evolved, I realized that my project's most important topic was not Acheson himself but the research around one single painting made by an artist I appreciate. And, luckily enough, I know and respect many artists dealing with painting!

After scanning through a list of possibilities, I decided to contact Anne Fellner, a Swiss/American painter based in Berlin. I was first introduced to Fellner's work via my artist friend Fabian Kuntzsch, who had exhibited her work within the frame of his project Real Positive. In 2016, Mads Lindberg and I included a painting she had realized together with her partner Burkhard Beschow in a group show we set up in LA in 2017. Since then, I have been following her work on the side.

When it came to choosing an artist for my project, I thought she could fit well for two reasons: first of all, because I had already established a positive contact with her, and secondly, because her practice is, without any doubt, steady and constant exploration of the painting medium.

When I think of Anne Fellner, I see, first and foremost, a dedicated painter that loves painting. Fellner's works are very painterly on the aesthetical side - mainly regular-shaped canvases without any material other than paint on the surface.

There is a lot more to be said about Anne Fellner's occupation as a painter, but I think this can be a good introduction of her intriguing practice for this thesis's purpose.

*Letter to Peter Acheson*

Dear Peter Acheson,

I hope this e-mail finds you well. I got your e-mail through Nick Irzyk from Brennan & Griffin.

Before I start this letter, please let me introduce myself. My name is Magnus Frederik Clausen, I am an artist based in Copenhagen, Denmark. I have a background in science studies, and I am currently working on my Master's thesis in Philosophy and Art at The European Graduate School.

As an artist, I am interested in painting, which I investigate through my studio practice, curation, and exhibition-making. I am occupied with how we create, see and use painting and how the network affects our perception of painting.

*The letter*

Dear Peter,

In 2015 I stumbled upon an online image of one of your works: an abstract painting with some elements attached to it and a text painted on the surface. The painting immediately caught my attention, and I started to search the internet for more information. The more I saw, the less I could say I knew since there was no verbal explanation or more resounding theme. But I became aware that what I witnessed was a direct and honest studio practice with a spiritual presence of reality, which grew out of these captivating paintings and into my mind. It felt like I found something I had been searching for for a long time. Something that made me think of what drives us to paint. And your anecdote about your daughter's material engagement with color (from the video interview on <http://www.gorkysgranddaughter.com/2013/07/peter-acheson-june-2013.html>) could be the right answer. Seeing my son drawing and painting while growing up has been a great inspiration for me.

After following your work online for a couple of years, it was a great pleasure to experience your paintings in real life. Through Brennan & Griffin I borrowed three of your works for the group exhibition *Landscape Modern Oil Painting Canvas Painting Abstract Oil Painting Wall Hanging* that Mads Lindberg and I arranged in 2017. I was glad that you trusted us for this show, which revolved around how painting connects with its surroundings beyond the gallery space. Both Lindberg and I took part in the show with a few pieces each as I was keen to experience my work next to my significant influences such as you, Per Kirkeby, and Svend Danielsen, amongst others.

After the exhibition, Lindberg and I squeezed the project even further to explore the documentation and reproduction of painting. We produced a newspaper touching upon the same topic through the photographic images from the show.

As mentioned earlier, I am currently working on a Philosophy and Art thesis at The European Graduate School. My writing is on how we look at painting in different contexts and its relation to its network. I am interested in an active relationship with painting, which I will investigate through a journey with an artwork. A friend of mine has described the project as a documentary on painting, and my professor Carlos Amoraes used the word “road trip” last time we discussed my thesis.

Dear Peter, I would love to make this road trip with one of your paintings. I hope this idea of having a documentary made on a single work of yours could sound intriguing to you. I must take on this journey with an artwork from an artist that has touched me.

It will be a journey where I will bring the painting along with me in all my daily doings. I will observe it, show it, talk about it, write about it and use it every day. As a quick reference, I would like to mention the work of artist Yvonne Dröge Wendel *The marriage and honeymoon in Portugal*<sup>56</sup>: a performative artwork where Wendel marries one of her sculptures and goes on

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56 “Yvonne Dröge Wendel, Heineken Prizes Presentation, 29 September, 2016,” YouTube, accessed February 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0II6EGUrrAk>

honeymoon in Portugal with it. As well as T.J. Clark's writing *The Sight of Dead*<sup>57</sup>, that has been a big inspiration for my idea.

Despite my hope that this letter might start to sound compelling, the project has a weak point. I can't afford to buy a painting, which would have been a gentle gesture to start this journey off with, and a lovely way to support an artist that inspires me. My concern is how to meet your professional activities as an artist without any monetary funds. I have thought about asking you to lend me a painting. Still, I have discarded that idea, considering that it would be very embarrassing and destructive for this project and my relation to you if something happened to the work. And I would never accept you gave me a painting without I gave you anything back. However, I can offer to give you a painting for a painting, to swap one of your paintings with one of mine.

I clearly understand if this can sound awkward – a stranger is writing you and asking for a painting of yours in exchange for one of his! But I hope you will consider my offer with regards to my dedication to this project.

At the present stage, I can't tell what would happen or where it will take me, or what I will accomplish, but I know where I want to start, and then the journey will show the rest.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

With my warmest regards,  
Magnus Frederik Clausen

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57 T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Dead*, (London: Yale University Press, 2006).

*Letter to Anne Fellner*

Dear Anne,

I hope this e-mail finds you well.

We have been in contact before I included your collaborative work made with Burkhard Beschow in the JIR SANDEL exhibition YEY AN UNUSUAL WAY OF SPELLING YAY. ^-^ in Los Angeles. Since this e-mail doesn't regard a JIR SANDEL project, I am writing you from my personal mail.

I have always been a fan of your paintings since the first time Fabian Kuntzsch and Robert Brambora showed me your work. Therefore, I was happy that you trusted us with your work for the LA show back in 2017. Currently, I am working on a Master's thesis in Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought at The European Graduate School. My writing is how we look at painting in different contexts, which I wish to explore through a journey with one painting. A friend of mine has described this project as a documentary on a painting, and my professor used the word "road trip" last time we discussed my thesis.

Dear Anne, I would love to make this road trip with one of your paintings. It will be a journey where I will bring your painting along with me in all my daily doings. I will observe it, show it, talk about it, write about it and use it every day, like any other ordinary object. Given the project's daily and personal aspect, it is still crucial for me to make this journey with a work from an artist that has touched me. Therefore, I hope you will consider this proposal.

Despite my hope that this letter might start to sound compelling, the project has a weak point. I can't afford to buy a painting, which would have been a gentle gesture to start this journey off with, and a lovely way to support an artist that inspires me. I have discarded the idea to ask you to lend me a painting, considering that it could be very destructive for my relation to you if something happened to the work. However, I can offer to give you a painting for a painting, to swap one of your paintings with one of mine.

I clearly understand if this can sound awkward, but I hope you will consider my offer regarding my dedication to this project.

At the present stage, I can't tell what would happen or where it will take me, or what I will accomplish, but I know where I want to start, and then the journey will show the rest.

With my warmest regards,  
Magnus Frederik Clausen

## Chapter 5. The Diary

March 11, 2020. Copenhagen/Berlin

I am leaving Copenhagen by train, destination: Berlin. The trip's purpose is to meet the artist Anne Fellner, who lives and works there, and swap a painting with her. I have planned to use a painting of hers in my experiment. In her practice, she only employs paint on canvas or other stretched garments. She is, in this respect, a very conservative painter. But her motives are not conservative at all: even if they follow the tradition of landscape, portrait, and still life studies, they instead seem to occupy their own space, which I would describe as "expressive kitsch". Even if I have exchanged many emails with her and included her work in a show I curated in 2017 in LA, on this trip to Germany I'll meet Anne Fellner in person for the first time. A few weeks ago, I contacted her and proposed the idea, and I'm happy she was open to the experiment.

I'll take advantage of my time in the German capital to see a few old friends and meet with my professor Zielinski.

There are not so many people around at the central train station in Copenhagen, despite its rush hour on a weekday morning. I guess I'm witnessing the effects of the Danish government's warnings a few days ago, which are part of the fight against the coronavirus that has started to spread rapidly in Denmark. The contrast when arriving in Berlin is quite striking. The S-Bahn is full and loaded to the limit.

While making my way around Berlin to reach Kreuzberg, where I'm going to meet with my friend Kristoffer, the paranoia slowly rises. I realize that I'm starting to move as if I was a block in the computer game Tetris: making my best to avoid bumping into other blocks and trying to fit perfectly in between the gaps.

I meet Kristoffer at his new job at Kunstraum Kreuzberg, where he is the technician. After he is off work, we make our way on foot to Neuköln, where he lives, while sharing news on what has happened in our lives in the last couple of months, because we don't see each other that often. On the way to Kristoffer's, we pass by a huge old building near the canal used to be a sanatorium built during the Spanish plague, and Google has recently bought that.

Kristoffer has invited some familiar friends over for dinner to catch up and drink some wine and eat risotto in the evening. The evening's topic is the virus, but we are still uncertain how to behave and what to expect. Later on, we hear on the radio that the Danish government declares all schools in Denmark closed from Monday. I start to worry about how I will come back home with the painting. My worries get interrupted by Philipp Simon, who comments on my project and suggests that I carry Anne Fellner's painting around in a glass crate made for the purpose. I don't understand my perspective regarding this idea due to a change in topic, but it becomes more apparent that the work's slow erosion is an essential part of the project.

After the guests have left, Kristoffer and I discuss my project in the light of Covid. We hang my painting Olaf on the wall – the piece I will swap with Anne the following day – just to enjoy the last glimpse of it.

March 12, 2020. Berlin

The meeting with Anne today went okay. I picked a lovely little painting, semi-abstract with bright colors that could work fine for my project. It's titled *Scumbly Gate*.

The painting has an innocent, honest appeal and is characterized by a motive that could look like a gate with flowers, apples, and a butterfly. Maybe there is also a beetle on a stick, or is it a closed eye? In Anne's studio, we hung the two paintings we swapped next to each other to see if they had anything special to tell one another. Some paintings just go better together than others. And this hanging was not any particular match.

I left the studio with my new painting under my arm, unwrapped. Anne started to wrap up the piece before I went, but I told her it was not the experiment's purpose, and she said, "oh yeah, now it begins".



*Scumbly Gate* to the left in Anne Fellner's studio next to the painting I swapped with her.

My experiment's purpose starts to seem crazier and crazier to me due to the evolving situation in Europe. With the spreading of coronavirus rising day by day.

After picking up the painting at Anne's studio, I had a soup in an almost empty restaurant. While reading the news on my phone - call about the virus - the painting began to lose its innocence,

and the red flower-like structures in the motive started to look like an infection or a virus molecule.

I regain hope by thinking that that mental association already sums up what the whole project is about - that every single thing is affected by its ecosystem, even a painting.

Back to reality, the constant flow of news makes me feel like I have itching all over my body and a sour throat.

After lunch, I went to see a show at Schiefe Zähne - a solo presentation of paintings by Lukas Quietzsch. Entering the exhibition with a painting in my hand seemed at first odd and made me feel a little unpleasant. A gallery has this formal aura around it, whether you like it or not. It is a place that shows and sells luxury products. It didn't take long before the gallery owner commented on the situation but politely and funnily. It turned out that he knew Anne and ended up photographing the work standing on the floor, almost as a little sister next to Lukas' bigger paintings on the wall.

Home at Kristoffer's that evening, we put my new painting (now it's no longer Anne's property) on the kitchen table while making dinner. Scumble Gate seemed to fit in quite good amongst plants, a teapot, onions, and other trivial things.

March 13, 2020. Berlin

Looking at the painting this morning makes me think about what else I will find in this piece.

I'm aware that I put high expectations on such a little painting, which makes me realize that what I will eventually find doesn't come from the painting, but from within me—something I will bring to the painting rather than the opposite.

Today plans to meet for lunch with my professor Siegfried Zielinski in the Charlottenburg neighbourhood.

Before I leave the house, I cut a cardboard piece to protect the surface while transporting the painting. My respect for Anne's work and her trust in my project made me do it.

I arrive at Charlottenburg by taking the U-Bahn from Neukoln. I had to cross a few blocks to reach the destination. While walking, my shoelaces got untied. I stopped by a public bench to tie them and put the painting next. While fixing my shoes, I glanced towards the painting and realized I had amputated the project by protecting the artworks' surface. I immediately took the protective board off again and continued my walk with the unwrapped painting, ready to be watched in any context if needed. It started to rain.

It came to mind that my colleague Piotr Łakomy once told me that all his works were like his babies: he had to take care of them because they were a part of him. This painting is one of Anne's children. And now it's growing up and experiencing life with my guidance, or in my presence, if you like so. There is a relation of trust around the action of swapping, buying, or renting an artwork. Like you don't just handle your kids over to some stranger. Stepping into a gallery doesn't necessarily qualify you to purchase an artwork: some collectors are better than others in the dealer's eyes - I imagine.

The meeting with Zielinski gave me many new perspectives on the project. He suggested me to look at Kirchner, who writes about the third viewer (me watching myself watching the painting). And he introduced a word called "participative studies" and said I should read Levi Strauss: *Sad Tropics*.

After lunch, I visited two other galleries, one with Zielinski and the other alone after saying goodbye to him. In both places, entering the gallery with a painting under my arm seemed strange for the employees, who started to ask questions about the painting and the project. In the first place, they even photographed me, Zielinski, and the painting.

Later that evening, Kristoffer and I went out for dinner and some drinks since my last day in Berlin. We brought the painting along. Inviting the painting to dinner at a restaurant seemed to be the right thing to do.



*Scumbly Gate* with Zielinski and I, photographed by Lotte Laub from Zilberman Gallery in Berlin.

March 14, 2020. Berlin

After yesterday's meeting with Zielinski, I have decided to take a closer study of the painting. An attempt could dissect the painting down into separate units that altogether make up this piece's puzzle.

Concerning this, Zielinski suggested me to do a memory exercise with the work. The practice is straightforward and is carried out by doing two separate drawing studies of the painting. The first study should be made from live drawing, meaning drawing while looking at the painting. The second drawing should be made, maybe when the project is almost done, and should be made only from memory of how I remember the painting. This exercise should stress what I remember about the work and, in a sense, underline what impressions it left on my mind.

Waking up this morning, I find the painting hanging on the wall in the same position I left it before going to bed. It is turned 90 degrees clockwise. The "wrong" angle makes me aware of new areas in the painting.

I prepare myself for a long trip home, not sure of the outcome, now that the country has been shut down. I visualize myself fleeing over the border in some muddy swamp area between Denmark and Germany with *Scumbly Gate* under my arm.

When I get to the bus station, they tell me that my bus is canceled, but they have rebooked me to another bus that will only bring me to Hamburg. I cancel the bus and buy a much more expensive train ticket departing from another area in Berlin, which will take me all the way home. I make it just in time to Hauptbahnhof to catch my train home. I notice people's behaviour had changed since my arrival two days ago, and everybody has suspicious eyes looking for something nobody can see. I get a funny picture in my head while changing train at Hamburg central station: what if you had a pair of glasses that could show the virus, glowing like a red light from the spots where it has just landed.

Before leaving Berlin, I packed the painting and practically didn't look at it until I arrived back home, where I hang it next to Johannes Larsen's print of an Otter.

March 15, 2020. Copenhagen

I haven't done much today. I entered Denmark yesterday on an almost empty train from Hamburg. Still, I saw a few bars open while walking home from the station.

The painting has been hanging on the wall the whole day, and I don't notice it at all. It's first when I return from a small shopping at the supermarket that I realize I forgot to bring it with me. It's challenging to change one's habits on how to behave with art.

Just to hang it on a wall is a very passive role. A wallflower - a term used to indicate a woman or man (mainly a woman) sitting at the border of the dancefloor, watching the dancers with the desire to dance but no spirit or company to do so. In a way, it's a metaphor that fits quite well in my setting.

I make a plan for the following day. I will bring the painting to two different places and observe how people will interact with the work.

March 16, 2020. Copenhagen

Got a sore throat that is not developing into the flu. Guess I'm feeling some psychosomatic symptoms from the panic around me.

I am sitting with Anne's painting this afternoon to take a closer observation of the work. I place the work leaning against the water bottle on the dining table. The size of the work is 30 x 40 cm, landscape format. And it is indeed a small landscape with all its almost fluorescent green and flower-like motives.

It is painted with a thick layer of oil paint on a background primed in light blue (small cracks in the green paint show blue spots hiding underneath the surface). It's difficult to tell over how long it took Anne to paint it. It could be painted in two different settings. First the background and then the motive – I have to ask Anne about that.

The title *Scumbly Gate* gives me two entries to the work: the gate is what I see in the motive, and Scumbly refers to Anne's painting technique.

At first glance, the work clearly shows a gate-like motive painted with white dry oil on top of a black line underneath. This gate figure's structure is wild and swirls around, starting from the center of the image and covering the whole picture plane. It has a plant-like structure about it. It seems like the gate, in some places, blooms with flowers, berries, and even a shoe. It gives it a strange twist. The swirl-like structure makes me wonder about Romantic fences and gates at park entrances from that time. With swirly decorative bars imitating the nature inside the garden, the gate opens up to.



*Scumbly Gate* on sightseeing in Copenhagen.

March 18, 2020. Copenhagen

I didn't manage to write anything yesterday. I brought the painting on a bike ride with my girlfriend. We drank a soft drink on the old ramparts of Christianshavn in Copenhagen while watching the painting hanging from a branch with the rampart as its background scenery.

The branches from the hedge almost melted into the work, and it made me look again at the white structure in the piece that I call "the gate".

I go back to the idea of the gate imitating the nature behind it. It is almost like a filter or a screen we see through before entering it. I have the impression that the gate in this painting is trying hard, with its romantic gestures, to imitate the landscape behind it. It tries so much that by accident, it even grows a human foot.

A gate can be open or closed. This one, I don't know. It seems more like a living being – a gate that could walk or move aside if you needed to trespass it.

I assume that such a majestic, decorative gate would signal wealth, the perfect framing for the land behind, which could belong to a rich person. It suddenly strikes me, instead of being outside and looking in at the garden, I could be standing in the park looking out of the gate. The living gate keeps me imprisoned in the park. On the right part, it even has a closed eye on a pole. Ready to watch me if I should try to climb or jump it to escape.

The gate's anthropomorphic features stick out and put it somewhere between a gate and a giant living organism. It has something in common with the carnivorous plant in the film *Little Shop of Horrors* - an American horror comedy musical from 1960 and then remade in 1986. The plant in the movie, named Audrey II is a big foolish-looking and talking plant that eats humans.

At the bottom of the painting, a small fountain squirts water from its basin. It resembles a vase rather than a fountain in its shape. A vase the entire gate grows from, with all its swirls, flowers, fruits, foot, and a butterfly on top.

The landscape behind the gate doesn't give away much at first glance. It's more of abstract greenery – very scumbly painted.

I show it to my son and ask what he sees in the lack of more words to describe the painting. He answers with several words, and it is up to me to combine them:

Garden

Butterfly

A white plant (my gate)

Pitcher – for pouring water

Wet stinky sock for drying

Nighttime

Black currant berries

The only thing that strikes me in his answers is Nighttime. Where does he see that? But I'm left with no explanation.

March 21, 2020. Copenhagen

The city's silence caused by the government's coronavirus measures can now be felt on a completely next level. Nobody around, and everything is still.

I bring my son to the playground, and the painting comes with me.

Both his and my frustrations rise every day more due to the restricted life we live now. A new setting we are unfamiliar with. We haven't spent so much uninterrupted time together since he was a baby.

We head to the skatepark in the early hours of the day—my son with his bike and me with the painting. As he starts to play around, I find myself a spot in the still cold March sun (3 degrees Celsius) and place the painting in front of me on the asphalt.

Once again, I think this is about what I can do with the painting rather than what it depicts.

Meaning that the painting is just a tool and what is painted on it is maybe of less importance.

In this setting, the work replaces my habit, which would be wasting time on my smartphone.

Today, the painting erases the smartphone and establishes a different kind of relationship. I would say a more active relationship: the painting is a dynamic object that demands me to write and perform, like in a quote by Ritter that I haven't been able to locate since I think it hasn't

been translated to English. In my words, Ritter says that a painting is an active object since it asks him to move to experience its full potential.



*Scumbly Gate* at the playground.

The more I move around with the painting, the more I explore its relationship with the world and me. The filter on my sunglasses gives the work a new glow today. The fresh orange aura asks me if I will find anything new in the painting. Maybe an unreasonable demand from my side – since the new has to come from me. It's not the painting that will change (perhaps in the end), but it's me that will change my look on it.

I hope I'll become more intelligent and more experienced along with my research. Not sure what I'm searching for – a hard thing to admit in a thesis.

It becomes more like a relationship where two people are shaped by each other over time.

Later that day we went for a bike ride to the harbor. I remembered to bring the painting along but didn't give it much notice. When we arrived back home, I hung it on a nail in our living room.

The plan for tomorrow is to organize a collective "watching session". Maybe I have to force its presence on people a bit more.

March 22, 2020. Copenhagen

I have planned to discuss the project with my girlfriend in the evening when my son is asleep.

The work hangs in the living room next to a small painting of mine, *Arch for past things*. We have a fruitful discussion about the project, and I take a few notes – mostly drawings, which I'm not able to understand now. Only two lines in those drawings make sense.

It is a constant relationship between two elements: the context/space and the painting. Space influences the view on the painting. One day the painting was hanging in our kitchen, and my girlfriend said it reminded her of Sicily. She also said that this connection appeared only because the kitchen's bright and familiar space clicked well with the motives in the painting. She says that she is not so fond of this work because it is too kitsch for her taste. This makes me think that there is also another element in this relationship: time. It is time that allows the possibility to change opinion and create new readings.

March 27, 2020. Copenhagen

I haven't been observing or writing about the work for a few days. The epidemic has taken over the news, and it the only topic we are all talking about. It is difficult to focus on the project. I have to find new energy to continue. It seems like a relationship that is already getting boring... In the afternoon, I'm meeting with some fellow artist friends outside, keeping a distance (the new social code), drinking beer around an iron ping-pong table in a park. I brought the painting with me because I wanted to show it to them.

They appreciate the gesture of bringing a painting that everyone has to watch collectively. A few jokes start to fly, and they concern the handling of art – since we all occasionally work as art handlers and technicians to make ends meet.

I tell them about my frustrations with the painting: I feel that nobody cares about interacting with the work or can focus on it as I would like to.

One of my friends tells me about “Klunkehjemmet”: an old Copenhagen upper-class apartment left as it was when the family moved out from it. The place is now part of the National Museum in Copenhagen. I remember I visited it ages ago when I was in primary school, but the memory is weak now. My friend tells me that the family had a collection of artifacts placed in the living room for guests - objects whose scope was to evoke curiosity and generate conversations between the host and guests. I like to think about *Scumbly Gate* as a conversation starter.

I must visit this place soon if possible when we are back to standard times (if ever again). My friend also tells me about a film called VHS freaks – I guess I have to catch up.

I tell my friends about my idea to go diving with the painting. At first, they thought it was crazy – it's going to get damaged! - but then they got fascinated by the prospect.

My friend Heine suddenly grabbed the painting from the table and started to run away from the group with the work raised over his head facing our direction, all the time while yelling back at me: “have you tried this!?”

The painting becomes smaller and smaller as he runs away. I get a little nervous thinking what the next move he could come up with is.

April 5, 2020. Copenhagen

I often forget to bring the painting around with me in my daily doings, as Zielinski called it: “my new relationship” has already started to bore me.

But then yesterday, I brought the painting for a dive during the night.

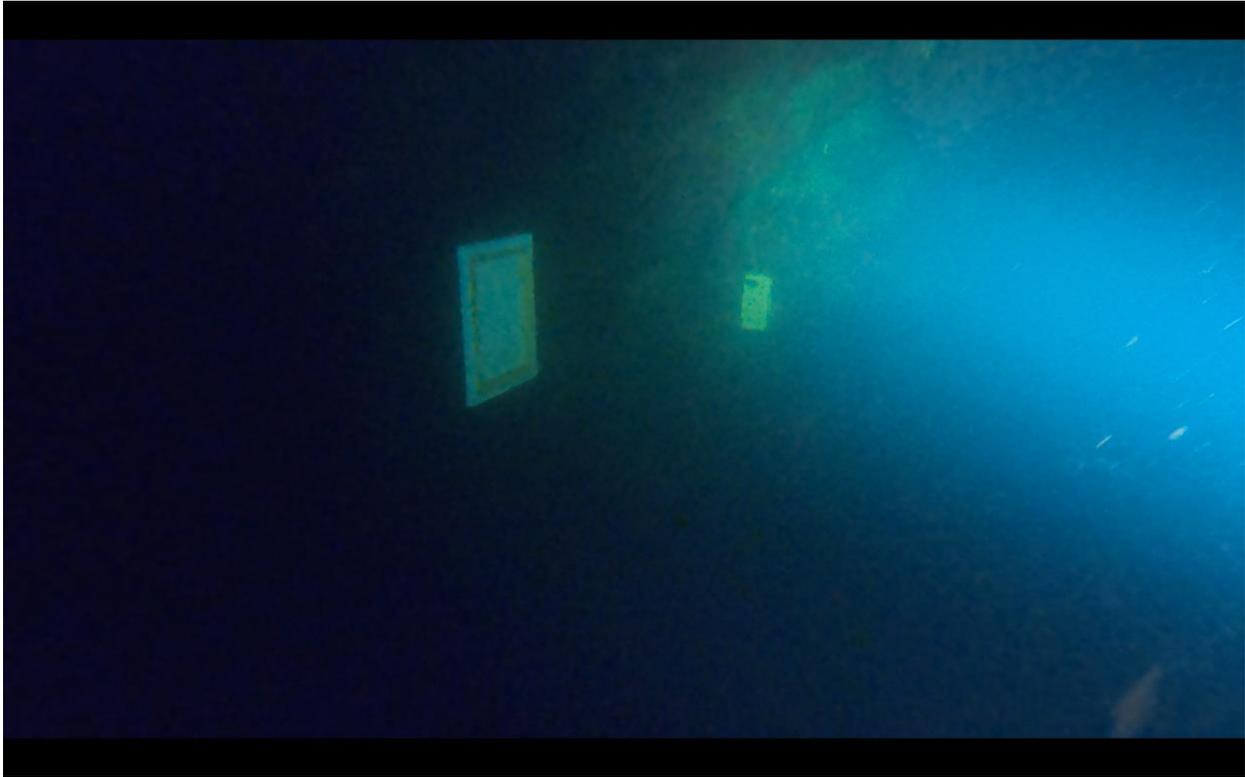
With my diving buddy’s help, we placed the work on the bottom of the Copenhagen harbor. I had carefully planned this. I screwed two small eyebolts on the back of the painting, one in each corner of the bottom stretcher-bar. I attached a heavy brick with a 3-meter long string to the two eyebolts so the painting could float freely in the water while being anchored at the bottom. It worked perfectly – the brick sank, and the painting floated beautifully, standing up in the water at a depth of 3 meters.

To come back to the quote about my new relationship, this event made me feel like when you try to fix a relationship that is going wrong, and you go to the movies or some fancy restaurant to bring you closer together again.

The dive’s first intense sensation was how the painting looked while I was approaching it—diving down towards an element floating in the water at a depth of 3 meters. This experience was indeed a particular space to meet my painting in. I had borrowed an underwater Go-Pro camera to record the painting in this unique setting. After the installment and a few recordings, we swam out on deeper water to hunt some fish. The temperature was around 6-8 degrees Celsius, so we didn’t last longer than 20-30 minutes, even with our thick wetsuits. After some luck on deeper water (we caught a few cods), we swam back in the dark water only lit by our flashlights. While swimming back, we passed by the painting, which was still dancing in the water with its colors, so shiny and glittering. It was a pleasant sight to meet the painting again on the way back from the deeper waters and observe it rising from the bottom, defining a new space around it, now liberated from gravity. I got excited and started thinking about future underwater projects.

It turned out that most of the recordings were glitched. I got annoyed at first, but then I thought that this moment had to be lived more than recorded. In this unfamiliar environment, the camera became an apparatus between me and the experience of the painting. Everything about this experience became more stressed underwater because the moment of presence could only last a

certain amount of seconds before my body started to gasp after a new breath of air. When the experience is more limited in time, it gains in intensity.



*Scumbly Gate* floating freely anchored to a brick at the bottom of the Copenhagen harbor.

April 8-9, 2020. Copenhagen

I had to work for an art dealer; hanging works in private homes these days. I put the painting in the bicycle's basket together with my toolbox. I jumped on the bike and hurried to work. My task was to move a private art collection from a huge Copenhagen flat to the owner's new address, a private villa in the rich suburb of Hellerup. On the way to work, I biked over a bump, and the painting flew out of the basket. My pulse jumped for a second, but the painting looked okay. After the night dive the other day, the painting has started to peel bits of oil paint – I guess the saltwater is no good for oil paintings. The peeling has begun to reveal another layer of paint underneath. Blue areas have slowly started to show. This new color on the painting has giving it a different aura - a different melody. Like Joshua Reynolds says, as quoted in David Batchelor's

Chromophobia (page 30): “Thought it might be allowed that elaborate harmony of coloring, a brilliancy of tints, a soft and gradual transition from one to another, present to the eye, what a harmonious concert of music does to the ear, it must be remembered, that painting is not merely a gratification of the sight.”

These freshly undisclosed blue areas have been giving me new energy. It is like the painting is growing and evolving, becoming older and wiser.

The second day at the job, the other workers noticed and commented on the painting, but asked no questions. A little later, while we were having lunch on the street, I placed the painting over an electrical box on the sidewalk. It looked like a small altar with the food around and the work in the middle. I noticed that by-passers cast glances at the painting while we ate.

These two working days stressed the contrast of artwork’s value versus how artwork is used, especially the second day, where I worked at the owners’ new home. On the veranda, I left the painting outside since it is clear that the painting I bring to work has nothing to do with the expensive artworks in the wealthy collector’s house – almost like it’s contaminated. Handling these pricy pieces of art inside this mansion and then picking up Anne’s painting when leaving made me wonder if the weight balance between these works would change one day. Imagine: Anne’s painting would be the expensive piece in a museum - highly valued and protected - and these works that I handled at the private collection would be the overpriced relics of the 21st century nobody wants anymore.



*Scumble Gate* during lunch break with colleagues.

April 10, 2020. Copenhagen

Talking with my girlfriend about my project and how long this exhausting process will continue.

April 13, 2020. Copenhagen

I brought my breakfast to the guest room in our flat, which is usually used for visiting friends and Airbnb guests - a big help in our low puzzle economy. But since the outbreak of Covid-19, our guest room has been empty and transformed into a working station.

This morning I sat down next to the window, with the bright light shining into the room.

I placed my drawing notebook and my drawing pencil next to my breakfast. I had installed *Scumbly Gate* at the end of the table the night before, leaning against the wall.

Today's exercise was planned to be a new approach of watching. Following Zielinski's idea, I wanted to make a classical drawing study of the painting, as an exercise in looking.

The aim is to give space to an intense way of observing/studying the object without much thinking. Well, maybe more precisely: a different way of thinking, since you still have to concentrate on how other elements composing the subject relate to size, position, light, and darkness, etc.

The sensation is similar to a stroll inside the painting - like I am walking around in the landscape depicted in the painting rather than studying it from the outside.

The action of translating the painting's color pallet to grayscale when drawing it put me, in a sense, closer to Anne's thoughts.



First Drawing study of *Scumbly Gate*.

I became aware of the small details in the painting, all the changes in gesture and color – and while trying to translate these impressions to my drawing, I felt like I was thinking how Anne had been thinking while doing the work. Of course, I can't be sure that that's true, but this exercise is the closest I have gotten to sharing Anne's same mental space. A pleasant sensation of mental bonding.

My final idea for the drawing project was to make another drawing when I finish the project, where *Scumbly Gate* might look different from what it did in this first drawing. I will do this final drawing by memory and not by the study.

April 14, 2020. Copenhagen

While bringing the painting to work today, my attention was suddenly caught by a specific area of the work. Part of the painting's upper right corner had started to reveal itself with a new depth. It was like I was seeing the painting for the first time.

This experience opened a room for me to make new studies of the painting – that I hope to undertake tomorrow afternoon after work.

April 15, 2020. Copenhagen

The day passed quickly today and I had no time left to take that deeper look I had planned. However, at work, I talked with one of my colleagues about the project. The action of telling my adventures with the painting triggered a new thought: looking at the same image, again and again, has parallels with our screen-obsessed society. With a huge difference, though. After scrolling Instagram, I always feel like I have been watching America's Most Funnies Home Videos – no inspiration or thought process is left after watching a computer screen if compared to watching a painting for the same amount of time. One is mainly entertainment, and the other is not. Or, is it? In any case, the painting activates my nerve cells differently.

And I wonder if that's why I have so many books with images of paintings at home and why I like to browse through them. It just gives me a different high – it leaves me with a distinct mark.

April 19, 2020. Copenhagen

Along the last couple of days, I haven't been able to find space for writing, even though the painting has been with me at work and even at a picnic on Friday afternoon.

Today, I sat in the living room with my notebook and the painting in front of me on the table. My son in the joining room was playing with his toys. While I was looking at the painting, the sounds of him playing with his cars while humming the Ghostbusters theme entered into the space I am sharing with the painting. I guess that is part of the whole project. I was relating these unpredicted situations or contexts to the work. I think back to the picnic from the other day, where one of my friends commented that Anne's painting was always "so casually around".

Over the last couple of days, more and more of the painting's surface has started to peel off. Under the peeling, a blue cote has begun to show. The peels fall from different places on the canvas, but two areas at the bottom of the work are far the biggest. They both reveal a mixed blue surface hidden underneath, which makes me wonder if a different piece will slowly start to show from underneath.

The blue areas at the bottom have added a lake to the green landscape, harmonizing the painting with all its green. The journey of the painting is slowly completing the work. Even though I never had the feeling it was incomplete.

April 23, 2020. Copenhagen

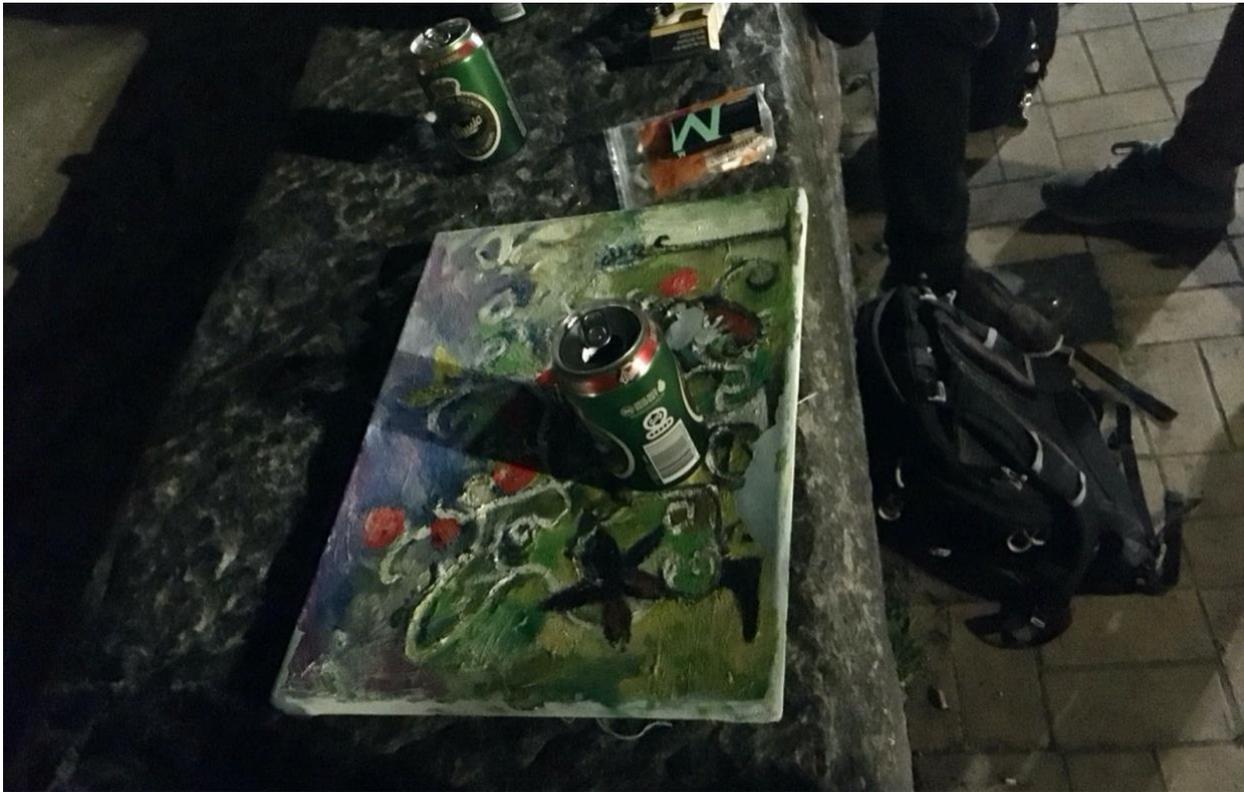
The first hot day of the year shows its face today. I'm at my studio catching up on some work. I have been trying hard to push some of my paintings over the last couple of weeks. After seeing my income sources disappear with the arrival of Covid-19, a large part of my thoughts has been concerned with money and how to pay the bills. The result is that I've been spending a lot of time documenting my paintings and setting the photos up in a nice looking PDF with information and prices. (Something I should have started doing a long time ago, thanks, Covid!)

Creating these PDFs was a great exercise in looking at reproductions of paintings and how they connect. Even though each of them is reproduced on a single page in the PDF, the whole thing creates a kind of story. Almost like there is a narration that runs through the various images. The story just works better in some specific orders than in others. Why? I've been racking my brain trying to find an answer but can't come up with a reasonable explanation other than painting exist besides language, and language shouldn't try to describe or explain them. Using paintings to explain language is also not something I have stumbled upon, but it seems like the real obsession is that we need to explain everything with words. That being said, why talk about painting at all? At this given moment, I feel a lack of tools to crack open what I find interesting in this project.

The weather is too nice outside, and I decide not to spend more time in the studio. On the table in front of me is *Scumbly Gate*, which I haven't been giving much attention lately. It's funny - the work has now started to trigger a feeling of guilt, deep in my stomach, every time looking at it. I know I haven't been able to look at the painting as much as I ought to.

Five years ago, if somebody had told me that I once would own a painting that would make me feel guilty of not watching it enough, I would have laughed. But now it's serious business. It sometimes hooks me like a drug, and other times doesn't appeal to me at all. In our times, paintings are no longer about the story they tell but about all that, we can put into them. They work like a mirror of the mind.

I call my friend and plan to have a beer in the sun. I bring the painting. The rest of the day is spent outside, on public squares and parks, consuming beers and enjoying the lovely spring evening. I observe how the painting becomes a photo gadget for the various people that I encounter that evening. A guy I meet and introduce to the project suggests me to visit an art conservator. Maybe, he says, he can provide you with a different perspective on the whole experiment. Well, I guess, considering the status of the painting at the present day.



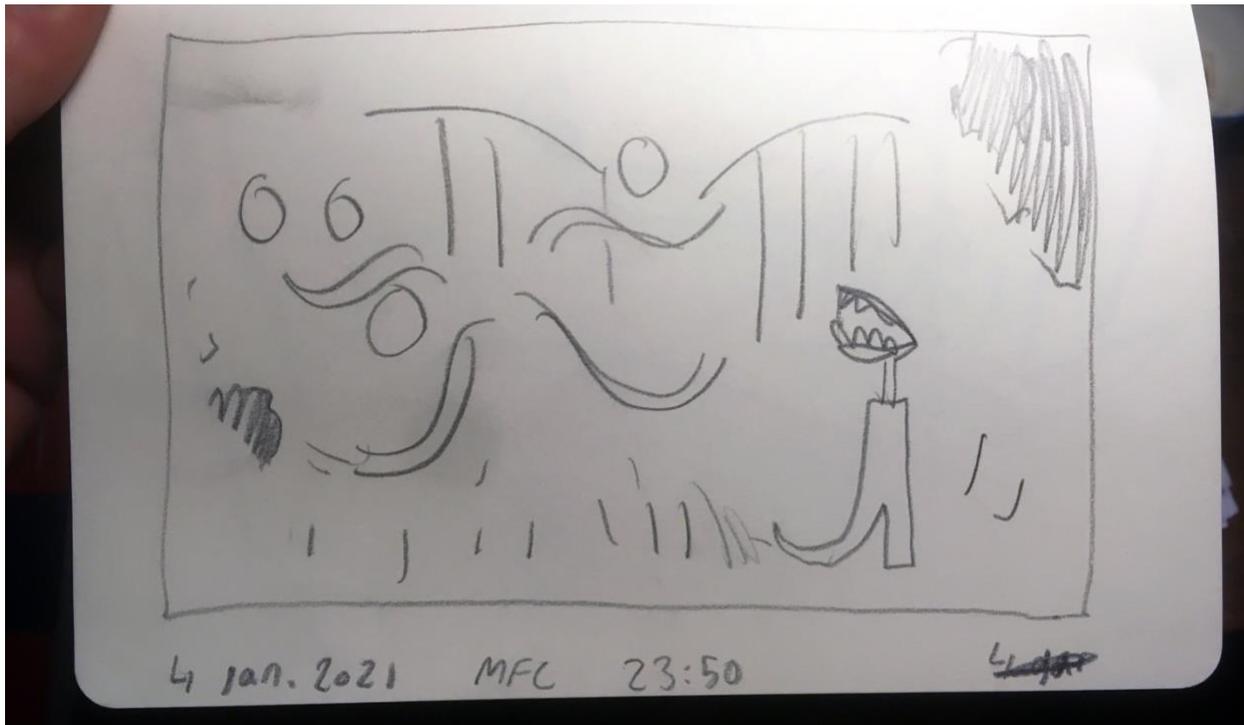
*Scumbly Gate* on a night out in Copenhagen. Image taken by a friend and send to me via SMS.

January 4, 2021. Copenhagen

It's been more than eight months now since I last wrote in my diary on *Scumbly Gate*. Initially, the painting traveled with me to several places (I didn't felt the need to put words on it, though). But for the last 4 months, the painting have been resting with its front against the wall in the corner of my living room. I have only been handling it when I needed to vacuum the apartment. Here we are, I guess. All the fuel has been used up. The destination has been reached. Today I decided to sit down to make a last drawing of the painting, this time from pure memory. It came to me quickly and with ease, just in some simple, fast lines. Only afterward, when I compared the drawing with the previous one and the actual painting, I could see that it was far from right. Some elements in the painting had been enlarged in my memory, and others had disappeared entirely. New ones were born. For instance, a carnivorous plant in a high heel cowboy-like boot now appeared in my drawing: a figure I couldn't find in the original. Could it

be that it came from an automatic and subconscious wish? A wish for an element that could eat the red dots of the painting and save us from the situation we live in.

That was my last time looking at the painting. The painting is now a mirror of my mind.



Drawing by memory of *Scumbly Gate*.

## Conclusion. Interpreting the experience

After presenting the intention for my thesis (Introduction), its theoretical background (Chapters 1 and 2), its relation to my artistic practice (Chapter 3), and the practical development of the experiment on which the thesis is based (Chapters 4 and 5), I would like to use the last part of my dissertation to draw some conclusions that could help me to interpret the meaning, and the output of the research presented so far.

My thoughts will be structured around the following sections: *Starting Point*, *Expectations*, *Reality Check*, *Lessons Learnt*, and *Next Steps*. This structure will help me to reflect upon the experience as a whole, revisiting its premises, addressing its successes and failures, and putting its results into a long-term perspective that looks beyond the termination of the experiment itself.

### Starting Point

In this first section, I will revisit my experiment's initiation to collect and arrange the thoughts that brought it from ideas to actions.

After having decided that the way to go to explore the concept of network in painting was to focus on one and only artwork, as inspired by T.J. Clark's *The Sight of Death*, and after having chosen *Scumbly Gate* by Anne Fellner as the "elected" painting, I started looking intensively at it for a long time, namely over several months.

In hindsight, this repetitive action of looking reminds me of a specific phase in the Impressionist painter Claude Monet's artistic practice. At the peak of his career, Monet became obsessed with one subject: the façade of the Rouen Cathedral. He observed the Gothic wall in different light and weather conditions and, between 1892 and 1894, he produced 30 oil paintings with such subject. It was not the first time Monet repetitively returned to the same subject; however, Monet

himself considered the series to be important, describing it as “special”. He wrote: “I am a prisoner, and I must go on until the end.”<sup>58</sup>

At the beginning of my project, my approach was similar to Monet’s in terms of obsessiveness and intensity. As suggested by T.J. Clark, the process or act of repetition is central to aesthetic experience rather than a contingent circumstance. But while Monet looked at an external object like a motor to painting, I was looking at an external painting (which, in my case, would mean: a painting not produced by myself) as a motor to my understanding of the network of painting. Looking back at the first phase of my experiment, another element played a big role and whose influence I see clearly now. The act of choosing the subject and looking at it was central to this first phase, but were not the only ones: I felt a strong need to talk about my experiments with other people. I spent a lot of time meeting with people (both friends and colleagues, and experts that I consider as my mentors in the EGS path, such as Professor Carlos Amorales and Professor Siegfried Zielinski) to discuss the premises of my experiment in theoretical terms, or to involve them in the “looking exercise” I decided to undergo. This urge to share both the very specific action of looking and the thoughts provoked by it has been somehow crucial, in a way that I will describe in the next section.

## **Expectations**

This section is dedicated to tackling the suppositions I had been building around the foundations of my project, and of which I thought I would find confirmation - and even expansion - along with its development. Expectations are maybe the emotionally hardest part of my thesis, as it is always challenging to admit that something in which a lot of energy and preparations have been invested turns out differently than how one had imagined.

To start with, I assumed that the whole experiment would be imbued with a sort of “wow feeling” and that it would enchant everyone involved in it: myself in the first place, but also all the people I included and reached out to along my research. I thought that the sensation of being

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<sup>58</sup> Alan Riding, “Monet’s Fixation on the Rouen Cathedral,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1994. Available at the link: <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/08/15/arts/monet-s-fixation-on-the-rouen-cathedral.html>

subjected to one work of art placed outside its traditional frame and within the chaotic and unpredictable flow of everyday life would touch somebody during the experiment, as much as it had triggered my imagination at the moment of formulating it. I supposed that such a framework would sparkle curiosity, open questions, and lead to long conversations.

But this isn't exactly what happened - or, better said, this didn't occur to the extent I was expecting. Contrarily to my rosy projections, my friends and colleagues showed lukewarm interest in the experiment, and I often had to poke them to get any reaction. Even more, I could notice a sort of detachment - ever-growing over time - even in my approach to the painting and the meaning of the whole research.

Picking up on the theoretical basis presented in Chapter 2, I imagined a spectrum of reactions based on the two opposite concepts of "love" and "value" that I had individuated as the poles of the discourse around the network of painting. In my mind, the encounter with Anne Fellner's painting would provoke two kinds of feedbacks in the people exposed to it within the particular context I had orchestrated for it: on the one hand, a love-based response (the "wow feeling" described above), corresponding to a more instinctual, sensory and emotive response; on the other, a value-based reaction, correlated to a more rational, mental and systemic reading of the situation.

In other words, I expected the issue of the artwork's value to be a central point of discussion. Something that would agitate my colleagues' thoughts who, like me, operate outside the "big game" of contemporary art, blue-chip galleries, and value generation, despite the hard work and efforts they put into their artistic careers. The fact, those discussions that I had been dreaming of in my head didn't take place in real life was met by delusion first and subsequently by a more mature elaboration of why this happened. I call this attainment the Reality Check of my thesis.

### **Reality Check**

After some consideration, I concluded that the topic of value didn't fill the space I thought it would be because more time is needed before we can assess it.

I mean that the discussion around the value of the painting when its network gets heavily stressed (or, in other words, when the artwork gets subjected to unconventional conditions that could lead to its damage and exhaustion) would acquire importance only in case Anne gained prominent recognition as an artist, let's say in 20 years from now. In case this scenario presented itself, people would look back and speculate on the fact that one of Anne Fellner's early painting, today worth millions, was once almost destroyed for the sake of artistic research. And maybe the same could be said about me: if Magnus Frederik Clausen became a blue-chip-gallery artist, his market value would increase and by reflex cast an almost sacred (and economically valuable) aura to Fellner's *Scumbly Gate*.

Alternatively, to create a situation with immediate effect, one would probably need an artwork produced by a much more famous artist. This object is imbued with the "control value" described by Merlin Carpenter in the book *The Outside Can't Go Outside*. As brilliantly explained by Isabelle Graw and Daniel Birnbaum, who wrote the book's preface, "[...] the value produced by artists and intellectuals is one of a specific kind: Carpenter describes it as "control value," the type of apparent value that arises when information – which is currently the most wanted currency – is given and obtained. By producing control value, [...] artists and intellectuals operate more like agents, whereby they produce useful information that allows the capitalist system to maximize its profits."<sup>59</sup>

The second part of my thesis showed me first-hand what I have been reading and theorizing in the first part of it: my experiment's success has nothing to do with the value of the painting itself, but rather with the value of the information attached to it. In that sense, each of the social interactions and physical circumstances I have been exposing Fellner's painting to - independently from their immediate reception and intensity<sup>60</sup> - have succeeded in contributing to

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59 Merlin Carpenter, *Ibid.*, 8.

60 Not all the interactions with Fellner's painting were as shallow and disappointing as it might sound from my account. I would like to mention two episodes that particularly touched me. One is the spectacular night of the underwater expedition that I also mention in the diary. As I have been spearfishing for a few years now, one night I decided to go diving around the Copenhagen outer harbor area and to bring the painting with me. For the purpose, I had prepared a 3-meter long string system attached to the painting on the one end and with a brick on the other end, so that, when sunk in the water, the painting would float freely above the harbor's bottom. The experience of swimming in the black waters with a flash light to meet the painting made me look at it in a totally new way. Though still kept in place by the string, the painting was caressed by water and swirled in a poetry I

the relocation and the displacement of its value. As Carpenter puts it, painting is not the site where value is produced, but the place where value is transferred.

If a painting isn't something made or done - an autonomous and inert object that leaves the studio in a state of completion - and is instead an entity in a continual state of happening, paintings are being equated with persons, not by their looks but by their actions. Seen as bodies with a will on their own, paintings exchange themselves and argue much as we do. They might behave in ways we didn't expect to and even disappoint us. Most of all, they are paid for, not just bought.

### **Lessons Learnt**

With this section of my Conclusions, I would like to formulate and share what I have learned through the long and bumpy process of developing the present thesis. This project has provided me with an advanced level of awareness of painting and its network, both theoretical and practical.

The themes and topics that have occurred on route during my writing are of extreme interest, and many of them deserve more time and space to be further unfolded. The theory of "Set and Settings" applied to art, the issue of "standard height," and the whole macro-issue of the value of

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had never seen before. The event left me with a strong impression and new ideas for future work with painting - such as realizing an underwater exhibition, one day.

The other episode I want to highlight happened one morning at the playground with my son. A much less adventurous event than the underwater expedition, but what I experienced could be recounted as a moment of awakening. While simply watching the painting lying flat on the ground and trying to scratch some notes down in my diary, a new "aesthetic consciousness" opened for me. It was not prompted by the painting's motive or shapes or colors; it can rather be described as the awe that one feels when a gate miraculously slides open after many attempts of pushing it with no effect. Looking at the painting while at the playground made me aware of my automatic behavior in similar situations, when half-bored and passive, waiting for my son to be finished playing. This is what I usually do: I stare aimlessly into a smartphone's screen. Now, I was staring into a painting. I don't believe that art can really "save us", but staring into a painting compared to staring into a smartphone drew a sharp comparison of what these two different "screens" can offer to my perception. Even though I have been owning a smartphone for less than a decade, I have already starred much more into the endless abyss of brain-dead entertainment than I have looked at paintings throughout my whole life. The painting surely can't provide the answer to almost any imaginable question. But it can manipulate and drive attention into deep space, surface materiality, and render them simultaneously, in a way that I cannot really explain.

painting in post-capitalistic societies are just a few examples that would each need an entirely new dedicated thesis to be fully uncracked in their relation to painting and its network.

With that said, and with the awareness that “I know that I know nothing” as Socrates famously put it. Nonetheless, essential evolutions have manifested themselves along the way. Both my eyes on painting and my painterly art practice has changed a lot. I have acquired a new language and new conceptual instruments through which I can now talk and discuss art, and my eyes have opened for new and old projects that could refer to and be informed by this significant set of interests. One example of an artist whose work I have been observing for a long time but that I have started considering under a new light after the beginning of my thesis is the Danish artist Albert Mertz (1920-1990). Known mainly for his red-and-blue signature works, Mertz was, in fact, extraordinarily productive and operated in a range of fields, including painting, film, collage, installation, and writing. He used painting as his natural tool while including everything he could get from other areas.

At times, Mertz’s paintings moved around and about into the exhibition space but entirely outside the traditional space of art. For example, he experimented with placing his paintings outdoors in Glenø, where he lived from 1976 until his death, and documented it in photographic collages. His iconic “duochrome” canvases lie on the beach, hang next to the laundry on the clothesline, stand on the backdoor stairs next to a pair of shoes, and are located outside a tent in the middle of a green meadow. Here, the painting is set free from the art institution’s narrow framework and put into life among the other objects of the world.

“Is a picture that does not hang on the wall still a picture? For example, is a painting standing on the wall or lying on the floor still a picture? Can a picture leaning up against the wall with the backside sticking out still be called a picture?”

I find these words extremely illuminating and on point in relation to my attempts of exploring the relationship between painting and its network, or, in Mertz’s terms, between art and reality. But, just like a painting interacts with its network without being the network itself, so, for Mertz, it didn’t make any sense to make art equal reality. “I do not confuse Art with reality or reality with

Art," Mertz pointed out. "I try to figure out what is art and what is reality and what relationship (or lack of relationship) the two things can have to each other."<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the work is an optic, a frontier between the world and us, or again - to use a term mentioned already earlier - a screen, and thereby it opens up the possibility of always meeting it anew. Here and now, over and over again.



Albert Mertz, painting hanging from the clothes line. Page 176-177, from the book *Forskellen er ens En monografi om Albert Mertz*. Strandberg Publishing 2020.

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61 Camilla Jalving and Christian Hald Foghmar, *Alt Dette er Deres! Albert Mertz 100 år*, (Sorø: Sorø Kunstmuseum, 2020), no page numbers.

## Next Steps

I have finally come to the point where I look forward instead of looking back. Presented in the last lines of my thesis is a set of ideas and thoughts regarding this thesis's potential developments that I might undertake after I have handed it in to EGS.

In all likelihood, sharing the thesis with Anne Fellner will be the first of my next steps. I am eager to observe her reaction and to find out whether she will embrace it or turn her back to it. I am aware that I have treated her painting in ways that could be seen as extreme and subjected to critical conditions - both on the physical and metaphysical side.

The hope is that the project could be further developed and opened up - maybe through a renovated and fruitful dialogue with Fellner. Even though the psychological aspect and the question of trust has been part of the encounter from the very beginning, I am nevertheless a bit nervous to show her the status of her painting at the time being, or the thesis now it is finished. A further step in the project could be to realize an exhibition based on it - with or without Fellner's painting. I haven't decided yet. Lately, I have been brainstorming about the possibility of wrapping the picture in some packaging as the final and last stage of the project: from now on, *Scumbly Gate* will be "erased" from the view, like De Kooning's drawing.

Another option is the publication of the thesis (or parts of it) in one or a series of pamphlets to share the ideas and thoughts behind it with a new context and group of people. This action is the farthest away from my usual artistic practice, and therefore the most challenging. But the effort (and sometimes the metaphorical sweat and tears) that I had to put in this writing has taught me that such an exercise could greatly help me reflect on my practice with a much more aware mind. Therefore, it would make sense for me to use the mental muscle that I have trained and treatise outside the school context.

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