



ART & DESIGN

SOME PAINTERS TRANSFORM THE SUN
 INTO A YELLOW SPOT,
 OTHERS TRANSFORM A YELLOW SPOT
 INTO THE SUN.

PABLO PICASSO

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS

Words: Tyler Mallison

United by shared interests and serendipitous connections, for this issue of *Class of its Own*, London-based artist and writer Tyler Mallison caught up with three fellow artists in Berlin and Milan to explore their work, motivations and context. Each artist draws from diverse references – ranging from futurism, cosmology and applied art and design to philosophy – wrestling with materiality in different ways..... 146

HABERDASHERY

Words: Anna Richardson Taylor

Haberdashery in London has made a name for itself by designing and creating high-end light sculptures for high-net-worth clients, combining the studio's passion for craft, engineering, design and fine art. Today the firm is also taking on huge public commissions and is launching its own range of lighting products, products. The designers' fascination with light and its effects continues to run through all their work..... 154

Opposite page: Joep van Liefland, exhibition view, 'Traces', Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Berlin, 2013, *Image:* Roman Maerz

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS

Three artists, three vantage points

Words: TYLER MALLISON

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Right: Joep van Liefland, exhibition view, 'Deadland', Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Berlin, 2009, *Image:* Roman Maerz; *Below:* Gianni Moretti, 'La morte del prete', 2012, digital print on plexiglass, variable dimensions (*detail*), courtesy of the artist.



EVA BERENDES

Above: Eva Berendes, 'Untitled' (Monday & Tuesday), 2013, steel, lacquer, 220 x 250 x 150 cm (each), *Image:* Jens Ziehe

Eva Berendes is a Berlin-based German artist who has been testing tensions between applied and fine art through highly reductive works that build on a multitude of traditions, including geometric abstraction.

Tyler Mallison: What is life like for Eva Berendes? What's keeping you 'busy' these days?

Eva Berendes: I'm currently finishing new works for my upcoming show at Sommer & Kohl, Berlin. Although I started from models with room for interpretation, I now have to leave those behind and operate with the 1:1 scale with the basic structures in place. To do this, I take dozens of photos as a tool for decision-making. It's sort of odd to involve the camera in a process that is otherwise so direct and analogue.

I am therefore busy arranging numerous found and bought objects, surfaces and materials, on steel tubing constructions that literally stand in front of the wall; some with one leg to the floor, others with two – or

hovering above the floor but very visibly attached to the wall with custom made fixtures. I think of these arrangements as pictures and the camera helps me to objectify when I get too caught up in the variations.

I remember chatting with you at ABC (Art Berlin Contemporary) this autumn about the sculptural installation you were unveiling that week for Dance Project „Synekism/Groove Space“, which sounded really exciting. What sparked this collaboration?

I was contacted by the choreographer Sebastian Matthias after (I believe), he saw my work at ABC the previous year. We then met several times before we decided to collaborate on this project. It was very interesting to learn about his understanding of space as one of operational possibilities, rather than as one of the layering and unfolding of images, which is how I think given my background in painting.



When it came to the 'performance' evenings, it was great to see how the structural elements of the installation – which was one communal space – were used by the audience without hesitation. There seems to be a need for people to relate to an object in a space when watching a performance – attaching themselves to walls for example. But here they related to the sculptures and that created its own, variable viewing choreography, which enabled an intimacy between dancers and viewer and a spatial experience not possible with a fixed position.

Given that you often express interest in the relationship between abstract form and the human body, this is an interesting development. What draws you to this space?

That is a good question. Perhaps it is the ultimate juxtaposition, to see two entities that you can think of as subjects (because a large abstract sculpture I would think of as a subject rather than an object), communicate and engage. There is no conflation, no immersion, just two things confronting one another which puts each into proportion. Perhaps on a personal level it also has to do with the fact that I am very tall. I always

joke that I know every woman taller than myself by name. I enjoy being 'outsized' when I stand in a group of people in which I am the shortest, which obviously does not happen very often.

In a similar way, when preparing the production of new work I'm always looking forward to the physical sensation of being confronted with the work, which is usually larger than myself. And once it's there, I need to get my head around it and accept or change it. One thing of course is the sheer looking and this is where the camera comes into play, but there is also a sort of physical level of decision-making that determines scale, size, proportion, material, color, placement etc. as a space between work and body.

I'm drawn to the high degree of order, minimalism and restraint recognisable across your work—whether metal sculpture, screens or curtains—where does this stem from?

I think it comes from the language I use and its genealogy: geometric abstraction – for lack of a better term. I am very interested in its consistent use throughout the 20th and 21st century, as perhaps in a similar way different motifs in painting – Virgin Mary with



Above left: 'People and Events will be the Decoration', installation view at S1 Sheffield, 2011, *Image:* John Hartley; *Above:* 'Assemblage 1', 2015, steel, lacquer, digital print, plastic bag, 220 x 148 x 35 cm, *Image:* Jens Ziehe; *Left:* stage design for 'Synekism/Groove Space', 2014, rehearsal view at Sophiensaele Berlin, *Image:* Florian Balze

Opposite page: 'The Middelburg Curtain', 2011, cotton, dye, metal, paint, 300 x 980 cm, *Image:* Leo van Kempen

You've spoken previously about applied art and design as it relates to your work. What are the distinctions and grey areas you see?

Much of my work approximates craft and design objects in appearance or production techniques. I have made 'patchworked' and tie-dyed curtains, silk scarves, screens... But in more recent years I have also translated those formats into more industrial materials like perforated sheet metal, and have introduced found and bought objects. I think design and semi-functional or decorative objects serve as a way for me to explore the possibilities and limits of abstract painting and the paradoxes of these what you call "grey areas".

Applied arts and design are the opposite of fine art in many ways. Its limitation delineates what is an artwork and what is not, while at the same time operating as its closest relative, and in many cases its foundation. There is great potential for complication and confusion, which I see as productive. It ultimately makes the two categories an even more relevant prerequisite to reflect upon any work of art.

Child – Salome – The Annunciation— were used in older times. In most of the work I am drawn to, there is a recognizable craft element when you look close enough. Not in the sense of folklore (although that is an interesting thing too), but in the sense of an economic means of execution. They have a 'handmade' feel that just makes sense in the production of unique pieces and exposes a prototype-like quality: They embody an idea, but are not brought to absolute perfection, because it is not what they are about.



Exhibition view, 'Traces', Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Berlin, 2013, Image: Roman Maerz

JOEP VAN LIEFLAND

Joep Van Liefland is a Berlin-based Dutch artist who has dedicated his practice to the more or less ephemeral franchises of his Video Palace and the allure of videocassette tapes since 2002.

Tyler Mallison: How has Berlin impacted your artistic practice? What changed when you first moved cities?

Joep van Liefland: I felt a sense of freedom, openness to the city when I moved here in '96. It was quite different compared to now, more raw. Many buildings were empty. There were a lot of not 'official' or 'illegal' places where people set up bars, clubs, kitchens or art events. It was inspiring and maybe a project like 'Video Palace' was easier to execute at that time than it would be now.

I'm interested in the 'Video Palace' construct. Talk to me more about where this idea came from and at what moment you recognised it as something central to your practice?

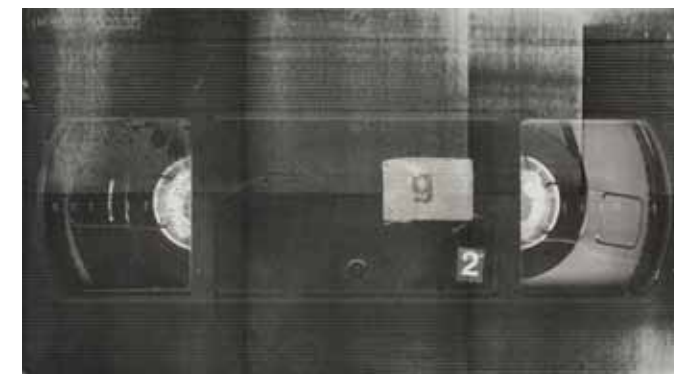
It is the core of my work from which all my other works derive. I wanted to merge different activities I was doing at that time – making/producing my own video's

and watching video's at home, which I did a lot and for which I collected VHS films – into an art installation to create this in a non-art context. My first 'Video Palace' installation took place in an old garage in the center of Berlin, formerly used by drug addicts and as a public toilet, in 2002. It was a functioning video store in which I played my own films.

Over the years I developed my Video Palace installations further. They are numbered and constantly change form, context and illuminated content so to speak. One of the latest editions represented a kind of VHS storage space.

What do you see and think about when you look at a VHS or Betamax tape?

A gravestone. My view of VHS has changed over the years, as has the status of the object itself in society. This transformation from a technological avant-garde consumer object to a commonly used medium to obsolete trash to something that has completely vanished, represents a kind of media-entropy that also applies to any other media. That interests me. If I hold a switched off iPhone in my hand, I see a potential fossil.



Above left/left: 'Video Palace #37 – MANIAC, Museum Goch, 2014 Image: Anna Poehlmann; Above: Untitled (Vid.-XVI), 2009, Silkscreen on canvas, 150 x 270 cm, Image: Roman Maerz

days, playing music in several bands, squatting, producing fanzines, organising concerts. There were a lot of people around me involved in these things. When I look back, it was a creative and positive time. It was before I started to make art.

Recently, your work has evolved into something more minimal, more alien even – I especially like the futuristic looking white installation at the Museum Goch and the black and white works at Galerie Gebr. Lehmann – what has been the thinking behind this progression?

At the moment I'm reading a lot about the history and future of technology and I see my work partly in this greater technological perspective. I'm very much into the work of older writers like Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Ellul and what they have to say about technology, but also current futurists like Ray Kurzweill.

I'm interested in the work of the Russian cosmologists as well, especially the writings of Nikolai Fyodorov, who also influenced Kazimir Malevich. He had visions of technology overcoming death, being able to resurrect our ancestors and colonising space. A kind of technology with mystical and cosmic implications. He wrote this in the 19th century long before rocket engines or even airplanes existed.

Technologies build upon each other. Video-TV principles have been incorporated and synergized into new and more complex (digital) storage and communication systems like the Internet and other computer systems. This is only a step towards total digitalisation, which will ultimately result in super-intelligent machines that will colonize space and make the human race as we know it superfluous.

Would you describe your work in any way as nostalgic?

No. I used to go fossil hunting when I was younger and was very fascinated by finding something 200 million years old. You would not call this nostalgic either. When I started to work with the VHS medium within my installations, I was fully aware of its disappearance. Although it was still fully operational in the market, it was clear that DVD would be the future medium. I wanted to focus on something that was going out of order instead of following the (technological) trend – I guess I felt an urge to resist the prevailing tendency to focus on all things 'new' (which also applies to art). I have always been interested in the history of things because it can tell us something about our current or even future status. I think of Video Palace sometimes in terms of a time machine.

You have talked about being a bit of a punk in your early days, and this comes through in the aesthetic qualities of your early work, which is quite raw. Was this a conscious decision?

Not really. I guess it's a part of me. I grew up in those



Above: 'Quindici esercizi di salvataggio', 2009, tissue paper, 160 x 280 cm, installation view: Km0, Innsbruck, courtesy Km0.

GIANNI MORETTI

Gianni Morretti is an Italian Artist, working in Milan and Berlin, who is deeply engaged in questioning, self-reflection and investigating philosophical concerns.

Tyler Mallison: You are currently building a catalogue that covers work from the last 6 years— Always a challenging task. What prompted this project and what have you observed from the experience?

Gianni Morretti: The catalogue is connected with my exhibition at Innsbruck's Km0 gallery. It will be edited by Montrasio Arte and will include critical texts by Mario Codognato and Raffaele Bedarida, plus an interview by Adelaide Santambrogio. Its title 'Noturlabio' references an ancient naval instrument used to calculate the height of the North Star at night. In use until the 18th century, it helped to approximate one's own position while navigating. This kind of approximation or empirically progressive approach to a place, core, centre; are fundamental elements of my research.

Like a torch in the darkness, my work illuminates something: getting closer with eyes shut, searching,

trying to define both the approaching path and the shape to be defined, always with a high risk of committing a mistake. The catalogue will recount this route, taking stock of what I have achieved up to now, to open the way to something else. It's been an extremely interesting challenge that has forced me to confront myself and my work and to clarify my ideas.

Your research is about 'investigating ways taken long ago and exploring new ones.' What underpins this interest? Do you consider your practice more process or research-driven?

There are many elements that have guided my research over the years. Initially, it was the need to discover the dynamics that determine the resistance to collapse and disappearance of different types of organisms. To do this, my practice encompasses process and research in its investigations, which have always been intertwined and without clear distinctions.

My current research is investigating old traditions and exploring new ones in linguistic and technical terms. Specifically, I prefer to deal with the same theme, or



Top left: 'La seconda stanza', 2012, small bells, wood, self-locking cable tiles, small vibrating engines, motion sensor, nylon wire, 387 x 350 x 295 cm, courtesy of the artist; top right: 'Caro amore mio', 2014, digital print on tissue paper, variable dimensions, courtesy of the artist; above: 'La prima stanza', 2011, fabric, paper, tissue paper, forex, metal, variable dimensions (detail), courtesy of the artist.

group of subjects, through different materials and techniques. In other words, I like to touch different things but always in the same way and with the same set of concerns. I often find the difficulty is in immersing myself, opening up and trying to find answers. But it is only through this insistence that a real understanding of things emerges, and through them, of the self. It is precisely this permanence (in things) that I try to train every day. It is no coincidence that the term "exercise" so frequently appears in the titles of my works. For example, I have had the words of Baudrillard on my mind for days. "...If the whole secret is returned to the visible...if every illusion is returned to transparency, then the sky becomes indifferent to the earth." For me, this relates to a video project I have had in mind for some time that explores shadow – a topic already faced in some of my other works. I am interested in getting closer to what lies within it: the unclear and the hidden.

I'm intrigued by the fact that your work often explores the collapsing point or limitations of materials, working with very delicate media such as tissue paper. How did this concern and material focus arise?

The materials that I have been working with for some time in my practice have always been—or so I have understood—a tool to both question and inform my work. They present opportunities to implement something transient: an idea, a feeling, an obsession.

When I started to work with pigments and the dusting technique back in 2006, I was looking for something that could give form to this dimension. In the following years I approached other materials (tissue paper, pure gold leaf, mirror) looking for their point of maximum stress and resistance to collapse. I do not know why, but everything always appeared extremely volatile, ephemeral and fragile to me. It was as if the choice of such light and delicate materials revealed, primarily to me, unexpected resilience.

You also have connections to Berlin, as do the other artists in this issue. I'm therefore interested in your perspective as an Italian artist working in this context. How does your background and the Italian artistic traditions play into the your work?

I became familiar with Berlin in 2002, carrying out a period of study. Since then it has continued to welcome me, love me and hate me, as have I. Despite the presence of many artists of different nationalities, it's a city with a specific artistic sensibility. Sometimes I find the precision and clarity in certain works can leave me rather indifferent. I prefer works to be more opaque.

What else is on the horizon?

I am currently taking part in a collective exhibition in Italy at CUBO Unipol, Bologna, entitled 'Macrocosmi – Ordnungen anderer Art'. The exhibition will then travel to Berlin, in September. I also have two other exhibitions in Berlin, in May and June. The first is on ingenuity and is entitled 'A trip into the woods', the second is a group exhibition entitled 'Cumuli' at the Verein zur Förderung von Kunst und Kultur am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz.