

The current group show at Two Rooms takes its name from Simon Morris' suite of 'accumulation' paintings executed between 2002 and 2003. However, the word can also be fittingly applied to the practice of his co-exhibitors, Joachim Bandau and John Reynolds, whose works are highly distinctive, but are underpinned by several shared elements. Issues of time, space and movement and the culmination of certain interests modulate them all. The work has developed in parallel with the ascent of post- modern discourse and typically raise questions about the process of making art. Although the works in this exhibition were produced in the previous decade they still foster critical thinking in the present moment. On a rudimentary level, each of the artists is concerned with the accumulation of pigment, spending time building and arranging layers of colour. The resultant paintings, all of which are abstract, feature a strong linearity that lends the finished piece a distinctly architectural aspect. All three artists may reference the interwoven strands of 20th century abstraction but this is not to say that they are uniformly alike. Their artworks are an accumulation of visual and physical sensations that are contingent and never fixed.

Morris' contribution to the exhibition comprises of monochromatic paintings conceptually configured and richly layered works. Restricted to one colour per canvas, paint is applied in block-like forms that are allowed to mingle, overlap, or settle against one another, but do not run the expanse of the canvas. Indeed, these blocks of colour dominate the centre, encapsulated by a sea of primed, but unpainted, white canvas. This activates the coloured segments and creates a strong separation of foreground and background. At the same time the sense of space is complex and ambiguous. Viewed at close range, there is a pronounced and evident texture rather than an entirely smooth surface. However there is little visible sign of the means of application. Morris' tightly geometric abstractions display a remarkable level of restraint, calculation and consideration with Morris repeatedly having to assess when the work is complete, ensuring that the strips of paint coalesce into well-ordered interlocking patchworks of colour.

According to Martin Patrick in his 2009 essay *Simon Morris : Folding Water*, Morris' works recall a seminal essay in the 1960's, *Systemic Painting* in which the critic Lawrence Alloway argued that "A system is as human as a splash of paint, more so than when the gets routinized" and that the personal is not expunged by using a neat technique, anonymity is not a consequence of highly finishing a painting. The artist's conceptual order just as personal as autographic tracks."¹

In a similar manner to Morris, Joachim Bandau also works with blocks of pigment, achieved by the application of many layers of watercolour. The work postulates an atmosphere of cleanliness, order, light, rest and concentration alluding to Asian landscape painting and calligraphy. Bandau dominates his medium with a commanding knowledge, agility and sense of performance.

Working with tones of very pale grey, Bandau meticulously and methodically applies pigment washes over particular areas of heavy hand made paper with very thick Japanese brushes, gradually developing segments into deep, inky velveteen black. The 'knife's edge' in these watercolour paintings is that the line of water that appears when the thick brush is moved slowly, regularly and with steady pressure of the wrist above the rough surface of the paper. It has to be made without interruption until the brush stroke is finished. Although there is huge degree of difficulty in this action, Bandau manages to produce what seems like an effortless accumulation of delicately layered grey hues that eventually dissolve into darkness. As with Morris, time is an integral aspect of this process. The watercolour paintings are made slowly with the process of drying affecting the works production so that they take months or even years to complete. The surfaces of the paper increasingly fill with pigment and the viewer feels the saturation that is reached in the end.

The most lyrical and expressive of the three, John Reynolds' paintings testify to his professed favour for drawing over painting, for while the works are in oil, acrylic, and enamel, their execution is resolutely focussed on mark making. A spray of diagonal streaks and stripes look to have tumbled almost haphazardly down the canvas, but as with Morris and Bandau, Reynolds has an impressive knack for preventing chaos from breaking out and swallowing the painting. As with the other two artists there is a performative aspect to his mark making and he has recognisable methods of pictorial organisation, however unlike Bandau and Morris there is a perverse interest in presenting paintings that seem 'underworked' or have an 'edgy sense of tension or wobble'.

Reynolds' titles are revealing and helpful in the reading of his work as a whole, indicative of an energetic set of interests more consistent than any surface elements. How Fiction Works references James Woods' 2008 book of that name. "How to push out?" asks Wood at one point, investigating the way the critical mind can work through the creative process. Similarly, Reynolds calls into question notions of stasis and timelessness often associated with abstraction and the overt aspects of 'expressivity' often attributed to his practice. For Reynolds, like Morris, abstraction is linked to the relationship between the resolved and the unresolved and according to both artists these issues are not as finalised as we have been led to believe.

Reynolds acknowledges his admiration for performance artist Bruce Nauman. "He uses only as much as he needs. Each piece is simple yet rich, a distillation of his thinking around a particular idea."² – qualities that could be applied to all three artists in this exhibition.

¹ "Systemic Painting" in Lawrence Alloway, Richard Kallian, ed. *Imagining the Present: Context, Content, and the role of the Critic* (London: Routledge, 2006) 121-135

² "John Reynolds Painting, Planting, and Performance". Roger Horrocks, ed. *Art New Zealand*, Issue 122

