

‘Open time’ is synonymous with the phrase ‘wet-edge time’. Both expressions refer to a period while paint-film has not hardened and remains malleable, pliable. The use of *Open Time* as a title is astute for several reasons, one of which is certainly the way it speaks directly to Noel Ivanhoff’s concerns with the matter of paint as a medium, and its material conditions.

As a viscous substance that suspends motion, paint is marked by repeated physical movement but also, more abstractly, by a sense of time when processes cannot be seen: in the place where each work constitutes itself as a thing. To contemplate this open-time part of its ‘thingness’, which falls outside our usual grasp of the object, is to consider impressions of temperature, air movement, humidity, light and levels of liquidity, which are also impacted by bodily, emotional and intellectual moments – small moments stretched inside a parcel of time that wraps all the constituents of matter together. This marked moment of time is not some macho expression: the work is too slight for that. And although it has a muscularity, the work leaves time and space for matter.

Another implication of the exhibition title is its inference of industry: it is a temporal but technical term used mostly by the paint manufacturing and coating industries. As a technological phrase it migrates to the labels of some fine-art pigments. But in Ivanhoff’s emphasis we might read a subtle deflection, from more lofty ideals in artistic preoccupations to the pragmatic sphere of the trades and the manufacture of the right products for the job at hand. Ivanhoff would slip off his studio smock for some tradesman’s overalls, or perhaps a factory coat, and assume an attitude of attending to task.

Part of understanding these *Slider* paintings and *Monoprint* work is to see how Ivanhoff executes and repeats his trials, at turns like a laboratory technician and at others like a builder and painter-decorator. There is a direct matter-of-factness to the objects, their build as well as systematically painted quality. It is an attitude of labour like that of a blue-collar worker.¹ Yet Ivanhoff’s academic training and interest in traditional pigments, oils, waxes and solvents affirms his investment in the project of fine arts.

In a 2003 exhibition catalogue displaying an earlier array of monoprint painting, Ivanhoff reveals how his treatment of colour has a tradesman’s touch. He explains, ‘This series of works explores colour within a field of interior design. The paintings refer to swatches, charts and samples of colour we use in order to make a decision about the colour a room will be painted.’²

Pragmatic references to painting as an industrial occupation might remind us of Duchamp’s myth-crumbing motives for incorporating colour swatches into his *Tu m’* of 1918. These swatches, as poet Susan Barbour explains, operate as reposts to the rarefied monochromes and dynamic shapes being pioneered by Kasimir Malevich’s suprematism. In contrast to his romancing of shape and colour as the pinnacle of purity,

*Duchamp insisted that oil paints were not irreducible essences; they were products ground by paint-grinders, mixed by chemists, and packed by assembly lines into aluminium tubes. To cover a canvas with a layer of a single colour was not to create a transcendent expression of its essence; it was merely to engage in another kind of illusionism, one that made the materials of painting and the bodies of paint-grinders disappear.*³

Ivanoff certainly makes use of colour as a readymade commodity, and even highlights its role as a product for design. More vitally, he also wants us to see this material, the stuff of it, and not mistake it as some quest for essential or transcendent principles, nor more mundanely as merely some retail decoration. To do either would be to dismiss what is there.

The readymade was a disaffected Duchamp's dark gift to art, countering the painting of spatial illusions with the demand for *real* space. *Real*, however, is an adjective that finds its way into the language of two post-Duchampian painters who would seem decisive to the project Ivanoff sets himself. One is Robert Ryman who preferred to name his work as 'realist' over the usual designations of abstraction, since its manner of reference was to the way it occupied actual space and the viewer's phenomenal experience of that. The other is the young Frank Stella. A quote used as a vignette heads a page dedicated to him at *The Art Story* online.

I like real art. It's difficult to define REAL but it is the best word for describing what I like to get out of art and what the best art has. It has the ability to convince you that it's present – that it's there.

Stella's famously physical preoccupations with 'What you see is what you see'⁴ extends, however, to much more than what we might understand as the bare facts of material composing art objects. Chief curator of *The Modern*, Michael Auping, points to this clearly in the title of his essay 'The Phenomenology of Frank: "Materiality and Gesture Make Space"'.⁵ That entitled quote is Stella's, and Auping explains how the material bluntness of Stella's early paintings, which nevertheless asserted a compelling sensuality,⁷ pushed abstract painting into a new era of materialism'.⁶ It was a materialism that seems now a pronounced territory for Ivanoff's work in the way Stella sought to collapse divisions between what Michael Fried famously designated as literal and pictorial space.⁷ Auping clarifies that,

*in other words, the traditional, rectangular, window-like shape of painting creates a unique reality, separate from the literal space of a room. Fried's assertion is that to maintain its integrity, painting needed to keep this separate reality. Stella would argue for both realities being present.*⁸

Ivanoff achieves this same kind of compound work where its material facts merge with its facture to create perceptual space. This is an experience of space that hovers between the material and its manner of making to conjure pictures, like opening a window into a distinct expanse. An example of this can be seen in the layered quality of the *Monoprint* work. Saturation in hue has been altered between coats, opening latent spaces in the colour. Vertical lines that have been pressed into the surface through sheets of paper have also removed part of the paint film, leaving linear courses that seem to vibrate like chords plucked on a harp. Space seems then to reverberate. An apparent grid ghosts over the surfaces, because it is not formed directly. It is built up impurely through a layer of horizontal brushing and then tracked vertically with a blunt, whittled switch over the top covering. A wooden apparatus, like a slide-rule, steadies the hand so the gesture's propensity to hyperbolic extravagance has been filtered out, affecting a minimal posture. The double layers of colour and mark however, open an interstice between them. The *Slider* paintings achieve the same ghosting space, an interval pressed between metal sheen, refracting light and slick of cloudy oil. We experience this space; it is physical, but it also opens mirages in the mind.

– Glen Snow

- 1 Michael Auping (see fn 5) uses this expression for artist Frank Stella and, although they are of different generations, Ivanoff and Stella share similar types of aptitudes towards building and renovation, whether it be houses or boats, which seem to be brought to bear on the making of art.
- 2 Noel Ivanoff, *Dressed Four Sides*, Vavasour-Godkin Gallery, Auckland, 2003.
- 3 Susan Barbour, 'Duchamp's Long Shadow: The Secret Meaning of *Tu m*,' *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 10 April 2017, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/duchamps-long-shadow-the-secret-meaning-of-tu-m/#!>
- 4 Frank Stella, quoted in Bruce Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and Judd', edited by Lucy R. Lippard', in Gregory Battcock (ed), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles CA, London, 1968, p 148.
- 5 Michael Auping, 'The Phenomenology of Frank: "Materiality and Gesture Make Space', in Michael Auping (ed), *Frank Stella a Retrospective*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT & London, 2015.
- 6 *Ibid*, p 18.
- 7 Michael Fried, Art and Objecthood, *Artforum* 5, no 10 (June 1967).

