Painting 2.0
Expression in the Information Age

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Introduction

It may come as a surprise that the considerable interest shown in contemporary painting in the past few years coincided with an explosion in new digital technologies. However, since the 1960s, the most advanced positions in painting—especially in Western Europe and the USA—have developed in productive friction with mass culture and its media. From the arrival of television and the computer, to the so-called internet revolution, painting has consistently succeeded in integrating the very mechanisms that seemed to herald its own death. Far beyond the seemingly outdated definition “oil on canvas,” painting was and is a privileged site where the challenges of our increasingly mediatized world are open to negotiation.

Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age is the first comprehensive exhibition to present the appropriation and transformation of mass media in Western European and North American painting. The exhibition sets in long before digitalization and the Internet—namely with Pop Art and Nouveau Réalisme which programmatically made use of emerging commercial pictorial languages for the first time in the 1960s. Just at the time when painting, as the prevalent pictorial form in the modern era, was challenged by the “society of the spectacle,” new topics, techniques and media emerged. The exhibition explores this multifaceted history of painting up to the present day—to the far-reaching effects of the interactive Web 2.0 which have conquered everyday life in the form of social media and data clouds. Painting draws its contemporaneity from the collision between the visual codes of the mass media and the subjective traces of painterly expression. It was precisely the painterly gesture that has again and again served to reintegrate the virtual world of the information age into the material realm of the human body.

The exhibition is divided into three sections—Gesture and Spectacle on the Entrance Level 0; Eccentric Figuration on Level 2; and Social Networks on Levels 3 and 4. The open exhibition architecture allows for correlations between different topics, enabling cross references and readings that go beyond chronological developments and thematic focal points.
Ebene 0
Gesture and Spectacle

With the end of World War II a radical change began in Western Europe and North America: economic recovery, technological advances, and the resultant global network became the ideal of a forward-looking society focussed on expansion. The “Situationist International” theorist Guy Debord described this state in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967 as a soulless, perfectly organized machine, in which everything has become a world of appearances. The section Gesture and Spectacle addresses the question of how painting has countered these developments since the 1960s. The painterly gesture, which had already been considered a pivotal vehicle of subjective expression at the beginning of the 20th century, played an important role in this process.

The programmatic prelude to *Painting 2.0* is the installation *Heavy Burschi* (1989–90) by Martin Kippenberger. For this work the artist asked Merlin Carpenter, his assistant at that time, to paint a series of pictures based on Kippenberger’s own works, catalogs, invitations, posters, and photos. Carpenter’s pictorial collages show elements of Kippenberger’s artistic universe intermingled with the trappings of consumerism, the logos of luxury brandnames and gimmicky slogans such as “Don’t cry—work” and “Very good.” After Kippenberger had taken photographs of Carpenter’s pictures and made photographic reproductions on a 1:1 scale, he destroyed the “originals” and threw them in a skip, which is also on view here. In a subtle way, this opening work draws attention to the omnipresent questions of the death and survival of painting, the relation between the original and its copy, and the position of the individual in the “world of the spectacle.”

Mediatized Gestures

The tour of the exhibition opens with a generation of artists who assertively examine the rising mediatization of the 1960s: television, the booming advertising industry, and the commercialization of the living environment are reflected thematically and pictorially. The “classic” medium of painting holds its ground as one in which the imagery of a changing western culture is put to the test.

The Affichistes Mimmo Rotella, Jacques de la Villeglé, and Raymond Hains stripped posters from billboards in Paris in the 1960s and showed them in exhibition rooms without making any alterations. The layers of images exposed by the wind, weather and deterioration create unintentional correlations of different meanings. In the anonymous metropolis of the late 20th century abstraction is no longer an individual process of creation but a random product of industrial society. Yves Klein’s pictures were composed at spectacular staged happenings, often in front of an audience: the bodies of naked women painted in “International Klein Blue” (IKB), patented by Klein, left imprints on canvases. The link between bodily gesture, effective publicity stunt and a registered trademark draws attention to the intertwining of art and economics. This relationship also seems to have preoccupied Arnulf Rainer when he almost completely overpainted a banknote fixed on a support with blue paint in 1961.
Niki de Saint Phalle on the other hand took a rifle and shot at plaster reliefs with bags of paint inside and literally “killed” painting at her happenings—a gesture that was not least of all aimed at the male dominated art industry. In the USA Robert Rauschenberg confronted the tradition of expressive painting with a flood of media products. In *Tree Frog* (1964), prints of photos and newspaper articles superimpose “liberal” painterly gestures whereby the images of the Statue of Liberty, the moon landing and the eagle seem to float in a space devoid of coordinates—stripped of their identity-giving character.

3

**Protest Painting**

The late 1960s were marked by social and political unrest—from the student movement and second-wave feminism which spread across a large part of the then “western” world, through to the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam protests in the United States.

At this time painting became an expression and part of this protest. Liberated more and more from the definition “oil on canvas,” its activist potential came to the fore. Daniel Buren wiped out the conventional format of the panel painting with a stereotyped “X.” Its geometrical structure anticipated the serial striped works which were to become Buren’s trademark soon after and with which he moved painting from the canvas into (the public) space. Günter Brus similarly took painting to the street with his performance *Wiener Spaziergang* (1965). Painted white from head to toe, eradicating his own personality as it were, he turned his own body into a canvas and a surface for social projections.

With the slogan *Hört auf zu malen* (“Stop painting,” 1966), Jörg Immendorff, a student of Joseph Beuys, painted his protest in words onto the picture itself. The agitative call demands a socially committed art and opposes the contemplative bourgeois notion of painting as a purely subjective sphere, removed from worldly things. In *Wo stehst Du mit Deiner Kunst, Kollege?* (“Where do you stand with your art, colleague?,” 1973) the activist on the street and Immendorff himself question the socio-political relevance of an art that seems unaware of the class struggle beyond the studio door. Louise Fishman’s *Angry Women* paintings of 1973 are a milestone in feminist painting. In this group of works, the first names of like-minded female artists and activists form an angry painterly protest march, rebelling against gender relations. Protesting against encrusted political structures could already be seen as a fundamental motif in early 20th-century Expressionism. Jacqueline Humphries’ gestural-abstract *Protest Paintings* of 2008 reference this connection, incorporating various painterly gestures as if they were slogans. Mounted on a wooden slat, painting’s support is no longer the wall but—theoretically at least—the activist herself.
4

Expression as Pose

In the 1980s, revolutionary hopes to employ painting for concrete political purposes were abandoned. Popular culture occupied that space instead. With Punk and New Wave, protest and spectacle merged; “authentic” expression became an exchangeable and artificial pose.

Keith Haring covered billboard spaces in the New York subway with comic-like stick-men which articulate the sign and pictorial language of advertising. The work in this exhibition shows the original frame of the advertising space including the neighboring poster. The announcement for the movie The Man Who Wasn’t There seems to comment on Keith Haring’s anonymous figures which were to become among Street Art’s best-known motifs. In his triptych, Jean-Michel Basquiat crosses references to Picasso’s Desmoiselles d’Avignon (1907) with the pictorial language of the booming New York graffiti culture. Using words, symbols, and signs, Basquiat—as an Afro-American artist—appropriates the way western modernism regards non-European art forms. Masks and skulls, anatomical diagrams and copyright signs make the individual appear just as encoded as in Early Modernist works. Ashley Bickerton’s Commercial Piece #1 (1989) hangs on the wall like a sarcophagus, covered with logos and the names of renowned galleries: the boundaries between advertising culture and the fine arts seem to have been lifted; in the era of neo-liberalism, identity becomes a commercial brand name.

Neo-Expressionist painting is also to be seen against the background of these developments. Although there is a return to the aura of painting and the myths of (male) self-expression, it is in a manner corrupted by trivial culture. In Albert Oehlen’s Auch Einer (1985), a stag’s head protudes from a blue suit. With broken antlers, seemingly forcefully thrust into the picture, the creature opens its mouth to roar: from Edvard Munch to Francis Bacon the scream is a sign of the protesting and distraught subject. Like a tear, blue paint trickles out of the stag’s human eye which looks at us from the middle of the picture. Shop-window mannequins pop up at various places in the exhibition as substitute figures. My Friend (1989) by John Miller is an uncanny “doppelgänger” of the optimistic, liberal man of the 1980s. His fashionable clothes including sneakers, typical of the time, have been completely spattered with pastose brown paint—“John Miller Brown”—with which the artist has “clothed” the mannequin as if with excrement.
Reassembling Painting

In the mid-1990s the computer and Internet found their way into everyday life: computer graphics and a blossoming Internet culture once again put painting as a contemporary pictorial medium to the test. Instead of giving in to this “disempowerment,” painting took advantage of these developments, using the computer-generated world of images as the starting point for a renewed reflection of its possibilities.

Artists such as Albert Oehlen and Michel Majerus reacted by literally transferring the digital pictorial language into their painting. Majerus records screenshots from an Internet search in a series of small-format pictures on canvas, taking visual cues from digital imagery. Oehlen transforms computer-generated patterns onto his hand-painted pictures and “corrects” their pixelled lines and surfaces with a brush and spray paint. Charline von Heyl’s works at the same time also appear to respond to the notion of virtual pictorial worlds: formations resembling satellite images, grids, gestural maneuvers, and diverse “surface effects” turn into improbable pictorial spaces whose existence painting strives to render plausible.

The erosion of traditional categories of painting since the 1960s reached a turning point in the 1990s: destructive tendencies were no longer seen as an attempt to “abandon painting”—expressed for example in Saint Phalle’s wish to “kill” the picture. The works shown here are instead self-assured, set against the background of this “history of destruction,” and reveal its aesthetic appeal: in 1997 Christopher Wool made his fire-damaged studio the subject of a photographic series; Steven Parrino’s *The No Title Painting* (2003) becomes a completed work of art only after its partial destruction. It is as if painting were to be reassembled from of its very own pieces.

Hacking the Code

Since the new millennium a growing interest in painting is to be observed which is also reflected in a booming art market. This is once again a reaction to a paradigm shift in technology: images circulating on computers and smartphones appear increasingly immaterial. It is as if the concrete, material physicality of painting were to provide a platform to reflect on the flow of contemporary picture production.

Images circulate on the Internet in completely different contexts: they are detached from their original source and copied, their dimensions and formats altered and processed. Analog to this, Josh Smith makes use of varied reproduction techniques, such as the silkscreen print, photocopy, and laser print so as to vary his repertoire of motifs—including time and again, the artist’s own name. His pictures are no longer cohesive objects but rather nodes in a network of references. In Laura Owen’s painting digitally modified “obsolete” media are interwoven with elements of gestural painting: individual brushstrokes and accumulations of color have been applied to a copy of the *Los Angeles Times* from April 1942, when the first American bombardments were flown as a retaliation to Pearl Harbor. It appears as if painting were to scan and comment on the historical events.
Paintings, as “flatware,” can be relatively easily marketed. In the course of the contemporary art market boom, when pictures achieve prices in the millions, painters offensively analyze their own commercialization. Banknotes, coins, and playing cards circulate Monika Baer’s abstract pictorial spaces: painting seems to have absorbed its own form of corruption. Isa Genzken’s *Wind II (Michael Jackson)* (2009) reveals a golden paranoid world of spectacle, in which the “King of Pop”—between calculated pose and vulnerability—becomes a superelevated Christian alter ego for artists. In Kerry James Marshall’s *Buy Black* (2012), references to Color Field Painting coincide with the colors of the pan-African flag and the 1930s’ call to “buy black” which, seen in the light of today, addresses preferences prevalent in the art market. Finally, with Heimo Zobernig’s *Ohne Titel* (2011) we are once again confronted with a “doppelgänger” of consumer culture, this time in the form of a shop-window mannequin wearing nothing but a SALE T-shirt on its plastic body: a perpetual clearance sale.
Eccentric Figuration

In 1966 the art critic Lucy Lippard coined the term "eccentric abstraction" to describe abstract organic forms in sculpture which are not only aimed at the eye but strive to involve the body as a whole. Following on from this idea, the focus of this section of the exhibition is on a form of painting which addresses the question of corporeality. How has our picture of the human body been changed by advertising and the media? What influence does technology have on our (self) perception and emotions? And not least of all: how is the material-based, "analog" medium of painting positioned with regard to digital technology? Since the 1960s painting has formulated a variety of different answers to these questions. The pictorial worlds of advertising and cartoons are examined, as are notions of sexuality, which found themselves in a state of flux and under the growing influence of the media. In this respect the body is not merely of interest as a motif but also as an instrument of perception: painting reflects what it means to have a feeling body or to be a feeling body in the "society of the spectacle." As such, it engages a subject of particular urgency in the light of the increasing possibilities of a social life “beyond the body” in the virtual world.

A central contribution to these questions is provided by feminist and queer practices. Fragmented bodies, anti-heroic gestures, and the dislimitation of the traditional pictorial body question normative notions. Ree Morton’s installation Signs of Love (1976) turns painting into a bodily entity. “Wedding portraits” and terms such as “pleasures” and “atmospheres” are linked to painted ladders, drapery, and roses to form a brightly colored stage set that celebrates the romantic: the feeling of love has infused painting and molded it into clichés, or vice versa, painting has breathed new life into stereotypes. Kitsch is not condemned here as conventional; instead the conventional is presented as a form of shared experience. Frank Stella’s pictures from this period were often interpreted as maneuvers, as paintings in which gestures and poses have become paralyzed into clichés and artificially kept alive. However, presented together with Morton’s work, Stella’s spatialized images with their decorative and sign-like elements appear less cynical but rather as credible attempts to re-orientate painting.

Affective Gestures

For the Abstract Expressionists—the generation preceding the artists presented here—gestural expression in painting was considered the quintessence of subjective introspection. Around 1960, and with the emergence of Minimal Art, a turning point took place. The existentially connotated painterly gesture was not only regarded as something suspicious but even anachronistic.

In the works of Joan Mitchell and Cy Twombly, who adhered to gestural painting, there is the hint of a new, more complex relationship between the brushstroke and expressiveness. Their brushstroke seems to be conscious of the historical burden, challenging it, and reveling at the interplay with what has been compromised. Cy Twombly’s canvas is full of gestural
marks and graphic allusions: numbers, hearts, phallic shapes, and the artist's signature are mixed with scribbles, dripping paint, and smears made with the bare hand. The pictorial surface acts as a screen, capturing different painterly happenings which overlap, correct and eradicate themselves reciprocally. While scattered, swift gestures bring graffiti and scrawls on toilet walls to mind, the use of the word “Rome” in the title conjures up associations with Antiquity—the libidinal and the sublime are inextricably linked to one another.

Eva Hesse's early painting stages the struggle between gestural abstraction and figuration. The sketchy figures and faces in her pastose pictures are literally pushed to the side, and have to assert themselves against monochrome backgrounds. The “subjective” that unfurls between anonymous depictions and the painterly gesture is less self-assured and heroic than doubting and relational. In the artist's reliefs created a few years later, a humorous lightness replaces existential hardship. Painting has actually transcended its traditional boundaries and inquisitively inches its way into the space. Protuberances and bulges in brilliant colors allude to botanical shapes, the human body, and technical devices in equal measure. Ear in a Pond (1965), for example, has something of a pink flower on a green stalk, or of a body part connected to a cable from which an extension, like an umbilical cord, hangs teasingly out of the picture.

9

Prosthetic Bodies

Bestsellers such as Marshall McLuhan's The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962) describe a changing body awareness at the beginning of the 1960s: technologies as prosthetic extensions of the human body. The body was considered a functional structure interacting with other systems in a variety of different ways. Painting looked for possibilities to incorporate this body and its expanded capabilities, however also reflecting the alienation which accompanied technological delimitation.

Lee Lozano's painterly bodies are involved in utterly unsentimental, at times masturbatory, cycles of excretion and absorption. The bodies are electrified (lightbulbs) and loaded (guns), their orifices are sites of all kinds of transactions, and their members prove versatile tools for drilling, ramming, and sliding. In one picture a gloved hand reaches out for a coin slit between splayed legs. Gustave Courbet's famous painting L'Origine du monde (1866) becomes the scene of a prosaic bartering deal. Lozano's bodies are excessively sexualized and irresolvably ensnared in financial and technological cycles. Through their transitional capability and mobility however they elude any clear interpretation—they are literally “slippery”.

In Leidy Churchman's video work Painting Treatments (2010), bodies are subjected to painterly actions reminiscent of spa treatments. With every new pictorial composition a new constellation of bodies is created: a continuously changing painterly collective body. Painting Treatments functions like an inverted touchscreen where sight and touch are interwoven. This is also the case with the picture Bang! (2011), in which a telescope (or the muzzle of a cannon?) exposes a view of green pants, touched in the crutch by a second telescope (or muzzle). In her “body-awareness-paintings”—to use the artist's own term—Maria Lassnig
explores the sense of her own body: inside and outside, what is felt and what is seen, are
pieced together to form composite bodies which identify the “self” as a continuously changing
formation. Technical views and images also mold this awareness which repeatedly reassures
itself of its existence on the canvas—like a blind, feeling hand. In Lassnig’s experimental
film Self Portrait (1971), produced in New York, the artist’s face is exposed to a multitude
of external influences and continuously in motion. It is stroked, halved, and stamped, trans-
forming into a film camera or assuming the features of Greta Garbo.

Painting’s Body

As a reaction to the increasing mediatization and dematerialization of the body in advertising,
television, and later on the Internet, the physical qualities of painting become the focal point of
discussion. Hands and brushes as tools, pigment as the bearer of painterly illusion, as well as
the pictorial body as such—mostly fabric on a stretcher frame—are motifs and subjects that
define the corporeality of painting in an increasingly virtualized world of images.

Lynda Benglis parodies the existentially charged habitus of the (male) artist-subject in her
latex works of the late 1960s. In Rumpled Painting/Caterpillar (1968) paint has left the
canvas and spreads out as a pure body of color on the floor. With a shape rich in associations
it is reminiscent of a giant caterpillar or of something run over by a „Caterpillar.“ Illusion and
materiality merge with one another in Philip Guston’s Painting Table (1975). The painted color
spots on the artist’s workbench really are spots of paint; the canvas itself looks like an artist’s
table standing on end. The color pink, however, awakens bodily associations: the picture
as skin that has been abused with paint. The blending of canvas and body surface in Head
(1977) is especially striking, where the depiction of a laced opening on a pink surface turns
into a post-operative human head. If one believes Guston’s picture, there is nothing behind the
layer of paint other than a white void; painting is unable to see into the (shallow) depths of the
psyche.

Harmony Hammond’s In Her Absence (1981) refers to a missing body in its title and presents
corporeal pictorial objects in its place instead. Reminiscent of the shape of windows, the
structures wrapped in rags, painted red and decorated with glitter, deny a view of any kind,
displaying instead their own materiality. Georg Baselitz’s Zwei Hände (1984) are all painterly
gesture, yet seem more like severed extremities or gloves which, together with the respective
body, have lost the agency they once had. However one interprets these hands—whether
hanging limply from above into the picture, clawing desperately at the canvas, or stirring up
the colored area in anger—they seem at any rate to have alienated themselves from their body
and perhaps from one another as well.
Every examination of body images is also an examination of the social norms of the time. The alternative cultures of the 1960s, their pictorial languages and codes, are also reflected in painting. Exaggeration and persiflage were used as rhetoric means to render implicit structures visible and to call notions of cultural homogeneity into question. The depiction of what positioned itself consciously outside the norm drew attention to the boundaries and hierarchies which condition society.

The identity of Karl Wirsum’s Miss Tree (1968) is a riddle as the onomatopoeic title of the work suggests (“mystery”). The face of the female figure, which in style and color calls comic drawings to mind, is concealed by a red question mark. Her body seems submissively—like modeling clay—to follow the eccentric sweeping lines of her hair and clothing. Why, Miss Tree seems to ask, does anyone assume a person or thing at all behind clothing and surfaces? Like Wirsum, Ed Paschke lived and worked in Chicago, a city with a rich tradition in alternative figurative painting. Jeanine (1973) is part of a series of portraits in which Paschke depicts figures from the demi-monde in psychedelic colors and weird get-ups. Bizarre hair-styles, diabolic grins, and full-body tattoos turn those on the fringes of society into surreally heightened icons of the outsiders’s world.

Elizabeth Murray’s Her Story (1984) presents a different kind of eccentricity. Extending in all directions at once, the pictorial body shows an empirical world that has come off its hinges. Interiority—depicted through domestic motifs such as chairs or tables—has blown apart like in an explosion and then frozen in a state of precarious tension. Familiar orderliness has also dissipated in Sue William’s Darklight (1996): upon closer inspection, the seemingly abstract confusion of lines set against a garish yellow background turns out to be a grotesque orgy of figures and body parts. Distinctions between the inside and outside, above and below, the beginning and end are rendered invalid—painting becomes an open outline that binds all and everything together in copulation. Chris Ofili’s Trump (1998) shows a black ace-of-spades with a friendly, smiling face against a bright background. In slang, the word “spade” is a racist term for an Afro-American. The decorative façade and cheerful references to a “black culture” are deceptive. Contrary to the conventions of western painting the picture is not hung but leans against the wall—standing, literally, on elephant dung.

With the establishment of the Internet as a mass medium in the 1990s an examination of subject positions can be observed in painting that were believed to have been lost. The uncertainty associated with a virtual life—what is “authentic,” what is fake?—gives rise to a yearning for historical models in which the subject and the corporeal form an organic whole. Painting responds to the “immaterialness” of the new images with an intensified interest in haptic, material qualities.
Kai Althoff’s frieze of seated figures is a collage of different materials and paper and conjures up memories of handicraft work at youth centers or schools. Any nostalgia however is confounded by the strangely stiff figures which seem to have capitulated on the path to individualization. Greater individual expression than deciding on blond or brunette hair, a checked scarf or diamond-patterned pullover is not necessary and perhaps not desirable among the average German grays. As a contrast to the reservedness of Althoff’s youth parade, Jutta Koether presents an overarticulated painterly excess. The signal color red gives it all: “100 % OBSESSED,” “100% PAINTED,” “100% PARANOIA” is to be read on one work. The brilliant traffic-light red in which faces, matter, and words are combined in one orgiastic swirl keeps the viewer at arm’s length while at the same time emphasizing the body reference. Anticipating their being on display, Koether’s paintings seem flushed with shame, anger, and coyness.

Amy Sillman’s pictures and animations deal with the different states, stages and layers of identity as well as the painterly process itself: moments of doubt and moments of re-orientation go hand in hand. In Fatso (2009), abstract lines and shapes hint at an unhappily stern-looking figure with a massive body—which, however, seems to be in the process of re-aligning itself as if doing a gymnastics exercise. The uncertain unity of body and subject bears further potential: alternative identities and utopian communities are able to take form. In addition to Nicole Eisenman’s heads of crying figures (made of expanding foam) and of sleeping figures (made of plaster) her work also comprises pictures of superheroines and women working together. How’s My Painting?: if one questions the quality of a painting which unhinges the self-image of the white male artist, the answer is as follows: “Call 1-800-Eat Shit.”
Ebene 3

13
Visions of Communality

The relationship between the individual and the collective has shifted in the information age. Networks, which extend far beyond a person’s immediate social environment, have become social capital. They are the expression of a globalizing world in which goods, money, and the flow of information are becoming increasingly abstract. Painting not only reflects the altered role of the individual within these structures but also its own status. Like other pictures and goods it is part of networks which shape its social and economic value. The works assembled here pick up on traditional genres such as the group portrait or the notion of the modern ‘man in the crowd’ to address this new situation.

“Wo stehst Du?” (Where do you stand?) is the question asked in Jörg Immendorff’s monumental Musée d’art moderne (1989), a subject the artist had already addressed in the past. From outside, where the world is in upheaval—a volcano is erupting; the Bastille is being stormed—he is seen in the window holding up a flyer with a picture of his protest painting from 1973 (shown on Level 0). Inside, the art world has come together for an exhibition opening: collectors, gallerists, artists, and curators are unaffected by the turmoil outside. And there is Immendorff again: sitting in the middle, drawing one of his own sculptures which is awarded the highest mark “I.” The fictive gathering of people important to him, both living and dead, shows the “Museum of Modern Art” to be a network that believes itself removed from social change.

Nicole Eisenman’s Beer Garden with Ash (2009) was painted at the height of the most recent economic crisis. Alluding to Édouard Manet’s Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère (1882), the artist depicts a beer garden in Brooklyn in which the local scene is “affected” by the European tradition of expressive painting: people express themselves in the painterly styles of Vincent van Gogh, James Ensor, and Edvard Munch. An androgynous figure with a smartphone is positioned on the threshold between the beer garden and the viewer. Introspective, like Manet’s barmaid in front of the mirror, it represents the digital Bohème of the 21st century whose possibilities for company and isolation have multiplied.

Sadie Benning’s animation Play/Pause (2006) is based on hundreds of hand-painted gouaches which, like spotlights, show life in a metropolis. Façades, shop windows, and advertising pass by as do activities such as taking out money, waiting for the subway or using mobiles. Images of everyday urban life are mixed with scenes of gay and lesbian city life: bar conversations, a television show with the title Lesbian Makeovers, and sex. The city acts as a mobile stage on which youth culture, sexual identities, and gender questions are performed. Painting is part of this rhythm of “Play” and “Pause.”
**Social Networks**

Since the 1960s, the massive commercialization of our living environment has led to a constant increase in the number of images circulating in the media. Reproduced and spread through television and the print media they took a hold of everyday life more and more. With the emergence of the Internet and social media, image production has now reached the furthest corners of our private and professional lives. This circulation of pictures follows the logic of commercial, technical, and social networks, which no longer merely transmit data but also structure social and interpersonal relationships. Digitality is encroaching on our perception and bodies: “networking” has transformed from "social capital" into an identity-generating survival strategy.

As a form of material image production in which historical genealogies and the question of the “original,” authorship and “authenticity,” as well as commodification and the promise of freedom have traditionally played a major role, painting has had good reason to reposition itself among the omnipresent circulation of images since the 1960s. It does so by broaching the subject of the relationship between art and commerical logics (*Warhol’s Factory* and *Capitalist Realism*) or by exploring gaps in the commercial cycle (*A.I.R. Gallery – Artists in Residence*). It does so by providing an arena for the myth-making rivalry between different artistic subjectivities (*Fantasy of Cologne*) or by joining the ranks of logos in the “war of signs” (*Signs, Floods, and Signals*). And it also does so by dissecting its own traditions and means of expression (*Appropriation and Image Circulation*) or by attempting to give body and shape to the abstract processes surrounding the increasing growth of technology (*Somatic Pictures*).

The various strategies in painting of tracing technical, commercial, and social networks—focusing or distracting attention—are shown on a formation of staggered, freestanding walls. Like open windows on a computer screen they mask and overlap one another, presenting a loose chronological sequence: On the front sides, works from the 1960s to the 1980s stretch to the back of the room; making a U-turn, looking back, the sequence leads into the present. In this way interferences emerge between the historical and the contemporary, the expressive and the semiotic, affirmation and criticism, which themselves focus and distract attention within this order.

14

**Warhol’s Factory**

Andy Warhol is considered a key protagonist of Pop Art which, with its commercial pictorial language, mirrors the changing society of the 1960s. Even today the “Factory,” as Warhol ironically dubbed his studio, is legendary. It was not only art of the “Andy Warhol” brand that was produced there by assistants, like on conveyor belt, using the silk-screen printing technique: the Factory was also a social meeting place for celebrities and the downtown Bohème who served as the “raw material” for Warhol’s paintings and films. In the Factory the logic of the social capital “celebrity” and the principles of capitalist mass production overlapped.
In the dollar bill pictures of 1962 the idea of painting as a “commercial surface” becomes explicit in a matter-of-fact way. Cash as a universal value-form—or “flat commodity” as painting is frequently called—illustrates the circular structures of the capitalist market like no other motif. While the seriality of the 40 Two Dollar Bills (Fronts and Backs) is only slightly marred by irregularities in the silk-screen printing, in One Dollar Bill (Front) painterly gesture and value-form seem to collide in an almost violent way: the red on the bill looks like blood. A few years later, Warhol celebrated one of his greatest successes with his comparably pretty Flowers series: the motif of the hibiscus flower stems from a magazine photograph which the artist adapted for his own purposes. Within just a few months, more than nine hundred flower pictures had been created in a variety of different colors and formats—“product variants,” so to speak. The Flowers take the notion of art as decorative mass-produced item to an extreme; they even migrated from the canvas to record covers and fashion. Warhol’s Skull pictures of 1976 depict a macabre subject in similarly sugary colors: just as the motif of the dollar bill signifies value, the skull is the ultimate, universal portrait reduced literally to the bone.

15 Capitalist Realism

From 1963 onward, the artists Gerhard Richter, Konrad Lueg, Manfred Kuttner, and Sigmar Polke formed the group of the “Capitalist Realists.” In subsequent years, exhibitions and happenings were held outside the institutional art space under this programmatic term, not least for the purpose of self-promotion. A shop, a furniture store in Düsseldorf or the snow-covered front garden of a gallerist’s villa served as locations. The pictorial language of the Capitalist Realists was linked to Pop Art: they shared an interest in consumerism, advertising, and decorative surfaces as well as the aesthetics of photographic reproduction. At the same time it is a language specific to the “West German economic miracle”—German everyday life, German history, and German values.

Gerhard Richter’s offset and silk-screen prints of the British monarch and fighter planes draw on political debates fought out in the media at that time—such as the question of Germany’s rearmament. The original material came from newspapers or magazines and was then subjected to a second technical reproduction process during printing. With the motif, also the medium is reproduced, as is clearly visible in the raster print in Elizabeth II (1966). National identity is also the subject of Sigmar Polke’s Goethes Werke (1963), showing the spines of books bound in leather which belong to the standard repertoire in the display shelves in any middle-class living-room. Polke’s picture reduces the works of the national poet to their packaging and implicates that even Goethe is a German brand.

Konrad Lueg focuses on the décor of the lower middle-class household—hand towels, wallpaper, gift wrapping, and tablecloths. In works such as Komposition aus 6 Flächen (1965) or Waschlappen (1966) cheap, industrially produced, decorative items are turned into art-worthy motifs; their standardization can also be read as a commentary on the consumer behaviour of the average citizen. Finally Manfred Kuttner’s Gartenlaube (1963) translates the notion of an idyllic front garden into an abstract grid in garish neon green, thus demonstrating how the networks of an expanding capitalism pervade our living environment.
A.I.R. Gallery (Artists in Residence, Inc.)

Instead of addressing the connection of life and the market, as Warhol and the Capitalist Realists did, the feminist A.I.R. Gallery targeted gaps in the commercial cycle. As an answer to the sexism of the art world, it was founded in New York as the first self-administered gallery for women artists in 1972, and still exists today. Its name, “A.I.R.” stands for “Artist in Residence”—a term used in SoHo to earmark industrial buildings at that time in which artists lived and worked.

A.I.R. was not intent on featuring a coherent aesthetic to be easily identifiable within the art market. Quite the contrary: the exhibiting artists worked in a broad spectrum of media and forms of expression and tried to establish alternative networks through experimental formats and discussions. Even when not all members were painters by any means, A.I.R. promoted significant debates on painting, especially from a feminist perspective. Nancy Spero’s frieze-like paper collages for example take a conscious stand against the notion of progress and the “high-art look” in contemporary oil painting. Her response was to focus on expressive figuration, text, and non-hierarchical compositions. Spero’s epic and at the same time intimate works deal with scenes of historical or mythological violence against women—with a biting criticism of the misuse of power, western privileges, and male dominance.

Artists such as Harmony Hammond and Howardena Pindell introduce materials and techniques into painting which recharge the vocabulary of modernist abstraction with references to the real world. In Pindell’s collage of 1970, for example, on top of the rigid structure of millimeter paper, a second, more playful grid of painted strips of paper has been placed; and the collage of 1975 features numbers and mathematical signs on randomly scattered confetti. In Mary Beth Edelson’s Death of Patriarchy/A.I.R. Anatomy Lesson (1976) the autopsy is on patriarchy itself: based on Rembrandt van Rijn’s famous group portrait The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp (1632), the A.I.R. Gallery feminist network hovers over the prominent corpse.

Fantasy of Cologne

To this day the Cologne art scene of the 1980s and early 1990s remains a legendary network of artists who developed their ideas in “nightly coteries” (Jutta Koether). This lively as well as combative exchange was marked by its cutting humor and polemic that was not only directed at competitors but also at itself. To this effect, painting served as an arena into which (semi-) fictitious artistic subjectivities were introduced—in the form of macho-like poses, self-deprecating gestures and encoded references which eluded the conventions of the market while at the same time feeding its hunger for gossip.

In his “Preis” pictures Martin Kippenberger exploits the ambiguity between “Auszeichnung” (prize=award) and “Wert” (price=value), and proudly accepts the 2. Preis (1987) for his “Tablecloth Painting.” Michael Krebber on the other hand “exhausts” Georg Baselitz...
by repeating the latter’s trademark style—turning pictures upside-down—without any further comment. Both gestures torpedo systems of values while at the same time providing anecdotal material. Female artists such as Jutta Koether and Rosemarie Trockel respond to the exaggeratedly “macho” stance of many of their male counterparts in different ways in their work. In Cézanne, Courbet, Manet, van Gogh and I (1990) Koether aligns herself audaciously—yet anonymously—with the heroes of Modernist painting. Trockel on the other hand shows in her picture, designed on the computer and executed on the knitting machine, a schizophrenic monologue by pleading “Please don’t hurt me”—“But quickly.” In Hans-Jörg Mayer’s photograph, Koether, Charline von Heyl, Michaela Eichwald, and Cosima von Bonin pose together with the author Isabelle Graw as a paramilitary formation.

The strategies of self-fictionalization and the creation of legends, which were part of the artistic self-image of the Cologne network, have continued right up to the present. In Michaela Eichwald’s collage Beziehungswahn (2013), painterly effects and text and photo impressions from the artist’s blog merge into one Babylonian all-over. And Merlin Carpenter’s Fantasy of Cologne (2006), which criticizes the retrospective idealization—and commercialization—of the Cologne scene in excrement-colored gestural painting also delivers its most seductive title.

18

Signs, Floods, and Signals

Parallel to the staging of subjectivity by the Cologne scene, another tendency in 1980s’ painting mustered much “cooler” surfaces. Signs and pictograms reminiscent of computer graphics, as well as the communicative effect of color values and shapes, were used to examine strategies of “image design”—in both senses of the word. In the catalog for the exhibition Signs, Floods, Signals which assembled these positions in 1984 at the Galerie nächst St. Stephan in Vienna, it says: “Through the force of spring floods of new pictorial worlds and image generators something has changed.”

Matt Mullican’s sign pictures are variations on a repertoire of motifs—skulls, globes, and ballerinas, circles, triangles, and squares—in different constellations and color combinations. The symbols address a personal world view in an objectified form, from simple activities such as “reading” to metaphysical concepts such as “death.” The world which Mullican’s signs (per)form turns out to be an instable construction: what knowledge or belief means is questioned as is the relationship between reality and imagination.

Peter Kogler’s cardboard sculptures of the early 1980s combine Expressionism with a diagrammatic interest: the charcoal drawing of a male figure develops into a kind of flat body which seems like a graphic abbreviation from the side. A little later the artist created his computer generated “grid faces” in which individuality dissolves into pixelated ornamentation. Gerwald Rockenschaub’s small-format geometric paintings draw their presence from the effect of color values and surface structures which are variously divided and combined. Like logos which communicate nothing other than their logo-function, they shoot forth emblematic shapes to stimulate the media-weary eye in the “war of signs” (Jean Baudrillard). Heimo Zobernig
stacks fifteen differently colored, monochrome canvases in a wooden crate; the respective favorite color can be hung on the wall: painting becomes a portable, mobile entity with the corresponding shade of color for every mood and, furthermore, its own stock of spare parts.

19

**Appropriation and Image Circulation**

In the 1980s artists began to address the framework of the visual arts and artistic expression in particular. With appropriation art and institutional critique attention was increasingly drawn to the context of art production. In painting, the traditional focus on the “individual picture” and the “individual hand” was questioned and involvement in discourse, forms of technical image production, and institutional networks reflected.

In her series *After Henri Michaux* (1985), Sherrie Levine makes exact copies of Henri Michaux’s ideograms *Mouvements* from the early 1950s. Whereas Michaux’ sheets strive to illustrate the pure spontaneity of the creative impulse, Levine’s graphic gesture becomes a readymade—the mere effect of subjective expression. Stephen Prina’s project *Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet* (since 1988) combines a grid-like index of all the picture formats used by the Impressionist Édouard Manet with a monochrome watercolor which, in each case, corresponds to the dimensions of one of Manet’s works. Irrespective of its content, painting here is corporeal in two ways—as an individual artifact with specific characteristics and as part of a corpus or body of work which, like a punch card, can be read according to different criteria.

R. H. Quaytman’s series *Ark, Chapter 10* (2008) was created for an exhibition in the cooperative-run Orchard Gallery, which operated between 2005 and 2008 on the Lower East Side in New York. Photographs associated with the venue and its protagonists are superimposed with Op Art-like silkscreen patterns that interfere with the motifs. Quaytman’s notion of painting is exponential and extends to institutional and social situations; at the same time her pictures seem to convey their future status as “documents”—of something now abstract that continues to “live on” in a mediated form. Michael Krebber’s pictures also deal with the mediatization of a social network—and the precarious relationship between institution and critique: by depicting art blogs associated with the Frankfurt Städelschule where he is professor, Krebber forces semi-anonymous discussions onto the canvas and transforms their critique into a representation “made by Krebber.”

In his *Calendar Paintings* (2004) Seth Price picks up on the aesthetic of wall calendars which bring artworks into the everyday world in the form of reproductions. Designed on the computer, Price’s pictures appropriate American painting from the time of the Great Depression as well as outdated computer graphics from the 1980s and 1990s. Their air of ruin and technological obsoleteness also effects the paintings, which are haunted by expiry dates and notions of disposable décor.
Somatic Pictures

The digital networks of our society provide a starting and reference point for a number of contemporary artists. Both structurally and in the choice of motifs, painting examines the new challenges of our living environment in which the realms of the private and the public, leisure and work, criticism and affirmation form ever increasingly complex hybrids. Painting also reflects how the incessant flow of images—the participatory promises and mechanisms of alienation—permeates our perception and body by attempting to give shape and body to these abstract processes themselves.

In 2009, Jana Euler exhibited six realistically executed paintings under the title Ambition Universe which depicted Daniel Gnam and Harald Wächtler, among others. The figures (and names) are montages: made up of the bodies of the artist’s friends associated with the Frankfurt Städelshule and the heads of influential players in the art world. The “identity” of contemporary painting is the result of an aggressive pose, the “right” network, and—as suggested by the constellations of stars in the background—cosmic circumstances.

In the collaborative project KAYA (Debo Eilers & Kerstin Brätsch) painting is part of an organism, which depending on the context, protagonists, and variables, can gain corporality in a variety of different ways. Tied to the wall or frames, the “body bags” present painterly gestures and material remnants of performances: painting as the “undead” which can climb out of its body bag at any time and reconfigure. Thomas Eggerer’s Heavy Harvest (2014) looks at questions of community and isolation, uniformity and individuality in the modern working environment. Gray in gray, numerous bodies repeatedly execute the same empty gestures; only a few break ranks. Monochrome white rectangles (windscreens of tractors, harvest sacks) are distributed across the painting like screens. In his close examination of abstract qualities such as gesture and rhythm, flatness and the monochrome, Eggerer’s figurative pictures are also meta-reflections on the “field of work” of painting in the digital age.

Using a variety of printing techniques Guyton\Walker (Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker) apply patterns and motifs—which fuse pop, commerce, and advertising in a manically seductive manner—on an eclectic mix of supports. Printed plaster boards, transport containers, paint cans, etc. are arranged into a dense installation, as if painting, unleashed by its digital environment, were set to take over every conceivable surface.
**Exhibition**

**Painting 2.0**

**Expression in the Information Age**

**June 4 to November 6, 2016**

Curators: Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer and David Joselit with Toniö Kröner

Exhibition Management: Claudia Dohr, Sibylle Reichmann
Exhibition Design: Kuehn-Malvezzi
Registrar: Sophie Haaser
Conservation: Tina Hierl, Kathrine Ruppen, Karin Steiner
Exhibition Installation: Olli Aigner, Andreas Gekle, Max Hochstätter, Michael Krupica, Rafael Ludescher, Wolfgang Moser, Gregor Neuwirth, Andreas Petz, Holger Reetz, Andreas Schweger, Stefan Seigner, DB SCHENKHERart, hs art service austria, Kunstttrans, must. museum standards
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