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**Painting in an Expanded Field**

***AM00157-3***

***Catalogue Essay Project***

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## Introduction

My theme is 'Painting in an Expanded Field' and will cover at which point and why traditional painting started to open out to be a new form of fine art. I will explore and compare the practices of today's artists, analysing their: techniques, the different materials they have used throughout their work and discuss how they execute all these within their work. I will investigate the driving force behind the artists and what they are trying to express with their work. The essay will also discuss why painting needs to expand, is it necessary to make painting survive as one of the main factors of Fine Art.

The first sign of painting starting to evolve in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century when more modernised artists became the pioneers of a new movement. Specifically, Cubist Collage, Kurt Schwitters' trash paintings and Dada's philosophy of "anti-art", as well as the De Duchampian Readymade.

The main change happened in the 1960's, when deconstructive art took over as the leading medium of Fine Art. During this period it was quite extreme and the artwork occasionally had very little to do with painting in its entirety.

In this essay I have chosen to discuss contemporary artists, these include; Angela De La Cruz; a nominee of the 2010 Turner Prize, Jim Lambie, Fabian Marcaccio and Ghada Amer. Other practitioners to be discussed are Ian Davenport and Jasper Johns. This group of artist's represent a ranging mix of "off-the-cuff" or "against the grain" styles, art within pop music, making abstraction ultra-extroverted and finally, Western Feminism. I will make clear how each artist deconstructs, dissects, unravels the language of pure modernist painting and puts it back together to make a piece of art.

## **Destruction and Reconstruction**

Jasper Johns early mature work, of the mid- to late 1950s, invented a new style that helped to produce a number of following art movements, among them Pop, Minimal, and Conceptual art. The new style has usually been understood to be calmly antithetical to the expressionistic gestural abstraction of the previous generation. This is partly because, while Johns' painting extended the all-over compositional techniques of Abstract Expressionism, his use of these techniques stresses conscious control rather than spontaneity. The way Johns use a minimal colour palette (Fig.1) and how he put in brushes into his work and also painted on the raw canvas on the backside.

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Fig. 1. Jasper Johns' "Savarin" (1977-81) is among the works in "Jasper Johns: Gray" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Jasper Johns work has a strong influence and background to start look into contemporary artists as Angela de la Cruz and Fabian Marcaccios work.

Angela de la Cruz and Fabian Marcaccio are two very different artists even if both of them work with destruction and reconstruction. Angela de la Cruz destroys her finished work when Fabian Marcaccio takes apart and builds it up again. They use traditional methods of painting and transforming them into something new.

Angela de la Cruz takes the painting to another level, by creating paintings in a distinctive way. With the use of a traditional canvas that Angela firstly paints on, she thereafter takes them through a unique process; destroying them by smashing the stretchers, tearing the canvases by pushing them into corners of walls and finally pulling them out of the frames until there is nothing left. One commentator states: "De La Cruz is more like the painter-as-bad-mother, mistreating her offspring, letting them out of the house half-dressed and bleeding" (*Vitamin P, 2002: 64*). She starts to spread layers of oil paint and resin thickly and excessively on the canvas in a forceful way, which results her canvases to be almost minimalist monochromes polished and plain. Her painting, *Homeless II* (Fig. 2) has been bent down in the middle in two pieces pressed and fit into a corner. The final pieces share a miserable tone of feeling – the inconsistency between the cleanliness of its colour and its unsteadiness but also the title, which gives the helplessness that the work displays. De la Cruz artwork are often taking over exhibitions and becoming "centre of attention", they don't look like they belong with the other artists work, which makes them stand out from the crowd. The bent stretchers and the folded canvases keep the viewers awake, to realise that they are something totally different when associate with the holy tradition of painting. Walter Benjamin(1936:1) said, "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized

when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art.

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Fig.2. Angela de la Cruz, 1996, *Homeless II*, Oil on canvas, 220 x 200 cm

One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.”

De La Cruz’s painting, *Larger than life* (Fig. 3) is a site-specific painting. The painting is folded and squeezed and pushed into the space between the polished floor of the ballroom and the ceiling, creating a feeling that this piece of work is not in its right place. The large painting is stuck between the wall and floor, like a stranded whale on the coastline. When it was exhibited it became an easy target for the viewers to look at and

make fun of. De la Cruz said: "My painting is humorous, but not ironic, I think, humorous and sad and a bit inadequate. This painting really is larger than life' but she is both too big for her own good and somehow ashamed of her size" (RFH Ballroom Commission, 1998: 7).

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Fig.3. Angela de la Cruz, 1998, *Larger than life*. Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 m.  
The ballroom, Royal Festival Hall, London.

In my opinion, her paintings are very strong and give a forceful statement on how painting is expanding today and fights for its survival but still keeping the traditional methods by using canvas as the base.

Fabian Marcaccio takes a different approach by using technology, such as photography in his work. Similar to De La Cruz , Marcaccio also uses forcefulness in the way he approaches his artwork. He transforms his original piece of art work and thereafter deconstructs, divides, unravels,

and bastardizes the languages of pure modernist painting and then reconstructs the parts as a combination of all the methods - all in an effort, in the artist's words, to "make abstraction extroverted" (*Vitamin P*, 2002: 202).

He expands 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism's remoteness from its own elements of production and presentation - stretcher, canvas brushstroke, and wall – but in 1992 the artist had concluded modernism "a geography of clichés and corruption" (*Vitamin P*, 2002: 202). He decided to apply current theories of society and technology to a study of complicated ideas about art: communist icons of hammer, sickle, and star; religious and genetic symbols – into the language of painting.

The canvas is both used as a construction support but also an image for Marcaccio's work. Numerous works by the artist have incorporated enlarged, photographically pictures of canvas weaves, with careful notice to the textured matrix of threads. This is to make the virtual and the real world to combine as one as well as the significance of the object and its digital representation.

Marcaccio drives awareness to the liquidity of brushed painting, by using clear silicone gel to produce ironic, artificial brush-marks and puts another layer of his coatings of strategies without concealing prior painting underneath. He calls such works: "paintants"; a hybrid of painting and mutant. He wants to distance his work from "action painting" to alternatively refer to the act of painting. Gabriela Salgado, a curator said: "Marcaccio sees his painting as a process that fossilises fleeting images, but, despite the proverbial speed of the virtual world, the genre of painting is still moving slowly." (*Art Nexus*, 2006,102-3.)

His artwork, *The Predator* (Fig. 4) was covered with mixed media work, and so large that he let the viewers walk into the tube-like structure. It is made of transparent synthetic panels of various dimensions and surface

design whose interior sides serve as a surface for digital painting on plastic foil. The panels are connected with cable ties, with 35 rings in total that are linked with one another to a C-shaped form. Some of the panels are covered with colourful foil. The predator reaches its maximum height of about 3.5 m and is very thickly painted with colourful silicone, both inside and outside. To keep the panels stable he has used curved aluminium pipes to get the rounded shape of the work.

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Fig. 4. Fabian Marcaccio, 2001, *The Predator*, mix media. Installation at Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio.

## **Painting and Decoration**

Jim Lambie takes inspiration from the environment but opposite to Angela De La Cruz in a more positive way by being influenced from music.

Jim Lambie he is not just a painter, but he still uses paint in his work. He is a visual DJ who uses the resources of club culture and the history of pop music to develop specific post-painterly visual surroundings. He grows up with rebellious culture of rock and punk; through this he

portrays an attraction of the simplicity of the medium. The curator Will Bradley commented: "Much have been made of Lambie's rock and roll past, and many of his works are titled after more or less well-known records of the last thirty years, but that's maybe the least interesting thing about them. Reversing Duchamp's famous ideal Ready-Made, he offers something more like an ironing-board used as a Rembrandt, a smart but casual burst of junk-shop alchemy" (Painting not Painting, 2003: 11). He pushes the painting off the canvas onto the street or the dance floor. He uses low-tech material such as vinyl tape. Lambie he usually gather materials from second-hand shops, markets or even waste disposal site. His installation multicoloured work *ZOBOP* (Fig.5) where he uses this low-tech material, vinyl tape. When he applies the vinyl tape to the floor he follow the architectural contours of the installation area. Then a geometric pattern starts to take a visual form of the room and a series of seismic effects appears that effect the viewer physically. To walk on the artwork as the viewers are expected to do, gives a exiting and distressing experience. Ian MacMillan said: "Zobop operates like a classic guitar riff – at once direct, electric and loud, endlessly repeatable, thrillingly blunt and utterly mesmerizing." (Modern Painters, 2005, 84-7) This artwork is vibrant and excellent with visual perfection of a strong painting. Lambie's work is about expanding the painting field further.

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Fig.5. Jim Lambie, 1999, *ZOPOB*, coloured vinyl. Installation at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, United Kingdom.

In his exhibition *Jim Lambie Male Stripper* at Modern Art Oxford 2003, where the installation *Rock Me Move Me*, 2003 (Fig.6) was a blue glossed mattress, hanging in landscape format on the gallery wall and dripping massively provoking trails of gloss paint to the floor. Michael Bracewell commented, "In terms of its sensibility, the art of Jim Lambie reminds me of the rococo splendour of Blackpool's Tower Ballroom – that great conflation of theatrical pronouncement and swaggering, pop cultural fantasy, where the slow rotation of the glitterball dapples the Tizer-coloured dance floor with silver leaves of reflected light"(Jim Lambie Male Stripper, 2003: 3). This installation, *Rock me move me*, 2003, the blue mattress dripping gloss paint extremely is a perfect example of how the field of painting is expanded in a very strong way.

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Fig.6 Jim Lambie, *Rock Me Move Me*, 2003, gloss paint, 200 x 140 x 20 cm, at Modern Art of Oxford.

When comparing Jim Lambie's Zopob artwork with Ian Davenports, *Puddle Painting: Dioxazine*,(Fig.7.) technically both works have bright colours and both artists create stripes and the difference is that Ian Davenport use paint and Jim Lambie uses vinyl tape to form the architectural shapes, but both uses frequently gloss house-paint. Meanwhile Ian Davenport frequently uses unusual techniques like syringes to pour lines of acrylic paint down aluminium or stainless steel sheets. There is a specific procedure and routine how he is making his poured paintings, a routine that must be repeated for each layer of the painting. Davenport put out, aluminium or MDF-board flat on the floor. House-paint is poured onto it from a constant height, so the paint hits the surface at the right point from where it floats to the sides of the support without leaking over. The painting is then leaned in one direction at the best angle so that the paint runs down the surface to complete the

painting. His painting, *Puddle Painting: Dioxazine*, 2009 and (Fig.8.) *Puddle Painting: Small Wave*, 2010).

“I like making pancakes. When you pour batter it forms a circular shape and then you flip it. These paintings are like pancakes of paint”. From Artist Statement, John Moores 23, exhibition catalogue, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 2004. For Ian Davenport the colour is more important than the painting, that directly expands his painting field more.

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Fig. 7. Ian Davenport, *Puddle Painting: Dioxazine*, 2009, acrylic paint on stainless steel mounted on aluminium panel, 250 x 250 cm. At Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

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Fig. 8. Ian Davenport, *Puddle Painting: Small Wave*, 2010, acrylic paint  
on aluminium, mounted on aluminium panel, 78 x 78 cm.

## Expanded Painting and Politics

Egyptian born artist Ghada Amer brings in an totally different angle with more serious and gender political aspects. She states her pleasure and expands painting through her abstract work, the actual rigorous process of touching and covering and sewing, self-knowledge in self-pleasure, the happiness of finding one's self that exists outside of the world around us. Ghada Amer creates hand-embroidered painting that use repetitive patterns which contain images of women taken from pornographic references. Amer challenges the male dominated language of Modernism by techniques like embroidery over abstract painting, further underscoring this idea by using imagery that attracts the male gaze.

Angela de la Cruz artwork changed after the terrorist bombing in Madrid, 2004, her emotions and political situation steer her work. She saw that all the bodies covered with black and white blankets. The white blanket symbolised unidentified body and she became really obsessed with death, blankets and body bags. Which she has represented in the sculpture-like painting *Clutter VI with White Blanket*, 2004, (Fig.9.) This sculpture-like painting by Angela de la Cruz shows how to expand the painting field.

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Fig.9. Angela de la Cruz, *Clutter VI with White Blanket*, 2004  
acrylic and oil on canvas, 54 x 200 x 247 cm.

Amer's work is about the narrative of Western Feminism, and can be known to encompass gender politics and assess critically of the male gaze. Her centre of attention is on the personal side of love. Amer describes female pleasure, with disconnected images of women, increasing information to its most with – fingers in valleys or embracing mountains of flesh, hands to mouth – from pornographic magazines. Amer then finds these outlines in repeated patterns on monochromatic or striped basis, eventually embroidering the figures in simple stitches. When the figures are finished Amer lets the thread run loose, covering the figures in long, bended stripes of colour floating freely, like pieces of hair. In the painting *La Jaune* (Fig. 10.), Amer takes private pleasure in twisting the sexualized “all over” painting of Jackson Pollock from mid 20<sup>th</sup> century America. The thread is fitted to the canvas with a clear gel medium. The result is a carefully ensemble, layered, non-narrative world of bodily pleasure (*Vitamin P*, 2002: 38).

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Fig. 10. Ghada Amer, 1999, *La Jaune*, acrylic, embroidery, and gel medium on canvas 180 x 200cm.

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Fig. 11. Ghada Amer, 1999, *Red Drips – Couleurs Rouges*, acrylic, embroidery, and gel medium on canvas 173 x 183 cm.

Ghada Amer use embroidery and acrylic colour, her simple stitched figures are covered with long bended stripes of floating colour (Fig.11).

## **Conclusion**

In this account of the exhibition I have shown that expanding the field of painting takes many different appearances, is not only done in one way. Jasper Johns used a minimal colour palette and how he put in brushes into his work and also painted on the raw canvas on the backside. Angela de la Cruz takes the painting to another level by the use of a traditional canvas, that she takes through a unique process; destroying them by smashing the stretchers, tearing the canvases by pushing them into corners of walls and finally pulling them out of the frames until there is nothing left. Fabian Marcaccio incorporated enlarged, photographically pictures of canvas weaves, with careful notice to the textured matrix of threads. This is to combine the virtual and the real world as one as well as the significance of the object and its digital representation. Meanwhile Jim Lambie pushes the painting off the canvas onto the street or the dance floor. He uses low-tech material such as vinyl tape. When he

applies the vinyl tape to the floor he follow the architectural contours of the installation area. Ghada Amer creates hand-embroidered painting that use repetitive patterns which contain images of women taken from pornographic references. Amer challenges the male dominated language of Modernism by techniques like embroidery over abstract painting, further underscoring this idea by using imagery that attracts the male gaze.

Finally, painting in an Expanded Field has no boundaries the only prerequisite is that the artist uses paint as one component in their artwork. They exploit traditional methods of painting and transforming them into something different and exiting. It will be interesting to see what the artists will do as the next step in this field.

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