

Open Cube

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Fay Nicolson

Sunday 17 March 2013; 17h30

Adriano Pedrosa: Before we start looking at the work I wanted to ask why you are interested in participating in 'Open Cube', and why you applied?

Fay Nicolson: Well there are a few reasons, well lots of reasons. I tend to be quite bad at applying for open submission things. That might be because I'm a little bit cynical. The thing that interested me about this was that it was obviously a private gallery that is extremely well known, that's almost like – maybe not the right analogy – but I was going to say, like the Walmart of galleries.

The Walmart!

But they have galleries everywhere and even the name 'White Cube' – it represents, it's synonymous with the modernist ideal of what a gallery is. And then I was interested in the fact that you were talking about how you were not necessarily going to disrupt that but intended to enter into that system. I've only ever seen solo shows at White Cube and I just thought that was quite an interesting thing. I was also curious about the fact that you said, or the copy on the website said, that 'this would perhaps give the opportunity for artists who might be outside of that system to enter into that system or to enter into a place that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to enter'. So I thought that was an interesting proposition. You're kind of making, or short-cutting perhaps, the unwritten rules of the way that artists might enter into that system whilst making them visible. On the other hand, it's a fantastic opportunity and I'm being completely honest here; if your work is in a gallery like this people will see it. It's an opportunity to show works in perhaps the ideal context. Also, being practical, as an emerging artist it's rare to find an opportunity to show works in a space that's going to do



Opposite:
Fay Nicolson
We Exist! We Have the Will!
We are Producing! (blue)
2013
Digital print on silk
71 ⁷/₈ x 50 in.
(182 x 127 cm)

Right:
We Exist! We Have the Will!
We are Producing! (orange)
2013
Digital print on silk
71 ⁷/₈ x 50 in.
(182 x 127 cm)



the work justice.

They invited me to curate an exhibition and I proposed this experiment, so somehow I am trying to open up a little bit what White Cube is and what 'Open Cube' could be. That's why I'm also playing with the notion of the transparent cube which is why we are recording the conversations, and they will be published in the catalogue. That's the idea at this stage, but I will see how all this material can be put together and articulated. I know you brought some objects, some of the digital prints on silk?

I have these with me because I am in the process of making some more, but I thought it could be interesting to bring some tests.

Oh some tests, wonderful.

So this is the colour test for two of those prints.

Is this the exact same silk that you are using in the others?

Yes.

So it's always slightly shiny?

Yes, and I think I got the size wrong; they are actually bigger. They're 130 cm wide by 184 cm. Like in here all that's happened is that I've taken a snapshot of that and just dumped it on the paper, but this grid runs all the way through the whole thing. And these were some tests for some new works I'm making and here the scale is accurate.

And also the delineation of the colour is slightly irregular, or is it more precise?
It depends. I have these with me because, yet again, I was working on these and I have them at home.

They're not absolutely hard-edged?

No they're not.

So the final pieces, they also have this sort of fluid, almost watercolour like quality?

Yes. So when you're standing here there's a sharp geometrical...

But as you approach... it's really important to see them. I'm glad you arranged this. Thank you so much, because it really makes a difference when you see them in person.

And these are the new ones, but this is an example of how they start.

Oh right, that's how you do it, I see. So that's where the grid is coming from, from these drawings.

Yes, and that's why they're that size, those dimensions, they relate back to the page and maybe even as a short-circuiting between something like an instruction drawing on the one hand and on the



Fay Nicolson
*We Exist! We Have the Will!
We are Producing! (green)*
2013
Digital print on silk
71 3/8 x 50 in.
(182 x 127 cm)

other something about domestic space and modernist textile design, and Anni Albers and Gunta Stölzl. Stölzl was a Bauhaus master, kind of forced into the weaving workshop. I first started thinking about this way of working when I went to the Bauhaus archive in 2008 and saw this fantastic, very small, scrap of design for textiles, and there was something about the way they were designed with watercolours on paper that interested me. It was like this graph paper. I like the fact that it related to jacquard systems or knitting or ideas of formatting work. It's really about work and labour and this repetitive process. And then in the design there's something else that emerges that's much closer to abstract painting. I really love her work. I'm interested as well in the kind of discrepancies about how you might now relate to work like that and the way that it's been represented, and the personal narratives that come out of that. So, for example, Oskar Schlemmer's diary is quite interesting to me because it contains information that you wouldn't necessarily see in any official manifesto, document or record about the Bauhaus itself, where he might be slagging off the diet in relation to questioning his own creative powers whilst thinking about the political context. I find that kind of personal catalogue of information fascinating. Yet again I haven't read it cover-to-cover. I tend to amass material.

But are you interested in the fact that these are women of a certain period, working with textiles? Because you mentioned she was somehow forced into textiles, there is a political, feminist reading there. Is that something that interests you?

Yes, it does interest me. I wouldn't say my works are making a statement.

A statement about feminism? I agree, but they are informing the...
They revisit that moment.

Yes, especially if you are looking at art history and focusing on these artists. Definitely. Looking back I think I was surprised by the way that things like gender relations actually impacted on something that was supposedly a kind of utopian model of education. But yes, I think that's fascinating.

And the choice of the material, silk. Why is that?

Well, I started off with the designs. In the painting process it's almost like a performance or a kind of thinking about the way that patterns

emerge and re-emerge, almost like re-visiting a kind of moment of being a textile designer, but then I've wanted to re-route or short-cut the way that they might be produced or the function of the actual design itself. So when the grid is no longer a tool for someone who is weaving, to actually decode and make the works, it becomes the surface of the aesthetic itself.

Of course.

The way I feel about them is they short-cut or re-route this in the way that they skip that physical production process and go straight from the design to something that is quite alluring or feminine.

That's what I was going to ask.

And I think in relation to some of my other works as well, they're colourful, and there are these edges that blur and you get the kind of serendipitous merging and the accident as well, when you get up quite close. But then maybe when you step back and you start to look at the way the colours... If you think of the rationale or the logic in the way that they've been constructed it's a different way of thinking, and it's almost like going back to a more mechanical way of reproducing, or maybe a cottage-industry way of working.

Yes, because it is a material for dress-making, it's coming from fine dress-making, mostly women's I would say, more than men's. I guess men can wear silk shirts but it's mostly associated with women's wear, and of course silk itself is made in a certain way that's somehow referring to this artisanal way of making.

Yes.

And over that you have the digital printing, which is somehow opposing all that.
Yes, or perverting it in some way. I think that recently I've gone back to reading some of the writing of Albers and it kind of struck a chord with some of the things I've been thinking about structuring an image, and weaving as a kind of tension between a structure and a surface. And maybe other ways of mark-making, if you're thinking about how the textiles are made, where materials are gathered and kind of coalesce in a certain way.

Many filters?

Yes, and then suddenly you have the digital which kind of flattens everything down again, and you want to touch them, but can you? These are some of the things I was thinking about.

And they are not framed, you just attach them to the wall with nails?

Magnets!

Oh okay, the tiny ones.

And also when they're hanging there's something about the way they hang, they become very physical and there are slight curves and maybe illusions in the way that they hang. So for example, this bit here is actually the scan of the paper and the wrinkles in the paper, but these are the ways they hang.

And the title, We Exist! We Have the Will! We are Producing!, is that a fragment, appropriated somehow?

Exactly, it's from Schlemmer's diary and I took it as the title of the whole show, but then I decided that the fabric prints should be titled that way too. To be honest, it has become slightly problematic because there are three works and they all have the same title. But with that statement I really love the way it was a kind of exclamation that, 'I Will Create!', is something that might be slightly absent from teaching at college. For example my BA from St Martins – as an institution it was very much about valuing the ability to analyse the surrounding artistic context and the value of criticism. It was very much that kind of art school, well it was when I was there, whereas the RCA values material experimentation, in a way that the workshops are set up, in the way time is organised. So I think when reading Schlemmer's diaries there is something about this phrase that seemed out of time but I thought it was quite bold.

I've also been thinking about these issues. That image of Gunta Stölzl I showed you is part of a project called Weaves.

Oh really.

It tried to look at weaves as an emblem instead of grids.

Yes, fascinating.

Because the grid of course is a grid of the Modern, whereas the weave is ancient and organic and handmade, and made in an artisanal way?

Yes, and maybe also relating more to a narrative or accommodating narrative, whereas a grid is almost like... If you think back to the way it was used in an educational sense it forms a kind of table, a point.

A matrix.

Yes, that you can place disparate samples on.

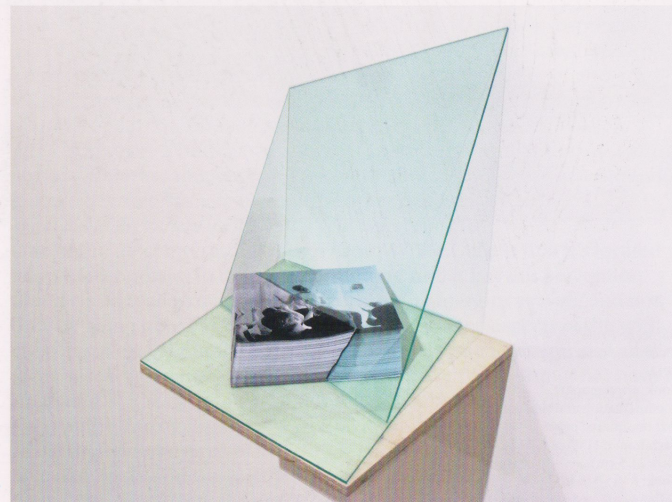
Organising things and bringing them together.

Whereas with the weave, everything is connected and has implications

on the rest of the image, and if you were to pull out one thread it kinda...

Unravels in a different way.

Fay Nicolson was born in 1984 in Derby, UK and lives and works in London. She holds a BA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, London (2006) and an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London (2011). Recent solo exhibitions include, 'Work with Material', Künstlerhaus Wien, Vienna (2013) and 'Bad Signs', PLAZAPLAZA, London (2012). Group exhibitions include 'A Small Hiccup', Grand Union, Birmingham (2013); 'Take Me Out', Limoncello, Art Projects, London Art Fair, London (2013) and 'Manifesta 8', Murcia, Spain (2010).



Fay Nicolson
A is for Albers
2011/2012
Sculpture with photocopies,
wooden shelf and Perspex
Approx.: 11 ¹³/₁₆ x 15 ³/₄ x 19 ¹¹/₁₆ in.
(30 x 40 x 50 cm)

Open Cube

'Open Cube' is a group exhibition of work by 17 artists by São Paulo based curator Adriano Pedrosa for White Cube.

In January 2013 White Cube placed an announcement in Art Agenda for artists to submit an application, inviting them to complete an online form and send supporting documentation of their work. More than 2,900 submissions were received by the application deadline of 28 February 2013.

From those applications Pedrosa selected 38 artists, all of whom were invited for an interview in London in March 2013. The applicants were asked to bring examples of their work where possible, and this was discussed with the curator during a 30 minute interview. All the interviews were recorded and the audio transcribed and edited for inclusion in this publication. Based on this process Pedrosa then selected 17 artists to include in 'Open Cube', at White Cube Mason's Yard, between 12 July and 21 September 2013.



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