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The coterminous impulses of art criticism—to differentiate a work from and assimilate it to what is already visible—is rarely in greater tension than when new art from one nation is exhibited in another. This taxonomic balancing act requires discretion and delicacy when a writer is asked to consider new work just within the context of an individual artist's career. Does noting abundant change or variety connote a lack of sustained focus? Does one stress continuity at the expense of innovation? The twin challenge in the case of an international exchange is to note otherness without fostering an ultimately alienating exoticism, and to underscore commonalities without eliding diversity.

In the late 1980s, a young art critic-curator from Riga wrote an unpublished essay that compared Latvian contemporary painting to a “fortress.” To her mind, painting had safeguarded her nation’s cultural identity from the unremitting assault of barbarian forces throughout the preceding half-century. In other words, painting served as a bastion against Sovietization during the decades Latvia had been annexed to the USSR. It was a fortuitous metaphor, but not as the author intended. As soon as the figurative moat around the Eastern Bloc started draining (and the literal threat of paramilitary siege subsided in Riga), the ramparts of painting not only were decommissioned but declined into near-ruin. Rather like the Berlin Wall or the graffiti-strewn barricades thrown up to protect a reborn Latvian parliament from Soviet tanks in 1991, scenic fragments remained in place but they appeared increasingly quaint and anachronistic, though still good for a dramatic, nostalgia-tinged story. Dispersing piecemeal through the rest of the world like chunks of the Wall, Latvian painting was fast becoming a capitalist commodity, a souvenir and an historical curiosity. The dismantling of this former edifice known as painting was largely facilitated by a seismic shift in local curatorial taste and fashion, jolting toward photography, installations, video, sound work and, to a lesser degree, performance. If and when painting still featured in major foreign exhibitions of the latest Latvian art during the 1990s and 2000s, its form tended to accede to conditions of installation; its practice, to performance.

Reasons for this transformation might be found within the architectural conceit of the fortress, although the isolated vantage of that original essay prevented the full revelation of structural conditions in that time and place. To perform well, a fortress has minimal fenestration, so peering at the outside world (especially in search of rescue from afar) must be done furtively from the parapet, which both risks exposure to the enemy and enforces a perspective at once elevated and removed. When available, more intimate information about external developments tends to arrive by messenger, the received opinions of whom can neither be isolated from objective data nor checked against firsthand experience. Under these conditions, a siege mentality can set in. To designate painting as a fortress—rather than contemporary visual art in general—perpetuated the privileged status of the medium, one that had been in place when Latvia left the democratic West in 1940 and one further ensconced by socialist cultural policies for the next fifty years. In this regard, the barbarians had succeeded far more than the well-defended artists could have imagined, for the fortifications of painting effectively rendered them captive to an art praxis that had long been challenged and retired in the West. Indeed, the more monolithic one’s defenses, the more imposing they tend to appear, and per conventional warfare, this might establish a daunting (if illusory) presence. But in a world where outright physical assault is becoming the least of our security worries, the immobility inherent in a fixed, impenetrable position is no advantage.

We now understand, however, that there is no such thing as a fixed position in matters of culture, even in tradition-based folk culture, and some of the greatest problems of comprehension and assessment arise when practices are attacked or defended with respect to some timeless, therefore mythical, standard. Progressive-minded Latvian artists—painters, in particular—found themselves in a critical predicament when they and their

administrators sought to escape the circular moat and reenter the stream of Western artistic evolution in the 1990s. This migratory project was more or less mandated by the establishment of Soros Centers of Contemporary Art (SCCA) in twenty-one formerly socialist capitals in Central and Eastern Europe, Rīga among them. The SCCA network was a vital replacement of institutional support that collapsed with the old political system, but it set in motion a development model with some profound internal inconsistencies. A new political and academic paradigm known as “transitology” took immediate hold in the small, exclusive curatorial and administrative circles and they inculcated the position that contemporary art would speed and buttress the transition of formerly closed socialist societies into new societies modeled on Western ideals of openness, democracy and free-market economics. Many artists who had distinguished themselves as stylistic nonconformists and/or cultural dissenters under the authoritarian system were charged with hastening this new order. In the words of Octavian Eșanu, this was a “managed avant-garde,” a formation of contemporary artists who had inherited the mantle of the early 20th-century avant-garde but was steered by “a hidden managerial agenda that monitored and implemented reforms in the field of culture” mirroring those enacted in the larger political and social spheres.¹

The notion of advanced artists consenting to be agents of anything other than the articulation and expansion of artistic boundaries is itself a dubious proposition, partly because they had learned the lesson of how political co-optation spelled the death of Eastern Europe’s first avant-garde—and literal death for Latvian avant-gardists Gustavs Klucis and Aleksandrs Drēviņš, lost to Stalin’s Purges. The lesson didn’t end there. Immediately thereafter, the perverse logic of Socialist Realism posited an inherently conservative artistic style as the visual rhetoric of ostensibly progressive social policies, an inversion somewhat less convulsive when enforced in Latvia beginning in 1940 because the previous decade had seen significant retrenchment in local aesthetic practices (and, indeed, in democratic institutions). Yet even in the West and many years later, in an audacious, further perversion of the concordance of artistic style and political substance, certain governments—most blatantly the Franco dictatorship in Spain—trumpeted their tolerance of high modernism, particularly abstract painting, as “evidence” of a liberalized ideological landscape. So, well before the establishment of the SCCA, the deployment of contemporary art as a credential, symptom or instrument of Western values had already been debased.

But that was a problem for policy-makers. For Latvia’s painters, the problems were quite different. Just when Soviet-era artistic orthodoxies (*de jure* and *de facto*) were being consigned to art historical mummification, new orthodoxies captivated curatorial and administrative circles, and, as mentioned, exhibitions and funding tended to favor artists who were working in the newer, trendier formats of photography, installation, video, etc. Naturally, some pragmatic artists who had trained as painters followed fashion, but many Latvian painters whose youth might suggest receptivity to and flexibility regarding newer mediums did not, in fact, abandon their easels. Indeed, to step inside Rīga’s private galleries proliferating during the 1990s and early 2000s, one could reasonably conclude that painting had suffered no interruption whatsoever. It was everywhere. After all, as American conceptualist Mel Bochner famously quipped, “There’s always a nail in a wall somewhere that can take a painting.”² But for those painters who were uninterested in merely providing the interior décor to which Bochner was referring, this lack of interruption in Latvian painting was *precisely* the problem. While their less critical, more complacent colleagues were content to daub, scumble and trowel pigment in an atavistic resumption of Latvia’s golden age of painting—or even airbrush and splatter in approximation of foreign trends—certain painters, it seems to me, sensed that they were confronting a crisis, the result of another crisis to which Bochner and his peers were responding in the 1970s.

The advent of minimalism in America and Western Europe in the 1960s had challenged painting’s centuries-long priority among the visual arts, and did so most effectively through an end run past the teleological program prescribed for painting itself by modernism’s leading formalist critic, Clement Greenberg. Whereas Greenberg had championed Abstract Expressionists for emphasizing the flatness of the picture plane, foregrounding the properties of pigment and eschewing pictorial illusionism, and, later, Post-Painterly Abstractionists for interrogating the shape of the support and further reducing subjective content, minimalism vacated the painters’ autocritique by expunging the very appearance of aesthetic decision-making. Instead of arriving at some intrinsic finality about the essence of painting (or, in the case of sculptors similarly exploring their version of medium-specificity, the essence

of sculpture), the minimalists produced objects that blurred the boundaries between painting and sculpture. This rupture fundamentally changed the relationship between art and its context, an artwork and its spectators, and art and the means of making it. Then, stepping over the minimalists' wreckage, the next artistic generation, that of the conceptualists, began making art that forsook visibility and materiality altogether. For them, language was the subject of choice; text, the support. By 1981, in America's most trenchant art journal, Douglas Crimp pronounced the end of painting, detailing the exhaustion of its possibilities and even quoting Gerhard Richter's assessment of painting as "pure idiocy."³ This sort of provocative statement is not uncommon in art criticism, but Crimp was utterly mindful of serious artists seeking to renegotiate the relevancy of painting as a mode of cultural production. A full thirty years hence, those negotiations continue in earnest.

During the past thirty years in Latvia, a small number of artists have on occasion grappled with analogous issues, and an even smaller number utilize such issues as a fulcrum for their professional activity. This engagement is fascinating, given the lack of rupture in the local painting tradition. Whether or not their projects are ultimately adequate to the task is arguable, depending on one's perspective on pertinent psychoanalytic theories of culture⁴: Without directly experiencing the initial trauma—the death of painting—does processing its repression and the psychic disturbances that erupt years later amount to anything more than False Memory Syndrome? Does that make the process any less interesting? Or does that double its interest? Perhaps most chastening for a Western critical observer is the distinct possibility that the aesthetic traumas of minimalism are wholly incommensurate with the aesthetic traumas of Stalinism.

That said, there's little doubt painters in Latvia have benefited from witnessing recent renegotiations of painting's ongoing claims on our attention, and, accordingly, they have extended this project in a variety of ways. Unaware that their medium would soon be marginalized by changes in taste and policy, painters were at the forefront of mapping the new social topography with the demise of the USSR. The 1990 event "Gentle Fluctuations" converted Rīga's primary exhibition space into a laboratory in which six painters lived and worked among gallery visitors for a month, even publishing a weekly large-format newspaper that commented upon matters both artistic and political—at a time, no less, when Soviet central authorities orchestrated an artificial newsprint shortage in the rebellious Baltic republics. Months later, one of these artists, Aija Zariņa, opened a solo exhibition at midnight in the midst of paramilitary siege, and the entire gallery space was transformed by black paint incised with her *brut* figuration, even the floor underfoot. Again, printed evidence of the event was crucial, and the conceptualist standard of an artist's book, its dimensions that of a conventional easel painting (and its heavily inked cover almost as textured), pushed Zariņa's painting beyond the six interior surfaces of the cube, out the door and into the dangerous streets.

Painting's crossover into other registers was variously explored by a number of artists. Another alumnus of "Gentle Fluctuations," Jānis Mitrēvics also made painting the occasion of a 1991 artist's book, *Poussin and the Dried Flowers Save the World*,⁵ and then tackled the titan of Latvian landscape painting, Vilhelms Purvītis, in a museum show that dissected the subject matter of a much-beloved canvas into its constituent elements. The birch trees painted by Purvītis at the start of the 20th century were brought back into 3D with actual tree trunks, and so forth. Installation, declared the enemy of painting by the likes of Rosalind Krauss,⁶ was employed here as an agent of rapprochement. Elsewhere, with his work *Stop No. 1* (1994), Oļegs Tillbergs subverted and yet implicitly acknowledged painting's Greenbergian ideals in almost every way imaginable: the flat picture plane is a concave wall; the oil pigment (literally petroleum sludge) simultaneously asserts the surface and remains subdermal, modeled beneath plastic film; industrial detritus serves as an index of human gesture and subjectivity; its technological subject matter, a jet engine, literally falls out of the composition onto the floor but is marginally retained—kept in the picture, so to speak—by the plastic skin. Unpreservable in this form(lessness), *Stop No. 1* could be seen as the crash of Latvian painting at the end of the runway.

The fragility of the medium and faith in its resurrection was expressed by Frančeska Kirke in museum and gallery exhibitions of 2002 in Rīga and New York devoted to the theme of restoration (restoration in the sense of conservation, although one also hears royalist echoes). Paintings were displayed in deliberate parity with their

materials: in terms of the picturesque, shelves of pigments, solvents, gold leaf and other pictorial ingredients rivaled Kirke's painted canvases, which were *folies* of painting, caught mid-restoration, their lost imagery re-emerging from blackened fields. For a watercolor survey exhibition, Ojārs Pētersons framed a small, clear rectangular membrane filled with water tinted a particular orange, the signature hue of his many installations and sculptural objects. One might be tempted to think the diminutive scale of this sculptural object gave it the weight of a one-line joke, but its morphological and epistemological implications were far more complex. Ivars and Inese Mailīši brilliantly glossed both the material value and the material process of painting, specifically that of encaustic, with compositions crafted of beeswax made by bees residing in a spectacular installation made by the Mailīši in a Rīga bank lobby, the hive and its accumulated wealth safely encased in a glass vault, with a conduit to the outdoors for the bees' creation of further wealth. This vertical economic model was fully operational well before any other in newly capitalist Latvia; accordingly, it traced the agrarian, pre-capitalist origins of thrift and industry. With these kinds of regular, robust interrogations, it appeared that painting was not dead in Latvia but rather, and in the right hands, deadly serious.

One thing seems important as we begin looking at work in the exhibition before us: Even if a contemporary painting from Latvia looks indistinguishable from one made that same week in the United States, they have different ontological bases. Their resemblance might be explainable as an instance of convergent evolution, in which case they are of two species. But more likely, the resemblance is explainable as a manifestation of globalized artistic processes. If we, like many policy-makers in Eastern Europe, indulge in the triumphalist narrative of Western contemporary art's universal relevancy and, more magnanimously, its receptivity to and assimilation of non-Western influences, it would indicate that today we're all one big happy creative family, nominally diverse but overwhelmingly in synch. The paradox of this deserves further exploration, especially as we try to understand why this current exhibition of Latvian art may, in ways, look strangely familiar to American audiences although the work issues from a different place, be it geographically, historically, socially or psychically.

The paintings of **Miervaldis Polis** are something of an anomaly in this exhibition, which seems appropriate given that the exhibitions of Miervaldis Polis have often been an anomaly in Latvian painting. For instance, Polis and his then-wife Līga Purmale had the distinction of organizing Rīga's first exhibition of photo- and hyperrealism in 1974 while they were still studying in the art academy's monumental painting program. The styles were new to Latvia, practiced seriously then by only two other young painters, but the notion of students taking such initiative without academic or bureaucratic approval was unprecedented. More importantly, their realization of these new manners of representation was impeccable. Two works in the present show date from this time, and while neither is paradigmatic of photorealism, the untitled work showing the front elevation of a housing block in foggy weather most closely evokes the style's impassiveness. The seemingly casual cropping of the image, endemic to snapshots, serves to relegate the lone human figure to the composition's periphery, all the better to startle the viewer. But this casualness is deceptive. The main portion of the façade forms a perfect square, betraying Polis's trademark compositional fastidiousness, as does the work's occult symmetry. His second work from the 1970s, *Forest*, is closer to hyperrealism with its subtle emotiveness, but again the quiet rigor of the axial symmetry indicates that Polis is unwilling to surrender cultured reflection to natural forces. Indeed, in this synecdochic work, we can't see the forest for the singular tree, but somehow we don't feel we're lacking the full visual experience of woodland.

The 1980 work *Woman of Kurzeme and Hawk* evinces the same acculturated relationship with the natural world. Botany, astronomy, zoology: All come to us mediated by the pictorial conventions of previous epochs in painting, as does the portrait of Līga Purmale in folk costume, seen here in severe—which is to imply artificial—profile. Leonardo, Rousseau, even Audubon are present, and like Purmale's image, their quotations are rendered with strict orthogonal dispassion. These acknowledgements of other master painters eventually became full appropriations of masterpieces, as seen in *Self-Portrait in David's Painting*. The insertion of Polis into existing works of art was gradual, initially being an image of his knuckle, almost in the way any painter's finger holding a brush violates the artist's field of vision coincident with the rectangular space actively being painted. His fuller likeness appeared in paintings at roughly the moment Polis assumed a performance persona known as the Bronze Man, appearing first on the streets

of Rīga, then abroad, dressed à la Joseph Beuys but with his clothing and exposed skin coated in bronze metallic paint. Complementary to the Bronze Man becoming a living monument in the public space, the painted likeness of Polis enlivens the spaces of monumental artworks in the Western canon.

Here the theatricality of Marat's murder made famous by David is redoubled by Polis's elocutionary pose. In fact, "redoubling" is the operative term with Miervaldis Polis: This exact pose held in these same clothes and this exact expression under this same (bronzed) hat appear in another appropriative work from this time titled *Polis and Caravaggio*, showing the artist in front of the Baroque master's *Deposition from the Cross*. I have little doubt that this particular replication of Polis is replicated still elsewhere. Copying himself while copying others, Polis challenges his viewer to apply a forensic level of observation, fair enough when the creative process apes forgery and, here, self-forgery. Any minute deviation or discrepant detail can generate a narrative tangent: Polis's spotted necktie is askew as he reacts to the murder scene in *David*, but he's had the chance to neaten up his tie before striking the identical pose in the anticlimactic *Deposition*. In any event—and these are events—instead of diminishing the value of an original work by copying it, he accrues value with each iteration.

Although his flirtation with anachronism is painting-based, Polis insistently alludes to subsequent media. His repeated choice of a three-quarter view of himself recalls the standard camera shot used to show an individual movie character in the context of dramatic circumstances, and indeed there is a cinematic quality to these cameo appearances in appropriative paintings as Polis projects antique visual information with the story-telling clarity of modern optics. Yet for all his efforts at verisimilitude, Polis is not simply replicating the "truth" of the photographic image or its offset lithographic reproduction. Indeed, certain works confirm the capacity of photography to lie. Once challenged by a friend that his commissioned state portrait of Guntis Ulmanis showed Latvia's first post-Soviet-era President as implausibly svelte, Polis stood up, sucked in his gut, and showed that in moments of vanity, all but the most corpulent among us are capable of inhaling ourselves into an improved silhouette, just as everyone is capable of performance art.

Our present exhibition moves into work from the present with **Ieva Iltnerē**. Like Polis, Iltnerē represents a generation trained under the Soviet academic system, but with a decade's difference between them, hers was at greater liberty to challenge its precepts and processes. However, because her father Edgars Iltners was rector of the academy, head of the Artists Union and a pioneer of the so-called Severe Style that nudged Latvian painting in the 1960s toward mild figural deformation and occasional flourishes of pure painting, Iltnerē had to contend with a privileged background that has often been the undoing of lesser talents. A participant in the "Gentle Fluctuations" exhibition/event, she quickly established a wholly independent reputation, although Iltnerē also possessed the self-assurance and familial pride to rework her father's masterwork of 1959, *Amber Seekers*, using molded aluminum mesh to reprise the original composition. The sparkling wit of using screen material similar to the seine nets that are pulled through the shallows of the Baltic Sea to collect the semi-precious fossil is characteristic of Iltnerē.

Here, however, we are looking at five conventionally produced paintings, though we're also immediately struck by their screened effect. They range from utopian to dystopian in subject matter, sometimes with undertones of both pervading the same work. The artificial environments are neither inviting nor entirely alienating, and it makes no difference whether the spaces are inhabited or vacant, nor set inside or out. A strange stasis prevails, and not just paradoxically in the case of *Windy Day*, with its halcyon waters and precision-machined beach. The qualities of tenderness and danger in the painting of the same name seem equally absent, and this reticence extends to Iltnerē's manner of painting. The luxuriant textures implied by hair, gown, porcelain skin, a Marc Newson-like chair, and an animated background surface are delivered flatly, devoid of any tactile interest, although this absence is itself interesting. High-design chattel and high-tech devices accumulate in these vast stylish interiors, but these are hardly paintings of a voluptuary existence. (Ironically, they will most likely find their way to an art collector's sybaritic flat where a nail in the wall can still take a painting.)

Iltnerē has long explored a fascination with commodity fetishism, and, therefore, how it is that painting itself figures into modern consumer behavior can not be divorced from these visions of contemporary *haut-bourgeois*

domesticity. It seems of crucial importance that Iltner's well-appointed spaces do not contain paintings—not that their inhabitants lack visual entertainments, because framed screens abound, whether those of television in *Plasma* or of radar in *Fragility of the Fireball*. However, oblique references are made to the realm of professional painting, be it the mania of the auction house or stylistic allusions to other painters. In *Fragility of the Fireball*, for example, the human figures and the floor lamps bear a strong resemblance to the work of Mark Kostabi, fixture of the 1980s New York art world, whose famously cynical manner of working and pursuit of commercial ubiquity seem utterly appropriate, even contributory, to the desolate mood of this image.

Notably, the women in this painting stand transfixed by the natural phenomenon of lightning while modern technology beams and scans behind them. In *Plasma*, the anemic figure on the couch seems drained of his own plasma as the television radiates, or irradiates, the premises. Indeed, the light cast by the screen is crisper and more linear than the edge where wall meets floor (or dissolves into it). In *Tenderness and Danger*, the mother with the glowing orb and, consequently, the glowing child appears to embrace her own dematerialization. *Ideal Projection* contains the ambiguity of whether the projection is issuing from the aperture in the ceiling, presumably a skylight, or is yet to come from the video projector suspended from the ceiling at the rear of the room. The unnatural configuration of the shaft of light from the skylight doesn't resolve the puzzle. Iltner withholds tidy conclusions, not surprising given how these works foreground the uneasy truce between painting and its technological enemies, those soulless competitors for attention that, in time, foster the widespread attention-deficit that renders painting boring to our CGI-addled youth.

Leonards Laganovskis is the third participant in this exhibition with the professional stature of an elder, though his work has a sensibility distinctly unlike that of Polis and Iltner. Considered Latvia's lone practitioner of the style known as *Sots Art*—often described as a parodic hybrid of Pop Art and Socialist Realism—Laganovskis has stronger stylistic affinities to artistic circles active in Russia, but his work is no less resonant in the Latvian context for that reason. Whereas most *sots* artists repeated and revised the commonplaces of visual or text-based propaganda and refracted communistic content through capitalistic advertising modes while respecting their typologies, Laganovskis gravitated toward topological deformations of the familiar, and this is his exceptional contribution to the genre. For instance, taking the personal computer as a point of departure in a series from the mid-1990s, Laganovskis retrofits the device with the hallmarks of Stalinist product design: classicist lines, alabaster surfaces, staid ornamental typographic effects, etc. We quickly appreciate the comic nature of this aesthetic and material miscegenation, but soon it dawns on us that this is, in fact, steeped in gallows humor. If private possession of a typewriter was once a jailable offense in that paranoid society, the consequences of owning this networking tool would have been catastrophic (whether for the owner, or as the Arab Spring has taught us, for the tyrants). Either way, the situation was as impossible as the very existence of this appliance from the future. In another work of topological dexterity, Laganovskis fabricated an ideological reliquary by embedding within pieces of amber the minutiae of Soviet hegemony: a Lenin lapel pin, a bullet, an enameled Marxist-Leninist flag. Again, the cleverness was immediately apparent. But as we handle these dubious treasures, recent news stories begin to filter into our consciousness of amber gatherers mistakenly collecting washed-up bits of phosphorus from old Soviet ordnance recklessly dumped off-shore, thus sustaining serious chemical burns. This equivalency of propagandistic kitsch and hazmat is made at the very instant we are most vulnerable to both: physically, to the golden amber nestled in our palms; mentally, to the vague nostalgia imbuing our regard of it.

In this exhibition, Laganovskis is represented by six recent watercolor renderings of fantastical tribunes, a motif that he has explored from almost the very beginning of his career in the fine arts. The hundreds of variants are best considered *in toto* to appreciate the monumental scope of this project, a scope belied by the intimate scale of the individual renderings. Nonetheless, everything one might need to understand the concept of the tribune series is present in this gallery selection. The regular format of the paintings and their use of isometric projection summon the spirit of industrial production for which these might serve as blueprints, while the visual delicacy of their drafting and coloring serves to remind us of the imagined subjectivities of the speakers who would mount the

rostrum to project their messages. Alas, for structures designed to broadcast viewpoints, the bearers of these views are conspicuously absent. This corporeal evacuation seems significant, partly because the tribunes themselves are often expository in form and always individualized, supplying information about missing identity, be it of gender, vocation, avocation, faith, political persuasion and so forth.

Still, it's unclear whether form follows the function, so to speak, reflecting his or her personal attributes and beliefs, or the tribune precedes and thus elicits a prepared statement from whomever chances upon it. Were it not for the persistent whimsy of the tribunes' detailing, one might be tempted to relate Laganovskis's series to another Latvian graphic cycle describing mechanical devices for the dissemination of ideas: constructivist Gustavs Klucis's *Radio-Orators* of 1922, designs for multi-media agit-prop kiosks (similarly devoid of human presence). Granted, it was whimsical of Klucis to believe that his visionary project would find lasting favor with a conservative regime preoccupied with indoctrinating a backward audience, and it's unlikely that Laganovskis's acute hindsight would miss this connection. The implied presence of the body is key for Laganovskis, whether within our imaginary haptic experience of these tribunes—are we speaking or being spoken to?—or in our corporeal relation to his other, more “artifactual” works.

Kaspars Brambergs is the one participant of this exhibition who best conveys contemporary Latvian painting's long-standing preoccupation with phenomenological presence. Or, put a slightly different way, standing for a long time in the presence of certain contemporary Latvian paintings, especially those by Brambergs, one feels oneself physically occupied by the artwork in a phenomenological dialectic of perception and reflection. Our bodies are implicated in Brambergs's works as they fill our field of vision and, zooming our sight onto their intricate and idiosyncratic facture, that field of vision is overwhelmed and merged with the paintings' own tilled plots of sand, coal dust, rust and soil, all suspended (like our gaze) in polyester resin. This exchange, which transforms the spectator into a component of the spectacular environment, has been seen—indeed, lived—in the aforementioned Aija Zariņa exhibition and, most recently, Kristaps Ģelzis's installation of wall-sized paintings at the 2011 Venice Biennale that immersed viewers in a nightclub's worth of black-light and fluorescent paint (treated, however, with the reverence of the Rothko Chapel).

For all the immediacy and contemporaneity of his expansive paintings, Brambergs is evidently not averse to art historical referents. Critic Vilnis Vējš has drawn stylistic connections to Twombly, Burri, Kiefer and Tàpies (Generalissimo Franco's favorite p.r. tool, by the way), and though he doesn't specify, we assume Vējš means the calligraphism, muscularity, materiality and monumentalism shared with these predecessors. He also notes a qualified concordance with native sons Ivars Heinrihsons and Ilmārs Blumbergs, an interesting pairing given Heinrihsons's sophisticated furtherance of academic easel painting and Blumbergs's aggressive wresting of it from the academy into the performance space.⁷ I would propose, for a work such as *Order*, two additional Latvian forebears: Gustavs Klucis and Kārlis Johansons (better known in the West by his russified name, Karl Loganson). On initial consideration, the comparison may seem superficial, but pursued, it enhances Brambergs's achievement in significant ways. Apropos of Klucis, whose 1919 *Dynamic City* series set a benchmark for constructivist painting practice, the incorporation of industrial substances in the painted surface not only added tectonic interest but performed a sort of transubstantiation of fine art into the concrete social realm, precisely by utilizing the materials of construction and heavy industry. *Order* evokes the compositional dynamism of Klucis but parlays it into a visceral experience via monumental scale, something Klucis was better able to effect through his photomontage murals. For his part, Johansons not only helped launch the Soviet productionist art movement but was one of the few to fully implement its radical art-in-industry agenda with his employment at Moscow's Red Roller Metal Factory. (That Brambergs has come to wider critical attention through a solo exhibition held in the cavernous spaces of Rīga's defunct VEF factory is apt.) With Brambergs's *Order*, we find axonometric notations reminiscent of Johansons's so-called Cold Structures that introduced the concept of tensegrity to sculptural form in 1921, almost three decades before Buckminster Fuller and others were credited with its invention. Brambergs's modulations of line weight intimate the thicker struts and thinner wires that balance compression and tension in the Cold Structures, as does the implied self-sufficiency of

the figure, self-contained within the compositional ground.

To note this resemblance is hardly to impugn Brambergs's inventiveness. As with his elaboration of Klucis, he creates a new relational dynamic with the viewer whose experience of Johanson's revolutionary forms, small and exhibited on a pedestal, had been impoverished by the dire economic circumstances of that revolutionary time. Moreover, other Brambergs paintings extend this investigation of recombinant three-dimensional form rendered in two dimensions. *Gravity*, for example, appears to subject a very different structure to the operations of, yes, gravity but also anti-gravitational force. The massive solidity of the central form recalls Brutalist architecture, but its weight is countervailed by two factors: first, its suspension in the middle of the composition, effected either by anti-gravity or the tensile intervention of thin lines issuing from the top of the form, and, second, the suggestion of illogical spatial form in the first place. Despite its block-like projections, the form is organized like a Penrose triangle, unaccountable to the forces of physics because it is, alas, physically impossible. We stand before this precarious, implausible mass much like we do in the presence of a Serra sculpture.

Ernests Kļaviņš offers us quite another vision featuring whimsical structures that are unaccountable to the realities of engineering but nevertheless present themselves as purposive. The forms are variously anthropomorphic, schematic and platonic. The anthropomorphism is situated somewhere between the cartoon animation of inanimate objects and postmodern architecture's frequent incorporation of ornaments and moldings suggestive of the human body; the schematic quality is purely on the order of a Rube Goldberg contraption; and other forms of his might be called "platonic" in so far as a child's rendering of a house will represent the quintessential elements of roof, wall, window and door by means of the most basic geometric shapes. That said, Kļaviņš's work is mostly about unabashed silliness. A good deal of this is visual. Flat expanses of bright color fill simple shapes outlined in black, evoking the first comic books and coloring books of childhood. Visual puns abound: Machine knobs look like daisies, a downspout looks like a tobacco pipe . . . unless, of course, the knobs *are* daisies and the house is smoking a pipe instead of a chimney. (At an early stage in our lives, this is eminently logical, given that the daisy-bedecked machine pictured in Kļaviņš's *Syrup Well* produces syrup, and syrup made from honey needs flower nectar.)

Silliness also obtains in the titles, or, more precisely, in the disjunction between the words of the title and the image so titled. *Lenin Leaves the Station* has echoes of the celebrated chapter in the Russian Revolution of 1917 when Lenin returned from exile at Finland Station in Petrograd. This episode was a staple of Socialist Realist painting, showing the charismatic Bolshevik leader exhorting the throngs of his adoring followers, but Kļaviņš fast-forwards to an imagined denouement with the station emptied and Vladimir Ilyich looking rather elephantine and dejected. The clock reads 1:50, which could indicate it's two hours past his tiring, triumphant return to Russia, but Kļaviņš could also be showing another day around two o'clock, a century later, when the slouching figure might allude to poor, taxidermied Lenin leaving his mausoleum in Red Square after the collapse of his empire. Similarly, *Finding in the Forest* could read two ways: "finding" as a gerund describing the actions of the mousey fellow coming upon the house, or "finding" as a noun, a synonym for a discovery, in which case we can't be certain whether it's the mouse-found house or the pipe-smoking house's discovery of the mouse. Elementary, my dear Watson, either way.

This fanciful interpretation is the sort of thing Kļaviņš encourages, first by a creative method that has been likened to surrealist "automatic drawing" in its chance combinations of motifs, then by supplying his exhibitions with far-fetched exegeses. For example, one solo exhibition gave its visitors their interpretive bearings with this fable:

An ancient legend tells of a small gnome carrying a candle through the forest. The gnome comes across branches along the way. Should the gnome stumble and the candle go out, life on earth will immediately be wiped out by a wave of gamma rays from the closest magnetar.⁸

Gnomes and gamma rays here, Disney and Kenny Scharf cartoon imposters there—all these conspire to make sense (or deliberate nonsense). For many years, Kļaviņš worked as an editorial illustrator for a leading Rīga newspaper, and during this period his paintings displayed considerably more painterly effects while his illustrations were clearly

inspired by and indebted to the linear style and spare imagery of Māris Bišofs, widely known to American audiences through his editorial work for *The New York Review of Books*, *The Nation* and many other periodicals. When Bišofs returned to Rīga and began contributing work to the same newspaper as Kļaviņš, the latter's style changed, and here we see the result of Kļaviņš transferring idioms from the editorial page to the easel.

The charcoal drawings of **Harijs Brants** are not illustration, nor are they painting, though they feel quite at home in an otherwise all-painting show. We might wonder why this is so. Is this because none of these works have the centripetal effect typical of conventional drawings, despite their centralized compositions? The "all-overness" of the background texture is a striking twist on a quality Greenberg admired in the abstracted figuration of deKooning and Pollock, just as it evokes the inky unboundedness of certain paintings by Latvian-American Vija Celmiņš. These comparisons, of course, are highly conditional and only serve to explain why Brants might be called a painter instead of a drawer. (Admittedly, these distinctions may sound as academic as the most turgid of these sentences, but the matter is worth considering in light of a curious disavowal Miervaldis Polis once made to me: "I am *not* a painter"—said while painting his likeness into an art reproduction.)

There is also some question whether Brants acts as a photographer in these works.⁹ His renderings could never be mistaken for photographs, of course, but he stages and lights his subjects in a manner peculiar for drawing but not unfamiliar to photography. Furthermore, when these drawings are assembled and viewed serially, a modest concordance with the portraiture of August Sander emerges. Perhaps it is the heightened sense of morphological observation, perhaps the directness of the subject's returned gaze, perhaps the profound interiority we sense but are refused access to. Like Sander's, Brants's titles often have an anthropological cast, be it a genetic description (*Albino Girl*) or a vocational one (*Agent*). Most importantly, even within a limited selection of these works, there is a sense of the existence of innumerable others. Brants is conducting a census from which the shape of an unknown society can eventually be discerned.

The temptation to move beyond the sheer, strange beauty of the image and indulge in amateur phrenology and psychology is subtly encouraged by Brants: It has frequently been observed that the faces of all of his male subjects are wizened in the extreme, while all his female subjects have preternaturally young skin, so the artist himself plants the suggestion of categorical distinctions and their divination. The larger story that this implies belongs to a reality removed from quotidian experience, and the unnaturalness is underscored by the crepuscular, shallow backgrounds. In works like *Fly Circus* and *Behind the Wall*, cryptic elements punctuate the composition like parts of a rebus, and not coincidentally, these elements are bearers of discrete meaning: paper notes, audio speakers, transmission wires.

Brants is known for working exclusively at night. The privacy and solitude that this affords corroborates his description of the drawing process as an "inner room." For these reasons, as well as the heightened sense of reality and, at the same time, its dislocation, we might conclude that Brants is engaging in dreamwork, plumbing his unconscious for the rogue characters that populate and steer the extraordinary, irrational narratives of dreams. It is a truism of dreams that nothing is more boring than listening to someone retell his dreams; nothing more interesting than recounting your own. Somehow, Brants is retelling what are putatively his dreams, but he provides a vividness of detail that we usually only encounter in our own. And so, they become our own, a shadowy eruption of some collective subconscious that is anything but boring.

Inga Meldere engages in similar, slippery transactions between the private and the public spheres. Her paintings might more properly be called mementos or souvenirs, not only because of their typically smaller sizes but also their customary manner of display: grouped on the gallery wall with the casual feel of a middle-class family's portrait gallery ("portrait gallery" itself an uneasy, overly aggrandizing term). The resemblance is not accidental, as Meldere often works from family scrapbook images, specifically those associated with her grandfather. Her transposition of such an intimate and personal, yet universally experienced, photographic history is, in a sense, a

restorative act, refreshing memories. On the other hand, her jettison of inessential detail and her distillation of the surviving optical data void the sentimentality usually associated with thumbing through family albums. Elsewhere, Meldere performs the same dispassionate operation on film stills, the amassing of which is normally driven by the obsessive mind of the movie fan. Although she consistently short-circuits the fixity of attention we customarily ascribe to doting grandchildren or swooning groupies in order to re-channel her viewers' attention elsewhere, these little painted mementos somehow retain a modicum of warmth and personality.

Meldere trained professionally as a painting restorer, and this seems significant in light of her painting process. Ordinarily, the restorer is never at license to edit the original, but must replicate both the appearance and, implicitly, the temporal instant of creation. Subsequent interpretations have little place in this technical procedure unless subsequent restorations are suspected of deforming the original. One needs to care enough about the original artist and not enough about oneself to be a truly effective restorer. Clearly Meldere cares enough on both counts, and so sets different parameters for her painting enterprise. I suspect that the very capacity of caring (and the risks of caring too much) may prove critical to understanding what Meldere is up to.

Anthropologists Susan Stewart and James Clifford have analyzed the pictorial strategy of the miniature (painted or built) in Western culture and concluded that its creation enacts a bourgeois longing for "inner" experience. Ordinarily, the miniature puts a premium on veracity to the original, and as we've noted, Meldere routinely performs the actions of a dissembler. When the miniature issues from one's childhood, and there are *a lot* of them with Meldere, suddenly the classic childhood impulse to collect comes into question, or, more precisely, the manner in which this obsessive tendency to accumulate matures into acceptable behavior:

The rapacious need *to have* is transformed into rule-governed, meaningful desire. . . . Accumulation unfolds in a pedagogical, edifying manner. The collection itself—its taxonomic, aesthetic structure—is valued, and any private fixation on single objects is negatively marked as fetishism. Indeed, a "proper" relation with objects (rule-governed possession) presupposes a "savage" or deviant relation (idolatry or erotic fixation).¹⁰

It would seem that Meldere acknowledges the psychological stakes of assembling private souvenirs and making them public. She simultaneously selects imagery with deep emotional underpinnings—baby's bath, a rainbow's appearance, a gathering of friends—and elides much of the specific, potentially compromising content, denaturing the source material while making this an occasion for a new human gathering, an art event. Elision of detail is compensated for by the robust application of pigment, deformation of shape augments the visual interest of whatever abstraction has left behind, and, somehow, color largely escapes these drastic measures. For all of these reasons, as well as the way they add up to a strange stylistic imprecision, it seems to me that Inga Meldere may be the heir to Aleksandrs Drēviņš, a much earlier Latvian painter who knew the peril of balancing a private life and a public role.

In Latvian critical literature, the name **Daiga Krūze** is often written in the same sentence with "Inga Meldere," and on a cursory level, it makes a certain amount of sense.¹¹ Like Meldere, Krūze began training as a restoration specialist, and they both do figural work that seems primarily informed by "de-skilling," a conceptualist commission that affected Latvian painters (even those doing conceptualistic art) very belatedly. In the past, Krūze has worked on the intimist scale of Meldere, although that was only episodic and the vast majority of her compositions are, well, vast. Moreover, the act of composition, as handled by both women, is not limited to the edges of their unframed canvases. Both have been known to locate the primary pictorial interest of their paintings beyond the edge and in the interstitial spaces formed on the gallery wall by the careful organization of multiple works. Equally significant, this organization is careful in the sense of being sensitively, intuitively done, without recourse to the modernist serial devices of grids, lines, stacks, etc. Both can be seen as adherents to the painting trend that Vilnis Vējš has identified as "the new simplicity."¹² But things are rarely all that simple.

The main difference between the two women's artwork, it seems to me, is sheer size and its implications for the painting process itself. When looking at reproductions of their work online and without the benefit of gallery installation views—I confess, this is how I was first introduced to both painters—distinctions between their individual techniques are eclipsed by the shared qualities of abstraction and chromatic intensity. The supposed equivalency is a false perception, interesting and notable in the scheme of Latvian art because many Soviet-era artists were influenced by Western art seen only in rare book and magazine reproductions, which resulted in, for instance, the production of miniaturized Pollock splatter paintings. As the saying goes, turnabout is fair play, and for artists, it's often a preferred method of operation. To wit, Krūze played *provocateuse* with her 2004 debut exhibition, "100% Disappointment." In advance of its opening, she posted tantalizing signage in the windows of a commercial space in downtown Rīga, implying that discounted merchandise was in the offing, only to greet prospective bargain-hunters with paintings and the limited-edition artist's book *How To Become an Artist?*, itself a bait-and-switch maneuver because the blank pages within offered scant advice.¹³ In any case, Krūze can fill tremendous space with a relatively small number of works, a strategy she exploited to maximum effect in her next exhibition, "Silver Gold Plasticine" of 2006, by overrunning the edge of the show's centerpiece painting, extending swaths of color onto the surrounding wall surface. Given the presence of video work in that gallery, one is tempted to compare the cascade of pigment with the ambient light emanating from the nearby monitor, a surplus that has long been recognized as being as integral to the work as anything on the screen proper.

When a painting is as large as those representing Krūze in the current exhibition, the labor of abstraction and the impact of color is of much greater magnitude, not simply in the relative sense of quantity but also in degree of intentionality. Denoting with a squiggle the shape of, say, a dog in a small, preparatory sketch is merely an act of efficiency; to do so when the canine image covers a square half-meter of support, as in Krūze's *Animals*, decisions regarding finish and contour come into play. Smudging a line of paint on a small canvas is a far different physical act than blurring a swath of paint on an expansive *panneau*: the former lacks the athleticism of the latter, having instead the off-handedness of a passing remark. Conversely, a passage of unmodulated color on a small painting has none of the reticence of the flat application of color over a broad area on a large painting. When these constrasting techniques coincide in a large-format work like *Background*, there is a *frisson* that small paintings can only dream about possessing if and when they grow up. Krūze makes "grown up" paintings, and to look at her career, from the early use of pictographic elements to the return of illusionism in the painting most recently posted on her website, we witness a maturation of vision and its various means, pictorial as well as presentational.

With **Andris Eglītis**, we come full circle to the realist persuasion with which I began this essay section. The realism of Eglītis is, of course, nothing like the realism of Polis, at least in stylistic terms. But they are kindred souls in their laconic, sometimes bemused regard of the profession. As mentioned earlier, Polis has claimed he's not a painter, and in a self-dialogical exchange several years ago, Eglītis described his identity and activity in this self-effacing way:

An artist is like a baker or a farmer: he bakes a loaf, someone eats it, and then he has to bake another. That's just like what I do: I paint a painting, people look at it, and then I have to paint another one.

Are you trying to say that an artist is just a manufacturer, like, for example, a manufacturer of interior objects?

*Yes. Icons are interior objects, too. But "food-product manufacturer" sounds better.*¹⁴

Not only can Polis and Eglītis be charmingly loquacious, but jocularly belies the earnestness with which both men paint and how they perceive the activity as a part of being actively human. Indeed, both of them have expressed deep concern about how they conduct their quotidian lives because they perceive a direct impact on their art-making: Polis in an intellectual examination of self-presentational and -representational strategies that begat his so-called "Egocentrs" project of intersubjectivity, Eglītis in a spiritual/vocational epiphany while studying abroad in the mid-

2000s that stipulated personal self-improvement if he was to improve as a painter. This insinuation of his self into the fundamental actions of his painting—“mannerisms” may be a more felicitous word than “actions”—was indicated in an interview when Eglītis disclaimed photorealism, despite having occasionally painted from photographs in his past, because “If you paint without a photograph, the work will have more of you in it.”¹⁵ So ends (and, at the same time, glosses) the comparison with Polis.

In the interest of putting more of himself into his subjects, Eglītis is often a *plein-air* painter, but the romantic, salutary associations of that term are immediately challenged by where he chooses to set up his portable painting base. He deliberately avoids the picturesque, opting for mundane and even vaguely repellent locations in middle-class suburbia, stranded between scenic urban centers and sanitized exurbia. Assuming the persona of a commuter, Eglītis sticks to a travel schedule and when the allotted time for working has elapsed, the painting is over, finished or otherwise. These small-format works stand as they are, pages in a diary, or serve as studies for larger works made in studio. When they are used for in-studio elaborations, one gets the feeling that these *plein-air* sketches are less useful as compositional guides than as experiential prompts or vestigial sensations. (It’s no coincidence that we use the word “trace” to describe the process of transferring an image as well as to name the mental residue of our initial apprehension of that image.) Eglītis has spoken of “the wisdom of the hand,” and this both sounds like an aestheticized case of “muscle memory”—conditioned physiological habit—and recalls what critic Leo Steinberg claimed for Picasso when he spoke of the artist’s limning fingers translating tactile memories of an erotic encounter into the drawn lines of a nude.¹⁶

The paintings in this exhibition are studio works, so we observe the results of Eglītis processing his fleeting impressions of a particular moment. Although whatever ephemeral notations residing in the preparatory sketch are analyzed and committed to documentary form, he somehow retains a measure of instantaneity in spite of this mental processing and pictorial commitment. Sometimes, as in *07.08.2010* from the *Living Conditions* series, this is attained with what appears to be an *alla prima* technique and a composition that suggests the vignette (however large). In other works, it is the choreographic details of the event—usually bordering on a non-event—that strike us with a sense of immediacy. Despite Eglītis’s refusal of photography as a source, a painting like *22.09.2010* bears productive comparison to the large-format conceptualist photo-works of Jeff Wall. In a typical work by Wall, intricate, extensive *mise-en-scène* fills the image field with banal contextual information on the order of visual white noise, through which the viewer sifts to behold a tiny dramatic moment that tends to reverberate disproportionately back through the incidental, coincidental details. Viewers can report much the same experience with recent studio works by Eglītis.

This subtle orchestration of unexceptional reality to heighten the viewer’s experience of it—but without falsifying that reality or our attitude toward it—requires the skills of a poet and a documentarian. Italian neorealist scriptwriter and theorist Cesare Zavattini once proposed that “The ideal film would be ninety minutes of the life of a man to whom nothing happens,” implying that the level of observation required to find ninety nonetheless engaging minutes of screen time would entail radically reordering one’s priorities, values, and expectations. It would also entail hushed poetry. The paintings of Andris Eglītis have the latent lyricism of unwritten poems.

Claims to the contrary, painting remains alive. And in Latvia, it has renewed visibility and vigor after a decade or so of stolen thunder. While some of this is explainable by the inevitable cyclicity of art world fashions, the diachronic development of culture in different geo-political regions pretty much ensures that there will always be something interesting to look at—and to hang on a nail on a wall. This sense that contemporary painting needs a home with nails has dominated local art policy discourse of late: Latvia does not have a contemporary art museum, and it’s of little to no consolation to the Latvian culturati that Rīga has an impressive array of Kunsthalle-type spaces, the state art museum allocates a respectable portion of its schedule to newer art, and the best individual contemporary artists are agile and enterprising enough to get on with their business without an august, dedicated institution in their midst. Frustrating as the situation seems, Latvian painting—visual art in general—is in a very good place, and it’s most definitely not a fortress. The learned behaviors of private patronage and corporate sponsorship are taking hold, even in these uncertain economic times, and accordingly,

arts administrators' myopic sense of entitlement is being unlearned. Organizations with competing visions are gaining an equal footing, and Rīga now has a plurality of curatorial and critical voices. Print and online art publishing expands in scope and ambition, and there is true complementarity between these informational formats. Regarding Latvian contemporary art, one might say that it's entirely reasonable to paint a rosy picture.

Endnotes

¹ Eşanu, "The Transition of the Soros Centers to Contemporary Art: The Managed Avant-Garde," <http://think-tank.nl/ccck/Esanu_ManagedAvant-garde.pdf>.

² From an interview with James Mayer in *Flash Art*, 177 (1994): 99.

³ Crimp, "The End of Painting," in *October*, 16 (Spring 1981): 69-86.

⁴ See Hal Foster, *Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996).

⁵ Regarding Zariņa and Mitrēvics, see my essay "Writers' Bloc: Reading into Late Soviet Experience Through Latvian Artists' Books." *Inferno: Journal of Art History* (St. Andrews, Scotland) vol. VIII (autumn 2003), 5-16. <http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/10023/612/1/Inferno_Vol_8_article_1_2003.pdf>.

⁶ See Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011).

⁷ Vējš, "Lielā stila sabiedrībā," (exhibition review), *Kultūras diena* (14 August 2010), <<http://www.diena.lv/sodien-laikraksta/liela-stila-sabiedriba-746418>>.

⁸ "Atklāta Ernesta Kļaviņa izstāde 'Karš starp titāniem un rūķīšiem,'" *Ir* (27 October 2011): n.p. <<http://www.ir.lv/2011/10/27/atklas-makslinieka-ernesta-klavina-izstadi-kars-starp-titanem-un-rukisiem>>.

⁹ The photographic connection has been made, using other criteria, by Remigijus Venckus in the review "Mathematical Nonexistent Unrealistically Real Reality," on Brants's gallery's website: <<http://www.makslaxogalerija.lv/eng/artists/harijs-brants-2/>>. Notably, Venckus refers to Brants as a painter throughout.

¹⁰ Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 163; and Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 218-220.

¹¹ See, for instance, Maija Rudovska, "A Few Words about the Latest Developments in Latvian Painting," *Epifanio. Ajatu ajaleht*. 10 (2009/1). <http://www.epifanio.eu/nr10/eng/latvian_painting.html>.

¹² Vējš, "Jaunā vienkāršība. 2000-...", *Studija* 72 (2010/3), <<http://www.studija.lv/?parent=3313>>.

¹³ Krūze and Krišs Salmanis, *Kā klūt par mākslinieku?* (Rīga: Ūdens, 2004).

¹⁴ Eglītis, "Fragments from a Transcribed Recording for the Forthcoming Book 'Salad: Paintings with Photographs and Text,'" <http://old.lcca.lv/projects/eglitis_eng/eglitisteksts>.

¹⁵ Diāna Barčevska, "Veids, kā kļūt par labāku cilvēku. Saruna ar gleznotāju Andri Eglīti," *Studija* 57 (2007/6), <<http://www.studija.lv/?parent=898>>.

¹⁶ Steinberg, "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," in *Other Criteria, Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1972), 125-154.