

Zander Blom

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Art

The only thing to really make art about is art, says Zander Blom

Abstract artist Zander Blom's exhibition at Stevenson Gallery in Joburg is a powerful assertion of the importance of art as a driver of cultural change

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BY GRAHAM WOOD



Untitled by Zander Blom.

Image: Supplied

You could say that making abstract art in SA at the moment is a perverse choice. There have certainly been times in Zander Blom's career when he has thought so. In fact, at least part of his choice to engage with abstraction when he began his career as an artist a decade and a half ago was negation.

As a young artist, convinced that he loved art and wanted nothing more than to be an artist, he felt trapped by the pressures on contemporary artists to "say something of importance". He also felt that the responsibilities towards his subject in representative art — whether a person, landscape or object — were debilitating. And he couldn't see anything interesting in the alternative: taking his own subjectivity as a topic. And so, he says: "The only thing you can make art about then is art."

As a young artist, convinced that he loved art and wanted nothing more than to be an artist, he felt trapped by the pressures on contemporary artists to “say something of importance”. He also felt that the responsibilities towards his subject in representative art – whether a person, landscape or object – were debilitating. And he couldn’t see anything interesting in the alternative: taking his own subjectivity as a topic. And so, he says: “The only thing you can make art about then is art.”

On the one hand, he was seduced by the stuff of art: the shades and gradients and textures he saw in photographs, for instance. “I don’t have as much interest in human beings as I’d like to,” he admits. Art for him became first and foremost not about having something to say, and more about finding “a language or ... multiple languages”.

On the other hand, he had the nagging sense that making art about art was “just boring and lame”. In times like ours, isn’t that simply a cop-out? Besides, all the ideals that drove abstraction in the 20th century seemed to have been discredited and debased. The figurative art he produced seemed to reach back to his childhood, when his choices of subjects – dinosaurs and monsters – seemed innocent and free.

When you look back, he seems always to have been escaping either the tyranny of representation or the tyranny of abstraction. In fact, he was right in the middle of one of his abandonments – creating works and a manifesto of sorts he called *Garage-ism* dealing with a kind of aesthetic of abandonment and retrieval itself – when he stumbled onto a technique that sent him right back into the arms of abstraction with renewed faith, and a new kind of maturity.

His latest solo exhibition, now on at Stevenson in Joburg – *Monochrome Paintings* – is his 10th with the gallery and this time, he says, he comes back to abstraction “without guilt or shame, and without the need to criticise it”.

In the past, part of his frustration has been his sense that his engagement with abstract art demanded a degree of inbuilt critique, or at least a sense of knowingness – even cynicism – that now “seems like a very youthful position”.

“I’ve realised you don’t really need a reason to engage with abstraction,” he says. “You don’t have to justify your desire to engage with abstraction by having some kind of theoretical story”. It’s more simply tied to a desire “to make paintings that feel innovative”.

“I figured out a way to create depth and texture, but without resorting to impasto,” he explains. In his earlier work, he frequently piled on oils or painted on the backs of canvases “to make something that was visceral or undeniable”.



Untitled by Zander Blom.

Image: Supplied



Studio view with works in progress for Paintings and Posters, 2011

Image: Zander Blom

Since his early 20s, though, he'd wanted to find a way to create the sense of depth and substance on a flat surface. His idea was almost to "nullify" his own presence as the artist. He didn't want to intrude on the artwork — like a brooding, expressive figure à la Jackson Pollock — but rather to exist "like an old artist in the background"

He played around with various tools, techniques and applications — using spatulas and bits of cut-up rubber and silicon, baking implements and the like to apply the paint and discover new effects. He devised a range of "gradients, ripples, smears, textures", delighted by the sense that through a simple technical innovation he was able to "visualise something that we wouldn't have been able to visualise" even a few years ago

"I can't really figure out what to say about them other than they're abstract, but they're figurative! suggestive," he says. The works on the exhibition appear somehow organic. Where chance marks do seem to resemble something figurative — he points out a banana, a seal's head, a dog's leg, a nose — he's let some of them be (although he admits to changing others when they were too literal-looking)

"With this work, what's really interesting is whatever figurative elements emerge, they're never quite on the thing, so you never feel trapped"

Each work is a provisional "solution", as he expresses it, to an infinite set of compositional possibilities. "It's almost like every painting is its own moment in time because you're never going to be able to recreate the thing, no matter how hard you try," says Blom

There is nothing of the sense of a final statement about them. As such, each work is filled with a sense of possibility: of more works and more expression

Looked at like this, it becomes clear that these works — Blom's new guilt-free attitude — marks a new tone in abstraction's re-entry into the conversation about contemporary South African art. His realisation that you don't need an excuse to engage with abstract art is as true as ever: its history is indeed a century-long story of abstraction reinventing itself in various places and at various times

The whole enterprise of abstraction though does involve a particular relationship between the individual and the social realm: the collective aspects of politics and identity. Abstract art, by its nature, resists collective consensus; it asserts the individual. Not just the individual consciousness of the artist – that snapshot “moment in time” Blom alludes to – but also a certain awareness of the lone viewpoint of the viewer. Am I seeing what everyone else is seeing in this work? Is my response purely personal? Does it have any relevance outside of my own associations?

That, in a polarised and fragmented social and political context – but one that simultaneously demands social consensus – is paradoxically where Blom’s latest foray into abstraction might find special relevance. The individual, isolated, inward-looking moment represented in these works embodies the very tensions between the individual and social that drives cultural change.



Zander Blom's current exhibition at Stevenson Gallery.

Image: Supplied

In his Mellon Lectures in 2003, the American critic Kirk Varnedoe, one of the greatest and most eloquent proponents of abstract art and its ongoing importance, compares the isolated consciousness inherent in the abstract artwork to the sand in an oyster. In asserting our differences, abstract art does not admit defeat or merely articulate defiance. It acknowledges the necessity of communication, negotiation and engagement. It’s not a nihilistic shrug that our differences are insurmountable, but rather the very cause and motivation for interacting and bridging them – always provisionally, never perfectible.

As much as a youthful Zander Blom might have worried about the lameness of making art about art, it’s actually a powerful assertion of the importance of art as a driver of cultural change: not as the mere expression or illustration of the weighty issue of the day. That’s why Blom’s renewed engagement with abstraction is vital and exciting and timely: because it’s regenerative, because there’s more if it, because it carries on.

BUBBLEGUMCLUB



Artworks by Zander Blom; Photography by Nina Lieska

From 'Garage-ism' to 'Monochrome' — this is Zander Blom's playbook on contemporary fine art

by Odwa Zamane

ART
3 MONTHS AGO



From witnessing his 2021 exhibition, *Garage-ism*, right through to viewing the impact of his most recent solo exhibition, *Monochrome Paintings*, here in Johannesburg – Zander Blom's work has always left me enthused and enthralled.

From the plethora of contemporary artistic influences and references which Blom draws from, this artist has managed to forge his own distinct signature style within the local art space.

This interview felt like such a full-circle moment for me – one in which I was finally able to unravel some answers to the questions which have riddled my subconscious ever since witnessing *Garage-ism*, at the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, for the first time.



Monochrome Paintings, 2022.

For example, Henri Matisse is one of my favourite contemporary fine artists of all-time, so witnessing certain draughtsmanship techniques in Blom's work which resemble Matisse's most iconic works (such as *La Danse*, 1909, is extremely impressive to see.

Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, German Expressionism, and Abstract Expressionism are also just some of the other examples which inform the palette of Blom's artistry.

I managed to virtually engage Blom in order to understand more about the influences and inspirations for his art, his feelings towards Garage-ism relative to his latest work, Monochrome Paintings, as well as obtain some extremely wise advice for all young and emerging fine artists around.

The interview below is another resounding example of the impact which lies within Blom's work and his developing legacy.



Photography by Nina Lieska

Would you mind introducing yourself and including a short description of what you do?

Zander Blom: I'm a painter based in Cape Town, born in 1982 in Pretoria. In the early 2000s I moved to Johannesburg and started out working with installation, drawing, printmaking and photography.

I've been involved in some fun group projects and collaborations over the years but the bulk of my energy has gone into my solo work. I began getting serious about painting around 2010 and that has remained my focus ever since. Within painting I've gone through many phases and right now I find myself in an abstract monochrome moment.

I was lucky enough to view your gallery exhibition, *Garage-ism*, in Cape Town and I can safely say that you are one of my favourite contemporary fine artists at the moment. What mainly inspires the art which you make?

Zander Blom: The inspiration and references change with each new series of work and can come from all over. For the *Garage-ism* show I was looking at medieval military technology and fables, stills from horror movies, photography from movie sets, images of homemade party costumes, children's colouring books, gargoyles... These were found mostly online.

For the new monochrome work my references are mainly black and white photographs/reproductions from books on history, nature, outer space, art, and so on.

I have a deep interest in art history and that has remained one of the cornerstones of my references over the years. Black and white images of modernist sculpture have been very useful for the new work, and if there is one painting in particular that has informed my current compositions it is Henri Matisse's *La Danse* (first version) of 1909. This reference might seem counterintuitive at first glance but if you look at the silhouette of the interlocked figures as a unit and the suggested movement it should make sense.



Henri Matisse, *La Danse*; 1909.



Monochrome Paintings, 2022.

Do you have a specific process when creating your art? I've noticed a lot of drawings and doodles which seem to form a part of your process.

Zander Blom: I find it very useful to have piles of compositional sketches around me in the studio. So, when I work on a painting, I have a lot of visual references to draw from. These sketches are usually done very quickly, and they are very basic ideas for compositions. I think of them as little blueprints or simply starting points for potential paintings.

The aesthetic of your work kind of reminds me of the great Francis Bacon – are there any artists which you draw inspiration from?

Zander Blom: There are many. Francis Bacon was one of my biggest heroes when I was a teenager and elements of his influence still linger. For the past few years I've been drawing a lot from Mark Rothko, Agnes Martin, Jackson Pollock, Kazuo Shiraga, Marlene Dumas, Georg Baselitz, Louise Bourgeois, Luc Tuymans, Joan Mitchell, Peter Doig, Constantin Brâncuși, Alberto Giacometti, Cy Twombly, Philip Guston, Henri Matisse, Jean Dubuffet, the Dada movement, the Gutai movement, German Expressionism, and Abstract Expressionism.

I see on your Instagram bio that you're also represented by the Stevenson Gallery – how has your relationship been with such a reputable art gallery slash institution?

Zander Blom: I've worked with them for over ten years and it's been a real privilege. They strive for a level of excellence in everything they do, from the way a show is hung, to catalogue design, to shipping and accounts, down to every mailer and Instagram post that goes out.

Working with people who are dedicated, engaged, professional and excited about what they do makes your life as an artist much easier. It allows you to really focus on your work. I was a practicing artist for many years before I started working with Stevenson so I know how lucky I've been and how challenging it can be out in the world without the support of a good team.



Francis Bacon, *Study for a Head*; 1952.

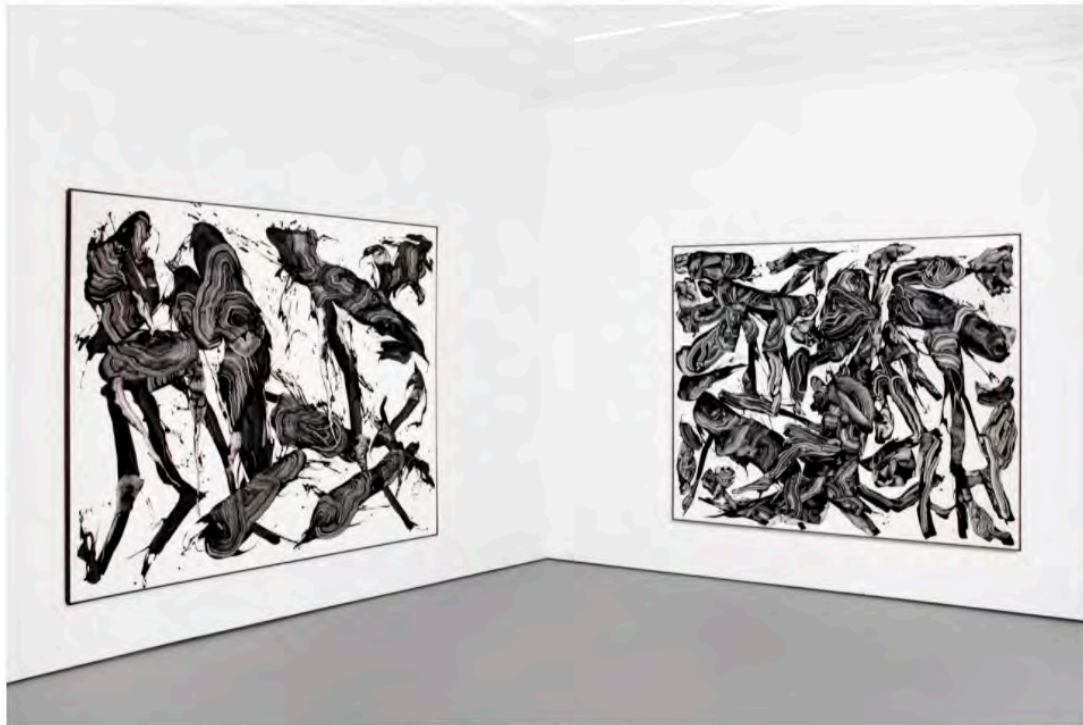
How do you feel about your latest exhibition – Monochrome Paintings – relative to Garage-ism?

Zander Blom: *Garage-ism* was a very liberating moment for me. I change styles quite frequently and I really wanted *Garage-ism* to last longer than it did, but you have to go where you feel the energy. The techniques I use now came out of the *Garage-ism* phase.

I pulled out one particular element that felt like it had huge potential and refined it. I feel very excited about the way I'm working now and the results I'm getting on canvas. In some ways, it's a return to a simpler approach to painting and in others it feels like a big leap forward.

I'm able to do things now with oil paint that I couldn't imagine 10 years ago, and it's purely because I stumbled onto a cool set of techniques through experimentation. You can't simply will paint into doing things it doesn't want to do. You are only ever as good as your bag of tricks and your choice of materials. Every kind of painting technique or approach is like its own technology that allows you to do very specific and limited things.

The current 'technology' in the studio allows me to make paintings that have a certain kind of focus and single mindedness or confidence which wasn't possible before. And this is giving me a lot of satisfaction.



Photography by Nina Lieska



Is there any advice which you could impart to any young emerging fine artists attempting to make a name for themselves within the industry?

Zander Blom: My playbook is from the perspective of someone who dropped out of university and didn't even study art. I was on my way to an unhappy life in advertising when I made a U-turn. So my perspective might seem somewhat pedestrian and smacking of self-help rhetoric, but here's my advice:

Don't wait for opportunities to happen to you, make them happen yourself. Be proactive, reach out to other artists. Band together with friends and like minded people to create your own scene. Strength in numbers.

Work hard, immerse yourself in your work, build your own world, build your own language. Be prolific. Make new work and show it as often as you can. Don't be afraid of failure or embarrassment. You have to start somewhere.

I've made loads of mediocre or embarrassing work, but without that trajectory of constantly making and showing new things I would be nowhere today. You will get better as you go along. Luck is a big part of it, not only in terms of opportunities but also in terms of the quality of your work. Be ready to receive that luck by always being an artist, always being busy in the studio and always hustling outside the studio for new opportunities, knowledge, friendships and connections.

Make it easy for other people to work with you by being open and willing to go the extra mile. Be generous with your time and energy, be generous and self-sufficient as a human being in general. No one wants to work with a grumpy or needy artist.

Work with what you've got. Dream big but keep your expectations low. If you can't afford a studio, turn your bedroom or backyard into one. If you don't have access to a gallery, show in a garage, a parking lot, or a kitchen. These places are much more exciting for an audience than the average gallery.



Monochrome Paintings, 2022.

People want to see young artists going at it against the odds, fighting for their own space in the world and searching for their own voice. If you can't sell your work, give it away to friends to hang on their walls; don't be too attached to your own creations – you can always make something new tomorrow, and word of mouth is a very powerful tool. If you don't have money for materials, use cheap or discarded materials.

For years I worked with ink and paper and found objects because I couldn't afford to work with oil paint and canvas. Even if someone gave me a big budget back then I wouldn't have known how to use it effectively. I also organised group exhibitions with friends at any space we could find. You don't need to ask permission – you don't want it anyway.

If you create energy around your work and if it has any substance to it, the world will respond. The art world is always looking for exciting new talent – you might feel like you're working in the dark, but you never know who is quietly taking note, waiting for your work to blossom. So be visible, and look busy!

Make it easy for people to invest in you early on by pricing your work low/reasonably. Once people own your work they have a vested interest in seeing your career grow. This is a great way to build an audience. And it's a great way to get old work out of the studio to make space for new, better things to come. Make it easy for people to get in on the ground floor and support you.

If you can't pay the rent, teach yourself a skill and have a side hustle. I did freelance illustration and design work on the side under a pseudonym for a few years before I could afford my meagre living costs by only selling work. In my case the strategy was to do as few side jobs as possible and keep my living and art material costs very low. Therefore I couldn't afford to work with expensive canvas, paints, or cameras, but I had weeks and weeks of free time rolling out ahead of me to make drawings on paper and cardboard installations in my bedroom. I could sleep the whole day and work the whole night, obsessing over art and nothing else. You have to choose what's more important, time or budget.

Do you want to start being an artist today with very limited tools and resources, or work a job that will one day enable you with all the tools you'll need? This is very risky because the world might have other plans for you if you go down this road. I simply chose time because I wanted to get away from doing jobs for other people as soon as I could. The desire to have that freedom outweighed everything else.

Don't be afraid to tell people you're an artist. You might feel it's pretentious or self-important to wear the label when you haven't done much yet. But people will respect you for taking the risk and believing in yourself – they might even help you out or become supporters along the way.





Don't expect everything to happen for you all at once. You may think that's what you want but are you ready for big success? Is your work really good enough yet? Have you created a body of work that is complex, deep, and robust enough yet to withstand and hold that kind of attention and scrutiny? Be ambitious but honest with yourself.

Slow and steady wins the race. Be persistent, consistent and patient. And don't be dissuaded by criticism – seek it out, make it your friend and learn from it.

There is nothing wrong with being critical of the work of others or indulging in a good art world gossip occasionally. But don't hold grudges or get involved in bitter backbiting and infighting.

You can be friends with people whose work you don't understand or like; people are more than what you see in their work. And don't be envious of the success of others. Other artists and people in the art world are your friends and comrades. Make allies not enemies as much as you can.

We're all going at it against the odds in our own way. We're all unique, strange and sensitive creatures with our own struggles. And a life in art is a precarious business for everyone. I've burnt some bridges accidentally and intentionally along the way and some relationships can never be fixed no matter how hard you try. So be gentle.

Don't get too caught up in the anxieties of your time. You don't have to subscribe to someone else's narrative of who and what you're supposed to be. The politics and ideologies of the day don't have to define who you are. Invent yourself. And keep reinventing yourself.

And lastly, have fun! Because if you stay open and curious there is a ton of fun to be had.

What are some of the things you are looking forward to in 2022?

Zander Blom: I've got a show in June at Signs and Symbols gallery in New York, and some work on art fairs throughout the year with Stevenson. So this year is looking pretty good for me, and I'm excited to travel again. Let's hope the world still exists at the end of 2022.

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TONGUES

Zander Blom

March 16 / 2022

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In celebration of two years of TONGUES, we chatted again to one of our very first interviewees, the Cape Town-based artist Zander Blom. He reflects on life, his creative practice and his 10th solo show with Stevenson, 'Monochrome Paintings', which runs until 19 March.

Q> When we last interviewed you it was in late 2019, a few months before the launch of TONGUES. In what ways do you think you've remained the same? In what ways are you different?

A> I reread the interview from 2019 and it does seem like a lifetime ago. I feel very different from that person and it's hard to put my finger on why. I'm strangely more at peace overall. I feel less ambitious in terms of wanting to do a lot of different projects, and more focused on just making paintings. Perhaps it's the nature of the new paintings or their process that has calmed me down. Perhaps it's because I'm nearing my 40th birthday. Perhaps it's because I started running on the mountain at least three times a week. Covid should probably also get some credit for not only the big obvious things, but also the small ripple effects it sent through everybody's lives that we haven't been able to really quantify or make sense of yet.

Q > You've mentioned that while working on your latest body of work, you were inspired by photographs of modernist sculpture in particular, and photography more generally. Tell us more about how photography has influenced the direction you took with 'Monochrome Paintings'.

A > I love poring over photographic images of paintings, sculptures, nature, culture, history, the cosmos etc., in books. I'm especially fond of grainy black and white images in old publications – they seem magical to me. Part of the reason I did a lot of photographic work when I was younger was that I was seduced by the depth and drama that one can achieve in photography with things like lighting, camera angle, grain, blur, tonality.

The way I'm currently working with oil paint also relies heavily on a three-dimensional illusion of depth in a way which is close to the qualities inherent in photography. The depth comes from the gradients and textures created by smearing rubber and silicone utensils through the black oil paint, revealing the finely grained white canvas surface to varying degrees. You can say it's like sculpting with light because it's a subtractive painting process. When I realised how closely these techniques could mimic grainy black and white photographic qualities, I tore out loads of images from my favourite sources and stuck them up on my walls as references. Strictly speaking the new work doesn't have much to do with these references conceptually. It's more that photographic reproductions act as a kind of compost of lighting, form, texture and composition out of which I can cultivate interesting shapes and forms for the paintings.

I think I was drawn to images of modernist sculpture because they are two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional space that is a step removed from the natural world – unlike, say, a photograph of a tree or a body. They have been very helpful in making shapes that allude to many things but don't signify anything specific. Abstract photography from the early 20th Century has also been very helpful – the work of Bill Brandt, Man Ray, Edward Weston and the like.



Zander Blon - Monochrome Paintings. 206 x 308.5cm / oil on linen

Q > Tell us about the other influences and inspirations that have helped shape these paintings?

A > I've had a soft spot for abstract expressionism for a long time. The scale, the boldness, the textures, the ability to create incredible emotive responses in a viewer without telling a story, without figurative signifiers leading you along. Like tumbling into the void-like white noise of a massive Pollock or being transfixed by a pulsating/vibrating Rothko. There is something about seemingly being able to say so much yet nothing at all simultaneously. I find this idea incredibly attractive.

I also love the drips, splats and smears that one finds in abstract expressionism and movements like Gutai. I love the idea of painting with your whole body, in big gestures, as opposed to using your wrists in small movements. There is something generous about those kinds of big gestures. There is a beautiful vitality, immediacy and violence in the work of people like Jackson Pollock and Kazuo Shiraga. But working in that fashion today can feel a little bit cheesy because we associate drips, splats and smears with a virtuosic performance of personal pain and angst. It's the old tortured-genius-pouring-out-their-soul trope. That kind of unadulterated sincerity and showiness seems somewhat trite today.

Up until now I haven't found a way to incorporate drips, splats or smears in my own work without having to frame my efforts as an ironic or tongue-in-cheek gesture in reference to the past. But with the new series of paintings there is such a strong figurative suggestiveness, three-dimensionality and reference to nature that these techniques seem to read as natural phenomena instead of the artist's pained expression. It becomes limbs and objects tearing apart, creatures forming and disintegrating, worlds colliding and exploding into each other, snapshots of fantastical yet abstract moments frozen in time. So for the first time I can use those techniques without feeling like I have to apologise for them, because they serve the image and don't point back at me and whatever trauma a viewer might imagine I suffer from.

You can say that the compositions are saved by the figurative suggestiveness and reference to nature, while at the same time the figurative elements never quite resolve into something specific or concrete. It remains suggested, allowing the paintings to retain a kind of open mystery, a story that never settles. It goes back to that idea of saying everything and nothing at the same time.

Q> You've been searching for silicone implements to use with paint. Where's the strangest place you found them? And which tool have you enjoyed using the most?

A> My tools have all come from the most ordinary places like kitchenware and hardware stores. For example, I recently found a soft rubber hot water bottle at a pharmacy that I can't wait to cut up and experiment with. Some of my favourite tools have been silicone baking mats, pieces of thick rubber flooring, the textured inside of a silicone cleaning glove, silicone moulds for chocolates, spatulas, etc. My current favourite is a piece of a silicone muffin baking tray with small incisions cut with a box cutter that has been stapled to a wooden handle. I've really just started exploring the potential for tools. The next step is probably to buy liquid rubber/silicone that is used to make moulds and pour my own tools, but I haven't gotten that far just yet.

Q> You've stressed the importance of "trust[ing] what your hands want to do no matter what your head is saying". Is it easy to ignore your mind (and all the speculation, criticism and doubt that it may contain) to get back to work? What are your strategies or tools that help to ensure that trust in your hands wins the day?

A> I trust in pitching up every day, and I trust in work. I spend a lot of time organising the studio, cleaning tools, sticking up references, making quick compositional sketches, getting paint mixtures ready, putting out fresh canvases – so that the studio is always ready, inviting new work to begin, giving me no excuse to stall.

I also trust in temperament. I think you have to learn to understand your own temperament, not go against yourself, and just receive the work as it comes, without too much preemptive judgement. This has so far dictated that I stay fluid and open to change no matter how much my intellectual brain wants to stay in a specific moment or mode of painting. The reasoning goes that if I'm excited about what I'm doing while I'm doing it, enjoying the process and feeling challenged, then that energy will be embedded in the work no matter what shape the work takes. The downside of this approach is that I often abandon my own well-laid plans. I'll be working on something that I know is strong and sound but then suddenly find myself unable to really care or be interested in it. Then it's time to move on and embrace whatever change comes. This usually just happens without thinking, unless I actively stop myself out of some kind of fear – fear of whether the work will be good enough, fear of what my peers might say, fear of how the market will react. But I know that if I give that fear any kind of power it will most certainly lead to a block or stalemate. And in the end the only fear to really take to heart is this: if you're boring yourself, you're likely to bore everyone else.

For others, trusting in temperament may mean different things. Take someone like Giorgio Morandi who spent his life painting mostly small still lifes of bottles and vases; those paintings are spectacular in their understated sensitivity. It must have suited his temperament to stay in that very narrow modest space. Otherwise he would surely have gone mad, or produced mediocre work.

Recently I've started realising that sitting around thinking and looking for long periods before taking action can have great benefits. Apparently Cy Twombly would sit for days staring at a canvas before finally getting up and making a couple of quick gestures. Then a painting wouldn't take very long to paint from start to finish. But this can be dangerous advice for a young artist, I think, because it can be misunderstood and encourage laziness and procrastination. I dabble in this kind of method now because I want to work smarter, with more intent, focused energy and precision, but I tread this territory with caution because I know the risks here are very high. Everyone has their own issues but for me personally, if I haven't painted anything for a couple of days, if there are no freshly painted wet surfaces around me in the studio, I get very agitated.

Q> Irreverence, frustration, ecstasy, urgency, humour, pleasure... which emotions play a role in your process, and how do you navigate through these when creating your compositions?

A> All of the above, but I think the emotions help navigate the way through, if that makes sense. All of those emotions help you better see and understand what it is that you're involved in and help you figure out whether what you're making has any kind of power or is of any consequence. Otherwise you would feel no or very little emotion.

Q> What music have you been listening to while painting?

A> My music taste has become very pedestrian. I used to be into all kinds of things that the average person would be hard pressed to call music. I've somehow lost my appetite for compositions of abstract noise, for example. I sense it has to do with youth and fashion. Perhaps in a youthful desire to belong to an imagined intellectual group or be different, I elevated things to the profound in my mind when they were really just "cool" noise. It's kind of ironic that I've returned to abstraction in painting with such a bang but no longer seem to have time for abstraction in music except for a select few composers. These days I listen mostly to mainstream and classical stuff or podcasts while I'm working. And I don't really get emotionally attached to anything like I used to do. Maybe I'm just in a funk musically speaking, or too focused on painting to have much space for music in my brain.

Q> Define what a "good day" in your studio is for you.

A> It's a day when there has been any kind of progress towards making an exciting painting, whether it's been spent sketching or looking and thinking and making notes or actually working on a new canvas. A really good day is when I painted a canvas that I'm very satisfied with.

It's the days when I get bogged down with admin and emails that make me anxious, but I know those days are important too. You've got to keep your house in order. If I only ever work on paintings my very simple carefully constructed little life as an artist would eventually start falling apart.



Q > We LOVE zines. And you've been making some! Tell us about them.

A > With the *Garage-ism* show it felt appropriate to do something that falls in the format/genre of the classic artist manifesto. The cover design was based on F.T. Marinetti's "Zang Tumb Tumb" futurist manifesto of 1912-1914, but with a contemporary humorous twist, and the design throughout was very loose, not taking itself too seriously. We printed it on newsprint with a risograph printer which really gave it that manifesto feeling.

With the *Monochrome Paintings* show it was a more straightforward catalogue with simple effective design to showcase the new works.

I'm very proud of the *Garage-ism Manifesto* and the more recent publication for the *Monochrome* show, not so much for my contributions as for the way they came together so beautifully as a team effort. I wrote the text, took some studio images and had a bit of input on the design side, but it's my handler at Stevenson gallery who really pushed for us to do something cool and special for both shows. He came up with the idea of zine-like publications, set it all in motion, and managed the process. Gabrielle Guy did all the heavy lifting on the design side and the Stevenson team assisted with editing.

Q> What do you like and dislike about the art world?

A> There can be a simplicity to the commerce of art that I like. You make an object, someone sees and likes said object, and a transaction occurs. Sure there are often a lot of complex things happening behind the scenes to facilitate this but compared to other fields you can actually live a really simple existence if you choose to. Maybe I'm just a primitive guy but the idea of a painting exchanged for food in your fridge and a roof over your head is really freeing and satisfying. There is a kind of unpretentiousness and honesty to it in terms of time, labour and craft. If you compare this to the complex machinations of many other fields, it's kind of amazing how simple and fulfilling a life you can have as an artist. Yes, you can get caught up in all the hype and speculation that occurs around different artists at different times and the constant shifting of trends and ideologies. To me that's really none of my business. I like to keep my head down, do the work, while believing that if I consistently do a good enough job in the studio I'll be OK. Maybe that's naïve, but it's worked out for me so far.

Q> What comes next?

A> Hopefully just an endless stream of long stretched-out days and nights of painting in the studio, many late-afternoon life-affirming jogs on the mountain, good health and not too many distractions.



Monochrome Paintings - exhibition view at STEVENSON gallery. Photography by Nina Lieska

Blom was born in 1982 in Pretoria, and lives in Cape Town.

Solo shows include *Polaris and Ursa Minor* at the Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean in Port Louis, Mauritius (2017); *Monochrome works* and *New Works* at Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf (2021; 2017; 2015); *Place and Space* at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah and Atlanta, Georgia, USA (2011-12); *The Black Hole Universe* at Galerie van der Mieden in Antwerp and 5x6x9, Berlin (2010); in addition to nine exhibitions at Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg (2010-22). *Garage Party*, his first solo exhibition in New York, took place at signs and symbols (2021).

Group shows include *Mapping Worlds* at the Norval Foundation, Cape Town (2019); *Assessing Abstraction* at the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town (2018); *Gestalt & Becoming* at Feldbusch Wiesner Rudolph, Berlin (2016); *Exchange* at Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf (2016); *Home Truths: Domestic Interiors in South Africa* at the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town (2016); *Material Matters: New Art from Africa* at the Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean in Port Louis, Mauritius (2015); *Handle with Care!*, the ninth Ostrale International Exhibition of Contemporary Art at the Ostrale Centre in Dresden (2015); *Thinking, Feeling, Head, Heart* at the New Church Museum, Cape Town (2015); *The Evolution of Art 1830-2140*, Kuckei + Kuckei, Berlin (2013); *The Global Contemporary: Art worlds after 1989*, ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany (2011); *Ampersand*, Daimler Contemporary, Berlin (2010); and *ZA: Young art from South Africa*, Palazzo Delle Papesse, Siena, Italy (2008).

In 2014, Blom won the third Jean-François Prat Prize for contemporary art in Paris. He is included in Phaidon's current anthology of contemporary painting, *Vitamin P3: New Perspectives in Painting* (2016). His second catalogue raisonné, *Paintings Volume II*, with an essay by Nicola Trezzi, was published by Stevenson in December 2016.

View the catalogue of 'Monochrome Paintings' [here](#).


Images courtesy of Zander Blom and [STEVENSON](#) gallery.

© Zander Blom

 Zander Blom

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“I WANT TO PAINT LIKE THERE’S NO TOMORROW” — IN CONVERSATION WITH ZANDER BLOM

BY LAYLA LEIMAN

“I have believed in the idea of perpetual change as a vehicle for innovation and discovery in painting for a long time,” South African artist Zander Blom wrote in the statement accompanying his 2016 solo exhibition at Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town. For over a decade, he had been reflecting on the conceptual and material parameters of abstraction through experiments in non-figurative painting. But a change was in the offing. In his subsequent solo show, in 2018, the scribbles, doodles and sketchy creature-figures that occupied his drawings now found their way onto his canvases, heralding a new phase in his painting that is still unfolding.

Zander’s current work features fantastic beasts, scrawls and riffs on famous art works from the European canon. Working in oil pastels and oil paint on irregular pieces of loose canvas which are then collaged onto larger stretched canvases, these works, playful and irreverent in tone, continue his deep fascination with the language of mark-making and material.

For his most recent solo exhibition earlier this year, Zander wrote: “there has only ever been one constant, one permanent [focus]: an endless infatuation and frustration with painting and mark-making—a stubborn, impatient desire to will paint into a compelling composition or expression of some sort.” While the style or direction of his work may change, Zander’s commitment to art and the life of an artist never wavers. Working incessantly and prolifically, his art reflects his deep fascination with material, art history, and process.

Zander’s start in the art world was as part of a three-piece collective wryly named Avant Car Guard who created satirical mock-art poking fun at South African art history and institutions. Around the same time, in his independent practice, he was engaged in photographing and documenting the process of creating elaborate installations. Following this he deep-dived into abstract painting following an ever-tightening set of compositional rules and guidelines. Zander’s work has been exhibited widely in South Africa and Europe. In 2014 he was the recipient of the Jean-François Prat Prize for contemporary art in Paris, and is included in Phaidon’s latest anthology of contemporary painting, Vitamin P3: New Perspectives in Painting (2016).



AMM: Hi Zander! In an interview in the book *9 More Weeks* you say that “The only thing I know for sure is that I want to be an artist and make paintings.” How has your understanding of yourself as an artist changed over the years and where is it at now?

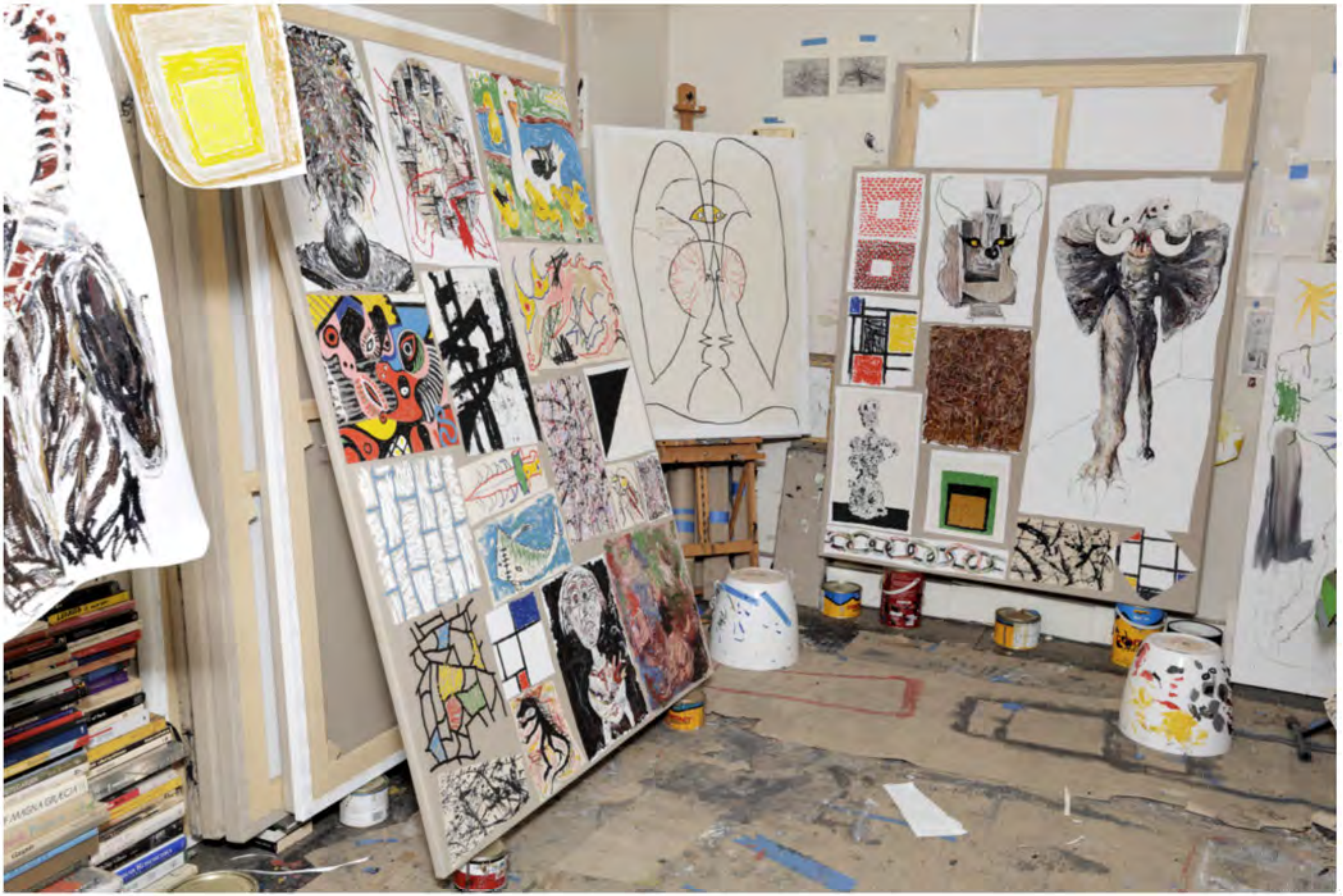
ZB: I think that, for me, being an artist ultimately has to do with freedom and purpose. It’s about finding a way to be free both in a practical everyday sense and in what you pursue intellectually—to be able to make and think and live with the fewest constraints from society. Basically it’s about being able to do your own thing, whatever that might be.

So what is my own thing? I’ve had a longstanding interest in art history, particularly painting and modernism. I like working with drawing, photography, collage, video, but painting has always been at the top of the hierarchy for me. To be a painter, and to live the life of a painter, has been a dream since I was very young. What that dream entails, in practical and intellectual terms, is: I get to choose what I look at and think about. I choose what I make and the hours I work. I work from home and get to be by myself in a studio all day, to work with my hands, to experiment endlessly, and to take part in a visual conversation that has been going on for a very long time. But the dream is also caught up in the desire to do something of value with my life, and to find some kind of meaning and purpose that goes beyond just surviving.

Perhaps it also has to do with an imagined sense of belonging. In art I’ve found a place where I feel at home, a place of refuge. This is a total projection, of course, but that doesn’t make it any less real for me. I don’t know if I understood this when I was younger. But I read somewhere that we are way too critical of our younger selves—looking back we tend to judge very harshly, thinking that our current selves have a much better grip on things, that we’ve made progress. I’m probably more similar to my 18-year-old self than I would like to admit.

AMM: What is your earliest art-related memory?

ZB: My childhood is full of art-related memories. I’ve been lucky in that art was a big part of my mother’s life. She created a kind of cocoon of art and craft that I grew up inside. My memories range from making pottery and jewelry, and painting murals on the walls of our house with my siblings, to extra art classes and visiting museums. There are some images from art books that feel like they’ve been burnt into my retinas because I spent so much of my childhood looking at them. In a way what I do today is merely a continuation of the cocoon that my mother created for her children and herself.



AMM: A few years ago your work changed focus significantly. What influenced this shift and what ideas are you currently exploring in your work?

ZB: The most drastic change is the shift from abstraction into figuration. This change felt massive at the time, but now it feels like just another small and inevitable step towards the artist I want to become. I had been working exclusively with abstraction for such a long time that I exhausted my infatuation with it. I've also started bringing more humour into the mix—something that I tended to reserve for side/group projects. At the moment I want to paint like there is no tomorrow, like I have nothing to lose. Still, I find it challenging to work in a mode where everything is permitted, because I can't completely escape my own rules. I can be pretty stiff and conservative when it comes to painting, and there are many things I haven't explored yet. I'm slowly making inroads and loosening up, but what I'm really trying to do is push myself and all my bullshit rules and mental limitations off a cliff.

AMM: Your recent show at Stevenson continues your experiments with a pictorial language, which you describe as “frenzied figuration”. What limitations and possibilities does this figurative language offer you?

ZB: There's a kind of freedom in abstraction. You don't have to engage with the visible world, you don't have to tie yourself up with real objects or subjects. With figuration you are plunged back into the world of people and things. I've been enjoying the change, reconnecting with figuration, probably because I stepped away from it for so long.

AMM: We first saw these figurative elements appear in your work in mixed-media drawings. How did you develop and translate these scribble and loose marks into your painting idiom?

ZB: It started with these rough and irreverent drawings I was doing on reproductions of Mondrian paintings in the pages of books. I really liked the quality of the lines I was getting with grease pencils (Sharpie peel-off china markers) on glossy paper. I also thought that there was room to expand the language of scribbles and monsters into something more complex. I wanted to move this language onto canvas and find a way to get the same quality of line and texture on a bigger scale. Then it was a case of experimenting with different mediums and techniques until I found the right tools for the job. I currently use oil sticks and big oil pastels predominantly. Sometimes I'll scrape oil paint onto a canvas roughly with a palette knife, but there is no detailed palette knife or brush work. In general I'm trying to stay away from mediums and techniques that will allow the perfectionist in me to come alive—I need my pedantic OCD self to stay dormant in order for these works to succeed.

AMM: What role does colour play in your work? How do you work with it?

ZB: My colour palette isn't very sophisticated. I tend to grab oil sticks impulsively—almost randomly—and just make marks on canvas. I've never been too academic about colour. It's been either black and white or anything goes. I only seem to have two speeds. That said, the oil sticks that I've been using come in quite a limited colour range. For example, if I want to use blue I only have a couple of different blues to choose from. So it's also a case of having to make it work within the limits of what's available.



Zander Blom, Man with a Straw Hat and Ice Cream, oil on linen, 82 x 82 cm

AMM: Your work has always been positioned in relation to art history. In your current paintings monster-beasts are mashed up with reproductions and riffs on modern art classics – Picasso, Mondrian, Pollock. How do these seemingly disparate elements fit together?

ZB: A surprising aspect of the current work is that the combination of all these elements in a single painting makes it into a kind of self-portrait. The juxtaposition of these various images ends up saying quite a lot more as a whole than I anticipated. I also think the paintings are generous in that they give the eye so much to look at. Most people will recognise the art history references because they are so universally known, and this creates a sense of familiarity. These paintings often look like a teenager's end-of-year art presentation, and I like that too. In general there is a weirdly celebratory, joyful quality to these works.

Art history has been a kind of hook for me to hang things on. Because it has been such a big part of my life, it feels like home. Who am I without these references that I spent so many years looking at? My identity is all caught up in it, probably because I didn't want to hang my identity on anything else that was around me when I grew up. I still don't know where to place myself, or how to really deal with my context in any other way. What is there in this world that is worth attaching yourself to, other than art? I know this isn't a remotely logical argument, and sometimes I'm not sure if I'm exploring art history or hiding inside it, but I know I have to throw the net wider and dig deeper. The monster-beasts are at least a start in that direction.



Zander Blom, Composition with Stuff, oil on linen, 240 x 170 cm

AMM: There's a playfulness in your current work which was absent in your abstract paintings. The paintings look like you're having fun making them. Is this the case?

ZB: I've been thinking a lot about the balance between being absolutely free and making the best work that you can possibly make, being the best artist you can be. Often these two things don't align and you find yourself doing tedious work to achieve some technique or effect in order to make a better painting. This is not ideal, but it's also no use having a great time in the studio that delivers mediocre results. Sometimes you have to refuse to do things that are painful or boring in order to keep your sanity, and other times you have to bite the bullet and sacrifice fun in service of the work. But you have to keep a healthy balance because if you want to be an artist in the long run you can't afford to lose your love for the job.

For sure, I'm having fun making these new works, but it took a lot of frustration and failed attempts before I worked out all the kinks concerning technique and visual reference material. It's flowing very nicely right now, and that feeling of breaking new ground can carry one very far—as it did when I was doing pure abstraction. But it is still early days for this vernacular, and it's going to be interesting to see how long it will go in this direction before another big break becomes necessary.

AMM: What is the appeal for you in scribbles and seemingly naïve mark-making?

ZB: Mark-making is its own kind of language. You can make happy, sad, angry, lighthearted or demented marks; you can make virtuosic, pompous or amateurish marks. You can make stingy or generous marks. There is so much you can say with the quality and shape of a line or mark. It's like acting in the way that it allows you to play different characters. Sometimes I scribble in a very deliberate way because it signifies something specific in a composition, but other times I scribble just because I don't know what else to do. A lot of the time I don't know what a painting or drawing is going to be—I just start by making marks randomly out of frustration or excitement and hope that something interesting will happen.



Zander Blom, Duck Buffet, oil on linen, 198 x 150cm

AMM: Process has been a central aspect of your work over the years. Can you tell us more about this, and also how your approach has changed in more recent work?

ZB: In the early 2000s, when I was working on a project called The Drain of Progress, I realized that the process and the motivation behind the handmade objects I was making was very often way more interesting than the objects themselves. So I made the documentation of the process the primary focus of the project. This quickly led to a practice of making more ephemeral installations in my bedroom which I photographed and then dismantled. That way of working ran its course and after another two projects like it (The Travels of Bad and The Black Hole Universe), I became less interested in documentation and process and more interested in making handmade objects. I still document the evolution of the studio but it isn't at the forefront of what I show on exhibitions these days. It has become more of a secondary narrative, and in a sense the studio isn't performing for the camera anymore.

Perhaps I realised that the focus on process was stopping me from becoming a painter. I was going down a road of conceptual photography that relied heavily on explanatory texts and titles. So I pulled my focus back to painting, and working towards putting everything of importance into the final handmade object. This is of course impossible, because so much of how we look at a painting or any kind of art object is informed by the history and information around it, but I wanted to try to make things that had a bit more of a chance at standing on their own. Not to mention how satisfying it was to put the camera down and focus on the materiality of paint and canvas, after years of looking at a computer screen grading images in Photoshop, and tearing my hair out trying to choose the best shot out of 700 images that all looked pretty much the same.

AMM: What does a typical day in studio for you look like?

ZB: I wake up, make coffee, come sit in the studio. Have a smoke, check email, look at my diary. The diary is full of lists of things to do. I cross out some, add new ones, and then loiter about for a while, walking in circles. Eventually I start doing whatever needs to be done: drawing, painting, research, edit a video, master some tracks for a side project, do my tax stuff, organise the studio, clean working utensils, order stuff from the hardware store, etc. More coffee at some point, then a snack, then perhaps I'll look at an artist interview online or catch up on exhibitions around the world on Vernissage TV. Then back to work, maybe a podcast is playing in the background. Hours go by, and at some point it's dinner time. My wife Dominique and I make dinner together, and then watch a bit of Netflix. Then it's back to work for a couple of hours, more coffee, get distracted, watch some more YouTube videos, read artist interviews and look at random stuff on the internet, more coffee, work a bit more, get tired, pour a night cap or two, pass out on the couch, wake up two hours later, crawl into bed.

AMM: You seem to work prolifically. What are your daily rituals that feed you creatively?

ZB: I feel like I can't not be prolific because I have to work through things in reality, not just in my head; I end up making a lot of physical objects as a result. The process of making does tend to feed itself, because it's like pulling a string: one thing leads to the next and the next and the next. But making isn't everything. I look at a lot of art—it's pretty much all I look at. I have many bookmarks of art websites and YouTube channels that I regularly check, and I look at stuff in art books. I love buying books—I have piles and piles of them. I make pilgrimages to bookshops every once in a while and usually return with a box or two. Books feed me in a way that is different from the internet, maybe because they hang around, they are here in the room, physical matter, not just immediately forgotten like so much stuff you see online. They are like the bricks that I build my house with.

AMM: What is The Bad Reviews all about?

ZB: The Bad Reviews is a collaboration between myself and art critic Sean O'Toole. Together we make music, music videos and various art objects. Sean is quite the music junkie, and I have dabbled in music throughout my career. We got together through this shared interest. While Sean had never made any music, he was curious enough to let me drag him into the studio and start recording random improvisations. After a couple of sessions like this it just snowballed into a full-on multimedia art project. Sean has a wealth of content and a beautiful weirdness inside him that just bubbles up to the surface when you put him in front of a microphone. It's been amazing for me to try and find the best musical forms/styles to complement what comes out of him. While he gets into his anecdotes and rants I'm on a synthesizer making the music, so we both react to each other in the moment and that's how we make songs. Our final recordings are chopped out of these long sessions. The whole thing is very amateurish of course, and I think that's what makes it special—it has a very Dada punk vibe.

Collaborations breathe new life into my usually solitary world. I try to make a point of getting involved in collaborative projects from time to time because it is an excuse for me to hang out with other people and get out of my own head. I would be a very different artist had it not been for all the things I learnt from all the people I've collaborated with over the years.

AMM: What are you reading, watching, listening to right now?

ZB: I speed read through a lot of stuff on the internet, as we all do. I just read about two-thirds of a review of Matthew Barney's new show on Artforum today, and I generally check out what Jerry Saltz has to say, but I haven't read a book from cover to cover in quite a while. I've just been too distracted. My literature of choice is mostly artist biographies and interviews. The last stuff I gave a proper read was a bunch of Hans-Ulrich Obrist interview books; a short book of Duchamp interviews by Calvin Tomkins; Portraits: John Berger on Artists—this is a fantastic read; and Gauguin's Ramblings of a Wannabe Painter—also a great and often hilarious read. I'm currently trying to get into the Henri Cartier-Bresson: Interviews and Conversations book as well as the biography of him by Pierre Assouline, but I keep dropping the ball. I've also started Arthur C. Danto's dramatically titled After the End of Art, and a book called The Books that Shaped Art History, but I don't think I've gotten further than 10 pages in with either. I'm a big sucker for the DVD sections in museum gift shops, and the YouTube channels of the big art institutions like Tate. MoMA has all these videos about art restoration on their channel that I really enjoy. I've got bookmarks for gallery websites and some Instagram feeds that I regularly check out, although I'm not on any social media myself. There is also this guy James Kalm's YouTube channel—he films openings around New York with running commentary; it's casual but informative, I find them pretty enjoyable. And I love Vernissage TV—they film important exhibitions around the world in a very professional and neutral/slick way. I recommend checking out their channel for anyone who doesn't have access to the real thing—sometimes these are enjoyable to watch purely as sociological documents of the art world and the people who show up for it at this moment in time. I listen to a bunch of different podcasts, probably the usual suspects, and for music I tend to download whatever gets a decent Pitchfork rating.

AMM: Lastly, do you have any interesting projects coming up? What's next for you?

ZB: I've had a pretty busy schedule for the last six or eight months, and things are just starting to slow down now. I'm going to try and extend this peace in the studio for as long as I can, read a book or two from cover to cover, and go into a deep dive of research and experimentation for the next batch of paintings.

Find out more about the artist: www.zanderblom.com (<http://zanderblom.com/>)

Interview by Layla Leiman for ArtMaze Magazine.

BY LAYLA LEIMAN

AUTHOR

I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in the middle of the eighties. My interest in art and creative practice was nurtured from early on through my education at a Waldorf school. I studied Journalism and English Literature and received my BA Hon. (English Literature) in 2009. I began my career in advertising, and in 2013 joined a fledgling team running a creative showcase blog. This grew into the largest arts and culture online publication in South Africa and in 2015 I took over as editor, leading a team of six other writers and refocusing the publication in a more reflective and critical strategic direction. The following year I attempted a hiatus from writing to explore career opportunities within the art industry. I received a curatorial mentorship award and in mid-2017 joined an art auction house as a cataloguer. At the same time new editorial relationships developed, one of which was with ArtMaze Mag. In addition to contributing regularly to AMM, I co-run a micro content production agency focusing on brands in the design and lifestyle industries and am head of communication at Pro Helvetia Johannesburg, the liaison office for the Swiss Arts Council in South Africa.

The New York Times

Frieze and Felix Turn Heads in Los Angeles

Memorable moments from a weekend of new fairs where art trumps celebrity-watching.



At the mock New York streetscape at the Paramount Studios backlot, commissions by artists included Hannah Greely's "High and Dry" painted clothesline (2019). Graham Walzer for The New York Times

Text by [Jori Finkel](#) | Photographs by [Graham Walzer](#)

Feb. 19, 2019

Galleries participating in art fairs tend to judge their success by the numbers — not only profits from their sales but also how many new collectors they met who stay in touch. But for visitors, what matters most is less quantifiable: Was the fair experience memorable? And how was the art?

For many viewers reached by a reporter and photographer for The New York Times, the inaugural edition of Frieze Los Angeles and the upstart Felix LA art fair last weekend succeeded on those fronts, dispelling a longstanding notion of the city as a graveyard for art fairs and underscoring its vitality as an art center.

Frieze, set at Paramount Studios, commissioned artworks for the five-acre New York streetscape on the backlot and they helped to give the fair a different vibe, from Hannah Greely's paintings of laundry on a clotheslines to Sarah Cain's wall-to-window takeover of a classic brownstone apartment, including a brilliant stained-glass window.

In the big tent housing 70 gallery booths there were many discoveries to be made. They ranged from a stridently colored, puzzle-like painting of female factory workers by the little-known Sacramento artist Irving Marcus (age 89) at Parker Gallery to a reconstruction of Judy Chicago's important 1965 "Zig Zag" sculpture at Jeffrey Deitch.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, the artistic director of Serpentine Galleries in London, who typically leads two to three trips a year for patrons, called his trip "one of the most exciting we've ever had." He praised the "village-like experience of the Paramount lot," the fair's manageable size (less than half that of Frieze New York) and the various satellite fairs and pop-up events around it.

Komal Shah, a Bay Area collector and trustee at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, praised the strong showing of women artists across Frieze and singled out as a Felix standout the room of the Chicago gallerist Kavi Gupta, which featured one wall of paintings by AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) — an artist collective that helped define the vision of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 70s.

THE T LIST: A weekly roundup of what the editors of T Magazine are noticing and coveting right now.

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“I did hear a couple of dealers at Frieze lamenting that the L.A. crowd seemed to be more conservative than New York — more interested in paintings than conceptual work,” she said. “But I thought the dealers brought great works. And I loved the energy.”

Howard Rachofsky, the Dallas collector, agreed. “I don’t ever remember Frieze New York actually being fun — and this was,” he said. “My sense is this will be the first of many Frieze fairs out here.” Tickets had quickly sold out, with the final tally of attendance at 30,000. Bettina Korek, the Frieze L.A. director, confirmed the London-based group would return in 2020.

Dean Valentine, the co-founder of Felix, said that given the crowds and positive feedback, he was “excited to start the process” of planning for the future.

Here are some highlights from the fairs’ debut editions.



Seventy galleries, under the Frieze tent designed by Kulapat Yantrasast, included those from Los Angeles, London, New York, Seoul, Mexico City and Paris, among other cities. Graham Walzer for The New York Times



A collaboration between Zander Blom and Sean O'Toole at the Stevenson gallery during Felix. Graham Walzer for The New York Times



A couple commuting between floors of the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel, looking for art openings in rooms during Felix. Graham Walzer for The New York Times

HYPERALLERGIC

[Art](#)

Placing Art in Hotel Rooms Can Yield Genuinely Surprising Results

At the inaugural Felix Art Fair in Los Angeles, visitors can weave in and out of the poolside rooms with relative ease, though expect the usual hustle-and-bustle feel of art commerce in action.



by Jennifer Remenchik
February 15, 2019



Dan Finsel and Kaari Upson presented by Michael Benevento (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

LOS ANGELES — After a morning of uncharacteristically torrential rains, **Felix**, the debut art fair of mega-collector Dean Valentine, opened in the historic Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel to much fanfare and generous attendance. The fair consists of two main sections with special projects interspersed throughout the building. The first, and far more accessible section, the Cabanas, hosts everything from a brightly colored interactive musical booth by Esther Pearl Watson and Mark Todd at Susanne Vielmetter to a more serene selection of Roger White paintings laid out lovingly on a hotel bed at Grice Bench. Fair-goers can weave in and out of the ground-floor poolside rooms with relative ease, though expect the usual hustle-and-bustle feel of art commerce in action.

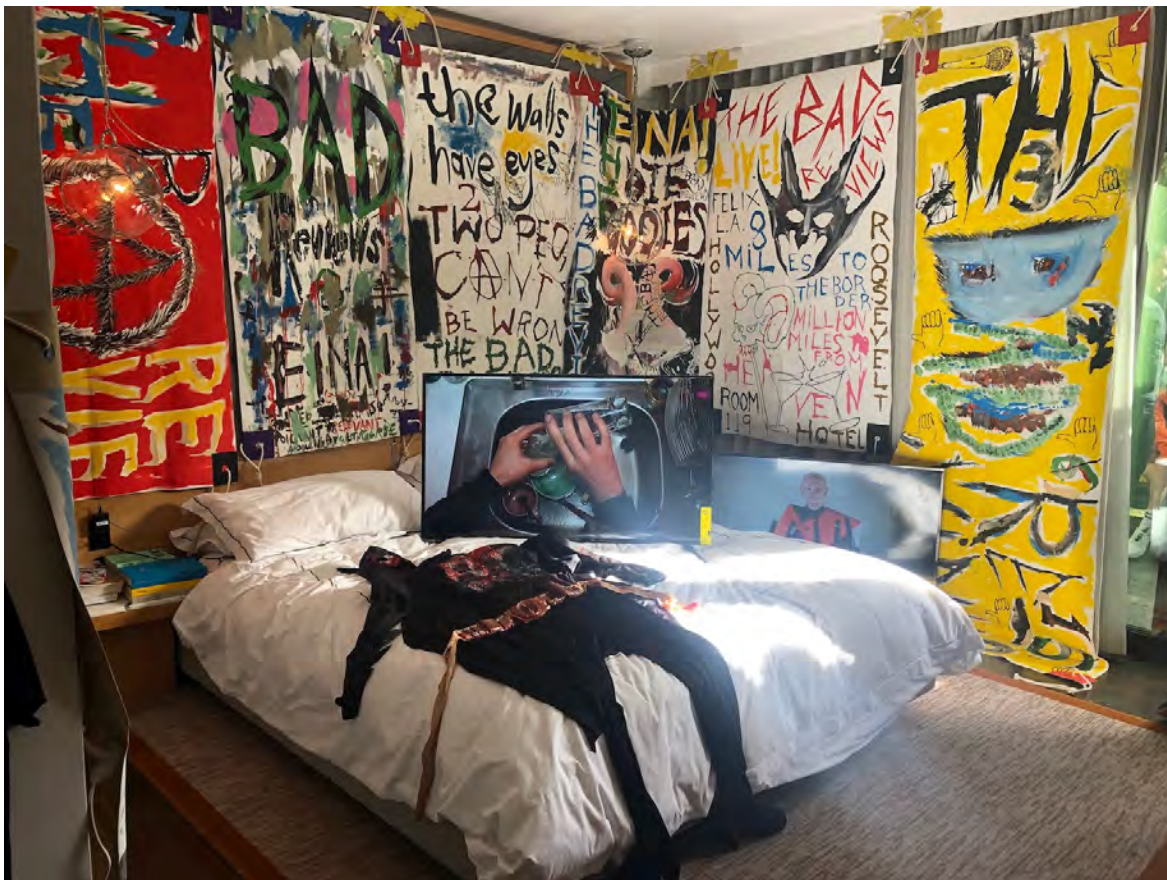


Esther Pearl Watson and Mark Todd at Susanne Vielmetter



Roger White on a hotel bed at Grice Bench

Valentine has said he wanted to eliminate this general commercial feel of art fairs, and, to a certain extent, he did. The hotel rooms do give the possibility of finding something genuinely unexpected in a way temporary white walls never again will, including one moment of sheer delight I had spotting a beautifully strange sculpture of stacked human feet by Mella Jaarsma, placed in front of a floor-length bathroom mirror at Baik + Khneysser. However, there is no way to make concerned or disappointed-looking gallerists (on their cell phones or staring curmudgeonly off into space, respectively) look like anything other than evidence of “transactions” or lack thereof.



Zander Blom at Stevenson



Vito Acconci at Kenny Schachter



Al Freeman at 56 Henry

A major hiccup in fair operations had to do with the one segment of government that seems to run with astounding efficiency: the Fire Marshal had the entire second section of the fair, located on the 11th floor, on a veritable lockdown. What this meant, practically speaking, was that the line for the elevator was almost out the door and the rewards were mixed for those who chose to brave it. Once upstairs, the hotel rooms were sparsely attended by design and despite a humorously striking tangerine dog by Ilona Rich tucked away in a shower stall in the Kenny Schachter booth (it was a great day for bathroom art), most galleries chose not to utilize the hotel rooms in any particularly novel way, instead settling on safe, sellable artworks and presentations — a missed opportunity. That being said, *The 13th Floor*, an exhibition curated by Andrew Berardini and presented by the French Committee of Art Galleries, is a must-see. Between the view, the takeaway newspaper essay that doubles up as an exhibition checklist, and the French film noir vibes of the work, the grand finale of the Felix fair makes it worth the trip up.

The Felix Art Fair continues at the Hollywood Roosevelt (7000 Hollywood Blvd, Los Angeles) through Sunday, February 17. You can check out our Concise Guide to Frieze Los Angeles Week [here](#).

Wallpaper*

ART | 3 MAR 2016 | BY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

Zander Blom explores 21st century modernism at Stevenson, Cape Town



For his sixth solo show at Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, artist Zander Blom showcases his unique expression of modernism. Pictured: *Untitled [1.777]*, 2016

Cape Town-based musician and artist Zander Blom is once again showing at Cape Town's Stevenson Gallery. A new show, simply entitled 'New Paintings', will be his sixth solo show with the gallery. For this exhibition, his most divulging, he 'followed the medium instead of trying to make it follow me'.

Known for his expression of modernism through the eyes of a young person living in a politically and socially interesting Johannesburg at the inception of the 21st century, Blom's new work is an extension of exactly that. 'I have believed in the idea of perpetual change as a vehicle for innovation and discovery in painting for a long time,' confesses Blom. 'Even though the overarching themes in my work have much remained the same over the last decade, my style and techniques have gone through many transformations.'

Blom characteristically creates modular forms in paint or printmaking that are then constructed and deconstructed whilst being documented at all stages. The documentation, in the form of photography, is mostly staged in his home. 'My current home studio is more or less the shape of a shoebox. One-third of the shoebox is the safe side, a painting-free zone with a couch, coffee table and two working tables. The other two-thirds is full of canvas and paint,' he says.

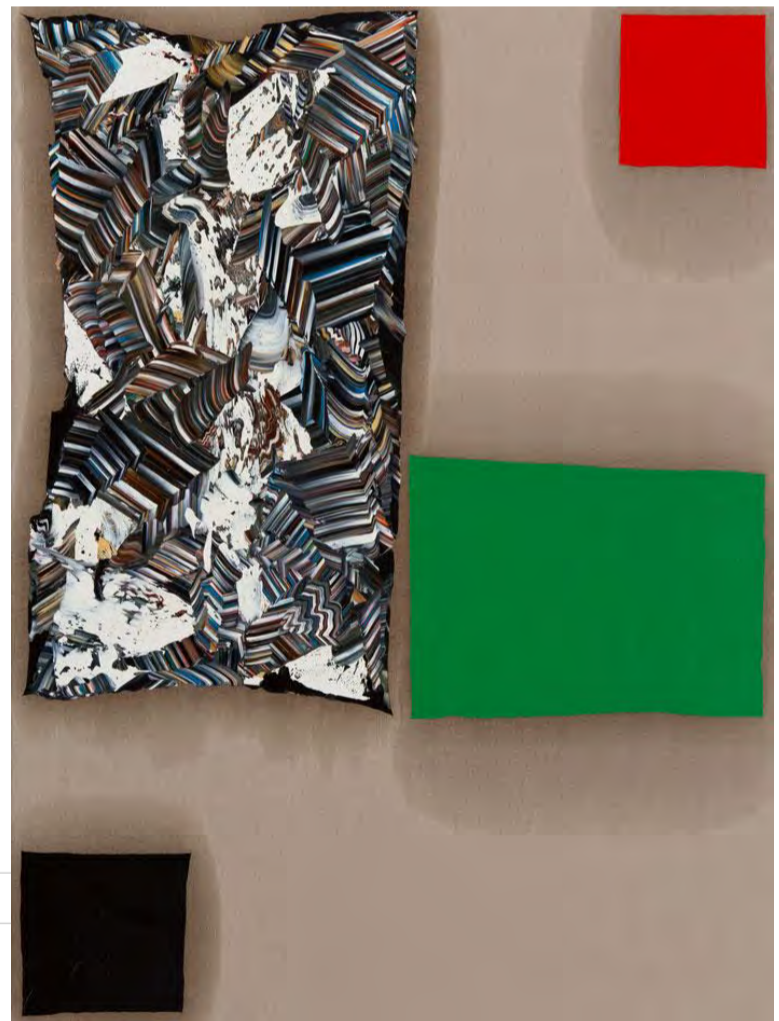
By his own declaration he decided early on in his career to be a 'productive, prolific and non-suicidal artist' following his own whims and impulses. His new expression collects this awareness and reveals some of his inner workings – including what he calls 'cabin fever' in his studio.



Despite the deceptively simple title 'New Paintings', Blom's new show is his most divulging yet. Pictured left: *Untitled [1.767], 2016*. Right: *Untitled [1.763] 2016*



Blom's art is a vehicle of perpetual change as a vehicle for innovation and discovery in painting for a long time.' Pictured: *Untitled [1.761], 2016*



By his own declaration, he decided early on in his career to be a 'productive, prolific and non-suicidal artist' that follows his own whims and impulses. Pictured: *Untitled [1.765], 2016*

Photography courtesy the artist and Stevenson Gallery

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VITAMIN

P3

NEW
PERSPECTIVES
IN PAINTING

PHAIDON

The paintings of South African artist Zander Blom exhibit a sculptural quality: large canvases filled with rectangles or odd shapes, each sitting autonomously, claiming their own space. These abstract forms are viscerally appealing, with crude colours buzzing amidst a repetitive fractal rhythm, a sense of expanding symmetry palpable among the shapes. Blom energizes his painting practice by employing new tools that enable him to try new techniques. Rarely using brushes, he relies heavily on palette knives and squeezes paint directly from the tube; he has developed homemade devices that mimic the shape of paint applied in this way and often mixes his own pigments. In other paintings, Blom uses modified syringes to draw solid lines of colour, intricately lining up one line after another with surgical precision. Elsewhere, palette knives with tiny teeth result in marks reminiscent of scallop shells, their contour lines dipping and diving. With a colour palette that ranges from dark tones – where blues, greys and whites are complemented by rusty oranges, browns and reds that weave like parallel lines on a life-support machine – to acidic juicy planes of bubble gum pink, canary yellow and apple green that work to energize the canvas, Blom's paintings feel schizophrenic – a vibrating vigour within boldly defined shapes. His forms cling to the bare linen canvas beneath, which is always a husky earthy tone. Into this material seeps the oil from the paint itself, creating a drop shadow that gives each shape a feeling of three-dimensionality and depth. They become plastic shapes that seem to have been moulded with speed and precision. Blom often works quickly and spontaneously and then waits for long periods of time for the paint to dry before smoothly and tightly packing on the next layer of detail. Paint is pulled and swept across the surface plane.

The artist cites as influences the likes of Vincent van Gogh (1853–90) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), but perhaps most significantly, Francis Bacon (1909–92), who strongly informs Blom's approach to the canvas. Bacon's figures, often underpinned by a sense of mutation and anxiety, are contained within confined or defined spaces. Blom's own shapes fix his images within a sense of delineated space, in homage to Bacon's interiors. In other works where he breaks up forms into bold shapes of pure colour, we might notice references to Henri Matisse's (1869–1954) potent and bright paper cut-outs which the artist turned to towards the end of his life.

Blom approaches his canvases as a landscape of the imagination, an emotional space in which to become immersed. Describing his practice, he has said that: 'When I started painting the gap between what I wanted to make and what I was able to make was massive. In the last three years it seems like the gap has shrunk significantly, while at the same time the work has developed into something that I could never have imagined from the outset. I tend to favour an experimental practice instead of simply rendering clearly formed ideas onto canvas ... So in a way I've followed the medium instead of trying to make it follow me ... I generally try to hang back and not intervene too much.'

– Louisa Elderton

ZANDER BLOM Born 1982, Pretoria, South Africa. Lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. Selected Solo Exhibitions: 2015 – 'New Work', Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf; 'January', Mixed Greens, New York; 2014 – 'New Paintings', Stevenson, Cape Town; 2013 – 'New Paintings', Stevenson, Johannesburg; 2012 – 'Zander Blom: Place and Space', Trois Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia; 2010 – 'The Black Hole Universe: Mapping the Void', 5x6x9, Berlin; 'Paintings. Drawings. Photos.', Stevenson, Cape Town. Selected Group Exhibitions: 2015 – 'Material Matters: New Art from Africa', Institute of Contemporary Art Indian Ocean, Port Louis, Mauritius; 2014 – 'Thinking, Feeling, Head, Heart', The New Church Museum, Cape Town; 2013 – 'The Evolution of Art 1830-2140', Kuckei + Kuckei, Berlin; 2011 – 'The Global Contemporary: Art worlds after 1989', ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; 2010 – 'Ampersand', Daimler Contemporary, Berlin. Selected Bibliography: 2016 – Daniel Scheffler, 'Zander Blom explores 21st century modernism at Stevenson, Cape Town', *Wallpaper*, Mar; 2014 – Alexander Matthews, 'Rorschach taste', *The Sunday Times*, Sep; 2012 – Leigh-Anne Neihaus, 'Making The Invisible Visible', *Seeing-eye*, Jun.



1.



2.

1. Untitled [1.733], 2015
Oil on linen
210 × 150 cm / 82 5/8 × 59 in
2. Untitled [1.757], 2015
Oil on linen
198 × 140 cm / 78 × 55 1/2 in
3. Untitled [1.752], 2015
Oil on linen
250 × 198 cm / 98 3/8 × 78 in



ETEL ADNAN
AHMED ALSOUDANI
MICHAEL ARMITAGE
LUCAS ARRUDA
MATH BASS
SADIE BENNING
KATHERINE BERNHARDT
MCARTHUR BINION
ZANDER BLOM
DANIEL BOYD
JOE BRADLEY
SASCHA BRAUNIG
SARAH CAIN
JUAN JOSÉ CAMBRE
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MARIETA CHIRULESCU
LEIDY CHURCHMAN
MATT CONNORS
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ELIZABETH NEEL
BLESSING NGOBENI
ALIZA NISENBAUM
SERGE ALAIN NITEGEKA
MAIREAD O'HEOCHA
ÉDER OLIVEIRA
ALEX OLSON

ANNA OSTOYA
BRUNO PACHECO
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YELENA POPOVA
NARBI PRICE
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MARY RAMSDEN
RAÚL RECIO
K.P. REJI
MARINA RHEINGANT
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JULIA ROMMEL
MICHAEL SIMPSON
AVERY SINGER
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RODEL TAPAYA
HENRY TAYLOR
TOREY THORNTON
CARAGH THURING
RAFAEL VEGA
CAROLINE WALKER
MARY WEATHERFOR
STANLEY WHITNEY
JACK WHITTEN
MICHAEL WILLIAMS
METTE WINCKELMAN
ROSE WYLIE
XU QU
YU HONG
YUAN YUAN

PHAI

ARTTHROB_



Dead Men, New Paintings:



Zander Blom, *Untitled [1.766]*, 2016, Oil on linen, 240 x 160cm

Zander Blom's 'New Paintings'

A review by **Felix Kawitzky** on the 21st of March 2016. This should take you 4 minutes to read.

STEVENSON, Cape Town
03.03.2016 – 09.04.2016

I am wandering the exhibition space – the pristine white walls with paintings hung *just so*, artfully tilted or set right with a spirit level – when a sudden chill runs down my spine. For a moment my body goes cold, and then the feeling passes. This is how I know there are ghosts afoot.

Using Zander Blom as a mortal vessel, the spirits of Mondrian and Picasso have risen from the grave to haunt the walls of the Stevenson. These unruly poltergeists are playing tug of war. They have fought over the artist's hand, using it to scribble profanities and childish doodles over each other's printed faces.

Blom: you may believe that you are unpacking and engaging with the forms and traditions of abstraction, and the history of Modern Art, but actually I think you might be a spirit medium. You have struggled with these conflicting forces – chaos and order, breadth and depth – for so long (or so your artist statement says), and they have had a tremendous effect on your work. The bizarre outcome here is that it turns out Michael Stevenson simultaneously represents Picasso and Mondrian in 2016.

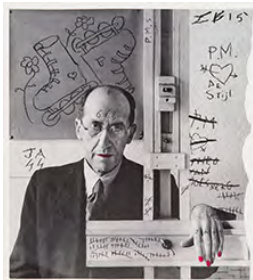
Certainly, Blom must have written his sprawling artist statement while possessed by the spirits of some Abstract Expressionists with unfinished business. To this day, the project of Modernism remains famously unresolved, and (perhaps spookiest of all) continues to haunt our art history books, primary and tertiary education systems, and



galleries.

This seductive incompleteness is also the hold it keeps on the living world – an eternal recurrence in the guise of *postmodern deconstruction* or *irreverent play*. These are the dangerous incantations which bring it back to life. What will you do with these restless souls, now you have conjured them? Their symbols and their power breeze through the exhibition, scoff at Blom's iterations, his critical form (his *critique of form*). This is not to say that the master narratives of Modernism should never be tampered with, only that masters are as masters do – they threaten to take control, and they have taken control here.

And so, locked in an unending struggle, the two Modernist heavyweights wrestle bitterly over the canvasses, blocks of pure pigment interrupted and distorted by the spiteful, jagged edges of irregular shapes and inconsistent colours – a grudge match taking place inside their shared human host. The paintings look uncomfortable; petulant men sleeping head to toe in a single bed (or grave). Their untreated canvasses seep with the greasy ectoplasm shed in these grisly skirmishes. These are the dead, rotting, reflexive, romantic carcasses of the avant garde, doomed to repeat the same mistakes. No wonder Blom is tired.



Zander Blom, *Modern Painting: Piet Mondrian* [Detail]. 2015-6. Mixed media on paper

The grand battles that play out in the paintings manifest in miniature in the series of drawings and prints that constitute the rest of the exhibition. This is a space for some (self?) reflection and some humour. The cartoonish drawings, scrawled over pages from monographs and Helen Gardner-equivalents and photocopies of serious Mondrian paintings, go some way towards a demystification of the 20th century master narratives. At a second glance though, see the malevolent spirit of Picasso seizing Blom's hand and taunting Mondrian the Stiff (*stop hitting yourself, stop hitting yourself, etc*). While the idea here seems to be to destabilise and delegitimise, the drawings remain stubbornly self-satisfied, smug, still wrought with

comfort and confidence. A portrait of Piet has been given make-up and nail polish, mocked and rendered impotent (read: feminised) by Pablo's virility. The spectre of machismo still looms large, has not quite been exorcised from the space, or the artist. The forces inside Zander Blom pull him into a perpetual Post Modern post mortem.

There are moments in this particular series of works where he seems to come back to himself. In one drawing, the title page of *Farewell to Pure Abstraction* has the image of a tombstone scribbled onto it, two hands breaking through the burial mound. In another, an alien stands next to a textbook Mondrian painting, the number 666 written across its forehead. Who has drawn this alien, this grave? I believe it to be Blom himself, grasping the rare moments his governing spirits are at rest. These are the text book doodles of a schoolboy, done covertly as their teachers turn away.

But without the right Medium, a ghost comes back no matter how many times you try to kill it. The ominous, grave-shaped paintings, stripped of their advertised playfulness and spontaneity, look on undisturbed – hanging in the eerie, ringing silence of the largest of Stevenson's rooms.

Sitting on a conveniently placed, meditative bench, the lonely Rothko looks on, and laments.



[Read more about Zander Blom](#)

{ ART }

Rorschach taste

He can afford more than pilchards now, but painter Zander Blom is still taking risks, writes **Alexander Matthews**

ZANDER Blom crouches down and picks up a blob of paint that has become dislodged from a canvas. He holds onto it as he walks, slowly inspecting the paintings lining the bowels of Stevenson gallery in Cape Town. Many of his beige canvases are taller than our heads; each is painted differently — there are smoothly smeared melting geometrics, thickly layered oceans of brown and purple, fat, plasticky beads.

When he's satisfied that they've survived the trip from Joburg relatively unscathed, we dash through rain to The Kitchen, a café across from the gallery. It's a week before the launch of New Paintings, his fifth solo show to appear at Stevenson. Tired of producing work that was becoming increasingly delicate and detailed, these paintings are "bolder, rougher", he says. "I wanted to make more hardcore, weird, punk, childlike, freer stuff."

Painted with palette knives and squeezed from tubes and syringes, Blom's abstract marks offer a visceral immersion in his emotional and imaginative landscape. He compares his work to a colourful Rorschach test. "There's no story," he says. "It keeps floating around, being open to interpretation. It is perpetually activating your imagination."

Blom, 32, grew up in Pretoria. At high school,

he loved painting, often working till three in the morning on his artworks. After matriculating, he began studying information design at the University of Pretoria, and was soon failing his theory subjects because he was too busy organising group art shows with his friends, doing printmaking and "a lot of really lame videos" — the medium, he then believed, "serious artists" practised.

While on internships at advertising agencies, he met art directors who made art on the

side. "I realised if I kept on this trajectory, I was always going to be an artist in my spare time, and it's either everything or nothing," he says. He decided he would "rather be a poor artist than a comfortable, unhappy designer".

And so, at the end of his second year, he dropped out, moving to Joburg to become a full-time artist. His parents were unhappy with his decision but he managed to convince them to help him cover the rent of a

the past. Abstraction offered an escape from SA's politics, identity and history.

Of course, abstraction has a vast history of its own, and engaging with this has been unavoidable. Blom's favourite modernists — Picasso, Francis Bacon, Matisse — have influenced his practice. But instead of feeling burdened by this tradition, he sees their work and the devices they used as a starting point he can "plunder" from to create new work, couched in a language of his own.



Painting '1.632 Untitled'. Top, Zander Blom

room in a friend's house in Brixton. "I was completely broke," he recalls. To make ends meet, he ate a lot of pilchards and took on some freelance illustrating work.

Initially, the art he made was mostly ink drawings on paper because that was all he could afford. He then created installations in his room, photographing them — exhibitions were too expensive. And he started painting. He had always wanted to work with oils, though it took several years before he was confident enough to share his work. The better he got, the more tired he became of sitting in front of a computer editing photos. "If you're a photographer, you spend 90% of your time immersed in moments that are gone. I think it's hard to live in the present. With painting, you're perpetually in the present. If it works, it works. If you can't get it to work, you throw it out and you start something new." It's a process of "capture rather than manufacture".

Blom's work soon became abstract. He wanted to avoid "resistance art" — "that struggle shit" — as he felt it belonged to

Joburg's dry, drab winters have inspired the ochres and browns he's been using, while the city's tension and roughness have also filtered into his work.

"We're quite paranoid living in Brixton, and I think the paranoia gets into my body somehow and affects my art," he says. He and his wife, Dominique, will soon be moving to Cape Town for a change of scenery. "I just hope I don't move here and start making pretty pictures," he grins.

In March this year, Blom won the Jean-François Prat, a €20 000 international prize for young painters. Having never won an award before, Blom is happy but a little bit surprised that "a bunch of people in Europe want to give some white kid in Africa money for making paintings". Aside from the obvious financial fillip, it's hard to see it having much of an impact on his art, however, when he's driven by something else entirely. "The end goal is to just make more and more exciting work," he says. **LS**

• New Paintings is on at Stevenson Cape Town until October 4. stevenson.info

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cape reviews

Kant's Blom and Wallpaper

Zander Blom at STEVENSON in Cape Town

By M Blackman

28 August - 04 October. 0 Comment(s)



Zander Blom

Modern Painting 3 (Floor Pieces), 2014. Mixed media Dimensions variable.

I have written on several occasions of my [concerns](#) about the current swathe of abstract painting that has filled our galleries in the last three years. There are at this particular moment three (four if you count the residency of Jan-Henri Booyens at the AVA) such exhibitions being held: Zander Blom, Kerry Chaloner and Chris van Eeden/Emma Nourse. And I – and here I really do speak for myself – am confused.

There is a time when critics must accept that just because something is not to their liking – or even not within their understanding - that there could very well be value in work if there is sustained critical approval of it coming from other notable quarters. One of the major factors in addressing the work of Zander Blom is that he is represented by Stevenson. Although there are many critical-Nimrods out there who stalk the internet for any opportunity to take a pot shot at the gallery, the fact remains that Stevenson's role as leading contemporary art experts and groundbreakers is hard to deny. To ignore their status and acumen would more often than not be an act of churlishness.



Zander Blom

1.632 Untitled

2014

Oil on linen

260 x 190 cm

This is not to say that they haven't made mistakes. Certainly they have – and I think they would freely admit to this. But in the case of Blom they are certainly convinced of his work, in a way that I remain uncertain of. In saying this however, like many people out there, I do think Blom's paintings are beautiful. In fact this is my principle concern.

In attempting to understand the concept of beauty, many art theorists have quoted Immanuel Kant's definition, and have used it as a mantra for understanding what art is. But Kant had two notions of beauty. One he called 'free beauty' the other 'dependent'. An object of 'free beauty', he suggested, is one that is universally considered beautiful because it is free of purpose. Although this kind of object seems to have a concept behind it, Kant argued, it does not. He went on to give examples of this: the rose and a certain wallpaper that he had in his own meager house. This beauty has no purpose. A rose is not beautiful because it attracts bees, we just say it is beautiful because, well, it just is!

However, Kant argued, this was not the beauty of art. The beauty of art has a distinct purpose to it: it is 'dependent' on something. It has a concept behind it, which can be explained. If art did not, it should be pointed out, then art criticism would be the greatest waste of time ever embarked upon. Artworks would simply be beautiful and there would be no purpose or reason behind engaging with them critically. Alberti, Vasari, Ruskin, Clark, Sontag, Hughes, Lippard, Krauss, Enwezor, Collings would have and are spending their lives in a performance of pure futility.

And it is here where I question Blom's work. What is the idea behind it and what is its beauty dependent on? Most abstract expressionists from the New York school would have argued that they were not simply putting paint on canvas like petals on a flower but rather, as Arthur C Danto put it, that their paint 'embodied meaning'. Certainly the likes of Barnett Newman believed himself to be doing something identical to what Michelangelo did. Again Danto's writing is apt: 'Abstract painting is not without content. Rather, it enables the presentation of content with pictorial limits. That is why, from the beginning, abstraction was believed by its inventors to be invested with a spiritual reality.'

This reality I have no doubt of. On occasion I have (although I am far from a spiritual person) felt this spirituality in abstract works. But in feeling this I have always sensed that I am feeling something explained from the past. That perhaps there is universal content to that emotion but that its

forms and methods are transported to me through time and culture. I cannot read works produced in New York in 1951 as something that represents the South Africa of 2014 – although part of the joy of art is to realise the cross-overs and commonalities. In short, abstract expressionism's time, when it represented the deeper meanings of the human condition, is over – it was of its time or what linguists refer to as synchronic. Its current use, if it has a use, must surely address a new set of concerns.

So where does this leave me with regard to Zander Blom's work. According to Blom, Matisse heavily influences his work, and to be sure, the minute I walked into the gallery I had Matisse in mind. But why now, why in 2014, are we going back to Matisse's late collage period and rendering it in abstract expressionist form? How is Blom's appropriation of these methods of representation communicating what it is to be a person in the early 21st century and a person living in South Africa? How is all that underpinned late modernism relevant to who and where we are now?

Perhaps Matisse might offer us some direction. As Robert Hughes pointed out, Matisse, despite having lived through and amongst some of the most fraught history of the last two hundred years, 'never made a didactic painting or signed a manifesto and there is scarcely one reference to a political event – let alone an expression of political opinion – to be found anywhere in his writings.'



Zander Blom

1.625 Untitled

2014

Oil on linen

198 x 150cm

This seems true of Blom. Certainly all of his paintings with their numbered titles are not meant as a political statement or even a social one. It is perhaps easy to see that much of the abstract work coming out of many painters today, particularly white males, may be just that, a refusal to address the current and historical state of this country. What can a white male say and contribute when faced with the political reality of South Africa? Perhaps the Rhodes academic, Samantha Vice, is right when she argued that in that a [certain quietism](#) should indeed be required and felt by white people in South Africa.

Blom does seem to suggest in his artist's statement that the art world is full of nonsensical utterances and political hypocrisies and that he will not be part of it. Blom intimates that his work is essentially addressing his response to art history and its relationship to his own emotions. But is this not true of most people's art? And what is more, why is the late modernist approach the best method for doing this? Abstraction, as I have argued, was a response to and dependent on a specific time and place, a

response to a world at war, dependent on a world of machinery, a world that demanded freedom and a world trying to find a new path after the decline of Christianity.

You might say, fair enough, so is Blom's. But Blom's response is a different one in that it contains the conservatism of holding onto the past values (i.e. those of abstraction) and this is precisely what modernism and abstraction tried to deny. There are, after all, some major differences between Matisse and Blom's response to their environment. Where Matisse was denying the current state of affairs; was revolutionary in his approach; was forward thinking and was engaged with the time and place even if he denied its politics – Blom and, it must be said, many others painting today are not. They are merely dependent on little more than an art historical period. This contemporary group of artists are conservatives who look backwards, they are not inventors but assimilators, not spiritualists but materialists.

We live in an age of uncertainty, one that perhaps demands a certain refusal to be drawn into tireless mendacious public utterances. However, as Tony Judt said of contemporary writers: 'In "Politics and the English Language," Orwell castigated contemporaries for using language to mystify rather than inform. His critique was directed at bad faith: people wrote poorly because they were trying to say something unclear or else deliberately prevaricating. Our problem, it seems to me, is different. Shoddy prose today bespeaks intellectual insecurity: we speak and write badly because we don't feel confident in what we think and are reluctant to assert it unambiguously ("It's only my opinion..."). Rather than suffering from the onset of "newspeak," we risk the rise of "nospeak."'



Zander Blom

1.648 Untitled

2014

Oil on linen

50 x 38cm

One feels that this is perhaps true too of painting. Although not necessarily 'bad', in fact with Blom is it impossible to say whether he is a good or bad painter (a good applicationist might be a better term) but there is a sense of nospeak about his work. Perhaps this is an adequate response to the contemporary position of uncertainty; I don't speak out so that I can exist! The age of the fear of saying anything that could be taken to mean something politically incorrect and being roasted on the fires of social media is certainly upon us. But if Blom's art is this refusal then why is this statement so clouded in the joy of primary colours and why does it go so well in north facing Clifton apartments? That is, is it saying anything more than Kant's flower and wallpaper? And is it dependent on anything other than its surface?

http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/M_Blackman_reviews_New_Paintings_by_Zander_Blom_at_ST_EVENSON_in_Cape_Town.aspx



Art Basel Miami Beach 2013

Updated 12:27 PM EST, Thu December 12, 2013



Photos: Art Basel Miami Beach 2013

Art Basel Miami Beach 2013 — Visitors look at a work by South African artist Zander Blom on December 5.