

## DOUBLE FLOOR PAINTING

*Material, space, and color are the main aspects of visual art. Everyone knows that there is material that can be picked up and sold, but no one sees space and color. Two of the main aspects of art are invisible; the basic nature of art is invisible.* Donald Judd<sup>1</sup>

1. Donald Judd:  
'Some Aspects of  
Color in General  
and red and Black  
in Particular',  
printed in ArtForum  
no. 32, Summer 1994.

No one sees space and colour, says Donald Judd, who is considered one the foremost artists and theorists of American Modernism/Minimalism. This makes you awfully curious to learn more, especially after having witnessed a whole new space for art being built in the course of the past year, and having also, in the course of the past 10 days, watched the largest painting ever, unfold along the full length of a 30-meter-long floor, across walls, over other paintings, over tightly packed bookshelves, and up under a seven-meter-high ceiling. We have seen a violet colour spread in whirlwind formations across an entire wall; a bright pink seeped down through several layers of black, and a green spring-like meadow spread across the floor. Bookshelves, books and cupboards have disappeared into a wall where white and brown hues have fused with orange and red. A luminous, yellow lake, many meters long, flows toward the windows. Torrents of colour – through what until recently I considered an impressive, new space for art – seem held in check by a grey shadow running from the doorway and merging with the green.

2. op.cit.

No one sees space and colour. Perhaps he is right, Judd. We don't see the space in which we move, for there are no terms, no theories, no context to guide us here. 'Space is made by an artist or architect; it is not found and packaged. It is made by thought.'<sup>2</sup> Katharina Grosse has been inside the new space. She has not defined the room, but she has marked parts of it with colour, pointed to a corner, to heights, expanses, depths, to possibilities and limitations. With her work, she takes us around the room – we must walk from one end of it to the other – to see – and understand – look where we walk – look up, over, and down to follow the many developments. We find ourselves in a three-dimensional work that stretches into the room and stretches it in different directions. 'The work is (...) knowledge about space, which is necessarily related to the space of architecture.'<sup>3</sup> We are learning about space through the knowledge that Katharina Grosse's work conveys to us.

3. op.cit.

We are beginning to be able to see space. Donald Judd would agree that in the last few decades of the new form of three-dimensional art – installation – some visual artists have succeeded in making us begin to see space, and to define and describe it. The New Space, The Double-height Gallery, as we have called it, is coming into view.

It is coming into view because Katharina Grosse makes it visible. She does so by means of the colours with which she emphasizes the structures of the bookshelves and the books, and by means of large canvases, painted over, creating new planes. She lets doors disappear or pulls them forward by means of colour. She makes the space visible by her countless movements through it, on the scaffold, the lift, or the floor. And she does so by means of the areas and structures she leaves untouched. The large window in the middle

of one of the long walls stands out with the full impact of its nearly 12-meter-long and 7-meter-high grid construction that casts long shadows on the floor when the sun is out.

One stands gaping in front of this enormous window which the artist has left untouched, emphasizing it by concentrating on the other walls and the floor. Perhaps we are now seeing the window and its prominent position in the room for the first time, for across from the untouched white of the window, areas of colour move along the opposite wall from its left to its upper right corner. On the way, new planes, projections, and depths have been created. It bears comparison to the dynamic forms of baroque art: '... it flows along with time, develops new shoots, generates new forms from those already created in an endless movement, the basic principle of which is instability and the dissolution of contours.'<sup>4</sup> Not to say that such total formlessness is the aim, but to suggest that all the individual parts are inextricably interwoven, forming a dynamic, coherent whole.

4. Translated quotation: Mikkel Bogh: "Formalitet og figurativitet" in Kunstteori. Positioner i nutidig kunstdebat, Borgen 1999.

There are many layers of colour, for in several places the first ones have been painted over. In the middle of the wall, behind the many layers and areas of colour, a huge canvas can be seen. The motif is an enormous ellipse, like the eggs that Katharina Grosse decorated as a child; but in size it is more like a black sun, or a foreign planet, with coloured ribbons winding themselves around and past it. This takes us back to Donald Judd, for what are we to do, if we don't see colour?

No one sees colour. But we do see the colours as we stand in the room, don't we? They are bright and overwhelming; how can we not see them? Donald Judd found that our vocabulary for describing the particularities of colour is infinitely poor in relation to the thousands of possible variations. And can we see them at all, if we can't describe them? Judd writes about particular colours in a way that conveys a sense of extraordinary beauty and depth: alizarin crimson, phtalocyanine blue, permanent green, chartreuse, and he points out that while colour has been discussed far more than space, he finds most of the discussions superfluous. There is a long history of colour in art and science, but: 'Every other generation has a new idea of color. However, this is a generation without ideas. At the present space and color have in common complete neglect. Despite the primary importance of color for more than a hundred years there are now no theories.'<sup>5</sup>

5) Donald Judd, op.cit.

No one sees colour. It is impossible to define, describe, and see precisely which colours Katharina Grosse has used. First of all, they are applied in several layers, of which those furthest in are no longer visible. Secondly, she has mixed most of the original colours, producing a great many new ones. Colour can be changed endlessly, and to Grosse it is a continuous process to incorporate and develop the experience she has gained from her previous work in her new painting. While relating to the site and the space, she also builds on the new impressions and ideas she encounters in the process. We cannot know if we 'see colour' in her work, but it comes towards us, presenting us with ways of seeing.

6. Clement Greenberg was without doubt the most influential art critic from the 1940s to the mid 1970s. He was the foremost Modernist critic and formalist with a profound interest in philosophy and the history of art, especially in relation to aesthetics. Cp.: Clement Greenberg: *Homemade Aesthetics*, Oxford 1999.

It is possible to see space and colour. Included in the exhibition Double Floor Painting are three of the artist's large paintings as well as a set of Montana bookshelves, complete with cupboards, drawers and books. The structures of these objects are repeated throughout the total work, which changes character as it progresses. The floor becomes part of the expression of the walls and reflects them. Focus and Chaos follow one's gaze. Although the room is huge, it has an air of privacy about it – the bookshelves and the books – the pictures on the wall – momentarily carry associations of a living-room. An oversized living-room. A few years back in Los Angeles, I visited the American visual artist Paul Sietsema who showed me a 16mm film about flowers, 'Beautiful Place', which he had made. He had not just shot it, but constructed it down to the smallest detail. He made all the flowers artificially, based on thorough botanical studies, and only then shot the film. It was pure illusion, the flowers weren't real, but everything had been carried out as if they were. A perfect copy. A work of art. On the same occasion I was shown a model which, he explained, he was making of a living-room with miniature paintings and furniture. The special thing about this model was that it was an exact copy, made from a photograph, of the famous American art critic Clement Greenberg's<sup>6</sup> living-room, complete with works by Kenneth Noland, Frank Stella and Morris Louis on the walls and African-inspired modern sculptures around the room. The model is used in Sietsema's film 'Empire', another brilliant variation on the theme of what it is we see, what we choose to see, our ways of seeing, and the ways in which we are presented with things. And the great impact which something that never existed can have on our perception of reality and fiction/illusion – which are so easily confused today.

We see space, and we don't see it. We see colour, and we don't see it. We find ourselves in the midst of processes that an artist has started – in an installation where our sense of sight, our mind and body interplay with reality and illusion, as indicated by the title of the exhibition: Double Floor Painting. A second floor has been laid on top of the first one for protection, and on this Katharina Grosse has painted. In three months time, this floor will have disappeared and the walls will be painted white again. The room will be ready for the next exhibition.

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