

Drawings: 2011 - 2013

Jaco van Schalkwyk

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FOREWORD

The publication of this catalogue coincides with *Constraints*, the third in a series of three solo exhibitions by Jaco van Schalkwyk at GALLERY AOP. The publication traces the shift in Van Schalkwyk's drawings in lithographic ink from the black, monochromatic work of *Bait al-Hikma* (2011) through his incorporation of fluorescent ink in *FUN AND GAMES...* (2012) and introduction of aluminium as surface for painting in *Constraints* (2013). An appendix surveys additional work on paper and aluminium within this period.

Jaco van Schalkwyk received his BFA in Drawing from the Pratt Institute, New York in 2003. With Carl Hancock Rux, he developed the acclaimed opera-oratorio Mycenaean as visiting artist at CalArts in 2005 and 2006, culminating in an engagement as part of the prestigious Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2006. He returned to South Africa, and to drawing, in 2008.

GALLERY AOP promotes contemporary art on paper, notably limited-edition fine art prints, drawings and watercolours by both new and established South African artists. The gallery also exhibits sculpture, mounts installations and hosts performance-based work. GALLERY AOP aims to engender a creative dialogue between artists and its versatile exhibition space, encouraging them to extend their artistic practice by articulating the space anew with each show. Exhibitions are often augmented with publications of various kinds, conceptualised in conjunction with each artist.

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BAIT AL-HIKMA

GALLERY AOP, 2 - 30 April 2011

The Bait al-Hikma was a library and translation institute in Abassid-era Baghdad founded in the 9th century. Renowned as a great center of learning, scholars from around the world were brought to the library, preserving and translating Greek, Indian and Persian texts including the work of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Euclid, Galen, Arybhata and Brahmagupta. Perhaps its greatest resident scholar was Al-Khawarizmi, the father of algebra.

It is said that when the library was ransacked during the Mongol invasion of 1258, the river Tigris ran black with ink for six months from the large numbers of books flung into the river. The library was again ransacked during the American invasion of 2003, and remains partly destroyed.

Jaco van Schalkwyk's work in context

by Wilhelm van Rensburg, Johannesburg, 2011

Jaco van Schalkwyk's black ink drawings involuntarily invoke two types of enterprise: *explaining* the meaning of the abstract works, or *discovering* their meaning by examining the formal elements. The former approach references, in literary theory, *poetics*, and the latter, *hermeneutics*. Van Schalkwyk's drawings are undoubtedly lyrical and poetical in their aesthetic sensibility, but considering the cumulative, compounding meaning that emanates from the forms created in black printer's ink, the latter seems to be the more satisfactory option in dealing with the compelling enquiry that his work invites.

The materiality of the ink inadvertently draws attention to itself. Its viscous nature determines the abstract forms: it seems to flow and congeal according to its own liquidity. The heavy black ink in Van Schalkwyk's drawings does not necessarily anchor the picture plane, and even sometimes prefers to defy gravity when it drips and flows freely from left to right over the paper.

Eva Hesse said:

“If a material is liquid ... I can control it but I don’t really want to change it. I don’t want to add color or make it thicker or thinner... I don’t want to keep any rules; I want to sometimes change the rules. But in that sense, process, the materials, become important and I do so little with them, which is, I guess, the absurdity. Sometimes the materials look like they are so important to the process because I do so little else with the form. I keep it very simple.”

In exploring the uncontrollable nature of his medium and process, Van Schalkwyk deliberately lures the ink into ‘battle’ by blasting it from an industrial spray gun, forcing him to attempt to ‘contain’ the ink to prevent it from covering up the delicate marks already laid down.

Van Schalkwyk’s chosen material – ink – transgresses into a surprising solidity when applied liberally. In this sense his drawings are reminiscent of those of Richard Serra. The themes in Serra’s black, melted paintstick drawings are mass, density, volume. The melted paintsticks are spread over a large area, over which a window screen mesh is laid. On top of this is put down a large sheet of paper, which absorbs the black paint, attracting it like a magnet, to settle en masse on the surface.

“Black is a property, not a quality. In terms of weight, black is heavier, creates a larger volume, holds itself in a more compressed field. It is comparable to forging. To use black is the clearest way of marking against a white field,” according to Serra.

Whether fluid or solid, Van Schalkwyk’s heavy use of industrial printing ink seems to cover up, and by the same process reveal that which is hidden. The

seemingly random ink marks and surfaces are like words on a page. They need to be read.

“Material is Metaphor”, says Anni Albers: *“How do we choose our specific material, our means of communication? ‘Accidentally’, something speaks to us, a sound, a touch, hardness or softness, it catches us and asks us to be formed. We are finding our language. Ideas flow from it to us and though we feel to be the creator we are in a dialogue with our medium. The more subtly we are tuned to our medium, the more inventive our actions will become. What I am trying to get across is that material is a means of communication. That listening to it, not dominating it, makes us truly active, that is: to be active, be passive. The finer tuned we are to it, the closer we come to art.”*

The meaning of Van Schalkwyk’s abstract drawings resides in a comparison with Kazimir Malevich’s *Black Suprematist Square* of 1914: simply a medium on a surface. Malevich’s black square was painted on canvas, not quite regular, slightly tilted, pitch black, its bituminous surface badly cracked: the most famous black in the history of modern art. Contesting the concept of the image in abstract art denies many of the possibilities of interpretation offered by figurative images. Instead it demands an effort of the imagination, a creative response. We need to respond directly to the dynamic relation between its visible elements of colour, texture and form. In an astonishing moment of intuition Malevich had seen in that image the energetic origin for a wholly new way of painting. He had realized its mythic potential as a painted sign for a new beginning, the signifying progenitor of any number of created forms whose dynamic relations would take place in the imaged space of the painting rather than the imaginary space of a picture.

The *craquelure* of Malevich's *Black Suprematist Square* is indicative of the fact that the surface is not solid or static, but fluid, alive. It is almost as if the material engages with itself. Malevich had to restore the work soon after it was completed, and he often had to apply fresh coats of black paint. The work thus became a repeated gesture, signaling gestural art and becoming an artistic act, or a performance.

The act in Van Schalkwyk's drawings is paramount. The ink, intended for printing newspapers or books, is applied by painterly and by sculptural means in order to make the marks and surfaces of his drawings: he uses chefs' knives to apply the ink thickly on the paper; he drips the ink on the paper like a Jackson Pollack would drip oil paint onto a canvas; he sprays the ink off the surface of the paper with a power tool and leaves it to run down the paper and congeal in its own time. Layering the ink in this way not only gives his drawings a painterly quality; the surface also becomes sculptural. The paper becomes an arena in which to act. What is to go on it is not a picture but an event unfolding in time.

The tension between surface and depth is what gives Van Schalkwyk's drawings their edge. Like an archaeologist, the viewer has to peel off one layer of material after another, uncovering ever more evidence in an attempt to see what lies underneath. Conversely, coming up 'for air' to the surface of the drawing, one is confronted with its compression, torsion and surface tension, giving it a 'vulcanized' appearance. At times the surface is pebbled with soft glossy peaks, and occasionally, with flat puckered patches. Underneath all this and partly covered or even obliterated, lies delicate drawings in graphite and pen and ink. Almost decorative in their simplicity, they invoke a different sensibility, a different culture. Emblematic of Arabic interlace, they connote an

intricate mathematical construct or geometric pattern. These drawings seem to hold as much information as the narrative of a story. At the same time they could well hide the chaos behind or beyond the picture plane: a memory of an event not captured on the paper itself.

Van Schalkwyk's drawings are informed by the illustrious legacy of abstract expressionism, *tachisme*, *Art Informel*, *Art Autre* (strands of gestural painting embodied in the work of Michel Tapié), and the work of the Gutai-group in Japan. The latter straddles the divide between abstract gestural painting and performance and is essentially a dialectic between material and spirit. Jiro Yoshihara, its leader said:

"In Gutai art the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other, even though they are otherwise opposed to each other. The material is not absorbed by the spirit. The spirit does not force the material into submission. If one leaves the material, then it starts to tell us something and speaks with a mighty voice. Keeping the life of the material alive also means bringing the spirit alive, and lifting up the spirit means leading the material up to the height of the spirit."

Van Schalkwyk's drawings connect the gestural with the material and integrate both visual and tactile perception, allowing the viewer to experience a dense intensified space in relation to materialized time.

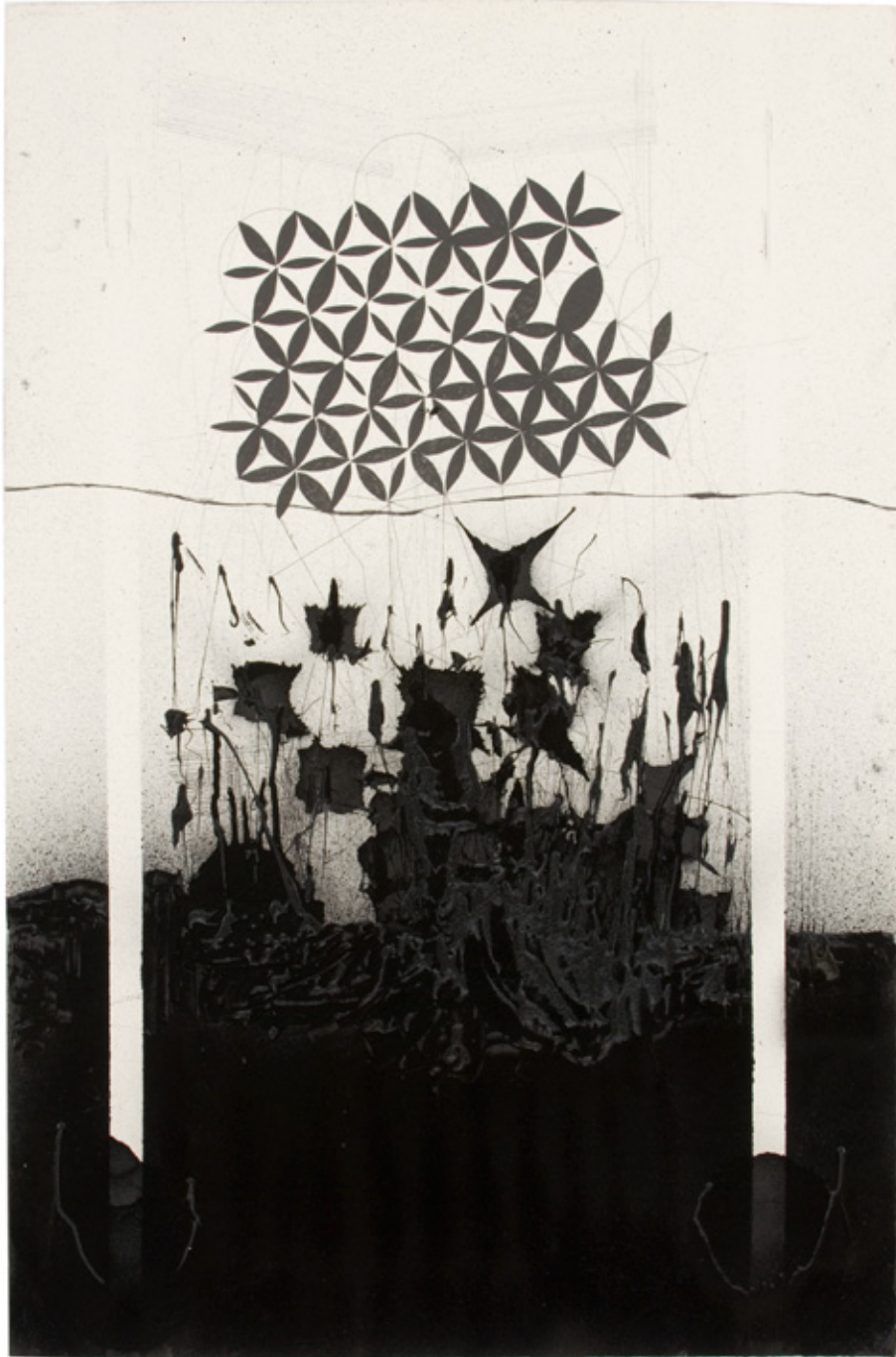
Wilhelm van Rensburg is Research Fellow at the Visual Identities in Art and Design (VIAD) research centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (FADA), University of Johannesburg (UJ)



Bait al-Hikma, Part I_07. Lithographic ink, pen and ink on paper. 765 x 560mm



Bait al-Hikma, Part I_08. Lithographic ink, graphite, pen and ink on paper. 765 x 560mm



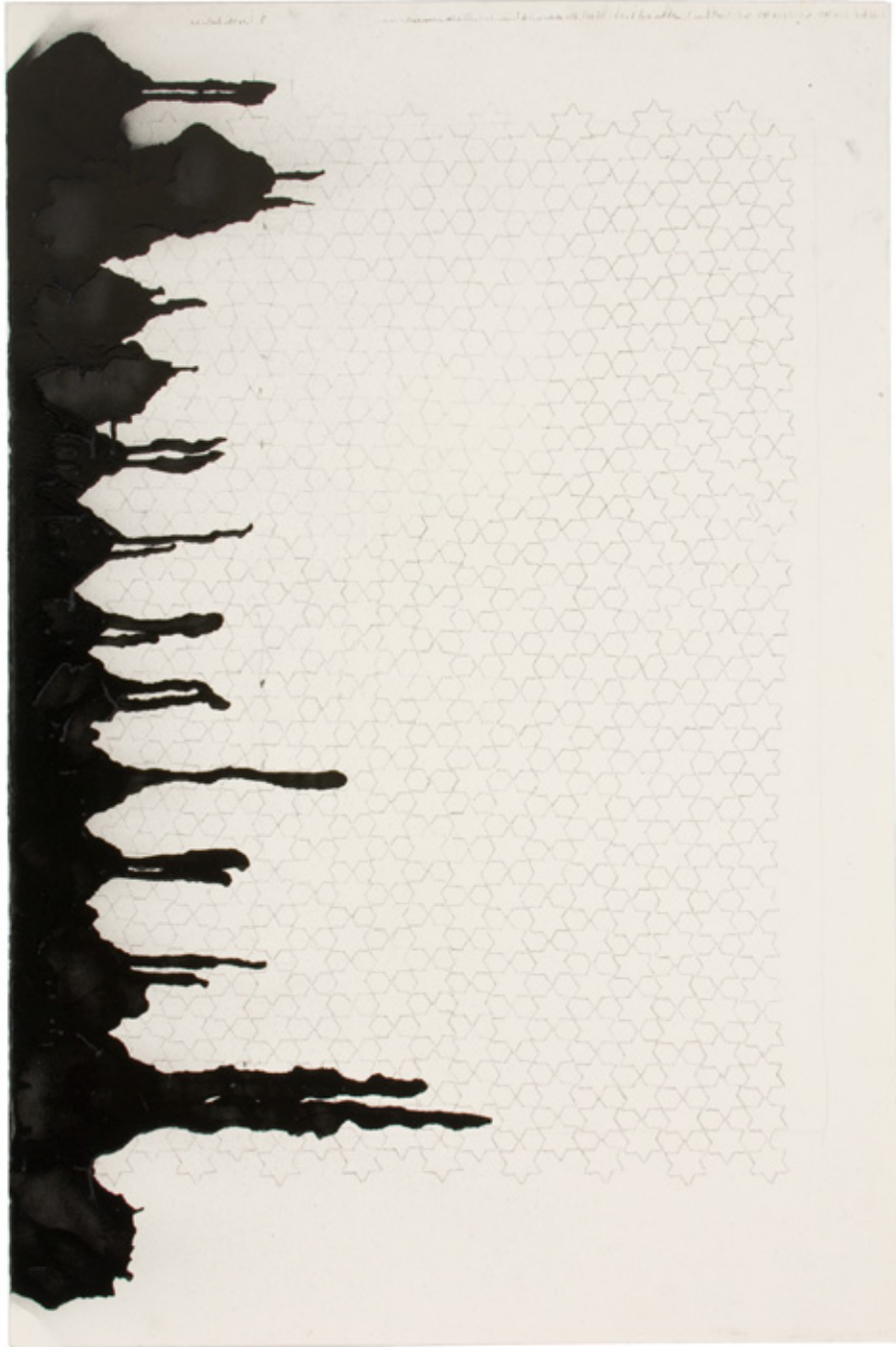
Bait al-Hikma, Part I_04. Lithographic ink, pen and ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



Bait al-Hikma, Part I_06. Lithographic ink, pen and ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



Bait al-Hikma, Part I_05. Lithographic ink, pen and ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



Bait al-Hikma, Part I_11. Lithographic ink, pen and ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



Part II_01



Bait al-Hikma, Part II_05. Lithographic ink, pen and ink, dry pastel in Paraloid
B72 solution on paper. 1000 x 660mm



Proof_01 and Proof_02

FUN AND GAMES...

GALLERY AOP, 24 March - 30 April 2012

Introduction to the exhibition

by Wilhelm van Rensburg, Johannesburg, 2012

Jaco van Schalkwyk plays Backgammon with Bridget Riley and Odili Donald Odita. "I wanted to play a game: to make a few drawings while questioning the distinction between form and colour", he states while discussing his new work in relation to these two artists. The influence they exert on Van Schalkwyk's work is an intricate and sensitive process that Harold Bloom, well-known American literary theorist would call 'the swerve'. Influence of one artist on another, according to him, involves assimilating the invisible inner spirit of a precursory artist, and 'misreading' or swerving away from it. Since the creative spirit swerves within the confined space of the art work (the drawing on the paper in Van Schalkwyk's case), Bloom goes on to say, the labyrinth of influence is forced by the irregular, if not random network of connections that such swerves have created in various pockets or regions of art history. Negotiating the labyrinth has become something of a game for Van Schalkwyk with 'pockets' of formal abstraction and of expressionism.

The elongated triangular shapes in most of his drawings invoke the 'points' of a Backgammon board. They constitute the playing field as two players move

their checkers in a horseshoe motion or path from either end of the board to the other. Each player's checkers have to be 'borne off' the board before the other one's, the players continuously avoiding 'blotting' each other's checkers on the bar that divides the two sides of play.

The 'bar' constitutes the space where the shapes in Van Schalkwyk's drawings assume delicate, even lyrical, forms. These forms, in turn, constitute the trails and paths of the laws of chance in Van Schalkwyk's work.

Much as these trails provide evidence of the gestural, abstract expressionist nature of Van Schalkwyk's artistic process, they also capture the structure or delineation of a conversation he wants to initiate with Riley and Oditá. Describing the way in which he works, Van Schalkwyk mentions the fact that he often starts by placing six to ten sheets of paper on his studio floor and making marks with a special type of fluorescent ink simultaneously on all the sheets. The way in which the ink lands on the paper is as much determined by his gestural acts as they are by a draft blowing through his studio, shaping how thick or thin the line or form becomes on the paper. Van Schalkwyk is concerned with making drawings in which he can communicate "both decidable and undecidable compositional elements". He is concerned with communicating the nature of chance without reverting to randomness. His concerns culminate in what he calls, "framing lyrical events in formalism."

His forms contrast sharply with those of Riley. "Riley is stuck in form", Van Schalkwyk maintains, "Her obsession with geometric shapes such as the circle, the triangle, the oval, and the square means little to me. Her work essentially presumes a blind faith in form. I am an agnostic when it comes to form." The resultant forms in his work are literal cuttings up of any recognizable board game shapes.

Although form delineates the conversation Van Schalkwyk has with Riley and with Oditá, the actual conversation is about colour. This conversation is shaped by the viscosity, flow, gravity as well as application of the colour of the ink he uses. He quotes Riley in this regard: "You cannot just paint colour: if you try to do this you inevitably end up in the trap of monochromatic painting." Colour, in other words, has shape. It is at this point that Van Schalkwyk involves Oditá in the conversation. "The colours I use are personal", Oditá states. "They reflect the collection of visions from my travels locally and globally. I derive at colour intuitively, hand-mixing and coordinating them along the way. In my process I cannot make a colour twice – it can only appear to be the same. This aspect is important to me as it highlights the specificity of differences that exist in the world of people and things."

With the same 'specificity of difference', the same 'pattern or structure of chance' Van Schalkwyk has his colours hand-mixed and colour-coded by a global manufacturer of lithographic printing ink, further in addition to hand-mixing in his studio.

The shape of Van Schalkwyk's colour field has an ability to enter an irrational zone. It is almost as if he cannot control colour. As if the colour just sits on the paper, hiding the many other layers of colour underneath it, any one of them which could have worked. The real colour reveals itself eventually. Colour, ultimately, has more than mere emotional quality, it becomes spiritual.

Talking about one of his well-known paintings, *Torch Song*, Oditá mentions the many hues of pink and blue in this work which resonate with the pinks and blues in Van Schalkwyk's. "*Torch Song*," says Oditá, "is a song of lament of unrequited love. So I wanted the red to be a certain tone, to be a flame that gets

extinguished as soon as it flares. That's why I brought the pink in... As a painter I feel much more affinity with musicians than with other artists. Music is so emotionally direct – people respond directly to it in a way they don't with other art forms. Right now I am listening to a lot of blues... I see the form of the blues, in the States, as a connection to Africa. And that makes it somewhat illicit there, because of elements within the blues that have little to do with Christianity, for example. As a form, the blues have the ability to address our sadness, our sense of loss both personal and spiritual, as well as the ability to call out to our ancestors and to the dead. It is about the humanity of all the people who have come before us, and our connection to this spirit.”

And how does Van Schalkwyk draw with colour? The conversation he has with himself about this matter goes something like the following: “How can I draw atrocity? With a good, fleshy pink.”

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FUN AND GAMES... Eyes. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm



Secret



Blush



FUN AND GAMES... Voice. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm



Hold on Tight



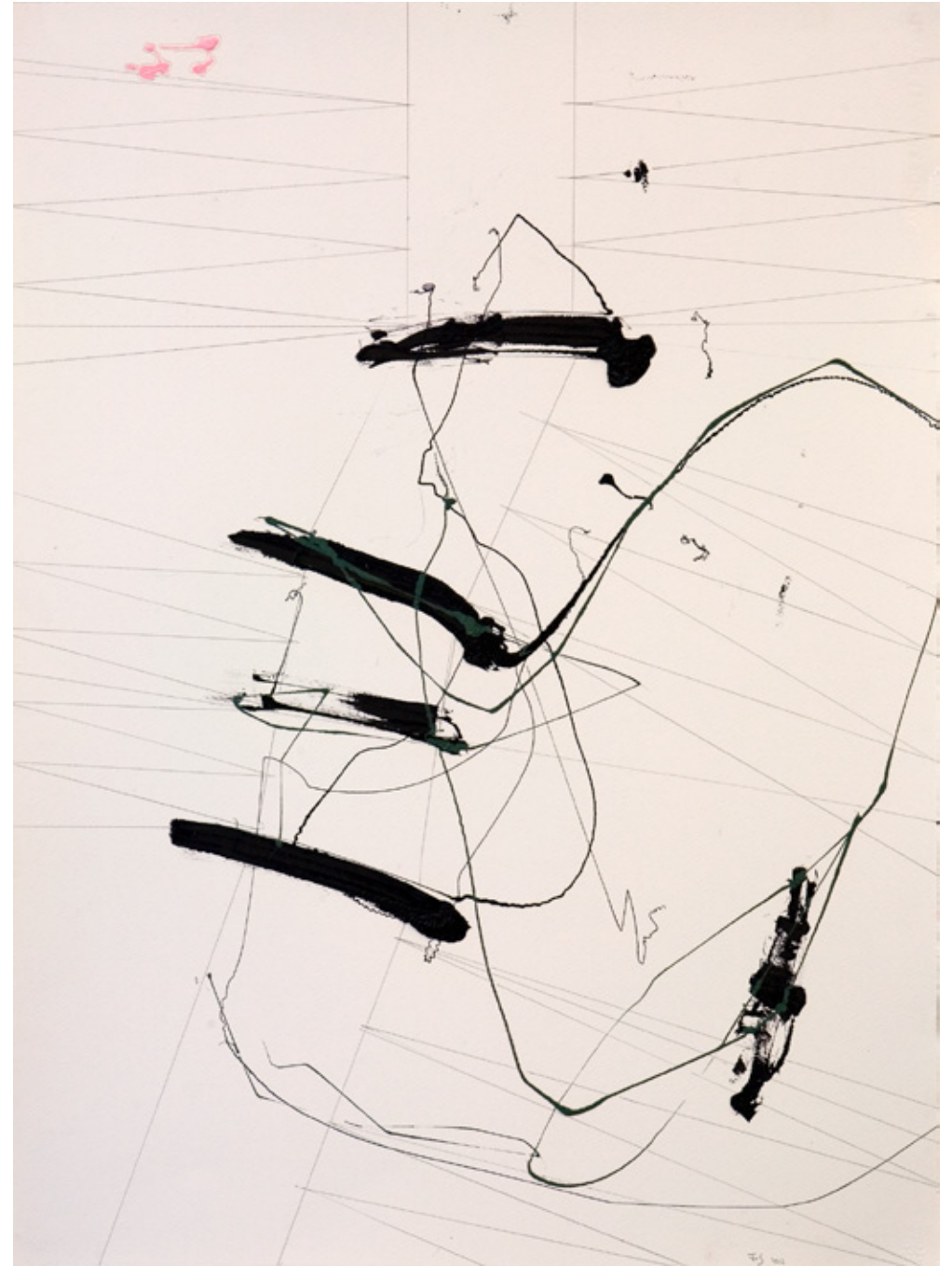
Hands



FUN AND GAMES... Funny Joke. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm

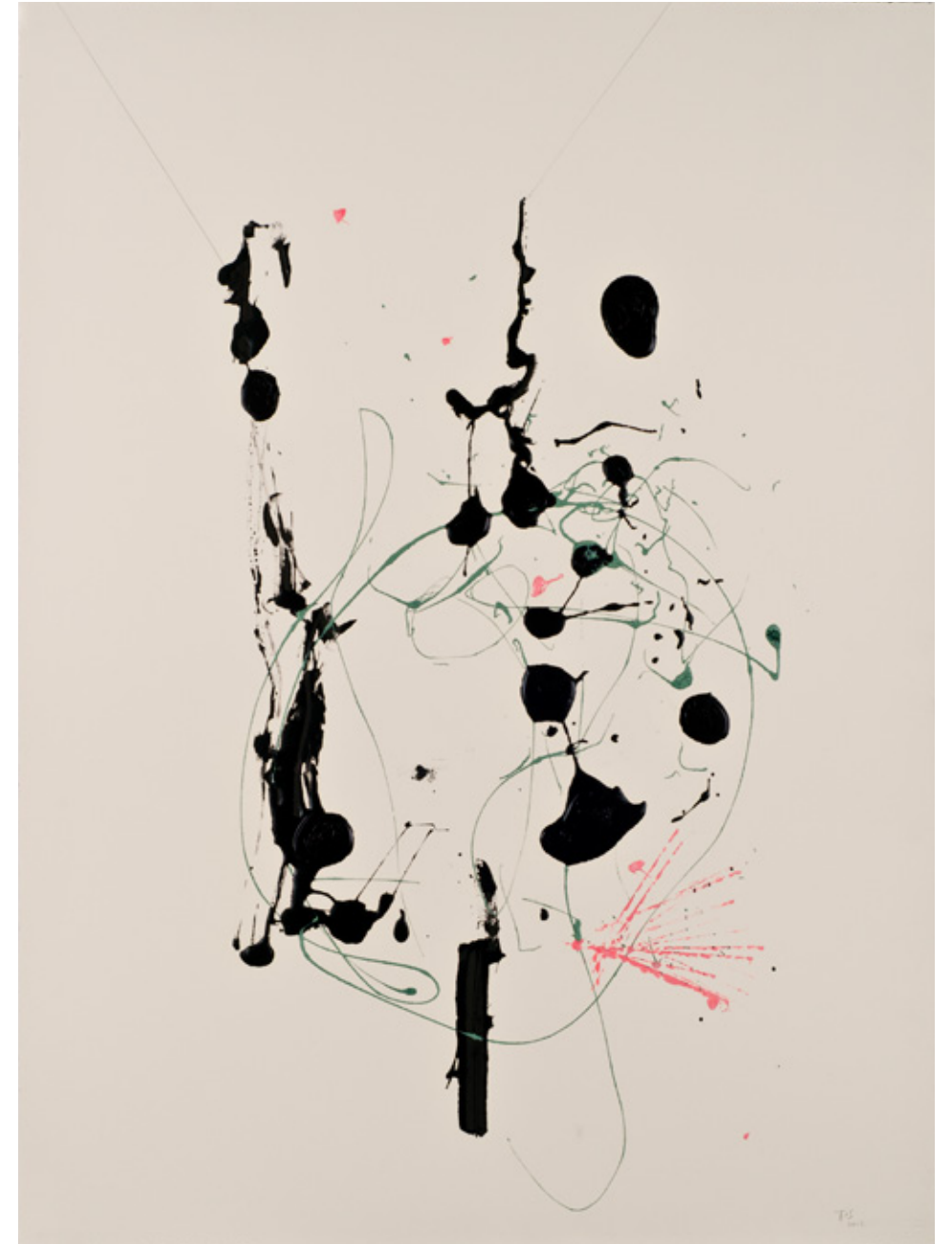


Lighter Than



FUN AND GAMES... Whistle. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm

If/When



FUN AND GAMES... Hanging on Threads. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm



FUN AND GAMES... Of Course You Didn't. Lithographic ink, wood glue on paper. 1740 x 1250mm

CONSTRAINTS

GALLERY AOP, 9 - 30 November 2013

Introducing Constraint

By Wilhelm van Rensburg

Looking at Jaco van Schalkwyk's latest body of work, one is compelled, even 'constrained', to ask whether the work is about abstract colour field painting, or about colourful abstractions, or even about a process of abstracting colour from the picture plane. All of these connotations of the word abstraction, whether used as adjective, noun or verb, signal the original Latin meaning of the word, *abstrahere*, to withdraw. And the question then is whether these abstractions signal a withdrawal from the physical to the metaphysical, or from the representational to the conceptual nature of reality. In terms of the title of the exhibition, *Constraints*, the question then becomes whether he is constraining colour, or creating colour constraints, or representing constrained colour fields. In addition, the fact that most of the work is done on paper, signals that (in the same manner as much of contemporary drawing is theorized presently) it is about cognition, about concept, about precept, even about dictum.

Van Schalkwyk's dictum is about the fact that colours actually interact with each other and with one another. His inheritance is that of a third generation Josef Albers colour theorist. Albers, the famous, ex-Bauhaus, post-World War II

Black Mountain College (and later Yale University) art teacher instructed some of Van Schalkwyk's lecturers at the Pratt Institute where he completed his Bachelors in Fine Arts, majoring in Drawing. The lessons on *The Interaction of Colour*, could as well have been taught to Van Schalkwyk directly by Albers himself. While at Pratt he also studied Philosophy of Mathematics with Robert Richardson, introducing him to formal analytical systems.

What is evident, however, from Van Schalkwyk's use of colour, is the fact that colour is more than the sum total of its properties. Yes, it is clear that colour has enormous synesthesia (i.e. sensory properties, for example that it emits a certain temperature like hot or cold, that it is tactile, and that it provokes a certain olfactory sensation, and so on) but what Van Schalkwyk wants to show, is that colour essentially *performs* itself.

Colour behaves in certain ways; it is unstable and susceptible to change when it is placed in relation to other colours. Colour, for example, intensifies when two adjacent values are placed together. Apart from this simultaneous contracting effect, colour can advance and recede, depending on the context, or the proximity of colours to each other and one another. Colour can become transparent; colour can increase in tonal, or light value; colour has spatial effects; colour even has density. Van Schalkwyk harnesses all these properties in his performance of colour, but under certain constraints.

These constraints assume notions of proximity, mixing constituents, combinations, after-image, intervals, harmonies, chords, grounds, and reversed grounds, all constrained within certain borders, frames, and mathematical intersections and axes. Van Schalkwyk essentially advances a category theory of and about colour. Colour is one category of what could possibly constitute atoms in per-

petual motion, or what Lucretius poetically verbalized in his *On Nature* (II: 496) as:

“From all over an infinite space opens
When atoms, innumerable and boundless
Flutter about in eternal movement.”

Colour, in other words, *lives*.

His studies in the philosophy of mathematics compels Van Schalkwyk to further explore the interaction of colour. As a living entity, he maintains, colour could well be used as an alternative form of communication to theorize about the world, and about formal ontological systems. In the same manner that mathematics constitutes a symbolic language about explaining and interpreting the world, colour can be used as a visual language to create a discourse about these worlds. Colour, in this sense, refutes the predominant linguistic means by which we philosophize about the world; it provides a visual alternative to the verbal. Words and numbers are replaced with colour fields that are in constant motion as they push against any constraints imposed on them. Colour becomes the language to converse about the untrustworthy nature of the essence of movement. Or about the uncertainty of chaos. Colour is much more than an adjunct to form or shape; it is a principle of organization.

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SEEING IN VERBS AND NOUNS

By Sean O'Toole

"I've taken constraint and put it in the picture," says Jaco van Schalkwyk. It is a weekday afternoon. Van Schalkwyk – a painter, printmaker, novelist and sometime vocalist with a crystalline sense for debauchery in his free-style lyrics – is bearing witness. Less ostentatiously, he is explaining himself, what he does, and how working in his Woodstock studio he is repeatedly faced by constraint. The economic limitations that prefaced his move to colour are worth flagging. White, like black, might be the irreducible and existential end-point of painting, as Malevich, Reinhardt and Ryman in their various ways revealed, but colour costs. Van Schalkwyk's new hard-edged abstractions – prefaced over the last three years by essays in tumultuous black and, more recently, slurry mounds of silver – may well be grounded in a process that purposefully employs constraint, but there is also a cautious plenitude at play in his new work. The artist can afford colour, not a lot of it, but enough to adapt and challenge his working method, which is based on limitation, reduction and, to name what is obvious, abstraction. So, constraint. Actually, they are multitudinous in his work, not singular. His ink-stained rollers, which direct and orchestrate ink on a surface differently to a brush, they are a constraint. As are his sassy fluorescent colours

amongst them dirty pink, wall plaster yellow, citrus green, each of them an admixture of Pantone colours and therefore industry duplicable. Ditto the inorganic substrate, which refuses ink, will not absorb it, in effect functioning as a parking garage for his purposeful and enraptured mark making. And just like the tape he uses to demarcate the linear boundaries between his volumetric areas of colour, these materials – the rollers, the industrial inks, the aluminium canvases – they all serve as deliberate constraints. Naming is also a constraint: Van Schalkwyk prefers to think of his works as drawings, not paintings. Perhaps, as he concedes when rubbing up against the constraint of rendering in words his pictures, it is more productive to view his work as a mash-up of printmaking, drawing, painting and sculpture, as a kind of enraptured syncretism in which Bridget Riley's alternative taxonomy of painting holds as much sway as Georg Cantor's continuum hypothesis on infinite sets. But testifying to Van Schalkwyk's work in this way merely animates a central crisis of art criticism after abstraction: how to respond non-journalistically to pictures that do not describe, without lapsing into an ornamental language. Returning from Antarctica, that "white free abyss" where "infinity is before you," as Malevich wrote in 1919 after escaping the hegemony of colour, a writer-friend remarked how that unfamiliar and apparently barren landscape refused literariness. Adjectives hold no sway in Antarctica, nor indeed do they in Van Schalkwyk's pictures, which are composed of inquisitive verbs and verifiable nouns.

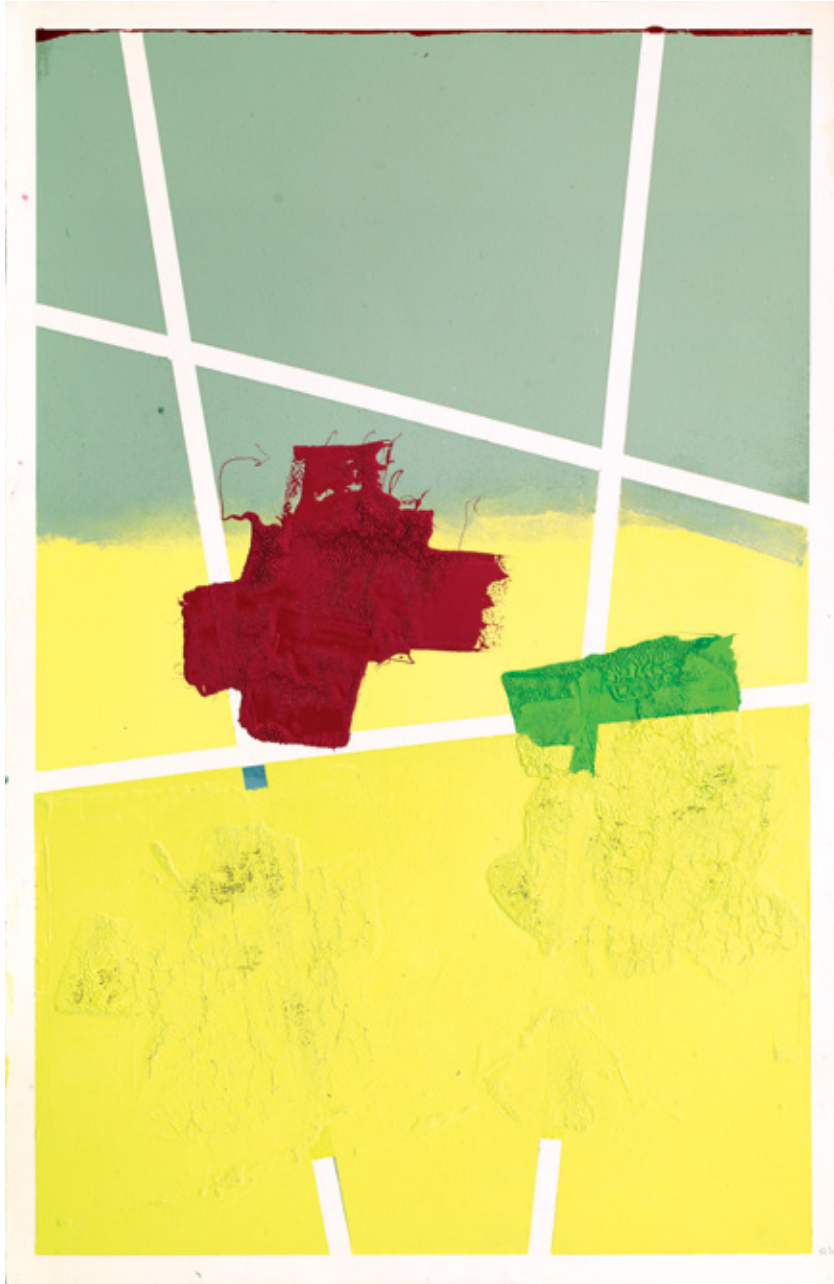
Sean O'Toole is a Cape Town-based journalist, art critic and writer. Formerly the editor of the magazine Art South Africa (2004-10), he writes a bi-monthly art column for frieze magazine (London) and is a regular contributor to the Sunday Times and Mail & Guardian



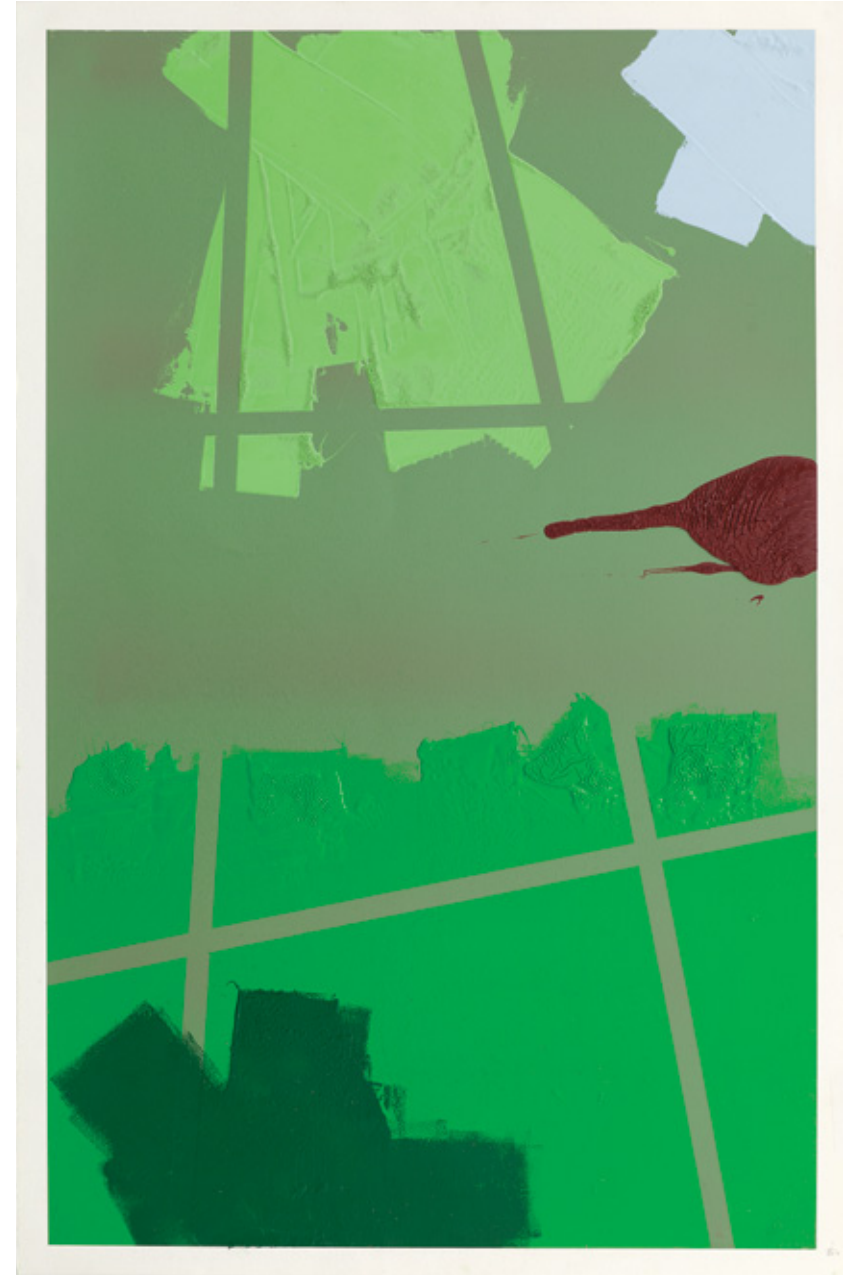
01. (*Constraint*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



02. (*Study for Decline*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



03. (*Constraint*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



08. (*Universe*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



05. (*Constraint*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



07. (*Constraint*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



15. (*Study for Hold*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



20. (*Study for Gris*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm

CONVERSATION

Robert Richardson in conversation with Jaco van Schalkwyk
New York City, May 2013

You stopped drawing for six years, between 2003 and 2009.

I did. The problem was that I couldn't find a way to speak of non-Euclidean space on the page.

Non-Euclidean space within a two-dimensional space, let alone a three-dimensional space as defined by Euclid.

Exactly. Practically, the solution was simple. I realized that I could prepare a border that would function as an axiom of acceptance. By preparing this border I could come to terms not only the limitations of the space but also with my limitations as an individual. It took me six years to find this very simple, practical solution to a number of philosophical issues that confounded me throughout my twenties. The border is my pictorial equivalent of the axiom of choice. It allows me to work with the unknown as opposed to being silenced by it. You used to like telling me that Plato said: "No man under thirty has any business with philosophy." Perhaps I just needed to cross that barrier.

Help me understand why the border of the page itself was not sufficient to the task.

I got really stuck on the fact that the border of the page is just a given.

Oh, so you needed it to be a construct?

Yes, exactly.

You needed a construct. So, you've built a framing device and put it on the page. Rather than having framed the page, you've established a method for a framing device to literally put within the bounds of the page itself.

Yes.

Do you ever re-tape?

Yes. But, there is a caveat: once I've removed the tape, I feel it to be dishonest to re-tape the same border. I feel like I have to go in slightly.

Oh really? I would've expected out, to give you more room.

No, because what has come before must remain visible to the viewer.

You twist tighter on the constraint.

Yes. The constraint comes closer. It has to be visible that there was a history of constraint. It is part of the nature of the construct, but it is also a key to the integrity of drawing. When I studied figure drawing at Pratt, I learnt how to

approach drawing as a process of constant alteration. When you study the drawings of Michelangelo you can see this process applied at the level of mastery, where even the approaches, the traces of failure to grasp entirely, are meaningful. Erasing the tracks of my approach by loosening or covering the marks of prior constraint will also erase a chance to develop my *métier*. I feel that there is a relationship between honesty and artistic development.

Are you painting as well?

I look at my work on paper as being drawings about the language of painting. This is because I feel that there are paradoxes within painting that need to be addressed from outside the medium. For me drawing retains an analytical approach that ensures I find useful, plastic solutions to the problems posed by painting. I think there is a correlation between Riley's postulate that "perception is indivisible" and the defined-ness of forms. I think that this correlation is at the foundation of painting as *métier* because perception is only indivisible inasmuch as forms can be defined, which is a dynamic correlation that may in fact be beyond the capabilities of drawing per se, given that drawing always retains a singular focus as a matter of inquiry. So, when I'm painting I try to maximize this dynamism. I choose specific drawings to redo on aluminium as paintings, which is a very traditional approach. The chosen drawings become studies. I take on the role of the copyist, repeating the essence of the study as a painting. But I am wholly averse to making 'product,' so to inform the process I insist on mixing all the colours from their constituents directly on the plate. There is an immediacy that is dangerous. Also, I go from the rectangular scale of the page to the square of the aluminium, forcing change in the composition to fit the latter. This is the approach to painting I've followed with this latest exhibition called *Constraints*.

It is funny to me that you reject the Newmanian appeal to the spiritual but at the same time say that the real product of your labour is your thinking, because that sounds not dissimilar to your forebears. Thinking is just a really, really modern way of saying what makes us spiritual, special.

Really?

Yes of course. By the way, I don't say that to catch you out, I say that to say maybe there is an inevitable relationship between our labour, the very productive nature of our labour, and thinking – that art, no matter how consciously produced with the intention to belie intention or spirit or mind, nonetheless involves it.

Well look, the thing is this: there is time. There is only so much time in contemporary society as a whole. In South-Africa we still have a lot of time, if you can afford it. If you can afford to have time, you can have a lot of it. So, there is time, labour, commodity and object. Labour on an object that can be a commodity affords you time to think. Art can be many things. It would be naïve to not look at art as commodity also. Art should not be free. It is time that should be free. We should all be free to do whatever we want to.

That's right. Fish in the morning, write in the afternoon, said Carl Marx.

Exactly. Well, to me having time is not strictly speaking a spiritual thing. It is my freedom and my right as a citizen. It should be the right of every citizen – to be that free.

Its funny, we'll have to at some point define our terms. Obviously I agree with you. I don't think there is any sense in which I don't, but it does lead me to think that we

should just define our terms. I say spiritual with my tongue fully in my cheek. Nonetheless, Newman and the like said spiritual but what they really meant was mentally, being of the mind. There was still a hangover about the distinction between the mental and the spiritual at some point and they weren't over it. Now we are and/or there are a number of us who are. What I just mean to say is: when it is the case that it is our right – and by the way 'right' is a strong word – but it is our right to be able to exercise our self-owned powers.

Yes.

We have self-owned powers that no one has the natural position to keep us from exercising.

That is exactly what I'm talking about. But, I think that works like Newman's *Stations of the Cross* are essentially operations or procedures. I read hard-edge work, the distinction between edges, as operations incorporating first-order principles. Agnes Martin's works are exquisite operations. Many of the operations of minimalism, to use that crude definition, have value. They had value in the time that they were completed and they still have value today in places where the operations find affinity...

Force...

Yes. Force. In South-Africa, these operations have great force. Incorporating them in a process that is not homage or appropriation but absolutely repeating certain steps of those operations with the intent to facilitate change makes sense and is entirely meaningful. Obviously there is much difference because the context differs: there is difference in how those operations or processes

react and refract within the context I live in now. But, within this context, the tide of the operation; the effect of the operation; the event of the operation pushes back and the result is... *it ain't spiritual*. It may have been then, in the original context within which the operations were formulated. But now, it is not spiritual at all. Our current situation is actually a bit bleaker if you wish. We have become much more impoverished in our *thinking*. That seems to be the diagonal we are on. Any confusion between 'spiritual' and 'thinking' only serves to mask this very bleak reality, which is underpinned by a real understanding of nature that is not based on what you see on Animal Planet. Nature is not that approachable. Nor is it perfect or spiritual per se. Nature is chaos. It is something that we do not and cannot fully understand. Being confronted by nature is not to be confronted by the spiritual. It is to stand in front of the unknowable. Nature is fearsome, cruel, unjust, absolutely horrific and infinitely huge. Nature demands *respect*. It is beyond the machinations of power's ability to control, which is why there is a considered and well-funded drive to eliminate the uncontrollable at every opportunity. The South-African context embodies this clearly. Any thing, person or animal that cannot be controlled is being eliminated. We are culling complexity. We are limiting the variety of thought. Therefore, our thinking is in decline. The worst thing we can do is to continue to identify these operations as spiritual. By doing so we are really refusing to listen to the sounds of our intellectual decline. To say that society is becoming increasingly spiritually impoverished is not really newsworthy. Saying that our thinking is going down the shitter is much more disturbing, and in my view more accurate of the current state of affairs.

Robert Richardson is Senior Director of Strategy at Control Group, an innovation consulting and technology development firm in New York City. He has acted as a special advisor in the Bloomberg administration for civic innovation and constituent communications. In addition to his work for Control Group, he has also been a Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Pratt Institute since 2000.



17. (*Constraint*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



12. (*Monoculture*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



18. (*Monoculture*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



19. (*Monoculture*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



23. (*Study for Shift*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



24. (*Study for Swerve*). Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



Sverve. Lithographic ink, aluminium, Kiaat. 1550 x 1550mm

APPENDIX

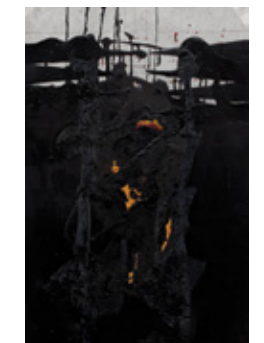
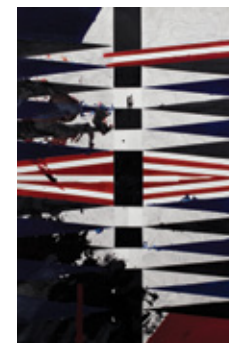
AVANT CAR GUARD, Jaco + Z-dog, and friends, *residency blank projects 2012*



Draw links, group exhibition GALLERY AOP 2010



Polish Cavalry, 1 and 2. Charcoal, pen and ink on paper. 770 x 566mm



IT'S ALL FUN AND GAMES... 01 - 06. Lithographic ink, pencil, wood glue on paper. 1000 x 660mm

NUMBERS GALLERY AOP at FNB Joburg Art Fair 2012



01, 02, 03 and 04. Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm

WHEN FORM BECOMES ATTITUDE Group show, blank projects 2012



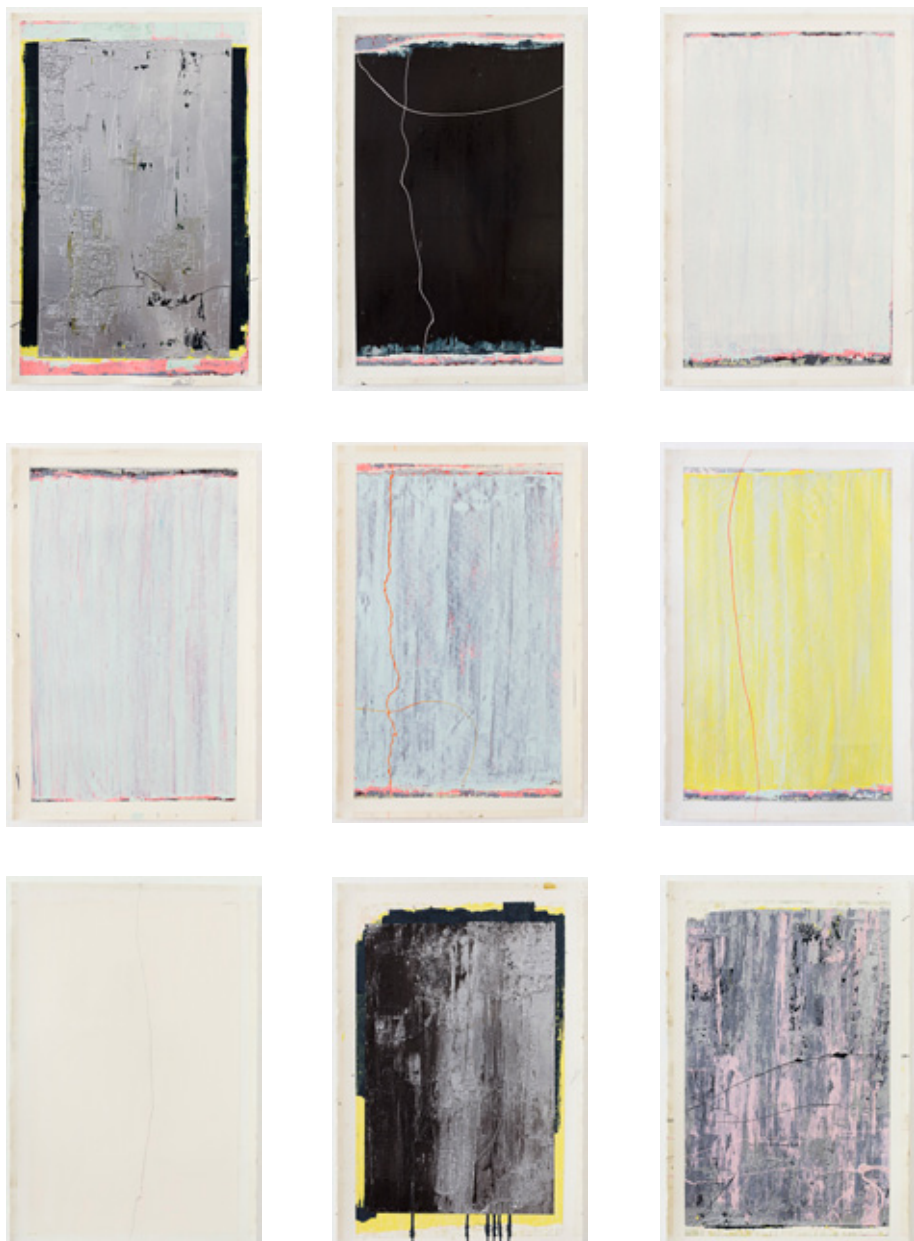
All the King's Horses. Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm
All the King's Men. Lithographic ink and pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm

SPLIT FOUNTAIN SERIES



Split Fountain 1 of 2 and *2 of 2.* Lithographic ink and pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm

6+1...14+1; 1st, 2nd solo blank projects, Cape Town 2013



6+1, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13+1, 14+1. Lithographic ink on paper. 1000 x 660mm



Blot 1 of 2 and Blot 2 of 2. Lithographic ink and pencil on paper. 1000 x 660mm



1st. Lithographic ink on aluminium. 1840 x 1250mm
2nd. Lithographic ink on aluminium. 870 x 640mm

Thinking About Category Theory March - May 2013



Blot 5 Purple and Blot 4 Purple. Lithographic ink on aluminium. 830 x 625mm



Blot 3 Purple and Blot 6 Purple. Lithographic ink on aluminium. 1250 x 830mm

Thinking About Category Theory 01 - 06. Lithographic ink on paper. 765 x 560mm.

Returning from Antarctica, that “white free abyss” where “infinity is before you,” as Malevich wrote in 1919 after escaping the hegemony of colour, a writer–friend remarked how that unfamiliar and apparently barren landscape refused literariness.

Adjectives hold no sway in Antarctica, nor indeed do they in Van Schalkwyk’s pictures, which are composed of inquisitive verbs and verifiable nouns.

Sean O’Toole

