

Udo Kittelmann in Conversation with Fabian Marcaccio

Udo Kittelmann Dear Fabian, let us start from the very beginning. You were born in Rosario, Argentina. It might be a coincidence that Lucio Fontana was also born there. But it might also be predetermination. Looking at Fontana's works it seems to me as if he always wanted to break the traditional rules of what a painting should look like. Looking at your works it seems to me that you have a very strong similar wish. Dear Fabian, what makes a painter break the so-called traditional rules and what are the rules that you want to overcome?

Fabian Marcaccio I always admired the work of Fontana, I grew up with his presence. At the time when Pollock was doing his 'all-over' paintings, Fontana did the 'all-through'. With his cuts, Fontana unified the event of gesture and the concept of support (ground), going through pictorial space, toward a new time-space situation.

In my work, I try to expand this idea. Not only on the material level of the painting, but on the indexical, iconic and rhetoric levels. I don't think about breaking traditional rules or things like that, I am more interested in continuity. After two centuries of fragmentation and destruction, collage and Unitarianism, there is a new possibility of integration if we embrace complexity.

Udo Kittelmann I want to mention another artist's name: Piet Mondrian. I remember that very early photograph piece that you did in the late eighties. The photograph showed a Mondrian painting, probably from your own hand, on an easel in front of a Toyota parked in a landscape. I remember that when I saw this photograph for the first time in the early nineties I was very surprised. I just thought: What the hell has a painting – in fact a Mondrian – to do with a lousy car? Was this already part of the complexity that opens up new possibilities of integration as you mentioned?

Fabian Marcaccio I may say that this picture was surprising for me too. In the late 80's, I started a series of quick photographs that work with the idea of irreducible complexity, I call them *Conjectural Amendments*. They were an instant pictorial intervention in a given actual situation. This one was the first, and it showed this beat up Toyota car, parked in a beautiful landscape. The fake Mondrian is standing in front of it quite naturally, like it was always there... Utopia and dis-topia, truth and falsehood are always coexisting in one defective life... In 1993, I called my Amsterdam exhibition *Mutual Betrayal*, referring to Mondrian's notion of 'mutual equivalence'. As the photographic medium became exhausted and a token of the art world of the 90's, I decided to abort the series. This happened together with my developing pictorial practice and the fact that the photo base was integrating itself with pictorial, sculptural and architectonic compounds, achieving a more integral and analytical complexity. This situation is important in my later works, because they offer a continuous organic flow of space-time dimensions. That is, indexical, iconic, and actual material.

Udo Kittelmann In your Amsterdam show there were some works that consisted of two elements connected by chalk lines on the wall. Also there was one of your paintings integrated into the baroque mural painting on the ceiling of the exhibition space. And then there was one painting with a frame that broke through the canvas in a kind of organic appendix. One could say that those works appear controversial or contradictory. Who is betraying whom? Your whole idea reminds me of a love affair that is dealing from the outset with mistrust.

Fabian Marcaccio More than mistrust. It has something to do with affection, with what I call 'structural affection', an abstract type of affection instead of literalist expressionism. *Mutual Betrayal* was like a thriller movie that never happens... Painting was attacking itself, turning out to contain its internal contradictions that somehow merge into a dysfunctional functionalism. There was no repose as they consumed themselves from the inside out and spread to the walls and the ceiling. In his text for the show Barry Schwabsky talks of a kind of bodiliness that is no longer given by nature, a pathos that floats freely, unable to contain itself in form. A new trans-formal painting space, after the pragmatic realization of late modernist painting.

Udo Kittelmann In the very, very beginnings of the history of humankind, people used sticks or their own hands to make a pictorial picture. Later on the brush became the main tool that was used to make a painting. After that every painting started with a brushstroke. It is very obvious, seeing your whole work, that you again and again – in very different ways – refer to the structure of a brushstroke itself as if you were trying to work on the history of the brushstroke.

Fabian Marcaccio The brushstroke is a sign of the presence of painting, with all the multiple transformations that it has suffered throughout history. It is a mark of action and time, of the fact that there was somebody that wanted it to change a world, with a ground that was something already existing and probably completed and in continuation with that world, but nevertheless, somebody needed to mark it, to disturb it, to bring that ground into the world of painting... In our recent history, self-reflexivity makes the act of painting an impossible task. Robert Ryman is the best example of this excess of reflexivity, the permanent "right now" of painting. But at the same time, this crisis opens up a new situation for painting: What if paint is not only paint but the hyper-consciousness of it? The excess of its own impossibility, the self-spread desire of the nightmare of its own means. Not as the Surrealist who depicts nightmares by means of normal representational painting, but as the means of painting in itself as altered, constant self-mutations. The "never now" of painting or an action painting of the integration of the multiple times of painting which are:

- a) the actual time of the making that coexists with the passing of time (process time)
- b) the micro-macro-representational time (referential and self-referential time)
- c) the perceptual time of observation (endless web of parts of perception. An action painting of the beholder)
- d) the time of absorption and duration (posterity or disappearance). These issues were present in my 1993 show: *The Altered Genetics of Painting*. After this, everything I have made flows like a roller coaster...

Udo Kittelmann In the mid-nineties you once sent me a very small booklet, a kind of sketch book, titled *387 Conjectures for a New Paint Management*. It always seemed to me as if you use a kind of genetic code to develop your idea of painting. If you look today at the meanwhile published DNS-combination your puzzle-like modules for the construction of a painting remind me more and more of a mysterious code. Is there a kind of a general grammar for painting?

Fabian Marcaccio No stable grammar of painting can be found, but, to evolve or devolve in different moments in history, we tend to favor some generic features and reject others. Like *sfumato* for Leonardo or divisionist space for the impressionists, collage for Duchamp and Rauschenberg and why not: the social collage of Warhol. I think that we need new notions of how to make paintings today, and these are possible and necessary for the advancement of painting. In *The Altered Genetics of Painting* and in *New Paint Management*, I use a type of booklet of logo-like drawings to organize a new painting complexity as a geneticist may do, manipulating the genetic code. It was like a cartographic help to remember where I was in space-time. It was never meant to be a dictionary, it was and still is a kind of pictorial organic pentagram, constantly evolving. I pointed out before that I believe that the pictorial will merge with biology, producing new possibilities of continuity.

Udo Kittelmann Apropos continuity. Some elements stay the same throughout your whole work like the brushstroke as a major subject. But during the development of your work it got, so to say, more and more three-dimensional. From the mid-nineties on more and more of your works were losing their direct connection to the wall and were expanding into the space like the one that you realized for our exhibition *ca-ca poo-poo* at the Kölnischer Kunstverein. You titled this work *Environmental Paintant*. And later on you did this great collaboration with the architect Greg Lynn for the Vienna Secession. Where do you want your paintings to go? Into the infinity of outer space?

Fabian Marcaccio The infinity of outer space... I love that phrase! It makes me think of Lucio Fontana again...

In the piece for the *ca-ca poo-poo* show, I tried to connect the extroverted public space around the Kunstverein with the introverted 'art space' inside the Kunstverein, through a multiple, transformatory paint passage. The piece starts in the front of the Kunstverein as an outdoor pseudo-advertisement, and as it negotiates

its way through the windows it becomes more pictorial and intimate. It was all about the complex degree of passages between public and private space. Artists like Daniel Buren have simplified this subject, in my point of view, in a fatalistic way.

In the Secession collaboration I tried to make a flow of paintants activities, moving from the exterior to the interior of the building, interacting with the alternative architectonic flow that Greg Lynn had designed for the existing building. The participants walked with the piece, following the specific time-space dynamics of the architectural structure. At the same time they followed the specific time-space dynamics of the pictorial structure in a complex resonance, instead of in a simple architectonic-pictorial meltdown (as it happens in many minimalist collaborations).

At present we are working toward a new collaboration for the Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio. We are trying to produce a plastic structural skin that supports itself as an architectonic space, as a sculptural relief without a mass or body, and as a paintant, informatic image. . .

Udo Kittelmann It also seems to me that with the expansion of your works into space your works are entering into a new relationship with what we in general call 'reality'. Looking at some of the titles of your works they have also started to refer more to reality than in all the years before. You have given your paintings titles like – to mention only a few – *New Religions, Third World Abstraction, Interiorized Psychosomatic Fascism*. Might it be possible that during that time you started not to believe only in abstraction but also in concrete reality?

Fabian Marcaccio Concrete reality is only a notion that we use from own interpretation of what we call reality. Not only art changes... Notions of reality are always changing... We make realities in relation to new needs. The internet is a good example of this, not as virtual space, but as a fully functional new abstract urbanism. Take for instance the atomic physical reality of the last century. You can affirm now that we are living with a biological interpretation of reality because we are preoccupied with the inner-space of our own bodies. I pointed this out in my first show *The Altered Genetics of Painting*, not only as a new type of organic painting, but as the beginning of the integration of paint and flesh: as a buildable structural continuity.

I said before that my work is based on the roots of abstraction because of its model-making capabilities. However, I do not accept the puritanical, hermetic interpretation of classic abstraction as pure formalism. Analytical abstraction can be a powerful answer to the literalist interpretation of reality... Like Robert Ryman: Abstraction as a real Realism... And by the way, you will never make the mistake that Margaret Thatcher made when she said that society only consists of family and individuals... A perfect example of Interiorized Psychosomatic Fascism...

Udo Kittelmann Back to the exhibition that I mentioned before – *ca-ca poo-poo*. When we started to discuss the concept of the exhibition back then you were spontaneously enthusiastic about it. The exhibition was about the making of paintings. Carl Ostendarp once said that "They're like big accidents that are supposed to evoke 'makings' of the most basic kind. In one sense this whole tradition of being alone in the studio messing around with all this goop made from dirt and oil is pretty infantile. So they're about that, about 'making', the same way that you 'made' when you were toilet trained. Someone says 'make' and eventually you did. Then you're proud. And if you got the chance, you'd smear it on the wall, probably trying to draw a picture of what you just made." And what can be more real than a piece of shit?

Fabian Marcaccio I think your show was great because it put together an open, dynamic vision of what painting could be, and how it flows to other media. I don't think much of the fecal metaphor... I think that artists – in this case painters – are not different from anybody else in society. People are subject to all kinds of shit everywhere... you know. Painters can fool around with materials, but so can everyone in their own place: the office, the factory, the hospital or the government has to deal in their own way with this. I don't like Carl's statement because it brings up this idea of an essentially infantile, pathetic artist's life. This relates to the 'inferiority complex' of art, in relation to reality. Art has lost its possibility of representing, like the art of the past used to do. After the super-importance that modern art gave to itself, and the self-alienation of 'art for art's sake' associated with it, we are left with the empty professionalism of contemporary art practices. It would be really nice if we could just try to be artists instead of Conceptual oriented Anti-Artists, or pathetic existentialists, art today exists camouflaged in many non-art practices, as if art, after the ready-made obsession, decided to run away from the official factory of fashion and professional culture.

Professional artists could more justly be called art workers, or in general, art candidates, circulating in the never-ending circuit of biennials and art fairs... Your show was an alternative to this state of things, by being gross, informal and amateurish.

Udo Kittelmann Thank you for the compliment and I really hope it wasn't a compliment for fishing. But back to you.

The title of your exhibition in Stuttgart and Cologne will be *Paintant Stories*. What is the story or the idea about *Paintants*? Of course I realize that you are using more and more photographic elements in your work. Is that already a part of your story? And with this strategy don't you sell painting down the river? What the hell makes a painter use photography? And remembering your exhibition at the Vienna Secession you also got very naturalistic in view of all those naked people hanging around in your work. Don't misunderstand me. You know, I love your works.

Fabian Marcaccio Ha! I would like to inform you that *Paintant Stories* is an environmental river of paint... It is new hope for a different type of paint or a new integration of painting, photo-digital, sculptural activities. From the very beginning I ran away from direct approaches to painting or photography: I think that painting, photography and sculpture as we know them are over or at least in a really predictable state of being. . . the name *Paintant* is a composite between the words painting and mutant. Painting is too descriptive to me, paintant is more like action... action painting for the beholder...

Paintant stories are indexical like a photograph, but literal like a painting. It is flat but hyper-textural. Fast like advertising but slow like analytical abstraction. Gestural and chaotic but totally constructed and organized. It spreads through space, but it's about time. It comes from the multiple heterogeneity of collage, moving to a new type of continuous, homogenous media integration. It's rooted in abstraction but offers narratives. It uses a kind of glorification of retinal media-effects, but it functions as an interior widespread demolition of visual mediatization. It could seem harsh and ugly or immoral, but it is about a new type of ethics. It's structural painting for our state of permanent micro-civil war.

Udo Kittelmann So, it might be possible that we are falling back into a kind of cold war like between conservatives and non-conservatives, conformists and non-conformists, secessionists and non-secessionists? Sometimes I have the feeling that art is a shambles. What will the future of painting be? What will be when we are 64? Is there still time for fighting and fussing, my friend?

Fabian Marcaccio Well, we know that realities are more interesting than art, but we need some kind of model to make sense of them... optimally, this model will co-work or merge in a syncretic way with our realities.

In the political arena we are losing the middle-class. We have a permanent micro-civil war between small communities fighting for power. But on the other hand, we have fascist-corporation power, targeting each single community to level them down to sameness. The thing to keep is a radical middle-class position that understands real difference and complexity in a coherent way.

I think that the future of painting, or the painting's future is already here... Today, we have two new vectors in painting: a new type of environmental painting, and painting interventions or actions into reality sites. The good thing about painting is that it never ends. A game can finish, like the formal or conceptual game, but there are new games to be played like the re-definition of materiality in a digital age, space-time transformation, multiple-sites or what 'site' means today, micro-representation, media-integration, image saturation and its crisis... and so on.

Udo Kittelmann I always made the experience that people either hate your work, as my girlfriend for instance – to mention only one person – or that they love it with every fibre of their heart like the New York collector that you told me of who mounted a small painting in front of his stationary bike at home to recover after his heart attack.

Fabian Marcaccio Thus the way it is... Sometimes you have nothing in the middle.