

How to do things with paint. *On David Roth's Painting.*
by Christoph Bruckner

Painting has been chided for being transportable, movable and thus tradeable for decades. Contraposed by the ideal of site specificity, which renders a division of opus and locus impossible. Apart from such paintings which merge with their location for conservational reasons, for instance, or have always been site-specific like frescos or the fact that many site-specific works can be realized in different places, in recent years a number of younger painters and paintresses has begun playing on painting's mobility in their work.

Austrian painter David Roth took a painting on a museum visit, used one as a makeshift tent when going on a hiking tour or climbed a tree taking along a picture. His work 'ORGY in the Park' involved Roth dragging four large-format monochrome canvasses through Vienna's Prater, a huge public park. ORGY follows from the initials of the colours orange, red, green, and yellow. One might interpret the artist's colour concept as mocking modernism's severe scientific colour theories. The reference to scientific colour systems under the pretext of objectivity made artists like Rodchenko or Mondrian restrict themselves to primary and non-colours red, yellow, blue, white and black and exclude green. Roth's application of green may be read as a jibe towards this constricting scheme. And it does make sense, as all canvasses 'end up' in the (green) grass eventually. Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the sublime as a perpetual antagonism of attraction and rejection aptly describes the result of these maltreated, monochrome paintings. Roth has developed further original processes and ideas for the production of abstract painting(s): from shades, named after fruit and vegetables by their manufacturers, he mixed monochrome smoothies. And even though he does not paint flowers, he does paint with them, the hue corresponding to the flower chosen as his paint brush.

There are canvasses on which he has been wiping off his brush for some time, creating an uneven, pastose 'frame'. This transfer from painting to object appears especially smooth in the digital era and its seemingly infinite formattability. As part of the debate about the post-internet generation's art, discussions regarding the post-medial, initiated by Rosalind Kraus, have resurfaced. While sculpture is probably the least media-specific medium and thus something like the leading medium of our time, Roth's as well as other young artists' work demonstrates that painting has arrived in the post-medial era and is, as David Joselit put it, a little beside itself.

Abstract painting may be the covering of a flight of stairs, the background of a performance or an element of social interaction. Neither the media-nonspecific nor the media-specific exists as an absolute, only as dialectic. The (historical) specific is attached to the media, each forming different particularities and it will not be removed, not even by employing the most powerful discursive means. Roth does not always stretch the canvasses used as a painter's palette on stretcher frames as Josh Smith does, but sometimes piles them like textile samples on wooden trestles, which he builds from old stretcher frames. The layering going on over years and years constitutes a genuine painterly process. It may be due to this particular transfer that especially those paintings hidden by the canvasses on top of them attract (unexpected) attention. What we cannot see arouses more interest than the plainly visible. Nevertheless, the artist does not see any hierarchy of a 'major work' versus a 'by-product'. Roth's performative, process-oriented and conceptual painting is part of a broader movement of younger or not-so-young painters and paintresses. Wade Guyton mis-uses an off-the-shelf inkjet printer for the production of his paintings, Tauba Auerbach sprays folded and crumpled canvasses while Jacob Kassay silver-plates them and Jessica Warboys paints in the sea. This work mode is contemporary in the narrower sense, because the semantic field of painting has grown so large, that even working with not entirely controllable processes results in painting(s). The term 'influence' does not grasp what connects Roth's works with those of his generation and previous generations. 'Influence' is a teleological system, no longer appropriate to describe the relations existing between todays' artists' approaches. 'Reference' seems more adequate, as it is not deliberate or intended unlike appropriation, but something inevitably appearing in the creative process.

A younger generation of painters and paintresses, just as Roth, integrated supposed by-products such as painting cloths or 'dirty' canvasses, which did not only look like they had been lying on the atelier floor, in their works as a matter of course. However, this was not owed to the influence of artists like Vivian Suter, Martha Jungwirth or Sam Gilliam, the reverse is true: these artists have been rediscovered thanks to the works of a younger generation. The present affects the past as the past has an impact on the present. The opus of Danish artist Per Kirkeby is an important reference to Roth, whose compositional structure and choice of colours is reflected in many of the artist's works, ostensibly developed without directing concepts or processes.

Both artist's approaches share the interest in nature. The conceptual is no longer in opposite to working freely unlike historic conceptual art dictated, but for Roth both complement each other in his endeavour of fundamental research of painting in as broad a spectrum as possible. This ought not to be understood as the rejection of a personal style - and not because lack of style might become exactly that – but rather as an eagerness to work with a variety of styles without confining oneself by preferences.

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David Roth's Paintings Get to See the World
by Patrick Werkner

Next to the Viennese Prater's entertainment district with the famous Ferris wheel erected in 1897 one finds a broad alley, equally popular with runners, lovers and families. This avenue leads into extensive forest- and meadowlands, sharing the same name, Prater.

In one of his videos David Roth strides along this alley. We hardly believe our eyes, but these are not dogs trailing behind him on the long leads he holds in his hands, but huge canvasses on stretcher frames. With each hand he drags two resolutely along the footpath and through the meadow, and fairly ruthlessly it seems. The canvasses are painted, indeed they are paintings, which David Roth shows the world, as we have seen him do in earlier videos.

This is why 'An Introduction to Painting' is also an 'Introduction for Paintings', whose creator wants to make the beauty of nature accessible to them. In the video 'A Question of Perspective' David Roth, like a good father, takes a large painting along for a climb on a tree in a dense forest. When he has found a safe place for it on a thick branch, he points out certain spots in the wood, quietly and without words. The picture also remains silent and absorbs the scenery calmly, but presumably impressed.

Once a painting even got to visit Austria's most famous art collection at the Kunsthistorische Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Vienna, where David Roth strolls through its suits of rooms with grand paintings from previous centuries with a canvas, primed in white and devoid of any artistic intervention or marks ('Museumsbesuch'/ Visit to the Museum). We cannot choose our family, Roth says, but the new family members should at least be introduced to their relations.

So his paintings are shown the world of art in Roth's The Hague exhibition once again. Like art scene debutantes they shall get acquainted with us, the viewer, flâneur, curious, collector, critic, gallery owner, or museum folks as well as the spaces where art is at home.

Paintings and videos are coequal, complementing each other. Roth still paints, but the creative process is more important to him than the product.

However, we would mistake his meaning, if we understood his actions' origin to lie in the spirit of the absurd. Rather they were carried by a gentle yet loving irony.

The videos are no satire or Dadaistic commentary on the art scene's excesses. On the contrary, very much in the spirit of romanticism pictures are conceded to have a life of their own and their own understanding of the world and nature. Albeit Roth's paintings certainly need to be robust, as he expects them to put up with dirt and injuries, sometimes receiving permanent damages during the field trips.

The video documentary 'Landscape Painting – The Road to Neulengbach' shows brief sequences of Roth on his 65-km-hike from his Vienna apartment through the Vienna Woods to Neulengbach in Lower Austria. For a moment Richard Long's or Hamish Fulton's land art walks come to mind, yet again, this is about (the subject of) painting. Roth is trailing a canvas on his clearly demanding walks uphill and down dale, through rough terrain, on gravel paths and cutting across country. During his two-day hike he bivouacs in the woods, his sleeping place protected by a sloping roof formed by the canvas positioned askew. The canvas's contact with the landscape and the ground reminds of frottage processes. At one point in the video a farmer giving directions tells Roth 'you cannot keep going with THIS'. Roth walks on. Landscape painting is simply a very trying and demanding business, not performed without risk or exertion.

In a series of short videos, all consist of just one take. In one of them Roth stands on the street in front of a building site holding up a huge canvas coated in layers of dark paint, while hardly perceived by the builder talking into his phone. There are variations on this theme: A film sequence shows Roth on a zebra crossing, holding out a canvas in shades of yellow and ochre. A smaller canvas in shades of red is presented to passers-by in an underground station, who seem not to take no notice, either. The videos are played in a loop, thus creating a potentially endless movie. Roth comments, almost defiantly, in a brief text: 'Art in public spaces without any funding. Art for builders, overworked underground train drivers, nervous motorists waiting at a red light. Art for everyone, like it or not.' Comparable with Joseph Beuys' optimistic dictum that 'each man is an artist', David Roth forces delight on an unexpecting audience that has nothing to do with art. And thus, the general public also receives an 'Introduction to Painting'.

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Until 2018 Patrick Werkner held the chair of art history at Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien (University of Applied Arts Vienna), where he was head of the art collection. From 2001 to 2013 he was visiting professor with Leiden University (NL). The focus of his work as author and curator of exhibitions is on Vienna Moderne.

Who's afraid of yellow, green and brown? – A guide to cooking by colours, based loosely on David Roth's Flower Paintings (incl. recipe suggestions)
by Jeanette Pacher

In his recent conceptual painting series titled Flower Painting (2019–), David Roth links model, the painting instrument and resulting abstract pictorial subject in a very immediate way. Rather than depicting the bouquet at hand in a meticulous or, instead, a more expressive manner – let's say something like Vincent van Gogh did in his still life series, Sunflowers in the late 1880s – David Roth uses the flowers themselves to paint abstract images that are, in fact, more closely connected to colour field painting. Just wilder, rougher, more immediate than, say, Mark Rothko's or Barnett Newman's monumental examples of this genre that exude an air of 'the sublime'. According to the method of their production and to their appearance, Roth's paintings thus represent a contemporary (would you now call that 4.0?) update of this genre.

The so-called 'photo doc' – a number of photographs, which depict the painting process – is an intrinsic and equal part of the work: like an instruction how to paint with flowers, the visual documentation always starts with an image of the artist holding a bunch of flowers. Next to him are unspoilt, white canvasses and bowls with paint in the respective colours of the bouquet in the artist's hands. Action can begin!

Indeed, David Roth's unorthodox and playfully bold conceptual approach specifically inspired me to relate and respond to his concept of pictorial invention in terms of a cooking recipe, or perhaps even several courses. Let's see...

Besides: cooking has been a topic in painting, and the (visual) arts in general, for decades and centuries. Both as an integral practice and as theoretical subject; a vast number of examples could be listed here, but I'll only mention a few, which randomly come to my mind, or which I've recently stumbled upon: from the Futurist Cookbook (1932), conceived as an antidote to the Great Depression propagated 'optimism at the table' (see: frieze 'The Food Issue', no. 205, autumn 2019) to A Cookbook for Political Imagination, that accompanied Yael Bartana's presentation of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland project at Zacheta National Gallery in Warsaw in 2011 (admittedly a very free association here), to cooking and sharing food as social artistic practice e.g. in the work of the filmmaker and former director of the Austrian Film Museum, Peter Kubelka, or in Rirkrit Tiravanija's oeuvre since the early 1990s, just to name a few. But now I'm drifting (off?), we should return to focus.

As I was speaking of painting as a starting point – and pointing out different, potentially referential works and genres – getting prepared to set out with a free-style recipe based upon the colour compositions of David Roth's Flower Paintings, here are just a few more loose thoughts, or references. They may make sense, or not.

Barnett Newman, Who's afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue (1966-72)

Kerry James Marshall, Who's afraid of Red, Black and Green (2012)

and David Roth, Flower Painting (Sunflowers), (2019) – which makes me ask: Who's afraid of yellow, green and brown?

Everyday menu based on cooking by colours inspired by David Roth's Flower Paintings Starter and main course are based on Flower Painting (Sunflower), whilst the dessert is inspired by Flower Painting (Three different bouquets)

Starter (Yellow Green and Brown)

Coconut dal-spread of Yellow split peas with turmeric, coriander leaves and fresh brown bread

or:

Yellow tomatoes with basil leaves, mozzarella and pumpkinseed oil.

Delicious!

Main course (Yellow Green and Brown)

Sautéed young spinach, fried egg and sausage (alternatively, for a vegetarian version, you can replace the latter with grilled aubergine spiced with sea salt and rosemary)

You can also offer HP sauce, in the UK casually also called 'brown sauce', for the sausage.

or:

Omelette with porcini, green asparagus, and herbs (thyme, parsley, and chives)

Dessert

(A variety of shades of Pink and Red with Yellow, Blue and White – and Brown)

Trifle (known in Europe widely as Zuppa Inglese)

for pink and red: take strawberries and raspberries

for blue: take bilberries and blackberries

yellow: biscotti, lemon zest, egg yolk

white: whipped cream (on top)

(optionally you can add brown: espresso / or cocoa)

As usual, I'm late. So all I can say is: Enjoy!

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