

June 26 - July 25, 2015

Artist Talk

Friday, June 26 | 6-7 pm

Opening Reception

Friday, June 26 | 7-9 pm

Sasha Pierce

Starry Night



Starry Night II, 2015, screenprint on Kurotani #52, archival mending tape, 38.5" x 28.5".
Printed by Nicholas Shick under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency, 2014-15.

Open Studio

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Gallery Hours: Tues - Sat, 12 - 5pm



Thin, Not Flat

by Kelly Jazvac

A connecting thread between the artworks of Sasha Pierce is literally thread: her works of the past fifteen years reference textiles, even though they are not textiles in themselves. Early works include trompe l'oeil paintings of knitted scarves, blankets, and seemingly paint-covered rags. They look as though a piece of fabric was left on the floor and glued down exactly as it fell. However, these textiles are not textiles at all. They have been carefully formed in paint. They are both an image and a full-scale relief sculpture.

Pierce's subsequent paintings, the paintings she is now internationally known for, continue this visual train of thought. In these works, the textile doesn't appear as a found object resting on the surface of the canvas; rather, it looks as though a woven fabric has been stretched on a panel. Instead of brushstrokes, Pierce's labour-intensive method of applying paint looks akin to how textiles are woven on a loom. Fine threads of paint are pressed tightly against one another. Compositionally, Pierce's paintings also have a double geometry that relates more to quilting than weaving: one geometric pattern is parallel to the picture plane, and functions as the template for the overall composition (think quilt); the second pattern is built within this geometry and uses colour and tone to depict a different spatial depth within the first geometric pattern, like an image in a fractured mirror.

The result is a complex optical illusion: it's physically hard to see it clearly, or know exactly what one is seeing. This not-knowing has been used to describe Pierce's work before,¹ and is also how writer Dave Hickey has described the op-art paintings of Bridget Riley. Hickey writes that the optical illusion of her work interferes with the viewer's ability to literally see, and thus know, Riley's paintings.² He sees this space of not knowing as a productive site of contemplation. Pierce's work has a similar buzzing and hard-to-pin-down opticality. But it has a further cognitive complication: it also oscillates between a simulacrum of a textile and an abstract painting.

This brings us to Pierce's new works, produced in residency at Open Studio. They are also made with paint, but again not in the way one would expect paint to be applied: the acrylic paint is combined with screenprinting medium and pulled through a screen on to tissue-thin paper. They are made like most printed textiles in the world (although industrial screenprinting is mechanized, not hand-pulled like Pierce's). The construction of these works has a further textile connection: Pierce has made a project of piecework for herself. The geometry of the final image is broken into repeating units. When printed, they look similar to a dressmaker's pattern: precise shapes mapped out on to tissue. The shapes are cut out and assembled together to create the original geometry of Pierce's composition. Yet, instead of keeping the pieces flat, she attaches them at the back of the paper to create a slight ridge: a seam, in fact. Through this subtle gesture, Pierce once again points to the third dimension of her work. These prints are things as well as images. Then there is the optical illusion. Like Pierce's previous works, they are hard to fully

see. These prints are trippy. The printed images are a swirling of geometries and vanishing points mapped onto a quilt-like geometric template. This is confounded by the slight shadow created by the ridge of each seam. The screenprinting process further extends the illusion, as the paint sits on the surface of the paper—it doesn't bleed in. As a result, layers of ink refract light differently than others layers, and a subtle visual disruption occurs in the pattern.

So what does all this add up to? Artworks that resist being seen simply as what they are. A practice that has so many references to textiles, but never actually *is* a textile. It remains art. It remains "painting," despite often not looking as such. What can happen when we consider such an everyday item such as printed cotton, or a tea towel, in the context of art, without letting it function as utilitarian design? These works don't do the things cloth is supposed to do (clothe, warm, protect, absorb, adorn, etc.). They do what painting is supposed to do: it prompts us to look carefully, slowly even, and fully consider what we do or do not see.

The gift-shopification of Louise Bourgeois' fabric collages comes to mind as a foil, and illustrates the rationale of considering artworks as thin (3D), rather than flat (2D). Bourgeois' fabric collages have similar formal qualities to Pierce's. They seem to be a hybrid of neo-geo painting and quilting. They have also been produced as an unlimited edition of coasters, now available at the MOMA gift shop. In their new status as merchandise, their thin relief as fabric collages has been made flat into a printed image and laminated on to a coaster. Here they become utilitarian design, and our consideration of them as ideas ends abruptly. They are aesthetic, but they lose Bourgeois' powerful bite. They are like an image of sandpaper, instead of sandpaper.

If we then consider this subtle resistance in Pierce's new print works—the work is never truly flat—an excitingly simple shift in thinking is made possible. It's hardly a new idea, but still a satisfying one: art is a very good place to think about ideas that are not art, because art too (even painting, even printmaking) is of the world of non-art. It is not a window to elsewhere: it physically exists among us. Both painting and printmaking are thin, not flat. Pierce's careful and exquisite work shows us this. Delightfully and paradoxically, the portal to the interior of her work is located on the side, not the front.

¹ Lee Henderson. *A Cloud of Unknowing*. Kitchener: Old Mill Books, 2013.

² Dave Hickey. "Not Knowing Bridget Riley." *Parkett* 61 (2001). Thanks James Carl for sharing this with me.

Kelly Jazvac is an artist based in London, Ontario. She also likes to write about art. Her most recent exhibitions include *Recent Landscapes* at Louis B. James Gallery, New York City (2014); *Anthropophotogenic* at the University of Waterloo Art Gallery (2014); *PARK* at Oakville Galleries (2013); *Why Painting Now?* curated by_vienna (2013); *Surface Tension* at Oakville Galleries (2013); *Impel With Puffs* at Diaz Contemporary, Toronto (2013); and *More Than Two* at The Power Plant, Toronto (2013). Her work has been recently reviewed in *The Huffington Post* (2014); *Magenta Magazine* (2014); *The New Yorker* (2013); *Border Crossings* (2013); and *The Brooklyn Rail* (2012). She is represented by Diaz Contemporary, Toronto and Louis B. James Gallery, New York.

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Sasha Pierce received an MFA from the University of Waterloo, an Honours BA in Studio Art from the University of Guelph and currently lives and works in Toronto. Recent exhibitions include: Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (2014); Jessica Bradley Gallery, Toronto (2013); Mercer Union, Toronto (2013); The Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto (2012). In 2009 Pierce was awarded honourable mention in the Eleventh Annual RBC Canadian Painting Competition. Pierce is this year's recipient of the Laura Ciruls Painting Award administered by the Ontario Arts Foundation. Her work has been reviewed in *Canadian Art* magazine, *Border Crossings*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*. Sasha Pierce is represented by Jessica Bradley Gallery, Toronto.

Sasha Pierce would like to express thanks to Jessica Bradley, everyone at Open Studio, her awesome Master Printer Nick Shick, Kelly Jazvac for her amazing text, Shannon Partridge for her expert precision, Susy Oliveira, Evan Penny, Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council.

Jim Verburg is a Dutch/Canadian based in Toronto. Solo exhibitions include *One and Two*, at Mois de la Photo à Montréal (2011), and *Afterimage* at Galerie Nicolas Robert (2014, Montréal). Recently, he's been a part of the group exhibitions *More Than Two (Let It Make Itself)*, curated by Micah Lexier at The Power Plant (2013, Toronto), *Primeiro Estudo: Sobre Amor*, curated by Bernardo Mosqueira at Luciana Caravello (2014, Rio de Janeiro) and *Far Away So Close*, curated by Kimberly Phillips at Access Gallery (2014, Vancouver). His film *For a Relationship* won the 2008 Jury Prize for the Best Canadian Short Film at Inside Out Film Festival, and was nominated for the Iris Prize (UK). He has held residencies at the National Film Board of Canada (Montréal), Gallery 44 (Toronto), and The Banff Centre (Alberta). His book *O/ Divided/ Defined, Weights, Measures, and Emotional Geometry*, was awarded the Dazibao Prize (2013, Montreal) and was shortlisted for Best Printed Publication at the Gala des Arts Visual (2014, Montréal). Work from the publication was featured by Art Metropole at Art Basel Miami (2013). This spring, widmertheodoridis (Zurich) presented a solo booth of his work at VOLTA NY (2015, New York City).

Jim Verburg would like to thank Laine Groeneweg for his expert, open, and optimistic guidance in exploring new and unconventional methods during this residency. He would also like to thank Alex Bowron both her words, and her generous engagement with the work.

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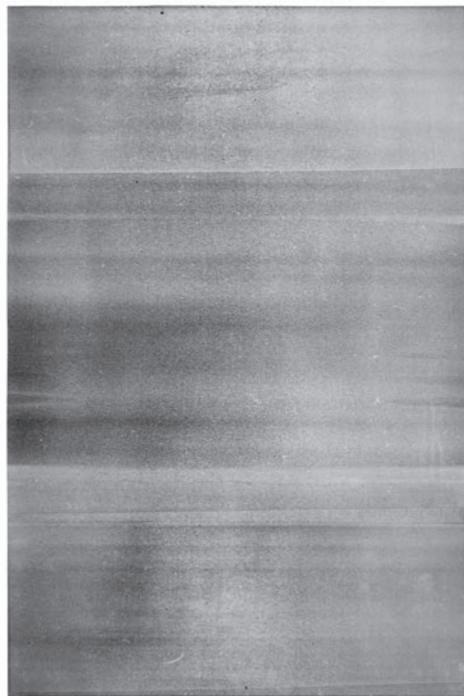
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Jim Verburg

~~what is missing / what is seen~~
the extent of what's already there



Untitled (mylar #3, from the ongoing series reflected/repeated), 2014, oil based ink on Mylar, 24" x 36". Printed with the assistance of Laine Groeneweg under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency, 2014-15.

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When Light Becomes Form

by Alex Bowron

Almost ten years before Mark Rothko's transition into his now famed method of colourfield abstraction, he was already fascinated by the potential for light to act as an instrument of unity and emotionality in art. Rothko saw how humans attributed certain emotions to the varying effects of light, thus endowing it with the power to function as a sort of conduit through which moods could be transferred. It only takes a few seconds of staring at the vibrating optical glow of a Rothko to experience deep emotional connection to the work. There is something specific to abstraction that allows for a clarity of communication between artist and viewer. Abstract works—specifically minimalist monochromes—are *atmospheric*; they offer non-hierarchical zones for contemplation where the mind is free to wander. They are, in many ways, the purest form of human communication because they do not rely on existing physical forms to represent internal thought.

With this in mind, we turn to a selection works from the series *reflected/repeated* by Toronto-based artist Jim Verburg. Produced entirely within the time span of the Open Studio residency, these oil-based ink on newsprint and frosted Mylar monochromes make use of light as both material and subject. With no prior experience in printmaking, Verburg moved quickly from an initial learning phase into a method of production rooted in mindfulness and intentionality while remaining committed to experimentation. We see in the works that each successive plane of pigment is applied with careful purpose, resulting in geometric abstractions that are as powerful as they are subtle. The strength in the works lies in the way that they communicate the artist's genuine interest in discovering a balance between control and chance.

Materially speaking, the works can be read as close relatives to printmaking. Each piece is composed of what would traditionally be known as the "off-roll": the act of ridding the roller of excess ink before its application to a matrix (the plate, block or stone on which the image that makes up a traditional print is prepared). By removing the matrix from the equation Verburg has chosen to use the roller as a direct tool for transferring ink onto to its intended surface. With surprising versatility, the roller produces marks that range from fully saturated fields of pigment to ordered geometric rows, irregular gradients and overlapping translucencies.

The density and viscosity in these off-roll "paintings" depend on a wide range of factors. These include the size of the roller, the amount of pressure applied, the speed of each pass, the number of overlaps and the number of passes. By layering pigment in this way, Verburg is able to build a depth and dimension to each piece that closely mimics some of the more fleeting effects of light. Viewers are offered the chance to be present at the exact moment when light becomes form. With a self-declared long history of "obsession" with light, Verburg has achieved a unique method of capturing its most elusive characteristics in these works. In a sense, he

has rendered light physical, transforming it into a material for art-making. The effects of this transformation appear in a variety of ways: sometimes as grainy swaths of semi-translucent grey forms floating in space, and at other times as flickering patches of reflected sunlight captured within the confines of a smooth white surface. Always monochromatic and composed of simple geometries, and yet, endlessly nuanced in the complexity of their detail, these works possess a deceptively minimalist appeal.

Throughout the process of the building up and transferring of ink there are a great number of elements that can affect the work's final impression. Each piece in this series is the result of a careful negotiation between control and chance. Every decision made takes into account the specific characteristics of the roller, the density and texture of the support and the numerous markings on the studio work surfaces themselves. The surprise is in the making, from never quite knowing what will come through and what will be absorbed or left behind. Any visual noise that may occur (like the tiny white spots that appear when dust has prevented the ink's transfer), is carefully monitored in order to control the proportions of solid and uneven forms. For Verburg then, abstraction involves the practice of a strategic method for calculating variables that are always already out of his control.

If early minimalist works sought to rid themselves of what they perceived to be an overblown sense of pathos in abstract expressionism, their exclusion of emotion only served to make their works more appealing to the human psyche. Rothko himself denied any attempt at categorizing his works, instead insisting that they be read as accumulations of his own internal order. There is something that happens when a human is presented with a non-representational work of art. At first we struggle to define what it is we see. In the case of Verburg's ink "paintings" we might decide that we are looking at spectrums of light or Xeroxed photocopies. Upon further reflection, however, we begin to allow our minds to settle on the not-knowing. We can appreciate the depth of colour and clean lines of form, but most importantly we begin to see how even formal elements can give way to the work's own inherent autonomy. By allowing ourselves purpose in such a pause, we are able to exist in the very moment that Verburg's works strive to capture. We can, in a sense, find our own light.

Alex Bowron is an artist and freelance art writer based in Toronto. She holds a BFA in Sculpture/Installation and an MA in Critical Cultural Theory. Her writing has appeared in *C Magazine*, *MOMUS*, *Magenta* and *VECTOR* and includes experimental and performance based work.