Øystein Aasan et
Jean-Baptiste Maitre

STRIPE PAINTINGS

La Salle de bains
27 rue Burdeau
69001 Lyon, France
+33 ⊙4 78 38 32 33
www.lasalledebains.net
La Salle de bains est membre de l'Art Center Social Club.

Exposition du 16 oct. au 3 nov. 2012
Vernissage samedi 13 oct. à 18 h
Ouverture mercredi ⇒ samedi : 13h–19 h
mardi sur RDV : 13 h–19 h

Commissariat : Arlène Berceliot Courtin

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Cette exposition a reçu le soutien de l'Ambassade Royale de Norvège et de l'Office for Contemporary Art Norway.

Lors de la première rétrospective de Frank Stella au MoMA en 1970, William Rubin qualifie les toiles de l'artiste américain de *Stripe Paintings*. Il ajoute que l'ensemble des différentes séries de peintures à bandes présentées pourrait être considéré comme l'extension d'un seul et même concept pictural, en dépit de toutes leurs différences[1].

L'exposition emprunte son titre à l'appellation de Rubin et propose d'analyser sous forme de projection, de conférence et de lecture, l'héritage visuel de Frank Stella dans les œuvres de Jean-Baptiste Maitre et d'Øystein Aasan.

Jean-Baptiste Maitre met en place plusieurs stratégies afin d'observer la manière dont les formes se transforment lorsqu'elles sont réexposées ou communiquées par le biais de médiums différents. En 2010, il réalise *Shaped Cinema*, un film 35 mm prenant pour point de départ la volonté de re-monstration de la monographie éditée à l'occasion de cette même rétrospective (*Frank Stella*, MoMA, 1970). Pour cela, il applique d'abord sur l'intégralité des pages du catalogue des pellicules 35 mm vierges qu'il scanne ensuite afin de reproduire les illustrations et les textes sur le film. Ce qui l'intéresse ici est l'action de conserver la logique processuelle du film analogique tout en procédant à la numérisation des images. Il effectue enfin le montage en commençant par la première image, en haut à gauche, jusqu'à la dernière, en bas à droite. Jean-Baptiste Maitre reprend le motif signature de Stella en apposant sur cette première monographie une nouvelle temporalité basée sur un découpage par bandes. À travers une succession d'images vacillantes, *Shaped Cinema* propose une déconstruction et une réévaluation des *Stripe Paintings* et du discours critique de William Rubin.

Tout comme Frank Stella dont les témoignages d'affection à la forme[2] sont nombreux, Øystein Aasan développe un attachement particulier pour le façonnage de ses toiles qui se manifeste notamment par le questionnement des diverses modalités d'accrochage. Depuis 2005, l'artiste poursuit une série intitulée *Display Units*, sous cette dénomination il déploie une nouvelle possibilité de présentation de la peinture. Ses toiles majoritairement recouvertes de quadrillages et de bandes sont disposées sur une grille en bois s'apparentant à un deuxième châssis, le support devient ainsi matière à redimensionner et repenser les bords de la peinture. Ces unités d'accrochage introduisant des images dans l'image provoquent une redéfinition de la notion de point de vue. Présentées directement aux murs lors de l'exposition à La Salle de bains, la peinture à bandes d'Aasan reste l'outil parfait pour installer une tension optique immédiate venant interroger avec pertinence cet héritage. Le soir du vernissage, Øystein Aasan viendra personnellement apporter son témoignage sur la relation particulière qu'il entretient avec Stella par la lecture de son texte *Stockbroker* qui examine la posture du peintre minimaliste à travers le récit et l'analyse de ces portraits officiels.

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1. William Rubin est à l'initiative de cette première rétrospective en tant que conservateur en chef du département peinture et sculpture au MoMA. « Les douze années de son travail exposées dans la rétrospective de 1970 du MoMA, ont démontré une richesse d'idées et une volonté de prendre des risques inégalée par rapport à n'importe quel autre peintre pendant la précédente décennie. Sans aucun doute, les œuvres de Stella d'avant 1970, les différentes séries de *Stripe Paintings* peuvent être considérées comme l'extension d'un seul et même concept pictural, en dépit de toutes leurs différences. » William Rubin, *Frank Stella, 1970-1987*, New York, MoMA, 1987, p.12.

2. « Je me sens impliqué avec ces formes. Elles signifient quelque chose pour moi. J'aime les formes en tant que telles et pour moi elles ont une identité et une valeur intrinsèque. Je les aime comme quelqu'un pourrait aimer la cheville de sa petite amie. Je les distingue des autres formes dans les reliefs, elles ont quelque chose de plus pour moi. » Frank Stella, *Frank Stella, 1970-1987*, New York, MoMA, 1987, p.117.

Autour de l'exposition
Le samedi 13 octobre à 20h00
Conférence de Øystein Aasan sur Frank Stella
Le samedi 3 novembre à 20h00
Lancement du catalogue de Jean-Baptiste Maitre basé sur la réalisation de son film «Shaped Cinema» édité par la Jan van Eyck Academie

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Exhibition Oct. 16th — Nov. 3rd 2012
Opening Saturday October 13th at 6pm
Opened Wednesday ⇒ Saturday : 1 pm – 7 pm
Tuesday by appointment : 1 pm – 7 pm

Curatoring : Arlène Berceliot Courtin

La Salle de bains is supported by the ministère de la Culture — DRAC Rhône-Alpes, région Rhône-Alpes and Ville de Lyon.

This exhibition is supported by the Norway Ambassy and the Office for Contemporary Art Norway.

At the time of the first Frank Stella retrospective at the MoMA in 1970, William Rubin coined the phrase "Stripe Paintings" to describe the works of the American artist. He added that the different series of *Stripe Paintings* presented altogether "could be considered as extensions of a single pictorial concept, despite all their differences"[1].

The exhibition title borrows Rubin's expression and offers an analysis of Frank Stella's visual legacy in works by Jean Baptiste Maitre and Øystein Aasan in the form of a projection, a conference and a lecture.

Jean Baptiste Maitre sets different strategies in order to observe how shapes evolve when they are exhibited anew or when they come out through various media. In 2010, he directed *Shaped Cinema*, a 35 mm film inspired by his will to exhibit again the monograph published on the occasion of the same retrospective (*Frank Stella*, MoMA, 1970). To that aim, he first applied unused 35 mm film on each page of the catalogue, which he then scanned in order to reproduce the illustrations and texts on film. What interested him here was the act of keeping the procedural logic of analog film while digitizing the images. In the end, he carried out the editing by starting with the first image on the top left-hand corner and going all the way down to the last one on the bottom right-hand corner. Jean Baptiste Maitre takes up Stella's feature pattern by applying to this first monograph a new temporality based on the idea of a stripe-by-stripe cutting out. Through a succession of flickering images, *Shaped Cinema* offers a deconstruction and a re-evaluation of the *Stripe Paintings* and of William Rubin's critical discourse.

Very much like Frank Stella, who stated his love of form on many occasions [2], Øystein Aasan develops a particular attachment to the shaping of his paintings. This most noticeably shows through the questioning of the various modalities of hanging. Since 2005, the artist has been completing a series called *Display Units*. Under this name, he exhibits a new possibility for the presentation of paintings. His works, in most cases covered with grid patterns and stripes, are displayed on a wooden lattice that looks like a second frame. The support thus becomes a resource to resize and rethink the outline of the painting. These hanging up units introduce images into the image and trigger off a redefinition of the notion of point of view. Displayed directly on the walls in the exhibition at La Salle de bains, Aasan's stripe painting remains the perfect tool to create an immediate optical tension that pertinently questions this legacy. On the opening night, Øystein Aasan will give a personal testimony of his particular relationship to Stella by reading the text *Stockbroker*, which examines the position of the minimalist painter through the story and analysis of his official portraits.

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1. William Rubin sparked off this first retrospective as the chief curator of the MoMA's department of painting and sculpture. «The twelve years of his work shown in MOMA retrospective of 1970 demonstrated a richness of ideas and a willingness to take risks unmatched by any other painter during the preceding decade. To be sure, among Stella's pre-1970 works, the various series of *Stripe Paintings* could be considered as extensions of a single pictorial concept, despite all their differences. » William Rubin, *Frank Stella*, 1970-1987, New York, MoMA, 1987, p.12.

2. «I feel involved with these shapes.They mean something to me. I love the shapes as shapes and, for me, they have an intrinsic identity and value. I like them the way someone might like his girlfriend's ankle. I distinguish them from other forms in the reliefs; they have something more for me». Frank Stella, *Frank Stella*, 1970-1987, New York, MoMA, 1987, p.117.

Also coming
Sat. October 13th at 8pm
Lecture by Øystein Aasan on Frank Stella
Sat. November 3rd at 8pm
Presentation by Jean-Baptiste Maitre of the catalogue on his film «Shaped Cinema» edited by Jan van Eyck Academie

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Texte de Øystein Aasan
Lecture, samedi 13 octobre 20h

ESSAY STUDIO
PART 1

IN THE BEGINNING
"*An essential quality of any true artist is separateness, whether he works in defiant solitude or within a style.*"
James Thrall Soby's introduction to Alexander Lieberman "The artist in his studio".

Of all the institutional apparatus containing and surrounding an artwork, the artist studio has been a much debated entity. A work of art has never existed alone, opaque and singular, as an island to paraphrase John Donne. The institutional nexus that contains and envelope the art work consists of too many elements to mention them all, but I will make a few suggestions. There are frames of socio-political and economical perpetuations, overlapping with museology, criticism, discourse, archival impulses, rumor (oh, yes), academia and many more. Many of these frames have come under repetitive investigation both from within and from outside the artworld, if we define the artworld as an all encompassing entity including everything and everyone, mover and shakers, producers and products, owners or just interested parties. The studio, as the place where the artist-occupant creates and works, has not escaped the searching light of upheaval, but rather been its first stop. And maybe rightfully so, since the studio is the first of these frames that contains the artwork. From the moment of conception, if we give man-like qualities to the artwork, the first thing an artwork sees is the whitewashed walls of the artist studio, an occasional sky-light ceiling and the bleary eyes of the artist-creator ragged and tormented in his macho-god-like appearance. Or so it seems.

In understanding both the studio and the role of the artist working there it seems, now more than ever, impossible not to divide between a popular myth and a "professional"/insiders understanding, let alone when they increasingly overlap and when the artists themselves use myth to redirect the attention towards themselves, redirecting the focus away from the work they make.

From the amount of tales, academic books, coffee table books and Vimeo clips we get a distinct feeling that the studio as we know it, has never seen a better circumstance to thrive and influence the understanding of the artwork. From Alexander Lieberman's ghostly B/W photos of Cezanne's studio after he had long passed, via his photos of Matisse's female models in the studio, to Robert Smithson, John Baldressari and Daniel Buren who at least superficially wanted to do away with the studio altogether. Those three all had their say in shaping the role and perception of the artist studio, and they saw the studio as the old world order, infinitely in tow with a general mistrust in both the old ways of the modernist ideals and the skills required to execute those kinds of works. And the need to change this was, according to them, a necessity in order to better serve the new ideas and the new works being produced. The emphasis they laid on the studio seems almost suspicious in its ferociousness, but in their eyes both the place and the tools needed replacement, and subsequently Smithson and Buren both formulated their thoughts on how this new work should take shape, and almost exclusively outside the traditional studio, and with a methodology strikingly different from earlier generations. But they did not stop with the tools and the studio, also the coding of the artists role in the public eye was reenacted. In Buren's words his studio was wherever he was, or within him. This moment corresponds quite naturally with the separation between "skill" and "de-skill". And those two ideological shifts in the 60's, turned out to have a long reach, far into the 90's they defined more and more, and then maybe less, radical practices until they themselves became a mainstay.

AMERICA
In America a different but related tendency rose in the early 20th century: namely the artist as worker. In Thomas Eakins' numerous paintings and sketches documenting William Rush working on the seminal sculpture Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River, Eakins early painting focuses on the female nude model, while the second version painted some thirty years later, the studio or workshop of the artist is foregrounded and so is the tools of the artist, to the point where they could be misidentified as the tools of a carpenter.

In this way these two paintings by Eakins underline the shift of public perception that took place during that time, from a Eurocentric focus on what occurs as traditional European motifs and toward an American, more pioneer-like code, also of course coinciding with a nationalistic uprising and a view of the arts as helping to reshape the immediate past of a nation coming into itself. The idea of the artist as a worker, more connected to the everyday and craft, blossomed with the generation of Abstract Expressionists painters. Where their European counterparts was still fixated on the School of Paris and its Bohemia, the American New York based circle of artists displayed a remarkable talent for siding with the everyman and contextualizing their work as precisely: work. Hours and hours of toil and sweat, and thus mirroring the hazardous circumstance of the colonization of the "wild west".

"*At a party (At de Kooning's studio) the talk turned to the condition of the painter in America, the bitterness and unfairness of his poverty and disregard. People had a great deal to say about the subject, and they said it, but the talk ended in gloomy silence. In the pause, Gorky's deep voice came from under a table, "Nineteen miserable years have I lived in America." Everybody burst out laughing.*" Edwin Denby

No doubt times were hard in the 30's and 40's for most of these artists. But come early 1950, several of them started making modest livings, getting bigger studios and moving out to for instance the Hamptons. Jackson Pollock famously worked in a barn there, and de Kooning spent months at a time working in rented spaces before he finally built one in East Hampton. The barn of Jackson Pollock, later used by his wife Lee Krasner, was in many ways the template for numerous studios later erected in the area. When Pollock and Krasner bought the property, the barn accommodated one large studio for him (she worked in a bedroom in the house, later, after Pollocks death, she took the big one. And fixed it up, only for it to be restored into the condition it was in when he worked there after her death. Even to the extent that the gray paint she put on the floorboards was carefully removed to expose his paint-drips). While he worked there it was unheated and with simple wallboards and no insulation. But still this simple barn structure seems to have upheld its allure for times to come:

"*I wanted something very similar in keeping with the structures around the area, which was barnlike*" Ross Bleckner

"*I mean, I tried to keep it very simple, sort of barnlike, or something*" Eric Fischl

THE STOCKBROKER

When Frank Stella made his "debut" into New York's art life he was 23 years old, showing several paintings in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "*Sixteen Americans*" in 1959. The catalogue produced for the show included biographies and pictures of the artists, often taken in the artists own "element", in the studio with working clothes and them deeply immersed in their work. This was a look, or a code, that had been well established, not to say celebrated, in the public eye. It was molded and infused by the reigning generation of AbEx painters. And it was not a coincidental public image. But rather, along the lines of the American working-man artist (as already described), a fusion of acceptable positioning and a bohemian outlook. It said : "we work, just like you do, but we maintain our freedom to be in a different world". When Stella was asked to submit his portrait, he insisted on a picture taken not in his studio but in a professional photo studio, agains a white background, sporting a dark three-piece suit and leather loafers. Something more akin to a stockbrokers sartorial choice of the day. And this way of representing oneself was very upsetting for the worker-bohemia. Not only did it poke fun of the representation, but it was also threatening in the sense that it attacked an image already tolerated and celebrated in the wider society, something that gave their generation a solid stance within the world, if this image was done away with, the AbEx generation would have to create or instill another type of image. In 1960 Stella had another official portrait taken, this time among the steel-beams of what appears to be an unfinished building. He sits with only white sky behind him, in the middle of the construction, in an outfit that at least at first look places him back in the workingmans realm, with jeans, leather jacket and boots. But somehow the quality of the garment and the hand-made look of his boots gives him away. This is a person with a privileged background and one who works more with his head than his hands.

Stella's conveyance of image was not a complete workover of representation, it was nothing entirely new in what the public saw, but rather a nuanced manipulation of codes that suited Stella well, as he was about to launch into the New York artworld, with a mixed message of being an honest painter/worker and/or executive/artist. The keyword in Stella's early feud with the established movers and shakers of the artworld is tolerance, they had become, directly as a result of their public image/persona publicly "tolerated", and Stella upset that tolerance not only with his sartorial choices but also by statements like: "*I just wanted to do it and get it over with so I could go home and watch TV.*"

The idea of genuine and true expression was suddenly doubtful, since the artist was not working in solitude, and did not convey a working-man persona, but rather an effective businessman with the world for his taking, capable of shifting the codes and his own circumstance to his own favor.

WHAT NOW?

We are not accustomed to making such sharp distinctions; Surrealism influenced Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism foreshadowed dematerialization. We accept modernism as a historical progression, "the tradition of the new". We are not accustomed to recognize similarities, only innovations. We do not think of recent art as a constant rearrangement of the same elements. Their quality, depth and relationship may alter but the actual materials remain constant. If one can accept this as an alternative view of the relationship between artists rather than art movements, our attitude towards "new" art must also alter. Lynda Morris (in Strata: paintings, drawings and prints by Ellsworth Kelly, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman and Cy Twombly. Published in Studio International 187, no 963, February 1974)

With commendable accuracy, the above quote by Lynda Morris could easily have been written in the 2012. And her proposed "alternative view", is today the most favored one. Not only do we tend to see similarities between different artists production, but we see identical or near identical projects being made in very different cities and under different circumstances. The distance of an ocean or two makes no difference any longer. They say that Gin was invented in five different places at the same time. And if there are still traces of what one used to call avant-garde, large shifts in ideology, output and style, by now it counts more as a homogenization of a large field, more than what historically accounted for one idea overthrowing another. As said before, the space where art is exhibited has unified and now represents an "ideal" setting for objects made for these specific settings. And partly because of that, but just as much the relative nearness of different art-cities and the colossal spread of information, art produced today tends to imitate this ideal setting, this standardized look and feel. Type in any relevant keyword and hit Google Image and see for yourself, alternatively look up www.vvork.com and you can let others do it for you.

This development is acutely relevant to the issues discussed in this essay, since it flows out of the backwater of the period which this essay is most concerned with, the 60's and the early 70's. Since then there has been productions or rather combinations of productions hailed as the new "new" but each time that happens the art world reverts its attention to a cacophony of multitude. It has certainly, from time to time, looked like the new "new" is actually quite old, with an inherent nostalgic streak. And even if we tomorrow hear of another new "new" it is likely only more of the same, and if this seems a tad dystopic, it is in many ways a good reflection of the times we live in, where even new technology and design has the sole purpose of looking old (think Instagram). And as we know, contemporary art has, and has always had among its functions; to hold up a mirror to its time.

The idea of the image, or rather the idea of reproduction and reproducibility plays into this, in not so obvious terms. If we accept Thierry De Duve's blending of Malraux's statement on what today remains in terms of aesthetic value: "the history of art since a hundred years is the history of what is photographable", with De Duve's dislike for Donald Judd's statement: "A work needs only be interesting", we can draw up historical lines that extends far into our own time. In the context of the studio and its site for production and further more the symbolic and contextual move of an object from the studio to the gallery, there is a fundamentally pictorial shift taking place. The circumstance, so neatly rendered in the white cube, is a pictorial circumstance more than tactile and sensory, or architectural. And if Benjamin rightly claimed that the artwork's "aura" could not be reproduced in a picture, the circumstance in which we now experience art have found a way to superficially circumvent the problem of a lack of "aura", by making the situation, the circumstance were we experience art look more or less standardized, unified as a pictorial median. This has led to a significant change in the actual production of artworks, where the works made and displayed quickly followed suit to live up to the pictorial quality of the circumstance. In other words we get a blending of works and context, of primary structure and secondary structure, to the extent where we can't positively separate the two. And where Brian O'Doherty locates the flight, and the success, of the white cube in the picture-plane itself, there is more to that story. Even as the white cube was modeled on a certain separateness from the outside world first found in the artist-studio, and as it was aestethically founded on the blankness of the artist studio, in later years the tide turned in on itself and the white cube is ultimately responsible for the works made in the artist-studio, and this time around it is not the separateness from the the outside world, the realness and the de facto socio-political existence of artworks, but a pictorial reasoning best summed up as "what object will look so awesome in an installation picture that it will radiate a "wow" effect, or a "knock your socks off" statement". That makes todays production of art a conglomerate of both context, content and reproducibility. It is, today, difficult to imagine a work of art separated from its documentation, since every work shown publicly is reproduced photographically, one way or the other. And in the 60's and early 70's when the artist studio became a "post" fatality in the attack waged on the forms, tools and contents of old, the studio comes back full circle some decades later, via the acrimonious space of the white cube, to again shape both the works made, the context of these works and the image of these works.