

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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Wade Guyton

Press Packet

- Hochdörf, Achim. "Wade Guyton: Museum Ludwig, Cologne." *Artforum* 58, no. 10, July/August 2020, pp. 140–42.
- McDermott, Emily. "Wade Guyton Gives Painting a New Edge in Major Cologne Museum Survey." *Wallpaper*, December 20, 2019.
- Bollen, Christopher. "The 10 Best Art Shows of 2017: Wade Guyton, 'Siamo Arrivati' at Museo Madres (Naples, Italy)." *Interview*, December 25, 2017.
- Russeth, Andrew. "In the Era of the Impossible News Cycle, Artist Wade Guyton Is Translating Screenshots to Painting." *W Magazine*, September 29, 2017.
- Bell, Kristy. "Wade Guyton: MAMCO, Geneva." *Frieze*, no. 184, January/February 2017, p. 158.
- Baumann, Daniel. "Wade Guyton, Peter Fischli, David Weiss." *Artforum* 55, no. 9, May 2017, p. 157.
- Kertess, Klaus. "Painting in the Age of Digital Reproduction." *Art in America* 101, no. 1, January 2013, pp. 74–83.
- Vogel, Carol. "Painting, Rebooted." *The New York Times*, September 30, 2012, pp. ARI, AR23.
- Hochdörfer, Achim. "Wade Guyton: Whitney Museum of American Art." *Artforum* 51, no. 6, February 2013, pp. 234–37.
- Rothkopf, Scott. "Wade Guyton: The New Black." *Parkett* 83, 2008, pp. 74–81.
- Burton, Johanna. "Wade Guyton: Rites of Silence." *Artforum* 46, no. 10, Summer 2008, pp. 365–73.

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ARTFORUM



Wade Guyton, *The Devil's Hole*, 1999, two C-prints mounted on wood, each 29 5/8 x 19 1/2 x 11 1/4".

Wade Guyton

MUSEUM LUDWIG

Curated by Yilmaz Dziewior with Leonie Radine

THE DEVIL'S HOLE is a view into the abyss. The diptych's two panels depict reddish light transforming layers of rock into the twists and folds of a bodily orifice, before vanishing in the dark of fathomless depths. It is an empty center, a mysterious receptacle for our projections. The hole, a water-filled cave in Tennessee, is not just an attraction for tourists and scientists. It evokes images of a mythical underworld and triggers thoughts of psychoanalysis and Plato. It conjures the expansionist bravado of Land art and suggests an anal variation of the origin fantasies of aesthetic modernism found in the work of Gustave Courbet, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Marcel Duchamp. Taken from different angles, the photographs, which date from 1999, hung

on the wall side by side and stared at us like two empty eyes. It is a bifurcated point of origin, one that programmatically marks the beginning of Guyton's artistic practice. From their position at the end of the long central axis of the exhibition space, the two images cast the sequence of rooms as a bottomless maw, as if all the works to follow sprang from this black source.

Appropriately, visitors to Guyton's survey at Museum Ludwig, Cologne, curated by Yilmaz Dziewior with Leonie Radine, entered by descending a staircase. From a ledge at the top, they gazed down on a nearly forty-foot-wide sculptural configuration of worktables, dollies, primed canvases, and ink-jet printers, all covered by two long strips of blue carpet and a sequence of shiny metal U's. The ensemble, created in 2017, at once brings to mind Guyton's earliest works—the installations recalling the art of Michael Asher, Dan Graham, and Robert Morris, among others—and displays the equipment and materials that constitute his signature approach: digitally printed canvases, which dominated the show. First there were the stripe, hole, and flame paintings; then the X's and monochrome paintings; and later canvases that extended thirty or fifty feet along the exhibition walls and brought to a head Guyton's staging of the late-modernist play of painting and object, material support and institutional context. Created around the time of his first midcareer survey, at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art in 2012, these large-scale works mark a conceptual tightening-up, a kind of idling of meaning production, which Guyton surely could have pursued further over the following years and decades. Instead, he let it push him into an artistic crisis, which spurred him, starting in 2015, to present to the public a wealth of new series in which he enormously



Wade Guyton, *Untitled*, 2015, ink-jet print on linen, 10' 8" × 9' 1/4".

expanded the scope of his approach, from the chair-sculpture paintings to the floor paintings all the way to the *New York Times* screenshots and iPhone paintings of the past few years. No fewer than ninety-four of these new pictures were distributed across the Cologne exhibition, displayed in a way that ensured they were understood not as a break or a new beginning but as an unfolding and multiplication of questions and concerns that informed his early work. Meanwhile, the various side cabinets, corridors, and staircases of the museum cleverly showcased individual series as well as books and posters as independent facets of his artistic practice. The installation was effortlessly integrated with the museum's architecture so that the conceptual throughlines of Guyton's work remained apparent. A focused, strictly chronological exhibition within the exhibition of his drawings was especially beautiful.

Guyton devoted himself to painting in the early 2000s, at exactly the moment when Western art history lost those parameters that had hitherto enabled it to maintain a compelling narrative.

The Devil's Hole and the sculptural installation at the beginning of the exhibition served, however, as reminders that Guyton's "origins" are not in painting but in conceptual photography and sculpture, traditions that emerged in, and in opposition to, that medium. So how can it be explained that Guyton was so soon afterward able to occupy such a central position in the discourse of painting? Where did this explosion of image production come from? It seems, at any rate, not a coincidence that Guyton



Wade Guyton, *Untitled*, 2002, ink-jet print on book page, 11 × 8 1/2".



Wade Guyton, *Untitled*, 2016, ink-jet print on linen, 84 × 69".

devoted himself to painting in the early 2000s, at exactly the moment when Western art history lost those parameters that had hitherto enabled it to maintain a compelling narrative. A historiographic crisis—one that shook to the core the structural premises of advanced art as they had existed since the 1960s—became manifest. Talk of the death of painting played a central role in this drama. For the neo-avant-garde, a rhetoric of “overcoming painting” could not disguise the fact that these practitioners remained reliant on painting as an underground reservoir of power. Indeed, painting came to represent an entire aesthetic and institutional framework—yet this mythologization lost more and more of its credibility in the early 2000s. Digitization served to accelerate this process. The digital’s anachronistic leveling released painting from its historical and philosophical ballast, and the death of painting shrunk into a discrete, art-historical episode, one localizable narrative among many. It is painting’s loss of power that made it possible for Guyton to turn to the format of the picture on canvas. Appropriated emblems of the death of painting—stripes, X’s, the monochrome—are the starting point in his work for an operative system of image production that is designed to be situationally contingent and active across media. Crucially, Guyton does not *think* in painting but defines painting as a site where various discourses can converge: Painting becomes a “devil’s hole,” a vacuum, a phantasmagoric space that can be strategically filled. Along such lines, Guyton has over the past twenty years established a methodical system, one that in Cologne became for the first time recognizable in its full complexity, where the reciprocal saturation of its constitutive elements is revealed.

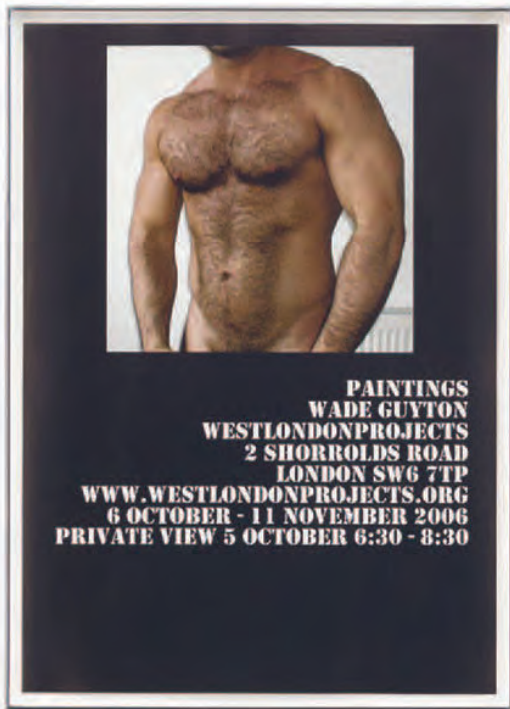
FIRST, GUYTON SYSTEMATICALLY PLUMBS the visual and discursive codes of art history. Countless artists and entire genealogies come into play and are overwritten, critically parsed, and confronted. At first glance, the Cologne exhibition evoked a kind of three-dimensional Google search. We could click on

each and every picture and link to deeper levels of meaning: Constructivism, Minimalism, Pop art; the history of artistic media and genres; art's relationship with architecture, design, and advertising. Guyton's reengagement with earlier subjects is, however, by no means about postmodern pluralism or ironic distance. On the contrary, each individual motif of a painting is in dialogue with its models and illuminates their discursive framing. Guyton's works enter into an open exchange of blows, put ideas to the test, and emphatically take sides. (This is why I have never understood why so many people find his art cold.) He achieves this antagonism primarily by limiting his repertoire of forms, which can be interpreted in various ways: An *X* can, depending on what imagery it stands in relation to, be seen as a source of resonant tension or ceaseless variation, as interference or cancellation, as an anthropomorphic sign or a signature. Guyton's images also comment on one another and summon new perspectives, depending on how they are hung. Alone, a black painting might call up the legacy of modernist abstraction and '80s appropriation, but combined with one of the *New York Times* paintings, it mobilizes an entirely new set of meanings. The horizontal traces of the printhead's movement suddenly appear endlessly agitated, as if they are failing to keep up with a flood of digital information.

Beyond that, Guyton works through various technical possibilities of digital image production. His motifs are based on text and image files, scans, cell-phone snapshots, screenshots, and zoomed-in bitmap files that are mostly reworked in Photoshop. The starting point of his imagery is always what's closest at hand, the infrastructure of the studio and the artist's surroundings. The iPhone paintings, for instance, feature a photo of an Apple advertisement, reminding the viewer of the devices on which important steps of image production are carried out. The floor paintings, meanwhile, are made from a snapshot of a canvas emerging from Guyton's printer—one can make out the artist's right foot at the bottom edge. The artist is photographed the scene from above, from a standing position, just as he did *The Devil's Hole* almost twenty years previously: It is a moment of waiting, staring, judging, surprise.



View of “Wade Guyton: *Zwei Dekaden MCMXCIX–MMXIX*,” 2019–20. Photo: Simon Vogel.



Two posters for Wade Guyton's exhibition "Paintings" at westlondonprojects, London, 2006.

A further level of Guyton's system is the organizational structure of his artistic practice. Over time—especially after he moved his studio to its current location on New York's Bowery in 2009—the logistics of his process have grown increasingly complex, entailing a range of activities including the preparation and stretching of canvases; the production of photographic documentation; the storage, transport, and installation of finished works; library management; and the publication of catalogues and the writing of correspondence. It is not just these individual activities that thus emerge as the subject of pictures, but also the social dynamics associated with them. We see studio assistants gathering in meetings, carrying the pictures, and standing in the kitchen having an after-work tequila. *Untitled*, 2016, which was prominently placed at the top of the main axis in the Cologne exhibition, is among these images. It is a classic interior scene: In the background, Zach Steinman is preparing a tequila drink; on the left, James Campbell, with his arms folded, is staring at a spot high on the wall, lost in thought; and Jeanette Mundt is caught mid-conversation, her index finger and thumb searching for just the right turn of phrase. Each of the three figures is in his or her own space, and yet they come together as a unit. One might imagine that art exists only for such moments, for a person to encounter themselves in others.

Finally, Guyton self-consciously lets calculated strategies of value production suffuse all aspects of his art and its experience. The standard format of his pictures is roughly equivalent to the proportions of printed currency. At Art Basel in 2014, Guyton consigned to each of the five galleries representing him a monochrome painting based on the same digital file of solid black. What at first glance might have seemed a friendly gesture, a generous effort to give equal treatment to his many dealers and collectors, also raised key questions of value: Which gallery would sell it fastest and to whom? Which of the pictures—which

differ courtesy of subtle formal nuances—would prove the most desirable? How would the black canvases be contextualized by the various gallerists? And what were the discursive preconditions for the recalcitrant negativity of the black picture becoming the emblem of a financial transaction? Guyton's approach in Basel made clear that economic concerns permeate every level of his system. But Guyton's project is emphatically not about playing aesthetic procedures and their commercialization against each other and tendentiously passing judgment on either as corrupt or idealized. Rather, it makes clear that his system situates the creative act in all possible locations, and that each of those sites comes to bear on the processes of value creation.

One crucial point about Guyton's art is that the individual levels cannot be considered in isolation from one another but are interlinked. The system is nonlinear and performative, with entrances and exits at the ready at every point. The combination in each case determines an individual piece's aesthetic, institutional, technological, social, and economic effects. When, for instance, a black picture was placed next to one of the floor paintings at the beginning of the Cologne exhibition, completely different conceptions of the image, as well as art-historical lineages, competed against one another: The floor turned perpendicular on the wall effected a phenomenological physicality that vied with the monochrome picture's aesthetics of presence. But the two exhibition posters in the same room shifted values and meanings. Created to advertise the 2006 show at westlondonprojects where Guyton first presented his X paintings—and presented in Cologne as if they, too, were artworks—these broadsides portray a muscular, hairy male torso; the black pictures, accordingly, came to evince a powerful, posing masculinity, as if they were simulating the booming



View of “Wade Guyton: *Zwei Dekaden MCMXCIX–MMXIX*,” 2019–20. Walls, from left: *Untitled* (detail), 2010; *Untitled*, 2017. Floor: *Zeichnungen für ein grosses Bild*, 2010. Photo: Simon Vogel.

bass of a gay club. Meanwhile, the *X* paintings hanging around the corner, with their rhythmically offset arms and legs, were dancing to the beat. At the end of the exhibition, four stacks of finished canvases leaned against the wall. They appeared as they might in the studio, withdrawn and part of an anonymous mode of production: a provisional arrangement in which only the edges of the image remained visible, like the stripes of a bar code.

I began this review at the outset of the coronavirus outbreak in Germany, and my writing was periodically interrupted by emergency plans, reports of catastrophe, and a flood of video conferences. Seeing the world from my home office made me more conscious than ever of the chasm between what is close and what is far away. And in the middle of it all, Guyton sent me, without comment, a snapshot of the view from his studio window, the sky heavy with clouds. He has deployed this motif in many pictures over the past few years; at Museum Ludwig, it appeared, among other places, in a five-panel work commissioned for the museum's stairwell in 2017 that had been reinstalled for the retrospective: Across the forty-five-foot-long piece, we find multiple images of the skyline, including shots featuring One World Trade Center and Herzog & de Meuron's apartment building on Leonard Street. In the foreground, a building with dark windows rises up in the images' lower third, resembling a monumental Guyton installation. The longer I look at that image, the more my eye is drawn to the dark building at its center. It is the windowless, Brutalist Long Lines Building, opened in 1974 for a subsidiary of AT&T, a building that returned to the news in 2016 when it emerged that the structure—first called Project X—was likely being used by the NSA as a covert surveillance hub. The split screen in Guyton's work divides and doubles the dark edifice: a faceless devil's hole in which the pictures and data from Guyton's studio are recorded and surveilled.

Translated from German by Alexander Scrimgeour.

Achim Hochdörfer is director of Museum Brandhorst in Munich.

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Wallpaper*

ART | 20 DEC 2019 | BY EMILY MCDERMOTT

Wade Guyton gives painting a new edge in major Cologne museum survey

Renowned for his inkjet paintings, the American conceptual artist is the subject of a retrospective at Museum Ludwig charting two decades of his trailblazing practice



Installation view of 'Wade Guyton: Zwei Dekaden MCMXCIX-MMXIX' at Museum Ludwig, Cologne. © Wade Guyton. Photography: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln / Marc Weber

From posters and books to paintings, drawings and sculptures, conceptual artist Wade Guyton is fascinated by printed and digital imagery. He continuously explores both their limitations and possibilities, be it on linen or paper or through cast bronze or manipulated metal. This preoccupation is clearly seen in Guyton's largest exhibition to date, currently on view at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. Titled 'Wade Guyton: Zwei Dekaden MCMXCIX–MMXIX', the show presents an overview of the artist's work from the last two decades, created in close collaboration with Guyton himself.

McDermott, Emily. "Wade Guyton Gives Painting a New Edge in Major Cologne Museum Survey." *Wallpaper*, December 20, 2019.

The exhibition begins with a large-scale installation, providing the ground on which the rest of the show unfolds. Inkjet printers and black metal tables are covered by two draping blue carpets (*Untitled*, 2017), on top of which stand nine reflective chrome U-shaped sculptures (*U Sculpture [v.1–9]*, 2004–2011). The depth of these three-dimensional letters summons memories of Microsoft Word Art, in turn connecting the singular ‘U’ to the shortening of ‘you’ when chatting online or by text. ‘U’ along with ‘X’, another letter that assumes symbolic associations in connection with the internet, recur throughout Guyton’s practice, most prominently in the works for which he is most well-known: images on raw or primed linen made with inkjet printers, like those covered by the carpet, that he calls ‘paintings’.

Many of these paintings are presented in the exhibition, which is arranged thematically rather than chronologically. For example, in the second room, each of five untitled paintings depict the letter ‘U’ against a black background with flames rising from the bottom. They appear to be a series made at once, yet they were made periodically between 2005 and 2014. In the centre of the room is *Untitled Action Sculpture (Chair)*, a 2001 sculpture of a twisting steel rod, originally from in a Marcel Breuer chair. Similar sculptures appear later in the exhibition, albeit flattened to two dimensions, as they’re depicted in five untitled paintings from 2015–2018.



Untitled, 2018, by Wade Guyton. Collection of Eleanor Heyman Propp. © The artist



© Wade Guyton. Photography: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln / Marc Weber



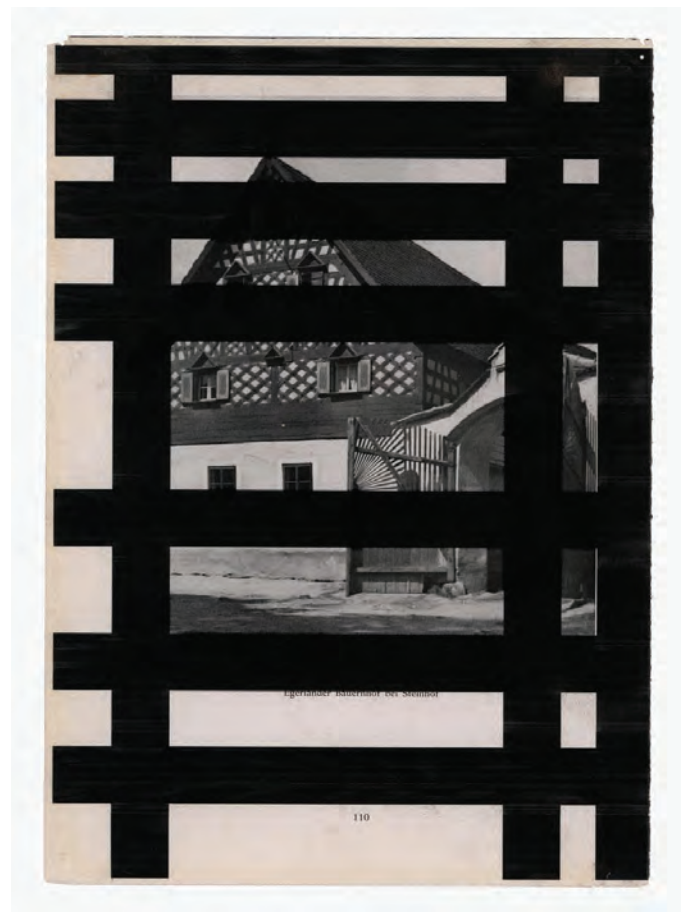
© Wade Guyton. Photography: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln / Marc Weber

McDermott, Emily. "Wade Guyton Gives Painting a New Edge in Major Cologne Museum Survey." *Wallpaper*, December 20, 2019.

Other printed paintings are less abstract, such as those showing screenshots from the *The New York Times*' website, iPhone advertisements, and the downtown Manhattan skyline. In vitrines created especially for the exhibition are a selection of Guyton's 'drawings' – images printed atop pages of books, art and design catalogues, and other found material – as well as a selection of his artist books. No matter the form the work takes, however, Guyton continues to explore and appropriate digital media and tools, as well as re-appropriate his own work when it feels right or when circumstances present the opportunity. As he opined in the exhibition catalogue, 'Sometimes the artwork decides when it wants to be an artwork.' ✱



Untitled, 2006, by Wade Guyton. Private collection. © Wade Guyton. Photography: Lamay Photo



Untitled (Egerlander Bauerhof bei Steinhof 110), 2002, by Wade Guyton. © Wade Guyton

McDermott, Emily. "Wade Guyton Gives Painting a New Edge in Major Cologne Museum Survey." *Wallpaper*, December 20, 2019.

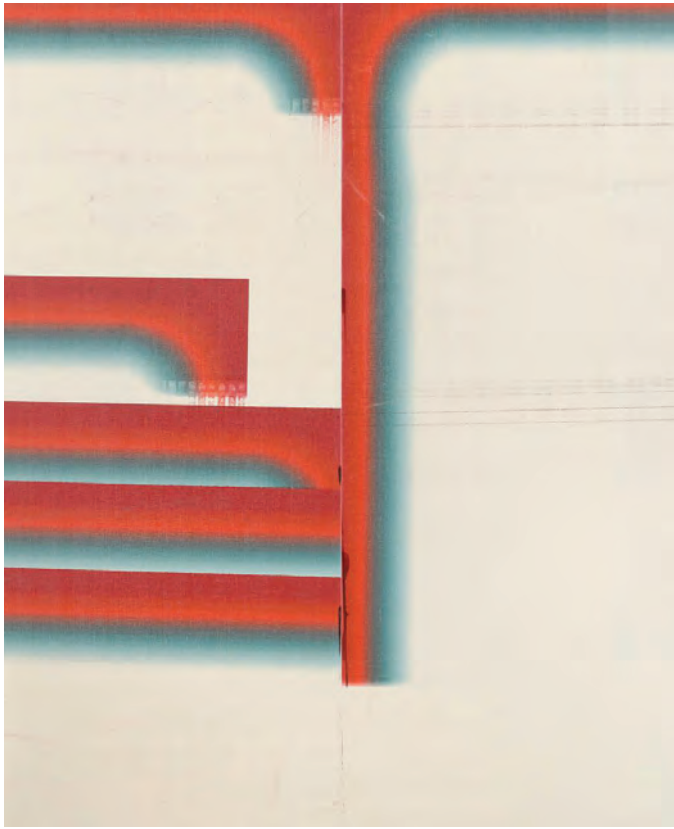


© Wade Guyton. Photography: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln / Marc Weber



© Wade Guyton. Photography: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln / Marc Weber

McDermott, Emily. "Wade Guyton Gives Painting a New Edge in Major Cologne Museum Survey." *Wallpaper*, December 20, 2019.



Untitled, 2019, by Wade Guyton. Private collection. Courtesy of Segalot, New York. © Wade Guyton



The Devil's Hole, 1999, by Wade Guyton. © Wade Guyton



© Wade Guyton. Photography: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln / Marc Weber

INFORMATION

'Wade Guyton: Zwei Dekaden MCMXCIX-MMXIX', until 1 March 2020, Museum Ludwig. [museum-ludwig.de](https://www.museum-ludwig.de)

McDermott, Emily. "Wade Guyton Gives Painting a New Edge in Major Cologne Museum Survey." *Wallpaper*, December 20, 2019.

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Interview

The 10 best art shows of 2017

By Staff

December 25, 2017



5. Wade Guyton “Siamo Arrivati” at Museo Madre (Naples, Italy)

The New York artist has been working with constructs of time and place for a while now, using screen grabs of the *New York Times* homepage for his fractured inkjet paintings. But last spring, Guyton spent two months in the city of Naples soaking up the local atmosphere, shooting everything from shellfish to a charnel house on his phone, and ultimately creating a lyrical, mesmerizing exhibition that served as a painterly ode to Italy. — Christopher Bollen

Bollen, Christopher. “The 10 Best Art Shows of 2017: Wade Guyton, ‘Siamo Arrivati’ at Museo Madres (Naples, Italy).” *Interview*, December 25, 2017.

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In the Era of the Impossible News Cycle, Artist Wade Guyton Is Translating Screenshots to Painting

The artist's new exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries freezes the news cycle into painting.

by **Andrew Russeth**
09.29.17

Wade Guyton makes art in the disorienting space where the digital and analog, the real and immaterial, blur—or jam up. For more than a decade he has been feeding canvas and linen through Epson inkjet printers, generating his black monochromes, letters, and flames from computer files, and letting the works carry the marks where the process malfunctioned. “We recognize them as paintings, but they are really on the very, very edge of what painting can be considered to be,” says Rebecca Lewin, exhibition curator at the Serpentine Galleries, where “Das New Yorker Atelier, Abridged,” the 45-year-old New York artist’s first solo London show, opens September 29 (through February 4, 2018).



Ron Amstutz, courtesy of the artist

The exhibition maps Guyton’s practice through an intriguingly diverse range of paintings from 2015 and 2016. One was made with a picture of One World Trade Center that he shot on his iPhone from his studio window, others with photo-saturated screenshots of the *New York Times* home page. Frustrated with his progress on a particular painting, Guyton recalls reading the news and realizing, “I just need to make something.”

The resulting works, a few of which debuted in New York in the wake of the Trump victory, are snapshots of both technology and the news cycle, quick-flowing forces eerily frozen in time. “We installed that show the day of the election,” Guyton says. Once the winner became known, “suddenly all the work looked completely different.”

Russeth, Andrew. “In the Era of the Impossible News Cycle, Artist Wade Guyton Is Translating Screenshots to Painting.” *W Magazine*, September 29, 2017.

Frieze

SWITZERLAND

Wade Guyton

MAMCO, GENEVA

Travelling from its original incarnation in Le Consortium, Dijon, in June 2016, Wade Guyton's solo exhibition at MAMCO in Geneva is his first institutional show of new work after a three-year hiatus. As often happens when an artist takes a pause following a period of intense production and activity, Guyton turned his focus to his immediate surroundings. The result is a series that takes as its motif a snapshot from the artist's studio showing two of Guyton's earlier works: *Untitled Action Sculpture (Chair)* (2001), a sculpture made out of the contorted chrome support of a Marcel Breuer chair, and a recent 'Black' painting. This casual photo, full of narrative incident, brackets 15 years of Guyton's production and as such strikes a stark contrast with the endgame blankness of the 'Black' paintings he made for his last show at Kunsthalle Zurich in 2013.

On the first floor of MAMCO's repurposed industrial building – which Guyton has had stripped of partition walls to leave a broad, open, window-lined space – the works are installed in groups according to scale. Guyton has subjected the show's central studio image to his typical treatment: it has

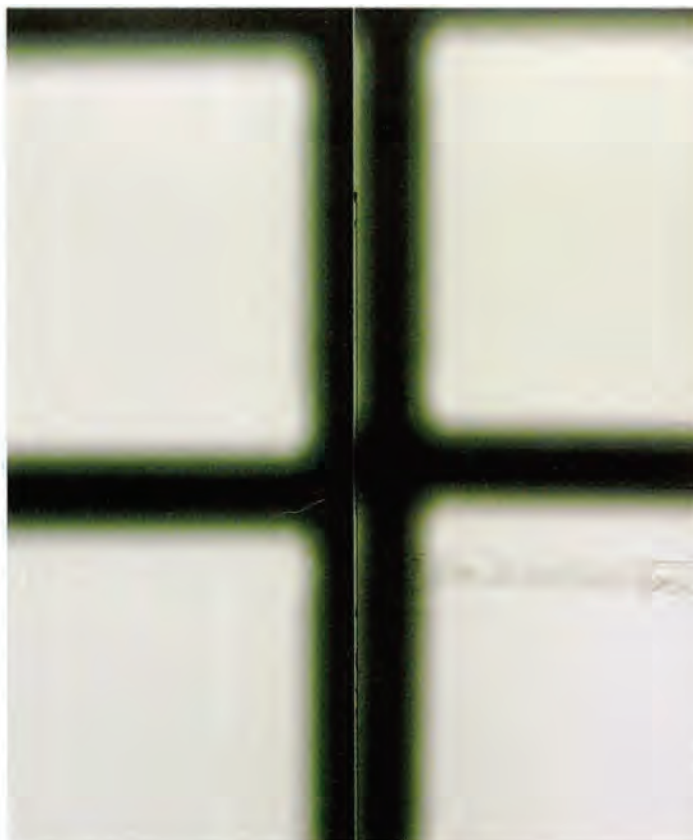


image to his typical treatment: it has been printed on a canvas folded along its vertical axis then fed through a large-scale Epson ink-jet printer. The result is a photo on canvas printed in two vertical sections joined by a central seam, which align more or less accurately. Across variously sized canvases, the same image appears alternately divided, staggered, repeated, printed in different degrees of degradation or colour saturation, upright or on its side. This series is punctuated by other untitled works (all from 2015 or 2016). Some depict Guyton's studio floor, rendered in Rothko-esque burgundy reds with bright blue patches. (The glimpse of a shoe in the bottom left suggests it also as a partial self-portrait.) Others feature graphic black and white images generated by zooming close up on a vectorized image file, reducing the digital information to op-art-ish patterns (digital updates of Sigmar Polke's Ben-Day dots?). While Guyton's previous works locked onto the bald facts of a file on a screen and its physical output, these seem to describe the parameters of the artist's enquiry: zooming deep inside the digital matrix, as if scrutinizing its very material, and then pulling out to take in the surrounding production environment.

But the repetition of the central motif becomes relentless, like a question asked over and over again. While a relation to the past has always been intrinsic to Guyton's approach, riffing on or overwriting modernist tropes, here this historical perspective extends to include his own work – which he must now situate not only in relation to preceding traditions but also to his own previous production and its attendant commercial or critical successes and failures. This self-reflexivity, however, is offset by the works' aggressive repetition, suggesting that even this moment of personal contemplation cannot survive the reductive processes of reproduction.

The central activity in Guyton's work is an act of transference, relegating the task of production to the machine. This leaves him to ramp up the possibility of glitches and misreadings on the part of the printing technology, and to edit the results. Consequently, we have a couple of gorgeous, dripping works where the printer has been over-inked and the colour, unable to saturate into the prepared canvas, lies in expressionistic rivulets on its surface. Or grid-like patterns whereby the machine, incapable of reading the zoomed-in-on material, chooses unpredictable shades of blue, grey or green. By feeding his industrial printers with information they cannot understand, Guyton forces them to choose. In encouraging interpretative malfunction, he seems to ask if doubt, too, can be transferred to a mechanized production process. The works manifest the problems that mechanical reproduction creates for the status of the artist, making doubt an intrinsic component of artistic labour and giving it centre stage.

KIRSTY BELL

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ARTFORUM



ASPEN

“WADE GUYTON PETER FISCHLI DAVID WEISS”

ASPEN ART MUSEUM

637 East Hyman

June 22–November 26, 2017

Curated by Heidi Zuckerman

Niklas Luhmann, the influential German sociologist and a pioneer in the field of systems theory, asked us to think of normalcy as implausible. A

comparable postulate is at work in the respective practices of American artist Wade Guyton and the storied Swiss duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss, the latter of whom died in 2012. No wonder, then, that the Aspen Art Museum thought to bring the artists together. Fischli and Weiss’s oeuvre celebrates normality as a deception that can be productively mined. Guyton’s art is an odd ode to the normality of art. Both practices employ distance in the service of annoyingly beautiful artworks. This summer, visitors to the museum’s über-normal hometown in the Rockies will have the chance to ponder how they do so, and thus what is at stake.

— *Daniel Baumann*

Art in America

PAINTING IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

**In his first museum survey, Wade Guyton
upends categorical conventions of painting,
print, sculpture and installation.**

Wade Guyton:
Untitled,
2010, Epson
UltraChrome
inkjet on linen,
84 by 69 inches.

CURRENTLY
ON VIEW
"Wade Guyton OS,"
at the Whitney
Museum of
American Art,
New York, through
Jan. 13.

KLAUS KERTESS
is a New York-based
writer and curator.
See Contributors
page.

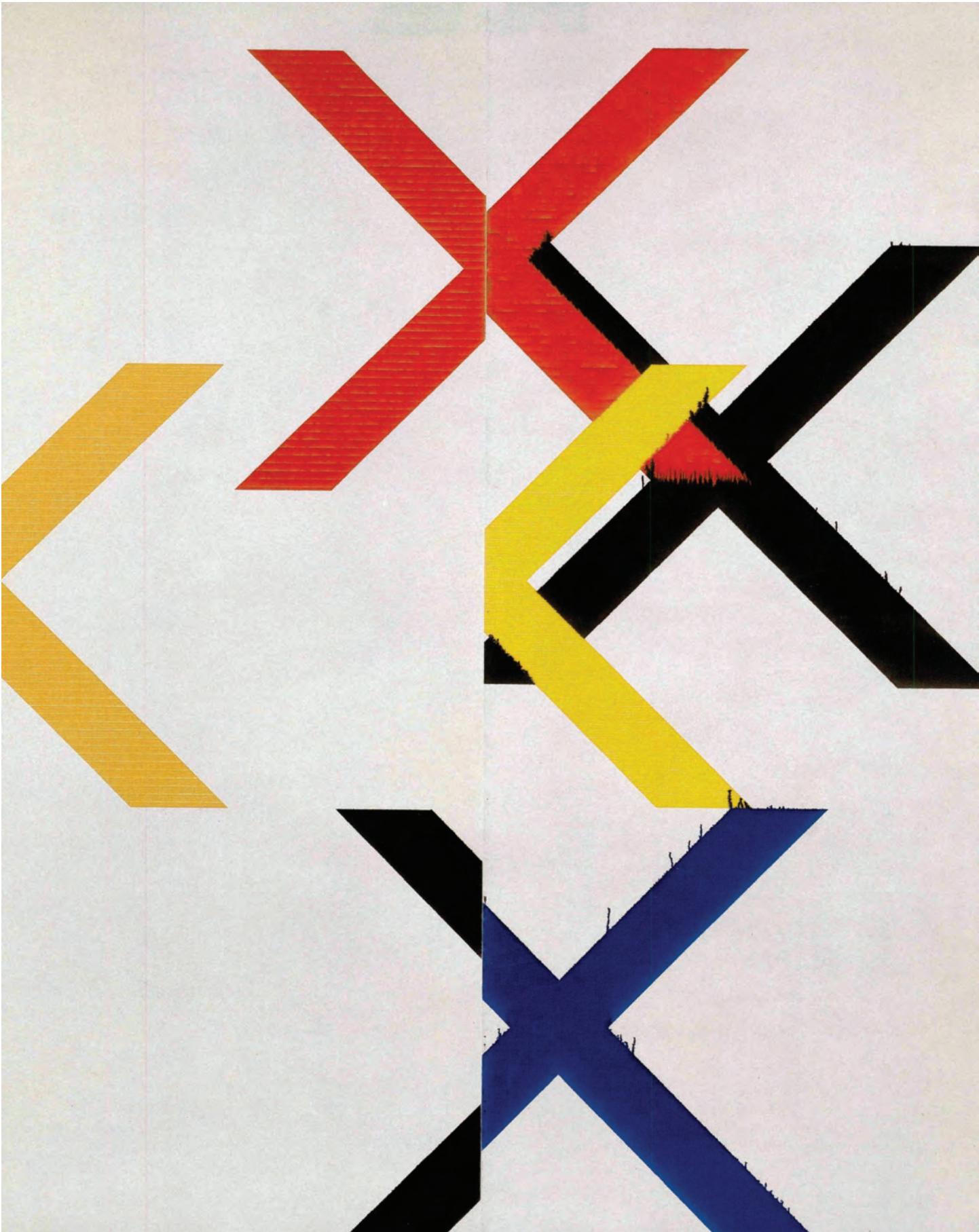
by Klaus Kertess

HAVING PURCHASED MY first computer, in the early 1980s, I left it in its packaging for several months. Several more months passed before I found a teacher to instruct me in its use. Three or four computers later, I am still, at least partially, a technophobe. And so it was with a combination of trepidation and anticipation that I took my first journey to Wade Guyton's survey exhibition at the Whitney Museum. When I agreed to write about the show, I was guided by a kind of didacticism that told me I could use a new experience and shouldn't simply accept the opinions of a few negatively inclined friends. I had to resist donning the armor of painterliness, as had long been my wont. And to my surprise, Guyton's exhibition, curated by the Whitney's Scott Rothkopf, by far outshines the monographic exhibitions I had seen in the previous months. Not organized chronologically, the installation incorporates freestanding walls throughout the gallery space that function like giant pages of an illustrated book. It bends the museum's third-floor space in a totally idiosyncratic way and feels personal and coldly calculated almost at the same time. The work energizes the galleries, encourages contemplation, and challenges conventional thinking about what constitutes drawing and what painting.

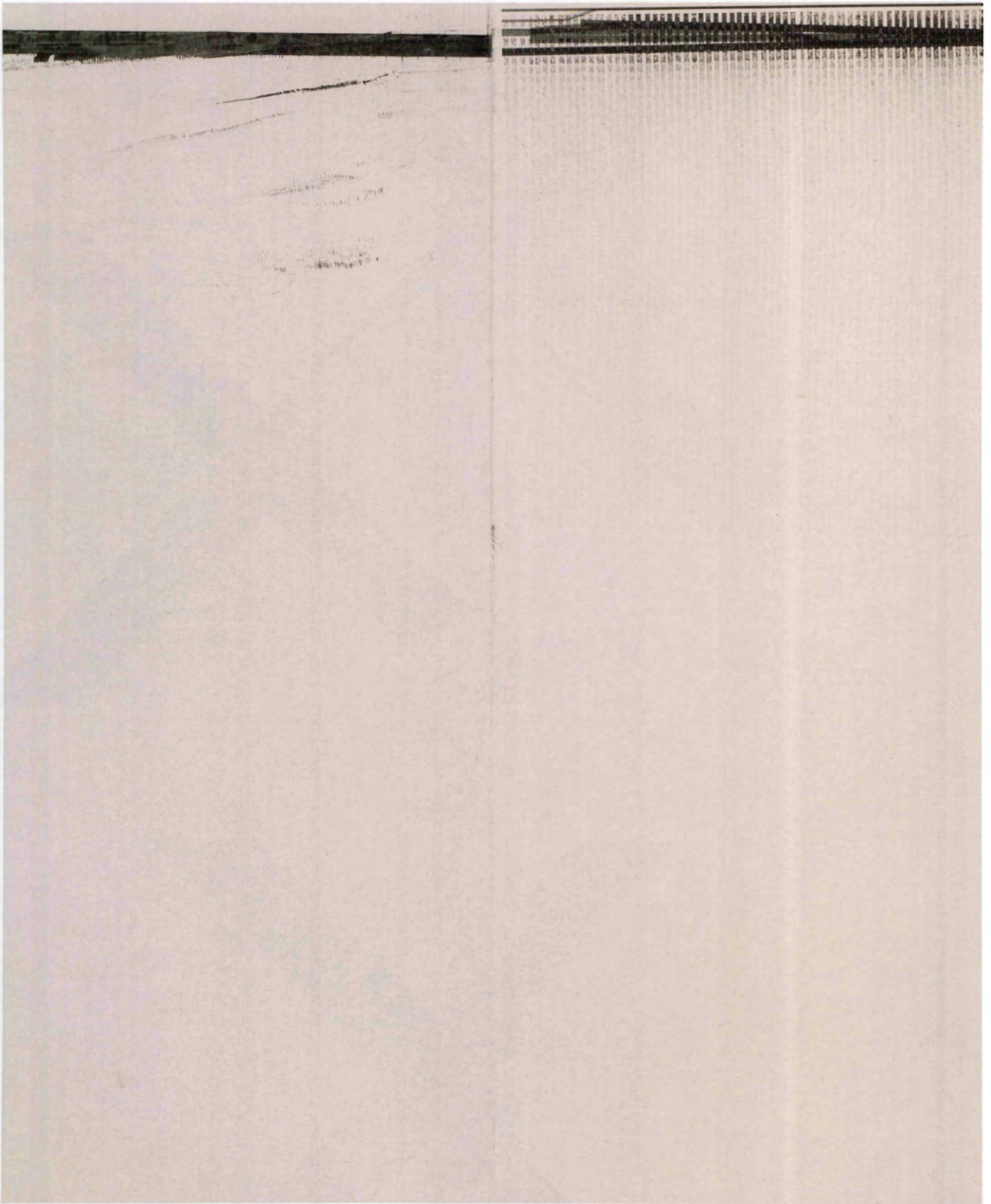
Guyton was born in 1972 in Hammond, Ind., and now lives and works in New York. While studying in the art department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and then in graduate school at New York's Hunter College, he immersed himself in criticism about Minimalism, especially sculpture, and in writings by figures such as Roland Barthes more readily than he tested his ability to create actual artworks. Guyton openly acknowledges his lack of manual skills.

In the first years of his career, Guyton focused on making photographic and sculptural work. The earliest piece in the Whitney exhibition—*The Devil's Hole (left and right)*, 1999, made the year after he graduated from Hunter—consists of two wood-mounted photographs that resemble a surreal rendering of a small excavation and that are hung side by side. He followed this with works not included in the show—faceted congregations of Plexiglas fragments spread across the floor and several tall, angular works made up of alternating vertical strips of black Plexiglas and smoked, mirrored acrylic that refract whatever space the sculptures are placed in.

During this time, he also explored the relationships among photography, sculpture and drawing, as well as the



Kertess, Klaus. "Painting in the Age of Digital Reproduction." *Art in America* 101, no. 1, January 2013, pp. 74–83.



photograph's ability to flatten objects and condense physical space. In *Drawing for Sculpture the Size of a House* (2001), on view at the Whitney, he intensified this photographic compression by blacking out a house from a snapshot using felt-tip pen, radically collapsing the pictorial space and blocking most of the scene from view.

Guyton further pursues unconventional approaches to drawing in his ongoing series "Untitled Action Sculptures," which he began in 2001. The earliest of these pieces came about by chance, after he had rescued a broken Marcel Breuer Cesca chair from an East Village curbside. He brought the chair back to his studio, removed the back, seat and armrests, and wrestled the frame into a new, dynamic linear form. The sculpture now angles up from the floor in the show, in proximity to five intact Cesca chairs that, together with the reconfigured street find, correspond to the Whitney's building, which, like the chairs, was designed by Marcel Breuer.

IN 2002, SHIFTING HIS focus to the technologies so prevalent in contemporary culture, Guyton took up digital inkjet printing as his primary artistic medium, which provided countless new options for his image-making. A number of his pieces from this time use torn-out book pages—most of them featuring illustrations of architecture, domestic interiors or artworks—as supports. A small, untitled work from 2004, for instance, employs a page featuring an image

of a Frank Stella painting from his "Protractor" series, which appears to interrupt and extend the vertical red and green stripes that Guyton has printed over it. Once Guyton adopted the printer as his main artistic tool, forms like the giant, hand-drawn black X that, in a 2002 drawing, crosses out a page showing a living-room space, could now be made almost instantly via computer. His radical move away from the manual and into the digital signaled the beginning of his mature work.

From the small-format works on book pages, Guyton moved to printing on large pieces of raw linen and then, around 2005, primed linen, developing a style that more strongly evokes conventional painting on canvas. One work from 2005 depicts a crumpled piece of printed-upon paper that Guyton placed directly on his flatbed scanner, scanned and printed out on a 51-by-36-inch piece of primed linen. Coincidentally, the scrunched-up form looks like one of John Chamberlain's crushed-car-part sculptures. In another 2005 painting, roughly 63 by 35 inches, the bottom two thirds of the linen ground is filled with red vertical stripes overlapping green horizontal stripes. Two black circular shapes, one behind the other, are set against the pure white of the top third of the composition, above the striped field. This painting borrows from the Minimalist geometries of the 1960s and '70s, but seems to temper their sternness with a lighter, more playful quality. The folds and slight irregularities

Untitled,
2011, Epson
UltraChrome
inkjet on linen,
84 by 69 inches.
Collection Ruedi
Bechtler.



View of the
exhibition
"OS," showing
(on back wall)
Inverted Woodpile,
2002/2012.
Courtesy Whitney
Museum of
American Art,
New York. Photo
Ron Amstutz.



Kertess, Klaus. "Painting in the Age of Digital Reproduction." *Art in America* 101, no. 1, January 2013, pp. 74–83.

Previous spread, view of "OS," showing five untitled paintings, all 2006, Epson UltraChrome inkjet on linen. Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art. Photo Ron Amstutz.

of the linen ground remind us that this is not a painting on canvas, but rather material that has traversed a printer. One of the circles dribbles a stream of black ink into the striped zone below; the second circular shape is like a blurry shadow emerging from darkness. Around this time, process became more visible in Guyton's work, with printing irregularities creating a subtle, disjunctive spatial play that endows many of his paintings with presence. This is particularly the case with paintings that use pieces of linen too large to go through his printer without manipulation. For such works, he folds the material in half, printing on one side and then the other; the material is then unfolded and mounted onto a stretcher.

Alongside his works on paper and linen, Guyton continued to produce sculptural objects, if less often. In 2004, for instance, he began a series of U-shaped sculptures, each one larger and thicker than its predecessor. Fabricated from mirrored stainless steel, the pieces are placed in rows at the Whitney and have a presence somewhere between industrial and ritualistic. They appear insistent—on just what, I am not sure, but they hold their own within the exhibition.

They also echo U's that one encounters in other works on view. There are, for instance, the vertical linen paintings from 2006 that feature one or more versions of the letter in outsize form, often amid flames licking up from the works' bottom edges. Different compositional sections and misaligned U's that seem to have slid from one section to another converge. These works, at once playful and visually commanding, push into a more assertive painterliness, celebrating painting more than unsettling its customary techniques and processes. A precursor to these works is found in a 2003 book-page piece that also features multiple U's. The letter is printed twice, in black, on a page showing a photograph of a nearly empty salon space, the smaller U seeming to hang on the back wall, the larger U floating at the entrance to the depicted room.

In 2002, Guyton created a book-page work in which a simple X was multiplied, layered and spread across the page via inkjet printer. This was a precursor to larger works, begun in 2006, that incorporated the X image in numerous variations—overlapping, interlocking, in uneven rows, and in varying dimensions and condi-

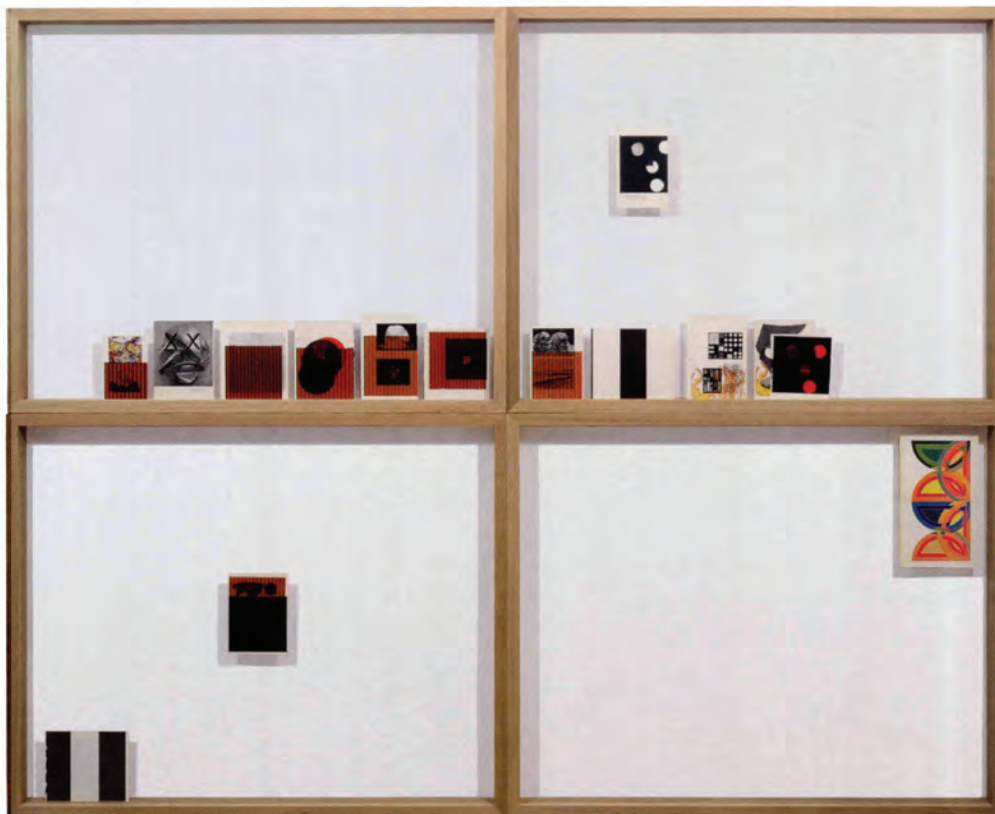
U Sculpture (v. 6), 2007, mirrored stainless steel, 24 by 22 by 53½ inches. Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art. Photo Ron Amstutz.



Opposite page, view of "OS," showing five Marcel Breuer chairs and five untitled paintings, all 2007, Epson UltraChrome inkjet on linen. Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art. Photo Ron Amstutz.



Untitled, 2005,
Epson DURABrite
inkjet on 15 book
pages, acrylic
panels and oak
frames, 101¼ by
125½ by 3½ inches
overall. Collection
Peter Remes.



Untitled, 2005,
Epson DURABrite
inkjet on 13 book
pages, Epson
UltraChrome
inkjet on poster,
acrylic panels and
oak frames, 101¼
by 125½ by 3½
inches overall.
Collection Brigitte
and Arend Oetker.



tions. The X, often a mark of cancellation, here serves as a nimble protagonist, now single, now multiplied and arranged in rows, sometimes missing a limb or two or being all but hidden in a dark monochromatic field. In two works on view, from 2008 and 2010, the X appears in red, yellow, blue and black, in different degrees of overlapping and completion. With the X's, the artist repurposed a sign with multiple meanings, including negation, into a completely neutral if not positive mark, just as he repurposed the inkjet printer into a tool for drawing and painting.

While Guyton's works often employ the same graphic elements, such as U's and X's, they are never identical. Two paintings created in 2005 have the same composition featuring a diamond shape with a triangle projecting inward from each of the four sides and a smattering of black circular shapes, one painting presenting the composition in meticulous finish, the other dissolving it in dripping painterliness. The pieces appear related at first, then totally different. Then they seem related once again.

bisected X and variously angled sections in which the linen is exposed in parallel lines. Another 2007 monochrome is covered in distinct, slate-colored horizontal bands, occasionally interrupted by more insistently black lines, and features several white spaces at the bottom. A 2009 monochrome is a softer gray-black than the previously mentioned ones, though a dark column runs down the center, alongside the vertical fold. Guyton has looked back to the 1960s monochrome paintings by artists such as Brice Marden and Robert Mangold, while also imbuing his canvases with more unexpected internal marks, such as fugitive lines or unintentional ink drips from his machine. The possibilities of his inkjet medium add to the tension in the paintings and keep the viewer engaged in exploring their varied surfaces.

Guyton is capable of grand gestures as well as more subtle ones. In 2008, he created eight large vertical panels—84 by 69 inches, like the monochromes—that are hung in a row, each with black rectangular bands irregularly placed on a white ground so that they create an almost melodic progression across the wall.



Untitled, 2008, Epson UltraChrome inkjet on linen, eight panels, 84 by 69 inches each. Whitney Museum of American Art.

FOR ONE BODY OF work on view, Guyton mounted groups of his manipulated book pages between sheets of clear acrylic in oak frames and arranged the framed compositions so that they abut each other against a wall. The earliest such work at the Whitney dates to 2003 and consists of two frames, while the later ones, made in 2005, bring together four frames in grid formation. Guyton again plays with format in a 2010 group titled *Zeichnungen für ein grosses Bild* (Drawings for a Big Picture), in which book pages are arranged in long vitrines lined with blue linoleum tiling. Given the context, these vitrines suggest large picture frames removed from the wall and oriented horizontally. The following year, in works titled *Zeichnungen für ein kleines Zimmer* (Drawings for a Small Room) Guyton made similar arrangements in vitrines backed in red linoleum tiling. So here we have the artist challenging the conventions of not only how drawings and paintings are created but also how they are to be framed and exhibited.

Around 2007, Guyton began printing monochrome works on 84-by-69-inch pieces of linen. One of these untitled works is in grayish black and features a partial,

In the camp of intimate gestures are two posters (reproduced in the Whitney catalogue) that he made to announce a 2006 gallery show in London. Both posters feature a photograph of the hirsute, muscular torso of a male nude, as if to emphasize the strength necessary to make this work, and also to indicate the humor in it.

Three paintings from 2011 are almost completely white, except for a narrow band of ink marking the top of each one and some delicate marks underneath each of these bands, black in two cases and red in the third. The paintings, with their feathery details at the top and cool expanse of white below, have a lyric outreach not elsewhere so readily found in Guyton's work. Another 2011 painting features alternating red and other stripes across two horizontal stretches of linen measuring, in total, about 9 by 50 feet. Created specifically for this installation, it is the culminating work in the show.

Guyton has devised one of the most varied and ambitious monographic exhibitions I have seen in a while. His exploration of what constitutes a painting, a sculpture and a drawing offers enough information and leaves enough room for rumination to reward multiple visits. ○

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The New York Times

Painting, Rebooted



Wade Guyton at his studio in front of a work produced by an inkjet printer on linen, which will be part of his show at the Whitney Museum. Karsten Moran for The New York Times

By Carol Vogel

Sept. 27, 2012

THE artist Wade Guyton works on the edge of Chinatown in a commodious light-filled space with windows looking over the Bowery. One portion is dominated by desks with little on them but Macs. Nearby is the biggest printer Epson makes — a hulking Stylus Pro 11880 inkjet. There is no smell of turpentine, no haphazard array of easels, no cans of paint or stacks of used canvases. In fact, there are none of the things one would expect in a painter's studio. Instead all the creating is executed on computer screens and printers.

“I never really enjoyed drawing or art classes,” said Mr. Guyton unapologetically as he described growing up in a small town in Tennessee. “I would prefer to sit in front of the TV or play video games.”

On a steamy morning a few weeks earlier, Mr. Guyton, 40, wearing shorts, a black T-shirt and sneakers, was anxiously watching while a work of red and green stripes slowly chugged out of the printer, spilling onto the floor. The repetitive pattern was not being printed on paper, but on linen that the artist imported from France because he liked its smooth surface.

Mr. Guyton had found the striped image on an end paper in a book and he tore it out and scanned it. He saw the book “sitting open on a pile of stuff and was attracted to the pattern,” Mr. Guyton recalled, adding: “They are weird Christmas colors yet there’s an optical buzz to it. It’s interesting for me to take something so insignificant and minor and affectless on its own and let it permeate in many different ways.”

He elongated the image on his computer and what was now printing out before him had a kind of pattern of Benday dots, reminiscent of something Roy Lichtenstein would have made had he created abstract paintings.

Less than a decade ago Mr. Guyton couldn’t get a dealer to pay attention to him. Now he is represented by the Friedrich Petzel Gallery in Chelsea, and has well-known collectors avidly buying his art, examples of which are already in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, to name a few. Starting Thursday Mr. Guyton’s work will be the focus of a midcareer survey



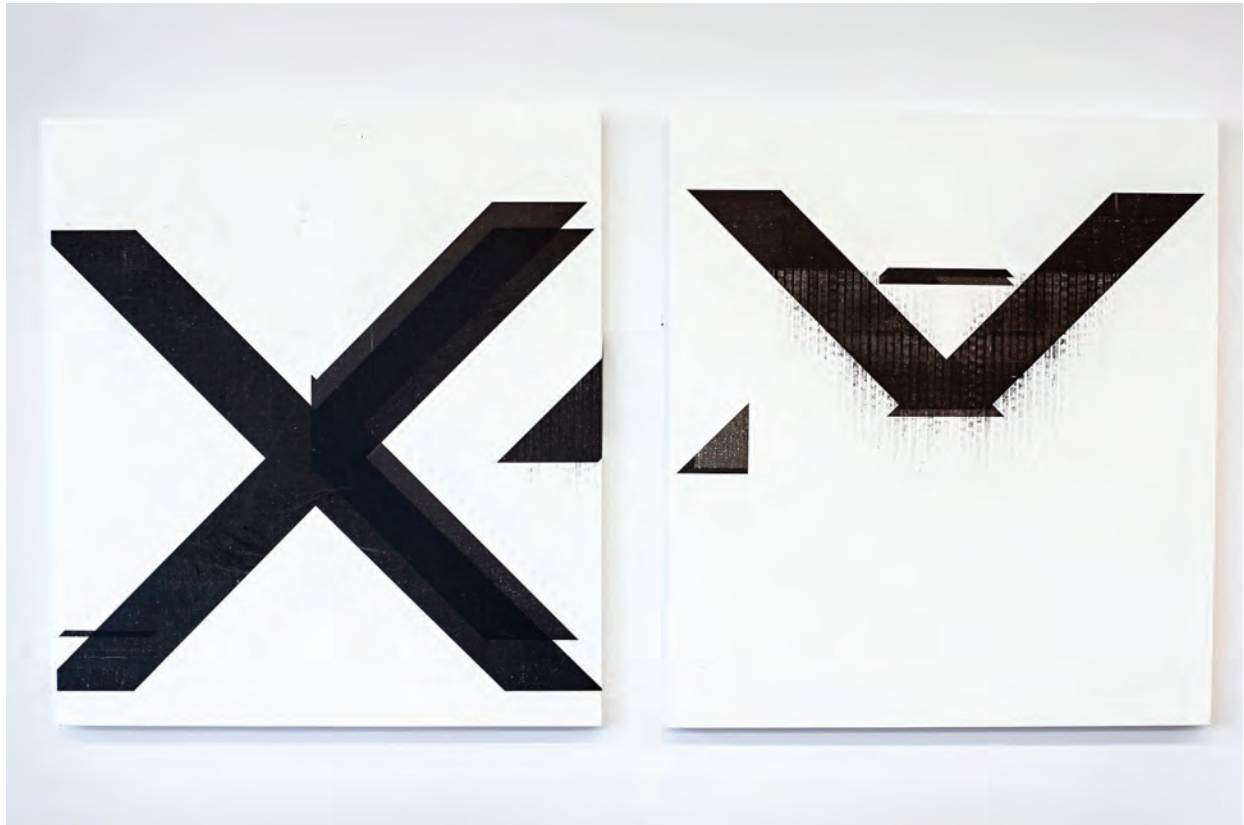
Mr. Guyton at his Epson printer with an assistant, James Campbell. Karsten Moran for The New York Times



One of Mr. Guyton's works on the floor of his studio. Karsten Moran for The New York Times



Mr. Guyton at work. Karsten Moran for The New York Times



Two works from 2007 with X motifs that will be displayed in the exhibition. Karsten Moran for The New York Times



More pieces by Mr. Guyton that will appear at the show. Kunsthalle Zurich

at the Whitney Museum of American Art called “Wade Guyton OS,” with OS standing for operating system, the software that supports a computer’s basic user functions.

Along with artists like Kelley Walker (a friend with whom he often collaborates), Seth Price and Tauba Auerbach, Mr. Guyton is at the forefront of a generation that has been reconsidering both appropriation and abstract art through the 21st-century lens of technology.

“Wade speaks to the way images travel across our visual culture — on our computers and iPhones, televisions and books,” said Scott Rothkopf, the Whitney curator who organized the show. “He has figured out a way to make work that deals with technology but doesn’t feel tricky or techie, rather it’s intuitive. It’s abstract on one hand and Pop on the other.”

It was Warhol, after all, who said: “Paintings are too hard. The things I want to show are mechanical. Machines have less problems.” And today artists as varied as Cindy Sherman, Jeff Koons and even the 80-year-old German painter Gerhard Richter are producing paintings with computers.

The Los Angeles artist Mark Grotjahn recalls seeing Mr. Guyton’s first show in New York six years ago. “I was blown away,” he said. “I must have gone back three or four times. I particularly admire the way he repeats motifs with just the slightest changes.”



A piece from 2008. Karsten Moran for The New York Times



A “U” sculpture from 2005. Ron Amstutz

The paintings that particularly seduced Mr. Grotjahn were what Mr. Guyton calls his flame paintings — black canvases with a menacing-looking flame shooting up from the bottom (again, something the artist ripped out of a book and scanned). Many of the flame paintings also have the letter U in them.

That letter came from his computer keyboard — typing is another way Mr. Guyton makes paintings. On a wall of his studio are canvases with giant X’s on them. On the floor nearby is a gleaming, stainless steel sculpture in the shape of a U — both morphed from letters he had typed and then played with. Ann Temkin, the chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, explained her early fascination with Mr. Guyton’s work.

“You tap a keyboard with one finger and this very large painting emerges,” she said. “It’s gone against everything we think of as a painting.” Yet, Ms. Temkin went on, “there are so many historical landmarks that precede him, so many artists who took the traditional notion of painting in a new direction.”

“Pollock flung it,” she said. “Rauschenberg silkscreened it; Richter took a squeegee; Polke used chemicals. Wade is working in what by now is a pretty venerable tradition, against the conventional idea of painting.”

In much the same way the Pictures Generation had to deal with figures like Warhol, said Hal Foster, a critic and Princeton professor: “Wade’s generation has to deal with Pictures Generation artists like Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince and Jeff Koons. That’s both a predicament and a promise. People tend to misread his work. They see it as only bound up with media and technology but it’s actually another version of the de-skilled, ready-made work.”

It’s the imperfections that result when the printer jams, or the ink is suddenly gooey or running low that make Mr. Guyton’s canvases more painterly.

“I’m not hoping for an accident or even courting disaster,” he said. “The works on linen are a record of their own making which at times can include accidents in the printing or in the physical act of making them, like when I drag a canvas across a studio floor.”

With his long, wavy hair and affable demeanor, Mr. Guyton is surprisingly candid when he talks about his life and his work. And for someone whose career took off in such a short period, he’s also surprisingly laid back. “It may appear that nothing bothers him but lurking beneath that exterior of calm is actually a perfectionist,” Mr. Rothkopf said.



An untitled work from 2007. Lamay Photo



One of Mr. Guyton's "X" paintings, from 2008.
Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Growing up in Lake City, Tenn., Mr. Guyton remembers how his stepfather, a Sunday painter who worked in a steel mill, did his elementary-school drawing homework for him. "I didn't have the patience for drawing and he enjoyed it," he recalled.

It wasn't until he was at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he became friends with students at the art school (among them Meredyth Sparks and Mr. Walker, both respected artists), that he was "seduced by art," he said.

When he moved to New York around 1995 he applied to the Whitney Independent Study Program. "I got rejected twice," Mr. Guyton said. "I ended up going to Hunter because that was the only school I got into."

To support himself he first got a job at St. Mark's Bookshop in the East Village and then became a guard at the Dia Art Foundation in Chelsea. "Dia was amazing," he recalled. "I met a lot of artists there: Dan Graham, Roni Horn, Douglas Gordon, Nate Lowman; some of them worked there and others showed there."

When Dia closed its Chelsea space in 2004 his severance pay was generous enough to allow him to continue renting an East Village studio and apartment without having to look for another job.

Computers came later. After he began making large sculptures he crammed the raw materials in his small studio.

“I had no room to move so I thought I should work on paper because that’s what artists do,” he recalled. He bought a few notebooks, he said, “but I couldn’t figure out what to do with them so I started tearing out pages of books and magazines that were around the studio and started making marks on them or just X-ing out images. Then I realized that the process of drawing didn’t make sense to me. The labor didn’t match up to what I was trying to do. And I thought the printer could make these things better than I could.”

So he opened Microsoft Word and typed an X. He took the torn pages and put them through the printer instead of blank sheets.

“I would drag Web pages over other printed materials,” he explained. “What I realized is that Microsoft Word has a structure to it. It has a language and margins. It has functions and a default size and a default color, which is black. And all those presets I decided to use as the structure for making drawings.”

“I chose the computer because it was right there,” he added. But he says he’s not very sophisticated when it comes to technology: “I don’t do Facebook. My Photoshop skills are rudimentary. I’m lucky to download my e-mail.”

He also has an old-fashioned love of books. He collects them and makes them — impeccably designed with pages and pages of his own images. For the Whitney retrospective he has been particularly hands-on in the layout of the show’s catalog. He also worked closely with Mr. Rothkopf to map out the installation, paying homage to the Whitney’s landmark Marcel Breuer building, especially the third floor where the retrospective takes place. “I wanted the show to feel as though it has been designed for the building,” Mr. Guyton said.

So he created partial walls inspired by temporary partitions Breuer had made for the building in the 1960s. “They evoke the layers of a computer screen with different files,” Mr. Guyton explained.

Rather than presenting his work chronologically, the retrospective is designed for visitors to see connections between different bodies of work simultaneously. As visitors are looking at a red, yellow and blue “X” painting, they will also see in their peripheral vision the same motif repeated in different scales, mediums and colors.

The last wall of the show is where two of the giant red-and-green striped canvases that he was creating in his studio now hang. The largest of them — stretching 50 feet — has noticeable red smears of ink and the illusion of folds where the stripes were printed off-register, giving the canvas a rich, three-dimensional quality.

“It would be wrong to have tried to correct these things,” Mr. Guyton said at the Whitney as he stared at the wall just after a team of about 10 had finished installing the works. “This is a recording process as much as a production process. And I have to live with it, smears and all.”

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ARTFORUM



View of "Wade Guyton 05," 2012–13. From left: *Untitled*, 2006; *Untitled*, 2005; *Untitled*, 2010; *Untitled*, 2006; *Untitled*, 2006.

Wade Guyton

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

THE LOGIC OF THE MODERN ERA demands revolutions: decisive ruptures that enable sweeping paradigm shifts and the introduction of new ways of seeing. In hindsight, such ruptures can often be seen as the outcome of periods of transition, those interregnums that are not dominated by a prevailing narrative and thus allow for an atmosphere of indeterminacy and openness, in which antithetical motives and genealogies can suddenly and surprisingly be connected with one another. Jasper Johns, for example, was buoyed by such a historical constellation: The speed with which his institutional breakthrough occurred in 1958 is matched only by the difficulty of his historical categorization to this day. His work looks back to

one period as it looks forward to another, and it is tied as much to European modernism as it is to Abstract Expressionism, neo-Dada, Minimalism, and Pop. This intermeshing of various sensibilities does not run aground in an eclectic “anything goes”: In fact, nearly the opposite is true. If a dominant paradigm forfeits its position, only then do the inner historical conflicts of a time become visible in their full complexity.

Wade Guyton seems to have caught one of these fortuitous moments. His rise at the turn of the millennium accompanied the first signs of the disintegration of the critical formation of the 1990s. Around that time, artists and critics affiliated with institutional critique suddenly began to reflect on previously taboo realms such as melancholy, formalism, and affect, and the lines of battle between so-called new media and the traditional genres of sculpture and painting came to seem less and less relevant. In Guyton’s work there is a collision of models from different eras: an easy congruence of aspects of Minimalism and Pop, high modernism and commercial design, appropriation art and strategies of institutional critique, preindustrial and postindustrial methods. Moreover, Guyton does not stage the far-reaching digitization of our world as a radical break, as do both technology’s progressive apologists and its conservative critics—a fact perfectly illustrated by the purposeful superimpositions of analog and digital techniques in his works on paper. And even the “paintings” that are fed through an ink-jet printer reject simplified polarizations between the analog as mimetic, embodied, and contemplative and the digital as immaterial, dispersed, and abstract.

Indeed, at least as seen from the outside, Guyton’s career has developed without a hiccup, reconciling diverse positions not only in his production but in his reception as well. He is embedded in a broad network of artist friends, critics, curators, gallerists, and collectors, and a market for his work emerged with impressive speed. He almost instantaneously attained canonical status in universities and art schools, where he is someone against whom students are already beginning to rebel. Accordingly, a considerable burden of expectation fell on his first midcareer survey, curated by Scott Rothkopf at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The occasion raised several questions: How would Guyton’s art-historical elevation affect the prevailing view of this relatively young artist? Would the show live up to such high expectations? Would his work be able to pull off the balancing act between its status as a product desired by collectors and its critical seriousness? An explosive mixture of enthusiasm, envy, skepticism, and sheer anticipation created a palpable tension before the opening. But Guyton and Rothkopf were not distracted by any of this and produced a consummately curated exhibition. There could hardly have been a greater contrast between the art-world buzz surrounding the occasion and the serenity and concentrated intensity of the show itself.

Upon entering, visitors were presented with a 2006 series of pictures featuring the letter *U* amid raging flames, as if the emptied linguistic vessels were literally being heated up. From the beginning, Guyton seemed to want to make clear that his work renounces the classical oppositions of Minimalist cool and expressionist heat, of Conceptual semiotics and modernist pictoriality. Behind these works lay a system of partitions, as simple as it was varied, which faced the viewer and created an open space that offered different sight lines and routes through the show. Parallel partitions of various sizes were layered behind one another and were reminiscent, as the press text suggests, of the pages of a book as well as of the stacked windows on a computer screen: The idea of interweaving the analog and the digital was thus also made into a leitmotif of the exhibition design.

Examples of Guyton’s early works were represented by pieces including installments from the series “Untitled Action Sculptures,” 2001–, and a particularly beautiful ripped canvas, *Untitled*, 2004, which hung

loosely on one of the temporary walls. Elements within later works, such as the U-shapes, migrated from sculptures to canvases to works on paper, and various series of the already “classic” ink-jet-printed pictures were hung on the long partitions. Two monumental, horizontal-stripe paintings—both *Untitled*, 2012, and made for the occasion of the show—covered the back wall of the gallery and functioned as a framing device for the entire exhibition. Altogether, the installation established a rhythm of conceptual compression and contrapuntal subplots. Every detail of the show was carefully considered, and yet there was still room for surprising cadences and visual discoveries.

This alternation between series and isolated works circled around the antagonism (so central since early modernism) between the auratic charge generated by the singular presence of the image and its diminution or depletion. Take, for example, *Untitled*, 2008, a sequence of rectangular canvases that were hung so closely together that it was nearly impossible to differentiate between the external borders of the constituent panels and the broader connecting structure suggested by the horizontal, slightly off-register bars within the pictures. Indeed, closely related works appeared again and again in various settings throughout the space, as if proliferating, troubling the borders between individual pieces: Guyton’s works on paper were in one instance hung traditionally framed on the wall, then encountered as a group in a wooden frame on the ground (*Untitled*, 2005) or lying next to one another haphazardly in vitrines (*Zeichnungen für ein grosses Bild*, 2010). Such migrations and reverberations seemed to enact visually the way we encounter images today, with their endless transposition and mobility between different scales and contexts, between screen and world, zoom and thumbnail.

The Whitney’s elegant Brutalist architecture, with its repetitive open-grid concrete ceiling and patterned stone floor, was extremely accommodating to Guyton’s aesthetic and became another kind of frame or echo of the work. It seemed a happy coincidence that Guyton has several times included chairs designed by the museum’s architect, Marcel Breuer, in his exhibitions. Indeed, the snaking metal tubing from a deconstructed Breuer chair in *Untitled Action Sculpture (Chair)*, 2001, was emblematic of the artist’s versatile reception of modernism, which overlays homage and estrangement, elegant functionality and eccentric (dis)placement.

Guyton’s works look as if they follow a simple set of rules. There is a “signature style,” based on a process that recalls, albeit in a different historical moment, Pollock’s drip technique and its dance between chance and control. Guyton enters a set of typographical elements and scanned or found images into a software program such as Photoshop or Word and then merely presses “print”—a winner every time. Yet his method cannot be understood as a gesture of genius akin to a master’s brushstroke, or even as its digital equivalent; its success depends far more on the artist’s conceptual framing. Guyton lays out the anchor points of the artist’s endeavor in such a way that the intentional decisions and accidental effects in each stage of his process become indistinguishable. Unplanned overlaps, machine errors, and physical limitations during the printing process are as important as everything else that gives meaning to the work. Yet this kind of interweaving is more than a nullification of the distinction between the intentional and the contingent. For example, when one sees a blank gap in certain works, it often corresponds to the canvas getting caught or stopped on its way through the printer; Guyton then has to pull at the canvas to keep it going, and that pull is registered as a white space. Guyton thus also “learns” how to adjust or fix certain problems that arise in his process, while remaining leery of allowing such solutions to themselves displace the refutation of authorial gestures in his work.

What sets Guyton's work apart from the current fascination with the seductive surfaces that the digital realm makes possible is that here technological progress does not become an end in itself, nor does it masquerade as creative freedom. To the contrary, Guyton's use of digital technology is based on his systematically demanding more from it than it is able to offer. He mistreats his printer, confronts it with commands that go far beyond the limits of its potential, and feeds it information or material that it is unable to process. In this sense, Guyton's art is fundamentally physical, even expressive: Its inherent conflicts are forced to the outside. Digital code manifests in his canvases in an otherwise unknown form—as moody and unmanageable; as if something were seeping out from these seemingly anonymous signs that one would never have expected there: a subjectivity that has broken free of the subject, and yet is not given over to the machine.

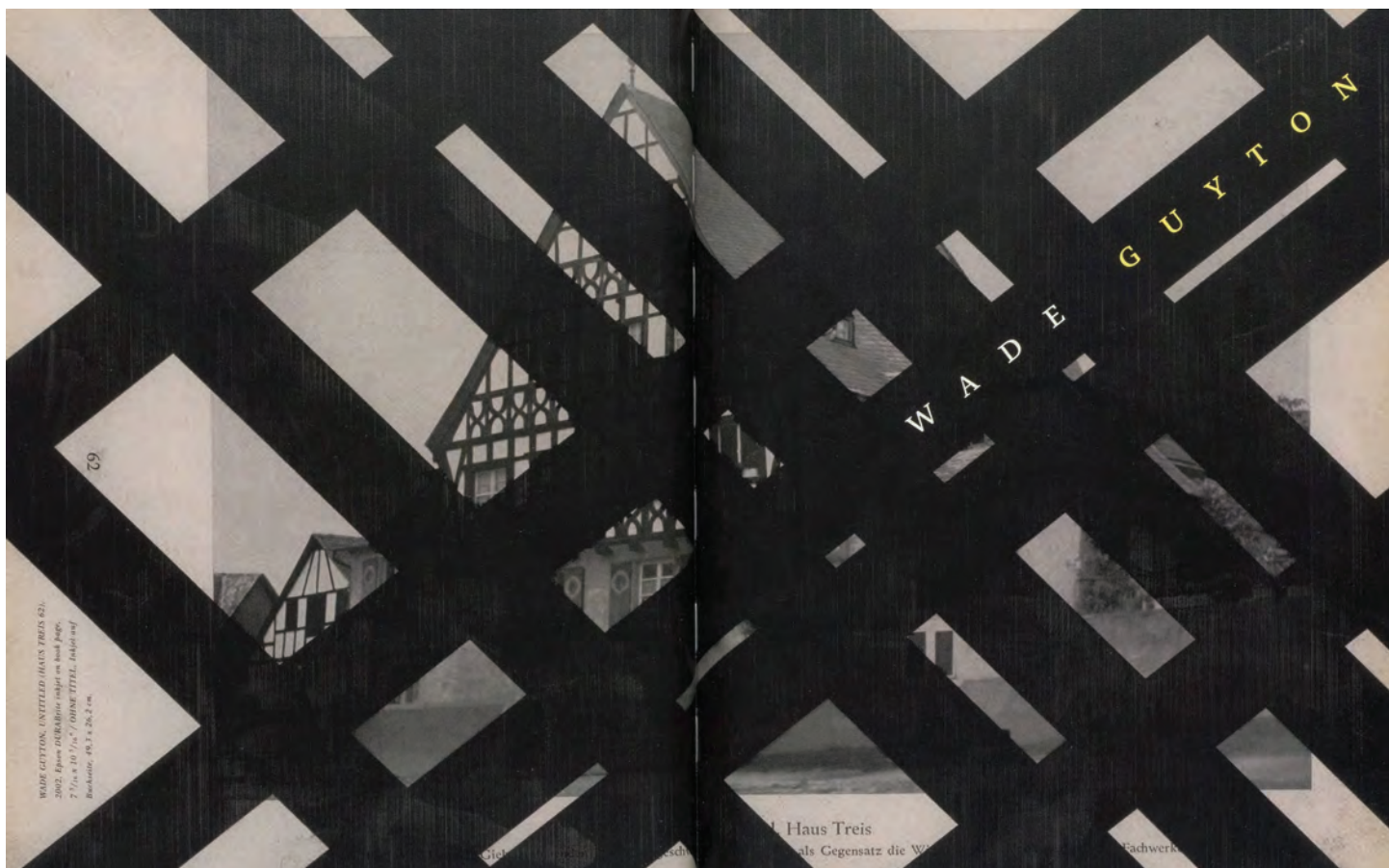
Achim Hochdörfer is a curator at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien.

Translated from German by Alexander Scrimgeour.

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PARKETT



THE NEW BLACK

SCOTT ROTHKOPF



Forgive me for beginning with an imaginary *New Yorker* cartoon. Two sketchily drawn men stand facing a pair of nearly identical, large black canvases. The caption below them reads: “Well, the one on the right is a failure, but the one on the left is clearly a masterpiece.” Now, forgive me for following with a confession: I’m one of the guys and Wade Guyton is the other. We’re in Guyton’s studio parsing the rela-

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tive merits of his new series of black paintings, and I can’t help feeling a bit like the butt of a withering joke, perhaps the dapper man studying a quasi-Pollock in Norman Rockwell’s 1962 canvas *THE CONNOISSEUR* or the beleaguered protagonist of *Art*, the nineties Broadway hit that turns on the dated conundrum of whether a plain white canvas can count as art. You’d have to be a hidebound reactionary at this point to think that it couldn’t, but you’d also have to be a touch crazy to spend the better part of an after-

WADE GUYTON, installation view / Installationsansicht, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2008. (ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF WADE GUYTON)

noon, as Guyton and I did, puzzling over the successes and failures within a group of strikingly similar canvases, all identical in size and covered almost entirely with wide swaths of fuliginous ink. The problem was not so much that one could log long hours examining the paintings (we're accustomed to doing precisely that with Reinhardts or Rymans) but rather that any one of them might be deemed qualitatively

metric forms. To create paintings, he figured, he needed only to replace paper with canvas—a support that had long been the de-facto signifier of the medium, whether or not paint happened to be involved. As in many of his drawings, Guyton rendered simple colored bars and grids in Microsoft Word, and he passed unprimed linen through his printer several times so that chance would determine

WADE GUYTON, *installation view / Installationsansicht*,
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2008.



better than any other. On what basis were such value judgments to be made? And if the criteria could, eventually, be discerned, what would that tell us about a group of canvases that seemed to push Guyton's painterly practice to both its formal and conceptual outer limits?

Guyton began making paintings around four years ago with the desktop inkjet printer that he had been using to produce drawings by marking the pages of old art books with letters and simple geo-

what compositions arose. But “composition” turned out to be the problem since the resultant canvases nodded perhaps too vigorously to the very abstractions—whether pre-war Russian or post-war American—that were often reproduced in his appropriated book pages, without registering critically their distance from those historical precedents. How could one know that chance—or, for that matter, the printer—was involved when the work seemed to summon, without quotation marks, the history of abstraction

and was thereby all too easily understood within a wave of more recent “neoformalist” art? What Guyton needed, he came to realize, was a resistant ground that could register his mechanical means, as well as a pictorial device that might function not just abstractly but that would also attest to its status as a pre-existing artifact, one plucked like his catalogue pages from the ever-expanding universe of pictures and their myriad reproductions.

Before long, Guyton began manipulating on his computer a limited repertoire of scanned images, such as a green-and-red striped endpaper and a row of flames from a book cover, as well as bands of Xs taken from his earlier drawings. When output with photoreproductive clarity on smooth sheets of primed linen, these motifs betrayed telling details—a printed source’s slightly yellowed paper or exag-

gerated halftone screen—that signaled their prior life as images and objects on the other side of the digital continuum. To these building blocks, Guyton would add graphic elements in Photoshop, such as pitch-black disks and candy-colored Us, which created a tension between his readymade imagery and his subjective digital interventions. Sometimes this disconnect took the form of a subtle semiotic inquiry into the visual vocabulary of his technical apparatus, as when Guyton overlaid jagged scanned and enlarged Xs with those newly and crisply typed in Photoshop. Yet each painting could never be executed exactly as planned on screen since the printer would falter as it disgorged ink onto sheets of canvas far thicker and wider than its intended supports. These “errors” in physical alignment and color consistency imbue the finished paintings with a sense



WADE GUYTON, installation view / Installationsansicht, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, 2008.

of chance and physical process both at odds and strangely in keeping with Guyton's chosen technologies, which are known as much for their slick reproductive powers as for their inclination toward mechanical mishap.

Guyton's art has always been characterized by his particular sensitivity to these unexpected failures, as well as by a knowing wariness toward the kind of sophisticated trickiness that might seem to predestine pictorial success—and it is these paired impulses that may have helped generate his subsequent body of work. His next series of large X paintings suggested that he had grown somewhat skeptical of the brainy showiness implicit in his previous paintings' juxtaposition of different forms of visual information. To that end, he dispensed with his scanned imagery and his residual compositional quandaries, such as where to place his Us and what color they might be. He reduced his preliminary digital manipulations to the bare minimum: typing one hefty X and then hastily dividing it in two on screen. This vertical splitting was crucial because, as with many of his previous paintings, in order to run a wide sheet of canvas through his printer, now capable of covering an area some forty-four inches across, he had to fold the material in two and print each half of the image at a time. Given the difficulties in aligning the on-screen print area with its actual output, and given that the printer sucks in the material until its sensor determines the optimum point at which to begin discharging ink, the Xs wound up fractured by the canvases' central seam. Sometimes Guyton tried to correct his or his printer's mistakes by running the material through once more. Yet this usually only added another splintered fragment to the mix, so that his boldest, most literal declarations on canvas to date can also seem his most hamstrung, like exclamations caught in the throat or rickety paeans to the off-kilter beauty of twenty-first century mechanical breakdown. These paintings, more than any before them, demonstrate a level of focus and a honing of decision to such an extent that we are left with the simple record of Guyton's not-so-simple grappling with his means. But even this rather economical system still depended on a kind of projective relationship between a predetermined image (the X) and its

eventual materialization (the painting), and it was not long before the first term of this equation was pared down even further; before, that is, Guyton's screen went blank.

Guyton's black paintings, like nearly all his work thus far, were born of an accident, though this one had less an air of serendipity than of misfortune. Over the years that he had been making paintings, he had gained a subtle feeling for how various batches of his preferred pre-primed linen duck registered the marks of his printer with slight differences. Yet new shipments of the material unexpectedly failed to take the ink as he had grown accustomed, despite assurances from the manufacturer that nothing had changed. Suddenly, in the midst of his large X canvases, painting after painting failed to achieve the crispness that so crucially tied his abstractions to the quotidian technological landscape that spawned them. With a show looming, a crisis ensued, and Guyton feared he might have to abandon his signature painting process as briskly as he had adopted it. Frustrated, he drew a black rectangle in Photoshop that was roughly the proportion of one half of his double-width canvases, and he began to blot out his failed paintings with layer upon layer of black ink—an iconoclastic violence evident in the phantom Xs that lurk just barely perceptible beneath the surface of his first all-black canvases. Guyton, it turns out, had somewhat inadvertently stumbled onto the terrain of modernism's undead painting par excellence—the monochrome—a form that would ironically allow him to perpetuate rather than to terminate his still young engagement with the medium.

"Ostensibly black monochromes" is the way that Guyton described his new paintings in press releases for exhibitions in New York and Paris, where they were eventually shown. The phrase was presumably meant to cast doubt on how neatly the canvases could be appended to the nearly century-old tradition of the "monochrome," and there is some validity to this hesitation, given that his printer often produces black by mixing together a range of colors that can lend the paintings a green or bluish tone. But the adverb "ostensibly" can ring a bit coy (or defensive?), as though Guyton wanted to signal his remove from the modernist tradition at the very moment

he once again appeared to veer rather too closely toward it. After all, with few notable exceptions, nearly all monochromatic paintings are only ever ostensibly so, and Guyton's are certainly no more so than those of Brice Marden, for example, which reverberate with the accumulation of their myriad waxy undertones, or those of Ad Reinhardt, which gradually reveal their variously purple or umber casts. Indeed, the fact that Guyton's paintings are only ostensibly monochromatic makes them more rather than less aligned with this vaunted (if admittedly diverse) strain of modernism, since they invite and even demand a kind of perceptual engagement that we have been well prepared for over the past hundred years, despite many artists' admirable challenges to those viewing habits over the past forty.¹⁾

Looking closely at the finished paintings, one cannot help but become trapped in a slow excavation of their surfaces. Each canvas is a patchwork accretion of multiple sooty layers, with the two halves often overprinted a different number of times so that tonal distinctions arise between them. The paintings, again like Marden's, reveal their aggregate nature most obviously at their perimeters, where two planes overlap incompletely to generate four quadrants of varying darkness, which shift from a dense, almost sticky, black, where the layers are superimposed; to a penumbral gray, where they diverge; to white, where bits of blank canvas altogether escape receiving ink. Sometimes these reserves form narrow angular slices along the left and right edges of the painting so that the whole canvas looks not orthogonal but slightly out of whack. And sometimes these rapier-thin fissures drop down the central seam, so that the painting appears on the verge of being cleaved apart. Peeking around the sides of the canvases, we find even more clues to the surfaces' strata since the various layers are generally most skewed where they round the stretcher bars. Meanwhile, Guyton often crops the tops and bottoms of the paintings so that a lopsided margin is left to demonstrate the uneven movement of the canvas' two sides as they made their way through his machine.

There's something slightly perverse about paying quite so much attention to the edge conditions and surface subtleties of mechanically produced canvases

by an artist whose spare, often appropriative gestures might signal altogether different concerns. Too much talk of cropping and the "framing edge" threatens to return us to the formalist discourse of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, as they adumbrated painting's inherent attributes in an attempt to arrive at its irreducible essence (and we could just as easily make mention of the canvases' bifurcated "deductive structure"). We're not, after all, looking at a 1960s Jules Olitski, or at Larry Poons in Emile de Antonio's 1972 documentary *Painters Painting*, as the artist faced a mammoth unstretched mess of a canvas and laughably barked at his assistants to crop just one more inch off the right or the left. Still, I couldn't help but recall this scene with slight embarrassment on that fateful afternoon when I saw the new black paintings in Guyton's studio. At the time, he seemed most drawn to those canvases that divulged clues to their material histories along their edges, to those canvases flaunting enough pictorial incident, even if arrived at by happenstance, to encourage us to linger. To encourage us, that is, to look at these paintings *as paintings*—not *ersatz* paintings or signs of paintings, but good old-fashioned modern paintings. But never too old-fashioned ones, of course.

Indeed, if Guyton had waded rather deeply into the waters of the modernist mainstream, he had no more interest in blindly espousing that tradition than he had had in making poker-faced abstractions when he first ran canvas through his printer. For although he was clearly courting the painterly and perceptual conditions of "classic" modern icons, he just as clearly wanted to avoid relinquishing his hard-won critical purchase on the world of readymade images and his refracted view onto the history of received styles. This is a fine line to walk. On one side lies the peril of an ahistorical return to a kind of prelapsarian aesthetic state, and, on the other, a glib conceptualism, a danger of lampooning a mode of making and beholding that has by now been subjected to four decades of assiduous critique. Still, this latter tradition must not be forgotten in the face of Guyton's work. For as much as each painting might invoke Reinhardt or Marden, it also gestures to those artists—from Marcel Broodthaers, Piero Manzoni,

and Blinky Palermo to Sherrie Levine, Rudolf Stingel, and Richard Prince—who in their own ways challenged the primacy and sanctity of modernism's most enduring signpost. Guyton is both historically and temperamentally closer to this latter gang who understood the monochrome as the kind of ready-made Greenberg worried it might become and who treated it with a wry and disputatious irreverence.

Guyton follows this line of thought not only in his paintings' digital and mechanical conception, but also in the way he treats them as they are born. His black paintings are marred with the scrapes and scratches that form as they are extruded jerkily and head first from the printer, before being yanked across his studio floor and flipped over, only to endure this ignominious genesis once more. These scars are traces of his process, and also a beat-up rebuff to transcendence, to naïve sincerity, or merely to over refinement. The elegant grandeur of the canvases is revealed to be something of a macho bluff. If an *informe* trope of horizontality famously emerged in the tabular surfaces of Dubuffet or Twombly and in the gravitational fields of Pollock and later Warhol, it's hard to imagine any of these artists—let alone any of the monochrome makers already mentioned—dragging their canvases face down across the floor. And as if to make sure this sacrilege did not go unnoticed, Guyton recreated his own black-



WADE GUYTON, *X SCULPTURE*, 2004,
wood, Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York / *X SKULPTUR*, Holz.



WADE GUYTON, *X SCULPTURE*,
2004, wood, Lebanon, Tennessee /
X SKULPTUR, Holz.



WADE GUYTON, *X* SCULPTURE, 2005, wood, Cincinnati, Ohio / *X* SKULPTUR, Holz.

painted, plywood studio floor in the two galleries where the canvases were shown. With each muffled and slightly destabilized step, one sensed that Guyton was hedging his bets a bit as a painter, cautioning us against taking his most abstract canvases as regressive bids for some discredited notion of autonomy and casting them instead as props or players in a slightly stagy *mise-en-scène*.

Guyton's monochromes serve, then, as tense indexes of his negotiation with these dual inheritances—a modernist fascination with formal, perceptual, and technological discovery, on the one hand, and, on the other, a more recent and more skeptical

understanding of this legacy, now distorted with reverb and parallax. This contrariety was abundantly clear when Guyton and I studied his new paintings fresh from the printer. If he prized surface subtlety in sifting the keepers from the dross, he certainly didn't want too much ostentation in this regard. In some paintings, the overlapping black veils created rectangles of varying tones, which, though beautiful, seemed a bit too fussy and grandiloquent to make the cut. One I dubbed the "Latin American," for its proximity to a southern strain of abstraction; another's planes abutted too starkly, which is to say that the picture overall was not quite stark enough.

Pictorial incident could be tolerated—and was even required—but it had to be clearly legible as accident, as when the printer's feed stuttered to create horizontal bands that lent some canvases an Op vibration reminiscent of a flickering monitor or an old TV's wonky vertical hold. In other paintings, the ink heads jammed to yield faint pinstripes evocative of ruled paper or a trippy Agnes Martin. And so, despite great variation, an underlying criterion emerged that allowed this or that canvas to make the grade. The painting should be variegated enough to attest to its underlying mechanical process and to compel one to draw close; but it should be black (or, in rare cases, white) enough to function as a monochrome, or, at the very least, it should be "all-over" enough to keep it from lapsing into the realm of compositionality that had haunted his very first works on canvas.

It's not, of course, that there's anything wrong with composition per se; a wholesale interdiction against it would be hard to justify in this age of promiscuous pluralism. But Guyton wants to lend his paintings a kind of inner logic—necessity, even—by ensuring that we don't mistake the vicissitudes of his printer's activity with his own design. In his fire, stripe, and X paintings, there wasn't really the risk of this confusion since the productive tension between a scanned or typed image and its ultimate manifestation was comparatively easy to discern. We could tell that the image came from somewhere, that it was not hatched *alla prima*, so we could know (or imagine) what went wrong. The problem with the black paintings is that there is no "image" against which to gauge this breakdown, no obviously imported source to ward against the creeping specter of "neoformalism." The answer, then, was to make the monochrome itself that image, a kind of *a priori* form against which Guyton's variations might be judged. The painting may display all the surface subtlety and perceptual intrigue of the modernist monochrome, but the very details that invite this engagement reveal the canvas strangely to be a kind of mediated, printed picture of that unmistakable paragon.

This is how Guyton's black paintings manage to retain the fundamental quotational character of nearly all his canvases to date, even as they speak more declaratively in the modernist language that

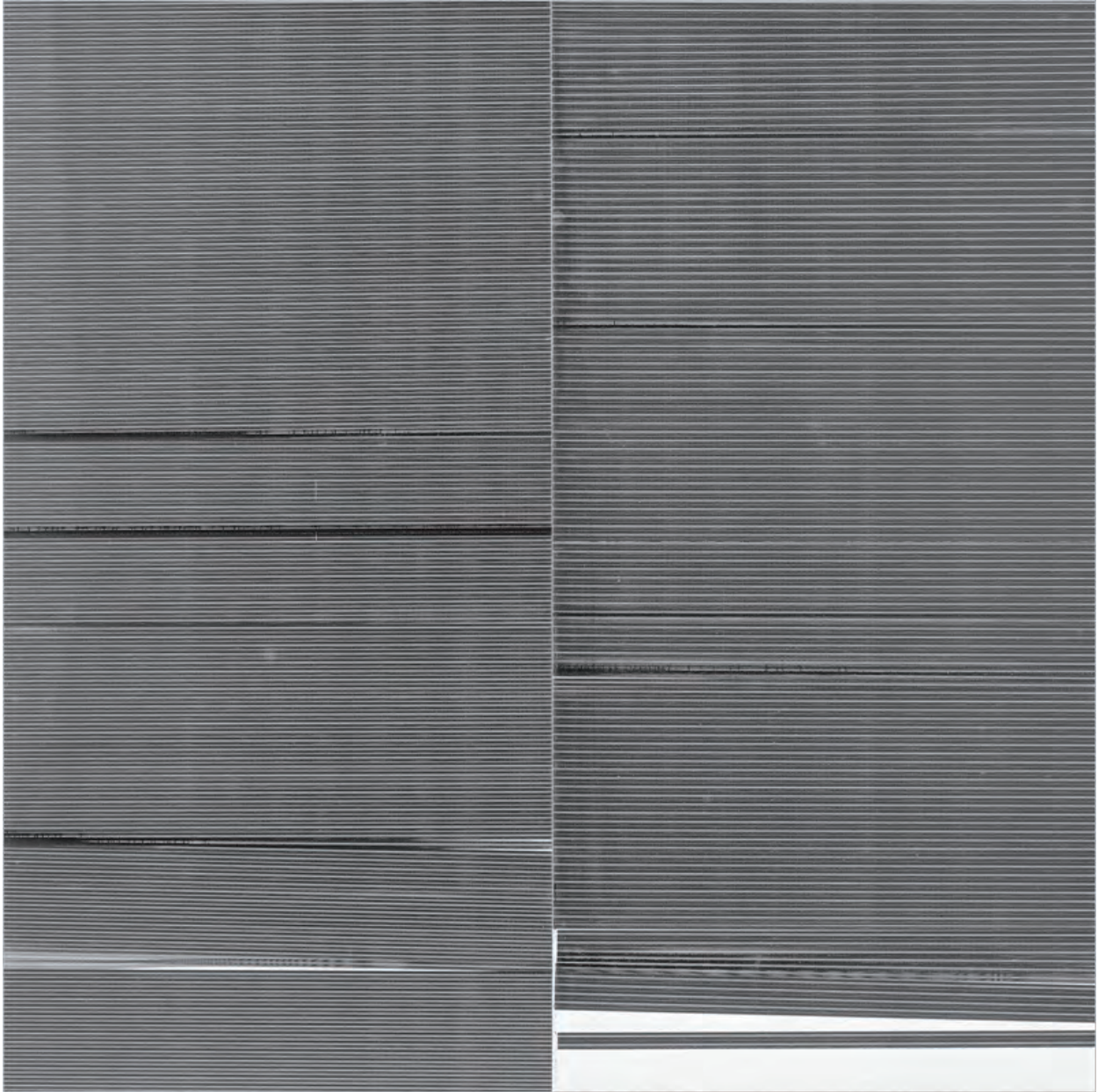
his work has long addressed. What is being recited is not an image scanned from a book but the term "monochrome," though there is never a one-to-one correspondence between this unstable concept and its utterance. The black field—thanks to its uneven margins, aggregate layers, and multiple printing errors—sits a bit uncomfortably and never quite continuously on its ground. It feels put there, printed there, on the canvas though not exactly of it. Like an actor who stumbles over his lines or a musician who misses a note, each painting represents the interface between a received idea and its imprecise manifestation in the present—a present that is as much the moment when the canvas wends its way through the printer as it is a particular art-historical and technological context. Guyton's black paintings are not *mélanges* of individual references and allusions, like so many abstractions are today; nor are they stillborn straw men or smirking stand-ins for a modernist orthodoxy that was never as univocal as many of its belated antagonists still tirelessly maintain. Rather, his monochromes suggest a way of making abstract paintings that are alive with the contingencies of their creation and delectation yet are neither innocent of the lessons of postmodernism nor duplicitous about their roots in an infinitely, if imprecisely, replicable digital DNA. Each painting is insistently aware of its distance from its graphic template and from some quasi-mythical model that we may construe only patchily from a museum's gallery, a line of text, or a crenulated JPEG on the Web. The archetype, Guyton knows, is no more fixed than its imperfectly printed instantiation, and his monochrome less absolute than self-consciously penultimate, always ready to be output once more.

1) Johanna Burton analyzes Guyton's use of the word "ostensibly" in a recent essay on the artist. Although I agree that his black paintings gesture "to monochromes without ever really getting there," I believe this to be a fundamental premise of many of the so-called monochromes that she invokes as foils for his canvases. See Burton, "Rites of Silence" in *Artforum* 46, no. 10 (Summer 2008), pp. 365–73. My understanding of the monochrome here is indebted to the writings of Yve-Alain Bois on Ad Reinhardt and Robert Ryman, and especially to his "Painting: The Task of Mourning" in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 229–44.

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Rites of Silence

JOHANNA BURTON ON THE ART OF WADE GUYTON

JUST WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS? Poised in front of Wade Guyton's work, admirers and detractors alike often find themselves asking the same question. It's not so much a query regarding the artist's character—though of course it's partially that, too—but rather the expression of a genuine quandary, one that can feel so basic that it's hard to find the way to frame it. *Where is he coming from?* is another way to put it, and it may be a little closer to the mark. But the real question is rather, and perhaps simply: How are we to understand Guyton's relationship to what he makes? And following from that: Why do the oblique contours of this relationship seem to announce themselves as the very content of the work?

Consider two of Guyton's one-person shows mounted in the past six months, the first at Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York, the second at Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris. While a group of unique works was produced for each, Guyton would seem at first glance to have presented nearly carbon-copy exhibitions. In both instances, the artist laid down a false floor made of plywood sheets painted a dense black, the kind of black that seems at once to reflect and suck up light. On the walls were hung large-scale paintings, described in the respective—also nearly identical—press releases as “ostensibly black monochromes.” Ostensible is a fantastic word, and it goes some way in addressing Guyton's work. Etymologically, it derives from the Latin *ostensus*, “to show,” but this connotation of transparency is joined by one of skepticism. There's something being shown, but there's also something that is not being shown, that's being blocked from view. Synonymous with *allegedly*, *ostensibly* also implies that a claim has been made, that a statement has been drafted, but that there is simply no verifiable proof to back it. That which is ostensible looks like, sounds like, even feels like what it purports to be, but it flashes doubt like a striptease, asking that we believe *and* interrogate simultaneously.

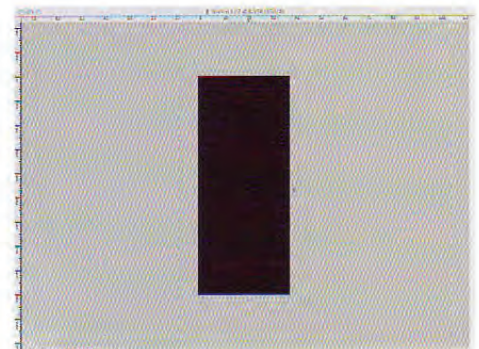
Opposite page: Wade Guyton, *Untitled*, 2007, Epson UltraChrome ink-jet on linen, 84 x 69". This page: Wade Guyton, *Inverted Wood Pile*, 2002, scrap wood, dimensions variable.

Such operations, though seemingly discovered afresh every decade, have long been the purview of certain practices of painting. Indeed, the past forty years of critical discourse have taken as foundational the idea that it is perhaps *only* its ostensible nature that keeps contemporary painting from relinquishing all relevance. This doesn't mean that a deeply held, intuitively argued belief in painting qua painting is not still in effect. (These days, a phrase like "the function of painting" has a fifty-fifty chance of being met with an eye roll—one more eerie similarity between this era and the 1980s.) What it means, rather, is simply that those who can't quite accept the notion of painting's radical authenticity have long looked for its first principles outside the frame. Take, for instance, the following passage, which would seem to address Guyton's ostensible monochromes astutely enough:

It is fundamental to X's work that its function in complicity with those very institutions it seeks to make visible as the necessary condition of the artwork's intelligibility. This is the reason that his work not only appears in museums and galleries but also poses as painting. It is only thereby possible for his work to ask, What makes it possible to see a painting? What makes it possible to see a painting as a painting? And, under such conditions of its presentation, to what end painting?

My tell-tale substitution of the generic placeholder "X" for a proper name is likely clue enough that this is borrowed text and that it doesn't describe Guyton's paintings at all. As it happens, these are Douglas Crimp's words, from his 1981 essay "The End of Painting," with the subject of his analysis being, perhaps unsurprisingly, one Daniel Buren.¹ Who better to exemplify the contextual turn born of the 1960s and '70s—a shift that allowed for the very conditions of artistic production and reception to become content? And how useful might it prove to think through the implications of one of the original purveyors of institutional critique for an artist, in this case Guyton, whose practice would seem, if not exactly aligned with, nonetheless clearly indebted to the older figure? Buren had his factory-produced textile stripes, Guyton has his equally terse black squares spit out of an ink-jet printer; surely this is a neat transposition of strategies from an industrial to a postindustrial context. In the end, though, while the comparison is indeed quite useful, what turns out to be most illuminating are the differences, not the correspondences, that it reveals.

For however uncannily germane to Guyton's practice Crimp's language might initially seem, the critic's analysis ultimately proves wholly inapplicable to the younger artist's work, and the very disjunction in fact



Opposite page, from left: View of "Wade Guyton," 2007, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York. Screenshot: `bigblack.tif`, the source file for Guyton's monochromes. This page, from left: Wade Guyton, *Untitled*, 2007, Epson UltraChrome inkjet on linen, 80 x 69". Wade Guyton, *Untitled*, 2007, Epson UltraChrome inkjet on linen, 80 x 69".



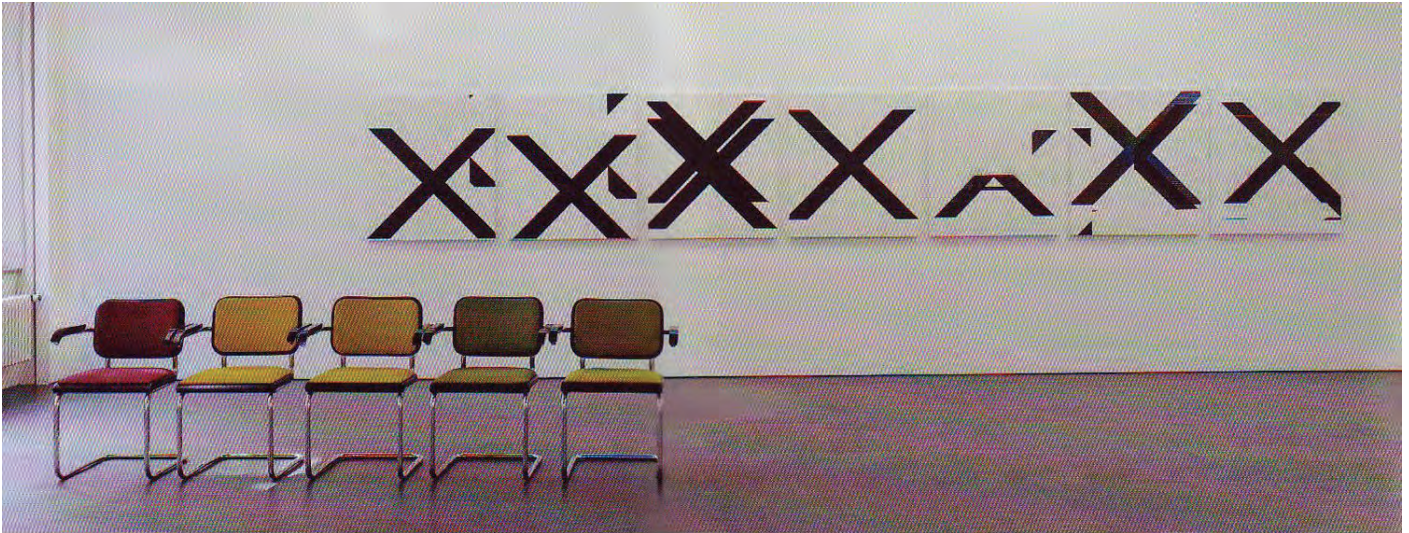
sheds some light on greater shifts in the terms of artmaking during the past forty years. If in 1981, Buren continued to hold out promise for critical practice, it was precisely because his work did not read legibly within the language of painting it alluded to. As Crimp put it in his essay's closing gambit, while Buren's work was of course literally visible, it was at odds with any historicist account of painting and therefore did not register within painting's terms. Crimp's projection for the future was clear: "At the moment when Buren's work becomes visible, the code of painting will have been abolished and Buren's repetitions can stop: the end of painting will have been finally acknowledged." Buren was just as confident about the deep ramifications of his own ideas. Quoted in Crimp's essay is a passage from the artist's 1977 volume *Reboundings*, wherein Buren claims the highest stakes for his work: "It is no longer a matter even of challenging the artistic system. Neither is it a matter of taking delight in one's interminable analysis. The ambition of this work is quite different. It aims at nothing less than abolishing the code that has until now made art what it is, in its production and in its institutions."² Whether Buren succeeded or failed in these aspirations and whether his subsequent anointment by the very "art history" against which he chafed signals an abolishment or an expansion of said code are questions for another time (and I am certainly not the first to raise them). But the fact that Buren is today

so much acknowledged by art-historical discourse—such that the tenets of institutional critique are now readily accepted by institutions themselves—presents a conundrum of sorts for any artist who would seek to make "critical" art. Pointing to the context for painting, or for artmaking more generally, as Guyton does, is inevitably attended by the peril of merely mimicking gestures of the past that, in this changed historical situation, are reduced to motif. We therefore need to ask how artists might

Pointing to the context for artmaking now, as Guyton does, is inevitably attended by the peril of merely mimicking critical gestures of the past that, in this changed historical situation, are reduced to motif. We therefore need to ask how and to what end artists might best extrapolate from yesterday's discursive tussles.

best extrapolate from the discursive tussles of Buren's time, pondering how and to what end an artist such as Guyton might be keeping the "end of painting" at bay or, perhaps more aptly, keeping the death of painting alive.

Looking closely at the works in question, one notes that if Guyton is himself working toward the dismantling of codes (or, perhaps more realistically, the rerouting of them), he is not founding his project on the nullification



of painting or on its transformation into an illegible cipher: If his are “ostensibly” black monochromes, in other words, it’s not due to any confusion whatsoever about the status of these objects as paintings. That is to say that what is “ostensible” here really is the denomination “black monochrome” and not painting itself. Though obviously following a format, Guyton’s monochromes have none of the built-in regularity of, say, Buren’s stubborn 8.7-centimeter-wide alternating cloth stripes (which have in their way taken on uber-aesthetic status despite their original somewhat anti-aesthetic premise). In fact, the opposite is true. Despite being produced by way of a set of predetermined, extremely limited rules and without a drop of paint or a single brushstroke, they bear all the obvious residues of spontaneous (and therefore “immediate”) mark making. Having folded lengths of factory-primed linen so that each half equals the width of his Epson UltraChrome large-format printer (forty-four inches), Guyton runs them through the machine, which deploys hundreds of individual ink-jet heads. Together, these tiny, dumb mechanical soldiers labor at Guyton’s behest to produce just as dumb an “image”: A black rectangle, drawn and then “filled” by Guyton in Photoshop, is printed twice, once on each side of his folded linen, doubling, in essence, the image of the rectangle (at the same time as trying to unite its parts on one field). Depending on the effects

of the initial printing process, Guyton opts to run one side or the other (or sometimes both) through the machine a second and sometimes third time (or more), smoothing and filling prior snags and drags on the one hand and on the other providing an even denser surface on which new anomalies can occur. To the extent that Guyton’s enterprise could be seen as one invested in the technics of image production, it figures technology’s tendency to complicate, rather than simplify—that is, to make its own kind of mess. And truth be told, Guyton aids and abets the glitches, gagging his printer with material not meant for it and asking it to lay uniform sheets of ink over an expanse twice its size—feats hardly enumerated in the user’s manual. In fact, if Guyton has a technical skill per se, it might be defined as encouraging malfunctions.

Once the canvas has been fed through the printer, it drops unceremoniously to the floor and accordingly picks up evidence of its time there in scratches, dings, and dust. The resulting two sides of the rectangle—given the imprecise procedure of simply folding the canvas in half and temporarily taping its edges together—are rarely if ever perfectly aligned; rather, one side typically is slightly higher or lower than the other. And one side, or both, may register the marks of having wandered diagonally off track during printing before being pulled back into alignment;

this sometimes produces a kind of shuttered effect, almost photo-graphic in its unintended illusion of light (the primed canvas) peeking out from between regimented lines that no longer match up to form an uninterrupted solid. The ink, trying to fix itself to a ground that is designed to hold thicker pigment, also occasionally pools, smudges, and drips. And of course, every piece of linen, once unfolded, bears the mark of the central seam, not so much a “zip” as a kind of vertical navel.³ Each painting thus bears proof of its process—the one real constant in every iteration of the series. (Or at least, the only readily apparent one: There is also the single digital “source” that is the foundation of all the monochromes—an image file on Guyton’s computer with the hardcore-sounding name “big-black.tif,” which, when opened, reveals a comically unassuming little black rectangle.)

The urge to act the connoisseur and genealogize in the face of these works is palpable as, somewhat counterintuitively, all these procedures result in unadulterated visual pleasure of the kind often associated with abstraction in its more luscious manifestations. Hung sparingly on white walls, the paintings take on the stark elegance we attribute to a whole lineage of morphologically similar items. Names, from Rothko to Reinhardt and Stella to Marden, are apt to fly. But let’s not forget that these are ostensible monochromes only. They are, none of them, fully resolved, not *really* monochromes, because the measure of their success rests largely on their gesturing to monochromeness without ever really getting there. Indeed, a few of the most beautiful canvases—which register thread-thin lines spread nearly an

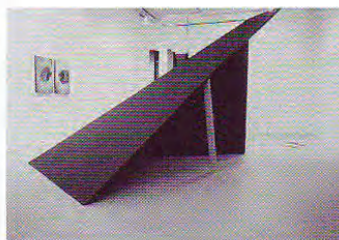
inch apart from one another—are also the most minimal. They were not, however, produced because the cartridge was running dry, as one might think—the problem is not too little ink but, in a sense, too much, as the machine overloads itself in an attempt to carry out Guyton’s bidding over and over again. With nearly all its jet heads clogged

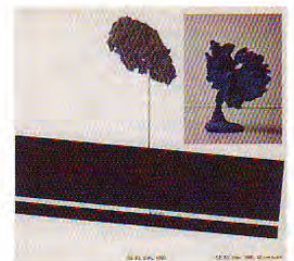
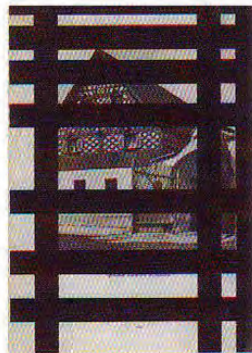
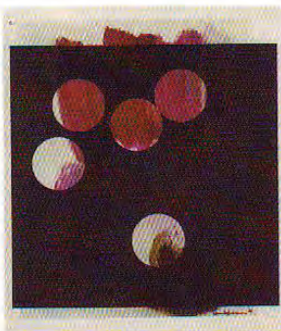
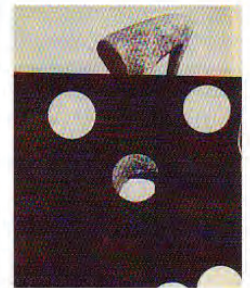
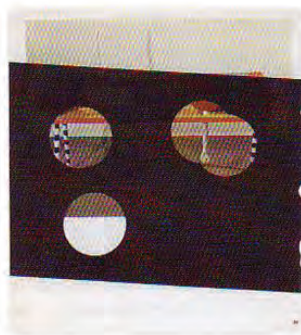
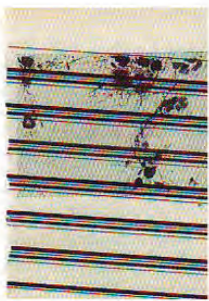
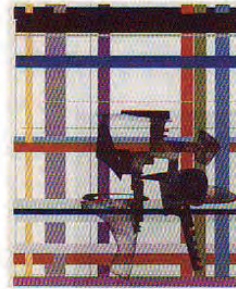
If it seems that Guyton has reached this point too early—what avenues has he left open for himself, one wonders while looking at so many iterations of the high-culture sign for “That’s all, folks”—it is worth considering how his career has proceeded by way of such impasses, with such seeming foreclosures levied to hold open future possibilities.

by ink that has built up and coagulated, the printer barely sputters out a trace of the image it is asked to compulsively repeat. The delicate, visually complex composition that accrues is nothing more than evidence that the Epson “self-clean” function has not kicked in when it ought to.

So what are we to make of all this? Guyton’s process is steeped in embarrassingly elementary moves: Preselecting basic parameters such as whether to print “draft” or “economy,” at “speed” or “quality” rate, and according to “normal,” “fine,” or “photo” standards—and then simply pushing “print”—comprises most of the artist’s control over the work he produces. (The critic inevitably wonders whether it is, after all, worth spilling this much ink on, well, the vicissitudes of spilled ink.) And yet he pairs this embarrassment with another one: that of making undeniably aesthetic products. (Here Guyton’s works would seem to

Opposite page: View of “Wade Guyton,” 2007, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich. Foreground: *Untitled Action Sculpture (Five Entron Chairs)*, 2007. Background, from left: *Untitled*, 2007; *Untitled*, 2007; *Untitled*, 2007; *Untitled*, 2007; *Untitled*, 2007; and *Untitled*, 2007. This page, from left: Wade Guyton, *Untitled Mirrored Sculpture (Gold, Bronze, Black)*, 2000, Plexiglas and mirrored acrylic, 86 x 64 x 60”. Wade Guyton, *Fragment of Sculpture the Size of a House (Black Plywood)*, 2002, plywood and aluminum, 8 x 10 x 12”. Wade Guyton, *Drawing for Sculpture the Size of a House*, 2001, marker on photograph, 4 x 6”.





perform themselves as decoys inciting the urge for art-historical roll-calling—a kind of bald “ostensibility” that might appear all too well attuned to the current vogue for generic “appropriative” gestures.) Taken together, however, these qualities imply an awareness that a work of art’s motioning toward another that came before it does not necessarily bear out much meaning; and an assumption that the binary poles of pining homage and violent erasure are the only two ways to read such allusions is just another mode of marketing. Guyton’s recent series of black paintings nods, if mutely, toward this crossroads, in which engagements with discursive history and profiteering usurpations of it look more and more similar. For if today it is impossible not to recognize the lessons handed down by Buren and others, it is likewise impossible not to see how those lessons themselves have been incorporated as a kind of affirmative content. If the language of “abolishing the code” has itself *become* code, what can one say in retort or even in response?⁴

FINALLY, A PERSONAL INCIDENT, *which will nicely introduce the figures to come: Thursday, March 9, fine afternoon, I go out to buy some paints (Sennelier inks) → bottles of pigment: following my taste for the names (golden yellow, sky blue, brilliant green, purple, sun yellow, cartham pink—a rather intense pink), I buy sixteen bottles. In putting them away, I knock one over: in sponging up, I make a new mess: little domestic complications. . . . And now, I am going to give you the official name of the spilled color, a name printed on the small bottle (as on the others vermilion, turquoise, etc.): it was the color called Neutral (obviously I had opened this bottle first to see what kind of color was this Neutral about which I am going to be speaking for thirteen weeks). Well, I was both punished and disappointed: punished because Neutral spatters and stains (it’s a type of dull*

*gray-black); disappointed because Neutral is a color like the others, and for sale (therefore, Neutral is not unmarketable): the unclassifiable is classified → all the more reason for us to go back to discourse, which, at least, cannot say what the Neutral is.*⁵

The spring of 1978 found Roland Barthes doing his own ruminating on the vicissitudes of spilled ink and giving his second lecture series at the Collège de France. Over several months, he introduced and expounded on a term that,

However much the artist laces his found images with varia printed atop them, they remain partially their own, pulled rudely from their bindings and thus displaced into their new, not wholly transparent contexts.

nonetheless, he had no intention of ever fully pinning down: “the Neutral.”⁶ Summing the course up for the school’s compulsory annual report, Barthes wrote of his topic that “one studies what

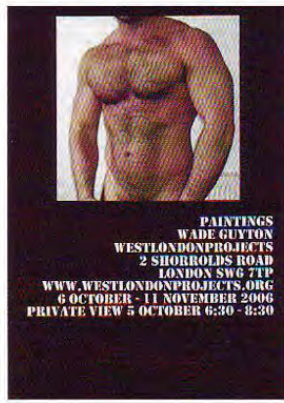
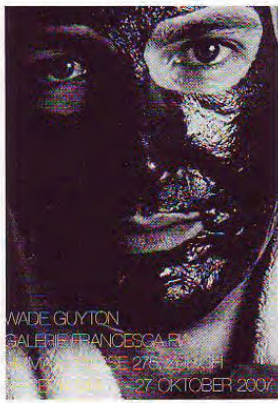
one desires or what one fears; within this perspective, the authentic title of the course could have been: *The Desire for Neutral.*” He continues, “The argument of the course has been the following: we have defined as pertaining to the Neutral every inflection that, dodging or baffling the paradigmatic, oppositional structure of meaning, aims at the suspension of the conflictual basis of discourse.” Presented not as a progressively building argument but instead as an offering of twenty-three figures or “twinklings,” Barthes’s exploration of the Neutral includes an argument for silence as one of the incarnations of his fugitive concept. The word—*silence*—should perhaps be treated with some circumspection here; as Barthes points out, he is himself *speaking* about it. Indeed, silence as defined by Barthes, like many of the figures he presents, does not conform to

First row, from left: Wade Guyton, *Untitled (SE 22, blau, 41 cm)*, 2007, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 7 1/2 x 7 1/2". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (25 Caro, PIECE #33, 1967)*, 2004, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 9 x 8 3/4". Wade Guyton, *Untitled, 2005*, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 8 3/4 x 6 3/4". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (23)*, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 11 3/4 x 9 3/4".

Second row, from left: Wade Guyton, *Untitled, 2006*, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 8 1/4 x 6". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (86)*, 2007, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 9 3/4 x 8 3/4". Wade Guyton, *Untitled, 2004*, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 10 x 8 3/4". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (1973)*, 2007, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 7 1/2 x 5".

Third row, from left: Wade Guyton, *Untitled, 2005*, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 10 1/4 x 7 1/2". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (39 9)*, 2007, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 8 1/2 x 5 1/2". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (A 31 k 100)*, 2007, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 8 1/2 x 6 3/4". Wade Guyton, *Untitled, 2007*, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 8 3/4 x 6 3/4".

Fourth row, from left: Wade Guyton, *Untitled (6)*, 2006, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 9 3/4 x 8 3/4". Wade Guyton, *Untitled, 2003*, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 10 1/2 x 7 1/2". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (cat. 28 A.B. van der SCHOOR)*, 2007, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 9 3/4 x 7 1/2". Wade Guyton, *Untitled (SE 93, blau, 1960 SE 33, blau, 1960, 42 cm hoch)*, 2007, Epson DURABrite inkjet on book page, 7 1/2 x 7 1/2".



This page, from left: Wade Guyton, exhibition poster (Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich), 2007. Wade Guyton, exhibition poster (West London Projects), 2006. Opposite page: Wade Guyton, *Untitled*, 2006, Epson UltraChrome ink-jet on linen, 80 1/4 x 69".

our likely expectations. Silence—like the Neutral itself—is not a passive condition but rather one voluptuously active, so active in fact that it refuses to settle into or onto a singularly readable position. If this sounds dangerously close to a kind of willy-nilly, fleeting lack of commitment, it of course risks being so (but only when it is not *actually* Neutral); for an active silence, as Barthes puts it, is what lies at the heart of all rigorous discourse. It opposes dogmatic speech *and* dogmatic silence alike.

As the foregoing may hint, an obvious tension regarding politics is characteristic of much of Barthes's late work.⁷ His suggestion that endlessly articulated battles between opposing opinions might be less potentially subversive than what remains unstated ("the implicit is a crime, because the implicit is a thought that escapes power") is understandably met with frustration by those in circumstances demanding nothing less than out-and-out activism. But Barthes's was, again, not a dictum to be consumed and applied. It was a methodological manifestation of *desire*—full if unfulfilled, and quite analogous to his (disappointed) dream of a truly neutral ink, without color or body; a desire that had all manner of political implications, not the least being that, as one commentator put it, Barthes's writing marked a lifelong project with "no motor other than desire."⁸

Guyton, too, seems, if not programmatically, to put forward a kind of Neutral deportment, one that, per Barthes, "postulates a right to be silent." That does not, of course, keep his commentators from ascribing, almost compulsively (and often aggressively), content and intent. (Indeed, Barthes's worry about silence is that while it begins as a "weapon assumed to outplay the paradigms," it too "congeals itself into a sign.") It's hard to imagine a more overdetermined space than the site of the monochrome—

the *black* monochrome no less, that tried-and-true image that now virtually screams out its simultaneous status as tabula rasa and tabula finitum. But if it seems that Guyton, at thirty-six years old, has reached this point much too early—what avenues has he left open for himself, one wonders while looking at so many iterations of the high-culture sign for "That's all, folks"—it is worth considering

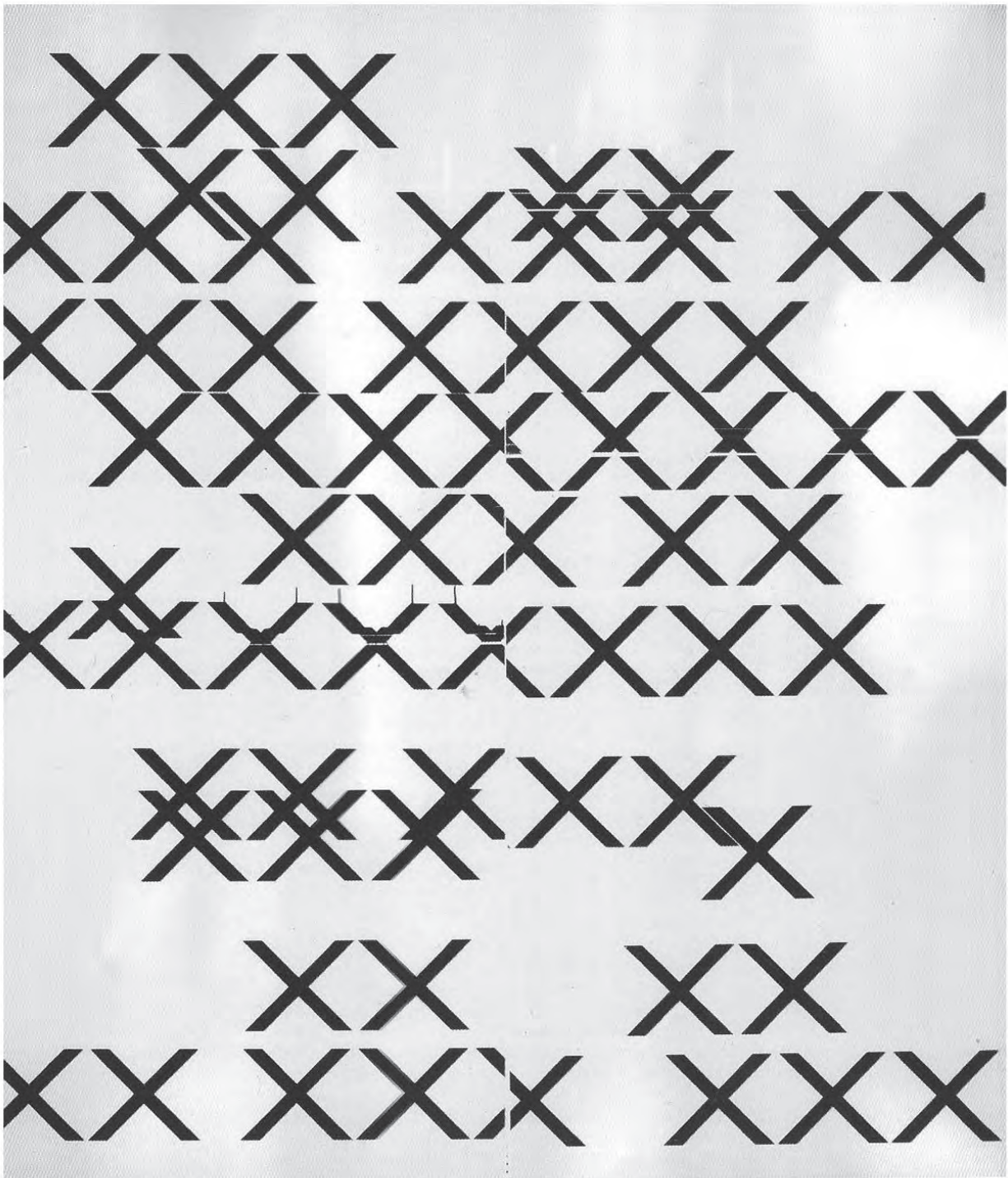
the ways in which his career has proceeded by way of such impasses, with such seeming foreclosures levied to hold open future possibilities.

Not pristine or even simply "ostensible," Guyton's monochromes take their place within the narrative of "painting," understanding that to deny doing so would be bad faith. Scratched, scumbled, in some instances stepped on, they are at once vaguely expressionistic in tone, elegiac in their relation to their (presumed) lineage, and, frankly, also a little the worse for wear.

It's not unfair, I hope, to characterize Guyton's oeuvre to date as evincing

a certain productive panic when it comes to rendering transparent the reality of being an artist who is faced with the task of making things. He absorbed the lessons of modernism and then postmodernism as an undergraduate in Knoxville, Tennessee, only to arrive in New York in 1996 with a head full of images and ideas that, learned as they were at a slight delay, were no longer quite contemporary. With a certain wariness, Guyton—who for the record, no matter how much attention this essay pays to painting, is not strictly a painter—then set to work entering the dialogue he had previously engaged almost exclusively by way of mediation (art-history books, theoretical anthologies, this magazine). He made sculpture: quirky quasi-Minimalist forms in wood or cork that took up too much or too little space; barely held-together strips

For notes, see page 464.



of mirrored Plexiglas whose accordion forms reflected viewers back in tall-skinny sections (a pathetically glittery effect at once carnivalesque and dance-clubby). By 2001, some of Guyton's sculptural renderings had taken a turn toward the disembodied. He found or took photographs—mostly of architecture, mostly banal—and then altered them using a black Sharpie to blot out selected features of the images, producing studies for sculptures that could never be realized, except possibly through some science-fictional techniques, since the sculptures he envisioned were essentially holes in space. Voiding the image but leaving its method of excision visible, Guyton's *Drawing for Sculpture the Size of a House*, 2001, made the contours of a low-slung American ranch house into a nameless one-dimensional shape, its jutting angles now mere geometry. (An unusually dramatic version of this kind of rendering was produced in *Drawing for Perpetually Burning Object*, 2002, in which an image of a blocky *something*, presumably a building, ravaged by angry flames becomes, with the architecture Sharpied out, a kind of Dantean nightmare.) For an "actual" sculpture, which he was asked to make for a public-art show in Brewster, New York, the artist, after scouring the area to no inspirational avail, landed on a heap of scrap wood in an alley, more or less neatly abandoned by its previous user when whatever task he or she was working on was finished. Guyton de- and then reassembled the pile, arranging it exactly as he had found it, except turned precisely on its head. (The resulting "sculpture" looked almost identical to the raw materials.) That Guyton wasn't really making a particular kind of material "his own"—or better said, that his use of the ready-made or found object seemed to result mostly in disappearing objects rather than claiming or really "transforming" them—seems fundamental to his practice in retrospect.

But this reaching toward things only to partially and rather heavy-handedly efface them was after all a *grasping*, and it offered itself as an insight that could be deployed procedurally only after Guyton worked more circumspectly than usual, one day in 2002, to mark a large black X over a page he had ripped from a design magazine. He used a ruler, and the lines were more or less straight, but not really, and the unevenness of the ink made the X look more handmade, less dispassionate, than he'd wanted it to. It also took much too long to produce, considering how dumb a gesture it was meant to be. Ripping another page from his stack of magazines and books, he fed it through his home printer (this one little and cheap: an Epson, but no Ultra) after plugging in a ridiculously high point size and typing one giant letter into an otherwise blank Word document: X.

To say that suddenly Guyton's hands were thus untied would make the change too profound and too definitively liberating. In fact, the rounds of "Printer Drawings" that ensued and that have continued apace, all of which use book or magazine pages as supports, may let Guyton off the hook for producing their "content"; but in so doing, they render more visible, and thus put more pressure on, this choice to let other images speak to some extent on his behalf. However much he laces his found pages with varia printed atop them, they remain partially their own, pulled rudely from their bindings and thus displaced into their new, not wholly transparent contexts. The imagery Guyton generated to superimpose on these backgrounds was limited at first to oversize X's but was soon joined by U's, colored dots and lines, squares, holes, grids, and other such not-designs constructed with letters or shapes made using Microsoft Word's "drawing tool." Also entering the mix in a few instances were three-dimensional objects, such as a wooden triangle, placed directly on the scanner, and, more often, a handful of "generic" images scanned from other sources and vetted through Photoshop (consistent favorites being "fire" and alternating green and red stripes, both swiped from book jackets). Take for example an untitled drawing from 2005, in which Guyton imposes his forcefully cheery green and red stripes over a page from an art book bearing a picture of a pastel Morris Louis painting from 1962. The placement of Guyton's stamp (one that is of course borrowed, not quite his own) on that of Louis (for a Louis is always recognizable as such, and here doubly so, since its caption is visible) neither cancels out the "first" image nor fully articulates a relationship to it. Yet this doubling gesture is still seemingly "readable," in much the same way that a series of "Action Sculptures" the artist has produced since 2002 is: High-design midcentury furniture is taken apart and manhandled into a lyric but ridiculous new form, but will always remain, and will always be recognizable as, Breuer chairs.

Guyton's decision in 2003 to also begin producing what would eventually become "paintings," first on raw, unstretched linen and soon thereafter on primed and stretched canvas, would seem to be distinctly different from the kind of tête-à-tête pairings of background source image and added superimposition created by the drawings, with their strangely tender yet proprietary urge. But Guyton's stretched paintings of the past few years, no less than the pages torn directly from books, acknowledge what writer Bettina Funcke has called the "risk of images," which she describes as the ethical and conceptual precipice

arrived at by artists who participate in image recycling.⁹ Some of these paintings appear stridently minimal, X's alone or multiplied and advancing in uneven rows, their typeface bodies subtly shifting under the eye (since some were printed directly from digital files and so are crisp and clear, while others are scans of previous works Guyton has produced and have thus experienced "loss"). Others are nearly baroque: Multiple, nauseously Pop-colored U's are consumed by Guyton's flame; a black square and four random white circles overtly court anthropomorphism, the seemingly gaping holes approximating open-eyed vacuity even while insisting that this is just abstraction after all. What is imported from the world of preexisting imagery becomes confused with what is mapped out within the purview of Photoshop and Word. The printer drawings' back- and foregrounds are more clearly distinguished by such overdetermined content as pages occupied first by Broodthaers, Farnsworth, Caro, and Stella and subsequently by Guyton; the paintings appear to have flattened such distinctions. Yet in producing through their more general nature—their ability to conjure a Rodchenko or a Black Flag logo or anything in between—even more references, they seem ever more tethered to citation, if less stably so. A "Printer Painting" in which the ink-jets have almost sputtered out, leaving us with an ostensible black monochrome that has nearly become an ostensible white monochrome, discloses nothing, and so discloses everything.

"If I were to describe it in a word I should say that I have been like a cartridge that's jammed." So says Henry Miller, in "The Angel Is My Watermark!," a semiparodic, nearly twenty-page episode in *Black Spring* in which the author relates "the genesis of a masterpiece."¹⁰ Living before the Staples epoch, Miller was presumably referring to a firearm, not a balky LaserJet. Yet his mention of a jammed cartridge is serendipitous on several levels. In their too-muchness and not-enoughness, Guyton's works are almost uncannily illuminated via a reading of Miller's characteristically manic reflections on the necessary interplay of erasure and inscription in the (supposedly purely additive) "act of creation." Poking fun at—yet clearly enamored of—myths of genius, Miller enumerates a process of conceiving, in his artist's notepad, a complex layering of drawn and painted images, all of them symbolically ripe but none of them working. Having decided after two excruciating days that the endeavor has failed, he finally scrubs the wretched thing in the sink and, of course, what does not wash away is the unexpected magnum opus—"It's like a splinter under the nail," he says. Despite the tongue in cheek, Miller—that self-

professed jammed cartridge—concedes that there is truth to his parable: "I have never been able to draw a balance. I am always *minus* something. I have a reason therefore to go on."

That there is a certain romanticism to quoting Miller on painting (writing in 1936 as he was, an expat in France, surrounded on all sides by the good and the bad of avant-garde heroics) is unavoidable, but in the end this is perhaps a fair—if also perhaps an unexpected—treatment of Guyton's work. Emphatic discussions of his art have focused on his clear attendance to "modernism," by way of his recycling some of its images (or what we think are its images), and on his interest in up-to-date technologies and modes of mediation (given his obvious debts to the machines on which he relies and to whose vocabularies he cannot help but subscribe). Yet there is nonetheless a minus that is glossed over in this reading. That minus is why Guyton's recent monochromes are not send-ups of—or even ironic commentaries on—finitude, despite their seeming courtship of degree zero. (Like the Neutral, Miller's minus takes its pleasure from being generatively deficient: Barthes calls pluses and minuses "intensive degrees.") They are, akin to Miller's dingy "masterpiece," scrubbed back down to basics while still having clearly been put through the ringer. Not pristine or even simply ostensible, they take their place within the narrative of "painting," understanding that to deny doing so would be bad faith. Scratched, scumbled, in some instances stepped on, they are at once vaguely expressionistic in tone, elegiac in their relation to their (presumed) lineage, and, frankly, also a little the worse for wear.

But there is another way to think about this lenticular affect, this display of wear and tear that looks melancholic from one angle and parodic from another. One thing that is displaced (one might even say denied) in interpretations of Guyton's work that focus on the precedents, or on the technology and the process, is desire. To really look squarely at this artist's work is to find desire staring you in the face—"outplaying itself," Barthes might say, which means desire is not locatable in the image, exactly, but is still felt within its nimbus. Desire largely proceeds, as Lacan and Louis Vuitton know equally well, according to what one does *not* have, by making objects and ideas (and even oneself) into what they are not.¹¹

Guyton's usurpations and representations of images—actual and "types"—proceed quite blatantly in this vein, a now-you-see-it-now-you-don't admission that he's only partially delivering the goods. The negotiation gives rise

to funny, queer, unexpectedly campy side effects, which are present in all the work but more evident in some. Take the posters Guyton creates to announce his exhibitions. The one for his 2006 show at West London Projects—an elegantly composed installation of X paintings—uses an image likely pulled from some cheesy soft-core site, a beefy, hairy guy cropped at the neck and thighs, his thick torso giving what is precisely the “wrong impression” of what was to be shown at the gallery. Similarly, Guyton’s poster for a solo show in 2007 at Galerie Francesca Pia, in Zurich, handed over its entire surface to the pampered visage of an anonymous ’70s fitness hunk, his face coated in a thick—vaguely scatological—mud mask, his eyes soft with performed relaxation. If this content seems utterly incompatible with the rest, which seems so general—or so specific—as to resist the kind of reading suggested, it’s important to remember just how many of Guyton’s drawings and paintings are given over to literally “flaming” effects and, less literally, how his entire practice is predicated on questions about “passing.”

Susan Sontag, of course, had the last word on camp even when she first articulated it, in 1964. As she explained and as we all know well by now, camp traffics in exaggeration, in the “off,” in “things-being-what-they-are-not.” Less rehearsed, but even more pointedly relevant here, is another of Sontag’s arguments: Camp is the purview of “style,” of, therefore, the “ostensible”: “To emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral with respect to content. It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical.”¹² But this attitude which is neutral with respect to content is, she goes on to say at the essay’s very end, “a tender feeling.” Perhaps the question of where to place Guyton’s practice in the field of contemporary art is only answered, then, by taking seriously the kind of neutrality that Barthes—and I think Sontag, too—marks as “active.” So to begin again, just who does Guyton think he is? A better question might be, How does he go on, when every image looks like it will be the last? Driven by no motor other than desire.

—Johanna Burton is an art historian and critic based in New York, and associate director and senior faculty member at the Whitney Independent Study Program.

NOTES

1. Douglas Crimp, “The End of Painting,” October 16 (Spring 1981). Reprinted in Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 84–105. Crimp’s essay specifically addresses Barbara Rose’s review of the show “Eight Contemporary Artists,” held at MoMA in 1974, which included Buren. For Rose, Buren stood as emblematic of a group whose overly political aspirations bred “disenchanted, demoralized artists” producing mediocre work. In 1979, Rose curated an exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery in New York, titled “American Painting: The Eighties.” Crimp argues that the show was meant as retaliation against Conceptual practices such as Buren’s and aimed to reinscribe traditional ideas about the legacies of painting.

2. From Daniel Buren, *Reboundings: An Essay*, trans. Philippe Hunt (Brussels: Daled & Gevaert, 1977). Cited in Crimp, 103.

3. This folding of the canvas—with the result that paintings can double in size—began well before Guyton’s monochromes, manifesting in paintings that include X’s, flames, etc., so the “navel” is itself not unique to this most recent series. However, while the X’s and flames resulted from one large file being split in half (and thus printed in two sections, one on each side of the canvas), the monochromes are in fact the result of two iterations of the same bigblack.tif file printed one after the other.

4. See on this topic, for instance, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who has long written on Buren and Buren’s reception, “The Group That Was (Not) One: Daniel Buren and BMPT,” in *Artforum* (May 2008), 310–313. He writes succinctly there: “It will be one of the questions for our decade to ponder why the spaces and practices of contestation and critique that Buren (and Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, et al.) opened at the end of the ’60s were—or so it seems now, at least—irredeemably hijacked. . . .”

5. From Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 48–49.

6. The seminar, *Le Neutre*, was not compiled and published in France until 2002; it was subsequently translated into English in 2005.

7. Questions regarding the relationship between one’s politics and one’s practice have long been asked. An interesting article appeared in *Artforum* (November 1977: 46–53) by Moira Roth, whose “The Aesthetic of Indifference” looked closely at “cool” practices by Duchamp, Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg, and Johns. Roth argues that though their practices do not comment directly on the cold war during which they thrived, they, like “others of a more liberal and self-critical persuasion, found themselves paralyzed when called upon to act on their convictions, and this paralysis frequently appeared as indifference.” I am arguing not for a paralyzing indifference but instead for a kind of personal, even amorous politics, but it is interesting that there is similarity when it comes to how and even whether signs of the political are perceived.

8. This is Thomas Clerc’s phrase, in his preface to *The Neutral*, xxiii. Clerc is referring explicitly to the way in which Barthes uses such a wide array of sources from all areas of culture. He similarly discusses the wide net of Barthes’s inquires and citations as proceeding by way of a kind of “secondhand erudition” and a “joyous dilettantism,” neither of which undermines Barthes’s rigor as a thinker but both of which do highlight the unconventional nature of his method.

9. See Bettina Funcke’s 2006 essay “The Risk of Images,” which focuses on Guyton’s work and is included in the catalogue *Guyton, Price, Smith, Walker* (Kunsthalle Zurich: JRP/Ringier, forthcoming, 2008). There she writes provocatively, “It remains to be seen what the appropriate response of artists will be to a new and particular risk of images. The zero dimension of the digital gives the power to manipulate to both the politician and the artist, to the terrorist and the activist, to popular culture and its critique, alike.”

10. Henry Miller, *Black Spring* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 57–76.

11. Guyton takes up the question of desire as it pertains to commercial goods and advertising somewhat differently in his work for Guyton\Walker, his collaboration with artist Kelley Walker. Utilizing materials including the logo and marketing slogans for Ketel One vodka, Guyton\Walker takes up more overtly the address of cultural signs. Walker, in his solo work, can also, as Scott Rothkopf argues, be read through the logic of desire, though this is a desire thoroughly vetted—even produced—by the machinations of popular culture. See Rothkopf’s essay in exh. cat. *Kelley Walker* (Le Magasin—Centre National d’Art Contemporain, Grenoble: JRP/Ringier, 2007), 105–125. In addition, for a valuable discussion of Guyton’s work—and, more specifically, working procedures—see Rothkopf’s “Modern Pictures,” in exh. cat. *Wade Guyton: Color, Power & Style* (Kunstverein in Hamburg: Walther König, 2006), 64–83. Also, see my “Such Uneventful Events: The Work of Wade Guyton,” in exh. cat. *Formalism: Modern Art, Today* (Kunstverein in Hamburg: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 54–61.

12. Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’” (1964), in Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 275–292.