I. Walls

Somebody was in the process of applying a layer of paint on a large billboard. The transition from a previously tarnished surface to the freshly-painted plane mesmerised me. It was a chance encounter with the moment of its erasure.

As if I was watching a dance, I fell into the marks and movements of the roller; the rounded forms shifted between figure and ground as they came into contact with the surface, the swooping gestures swirled and entangled into each other, each stroke varied in density of paint, the marks of the paint charted the limitations of the body’s reach. The negative and positive spaces were constantly shifting modes. These two states of erasure and addition were simultaneously entangled and repelled by each other.

This essay started as an attempt to reflect on my work Motion in the opposite direction as part of the exhibition Braided Field that was held in abandoned block in Melbourne, Australia.

These reflections aim to consider my actions of covering an existing wall with a new layer. Like the billboard in Oaxaca, the painting on the Coburg wall neutralises the plane. Through this act of cancellation, I am able to reconsider how this new state has erased its previous capabilities. Through the reframing of these planes the surface can go on to support and facilitate various stages of regeneration and renewal. There is the reincarnation of an existing structure that arises through the tension created by the addition of a new element. I am interested in the potential of these intersections, of an existing form to take on a reconfiguration of its original purpose and provide a new direction forward.

The wall itself sits in an industrial context and holds a vast area of the block which is a combination of existing bluestone with large areas patched with grout that has eroded over time from the rain. This has created a strange coral sponge like texture in certain areas. The surface is made up of parts, which include previous graphing and tags on the wall. Other areas have plants growing, creepers, weeds, grasses, spurring from the wall. A section of the wall, 4x3 metres large, is orange brick. This surface is smoother and more even.

Motion in the Opposite Direction, a large-scale painting, was developed onto this wall in situ on a derelict block by the Merri Creek in Coburg, Melbourne. Made with wild fennel, grasses, thistles, sugar spray paint, raw blue pigments, turmeric, rainwater, plaster, grout, rubbish found on the block, the 11 x 7 metre work was made onto a large retaining wall. I covered the bluestone wall in a layer of blue pigment creating a new plane redefining the
blue stones previous state. Through this erasure a process of regeneration in the form of a painting is born. The painting will erode over time due to its exposure to the changing weather. By engaging with various states, tensions, filters, gestalts, and realities and perspectives. At times for that vitality to be attended to, through such vigour of addition it can become, in some way, fused with one another. Entirely dependent on being overworked to then fall apart. The layered surface undoes itself through exhaustion, though being so attended to, through such vigour of addition it collapses within itself.

Through the use of an existing material, my process often encompasses a reconfiguration of a materials original purpose. From painting on a curtain, cutting up a bedsheet to using dental casting plaster to create textures in paint, these intersections cancel and reinstantiate the materials prescribed value/use to expansive possibilities in how one can look at a curtain. By beginning with a process of cancellation that leads to a variety of directions forward. There is moment of possibility and simultaneous slippage that provides tension that I aim to explore in my practice.

By considering my surroundings to be a key role in the process of making and therefore makes the most from what I can find and make from my environment. The process of pulling together an arrangement to let the work then shape itself. Past and present moments are brought together creating a disparity between tenes, leaving space between each encounter creating a non-linear work.

It is this temporality and continued cancellation through processes of both addition and subtraction that keeps the work in a constant state of flux. The newly introduced brown tag (added around three months after the work was finished by an unknown author) contributes to an ever-evolving work that takes its own form. New collaborators simultaneously mask and erase sections, perhaps it is an ongoing process of participation, where the collaborators are unknown to each other.

A multitude of possible pathways for the furthering and development of a work can be found in the use of pre-existing materials and sites. Like the man painting the billboard, I look to existing surfaces that I can intercept. By working into and against with my own mark making and painterly gestures, to craft a more comprehensive or complex surface that proceed towards a re-direction of material. This re-direction of the discarded material sets out a parameter to both operate within and brush up against. By mapping my movements encourage an ongoing negotiation through a process of piecing together multiple facets in an aim to amalgamate material and their surroundings. It is part of my practice to maintain a movement that can continually reignite this approach of the minor position towards painting; to approach painting from multiple perspectives.

This idea of re-creation is akin to a process of composting, for it is not in dismissal or an erasure of past lives that the material becomes lively, it is with the acknowledgment and re-saturation of these elements that a kind of breakdown and renewal or re-direction can take place. It is in these fertile conditions that material processes can be reinscribed and expand to something else. Without these conditions, the compost becomes stagnant and materials rot, they become exhausted and breakdown with an unproductive potency. Vitality occurs in the shifting between the multiplication of layers that is informed by engaging with various states, tensions, filters, gestalts, realities and perspectives. At times for that vitality to occur the materials original prescription needs to be abandoned and cancelled.

Endnotes

1 Motion in the Opposite Direction is a large-scale wall work that I made in situ as part of a group exhibition Braided Field, an offsite project developed by Brunswick Sculpture Centre.

References


Jahnne Pasco-White: Kin

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