

REHEARSALS

by Pádraic E. Moore (curator)

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Dearest Stefan,

I hope this finds you in good spirits. It's early on Monday morning and grey light fills my room here in Den Haag. I imagine that you are probably reading this in your North Facing studio overlooking Kakeberg. Apart from the few street lamps and traffic barriers Kakeberg is one of those cobbled lanes in Maastricht which possesses a character that is distinctly medieval. No doubt your studio has changed considerably since my last visit, I recall how then numerous artworks were placed around the room, propped carefully against walls, facing inwards. Some of the paintings I viewed that day remain vivid in my mind. I recall how they appeared initially as landscapes but revealed themselves upon closer inspection to resemble film or theatre sets; artificial interiors devised for some performance or photo shoot. However, the work that has preoccupied me most since my studio visit is the work entitled *Rehearsals*. Deliberating on this work which -it must be said- constitutes a significant departure from everything you've previously produced has led me down several avenues. Some of these avenues may seem only tangentially connected to *Rehearsals* but I believe that they will expand thinking around your work in ways that are significant.

Since leaving Van Eyck I've given much thought to how time spent there has a significant impact upon one's work. Every individual I've met who has spent a period working there has been affected by the experience. It may be that my background as an art historian is at the root of my propensity to forge connections between an artist's work and the context in which they are working. Whatever the cause, I've been considering the ways that working at Van Eyck may have shaped the works you've produced there. The soundscape of *Rehearsals* is a key element of the piece. It's prominence in the work reminded me of how on any given day musical emanations drift from the Conservatorium and echo through the space in which you are now working. Whether it be vocal exercises, the tuning of strings or -as I recall most vividly- the distinct low drone of a contrabass tuba, there's almost always sound drifting across Academieplein and echoing through the corridors of the Van Eyck. I wonder if perhaps working next to the Academy of Music might have influenced this work? Could the layering of sound and

vision that distinguishes this new piece be viewed as a response to the unique environment in which you are currently working?

It occurred to me while thinking about *Rehearsals* that although it's not actually executed in paint per se, it is ultimately is a reflection upon the process, history and potential of paint . On the most fundamental level the work explores what painting is: the act of making marks on a surface to create form, image, shape and in this case even atmosphere. Viewing *Rehearsals*, one navigates through a constellation of brushstrokes that resemble the types of marks an artist might make in the act of warming up to paint in earnest. Every dash, line and curlicue might be seen as an exercise in brush-handling, made by one readying muscles and nerves for a future act. However, in addition to resembling marks made in preparation for a honed action these accumulations of paint also bring to mind a number of specific episodes from the history of Western Art. We discussed how the palette in some of these accumulations -and indeed the title of the work- are evocative of Degas' series from the 1870s depicting dancers in various poses of rehearsal. However, what the appearance of this new work, and indeed the way it was produced; (by applying paint directly onto sheets of transparent Mylar) remind me of most are works by Len Lye or Stan Brakhage; artists who painted directly onto to the surface of film..

There is a synaesthetic dimension to the work that Brakhage developed over the course of his lengthy career and demonstrated through his film practice. Indeed this synaesthesiac element of Brakhage's (abstract) art comes to mind when viewing *Rehearsals*. This quote by Brakhage seems particularly pertinent to your own new work: *Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception .*

Although Brakhage's work is usually situated within the realms of experimental film his approach to using materials might also be seen as rooted in a movement that first flourished amongst painters in the 1950s, many of whom have come to be known as Abstract Expressionists. In this way Brakhage's work might be seen as a bridge between the visual preoccupations of experimental film makers and those of High Modernists whose paintings were distinguished by a decision to use techniques of mark making which are ultimately an index of their physical

actions. This approach emphasised the connection between an artist's physicality and the paintings that they made. Marks made came to constitute the sole 'subject'. It is these webs of visual connection that reminded me whilst watching *Rehearsals* of that -now iconic- footage of Jackson Pollock by Hans Namuth filmed in 1950. In this footage Pollock paints directly onto glass as a means of demonstrating his technique, his actions seem exaggerated-almost performative. This footage evinces more succinctly than any of Pollock's paintings ever could Harold Rosenberg's assertion that *what was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event*. The marks that constitute the subject of *Rehearsals* can also be likened to Pollock's works to some extent in that when viewing *Rehearsals* one's eyes are caught in what seems to be an impossible impasse: the strokes/pours of paint push and pull upon one's eyes. It becomes difficult to know whether we are gazing onto boundless unlimited and infinite space, or are we peering into claustrophobically constraining, sealed and hermetic compartments from which nothing can leak? Indeed, watching *Rehearsals* one is prompted to ask if we can, simultaneously, do both?

There are numerous aspects distinguishing *Rehearsals* from the work you've previously produced. *Rehearsals* is of course lens-based and characterised by a perpetual mobility that introduces a phenomenological aspect to the work. The screen becomes a portal via which one navigates through diaphanous forms, the transparent nature of which emphasises the solidity of the world in which we -the viewers- inhabit. Yet, despite these differences the new work shares with previous paintings a distinctly cinematic aesthetic. While the paintings I viewed in your studio possess a directly 'narrative' content and were more 'psychological' in terms of the symbolism and interiors depicted they share with this new work the evocation of cinematic scenes. Or perhaps, to be more precise, the images you produce evoke in my mind scenes viewed in films. *Rehearsals* instantly summoned cinematic representations of deep space from science fiction movies. In particular, *Rehearsals* evokes the Star Gate scene in Kubrick's *2001 Space Odyssey* in which streams of psychedelic light stream in infinite planes of exposure. This atmosphere is significantly heightened via your intense drone like soundtrack, which is an important feature of this work.

Indeed, imagining an aimless drift through limitless space evokes within me the same metaphysical intensity generated by Jackson Pollock's works which, packed and agitated as they are, ultimately function as investigations into the sublime. This line I've drawn (by way of

your new work) to connect the paintings of Jackson Pollock to images that have come to us via science fiction movies may seem tenuous. However, drawing such a line emphasises the inherent duality of *Rehearsals*, which is on one hand focused upon the particoloured constellation of gestural brushstrokes and on another hand the intervals, voids and the SPACES that separate them. Space -and of course time- play a role in this work in a way that couldn't have been possible in your previous works which were for the most part static paintings. Your decision to paint directly onto Mylar has led me to draw yet another connection to space exploration. However, this connection has emerged as a result of the materials utilised as opposed to aesthetic outcomes. Did you know that in 1968 -the same year Kubrick's pioneering 2001 was released- one of several experimental spacecraft entitled sateloons (spherical satellite balloons) was sent into orbit? These sateloons were made from Mylar, the same material that's been a key element in the production of your *Rehearsals*. The slow drift one makes when viewing your new work certainly echoes the idea of a Mylar balloon floating slowly -perhaps even aimlessly- through space, reflecting radio signals back to forth. Yet, while *Rehearsals* seems on one hand to refer to outer space (which I imagine must be a dark and frightening place) it could equally be described as a representations of an interior psychological state, as opposed to an objectified, externalized, space. What might be termed an *inscape*. This term, *inscape*, is one I recently encountered in the work of English poet and priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins. His poetry concentrates upon the concept of inner-dwelling-ness which I believe is a key concept to grasp when thinking about the work of visual artists whose vocabulary often doesn't engage with the external/ material world. Perhaps engagement with the *inscape* of personal expression can paradoxically bring us closer to the existential immediacy of the cosmos as it presents itself to us, and our participation within it. ..For it's been suggested that there are direct analogies between the microcosm and macrocosm: the maxim 'as above so below' comes to mind yet again.

I don't believe there is any way to successfully evaluate the outcome of an individual's artistic expression through the use of the written word. However, I do think that analogy can be an effective way to respond to a work and that exploring ideas and events that may seem only tangentially related can introduce new meanings. If I am to address *Rehearsals* directly, without analogies; I would have to say that this work is one which addresses the permanence of painting. *Rehearsals* is a meditation upon the capacity of paint to endure physical time as well as the fads of style and that perennial pointless exclamation that **painting is dead**. But *Rehearsals* also

evinces an important point concerning the evolution of video art during the five decades that it has existed as a medium. That is that of the countless permutations in video, one of the most interesting is the way that it has developed relationships with other mediums, in this instance painting. I'm interested to know your thoughts on some of these ideas and look forward to your response. Hope to make it to the show in Galerie Van De Weghe. Looking forward to engaging with **The Gravity of Painting!**

Warmest regards,

Pádraic E. Moore