

Richard Hamilton

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IN PRAISE OF DESPAIR

THE PAINTER'S DESPAIR

In Picardy, in Brabant, in the neighbouring provinces and doubtless in other places, grows a wild flower. A long time has passed since I saw it. I no longer wander along lanes and hedgerows; and then, roads have vanished the ditches—asphalt has done its task well. How has this unforgettable flower fared amidst the devastation of the countryside? Though my memories of it date from the 1930s and are forever mingled in my mind with inflation, I could still describe the appearance of that flower—were it not composed of an infinity of points so closely enmeshed that a complete description of its aspect would require a visual acuity available only to science. Does it still live, this accursed flower, known to country folk as *The Painter's Despair*?

THE ART-LOVER'S DESPAIR

These flowers, planted in paper, remote from seeds and seasons, do not speak the language of the heart as once was the fashion. The artist presents a series of states enabling us to observe the development of his work up to the final proof, which is of such beauty that it effaces the reservations we may have had about the excremental form lying low on each plate. Like manure nourishing the colour in the blossoms (the conventions of horticulture are fully respected) it accompanies each stage of the progression and builds a definitive mass. And indeed it is a question of form and mass, obliterating direct reference to reality. It would seem that the subject is not flowers but technique. This technique, sustaining artificial flowers, is a tangle of roots whose hidden image invites a host of interpretations. Is there one among them that might be called definitive? It is as if the artist knew of some theory of prosody and declined to utter it—he paints, he engraves, before the onlooker: who will, I hope, find the key.

Marcel Broodthaers, 1974