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A general history of labyrinths
Stéphane Calais, Kaye Donachie, Kees Goudzwaard, Antoine Marquis, Renaud Jerez
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“The section on Language and Literature was brief. Only one trait is worthy of recollection: it noted that the literature of Uqbar was one of fantasy and that its epics and legends never referred to reality, but to the two imaginary regions of Mlejnas and Tlön... The bibliography enumerated four volumes which we have not yet found, though the third - Silas Haslam: *History of the Land Called Uqbar*, 1874 - figures in the catalogs of Bernard Quartich’s book shop (1). The first, *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen uber das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien*, dates from 1641 and is the work of Johannes Valentinus Andrea. This fact is significant; a few years later, I came upon that name in the unsuspected pages of De Quincey (*Writings*, Volume XIII) and learned that it belonged to a German theologian who, in the early seventeenth century, described the imaginary community of Rosae Crucis - a community that others founded later, in imitation of what he had prefigured.” Jorge Luis Borges, “Tlon Uqbar Orbis Tertius”, *Fictions*, 1944.

“This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought - our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography - breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a ‘certain Chinese encyclopedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies’. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that. (...) When we establish a considered classification, when we say that a cat and a dog resemble each other less than two greyhounds do, even if both are tame or embalmed, even if both are frenzied, even if both have just broken the water pitcher, what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty? On what ‘table’, according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? What is this coherence - which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by an a priori and necessary concatenation, nor imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents? For it is not a question of linking consequences, but of grouping and isolating, of analysing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents; there is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things; nothing that demands a sharper eye or a surer, better-articulated language; nothing that more insistently requires that one allow oneself to be carried along by the proliferation of qualities and forms. (...) Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 1966, Preface. The Borges text to which the author refers comes from “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins” published in 1942.

“In the early part of this century there began to appear, first in France and then in Russia and in Holland, a structure that has remained emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts ever since. Because of its bivalent structure (and history) the grid is fully, even cheerfully, schizophrenic. I have witnessed and participated in arguments about whether the grid portends the centrifugal or centripetal existence of the work of art.6 Logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity. Any boundaries imposed upon it by a given painting or sculpture can only be seen according to this logic-as arbitrary. By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric. Thus the grid operates from the work of art outward, compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame. This is the centrifugal reading. The centripetal one works, naturally enough, from the outer limits of the aesthetic object inward. The grid is, in relation to this reading a re-presentation of everything that separates the work of art from the world, from ambient space and from other objects. The grid is an introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work; it is a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself. It is a mode of repetition, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself.” Rosalind Krauss, “Grids”, *The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths*, 1986.

(1) Haslam has also published *A General History of Labyrinths*.

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“We have been trained to see painting as “pictures”, with storytelling connotations, abstract or literal, in a space usually limited and enclosed by a frame, which isolates the image. It has been shown that there are possibilities other than this manner of “seeing” painting. An image could be said to be “real” if it is not an optical reproduction, if it does not symbolize or describe so as to call up a mental picture. This “real” or “absolute” image is only confined by our limited perception.”

Robert Ryman in *Wall Painting* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1979).

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Born in 1967, Stéphane Calais cultivates a complex and heterogeneous artistic practice. Drawing remains his chief language. For him, it is this “wonderful tool” repeatedly present in his work, such as in his imposing silkscreen series *La Pléiade*, installations like *La Chambre de Schulz*, and of course in his paintings, where the black line interferes with his Gustonian evocations and fierce physical gesture. If the elementary data of gesture and line in painting are confronted and associated in Stéphane Calais’ painting, another fundamental issue underlies his practice, namely, working in series. This is in line with the artist’s fascination for subjects he finds “on the fringes” of a “rather non-dominant” culture. For Stéphane Calais, in his paintings the “alacrity of formal elements naturally agglomerate (...) tending wholly and consistently towards concretion”. Thereby, a confusion is accessed that is dear to the artist, that of “durations, places and production”.

Kaye Donachie, born in Glasgow in 1970, works from archive or cinema images and is concerned with creating fragmentary narratives in her small-scale paintings. She resurrects characters from a forgotten past, affiliated with pioneer movements of libertarian culture such as the *Monte Verita* utopian community (formed in Switzerland, which attracted figures like Herman Hesse, Hugo Ball and Otto Gross, a pioneer of the sexual revolution) and 20th century bohemia, including the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay or the author Nina Hamnett, nicknamed the “Queen of the Bohemia”. Kaye Donachie’s paintings are elaborated through a long process of the addition and subtraction of layers, lending a subtle and light, almost spectral, appearance to the artist’s oil paintings, merging with the tragic and the romantic nature of these characters.

Kees Goudzwaard was born in 1958 in Utrecht (Netherlands). Influenced both by Flemish painting and by American Colorfield Painting, he produces an abstract pictorial oeuvre that respects strict protocols. His oil paintings are precise 1:1 scale copies of abstract collages he creates in his workshop, made with coloured papers and adhesive tape, thus opening the way to new experiments on the notion of appropriation in painting. Through this mechanics of repetition and reproduction, achieved in the physical act of painting, Kees Goudzwaard thereby substitutes one reality for another. The paintings presented in the *Extent* (2005), *Long Division* (2007) and *Transit* (2009) shows were large diaphanous compositions featuring several coloured planes, without any relief or shadow, obtained by means of a very precise technique involving the superimposition of transparency levels and subtle colour changes that create perspective.

Renaud Jerez was born in 1982. He produces a multiform work in the context of a frenetic observation and reproduction of images sourced from varied visual universes (snapshots taken in the city, images from the Internet, video games etc.). He is mostly interested in the circulation of images produced by new communication technologies, but also in the circulation and connection of objects and bodies. Elements like pipes, tubes and rods continually recur in his sculptural vocabulary. He initially produced paintings; later carrying out research on different digital printing techniques, mainly on transparent films adhered to Plexiglas sheets featuring the addition of several paint layers/strokes. The resulting surface refers to the contemporary use of the screen, which beyond its own technological performances, is, above all, the scene of fantasy: the site of all the identifications and projections possible.

Antoine Marquis was born in 1974. His painting combines great formal command with research focused on intimist situations, scenes and atmospheres, yet devoid of any sentimentalism. He is concerned with the representation of a France described in Simenon’s novels as capturing an ordinary, everyday sequence of moments, occasionally submerged in a “municipal” eroticism. The grey scale tones that recur in his pictorial work, allow him to pass from one image to another, as in a dream, and originate in his early practice of ball pen drawing, long used for its irrevocable aspect, without any possibility of erasing. These recent paintings on show here extend this research while developing a new technique mixing oil, acrylic and thick chalk on paper. Objects and bodies appear as if they were painted in negative, the result of a practice involving the superimposition of consistently light veils of matter.