

## RNOP MELBOURNE - THE ROAD PAINTINGS

A satellite event presenting new works from new systems - a discourse on coteries & the New Modern movement. For the Biennale of Contemporary Non Object Art, Grenoble Sept 2019. Co curator Aaron Martin, artist notes by Billy Gruner.



The road through Death Valley from San Francisco to Cincinnati, 2018



Serhiy Popov, Kiev 2019

This essay posits an argument on traction taking place in contemporary art. The RNOP Melbourne event is in that sense, significant. As it partakes in a set of events coordinated by RNOP as 'special projects' of West Projects in Sydney, in association with the Biennale of Contemporary NOA in Grenoble, September 2019. These 'satellite' RNOP events have been occurring in multiple cities across the world since 2017 and as parts of the upcoming biennale program support the conception of a new and very modern movement that began around 2000. That is, out a greater legacy of dedicated spaces such as CCNOA, PS, Minuspace, NOSUD, UND and the original SNO circle active early.

Since 2000 many other projects such as Tekksas, A9e, ISprojects, Divisible, Saturation Point, ParisConcret, West, and 5Walls in forming newer circles have been developing modern programs to cater to what can only be described as a vast network, of participants active in the post 20thc arts arena globally. Run by as many newer and significant artists' coteries these relational project/programs are independently designed yet in composite view remain a movement academia and the greater museo context has not yet acknowledged.

RNOP - MELBOURNE like the very recent APELDOORN ACEC near Amsterdam or BLACK SQUARES in London at Saturation Point and a dozen other equally interesting international events before that coordinated by RNOP have in fact been considering this post 20thc phenomenon directly, via a strictly coterie-based engagement system. 'The Road Paintings' presentation of local and international small works at Five Walls in Melbourne is in that same manner, evidence. As such co curator Aaron Martin presenting the Melbourne event is looking at a new modern-ness appearing in contemporary reductive art and how a growing inter-discursiveness seen in coteries of art makers from San Francisco, Kiev, Krakow, Paris, Amsterdam, Bangkok, Copenhagen or Melbourne to name a few are recovering their own and not so disconnected *alt*-histories at the same time. Importantly, these shows of many kinds

locate who it is that have new words and new systems in play using present day visual language.

As stated, as part of an ongoing international series the RNOP MELBOURNE event is held in association with Australian artist/curator Aaron Martin and, Australian artist/curator Billy Gruner from West Projects (presenting for RNOP). The Melbourne gathering like other versions held in foreign cities of late is in fact an exemplar of the opening statement. *New Modern*<sup>1</sup> for instance was a recent exhibition held at The Saturation Point in London as co curated by Deb Covell, and like in London West Projects in Australia asked Aaron Martin (co-curator) to bring together the shared interests of a local Southern Australian coterie. And, to focus on a familial sense of engagement within interrelated coteries who had previously participated in other cities. Hence the 'Road Paintings' sub title.

Importantly, RNOP or the Reductive Non Objective Project was itself born out of earlier inter-collaboration programs operative since 2000. These include UND European series (an early seven European city survey curated By Jan Van der Ploeg, Tilman Hoepful and Billy Gruner), Reflex Wall (ongoing), the original MAP and KNO (ongoing) amongst many others. Today, given the RNOP program is media driven it features a loosened yet trans-global model of independent arts activity. However, it does in fact physically make public events in a generalised response to the rise in popularity of the reductive arts overall. A process that further acknowledges a growing need for participants to meet independently and what RNOP sees as essential. As a media program its aim is to simply facilitate 'person to person' contact and to support a growing 'genre-specific' network interested in further validating cultural inter-connectivity and, relationships to coteries of artists living within different cities around the world. This system/portal basically engages contemporary art makers connected in a personalised yet intra-associated inquiry into post 20thc reductive or neo non-objective practices.<sup>2</sup> It is in that particular manner, highly specialised.

RNOP events require a co-curator who is one of the invited local participating artists likewise often receives assistance from others working within a broader network. This 'flat platform' approach operates a community driven model and amounts to a culturally diverse 'space' linked to other highly pro-active projects networking in foreign environments. RNOP events are a basic and unfunded response to the opportunity that media systems can provide, just as it is the collegiate-minded nature of art makers working within this process that finally produces event opportunities. From this a significant heightening of interactions produces its' own system. At the same time a certain philosophic questioning arises concerning the post 20<sup>th</sup> century appearance of new language forms, especially within the highly

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<sup>1</sup> The Reductive Non Objective Project (RNOP) features a trans-global model of independent arts presentations done in San Francisco, Cincinnati, Europe and then further RNOP events in Australia and Auckland in 2018. The RNOP series is a participating program ending in the Biennale of Contemporary Non Objective Art Grenoble, France 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Note the basis of this essay was originally titled NEO NON-OBJECTIVE: new modern, new work, new language and presented for RNOP San Francisco catalogue especially, this essay suitably modified. By Dr Billy Gruner at West Projects, Blue Mountains, Australia, and Dr Kyle Jenkins at University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia. July 2018

specialised genre of reductive and non-objective art coming after the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, there are a plethora of developments taking place that seemingly exist beyond the interests of traditional critics, dealers and academics. A secession in play.

KNO is fine surveying example, InterDiscursive in Poland, or Abstract Projects Paris, the recent and vastly accommodating Abstraction 2018 in Melbourne another. The RNOP program like these independent projects looks coolly at academic surety, associated biases, and questions morays and conventions as a frame from which to develop more fitting language. What has come from this global interaction is a clear-cut and very visible response to an absence in critical engagement overall. It's *alt* presence within contemporary art irrespectively points towards an art critical gap - with 12 international RNOP events alone delivered on this matter since inception in 2017 it seems a matter remaining rather open ended academically speaking.

Significantly RNOP began very modestly as a face book page on an android iPhone located on an isolated farm in the Blue Mountains of Australia, and all the RNOP events since 2017 have subsequently followed a system/model of 'coterie development' just as remotely. As mentioned, the RNOP conception or 'space' utilises a process that independently questions who is involved and, where are other city-based groupings located. Perhaps more importantly the program asks what kind of new or more modern language is appearing within these developmental practices *per se*. In brief, the program asks from one set of art makers to another what's going on in your town involving specifically defined practices associated with neo non-objectivity, as Dr Kyle Jenkins puts it?

For these reasons RNOP prefers the exhibitions and events are independently curated and are co-designed by a different local artist, someone well connected from the city the event is presents within. The exhibition held at The Great Highway, San Francisco was co curated by participating American artist Jessica Snow. Again local coterie were invited to present new work alongside a smaller rotating core of international artists at a beach side shop, not a gallery. In restating the social, collegiate and academic aim of RNOP it is to remain focused on connecting regionally specific 'coterie based' satellite presentations of contemporary reductive and non-objective styles and, to assist in bringing this activity to the attention of the broader community who may also be interested. Where the events take place is secondary altogether.

Like the RNOP-GERMANY studio event co curated by Werner Windisch at A9e, Aaron Martins Five Walls event is also a remarkable participation given the success level of some of the local artists included. But on another level RNOPs central effort is to introduce possibly lesser know artists to the vast European, Australian, British, Asian, and American networks at the same time. The Melbourne exhibition is in that sense symbolic of change, a responsiveness to an emergent otherness, and resistance to norms while gently offering a public questioning of certain overshadowing critical belief systems artists engage. The Melbourne 'Road Paintings' array of small works in this same fashion talks about an arrival, and as discussed elsewhere using earlier terminology from other events such as 'post formalist rising' or 'the generic

aesthetic response', catchphrases are used to underline a radical shift in both intent and meaning argued here to have long been taking place in the reductive arts genre. And stated again, taking place within a vast new arena of developmental practices evidenced in the genre of non-objective practices coming after the 20thc.

This topic has everything to do with the post 20<sup>th</sup> century appearance of egalitarian and accessible systems, positive net-based media outcomes. By describing this as a digitally prone phenomenon and openly independent engagement as a 'flat platform', what is noted is key to matters overall. Reiterating, there has been a surge in participation in radical yet highly qualified forms of art since 2000. In particular the characteristic art-critical form the 'nonobject' is underlined here.<sup>3</sup> Consequently in Melbourne guest local and European artists are quasi-curated with participating international guests from out of prior RNOP events, a curious process that restates a value placed on a rotational system featuring engaged voices. Moreover and directly because of this rotation the Melbourne event like all the others since 2017 has been invited into the buildup program for the next NOA Biennale of Grenoble in Sept 2019; as an official Satellite listing.<sup>4</sup>

The background theme of 'New Modern' discourse outlined earlier in a series of closed-door events held at the Saturation Point in London is by literary conceit to best understood as a related matter in the concept development towards Melbourne. Just as the London events similarly featured artists I would consider foundational to one of the fastest growing genres of modern art after the 20thc century. And given that the central aim for each RNOP presentation is to connect people while highlighting shifting differences and aesthetic concerns between the individual participants, there is in particular a relating to or, feeling for *disparateness* to 'historical precedence', at the same time. From that vantage there is at least some critical way to begin commenting on how and why so many contemporary divergent voices within contemporary art are reading each other's practices so carefully, and in great detail within a single genre. Moreover, it is fundamentally critical to note how these often highly trained artists may be contemporaneously utilising and enacting on individual concerns, while simultaneously developing associated styles or sharing art-critical associations on a flattened out platform simultaneously. That is modern work not seen before. Traction.

In the exhibition there are a number of shared artistic concerns or threads of aesthetic commonality that as discourse elevates works seen into a form of collective, and when read within the architecture of a space, a process appears that ironically heightens individual practices. The overarching thematic staked-out marks the transitions of the many artists' works seen, or so far encountered. Above all else RNOP events are an explorative connection to, and aesthetic investigation with, the architectonic when perceived that way. In many of the works the architecture of

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<sup>3</sup> This matter has been discussed in a previous essay produced in the KNO group in Kiev, 2018. 'Nonobject' by Billy Gruner.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note the Grenoble Biennale of Reductive and Non Objective art - the lead curator Roland Orepek may select artists to present from any of these events, with a publication on the entire program of events published at that time - Dr Kyle Jenkins from USQ acting as a contributing writer amongst others, and editor.

light and the physicality of color is likewise commonly understood as a transformative device in terms of objecthood and intent, mixing pattern and spontaneity. That characteristic of methodological response seemingly creates new directions, and often within each subsequent works found in the evolution of a known practice.

The aesthetically charged reductive works focused upon in Melbourne likewise become a conversation about and between, light (color) and form and how these create an intimate physicality and presence for each maker. For myself the importance of space and its relationship to constructed color through structures and scale variations and the inhabitation of the surface of a work (its folds / assemblage / materiality) and the architecture of the space it is situated within enlivens new works, and the nature of the discursive nonobject forms comes to the forefront. As such the collective of works seen commonly straddle a relationship between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional where slippages of intent allow works to become themselves transformative of 'place' and, of as many other personal and historical aesthetic engagements. For Sarah Keighery for instance the composition of the work creates tension between the surface of the painting, the weight of color (or lack of) and the scale of the support and positioning within the frame of the wall. For Keighery the gallery space becomes a field in which surface permutations can occur where the wall is both an architectural support but also an experimental space of compositional investigation and political meanings, as in the toxic paint codes et al.

Collectively all the presented artists noisily engage in a neo non-objective discourse of some kind where to pare down visual ephemera is not to reduce the complexity of the work, but underscores an aiming at a heightening of the conceptual intensity of what is presented, its post 20thc intent. There are no distractions in the collectively seen 'Road Painting's works *per se*, and in bringing together people from disparate locations a renewing of an aesthetic challenge to what painting/objecthood is, especially when viewed as new language seen through an art historically prone lens visually speaking, new engagements appear regardless.

In some memory of Secessionist fashion the RNOP artist driven events document time, place, and key participants observed in the process of alternative development to contemporary morays. Each event marks shift, regional ideology, critical aesthetic engagements that are nevertheless all-different from each other and mainstream conventionality. It is from a specialised perspective that a post 20<sup>th</sup> century movement is readily observed in my opinion. As such, previous events having taken place in Athens, Kiev, Paris, Cologne, and London have in the same way systemically illustrated that when local language is cast against other international makers styles, histories, aesthetic engagements and influences, a unique 'genre specific construction' of readable contemporaneous discourse is found. It is precisely there, located within each unique presentation and when cast against others that a broader dialogue and sense of cogency appears into view. Importantly, each event quietly builds on further 'network establishment' processes for the participating artists' to personally and professionally utilise. All while collectively facing the

cultural challenge of what it means to be a productive independent voice within an increasingly complex, global institutional arts system wary of unsolicited opinion.