

A NEW MODERN

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 about a new kind of *modernness* found in the post-contemporary¹ genre of reductive art posits an argument, about traction. Or, comments on an unsolicited and culturally organic criticality taking place during the tail end of contemporary arts cogency, more generally speaking. As has been happening since 2000 approximately, and possibly much longer beforehand, prior that *alt* marker. As such, the RNOP or the Reductive Non Objective Project event in Melbourne, as its presented by West Projects in Sydney in association with Five Walls, is significant in all this. In celebrating a set of events done since 2017 held in association with the Biennale of Contemporary NOA in Grenoble, some important ideas are forwarded on into the Australian arts.

The Grenoble Biennale of Contemporary Non Objective Art is no doubt unusual. Yet it has run successfully for a decade now by its founding artist and curator Roland Orepu, with the latest opening September 2019. Arrangements made after the last biennale of 2017 led to an agreement that all of the subsequent RNOP events should be official 'satellites' of the biennale, and independently delivered across multiple cities globally. In supporting the upcoming biennale program in this efficient way a conception of a new and very modern movement would also highlight a legacy that unquestionably emerged out of earlier work done within a far greater circuit of dedicated spaces. These included CCNOA, PS, Minospace, NOSUD, UND, F49 and the original SNO. SNO is still running today is a genre specific program I founded and curated for many years to simply begin commenting on all of the abovementioned.

However since 2000 many important genre specific projects opened such as Tekksas, A9e, ISprojects, Divisible, Saturation Point, ParisConcret, West, and Five Walls had in

¹ Terry Brooks in recent conversation on fb made a suggestion; a certain post contemporary atmosphere surrounding these artist's work and interrelated practices might be addressed that way.

likewise manner been formatting the activities of ever-newer circles. These artists often working as the proxy gallerist/curator by necessity have essentially been developing new and more modern programs within arena of post 20thc arts globally, a space in its own conception that remains full of surprises. These project spaces have single handedly catered for what can only be described as a vast international network of participants in need of recognition. These unsolicited yet often very popular spaces by as many newer and significant kinds of artists' remain characterized by a desire to work within coterie. And as stated are seemingly interested in establishing their own relational project/programs via some independent yet highly discursive-driven design.

It is that phenomenon, when considered in overview or in composite, appears more like regionally specific chapters of an as yet unnamed global movement. Importantly, its significant to note that academia and the greater museo context has only just begun to acknowledge this, if at all. Perhaps this fail is due to overarching and somewhat misleading readings of the genre in the post 20thc environment of absolute desperation, as ill informed modernist practices. It is not that. Its sustained by another form of engagement involves highly trained and articulate makers to redefine those and many other *alt historic* notions within a post 20thc genre. A movement conforming its own right, in the service of its own logics, theories, philosophic ends et al. I have preferred to name that matter in earlier documents as, the 'post-formalist aesthetic rising'.² Or, is it just a global Secession?

RNOP - MELBOURNE like the very recent APELDOORN ACEC near Amsterdam or BLACK SQUARES event 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. That is, via its leading conception that a strictly coterie-based engagement system must be further developed to assist those interested in undoing the isolation of that any form of artistic practice might manifest.

'The Road Paintings' presentation of about 80 local and international small works at Five Walls in Melbourne is in that manner self-evident. Five Walls' founder Aaron Martin in presenting the Melbourne event is then himself looking at a new modernness I know he has long been attending with Australia's many local contemporary reductive art circles. The event like many others he presents marks a growing and similarly perceived inter-discursiveness found in the new interconnected coterie of art makers from as far as San Francisco, Kiev, Krakow, Paris, Amsterdam, Bangkok, Copenhagen to Melbourne, in namely only a few. Pointedly, these unique circles are recovering their own and not so disconnected *alt*-histories simultaneously, and most importantly making showings that deliberately locate who it is that has new words in play, or new systems of understanding to be fathomed within more present day visual languages they may or may not admire. It's not right or wrong in that way, its complex.

² What Is Post Formalism? Published Minuspace NYC, 2006. Portal.

The ongoing international RNOP series, like the Melbourne gathering and other versions held in, as many foreign cities of late are in fact exemplars of the opening statement. Significantly, the *New Modern*³ moniker came from a recent exhibition held at The Saturation Point in London. It was co curated by the renown artist Deb Covell and therein like in London, West Projects in Australia in asking Aaron Martin (co-curator) to bring together the shared interests of a local Australian coteries, a repetitive focus was again put on a familial sensing of art criticality, homage as opposed to appropriation, and other highly socialised processes automatically taking place.

Just as importantly, in these events there are those who had previously participated from various cities – and because of the regular transfer of works cheaply as possible the ‘Road Paintings’ sub title or thematic is used to cover a feeling for things. The title also comments on the fact that the RNOP events are not fussed over, they often are crowded onto the walls, and that demounting of styling speaks of an inter-discursiveness more than any other matter; as the Polish curator Mark Starel recently noted. Another a German curator likewise succinctly described this model of artist driven show as, noisy affairs.⁴ Certainly that’s true and acknowledges just how very far from the sedate minimalism of the late 20thc these art makers are presently located.

As claimed RNOP was itself born out of earlier inter-collaboration programs operative since 2000. These included 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 realisation process that further acknowledges a growing need for participants to meet independently, a matter RNOP sees as an essential function. However 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, relationship to coteries of artists living within different places. This system/portal basically engages contemporary art makers connected in a personalised intra-associated inquiry into post 20thc reductive, post formalist, or neo non-objective practices as others prefer.⁵ It is in that one particular manner, highly specialised.

RNOP events in seeking a co-curator from one of the invited local participating artists circles receives assistance from others working within a broader network. The ‘flat platform’ approach as I say operates within a community driven model and

³ 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.

⁴ Dr Christoph Dalhausen, in private conversation in Bonn, 2010.

⁵ 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

amounts to another, culturally diverse 'space'. It is one way to be linked to other highly pro-active projects networking in foreign or less obvious 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. The outcome is a significant heightening of interactions that produce *alt* contemporary systems. At the same time its reasonable to state a certain philosophic questioning arises concerning the post 20th century appearance of new language forms, especially within an inquiring of such a highly specialised genre, of reductive and non-objective art practices coming after the 20th century.

KNO is another and parallel surveying project to example here, as is the InterDiscursive series in Poland mentioned, or Abstract Projects Paris another. Locally the recent and vastly accommodating Abstraction 2018 in Melbourne was an equally familial and very successful genre specific platform. Commonly the RNOP program like all these independent projects looks rather coolly at known academic surety regarding post 20th reductive arts practices, associated biases, while questioning morays and conventions as a critical frame of its own design and place from which to develop and understand fitting language. What has come from all this global interaction is a clear-cut and very visible response to an absence in critical engagement overall. It's *alt* (or not or lesser known) presence within contemporary art irrespectively points towards a same art critical gap - with 14 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' remotely, as mentioned, Yet the RNOP re-conception or 'real space' actions utilises a process that independently questions who is involved and, where are other city-based groupings are 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? Especially those places with organised sets of practitioners 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 to more significant matters and in that fashion restates a primary aim of many post contemporary makers is not to appease dealer's academics or the public for that matter, it's mostly about what other artists think that matters.

A case in point was the RNOP-GERMANY studio event and co curated by Werner Windisch at A9e, his own studio made over. It was packed and a huge local success. Aaron Martins Five Walls gallery event is however no less 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 in Australian art, responsiveness to an emergent otherness, and sites a resistance to norms while gently offering a public questioning of certain overshadowing critical belief systems local artists equally 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', these catchphrases are used only to underline a radical shift in both intent and meaning that is argued here to have long been taking place in the reductive arts genre globally. And restating again, all 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 20th 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.⁶ 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, is been participant in the buildup program for the next NOA Biennale of Grenoble in Sept 2019; as an official Satellite listing.⁷

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

⁶ This matter has been discussed in a previous essay produced in the KNO group in Kiev, 2018. 'Nonobject' by Billy Gruner.

⁷ It is important to note the Grenoble Biennale of Reductive and Non Objective art - the lead curator Roland Orepuik 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.

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 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 different from each other and, mainstream conventionality.

It is from a specialised perspective that a post 20th century movement is readily observed in my opinion. As such, previous events having taken place in Athens, Kiev, Paris, Cologne, San Francisco, 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 any and all unsolicited opinion.