

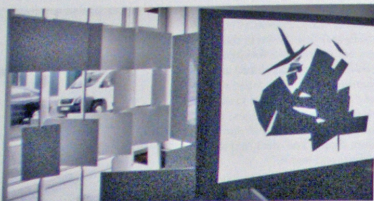
Walter Swennen at Aliceday Gallery (Walter Swennen)

Published in *Artforum*, April 2008,

XLVI, n° 8, p. 383

(translated from French by Jeanine Herman)

View of "Tolke Pisano," 2008. Foreground: Object and Disintegration (the object of three), 2008. Background: Screen (Parabolic Reflector), 2008.



accommodated by the dimensions of the gallery, while gently directing viewers' movements. Three videos were projected onto a delicately balanced composition of white rectangular panels. In each of them, the artist uses texts—almost like an elegant form of graffiti—to identify and deconstruct one of three positions in relation to the sculpture: the engaging spectator, the constructing artist, and the activated site. Upon entering the gallery, the first visible projection outlines the position of the spectator in a series of white-lettered statements on a black background: NOW: A FIRST VIEW ON THE OBJECT. I CAN SEE FORM BUT MANY THINGS ARE AMBIGUOUS. Pisano herself appears in the second video, practicing a lecture presentation in front of a mirror; her hypnotic voice, heard over headphones, accompanies the slow tap of her hands as she marks the rhythm of the text, a gesture, combined with her gentle pace of speech, serving to weaken the severity of the sculptural form she describes. An abstract black-and-white animation visualizes the activation of the sculptural site that is constantly evolving through its relationship with the artist, the spectator, and its surroundings.

To echo the geometric forms of the graphic animation, Pisano playfully tucked a black-paper hanging sculpture, *L'objet complet* (the undeniable success of operations), just next to a mirrored panel in the otherwise static white *Screen (Parabolic Reflector)*. In fact, Pisano took the shapes in *L'objet complet* from a number of maquettes for unrealized projects kept in her studio. Emphasizing process over product, Pisano has also formally framed images of her work space, filled with unfinished models and reference materials, in three photographs, each titled *Conceptual Reconstruction Concerning Form: The Object*, followed by different parentheticals concerning experience and comprehension.

Grappling with the legacy of modernism, Pisano's approach to *E-1027* (not to mention her own studio) is much like Robert Smithson's relationship with Hotel Palenque. Dwelling on the structure's concrete aesthetic as a means of its erosion, Pisano, like Smithson, is preoccupied with the site as an intermediary zone of construction and decay.

—Lillian Davies

Pascal Broccoli

GALERIE FRÉDÉRIC GIROUX

Pascal Broccoli's works have long explored the boundaries between sound and vision. In this recent exhibition, he presented an installation that highlights sound along with four photographs (three in the exhibition space and one in the gallery office). It was at first difficult to connect these two sets of work, and the title of the exhibition, "Dispersion," seemed to be justified by the apparent heterogeneity of its means and motifs. *Sonotubes II*, 2008, is an intriguing installation whose formal purity evokes minimalist sculpture as much as hi-fi equipment,

industrial machinery, or spacecraft; the photographs (all *Untitled*, 2007) are of landscapes: deserts of stone or ice, empty expanses punctuated by the asperities of the soil, images structured only by the horizon line subtly separating the sky and earth.

But soon a resonance is established between them. Counterpoints—the dazzling whiteness of the machines in the sound installation and the gray or black masses of the photographs; the sounds (vibrations, buzzing) emitted by the tubes and the silence that seems to reign in these uninhabited regions of the globe—are transformed into echoes: The photographs were taken over the course of the artist's wanderings, and he recorded the sounds by means of various instruments (microphone, seismograph, radio telescope, radio receiver) in the course of the same travels; just as there is nothing to see in the photographs, the sound environment is made up of imperceptible waves without instrumentation.

Although not abstract, the sounds and images refuse any reassuring narrative. While playing on absence and emptiness, and while seeming discreet, these arrangements, in fact, saturate the space. For instance, the light in the space is deliberately intense, transcending the material presence of *Sonotubes II* and spreading much as the sound does—an unexpected equivalence between the two. Similarly, the viewer becomes immersed in the photographs, quivering to see their infinite nuances of color, clinging to the smallest detail—pebbles or ice crystals—concentrated on her own perceptual effort as on the image, as if listening for the sonic traces of the photographed places. Through this combination of sound and image, the visitor paradoxically experiences her own presence in time and space—paradoxically because time here is at once vaguely stretched out and suspended and because the space we are invited to travel through is almost like non-space, indeterminate and confusing, in which the individual takes leave of the world and herself. Counterpointing this displacement, however, Broccoli inserts into his photographs the GPS coordinates of the sites, but in the form of cryptograms that, in these lunar landscapes, evoke futuristic architectures, combining sensory experience and the systems of abstract representation that make up the eminently complex definition of a place.

—Guillermo Maldonado

Translated from French by Jeanne Herman.

BRUSSELS

Maryam Najd

CROWN GALLERY

Maryam Najd was born in Tehran in 1965 and left Iran at the age of twenty-six to study and live in Antwerp. Just old enough to remember the Islamic Revolution, she grew up in a country beset by tumultuous events, where artistic expression was severely limited. The isolation in which Najd was forced to work had at least one advantage: She could work on her style undisturbed. Her recent show was called "GET GIRL, KILL BADDIES, SAVE PLANET," and those words appeared in the first painting viewers encountered upon entering the gallery. Superimposed on a portrait of a naive- but harmless-looking young

Pascal Broccoli, *Sonotubes II*, 2008, mixed-media installation.



man, the text in *Self-portrait*, 2006–2007, might be quoting or paraphrasing one of the subject's comic-book superheroes, but there is also a disturbing association with the fantasies of suicide bombers. Then again, one person's hero is another's terrorist, just as a military engagement can be called "liberation" or "occupation," depending on your point of view.

Like all the paintings in the show, this one is based on an existing image, in this case one taken from the Internet; but rather than simply appropriating photos and transcribing them on canvas, Najd destroys these figurative, narrative images in the act of painting them—or, to describe it more accurately, she veils them with layers of paint. What you think you see is an illusion, a lie: The power of the paintings is generated by the paint itself. In this respect, Najd always conceals what she wants to say, often to the point that you don't know what you are seeing. It's not surprising, then, that Najd, in addition to her figurative work, makes abstract paintings that contain, she says, her most personal expressions and reflections on the world. This is of course not a unique approach, but in Najd's case there is no clear boundary between the abstract and the figurative: What seems to be a figurative image is nothing but a reflection of the viewer, and a painting like *Enola Gay*, 2007, only becomes figurative when one reads the title.

Other works in the show were also called *Self-portrait*: a glamorous image of Farah Pahlavi (Farah Diba), widow of Iran's last Shah; a portrait of Osama bin Laden. They were hung side by side, and the exhibition imposed no hierarchy between them. The world's most wanted terrorist, whom we usually see in badly lit images from amateurish video messages, is depicted as in a ceremonial portrait. So, what is Najd trying to say? By naming two extremely different icons from our recent history *Self-portrait*, the artist plays with how we interpret images when we are instructed to look at them in a certain way. At the same time, the paintings comment on how Middle Eastern stereotypes are based on a few notorious icons. The subtitle of both works could obviously be "Ceci n'est pas un autoportrait." The artist is not projecting herself onto these two characters but rather playing with definitions and meanings from history, including art history.

—Jos Van den Bergh

Walter Swennen

ALICEDAY GALLERY

Walter Swennen, born in 1946, has been a presence in the Belgian art world for many years, and his work is admired by many in his native country. His renown, however, does not extend much beyond the borders of Belgium. The reasons for this have to do with the work itself, whose variety may seem puzzling to those who expect an artist to develop a singular style: Swennen's art is always unpredictable, always in progress. Then there's the way the artist has managed his career: He has resisted giving any one gallerist exclusive representation of his work, a stance that has always had a political dimension. He has made an effort to remain open and free, a philosophy that is deeply ingrained in his practice.

But what does it look like? This exhibition gave an excellent overview of Swennen's painting—his abundant and interesting work on

paper was not included. The show comprised eight oil paintings, two of which are diptychs. Some are painted on canvas, others on wood panels or improbable supports that appear to have been found by chance; this humility in the choice of supports is telling. One canvas, *Untitled*, 2007, depicts an airplane, brushed over a white background, placed on a layer of red. At the bottom of the image is a partially legible inscription: HAPPY BIRTHDAY. Then there is what appears to be a landscape placed summarily on the back of a workman's hat, dominated by a blue moon, also *Untitled*, 2007. All the images, despite their apparent simplicity, teem with details and nuances of execution and possess a strange glow; what they represent is, finally, mysterious. To describe them exhaustively or perhaps even accurately is a challenge.

Yet these paintings are not hermetic in the least, and the viewer invariably finds elements that have personal meaning. A whole visual vocabulary exists in these works, an ensemble of forms and objects that one's eye and memory can instinctively recognize. Hidden resonances rise to the surface, from the most anodyne to the most symbolic. What is manifest is the desire not to make exclusively melancholic or amateurish or lighthearted work but rather work that has all these qualities at once and more—which is to say, all the nuances of existence. Certainly, Swennen's work is as rich as that of other Belgian painters who enjoy a greater celebrity abroad, such as Luc Tuymans or Raoul De Keyser. Let's hope he achieves equal recognition someday soon.

—Yvoan Van Parys

Translated from French by Jeanne Herman.



Walter Swennen, *Untitled*, 2007, oil on wood, 32 1/4 x 28".

BERLIN

Kirsten Pieroth

GALERIE KLOSTERFELDE

Untitled (Loan) (all works 2007), the first work viewers encountered in Kirsten Pieroth's third solo show at Klosterfelde, comprised a vitrine and seven unframed photographs. An ironic examination of the international exhibition industry and its protocols, the images documented the Berlin-based artist's contribution to "Learn to Read," a group show at Tate Modern last fall. Pieroth had borrowed the label for the Mona Lisa from the Louvre in order to show it in London as an unassisted ready-made, using this self-reflexive gesture to reenact the paradigmatic shift from work to frame (to borrow Craig Owens's phrase) established in Conceptual art in the late '60s. Pieroth's photographs, hung as two separate series, showed museum workers in Paris and London removing and installing the plaque as well as a shot of the canonical painting without its label, protected by bulletproof glass and a semicircular wooden railing. Another photograph in the vitrine showed the masses of tourists that make the pilgrimage to admire the Mona Lisa every day; beside it, Pieroth had arranged a photograph of the label itself, along with the loan contract she had signed with the Louvre. On the form, the label's insurance value is specified as twenty-five euros.

The work centers on an administrative process disproportionate to the economic or artistic value assigned to the object in question,

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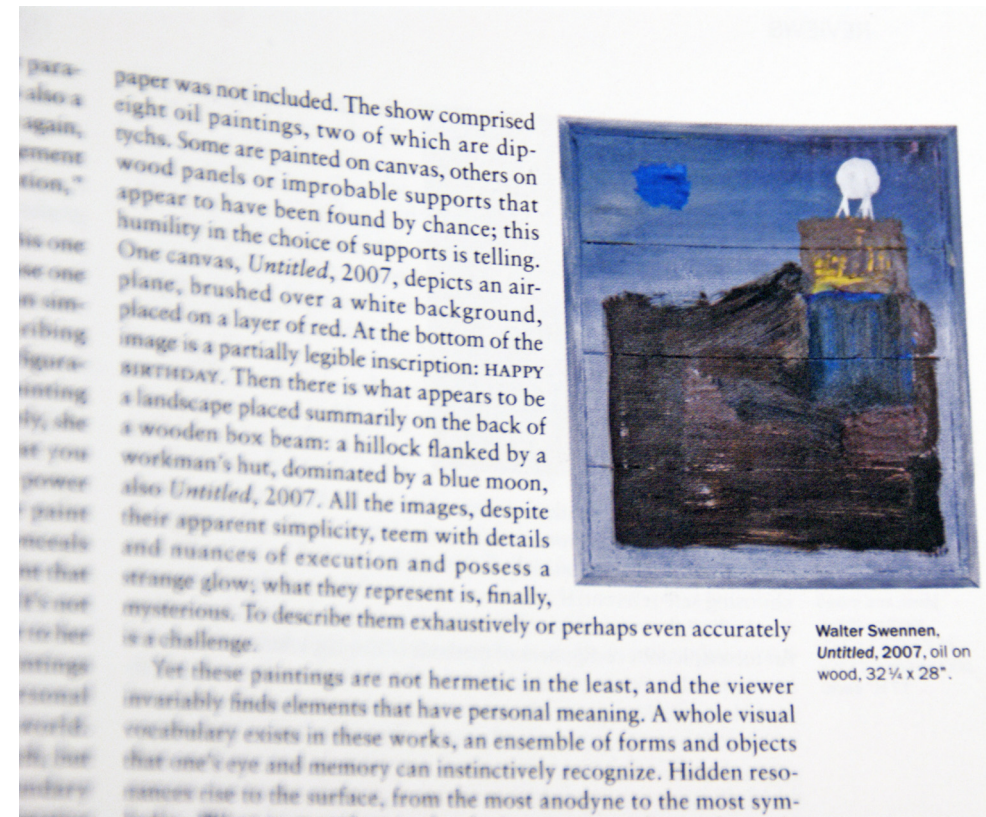
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