

Zander Blom

Zander Blom's art production to date is mildly paradoxical. Both via his individual practice, and as part of the former collective Avant Car Guard (with Michael MacGarry and Jan-Henri Booyens), his choices and negotiation of subject matter have been ironic and, in some cases, impertinent in their experimentation with art history (especially modernism and modernist abstraction) as well as the perceived hierarchies within the South African art world. Yet his references to and explorations of these different legacies also pay them sincere homage.

Drain of Progress (2004–07), *The Travels of Bad* (2007–09) and *The Black Hole Universe* (2009–present) are investigations Blom subsequently refers to as 'a kind of science of the picture plane', which he pursues by consistently altering perspective and technical means. These varied productions have found their key expression in extraordinarily restrained yet luscious explorations in oil paint, which reflect on Blom's early encounters with (Western) art history. In South Africa this education was mediated through textbook reproductions – photographs of original artworks – distinctively experienced through variations in quality of light, colour and size. This feature of the reproduction as the only point of access is crucial to understanding Blom's conceptual project, in which he endlessly creates contextual and aesthetic problems to solve.

In *The Black Hole Universe*, the difference between a photograph of a work and the work itself is a proposition for both the artist and his audience. The 'original' becomes a secondary notion, and, in Blom's hands, something malleable to interpretation. He playfully mimics abstract-modernist styles and motifs with makeshift materials (cardboard, tape and paint),

to build striking interventions into the corners of his home studio and occasional exhibition spaces. These temporary constructions, which echo Tatlin's *Corner Reliefs* (1914–15), he then photographs; afterwards altering or destroying them and circulating the photograph as the work. Blom's process is unsentimental; but his carefully staged interventions retain a certain immediacy and palpable edge, marked by a 'perverse seriousness juxtaposed with a charged sense of irony'.¹⁴

His paintings echo this approach. Many, such as *1.2 Untitled* (2010) and *1.38 Untitled* (2011) tease the depth of canvas or raw linen: oil, graphite dabs, lines and markings sculpt layers that emphasize surface while alluding to other perceptual planes. In *1.00 Untitled* (2012), the stain of separated oil bleeds onto an otherwise clean ground. The name of this series is at once specific and arbitrary; historically, the painting denotes an original, but for Blom it is clustered into a series of 'untitled' creative moments, definitive only in variation from other studies, and by means of a unique cataloguing number.

Blom's relationship to modernism is equally contradictory; he claims few things to be 'less relevant to his life than a Mondrian or Jackson Pollock'.¹⁵ Yet these remain strong points of connection, which he works through self-reflexively. Recalling how the 'exotic' cultures and artefacts of Africa influenced the European avant-garde from the end of the nineteenth century, Blom astutely inverts the trend, claiming Western art as his 'exotic'. The artist's Brixton studio is littered with visual references from which he randomly selects, discards or draws influence, for both personal amusement and to push the possibilities of his own production.

← *1.2 Untitled*, 2010, oil and graphite on linen, 198 × 164 cm

← *2.40 Untitled*, 2011, ink and graphite on paper, 75 × 52 cm

→ *Scene 16: Death by Syphilis × Mosquito Bytes × Tuberculosis × Broken, Mutilated Infected Leg × Savage Booze × Stupidity*, 2009, C-print on Kodak Endura metallic gloss paper, 60 × 87 cm

↓ *1.38 Untitled*, 2011, oil and graphite on linen, 163 × 108 cm

↘ *1.100 Untitled*, 2012, oil on linen, 198 × 140 cm

