

The Single Art Work project exhibition of a painting by Franz Immoos, 10-5-92, Amsterdam. Participants: Maria Chailloux, Elsa Stansfield, Franz Immoos, Frank-Alexander Hettig, J.C.J. van der Heyden, Jonathan Bragdon.

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Dear Participants,

The fact that a couple of you had not seen Franz's work before, made me uneasy in the weeks leading up to the exhibition. How could I expect you to spend four hours with one painting, when you are accustomed to ducking in and out of museums, etc., all over the world, searching only for exactly what interests you? And if this painting wasn't quite that?

Franz could relax, because he claims simply to be a navigator, making maps of his journeys, and in a style that could hardly be less innovative. What needed to be taken seriously, I believed, was the use to which he put that style. The maps were made to become vehicles for the journeys they mapped. Maps with sails, so to speak. It could be a problem that the journeys are outside the boundaries conventionally drawn for art. Franz had often said something like this: "I'm not sure why this work should be seen as art. Certainly, if it is seen as abstract art, it won't be interesting."

So I felt misgivings that kept me awake Saturday night, thoughts of you arriving and turning away from the squares of yellow, blue-green, purple, orange, and ultra marine, and the rectangles of black, green, red, and white, all neatly combined into one large square. Not even one of those virtuoso balancing acts. A plain surface of sand, mixing fine shadow into the colors. Something Jacques had told me, when I met him, was an encouragement. A student had said to him, "We have to work in a way that is integrated again with the rest of life." I guess that

is a desire to give up art's autonomous status, its equivalent of the Immaculate Conception. It struck me that for all of us, the Sunday event would express the motive of Jacque's student.

On Saturday, Franz and I had been hanging the painting, and putting the table in place. I put chairs for us along three sides of the table, leaving the fourth side empty, facing the painting. I thought of this as turning towards another person at an encounter, face to face and with arms open. Also, as letting the painting occupy the fourth side, a relationship of equality. Looking at an art work is working with it, it seems to me, implying a need for awareness of how I am presenting myself to it. If I go to chop wood with a two-handed ax, I've got to consider my stance. I <sup>was</sup> being pleased by the table's setup, when Franz startled me by pushing it into a lengthwise bias with the painting. "The table's axis should be in line with the north and south poles," Franz explained, getting out his compass for me to see for myself. I wondered if whoever sat at the south end would now have to turn to keep the painting in their field of vision, and whoever sat along the east side would feel uncomfortably out of parallel. The change was a bit difficult to accept, but it was clearly Franz's responsibility in action on both sides of his art work, its being made and its being seen.

Franz wanted us not to take for granted the painting's position. The vertical presentation was a transformation from the concrete to the abstract, which needed to be seen as continuing in a circular motion, returning. I suggested laying the painting on the ground for awhile, then hanging it up again, in reenactment of its origin. Franz believed that turning the table gave a sufficient cue. When did you notice it? Perhaps at first it seemed to be a gesture to assymetry. Impatient, I spoke of the table's orientation soon after we were sitting around it. Later in the afternoon, Franz was delighted to find that the eastsiders had edged

their chairs around to be sitting parallel with the painting again.

Waiting for arrivals, we were standing in the northeast corner of the studio, about as far away as possible from the painting. It seemed to be being purposefully neglected. A stranger looking in might have thought he saw an event coming to a close. But from the start, the talk was about Chinese things, the Mandarins' fingernails, the women's broken feet, an emperor's observation of sunspots. We all knew of the background of Franz's work, so the antennas were out. The subject of geographical directions had come up before we moved to the table, the relativity of east and west, as experienced when someone stands in front of you, and their left is your right, etc. Yet each use of direction has its concrete origin. My left hand is not my right, and the sun rises and sets for the Chinese as well. Here I felt confused, trying to see how congruent my sense and feel of direction were with the symbolic scheme of the painting, and I believe some of you were as well. It was surely the direct influence of the painting, that all afternoon the theme of our conversation was the genesis of relationships and transformations. How does an instant become an ongoing experience, or a point become the space of an event? What is involved in getting from here to there, and what was the little boy doing while waiting for the crocodile to move? What is the effect of our degree of consciousness, our consciousness of where we are going, on the nature of the influence at work? Elsa in the past has reminded me of the virtue of the indirect, the art of courting answers by forgetting the question.

We spoke of the floor plan of the Emperor's palace as being a mandala, and that his throne was placed in its center, the simultaneously symbolic and real center of the empire and of the world. Sitting on that throne, he was also everywhere else, and the influence of everything he decided and said on that throne radiated throughout the world.

Not only his decrees, through their administrative implementation, but his state of mind, immediately. I pointed to the yellow square central to the painting, saying that there was the place of the throne, what Franz called the world's axis, down to the depths of the earth and up into heaven, the basic relation he was concerned that we understand in the composition's vertical presentation. A variety of axes came to my mind during the afternoon, including the rotational and magnetic axes of the earth, not quite the same, the axis on which the microscopic paramecium curls through the water, or the axis around which I spin on my toe, and can trace with a thumb along my backbone. In pointing to the yellow square, I intended a contact with the painting as direct as a thumb along a backbone. Do you remember my gesture, what you felt, and why you gave no direct response?

My memory is within my personal sphere of influence, which is why I need the memories of others, or objects carrying passive memories. You can't stretch a tennis net between one post, and you can't pull a bow without a string. Not really. At a couple of different times, those of us who had seen it, described to those who hadn't, Franz's sand painting on the floor of Maria's gallery, its strange massive momentariness. If a window were to be opened, or a child ran across it, it would be destroyed. I had had a desire to snap the black elastic strings running through it. As it was spread on the earth's surface, simply standing to look across it, or walking around it, meant acting out the art work's references. There was also doubt. Why not just pick up a compass? Realities may be always at hand, our experience is created by how we use them, I mean, for example, the difference between chewing or just swallowing food. I believe that the variations matter as much as the central concept. Taken seriously, they can cause us to question, what is the central concept, and that is life-giving. Do you agree?

The painting hanging before us presented another step of transformation, literal geography sublimated into an order of colors, overlaid by an analogical scheme of natural elements and personal energies. I caught signs of us feeling for the links in ourselves between the colors we saw and their locations in our sensual worlds. The green forest, the red desert, the blue ocean on our maps at school? The colors seemed to be leading me to substances, yet direction was a principle of movement, returning to its origin as the shaping of space. Direction is what gets me back home after I've stepped out for a liter of milk, it is a feeling in the body. A line drawn on a map is the abstraction of an experience of walking. What is the equivalent of walking in the seeing of color? We sat there, I believe kind of wistfully wondering about speaking aloud our "associations". Or did such an interaction with those colors not get underway for you? Direction, movement, time, connection, these we could speak of much more easily. Was it mainly via these that we were seeing the painting?

For the whole afternoon, the table's orientation was as impossible for me to forget, as a prevailing wind on my face. That may partly explain the fixation of my attention on one color, the black rectangle at the base of the painting, north. Drawing a map, I would always put north at the top, so looking at the black made me feel upside down, although I knew the sexual meaning also given to black, and that turned me upright again. Jacques told of hanging his earth globe with the north pole underneath. When I had succeeded in floating off into space, lying on my back in a field on a moonless and cloudless night, I remember thinking that the soles of my feet and the crown of my head would have to substitute for the south and north poles. However, in that scheme my sex lay down south. Writing this evokes what I most missed in our conversation, our experience of the colors. I'd like to have heard more of what we knew they meant, felt they meant, and the odd associations which might

seem to mean nothing at all. Franz works with colors as universals, but multivalent, responding always in surprising ways to individual intuition. From the mixture of chance associations and the deepest traditional knowledge, I would expect interesting, and sometimes wonderful, fermentations. Consider also Franz's own belief, as I understand it, that the meaning of colors begins with the impact on us of their physical energies, which are finely modulated and specific in the aspects of a person's presence which they effect. Usually, at the moment I am getting sunburned, I'm not aware of the fact. Perhaps it is partly a question of a process ripening to the point of being speakable. Partly, because there was a possibility left more or less unused, at least that is what I feel.

Our event's duration of four hours, is an example of unity and diversity<sup>s</sup>. A slow seeing can be as intricately worked through by speech and thought, as light can be by a complex lens, and still we are only aware of the result, not of the refractions and reflections themselves. Elsa spoke of the, was it twenty-two, frames per second necessary for the illusion of motion in film. Now I see those four hours in a second, and all our movements, words, glances, and thoughts are condensed into the essence of our relationship to the painting. We are still, and it is the painting now which is moving, not flat rotation like a windmill, but rushing around us like a landscape through which we are walking. At each step we transform it into the still mandala hanging before us.

The one light, which fell through the windows of Franz's studio, broke into nine colors, like Jacque's present moment, which before we knew it had turned into the hours of an afternoon. Both hours and colors were made manifest through activity and concrete situations. Franz sawed, hammered, stretched, sieved, and painted, and we see nine colors. Looking, eating, and talking, we spread the present moment into four hours. Looking and talking

aren't only skin deep. Franz was already working on the nine panels when he set off to Sri Lanka to study accupuncture, although he wasn't aware of it. Peeling an orange in 1962, and dividing it into four sections, morning, afternoon, evening, and night, was preparation for the Single Art Work project, I guess.

Of the images which came up that afternoon, the "hinge" expressed my main question about how we were seeing the painting, and how we were linking it into our conversation. We started at the point of an instant, of being transfixed in a glance by an art work, and agreed on the contrasting reality of being surprised later by what we thought we had known totally in the first instant. The difference between a sight, and an ongoing experience. I spoke of the analogy of meeting a person, in a moment's intuition knowing who they are, and that only being the beginning of a story it might take years to tell. The moment's intuition and the lived story are complementary dimensions of knowledge, not alternatives. They naturally come hinged together. It can take hours, or years, of living, to know what we have seen in an instant. Light is colorless until we touch it, and the more we touch the colors, the richer in meaning they become. For example, the green of pastures, of jealousy, and of the direction west in Franz's painting. How do these connect, the instant and the hour, the vibration of light and the symbol?

I wonder if language, speaking and listening, is the archetypal hinge, able to rotate  $360^\circ$ , and  $360 \times 360^\circ$ ; the way the dawn constantly swings open from the night around the earth. It seems to me that speaking and listening are at the intersection of all our senses. As an intersection it contains at its heart a point, and therefore silence, listening. As an intersection, it makes possible exchange and transformation, therefore a line of development, speaking. I believe language can participate in sight, without force or distortion, and in the making of things to be seen.

What we say, and what we speak about, are related like the two parts of a hinge. Problems arise when those parts become detached, or are welded together. Every hinge has its third part, the pin, which belongs to neither the one or the other.

Maria described a walk in the countryside of the Provence with a friend, who persisted in pointing out the botanical names of every plant, tree, and flower they passed. The naming made impossible what she really wanted, which was to give herself over to the whole scene. Couldn't talking directed in detail to the painting be similarly distracting? We agreed with her, but distinguished the distraction of a particular act of speaking, from the knowing of the names. The words are not the cause of the distraction, nor is the knowing. Still, that leaves the problem of distraction. An answer, I think, lies in the hinging of listening to speaking, or, as Elsa reminded me on the telephone just now, breathing in to breathing out.

It was good to hear Franz speak about how he'd folded a piece of paper to derive the inner proportions of the painting, reenacting a moment in the making of the painting. The generative order reappeared in our listening. The act of folding the piece of paper had articulated both the painting before our eyes and, eventually, the speech in our ears. The folded paper, the divisions of color, and the words of Franz's speaking were all categories in use, transforming reality from level to level, connecting moment to moment. I'll go this far, that it is only because of the hinge between what we say and we see, that we are able to see anything at all. Franz's story had a paradoxical effect on me, bringing the painting back into a process of unfolding, and making me more sharply aware of its becoming the boundaries of an object before my eyes. By the means of speech, we are able to cross and recross the boundary of an art work, from the activity of the artist's bringing it into existence, to our activity now, seeing it.



Franz would like the action of a color on a viewer to be as specific and real as that of an accurately placed acupuncture needle in their body. The evening after our exhibition, Franz said to me, "I wonder if my belief is a delusion. When I place a needle into someone, I directly sense the result, even if the person is not yet conscious of it, I have no doubt about that. But when a person is looking at my painting, it is difficult to know what is happening, how they are responding. Sometimes I sense a reaction, sometimes I hear it in what they say." During the afternoon, I had felt like speaking my reaction to certain combinations of colors, and had hesitated. By hesitating, I was presuming to decide for the painting, rather than let it decide for me. What were the green rectangle and the yellow square doing next to each other, the grass and the noonday sun, and then when I got up to pass the salad, I saw again the thousands of lit and shadowed facettes of sand particles, <sup>and</sup> I had to think of the shadows in grass and the spots on the sun. How does this relate to the correspondence chosen by the emperor Fu-Hsi, of yellow to the earth? A correspondence as deep in the painting as the folded sheet of paper. The yellow square above the black rectangle, and the ultramarine rectangle above the yellow square, move me as I write into a sequence of time. Yellow is where I am, black is where I won't be, and ultramarine is where I want to be. To the right of the yellow is a rectangle of white, standing as a door open, an exit from the painting. I remember Franz speaking of persons seeing ultramarine during orgasm, and suddenly wonder about the spatial order in my memory. Looking at the photograph I see that the red rectangle is above the yellow square, and that the ultramarine is a small square in the lower lefthand corner, one of the intermediaries between the four major directions. An example of memory taking advantage for its own preoccupations. However, I have noticed before a quality of cooperating with change in these paintings. Even when

being directly looked at, the elements seem to be about to move, rather than having settled down. We spoke of another work by Franz, a series of nine pigment rubbings based on the Chinese calendar and its cycle of nine years. In each succeeding composition, another color takes its turn in the center, and yet no one composition seems stable, even when white is central.

The environment in which the object finds the space to move as a process again, is the time of our viewing. Memory is a permanent question for me, its relationship to sight. Anyway, this painting tends to revolve in the environment of my seeing it and my remembering it. Movement results from interaction. The revolution of the windmill results from the combination of the shape of its arms and the flow of the wind. The wind doesn't alone create the windmill, and neither does my seeing create the painting.

What did we see? I'm tempted to treat the image in my memory as if it were the painting's ethereal body, come to me while its physical body lies somewhere else. The image seduces me with the idea that it is more than enough, better than what it has left behind, but in fact that image is only what I have seen so far. As we were leaving, and stood near the door of the studio, turning to take a last look, Jacques exclaimed, "Ha. From here the colors are different." I think he said, " they have greater clarity." He'd been looking already for four hours, and now, a moment before leaving, the image he took with him was changed.

Well, I've enjoyed very much our working together, and want to thank you very much. I look forward to seeing you again.

Jonathan Bragdon

27-5-92

Beste Jonathan,

Amsterdam, 24.04.1992

Tijd in de zin van beweging, verandering en wijziging - zou je kunnen denken, dat dit in abstracte schilderijen geen rol speelt, daar de monochromie een statisch effect heeft en het kleurlichaam met een oogopslag te overzien valt.

Aan het begin van onze zondagmiddagbijeenkomst, geconfronteerd met een werk van de door mij onbekende kunstenaar Franz Immoos, dacht ik hetzelfde: 'god, weer iemand die zo graag met kleuren experimenteert, die misschien weer een 'diepzinnige' theoretisch basis heeft, die opnieuw iets uitdoktert en zo maar doorgaat en zeker van de beschouwer verwacht, dat deze uren de tijd en zin heeft om lekker ervoor te mediteren: het effect en resultaat echter oersaai blijft, daar kleuren al in het dagelijks leven toch voortdurend op onze retina inwerken en een echte beleving - wees het nu van schokkend effect tot intrigerende analyse - uitblijft. New age op de plank en weer de meditatieve huis en keukenpsychologie van het ontdek je plekje.

Gedurende het eten, waarbij aan het begin het schilderij een ondergeschikte rol speelde betrapte ik mij erop, dat ik - misschien ook bevordert dat ik schuin ten opzichte van het schilderij zat en niet frontaal ermee werd geconfronteerd, mijn hoofd draaide en keek of het door te kantelen een ander effect zou hebben (opeens zie ik, dat ik het woord effect wel heel erg veel gebruik). Het maakte niets uit, daar het geel het middelpunt was en men de omringende kleurvlakken in gedachten kon verschuiven. Als in een legpuzzel heb ik dan de vlakken opnieuw samengesteld: maar het bleef voor mij een spelletje, dat al naar korte tijd verveelde, daar bij al de mogelijke resultaten geen dynamiek te signaleren viel. Daarom heb ik dan geprobeerd het analytisch te benaderen (kleurenleer van Goethe, Albers, Itten...), daar ik ook niet zo recht wist, wat ik erover zeggen moest, zonder de kunstenaar mogelijk te kwetsen en ik ook niet van plan was en geen zin had een soort kunstkritiek te spuien. Daar ik zijn installatie bij Maria nog niet had gezien, en de verdere aanwezigen deze kort beschreven, vroeg ik mij ook af of het schilderij een andere uitstraling en/of effect zou hebben, als het op de grond zou liggen en je dan denkbeeldig binnen de kleurvlakken zou staan - een ander effect zeker, echter of boeiend blijft de vraag. Nu achteraf gezien ben ik toch verbaasd over mezelf, dat ik mij niet naar de invloed van het licht op de

kleuren afvroeg: misschien omdat het werk mij niet intrigeerde, had ik ook geen behoefte om het werk onder andere (behalve de invloed van een liggende of hangende opstelling) omstandigheden mij voor te stellen en de wisselwerking en het mogelijke resultaat te onderzoeken.

Een grondige behandeling van het werk en zijn esthetiek en een dispuut met het werk kwam bij mij niet op, omdat ik denk, dat het mij te statisch, te overzichtelijk en daarmee te weinig verrassend overkwam. Pas door mijn gesprek met jou, Jonathan, werd mij de boven beschreven proces duidelijk. In feite pas na de zitting toen ik je de hierboven geschreven proces probeerde te beschrijven werd mij het procesmatige van het kijken duidelijk, hoewel ik ook gedurende het naar huis gaande het werk als vaststaande feit zag en dacht het met een oogopslag te hebben gezien (de boeiende verklaringen en theoretische uiteenzetting van Franz had daarmee niets te doen: het werk bleef voor mij zonder effect) - werd ik later verbaasd, dat de kleurconstellatie die ik na twee weken in gedachten had niet met het echte werk, dat jij mij op een foto liet zien, overeenkwam. Ik dacht, dat ik het in mijn geheugen zou hebben opgeslagen - deze diskette was blijkbaar vol of door het heen en weer schuiven en draaien bleef een 'ideaalbeeld' in mijn herinnering. Kort samengevat ging het werk via zijn kleuren en vlakken naar mijn ogen, het werd als bekend bestempeld en afgedaan, omdat het geen reactie in mijn 'onderbuik' teweeg bracht. Via de tijd, waarin ik met het werk werd geconfronteerd probeerde ik het te analyseren en speelde ermee (de factor tijd was voor mij niet in het werk aanwezig, daar het procesmatige van het schilderen en het ontwikkelen van de kleurvlakken niet zichtbaar was en zo een ondergeschikte positie in het werk innam en de energie alleen in de kleuren lag en niet in het proces van het schilderen). Door het imaginaire verplaatsen van de kleurvlakken in mijn verbeelding werd de tijd door de kleuren sedimenteert en ingedeeld. In die zin kun je wel van een wisselwerking van beeld en beschouwer spreken - als ik echter door jou niet bewust met het werk voor ongeveer 4 uren zou zijn geconfronteerd, had ik gedacht, het in een 'oogopslag' te hebben gezien en als saai zou hebben ondergebracht - boeiend vind ik het echter ook nu nog niet - alleen de bewuste registratie wat toen onbewust gebeurde. De wisselwerking tussen het beeld en mij (ik noem speciaal het beeld eerst) was er dus

geen directe, maar kwam door een analyse achteraf tot stand. In het Duits bestaat er een onderscheid tussen "Erscheinungsbild"; "Seinsbild" en "Erlebnisbild". Het eerste, het "Erscheinungsbild" is alleen het beeld, dat zich op onze netvlies 'aftekend'. Het tweede "Seinsbild", is wat existeert, en dat wij door optische (of tactiele) informatie krijgen en waarin de informatie door onze zintuigen en ervaring en waarneming, door ons verstand geïntegreerd tot een idee van het ding worden verwerkt (de optische informatie waren voor mij blijkbaar niet boeiend genoeg om tot een direct wisselwerking tussen het beeld en mij te komen) (het woord wisselwerking vind ik toch boeiend, daar erin 'ruilen', 'overgang' en 'verandering' verbonden is. Het "Erlebnisbild" beïnvloedt natuurlijk ook het "Seinsbild", daar dit met de betekenis van het object voor mij te maken heeft; welke plaats het op mijn scala van beoordeling, stemming of betekenis inneemt. daaruit resulteert dan ook het contact ermee zoals emoties, associaties (en wat men misschien nog onder woorden kan brengen).

Ik weet nog niet, of deze indeling klopt, en hoe de wisselwerking tussen het "Erscheinungsbild"- "Erlebnisbild"- "Seinsbild" toch op elkaar inwerken - waardoor - waarom - en wat er zich ertussen afspeelt en hoe je de streepjes(-) zou kunnen noemen. In ieder geval ontstaan deze door een proces in tijd en blijkbaar kun je een onderscheid tussen kunstwerken aanbrengen, waarin dit proces direct en in een fractie van seconde tot stand komt en andere, waarin het proces pas na verloop van tijd tot stand komt (wees het door analyse of van het beeld een 'ideaalbeeld' te construeren).

Naar aanleiding van deze eerste 'sessie' en mijn poging één, dus mijn ervaring onder woorden te brengen, ben ik toch benieuwd hoeveel nuances er bestaan en hoe een werk op de beschouwer kan inwerken (direct, provocatief / indirect, ?) en of naar aanleiding hiervan een soort kwaliteitsoordeel zou kunnen worden gemeten.

in ieder geval tot gauw,

Frank-Alexander Hettig

