

Nunc Stans
(*the Standing Now*)
detail of installation of
found images with glass
dimensions variable

1. Deleuze, Gilles.
Cinema 2, trans. Hugh
Tomlinson and Robert
Galeta. London: Con-
tinuum, 1989, p. 35.

2. Deleuze, Gilles.
*Difference and Repeti-
tion*, trans. Paul Patton.
New York, NY: Columbia
Univ. Press, 1994, p. 80.

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Complications of time

We commonly think of time as a homogeneous, continuous medium in which we exist, with events strung out in a chronological series, lying alongside each other, almost like points in space. This representation of time as movement along an axis can be traced back to Aristotle, who believed time was composed of base units of abstract ‘instants’ which developed incrementally and linearly into the future and backward into memory¹. Such an approach relies heavily on a practical perspective of the universe, and offers a simple, mechanical model of time. It suffices as a convention adopted for everyday use, but provides an incomplete picture of the breadth of our experience of time.

As a system it also fails to resolve two paradoxes: it cannot account for the actual passage of time, nor does it explain the quality of our experience of the past as past. If the present is a succession of infinite instants, where does one situate the limit between the present moment and the next? Gilles Deleuze writes: “it is as if the past were trapped between two presents: the one which it has been and the one in relation to which it is past.”² Furthermore, we tend to associate reality as that which

is perceived directly with our senses, the full, immediate present. With the absence of these stimuli the past becomes even less than a faded shadow – and risks being relegated to the realm of the unreal. This perspective of the past as simply derivative (and the future, anticipated) of the present flattens out the complex interrelations of past and present, forming a closed system, which excludes the new and unpredictable – as well as other possible modes of experiencing time (such as dreaming).



Nunc Stans (*The Standing Now* 2010–) is a piece that can be read as a complication of the standard view of time. It consists of a collection of found accidental prints, discovered beneath old framed flower embroideries, obtained from flea markets and second-hand stores. These cloth handiworks once inhabited domestic spaces, and functioned as decoration,

and personal mementos. Although hand-made, and thus unique, these stylised images were mostly made according to a pattern; and so in a way, each becomes a multiple. It is unlikely that the creators of these images would have anticipated that their stitched designs would generate another image on the paper framed behind them. These paper images seem to stand outside of codifiable time, even as they are in fact direct

traces of time – made by light itself. Created indirectly over long, but indefinable periods of time, (longer if you include the making of the embroideries), by various levels of light in unknown locations, they speak of a past, but an inaccessible, generic past. Though suggestive of a reality not so distant from us (that of another generation – perhaps our grandparents’ living room), we simply do not have access to the specifics of their contexts (how they functioned or what meaning they may have had for their owners). At the same time, it could be argued that their place in time must be linked with their moment of discovery – are they then wholly new images, despite whatever remnants of another time they might carry? Now, as I have collected them together to be shown, and exposed them to a common light source, their unprotected images will begin to fade away. Some may disappear from our eyes faster than others, but when can we mark the end of their existence? Does my photographing them arrest a moment of their time? Caught in a never-ending darkroom of developing, or frozen in the singular moment of a photograph, both processes present a print of time, both present a different, yet equally ‘real’ manifestation of the work itself, in a sense coexisting as an always becoming and an always already become.

Duration, crystallisation, and the virtual image

Henri Bergson’s concept of ‘duration’ seems better equipped to describe the experience of time within my work, than traditional concepts of chronological time. His writings, and those of Gilles Deleuze offer an alternative, non-linear, ‘lived’ experience of time, with the possibility of coexistence, rather than successive relations between the past and present.

Bergson maintained that time is not simply an experience within consciousness, nor are

memories stored within consciousness or the brain. Rather, as Deleuze explains, “it is we who are internal to time”³, to the flux of duration, and who move between memories of different levels and intensities in our acts of recollection, reminiscence and perceptual recognition. Thinking of time as movement, Bergson proposed that the paradox of time’s passing from present to past could be resolved if one was to conceive of a continuous ‘splitting’ of time into “two symmetrical jets”⁴. In each moment of the present, he writes, there is both an instantaneous living present which passes, and a past that is preserved and is contemporaneous with the present, in the act of memory⁵. Deleuze elaborates:

“It is clearly necessary for [the present] to pass on for the new present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at one and at the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on. The past does not follow the present that it is no longer, it coexists with the present it was. The present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror.”⁶

According to Deleuze, this virtual image can form a bridge between the present and the non-representational past by contracting the past into the present, and expanding virtually to hold the whole of memory⁷. The flow of the present is always already ‘crystallised’ with the past, from its very beginning. To envision the incorporation and preservation of the past within the interior of the present, Deleuze elaborates this analogy of the crystal – a natural formation that occurs when two fluid states meet and combine into a multifaceted, omni-directional structure, which preserves itself while expanding along an internal pattern. On one hand this movement is inward, a gathering of everything together into a

3. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 80.

4. Bergson, Henri. *L’Energie Spirituelle*. 1919. Quoted from “The memory of another past: Bergson, Deleuze and a new theory of time”, 2005 by Alia Al-Saji, p. 131-132.

5. Bergson, Henri. *Key writings*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson and John Mullarkey. London: Continuum, 2002, p. 124-156.

6. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 76.

7. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 77.

Bordet är Dukat
series of collages from
found book, plexiglass,
wood
dimensions variable



point – the crystal as having a magnetic potential to attract and incorporate everything around it. On the other hand, it is expansive, situating these elements into an already growing formation that has the potential to expand indefinitely, like a seed.

In this way he describes our existence as characterised by an expanding network of endlessly relaunching circuits connecting the actual and the virtual⁸. It is a kind of intermingling and exchange that I feel can be compared to an engagement with process of painting.

In an ongoing series, entitled *Crystallised Stiff Lifes* (2010–), I paint directly into an already existing painting, a representation of a found glass crystal object. This is not a straightforward juxtaposition, a superimposition of the object onto the existing painting. I hold the crystal in the space between me and the painting, and paint it while looking through it, allowing for a much more complex and involved mediation. The process collapses the space between the crystal and the found painting, but also fuels the flowing and intermingling of information: the crystal's refraction of light, colours from the painting and surrounding studio; my receiving, interpreting and expressing information back as paint into the original painting; and the resulting integration of these colours and marks back into the crystal, back into the feedback loop. The time of day, my concentration and ability, my interest in achieving more or less mimetic representation, my position and the distances between myself, the crystal and the painting all impact on the resulting image. The parameters of the experiment are set, the potentialities are innumerable.

In a way, this can be seen as a re-mapping of a painting onto itself, with the intervention of me and my crystal. Accordingly, the



process of creating these paintings could continue indefinitely. Within the image it becomes impossible to distinguish between what was prompted by the actual (perception) or the virtual (imagination, memory). The crystal focuses our attention on the possibility that perception is attached to external surroundings, and is not merely an interior subjective experience.

At play in the unfamiliar

In becoming familiar with our environments and formulating conceptions about the world, how its systems work, it is important to remember that experience is fundamentally incomplete. We can never perceive a thing in its entirety, only as a fragment, and our minds tend to fill in the blanks. In our daily existence we tend to relax our critical disposition, and rely on habits, clichés and other automatic learned responses. Our habits around the setting of a table for a meal are a good example. In all cultures, some of the strongest rituals and taboos concern the preparation and consumption of food. The experience of eating is highly organised – the tiniest transgression can trigger disorientation, the feeling of being out of place. In the series *Bordet är Dukat* (2011), I made collages out of a vintage book about Scandinavian table-settings. Each colour image in the book was altered according to a pattern or inner logic that I developed while studying the image, a process which itself set off a series of other adjustments (some of the parameters being already partially set by the image). But as the pages were double-sided, the impetus for the collage could be found on one side, but not the other. When viewing both sides of these collages, enjoyment can be found in each kind of engagement; in

the possibility of retracing, re-imagining the original image, and at the same time, in the abandonment of the possibility of creating a

Crystalized Still Life
oil and acrylic on canvas
25 cm x 31 cm

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8. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*,
p. 96.

Visions at the Bayswater Hotel (part one)
oil on canvas
150 cm x 102 cm

Opposite page:
Visions at the Bayswater Hotel (part three)
oil on wood panel
200 cm x 100 cm

9. Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 373.

10. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 20.

11. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 17.

12. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 47.

cohesive, unified image. We cannot return to the origin, we can only acknowledge the desire to do so, to be aware of the value of play, of spending time with things that we do not have full access to, nor completely understand. In testing out, re-turning to a theme, and play, repetition does not seek a resolution. As Derrida writes, in repetition something always escapes⁹.

Similarly, Deleuze speaks of a disorientation in *Cinema 2* when he describes certain encounters with images where our sensory-motor faculties jam or break, and thus cannot properly absorb, or effect, the usual immediate response¹⁰. An 'optical-sound image' he says, is non-localisable, it does not induce action nor extend into movement¹¹. Rather than linking up with the actual, it forms a bond with the virtual. It is 'no longer any question of an explanation, a causality, or a linearity which ought to go beyond themselves in destiny. On the contrary it is a matter of an inexplicable secret, a fragmentation of all linearity...'¹²

I would argue that painting, too, has the potential to slow and complicate our perception, to the point of delaying reflexive responses. In the building up and dissolving of a painted image, in the inclusion of inconsistencies, in evocative ambiguity, we are encouraged to bridge the distance to an unavailable source. The series entitled *Visions at the Bayswater Hotel* (2010) takes an apparently trivial, familiar moment (the perception of a pattern of light through a curtain) and passes it



through several visualisations. In one variation done on a wooden panel, the curtain's floral patterns merge with the surface that supports the image, while the spots of light have an uncanny optical brilliance. Upon approaching the painting, it is easy to see how this is accomplished – these areas have been sanded thin from the back and are lit by a window from behind. But for a moment perhaps, this curious effect may elude classification, may lead the viewer to suspend their judgment, their pre-conceived notions of what to expect.

The importance of the approach to an object

In this complication of the viewer's experience, the subjects of my work are cast in a kind of interpretative mode, being always and already at a distance to us. I often attempt to approach subjects or contexts which no longer exist, or that I have only distant experience of. In using second-hand objects within my work, I am not necessarily attempting to revive or reactivate their utility, or to quote from them, nor do I wish to make an ironic gesture. My involvement as a collector goes beyond (restorative) nostalgia or a mourning for a lost past. Rather, my work is an attempt at eliciting a dialogue with these objects - I feel that perhaps through these objects I could find a way to ingrain memory as the virtual within the actual present, re-engaging the past as potentiality. The re-invoked past infuses a sense of doubt into the experience of our temporal space as a coherent and unified whole, and questions the assumption that the present can be described in terms of its own logic, separated from the context of history.

The discarded items I speak of were found hidden among heaps of other objects in flea markets or second-hand stores, in chaos. Unlike the more common path direct from manufacturer to



consumer, these objects came from a multitude of sources, of pasts. The marketplace serves as a point of both constant re-establishment of value and redistribution. These things have become temporarily unnecessary, surplus or otherwise ownerless, but the fact that they have been gathered and not completely thrown out shows that they are considered to retain some use value (as oddities and antiques, or affordable, useful tools).

Their fascination for me is that while they once had a specific context to which they belonged, they now have been cut off from their 'proper' place and time. They might carry a physical trace of their pasts as markings of age, and I may recognise something familiar in their forms, or guess at their apparent use, but their remoteness from my own experience is palpable. In offering me content that I can never verify, or clarify, my relationship to them is much like a relationship to a vague generality, rather than a relationship to a fully defined particular. The objects enter into my studio as fragments of other places and times, and I examine, make arrangements and form attachments to them. Painting them becomes a way of exploring them in an intimate way, as a tracing of the virtual over time.

During the Renaissance, it was common practice for the painting of religious scenes to be set in domestic interiors, even the patron's own home. To add to the realism of this space, saints and religious figures would then be surrounded by choice objects owned by the patron – with the additional benefit that these objects, after their spiritual 'visit' in the painting, would then become devotional prompts when returned to their ordinary place in the house¹³. Although the objects that I use do not have spiritual value for me, their hidden histories, their uncanny familiarity, their virtual existence offers me an inexhaustible number of entry points into an engagement with the world.

Prelude to an other

"If time does nothing it is nothing" Bergson writes, and therefore 'living' means an openness to time, such that the virtual and the real are "different modalities of reality."¹⁴ To consider "different modalities of reality" within a subjective experience however, warrants a reconsideration of the subjective experience itself and questions the traditional understanding of the subject as a unified, individual, autonomous being. (Furthermore, such an approach also questions the isolationism of the self, the primacy of the author, and in terms of art: the high modernist conception of the artist.) This very approach is at the heart of Jean-Luc Nancy's discussion of subjectivity. Nancy's work questions the ability of the self to fully detach itself from coexistence with others, to find its own ivory tower, a separate niche, populated fully and completely by itself.

The impossibility of fully-fledged individualisation leads Nancy in *Being Singular Plural*, to replace the existential model of individuality with the notion of singularity. This enables a reconceptualisation of the self towards a more neutral subjectivity – where the authorial voice is subdued. Here, the construction of meaning is not only based on declarations, statements of the type "I assert that...", expressed according to an individual agenda, but rather according to a self-generating relational structure created in the moment of encounter with the other. Nancy explains: "Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and the with of this singularly plural coexistence."¹⁵

"Being-with-one-another" denotes the sharing of subjective experience between many singularities. By extension we can propose an expanded theory of subjectivity that acknowledges its own limits, one that does not see the innumerable other subjectivities as the impassable 'Other',

but recognizes instead a constant overlapping of subjectivities within a shared field of experience. Paola Marrati emphasises that Bergson believed the field of experience to be broader than 'human' subjectivity, and that therefore the field of experience is not constituted by, nor necessarily related to, a subject.¹⁶ We form conceptions about the world in an open-ended process that allows for elaboration and growth.

The practice of grasping

Within my own process of painting subjective experience plays a key role, but while my perspective is acknowledged, and surely dominant in my work, my intention is to question it through an attempt at mixing it with various other perspectives embedded in other layers in my paintings. I create situations where I must react to decisions made by other artists, or to complications in the materials themselves. My role is most limited in my practice in *Nunc Stans* ('*The Standing Now*', 2010–), where the images emerge almost without the author's input, or at least with one very removed.

In much of my work, the original other is always the irreconcilably foreign (entity). In using found paintings, the data usually considered important concerning the original (such as the artist's identity, where and when the painting was completed) is inaccessible to me. Yet its presence still lurks in the shadows. My imagery is often obscured in films of paint or strata of wood. Depicted spaces are suggestive rather than exact, containing areas of indefiniteness, incompleteness and internal contradictions (of perspective, light etc.). With the layering of glazes, it is not always clear if certain vibrant patches are being lit from a light source behind (the primed white canvas or light itself) or if they sit opaquely on top. I achieve this by working into wet or dry layers wiping away and sanding into the surface. There is a feeling of a potential for a 'revealing'; we

think: if only I could just shine some more light on it, take a step back, hold it at another angle or move some pieces around, then a more coherent image would appear. Yet it is through bringing attention to these difficulties of readability, by suggesting a lack of accessibility, that I hope to encourage the attempt.

Windows, screens, curtains, often appear in my painting, light and reflections too. Wood blocks the light or lets it faintly through. The characteristic movement is one of passing from one thing to another, of obscuring and revealing. When darkness sets in, things that are obvious and familiar become strange and unfamiliar. Illumination has long been associated with a moment of enlightenment, with a moment of transcendence. But the clear light of reason does not fall steadily on my work - the outlook is more cloudy and uncertain. At times, light seeps through wood as if it were a heavy curtain, and circles of woodgrain become flares of light. Elsewhere light slices through cracks in a collage suspended between glass sheets, splintering the image. Light can divide and clarify but it can also overlap and obscure, as when paying equal attention to both sides of a printed page has the effect of merging them into one. It will refract a thousand images on encountering a crystal, seeming to contract the visible into an infinitely dense point in space. When it shines through a painting from behind, it helps to reveal details of brushwork and thickness of paint as though excavating its surface.

The revealing moment

The manipulation, position and direction of light are a crucial aspect of my work. But often, rather than shining down upon a depicted subject, light faces the viewer, originating from somewhere within the work. Like the reflection of light that shadows your movements on another



er surface, it exists only in relation to the viewer. It is part of a performance, or a demonstration, grabbing the attention of an audience, requesting their participation. The daily schedule of natural light conditions in my studio determines my own patterns of work and movement there. Morning or afternoon light enters into my palette, frequently determines composition, and is an active participant in my work, even in the presentation of my work.

There is a special moment at the end of a performance when the curtain drops and the lights go on. An awkward transition. The end has come and gone and we are ejected from the imagined space and time of the story. In the series, *Back-Lit Paintings* (2011–ongoing), I placed found paintings in a window and attempted to create a representation of the varying light on the image. When viewing the original subject matter of a given painting, under normal light conditions one becomes involved in the presented fiction, one partakes in its particular point of view. But when the lights come on from behind, revealing the painting's support, the bare structure overwhelms the experience of the original, seeming to question the reading established a moment ago. It has been altered, but neither temporally nor physically – it can readily return to its other state. Painting this effect is a way to recognize this change of states, even as it transforms further, into a painted image.

These works present the possibility that the ordinary, the bland, the everyday is one and the same as the curious, unique exciting other, simply with a change of perspective. With the addition of light, it is no longer what it was, it is the same and yet also something else, it is a multiple. Even if we understand the 'trick', so many other readings become available. The previous information is still present – the only thing refuted is its sole definition as cliché, or that it is a static, closed whole.

Vibrating inside and outside of painting

In this way, my work vibrates between being a singular point and being a circuit, between different points on the circuit, between one kind of circuit and another. Each of my pieces is a variation on a theme, like a relay-point, testing out different variables within an elliptical series. But each can also be seen as a circuit itself, like a *Crystallised Still Life* (2010) painting, which includes the movement of the found painting through the crystal into my eye, into memories, imagination, and paint, and back into the painting, and now into a new circuit the eye of the viewer too. The painted surface can be seen as something of the residue of this process, a possible point of contact between various different positions. The surface of the painting is this active place, an actual, material location.

As mentioned before, for me, what has being has "being-with-one-another." And so, what has being is in a kind of state of vibration of always expanding and contracting its being. Sometimes it is almost undecidable whether something has being or not. Many of the videos I have made over the past years in my parallel collaborative practice with Wojciech Olejnik, have dealt with such negotiations of being. Stop-motion animation, as a medium which itself is a collage or collapsing of time, offers an interesting method for developing this idea. The video *St. Helena Olive Tree, Extinct 1884-1977, 2003- (2010)*, for instance, concerns a species, the St. Helena Olive Tree, which was extinct by the late 19th century and rediscovered 80 years later, only to disappear once more in 1994. It was the only species in its genus – having been separated from Africa in the island's tectonic journey to the South Pacific – and during its brief revival countless attempts were made to propagate the tree. Cuttings and seedlings were

Opposite page:
Installation shot of:
left
Diffust Deren
oil and acrylic on canvas
36 cm x 50 cm

right
Glödande N.B. '52
oil and acrylic on canvas
115 cm x 136 cm

Installation shot of:
left
Anderssons Å
oil and acrylic on canvas
35 cm x 46 cm

right
Blå knäckt Taberg
oil and acrylic on canvas
36 cm x 44 cm

St. Helena Olive Tree, Extinct 1884-1977, 2003- Stop-motion animation 3:07 Loop

shipped around the world to greenhouses, but to no avail – from 2003 there remains no living tissue in any botanical collection. The paper replica of the tree that appears in the video does not respond to the wind heard through the speakers, it stands motionless as the grid-like shadows of a greenhouse slowly moves across its surface. The paleness, ghostliness, in-between-being of the plant is like a shadow (or a imprint created by light on wood) but the shadow of the greenhouse and the disjointed eerie sound of its movement are also part of its being. This video is an attempt to investigate not only how the plant's history demonstrates the expanding and contracting of its being, but the impossibility of establishing the boundary of being – that it slips into superstitions, suppositions, into indeterminate, hypothetical realms. In this video we attempted to make this vibration, this process of moving from one determinant of being to the next, itself visible.

Painting as an extended experience

A painting makes visible a process – a series of immeasurable gestures – that exists somewhere between an artist's involvement in the making of an image and each encounter between the work and a viewer (continuing in memory).

It is a slow way to make an image. Paintings are made within time, and they can be contemplated indefinitely, as objects that carry traces of their making within them. Since the invention of photography, mimesis can no longer be said to be painting's primary function. Making a painting must be seen rather as a way to create difference – to suggest, to make an abstraction from the actual, to create a presence out of a process. To create a presence out of a process is to consider a painting (as a becoming), in relation to time.

In earlier stages of my painting practice I often relied on photographs as a preparatory tools for

paintings, and was interested in the medium's way of assembling reality into an image (in relation to painting). The relationship of photography and painting finally became more decipherable to me once I started thinking about light and time. The first of the *Visions at the Bayswater Hotel* (2010) paintings was inspired by a still photograph, but the subsequent versions moved gradually away from this representation into a parallel, but painted experience. In negotiating the wood grain, I began to establish myself as the mediation, finding that certain parts of the image needed more light (in photographic terms, more exposure) and thus more sanding away, more paint, more labour, more time. I felt as if I had to somehow approximate the practices of the lens and the darkroom myself, and that the building up of a painting is like a rubbing into life. Painting can be compared to alchemy and early experiments with photography, if one locates painting as a testing ground, where what is sought is, to some degree, out of our control. If one understands that painting's language is not straightforward, but contains inconsistencies and allows for doubt.

As a representation made by hand, by definition its dimensions include the collapsing of physical matter and immaterial thought (the actual and the virtual). Painting can be an act of resistance, of doubt, a way of recognising the constant state of change (and the lack of absolutes) – the inconsistencies, irrationalities and emotions of the human equation. As an act of duration, it can become a way of reaching towards and prolonging the experience of an encounter with the viewer. Because a painting is ultimately meant to enter someone's home, to exist alongside everyday life as an object of contemplation, this encounter is meant to be indefinite in time. In this encounter however, the viewer's experience must also be considered as a complicated set of sensations, beliefs, memories, etc. Experience is the constant

negotiation of one's perceived inner and outer worlds. There is arguably no such thing as a private space – like a seed, the 'inner' is always developing in relationship to an outside. One is like a book in a library, always available, with an author's name on the spine, within a finite space, but always in a context, in a grouping.

What defines us then as singular beings is the way we develop a 'mode' of being in the world. In the practice of everyday life we encounter varying densities of information and meet them with varying levels of engagement. During our perception of these dense and diffuse areas we are not simply receiving but accommodating stimuli, evaluating and corresponding them to matching memories, determining their interest to us.

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It's as if you are a magnet approaching an opposing magnetised field. The space between you is felt – you may be concentrating on reaching that other point but it is the presence of the distance that separates you that you feel most. You instinctively move to the centre of its apex, feeling that this is the entrance. You push against that force, but it only deflects you to the side. It is almost impossible to balance here, and when you slide over it, you are hurled down an ever-unpredictable path. Yet you continue to try, and your movements may become desperate, calm or playful, passes over the unreachable. Of course, you can enter this space if you turn your back, but being stuck in this closeness facing out is a different situation entirely. Here you no longer face the light, you have lost your dynamic engagement in passive resignation – it is much less exciting and dangerously difficult to be released.

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