



'Painting Show'  
2012  
Installation view

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## Painting Show Eastside Projects Birmingham

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It's the nature of this artist-run gallery – a former industrial unit in east Birmingham – that the act of negotiating its space shifts significantly from one exhibition to the next. Curated by Eastside Projects' director Gavin Wade and artist Sophie von Hellermann, 'Painting Show' further amplified the sense of the gallery as an active environment, fully immersing viewers through the construction of a purpose-built mobile wall system. Arranged on a square and triangular grid, six free-standing sections were inserted into the space, framed on two sides by permanent gallery walls and on the other by a separate section of mobile wall, designed by the Austrian architect Adolf Krischanitz in 1986 for the Secession in Vienna. The effect of all this was initially disorientating – there was so much work in, or at the edge of, your line of vision that you really didn't know where to look – but the show soon revealed its own rhythm and order.

'Painting Show' was part of a series of exhibitions that began in 2008. Beginning with 'This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things' (an allusion to a 1994 show curated by Bart de Baere at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst in Ghent – a key reference for the gallery's approach) and including 'Sculpture Show' (2009) and 'Book Show' (2010), the series has had a cumulative and permanent effect on Eastside Projects, with elements from each remaining or being recycled. Krischanitz's wall system, for example, is on long-term loan and was originally used in 'Narrative Show' (2011).

'Painting Show' was presented as 'an exhibition as an act of painting', the term 'painting' stretched and cajoled across the 30-plus pieces on display. Paint was everywhere, the space alive with the energy, ideas and history of the medium. Nicolas Party's *Decorative Pattern* (2011) filled the main wall of the gallery: an arrangement of rectangular blocks, each made up of five blurry spray-painted lines of the same colour, they appeared to jostle and squirm like

multicoloured amoebae. It was indicative of the busy range of the show that Party didn't get the wall to himself. Along it were four pieces that covered and cut into his pattern: Richard Woods' work *Off Cut Inlay Painting No.27* (2008) was made all the more animated by the backdrop, while Rob Pruitt's *Comme ci, comme ça...* (Like This, Like That..., 2010), a flattened-out smiley emoticon in sunshine yellow and orange, looked to be undergoing some kind of chameleonic mutation, perhaps induced by its surroundings. Contrastingly, the gallery's back wall was covered in intimate brush-marks by Tamuna Sirbiladze, shifting the mood from controlled exuberance to sober reflection. The cartoon-grotesque face of George Condo's *Monochromatic Portrait* (1996) peered out from the muted blues and blacks.

On one side of the mobile walls, Von Hellermann's own *A Brief History of Civilization* (2011) presented a series of scenes – couples dancing, tigers prowling – that licked and curled around the other works. These served to enliven and anchor the disparate pieces on the walls, from Markus Vater's looming headless Native American horseman with spear and slip-on Nikes (*Horse*, 2011), to the blood-spattered precision of Imran Qureshi's neat watercolours with gold leaf (*Blessings Upon the Land of My Love*, 2011). Nestled among recent pieces by a diverse collection of artists (including Ashley Bickerton, Barry McGee and Hayley Tompkins), were a small number of earlier works, including pieces by Richard Tuttle and Paul Thek. More surprising was a piece from 1970 – a small acrylic depiction of a bear, purporting to be painted by the footballer George Best.

'Painting Show' had no clear theme except for painting itself, and even then the term was shown to be slippery. In encompassing such a vast range of approaches and displaying them in a risky and unconventional manner, the exhibition communicated both the intellectual concerns and visceral power of the medium, with some clearly argued ideas about modes of display. To borrow from the title of the first show in this series, the issue of what constitutes painting today was answered thus: 'This is painting and painting is many things'.

**Chris Sharratt**