

Ian Kiaer
Endnote oblique, pink

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Opening: Friday, September 8, 6–9 pm

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PRESS RELEASE
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We are delighted to present the exhibition *Endnote oblique, pink* by British artist Ian Kiaer. In anticipation of his show, we had a conversation with Kiaer about the exhibition and his work.

Your third exhibition at Galerie Barbara Wien focuses on painting. In your previous shows at the gallery, you combined painting with installation and sculpture, involving models, architectural structures, inflatables, and video. How do you differentiate between these categories and do you give preference to a medium?

Kiaer: For a long while I've been interested in the 'model as a form', equivalent in writing say, to the aphorism or written fragment – something that can operate between the more established disciplines of painting, sculpture, film. The model's capacity to pragmatically carry ideas in fragmentary, makeshift, experimental modes means it can respond to the demands of each discipline, with the resulting works speaking to one another. To think of paintings as models is not new, but it does allow one to revisit certain concerns in painting that otherwise might be overlooked or considered already resolved.

A recurring element in your paintings is a subtly drawn baseline grid in the background. In painting, the grid is usually a tool to follow the correct proportion of a certain template image. Your paintings are rather abstract, figurative representations are only hinted at or emerge as accidental traces in the material. What meaning does the grid take on in your work?

Kiaer: The grid is perhaps one example of returning to a particular figure in painting. It has all kinds of associations both with Modernism and the monochrome, as well as earlier historical manifestations of squaring up an image for translation. Rosalind E. Krauss mentions its relation to the Romantic windowpane and implies a certain loss of narrative, a kind of ghost image. I've always been intrigued by the grid as an almost forlorn method, an attempt to pin something down that altogether resists measurement. There are those perverse diagrams that Ruskin uses to attempt to rationalise representations of clouds. It's so beautifully unsuited, to use fixed geometric principles to contend with water vapour, but it speaks of the wider concern for different kinds of knowledge to be at play in a work. That my grids are pencil suggests something quite tentative, as a way of beginning

something, a means of accounting for the surface of the work and attending to the different traces, marks and stains that might already be present or later appear in the process of painting. Grids then become a way of giving attention to an emergent image while also asserting a certain flatness, where mood or tone might be given as much importance as information or ideas.

For your recent work you did research on 'The Function of the Oblique', an architectural concept conceived of and driven forward by Claude Parent and Paul Virilio in the 1960s. Parent and Virilio explored a new architectural and urban order that would force the body to adapt to disequilibrium, encouraging vertigo and promoting fluid, continuous movement. This investigation manifested in their theory of the 'angle of the oblique', which suggested designing spaces at angles, proposing a new dynamic architectural model that focused on the body's awareness within a destabilised environment. Can you tell us about your interest in 'the oblique' and in what way it influences your recent work?

Kiaer: Things have moved on slightly since my initial interest in the oblique and the development of work for this show. But as you say, when a person stands on a slope and has to negotiate a variety of angles, it introduces a certain instability which, in turn, heightens perception. I'd heard that Parent and Virilio met while attending Merleau-Ponty's lectures on perception at the Sorbonne and this led me to think about what their ideas might give back to painting. Questions of surface, touch and attention in painting were clearly concerns of Merleau-Ponty but I felt this bodily dimension they introduce, could be important for an experience of painting. In my last show at Alison Jacques gallery, I focused on different registers of surface material – paper, Plexi, cellophane, hessian, and silver leaf, along with dramatic changes of scale, to try and bring about a bodily sensitivity as one moved between the works. For our show, it's almost the opposite that's at play – quite small discreet works, though the titles suggest a remnant interest, particularly in respect to touch. I googled 'oblique, pink' and was presented with a range from Dior, which I kind of enjoyed.

Thinking of Frederick Kiesler or Michael Marder, amongst others, who informed your practice in the past, what is the common thread that runs through your work in

terms of your involvement with different figures and ideas from architecture and philosophy?

Kiaer: I'm not sure, though questions of natural form could be a linking impulse. D'Arcy Thompson's *On Growth and Form* was a work that I came across early on and certainly has a resonance with the two you mention. With Kiesler, certainly his turn from a pre-occupation with modernist geometric plains towards the more biomorphic and surreal grabbed me. Also, his still unpublished 'Magic Architecture,' comprised of cut out and pasted bits of text alongside magazine clippings and his own drawings that conjoin into a visionary thesis (only a few pages ever seem to be reproduced in books but the whole thing is wonderful). With Marder, it was his 'plant thinking,' an approach to non-human thought informed by plant growth and being. Implied in this demand, is an innate sensitivity to surroundings, to ground, mineral, light, liquid – really the stuff of painting.

This conversation is taking place whilst you are working on a new body of work in your studio for our exhibition. How important are the conditions of the exhibition space to you? To what extent do they influence the development of new work and ideas? On the other hand, how significant is the studio practice?

Kiaer: For me the studio is so important, both for making but also in moving away from ideas of direct production, to allow time, failure and the unknown into the work. When I was a student, Bourriaud and others were developing notions of post-production, for work to be implemented directly from hotel room to factory or fabrication plant. This idea of a contingent nomadism seemed very dynamic, but implicit was an emphasis on the will of the artist, an idea of control and certainty that didn't allow for a slower, more experimental means of reflection. I feel then, there's always a need for adjustment when the work moves out of the studio for exhibition. Each work has to respond to the particular space it occupies, even – as with our show – when the paintings have a certain autonomy. Perhaps because this time, each work is so singular, that their presence needs a very particular response, for them to be conversant both with the room and each other. I love the spaces in Barbara's gallery, the height of the ceilings, the light, the different pacing it allows between windows, works and doors.

Questions: Anika Matthes

Ian Kiaer (b. 1971 in London, UK) lives and works in Oxford. He has had solo exhibitions at venues including Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg (2020); Kunsthalle Lingen (2019); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2017); Neubauer Collegium, Chicago (2016); Henry Moore Institute, Leeds and Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea (both 2014); Centre International de l'art et du Paysage, Vassivière (2013); Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2012); Kunstverein München (2010); and Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin (2008).

Kiaer has participated in group shows such as at Schiller Museum, Weimar; Phenomenon 4, Anafi; GAK Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen; Modern Art Oxford; frac île-de-france, Paris; Mudam Luxembourg; Tate Modern and Tate Britain, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Hayward Gallery London; as well as in biennales in Rennes (2012), Lyon (2009), Istanbul (2007), Berlin (2006) and Venice (2003).

In 2018 Kiaer was awarded the prestigious Philip Leverhulme Prize.

Concurrently with his exhibition at Galerie Barbara Wien, Kiaer is participating with a site-specific installation in the inaugural group show, *UNBUILD: a site of possibility*, at Drawing Room's new building in London (September 22 – December 10, 2023).