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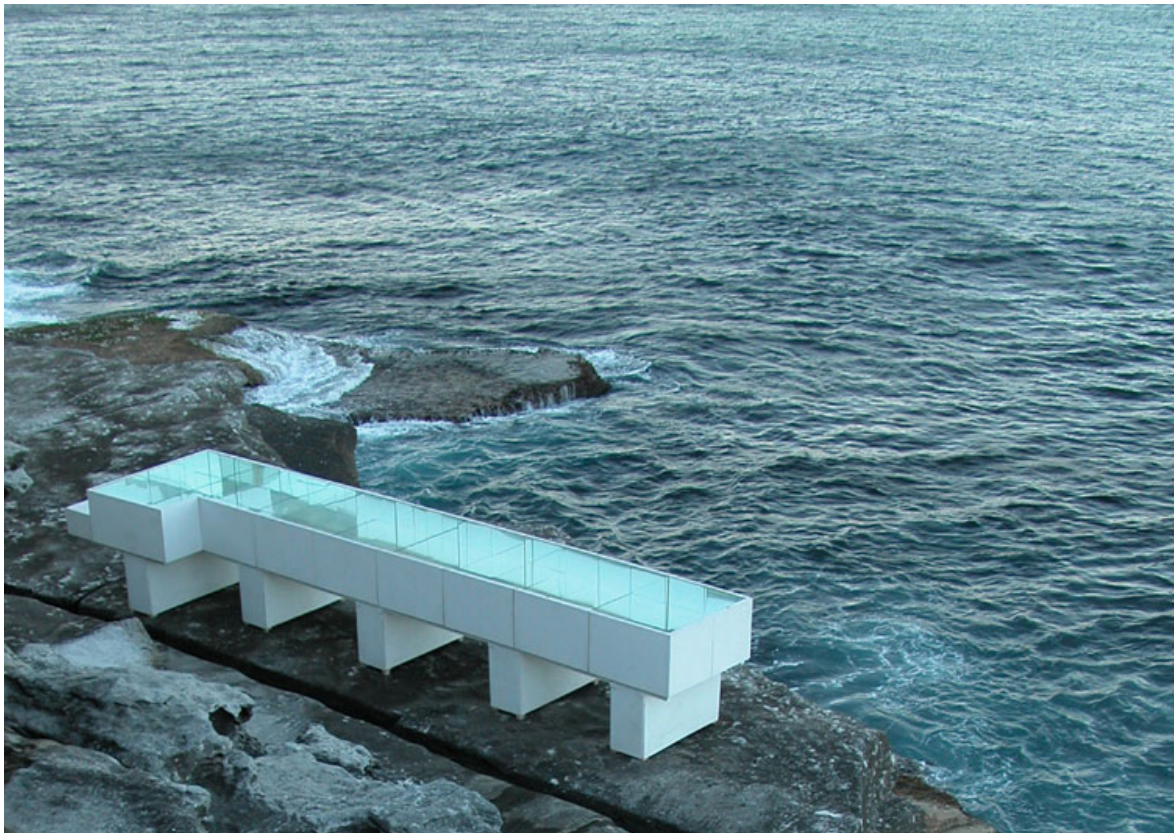
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**AUGUST 2018 - "THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"**

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## July 2013: SMALL GESTURES OF EXULTATION PART II: In Conversation with Pam Aitken

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*Pam Aitken, Monochrome as object #2, Installation, Sculpture by the Sea, 2004. Plywood, mirror, acrylic paint, 230 x 230 x 1050 cm.*

*Courtesy of the artist.*

by Amarie Bergman

Pam Aitken has been engaged in painting and installation since 1990. She is also the Director of Factory 49, in Sydney, Australia, a Showroom that has a focus on stimulating abstract non-objective work. As well as the main Showroom, the Factory features an Office Project Space and organizes the Outdoor Wall Work Project, along with other outdoor wall projects on selected facades in the same street. Aitken has recently curated exhibitions at DRU Fabriek Cultural Centre, Ulft, Netherlands, and for SCOPE Miami 2012. Factory 49 was established in 2006 and makes a significant addition to experimental and critical

contemporary art.

*Amarie Bergman: Describe the essence of who you are in 4 sentences.*

Pam Aitken: I think that I am determined and methodical to the point of being a perfectionist, focused and conscientious. However, my emotional, sensitive and spontaneous side makes me quite responsive, full of life and outgoing. I have an eccentricity common to many artists in which I can be out-of-touch, gullible, and indulgent. All together, this leads to an original, inventive and perceptive mode of thinking (I hope).

*Bergman: Can you reveal your artistic philosophy?*

Aitken: Since 1990, I have been engaged with work and thought processes about repetition, reduction, the line, the grid, space, light, surface, transparency, and the practice of painting itself.

*Bergman: What attracted you to non-objective/minimalist art?*

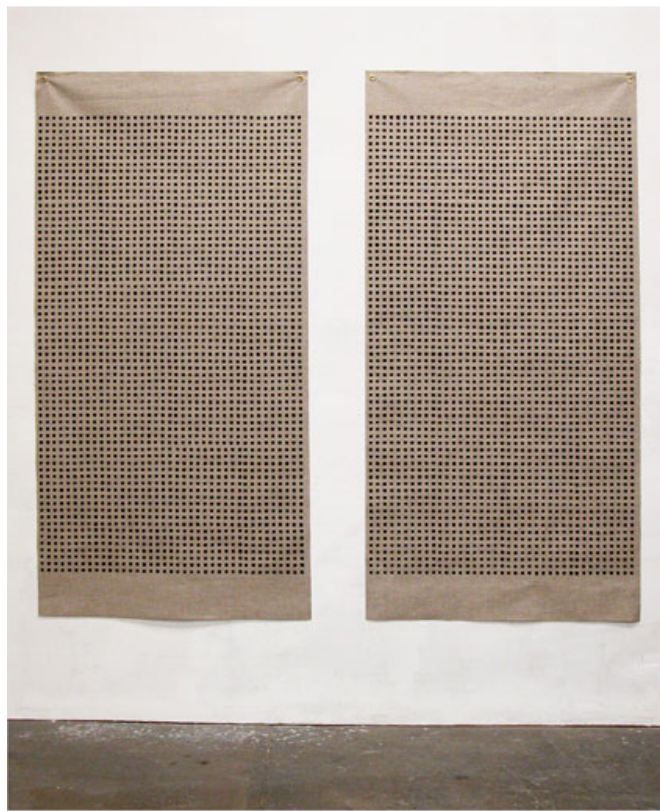
Aitken: It was the matter that photography had taken over what painting used to do in realism, so painting had to be something different. I realized that it could now only be about paint and ideas. Both paint and ideas have the most clarity and impact when they are realized simply.

I gravitate to standard, repetitious forms (squares and rectangles) because they are the most primal and ageless. They are also the ones with the most clarity; the results are then the most obvious. Form becomes meaningful, not because of ingenuity or surprise, but because of repetition and extension. Complex yet reductive forms of expression demand analytical rigour and personal commitment to engage. It is an effort to relate the observer to the thing observed at that point where perception brings them together. Abstract ideas, which previously existed only in the mind, can be made visible in a concrete form through colour, line, surface, space and light. Through this process, non-objective work can reveal what is being experienced in the wider community.

*Bergman: When and how did you establish your style, and why has it continued to be entrancing or compelling for you?*

Aitken: The questions I was asking myself were: "What is a work of art?" "What is it to experience art?" "What are the basic conditions of a thing being art?" "What is it to perceive something?" Ordinary things in the world have their own particular 'thingness,' as Heidegger said, whether that be the solidity and thickness of bricks, the smoothness and silkiness of Perspex, the particular thinness or thickness of paper, the simple quality of lead pencil without its subservience to language and word. There is a 'truth to materials' that requires me to let them 'be' as much as possible.

The materials that are employed in my practice are traditional ones (associated with painting, e.g., canvas, paint and mediums, and drawing, e.g., paper), as well as non-traditional materials (e.g., mass produced transparent plastics.) Although the work's 'being' is very quiet, it encompasses the technological age. The viewer can look at a surface as a purely reflective one, as a self-reflective activity, or as one that leads to the walls or floor of the space. My approach is reductive and conceptual, in opposition to the current age of information overload which reduces an individual's ability to think for oneself.



*Pam Aitken, Variations on a still point 36, 2012. Oil on linen, 180 x 90 cm each.  
Courtesy of the artist.*

*Bergman: Is there a rationale or an emotion that is a constant influence on your discipline?*

Aitken: The rationale is to try to get to the essence of painting, while still propelling painting forward.

*Bergman: Which artist (and / or architect or musician or fashion designer) has inspired you the most?*

Aitken: Mainly Robert Ryman, but presently Anish Kapoor.

*Bergman: What is the principal medium and scale of your work? Why is that?*

Aitken: I work in all scales, from very large installations to small sculptures, and large paintings to grids of small ones that often make a large one. I like to experiment, and ideas are often dependent on scale. The challenge of scale variety interests me.

*Bergman: Do you do the work mainly for yourself or does it have a gallery exhibition as its focus/motivator?*

Aitken: I do both, but I find that having an exhibition coming up gives a finite date with which to work. The days can then be calculated so that the finished work is ready at least a month before. The work is made according to my ideas and is not influenced at all by whether it is accepted by anyone else as a worthwhile project or not. I feel that if 1 in 100 viewers can appreciate and understand it, then that is a bonus.

*Bergman: When you start a new project do you already have the end result in mind or does it keep changing during the process?*

Aitken: As I am interested in process, I always have the end result worked out. Sometimes when I am halfway through I will question whether the idea is good, but have learnt not to change at this point. It generally works out as imagined and often much better than imagined.

*Bergman: Beyond visual art what informs/augments your work? Related to this, are there statements that describe what you conceive in solitude through non-objective art and not through any other form?*

Aitken: I usually conceive my work through thinking obliquely when I am not in the studio. For example an idea may occur driving the car or dozing off to sleep. These ideas can be in my head for a couple of years until I find a practical way of realizing them, but I'm always thinking of how to simplify the work.

*Bergman: Over these years, which series or project of yours has given you "moments of perfection"?*

Aitken: The 2004 *Sculpture by the Sea* project has given me the most satisfaction, so far. During a residency in Milan, I visualized *Monochrome* as object #2 in a coffee shop and did a drawing of it on a serviette. (I still have the serviette.). The work was 10.58 meters long, 2.3 meters wide and 2.3 meters high and constructed in sections that fitted exactly together. It was installed 7 meters down a cliff by 20 volunteers, and took all day to position and secure the piece. The finished result created what it was supposed to do, i.e., reflect the sky so that the interior looked like it was full of water. Unfortunately, the work only lasted 27 hours as huge seas took it into the ocean. A plaque that read like a tombstone was erected on the path above, so lots of people were able to visualize it themselves. It turned out to be a truly ephemeral piece.

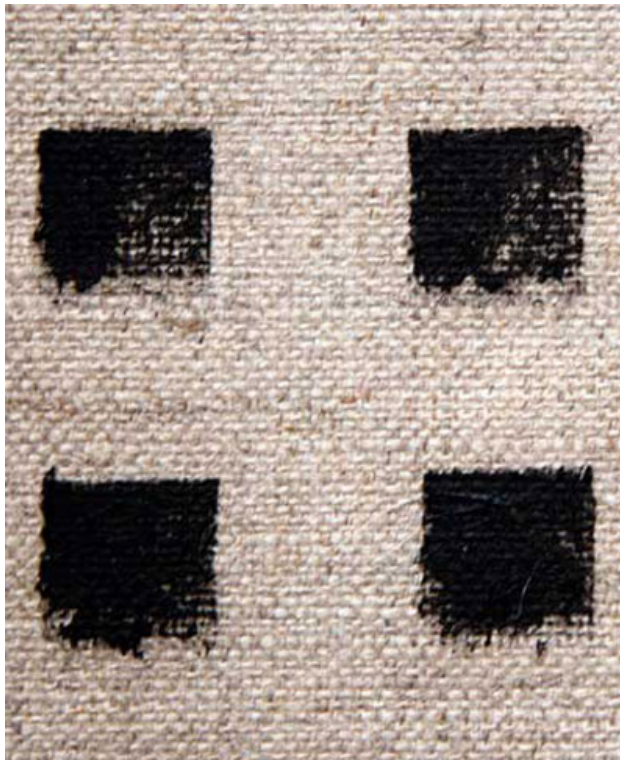
*Bergman: Does the configuration of a venue space or the status of a gallery come first, or are you inspired to do the work and then set about finding the right place for it?*

Aitken: The configuration usually comes first, as many of my installations are site-specific. But there are also questions I pose to myself, for example: "What is a line?" "What is a brushstroke?" I then try to get to the essence of those questions. The format of the work plays an important role.

*Bergman: Is there a fascination you have found when non-objective art interacts with the architecture of a gallery?*

Aitken: My feeling is that all art should interact with the space, even if it is only a consideration about how and where light falls on a piece. This interaction is especially important with non-objective work, as it has the capacity to either sit unobtrusively or accentuate parts of the building that would not have otherwise been noticed.





*Pam Aitken, Variations on a still point 36 (detail), 2012. Oil on linen, 180 x 90cm each.  
Courtesy of the artist.*

*Bergman: Are there any special materials, or ways of presentation, that you anticipate using in your future exhibitions?*

Aitken: I have been using transparent materials since 1991 and am still fascinated by them. I have found a source of gridded plastic in Paris that is not available in Sydney and intend to keep using it because of its possibilities. And I can paint on it.

*Bergman: How would you like people to engage with your work?*

Aitken: To take the time to reflect on it, as the work does not give any particular story. Viewers can have their own experience, and come away feeling that it has been a worthwhile one.

*Bergman: If you could stage an exhibition in any space, in any scale, in any format, in any era, what would be your ideal?*

Aitken: My dream is to have an installation in the Grand Palais in Paris. The height of the interior is 48 meters, and the architecture is full of light.

*Bergman: How has your practice formally been affected by exposure to the repeated viewings of other artists' exhibitions, along with the intricacies and constant responsibilities of running/keeping financially solvent/being associated with a gallery?*

Aitken: I learn something new from every artist that shows, although my practice still maintains its own integrity. Factory 49 does take an enormous amount of my time but I have a timetable so I am in the studio as many hours a week as I can.

*Bergman: Is curating collaborations with international galleries a vital part of your role? And if so, why?*

Aitken: Yes it is. It is really important because Australia is physically distanced from Europe. The international audience is a lot more responsive to non-objective work, and its population is so much

larger. I have found that Australians are still thought of as the Antipodeans, but it has a positive effect in how our work is perceived. My aim is get as many Australian non-objective artists as possible to regularly show overseas and for them to attend the openings of their exhibitions. My present project is to raise enough money to buy a gallery space, with petite residency, in Paris, so Factory 49 can have another venue to present Australian contemporary art.

*Bergman: Have you visited an exhibition recently that has made an impression?*

Aitken: I experienced the works of both Anish Kapoor and Daniel Buren in the annual Monumenta series at the Grand Palais. Both impressed me for different reasons. Kapoor utterly filled the space with a walk in installation; its interior changed dramatically from day to night. Buren created an array of colours beamed onto the floor from transparent, coloured acrylic circles installed –above head height; the optimal time to view the work was between 11.30am and 2.00pm when the sun was overhead.

*Bergman: How do you see the relationship between what you are doing and the (apparent) inception of non-objective art by Kasimir Malevich?*

Aitken: Absolutely connected.

*Bergman: How do you foresee the evolution of non-objective art in the next 5-10 years?*

Aitken: The evolution will continue to seek new ways to express this genre of art. At the moment, artists are interested in mass-produced products, ready-made colour, and showing the process of making to reveal the artist's hand in that process.

*Bergman: Are you working on a particular project right now? And can you tell us about your future plans?*

Aitken: I usually have 3 or 4 projects bubbling along in my head. Presently I am working on a project that investigates the brush stroke and the difference that colours can make to the completed works. The format is quite large and the strokes repetitive. I have completed the black and will work through the tones until I reach white. Future plans are dominated by the Factory 49 Paris gallery project. I would love to have that completed by December 2013.

Pam Aitken

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*Pam Aitken, Volume #9, 2012. Acrylic paint on plastic grid, dimensions variable.  
Courtesy of the artist.*



#### AMARIE BERGMAN

Amarie Bergman formulates and makes reductive art, showing her work at non-objective art galleries located in Melbourne, Sydney and Paris. She writes occasionally for Whitehot Magazine and lives in Melbourne.  
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