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2009

Path of Most Resistance [Exhibition Catalogue]

Reeve, Charles

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Alexis Harding, *FT*, 2004, 81" by 39 inches (courtesy the artist and Mummery + Schnelle).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

London's **Alexis Harding** has been exhibiting his unusual paintings and sculptures extensively throughout Ireland, Great Britain and Europe since the mid-1990s. His first solo show, at Galerij S65 in Aalst, Belgium in 1997, preceded solos at London's Andrew Mummery Gallery and Dublin's Rubicon Gallery. The Mummery and the Rubicon continue to represent Harding; Georgia Scherman Projects represents him in Toronto. In 1995, he graduated from Goldsmiths, University of London. In 2007, he participated in Robert Linsley's program for New Research in Abstraction. This show is his first in Canada.

For well over 15 years, Toronto's **Nestor Krüger** has been showing a wide range of work in diverse media nationally and internationally. Since graduating from OCAD in 1989 with an Honours AOCA in Fine Art, he has had solo shows at such institutions as the Chinati Foundation in Texas and the National Gallery of Canada. Like Elizabeth McIntosh, he participated during the mid-1990s in the Toronto collective Painting Disorders. He teaches at the University of Guelph and is represented by Toronto's goodwater gallery.

Educated at York University and the Chelsea College of Art & Design, **Elizabeth McIntosh** has exhibited her uncompromising abstract painting in solo and group shows throughout Canada, the United States and Europe. A decade ago, as a member of Painting Disorders, she participated in an intense interrogation of painting's continuing relevance, an investigation that still informs her painting. She lives in Vancouver, where she teaches at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Diaz Contemporary represents her in Toronto; in Vancouver, she's represented by Blanket Contemporary Art.

Working from the slogan "Painting a better future for you," **Daniel Raedeke** explores the synergies and differences between art and commerce by painstakingly reproducing handmade objects from digital images. Educated at Southern Illinois University, Raedeke lives in St. Louis, where he is represented by Bruno David Gallery, and has exhibited widely throughout the United States. As with Alexis Harding, this show is his first in Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Benjamin Diaz at Diaz Contemporary, John Goodwin at goodwater gallery, Georgia Scherman at Georgia Scherman Projects, Bruno David at Bruno David Gallery and Andrew Mummery at Mummery + Schnelle.

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday to Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday open to 9 p.m. Closed Mondays, weekends and holidays. Admission is free.

EVENTS

Thursday, June 25

Opening reception. 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Friday, June 26

Panel discussion: the artists and curator discuss the exhibit *The Path of Most Resistance*. Free and open to the public. 6:30 p.m., OCAD Room 284 (100 McCaul Street, Level 2).

Insights:

Local discussants offer personal perspectives on the exhibit. Insights begin in the gallery at 6:30 p.m., and last about 40 minutes.

July 9

Charles Reeve. Curator of the OCAD Professional Gallery, Associate Professor in the Faculties of Liberal Studies and Art, and organizer of the exhibit *The Path of Most Resistance*.

July 30

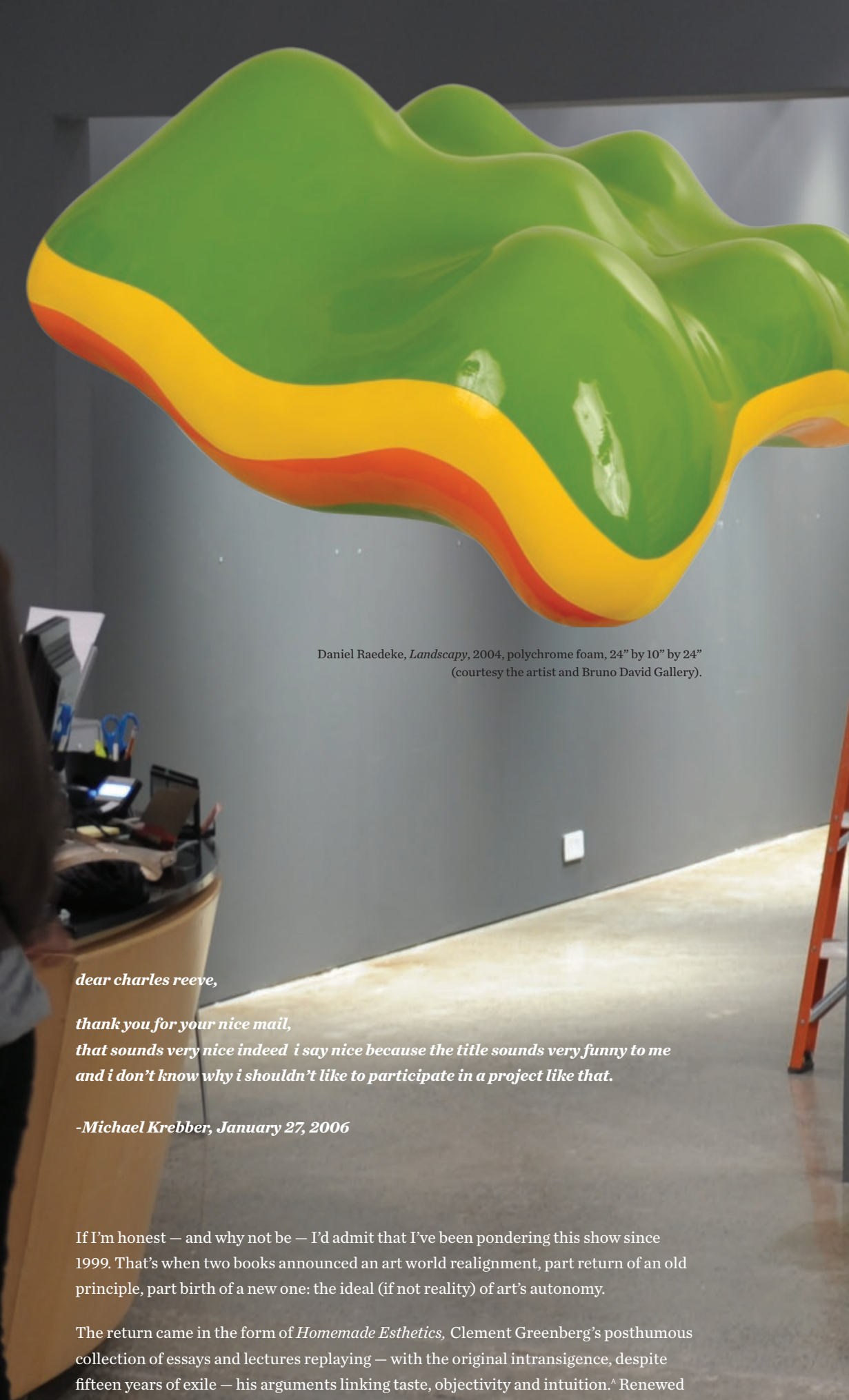
Robert Linsley. An accomplished artist, respected writer and popular lecturer. Linsley has a long-standing fascination with the possibilities of the painted surface. He shows at Felix Ringel in Dusseldorf, Germany.

August 27

Colette Laliberté. Associate Professor in the Faculty of Art at OCAD. She exhibits regularly at Toronto's Wynick/Tuck Gallery, and has shown her ambitious work throughout North America and Europe.

For more information on the Professional Gallery and its programs, please go to www.ocad.ca/progallery or visit us on Facebook.

The Path of Most Resistance



Daniel Raedeke, *Landscape*, 2004, polychrome foam, 24" by 10" by 24" (courtesy the artist and Bruno David Gallery).

dear charles reeve,

thank you for your nice mail,
that sounds very nice indeed i say nice because the title sounds very funny to me
and i don't know why i shouldn't like to participate in a project like that.

-Michael Krebber, January 27, 2006

If I'm honest — and why not be — I'd admit that I've been pondering this show since 1999. That's when two books announced an art world realignment, part return of an old principle, part birth of a new one: the ideal (if not reality) of art's autonomy.

The return came in the form of *Homemade Esthetics*, Clement Greenberg's posthumous collection of essays and lectures replaying — with the original intransigence, despite fifteen years of exile — his arguments linking taste, objectivity and intuition.^A Renewed interest in Greenberg had been bubbling for a while, but the publication that same year of T.J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea* underscored this resurgence.^{B,C}

The idea in question was modernism, Greenberg's name for these values. Yet a glance inside Clark's book shows his title's conclusiveness to be unexpectedly provisional. The phrase "farewell to an idea" comes from Wallace Stevens' poem "The Auroras of Autum." It appears there three times, but Clark quotes its last, most ambiguous return as his book's epigram: "Farewell to an idea....The cancellings, / The negations, are never final."^D This is revisiting, not rejecting, and Clark fashions this reconsideration into an invitation to separate modernism's constants from its variables.

Perhaps one key constant is that art paradoxically needs a partner — either viewer or context — to be autonomous. It embraces one to exclude the other. In Greenberg's time, art and viewer colluded against context, seeking to transcend time and space on their way to an unmediated aesthetic experience. Hence Frank Stella's summary, "All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion. What you see is what you see."^E

Today, however — and I suspect this is a key variable — art embraces context while eschewing the viewer. Indirectly at least, Clark's commentary fuelled this exchange by marking Clark's shift from rejecting Greenberg to engaging with him.^F And this change no doubt springs from a sense that the imagination has succumbed to the forces of administration that it sought to evade.

The quickening convergence of art's visual language with that of entertainment — bright colours, flashing lights, cartoon shapes, outsized productions — typifies this collapse.^G Thus, art's longstanding flight from entertainment now involves shunning visual appeal out of a concern that life is more fully commodified in the twenty-first century than it was in the twentieth.

So, Elizabeth McIntosh's paintings don't merely replay 1960s abstraction — though they do that very well. For one thing, the musings they compel about whether this painterly syntax can be current again obscure the clarity that Stella sought. Moreover,



Elizabeth McIntosh, *Untitled (yellow)*, oil on canvas, 90" by 75" (courtesy the artist and Diaz Contemporary).

Daniel Raedeke, *Freestand*, 2003, enamel on MDF and laminated foam, 78" by 156" by 72" (courtesy the artist and Bruno David Gallery).



this obscurity intensifies when we recall that, forty years ago, feminism saw hard-edge abstraction as somewhere between self-deception and conspiracy. (Judy Chicago cites this realization as a spark for her conversion to a feminist artist.)^H Thus these pictures offer transcendence with one hand but pull it away with the other, invite us near yet resist our embrace.

Daniel Raedeke does something similar, while holding his cards closer to his chest. Featuring bright colours and smooth, repetitive forms, Raedeke's works look like he made them with a computer and a rapid prototyping machine — like they belong to entertainment's world of instant, shallow gratification. In fact, they're the opposite. *Freestand* (2003), for instance, is made of cast latex paint, a painstaking medium that takes days to dry. Raedeke's forms look into art's future while his dedication to paint looks into its past, as Ivy Cooper notes, creating an odd utopianism that tries to imagine a role for painting *as painting* in today's world.^I

This question of what painting is — and is for — has circulated for decades, perhaps centuries. But, as Martin Holman writes, "[B]y the start of the 1980s the pure idealism that was modernism's Berlin Wall had already fallen and a decade was to pass before abstraction had fully reasserted itself, redefined and reinvigorated." This redefinition means that the same materials and moves had different connotations 20 or 40 years ago than they do now. Hence, Holman observes, Alexis Harding's art doesn't resemble action painting even though a description of it — abstract paintings made by pouring paint onto surfaces laid on the floor — sounds

familiar, as does the balance between attraction and repulsion that he occasionally shares with both McIntosh and Nestor Krüger.^J

But while Harding looks at art's history and future simultaneously by enacting painting's collapse, Krüger shores up the whole building to see if it can last a bit longer. Perhaps extending his "Geezus" show at goodwater gallery earlier this year, which obliquely explored that venue's history by riffling through old invitations and mailers, Krüger's installation here hints that this gallery, only two years old, already might be crumbling, rotted from within by its past as by a fungus.

Neither the visual anachronisms of McIntosh and Raedeke — Raedeke's work looks futuristic, but it's the outdated future of the Jetsons — nor the collapsing forms of Harding and Krüger add up. But then, this art is not about adding up. It's about withdrawal, and in this way links to the gallery's inaugural exhibit when Rirkrit stymied viewers' expectations by sealing the venue shut for four months.

Krebber, you'll have noticed, figures nowhere in this story. Having agreed to participate, he began a meeting a few months later by stating that he couldn't possibly be in this (or, more or less, any) show: he had turned increasingly to archiving his career, protecting himself from the institutional apparatus that I represent. I can't say I wasn't frustrated by Krebber's feint, but I also can't decide whether it means he's in the show, or not.



Alexis Harding, *Flexible or Fixed?* 2007, 72" by 72" (courtesy the artist and Mummery + Schnelle).

ENDNOTES

^A Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics: observations on art and taste*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

^B John O'Brian had been editing the collected writings since the mid-1980s: Clement Greenberg, *Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986-1995). Book-length commentaries appeared through the 1990s, including: Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT, 1994); Thierry de Duve, *Clement Greenberg between the lines*, Tr. Brian Holmes (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1996); Florence Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg: a life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997).

^C T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: episodes in a history of modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

^D Wallace Stevens, "The Auroras of Autumn," *Kenyon Review* old series 10.1 (Winter 1948).

^E Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," 1966, reprinted in *Minimal Art*, Ed. Gregory Battcock (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995) 58.

^F The locus classicus of this enmity is their exchange in *Modernism and Modernity*, Ed. Serge Guilbaut, Benjamin Buchloh and David Solkin (Halifax: NSCAD, 1983) 188-193.

^G James Meyer, "No More Scale," *Artforum* 42.10 (summer 2004) 220-228.

^H Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower* (New York: Doubleday, 1975): 27-67.

^I Ivy Cooper, "Painting's One-Man Show: Daniel Raedeke's PAINT_INGS," *Art Papers* 26.3 (May/June 2002) 6.

^J Martin Holman, "Twisted into True," *Alexis Harding* (Dublin: Rubicon Gallery, 2006) n.p.