

Oran Hoffmann à Aix

Written by
Patrick Healy



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Thanks to the three different exhibitions of Oran Hoffmann (born 1981) taking place in Aix in September of this year (2018), one at the Atelier Cezanne, another at Fondation Vasarely, and one at La Non-Maison, one can say that every surprise at any, or each one, of the exhibitions confirms what has become increasingly apparent in the trajectory of Hoffmann's development as an artist since graduating from the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, and his later studies at the Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem, in the Master of Fine Arts programme, where he graduated summa cum laude.

In these three shows his increasing preoccupations and achievements as an artist become more legible. It is a work involved with the signature of things as much as persons. There is much subtle thinking, and ingenious transformations, which has been a feature of his personal development since his graduation days. The detailed research and response he makes are a result of careful preparation, and the current shows have involved him in working and living in Aix for the best part of a year. As we will see, he has literally spent hundreds of hours working through material in the Fondation Vasarely, living on site to progress his ideas further.

In that undertaking he has gone beyond indexing and archiving to show how constructive and deconstructive seeing, his own decade-long research on perception and responding to art practise itself, has lead, as will be shown, to an expansive and an emancipatory achievement. Not unlike his last major museum exhibition in Tel Aviv, Hoffmann responds to, enters into visual dialogue with specific works, in that case of the artist Josef Albers, and wrests from these his own independent fashioning and highly individual and recognisable style. In this case in Aix, he continues and refines that first great dialogue and now with the work of Vasarely and Cezanne, and a single manifestation at La Non-Maison, often described as a micro-centre for cultural experimentation.

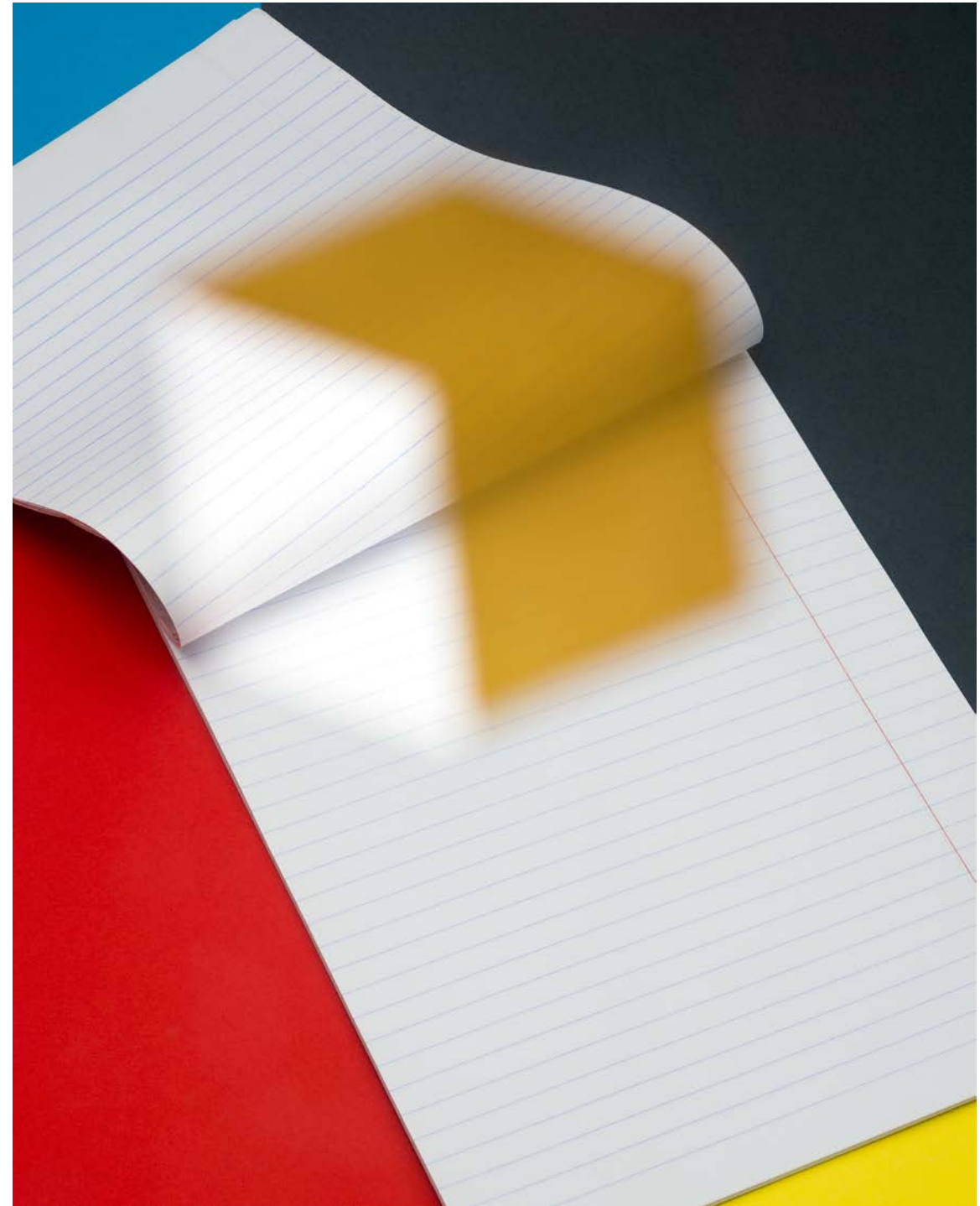
The exhibition in Tel Aviv was a mature statement, if you like, or the way-station at which Hoffmann had arrived. It was labelled as a 'two-person' show and given the title *Objektiv*. The remarkable fact of the exhibition was how Hoffmann would literally engage in a de-structuring and response that was constructive and developed a kind of constitutive seeing where with the deceased artist Josef Albers he forms a living partnership and dynamic exchange.

By a process of selection and shifting of observation viewpoints, a playful and inventive group of works emerged. One can speak of inter-iconic exchange. This inter-iconicity pointed to a community of concern, as much as any issue of facts. There is a hazard in such an undertaking, as the past can literally overwhelm those who do not approach it with great respect. For Hoffmann the artist is still alive and available for dialogue in his works.

The title of the show, *Objektiv*, points to an outstanding paradox, namely that the very lens which adds to the claim of photography as rendering the objective world, points to the reality of the subjective, and the point of view. In literature the phenomenon of intertextuality is well documented, and in art-historical study much of the tracking of sources and influences can be seen as a recognition of the 'inter-iconic', which for some challenges the view of creation as necessarily original, and for others indicates the ancestral claims that can free and empower creative, artistic work. So, too, in Aix Hoffmann continues with his working through and responding to earlier artistic work, seizes the conjunction of Cezanne/Vasarely, and in a third show at La Non-Maison.



Objektiv: Wood Print Linoleum, Plexiglass (Yellow and Blue), C-print, 80 x 64 cm, 2014



Blocknote, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2014



Habseligkeiten, C-print, 80 x 64 cm, 2006

It is necessary to review Hoffmann's earlier sojourn. Although born in Israel, Hoffmann spent most of his formative years in Holland, and had made his choice to study photography at the prestigious Rietveld Academy. During his undergraduate years his work was already noted for the combination of technical precision and the unusual choice of subject matter, which in one compelling set of images consisted of photographs from illustrations of a bison and a hare published in an old book of 'natural history'. With the graduation exhibition, one sees the various interests he had developed, and the strong relation to the problem of the artefact, to the process of making.

Hoffmann had travelled to Israel in the same year as completing his preparations, 2006, mostly visiting archaeological sites, both ancient and modern, covering the whole land from North to South, taking photographs of Beit She'an in the north and Caesarea in the South, including the Nabatean site of the remains of Avdot on the old Petra-Gaza road – a site that was heavily vandalised three years later.

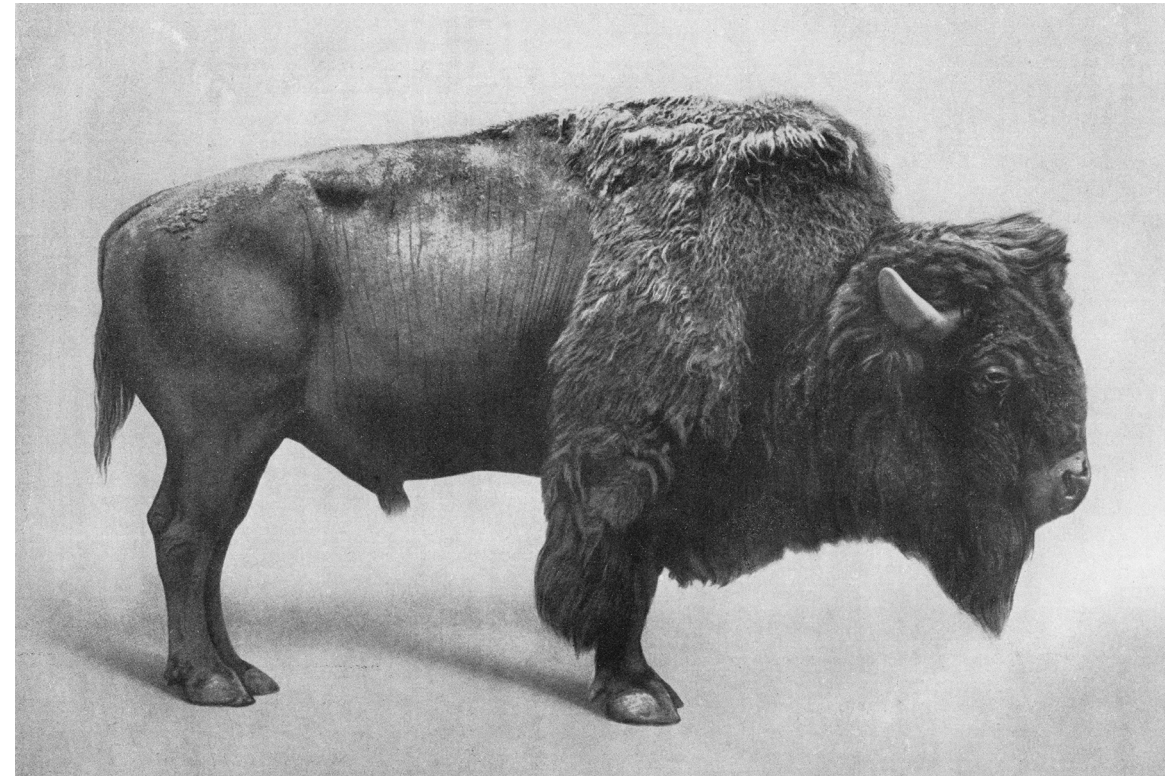
Given the range of his, it would be best to say, topics, and his fascination with imaging already existing images from book illustrations, film posters, the fascination also with the way of looking: the set-up of the image and awareness of its destination and so forth, his work was seen to epitomise strong currents which were emerging from the Academy at that time (between 2000-2006), and both he and his contemporaries were critically treated in the Dutch context as 'conceptualists'.

The complex tensions between landscape, nature and objects are held together through works that insist on their own artefactual existence; the examples are *Three Trees*, *Fabeln*, and *Habseligkeiten*, with its precise interest in ornament, repetition and optical illusion. Rather than thinking of the artist as moving from one set of topics or thematic to another, thus marking some idea of 'progress', it is better to see how the various tendencies already shown in his early work gain traction and become more intensely focused as his range of experience and life lived goes on. In one sense there is a line forward in terms of lived directionality, and yet in another there are circles of repetition that turn and turn about like an expanding spiral.

But no amount of intellectual rigour can keep the image made from its own object status, its life literally, as a thing in the very *Nachleben* of reception, and every reception of an image had to leave open the openness it engendered. In a very frank avowal of intention and also of freedom from a single label, for example 'conceptual artist', Hoffmann created both ambivalence and persistent ambiguity in his work. He did not view himself as anything or anyone other than a working artist who engaged with the medium of the photographic and not only as an end in itself.

The choice of a new photographic image, the creation of another object, of something already made, a photograph of a photograph, points on one hand to an acknowledgement of his art inspired by traditions, and on the other to a double gesture towards his position with regard to image making. He accepted 'ready-made' work, and indicated in that choice his awareness of the complex interplay between the enabling object and the simulations and illusions the play of subject and object involved.

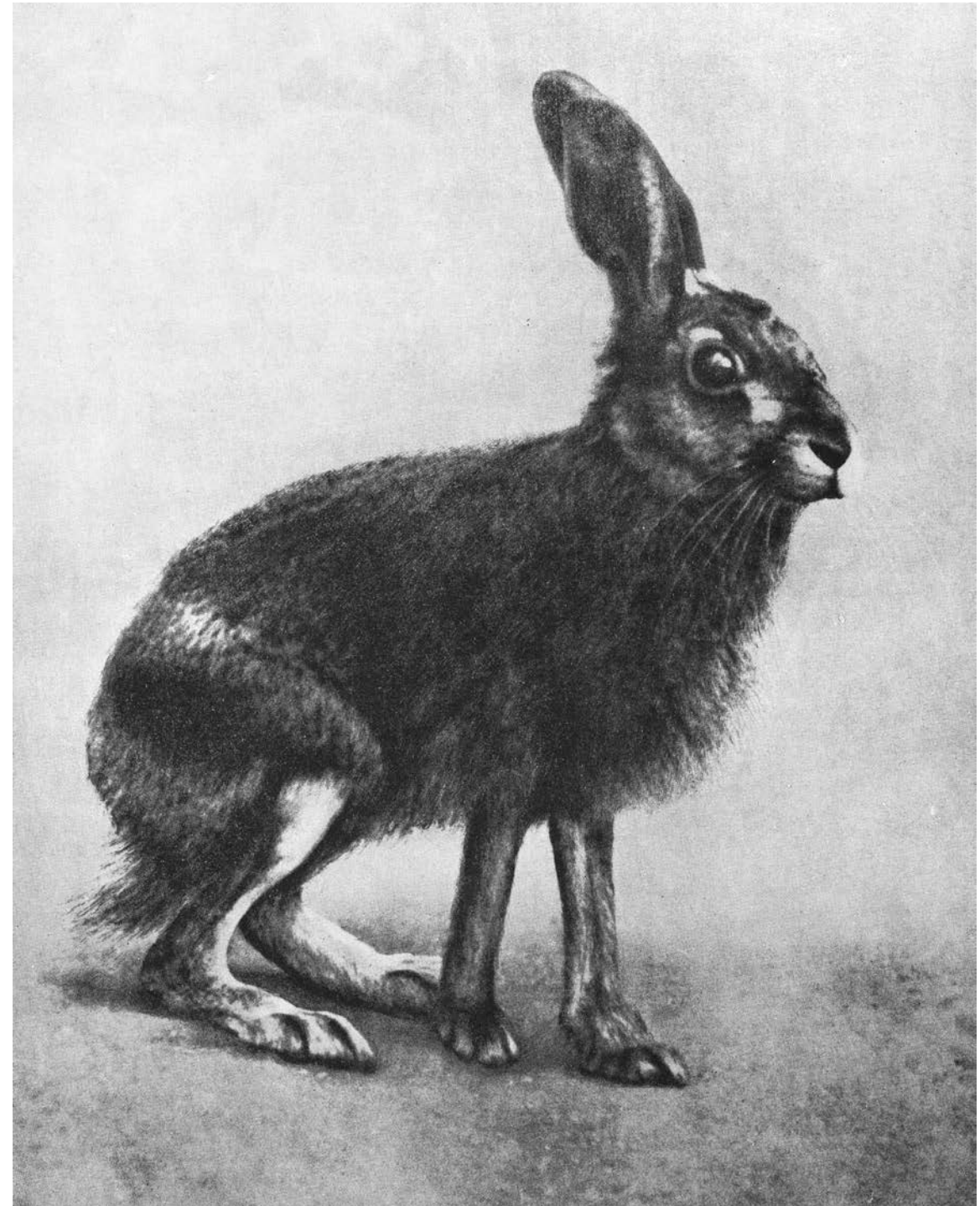
He also understood that photography abandons an image to its own fate, and restores the objective as intensely contingent. In whatever way illusions are orchestrated, the photographic object must endure its existence as surface, and as carrier of the visible, which can include darkness and light. The image of the hare and bison were both in black and white. In one of the tendencies his commitment to the story, or fabel, can be seen. There are inevitable symbolic resonances; one could, for example, point to two explicit examples of artists working in the Netherlands at the time of his graduation, namely Joseph Semah and Hilarius Hofstede.



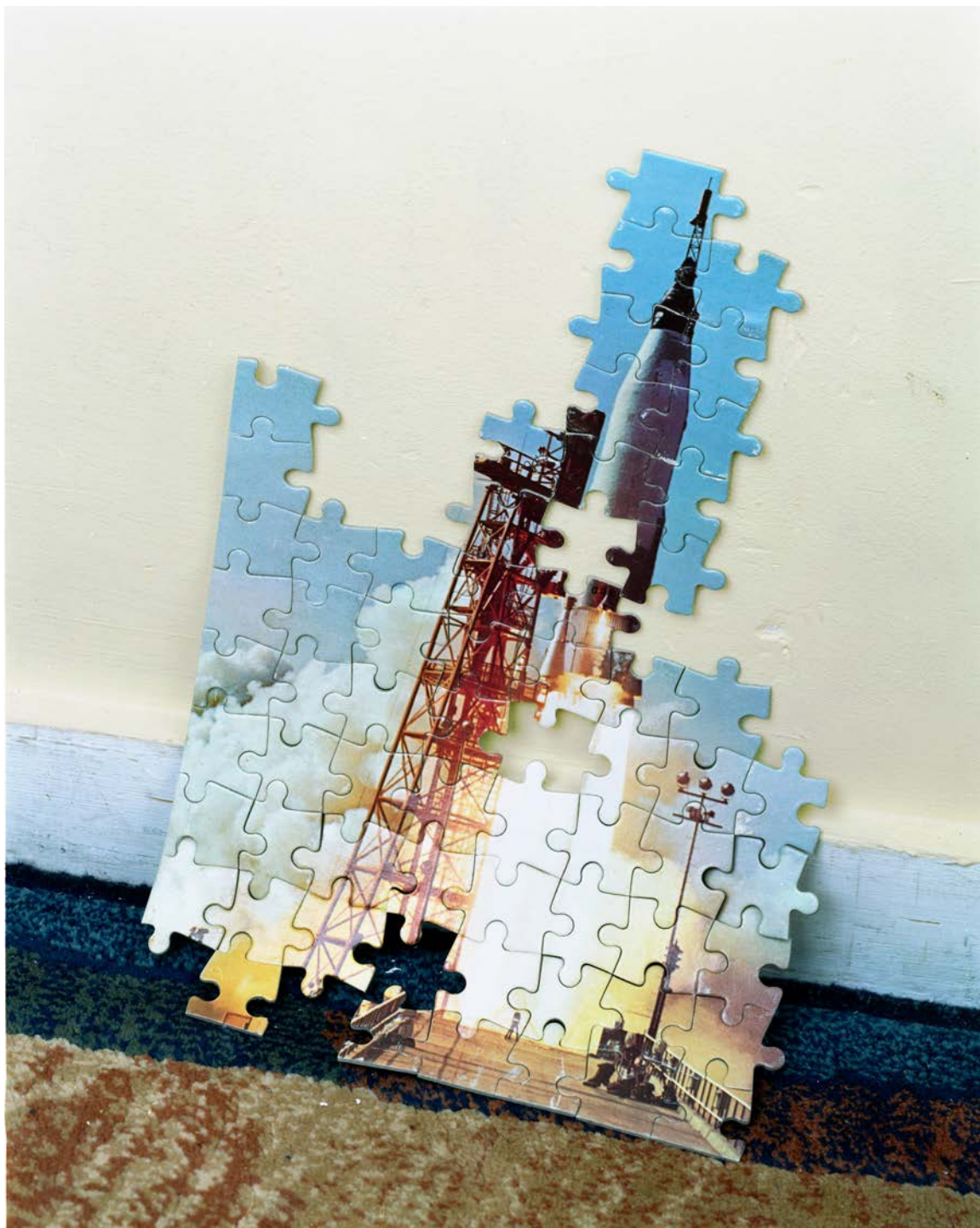
Fabeln; Bison, black and white pigment print, 120 x 90 cm, 2006

The image pair also pointed to a subtle iconographical source, which in the case of the hare was directly taken up by the artist Joseph Semah, who has in his work explored the relationship of the hare and persecution in the Diaspora. The bison was deployed as a powerful image in the major project initiated by the Dutch artist Hilarius Hofstede, under the title *The Bison Caravan*, which has resulted in major group shows on this single theme in Marseille, Mali, Brazil and Amsterdam. Hoffmann contributed to the show with his poetic and memorable image, during the *Tierrafino* hosting of the caravan in Amsterdam (2014).

Hoffmann was a student who acknowledged the work of his teachers, and especially that of Johannes Schwartz, part of whose teaching emerged directly from his own practise and was concerned with unusual aspects of the neglected everyday, and the high-end cultural locations such as museums as a setting for art and the viewing of art; his projects ranging from shepherds huts, garden sheds to viewing Vermeer at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. One could certainly speak of a search for 'profane illumination', as defined by Walter Benjamin in his essay on Surrealism. The strong optical obsession within the Dutch tradition was often engaged in releasing a beauty from the banal, of bringing light out of darkness. The highly wrought consideration of process and the history of photography exhibited a strong paradox, that of purity and a kind of innocence in the creation of the new object, itself not a reference to something total, but another fragment another salvaging of appearance.



Fabeln; Hare, black and white pigment print, 120 x 90 cm, 2006



Puzzle, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2005



Blocks, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2005



Le Cinquième Mur, C-print, 80 x 64 cm, 2014

With his return to study in Jerusalem, Hoffmann would expand his range of activities and engage much more directly with theoretical concerns and with himself. The return to Israel also granted him new opportunities; with a studio of his own, a situation emerged where he could invite visits and criticism from a range of highly engaged teachers, among whom Nahum Tevet, Raphael Zagury-Orly, Sarit Shapira and Moshe Ninio.

Students learn as much from each other as from their best teachers, who teach students mostly how to learn. The intellectual atmosphere and encouragement to advance thinking and making together was for Hoffmann an exciting intensification of what he had already attained in Amsterdam, and the further impetus of renewing his relation to speaking Modern Hebrew and expanding his horizons. Tel Aviv as a dynamic and welcoming environment also gave him contact with collectors and curators, who in this period had replaced the 'critic' in terms of setting the direction of art and exhibition goals. Artists increasingly needed to develop their own critical skills, the courage to 'kill their darlings' in order to avoid having works preferred by the collector beginning to dominate the direction of their output. It was not an easy balancing act.

Hoffmann has taken the various dilemmas that have haunted the debates around photography and art, the relation of reality and the image subjective/objective distinction, and transformed and shape-shifted them to the places of surplus and imaginary conversation with other artists and the photographic tradition, leading to new creations of sculptural and architectural elements that challenge one to think about his precise and very sensitive registration of the intense information that is light and of objects that increasingly assemble as things. He stages a masterly *hey presto* of the various dichotomies in manifestations which he construes inevitably as a form of punctuated expression and also as a form of self-disappearance and movement to impersonality.

In one sense the tracking of Hoffmann indicates an artist of settled convictions and patient and systematic searching through photography for rest, silence, the appearance of things, surfaces, shine and lustre. It is a purity and innocence won with the most artificial and self-conscious means, a kind of freshness that one finds in the early greens of Spring. It is an innocence born of great knowledge, and not of an unknowing ignorance, and it is a knowledge that knows so much of the random and limits that it seeks nothing more than to be part of that flow: it is the precariousness of the world.

In some of his earliest photographs the human is placed in an isolation of space, where the bright mind of the creator seems to whisper in the ear of the viewer, and the word is passed on from one person to the next, or a profound trace actually stops pointing to some absence which must be pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle and bestows ineluctably a capacity to call to mind the urgent reality of limits of the human condition, because it is finite. One may refer to his image of the child's cradle. That image is also one from 2005, and has had great resonance for his own artistic struggles. There is no tumult, nor a heart-rending cry. The shelter of the new-born and its confining pen, is a stark silent object that points to the mystery of how we come into the world, linger and one day leave.



The Schnoz, C-print, 125 x 100 cm, 2010



Blackbox, black and white pigment print, 35,5 x 28 cm, 2005

The camera obscura and the coffin are fatally conjugated in this remarkable apposition in naming and image. Indeed his idea of the 'black box' as the complete event of record and container of information would indicate to him a new declination of the past/future in different unexpected tenses and moods, a way of making image and word, thought and action more personal even as it became something whose efficacy and quality was held in the statement, if asked about work: 'heaven knows.

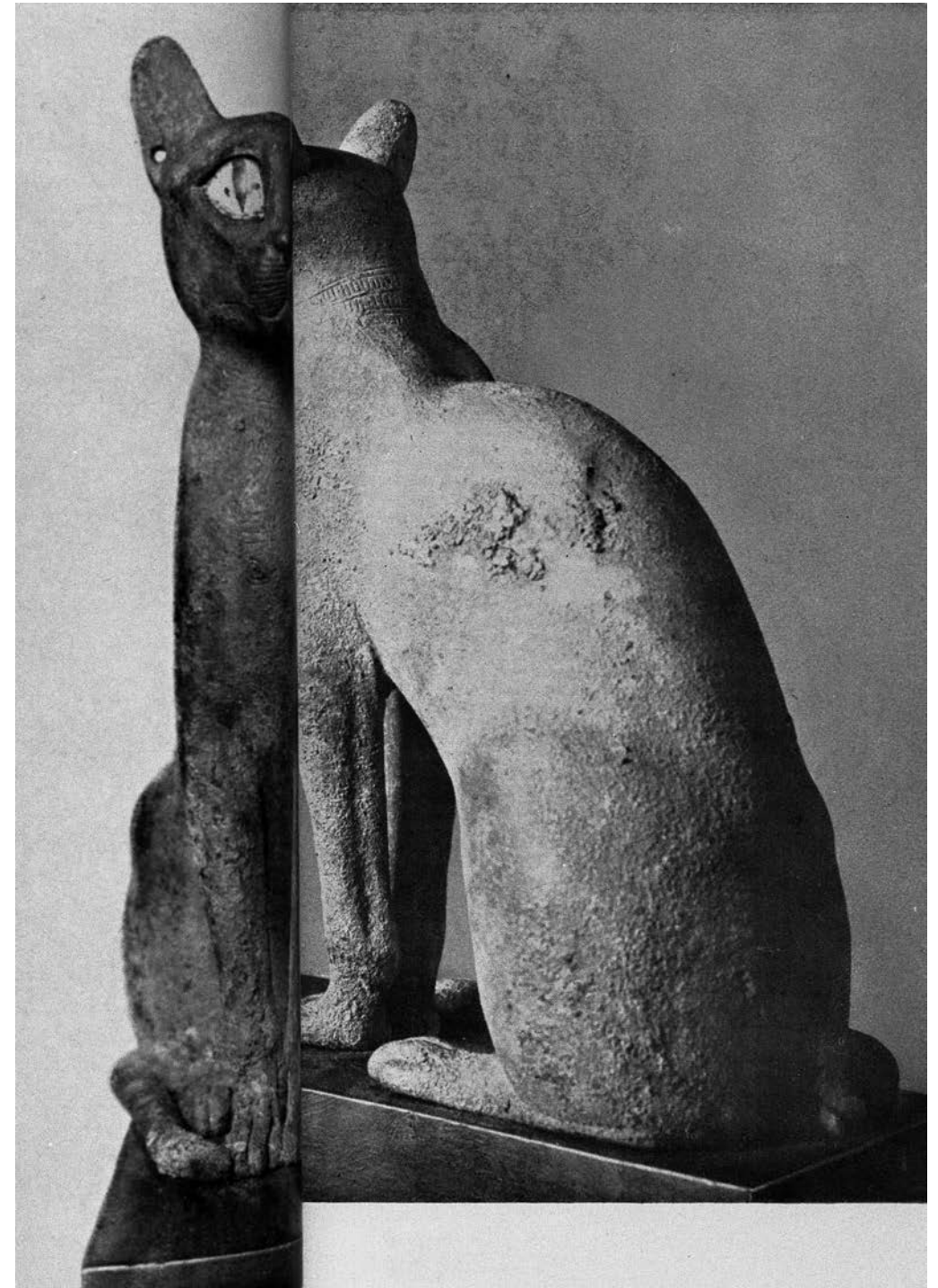
'The 'black box' from 2005 is the presage of much that is to come. An image has held time in a form of luminous appearance, and risks what cannot be said. The instant holds on to its own vanishing point and keeps appearance safe, in some sense images are the capture of other images seen as scintillations of the object, a kind of endless fata morgana where the vibration of energy generates in the subject the capture of a capture, and thus captured; it is we who are captivated.

The image is equally that of a little black box surmounted by a draped curtain whose kink gives the impression of a Baroque baldacchino, and it forestalls the direction of memory because it joins it directly to the dream, as image. Hoffmann is also alluding to the daguerreotype, and to a time when image making was literally slower. Thanks to the extraordinary work of David Hockney such preoccupation suddenly, and almost simultaneously, seemed less against the contemporary grain than might otherwise have been the case. Artists were now fully engaged with photography and re-thinking the practice of artists and the relation of art to techne in a very direct way.

One can say that the speed of capture of an image from the complex emanation of the material world is a matter of persuasive archaeology. It is no accident that the artist is directly interested in the same period of his work with archaeological sites and geological stratifications; one can mention his photographs of the Negev desert and the direct focus on archaeological finds on which he concentrates. Thus a struggle takes place between a technical apparatus that slowly develops and composes the image with that of a perception of the moment given in, for example, flash photography. The struggle is not between a version of greater or lesser representational realism, of art and photography; rather the tool and the moment are both saturated in a perceptual composing which is a capture as eruption into image.

Perception too is layered, and instead of trying simply to assemble Gedächtnisbilder (memory images), the interrogation of the very nature of layering in the strata of things as their concretion and assemblage of image moving at speed, the perceptual layer coincides and finds the moment of image which creates rest and silence, which gathers the illusions and allows one pause.

There are complex illusions in such 'eidolapoesis' that puzzled Walter Benjamin in his theory of the 'dialectical image', which is worth dwelling on for a moment. In the Arcades Project (Das Passagen-Werk), Benjamin has as outlined in his various exposés a section on photography, which for the most part interrogates and cites approvingly the then unpublished manuscript of Gisèle Freund on photography and society and points to the complex way in which the speed of the image can erupt as the now moment of the historical.



Katze, black and white pigment print, 34 x 24 cm, 2007

The way of viewing the image and material resonance inevitably makes one think that it seems as if the image is indeed formed, or moulded by time and this makes of it an archaeological moment. In some way one can also say time is the speeding image itself. After all the speedy image being 'expurgated' from the object is also perceived without its past or the void spaces it creates, and is thus, as it were, deliberately stratified: time is the speeding of the image itself. Here the perceptual is action at a nearness to the image, being itself as much image – degree zero – as what is said to be of the object. But the realm of the object is not neutral, nor indeed that of things.

In Benjamin there is a form of strange distribution of animistic thinking, a magic on one hand that has been lost because of means of reproducibility, and on the other hand which he insists stays in objects in different ways, so that the ghostly life of the early photographic images, which have longer exposure time, somehow opens up a realm of phantom-like and uncanny presence where one can say 'things look'. It may be that this universal perception can be traced to the work of Leibniz, and inevitably one finds that all distinctions between the animate and the inanimate are of infinitely subtle gradation if they can be maintained at all.



Glass on Glass, C-print, 50 x 40 cm, 2012



An Unkown Collection, C-print, 125 x 100 cm, 2010



Bilder Fleck, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2011



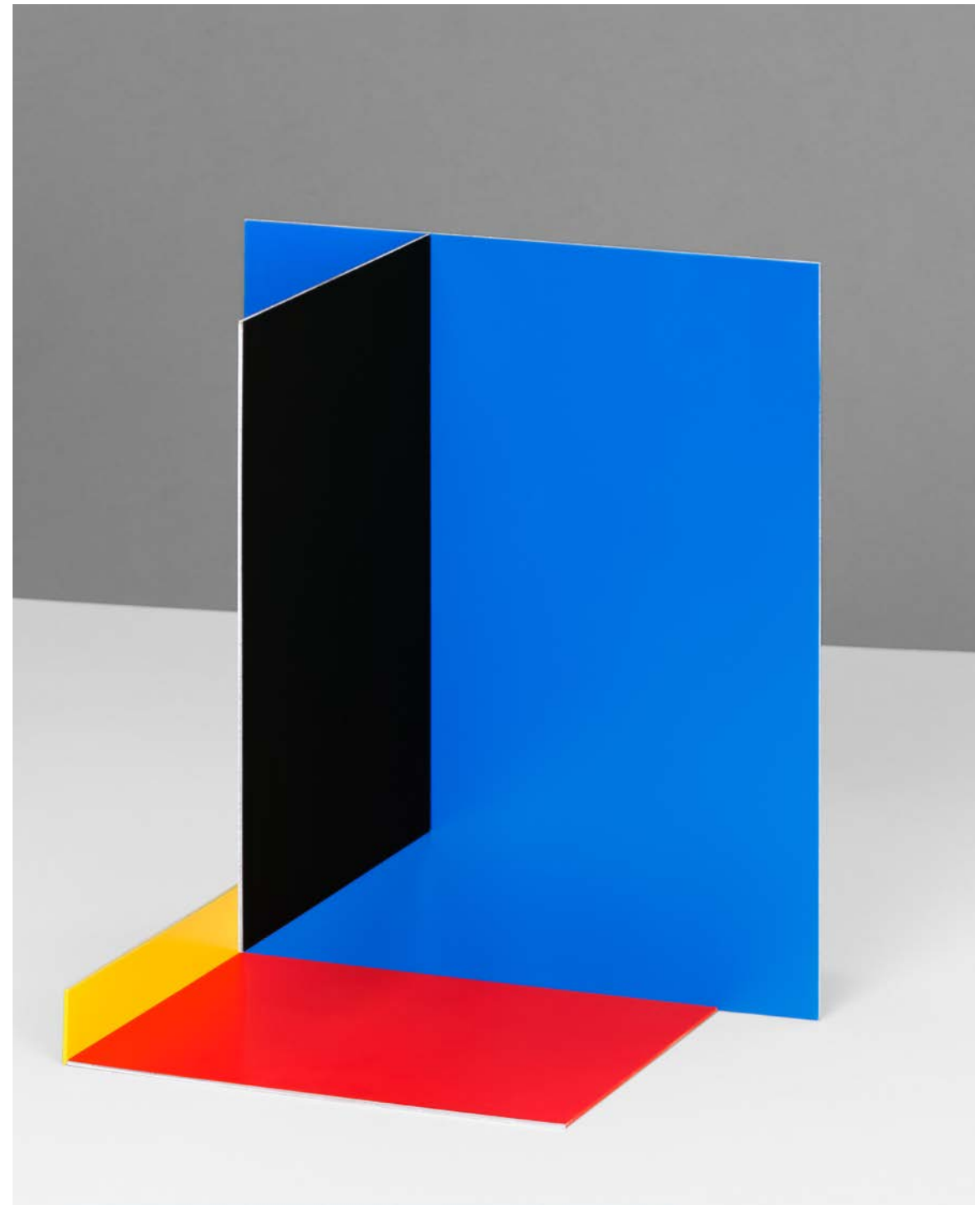
Planes, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2008



Exhumed Arrangement #3, C-print, 80 x 60 cm, 2009

In one image of a mound in the Negev, actually the groundwork done at the beginning of a building project which are called 'pillars' and a temporary recording of depth tracks, entitled *Exhumed Arrangements* (2009), Hoffmann finds in the travail of the earth itself structure and explosion simultaneously, which points to his own fascination with the land of his birth, ever old/ever new. This jutting up out of the earth resembles the way in which time past also juts into the present and explodes an image, which is memory and present simultaneously. It is the shock of the classical and the deep issue of modernity combined: how the past and the present are a future constellation.

Even in the desert the earth is fecund. It is really in the notion of composing and de-composing process and production via technique that Hoffmann finds the impetus for his way of layering and converting realities, so out of a particular optical treatment the play of light and shadow, as viewed, becomes a crystalline source for a new sense of space and register of forms. In the previous year, as with the graduation show, one finds a threefold prong of direction with the works *Stripes*, *Planes*, and *Stones of Remembrance*, the latter being the indication of the appearance of a *Gedächtnisbild*, so called, and within the cultural injunction 'Remember', which is the tradition that creates itself in its own activity.



Incipient Type #6, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2016



Incipient Type #5, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2016

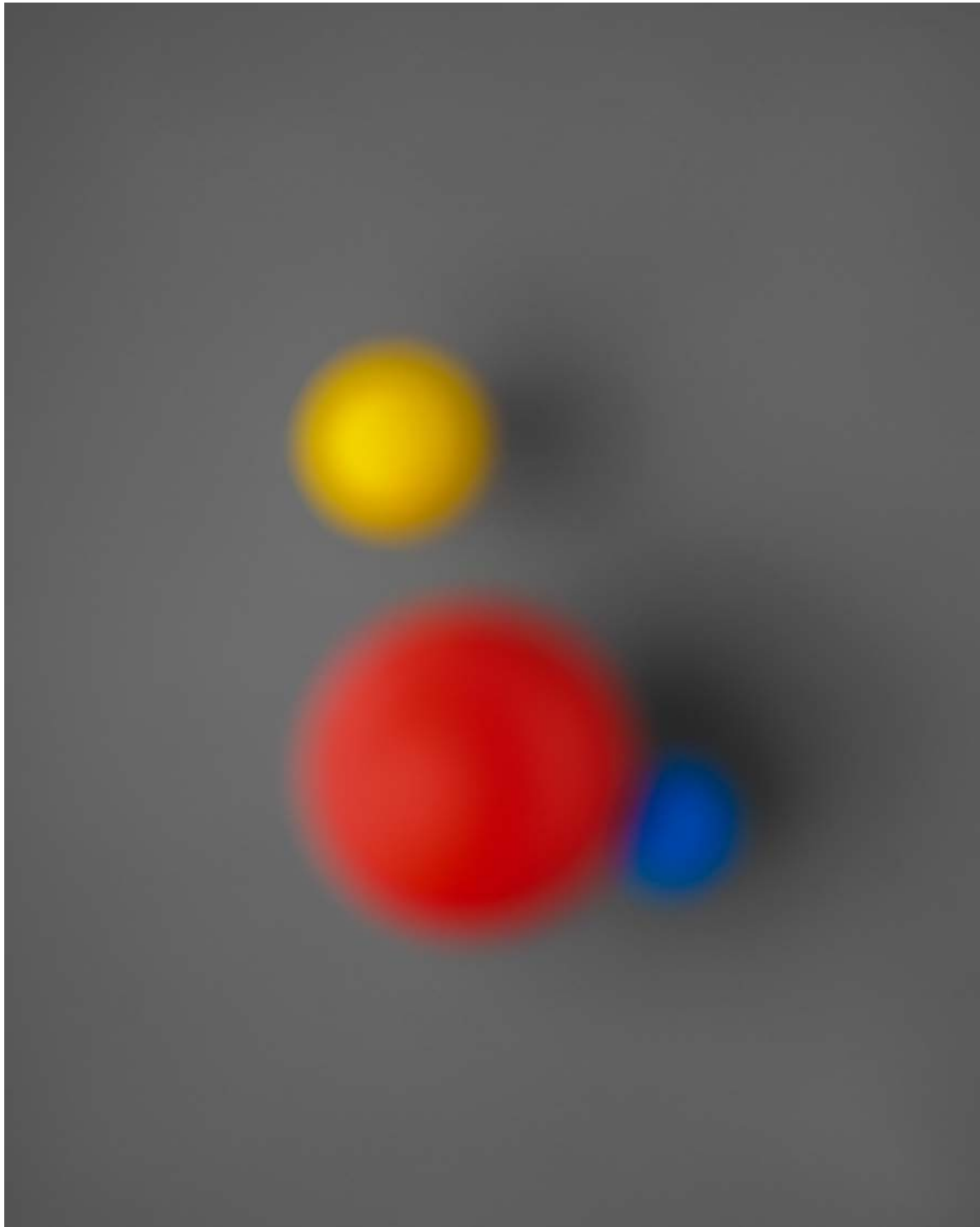
In Benjamin's writing this process of layering, the relation of the photographic and the archaeological, the creator of images can be specifically seen in section Y of the *Arcades Project*, where a fundamental encounter is given as the interest one has in early photographs, that of machine and man ([Y4a, 3], p. 678) Nadar reproduces the Balzacian theory of the daguerreotype which in turn derives from the Democritean theory of the eidola ([Y2a,1,] p. 674). Benjamin has made a purposeful connection, but denies that Nadar was aware of the complex provenance of Balzac's account of the daguerreotype. The response of Nadar to Balzac may be seen in a passage from Nadar's 1899 'Quand j'étais photographe'. There Nadar also shows how a certain aporia was reached in his communication with Balzac, since he treats of the daguerreotype as that which layers. Nadar says that Balzac's theory is that every body in nature is composed of a series of spectres, in infinitely superimposed strata, foliated in infinitesimal foils. There is loss in transmission of some of the spectral, and Nadar wonders if there is then some gain through the photographic process itself. What becomes clear is that image generates image, and that the notion of eidola is tied to perceptual activity as much as to atomic movement, or object fulguration.

There is a further consequence in that the notion of a bare particular, which is given as the *singulum tantum*, also raises the issue of matter as being capable of thinking, since the way images are generated means we are even in consciousness the play of image grasped as a temporal concreteness and directed in certain ways. Such a radical materialism may lie close to the idea of Benjamin that the regime of the visible is not about the sighted alone, but belongs as much to the irradiation of image on image from atomic activity.

Benjamin cites a passage from Balzac's cousin Pons: 'If we consider only the practical side of divination, then to believe that previous events in a man's life ... can be directly represented by the cards he shuffles and cuts (...) is to believe the absurd (...) If anyone had come and told Napoleon that a man or a building is incessantly, and at all hours, represented by an image in the atmosphere, that all existing objects have there a kind of spectre which can be captured and perceived, he would have consigned him to Charenton as a lunatic.'



Circles of Confusion; Blue, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2015



Arbitrary Formation #02, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2014

'In Benjamin the different meditations on children's books, especially those called trick books, or about the phantasm of the collector in relation to an object which is, literally, his whole world, the accumulation of kitsch bric-à-brac that was intensified by the phenomenon of luxury capitalist accumulation, where objects were just pell-mell and clamouring for attention, literally overpowering the subject in the incessant demand for the 'new' of fashion, the phenomenon of mass production, of vulgarity and cheapness that seemed like a carousel in a Luna Park, heralded the collapse of the subject and the deadly impoverishment of human experience, and in his analysis displayed the true dilemma that emerged from the onslaught of the capitalist dream market.

Carl Einstein, in his novella *Bebuquin*, sees the modern technology of electrical lighting as leading to intense optical fragmentation and a tripping, hallucinative pressure on the senses. Benjamin has a didactic mission, and an agenda for revolution, that has to do with the very way one needs to break with the giving oneself totally to the commodity – which in a powerful metaphor is the whoring of things as a fatuous empathy. The problem of the loss of experience, its poverty, and the elimination of the human sensorium, made film the new art of the masses, deployed for distraction and even the denigration of the power of the image.

Imagining one's own space of things, challenging through perceptual action the very appearance of things, and objects, would be a necessary emancipatory goal of artistic life. Touching and seeing the haptic and the optical, needed to be bridged, in a way that a form of touch was a real perceptual gain. We still need to think much more closely about what Benjamin meant when he remarked 'old photographs not old drawings have a ghostly aspect' (Passagen Werk [K2a-1], p.393). The idea of the gaze that rests on things, mentioned by Proust, or the notion that within the very realm of the visible looking exists throughout, thus the concept of a thing 'looking back' as the gaze is returned, or of the objectification of the sense of being looked at, where one is somehow 'petrified' belongs to the real way in which the gaze is given to the realm of the 'fascinating', and this fascination can have deadly and violent consequences in the capture of things. There is no innocent look, there is no possibility of complete transparency that does not simply become invisible. Struggling to see in more dimensions requires the further deployment of illusions and not their unmasking; they have to be activated to the last cry, before some real clearing and truth of appearance can come into being, and it is with finding that clearing that Hoffmann is most vividly concerned. It is the open space where the truth and the real occurs.

A question arises in considering the problem of the object which is germane to Hoffmann's explorations, from landscape views that are divided by a tree or a stark red column, of a set-up of a still life which uses repetition as the idea of mirroring displaced from the task rendering a 'real', of assemblages which risk every kind of strangeness in the way archaeologists have to look increasingly at the culturally produced artefact and its exhibition, and think, and in the example of small perfume containers found in graves as status deposits, or technically accomplished fine ware, an offering to the divinity, a deposition with the dead, the whole after-life of which the explorer becomes a part.



Gambit #2, C-print, 80 x 64 cm, 2012



A Model of a Model: Orrery #1, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2014

There is no object in general, the field between production and consumption as a social fact entails meanings which create meaning, and in some cases through concentration and abstraction an object that is both sign and signified, which can only be understood adequately in terms of the ritual practises that adhere to it. In what has been called the new archaeology, a sophisticating of view on the status of cultural object.

Benjamin shared with Agatha Christie the conviction that archaeology and the detective shared common goals. In the 19th century archaeology in German speaking lands became the high prestige activity for defining education and culture. It was always a matter of traces and induction, processes of relations indicated that the subjectivity of the searcher is the form of the mute object, in the act of interpretation. Things are related to things, and objects to other objects; they are internal relations and contextual through and through. There is no natural, given, unit for data; things are chosen, assembled and re-contextualised.

It is necessary to try and grasp the work in Tel Aviv as it also indicates the fruit of Hoffmann's more theoretically oriented studies in the Bezalel and his 'coming of age' as an artist with a solo exhibition in Tempo Rubato gallery the same year. He had been awarded the Young Artist Award in 2013 from the Israel Ministry of Culture, and was a recipient of funding from the Mondriaan Fund in the Netherlands (2007). As an artist he had both the independence and circumstances to explore his own world in more and more detail. A remarkable work, *Model on Model: Orrery*, shown in New York at this time, is the image that has prepared for the work he has so steadfastly pursued in Aix, and is especially evident in the Fondation Vasarely show.

The curator of the show *Objektiv*, who also supplied an essay, emphasised the image/perception dichotomy for the artist working with photography. Photography in Hoffmann is abstract in the sense that there is always a reference to the medium as a means to study reality and as a vehicle of research at the same time. The question in the encounter between Albers and Hoffmann is observation with, and not of and through. Thus the question 'how does one see with a square?' Both the issue of image making and the question of point of view is a constant in his explorations. This still remains moot when we turn to consider the individual exhibition responses.

In Aix then we find the artist at work on three different sites, and twice in response to important artistic legacies and to the land of his birth. It remains to be shown how he has connected his previous directions in this rich context of involvements, places of devoted homage and highly independent creation. The artist has literally taken on the major project of responding to the significance of the whole development of 'modernity', as much a phenomenon of artistic life and work in Provence, as in Paris, Vienna, Moscow.



l'Atelier vu à travers un Miroir, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2017



l'Atelier vu à travers un Miroir, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2017

No one who visits Aix can fail to be aware of the almost cultic presence of Paul Cezanne, and the remarkable trek of tens of thousands of people from all over the world making their way to visit his atelier, and taking time to view Mont Sainte-Victoire from the vantage points he was known to have used, which introduces the search for connection with the past and the physical significance of place to memory. A singular locus, even of a life passed, seems to hold onto atmosphere and presence which are like a subtle aether.

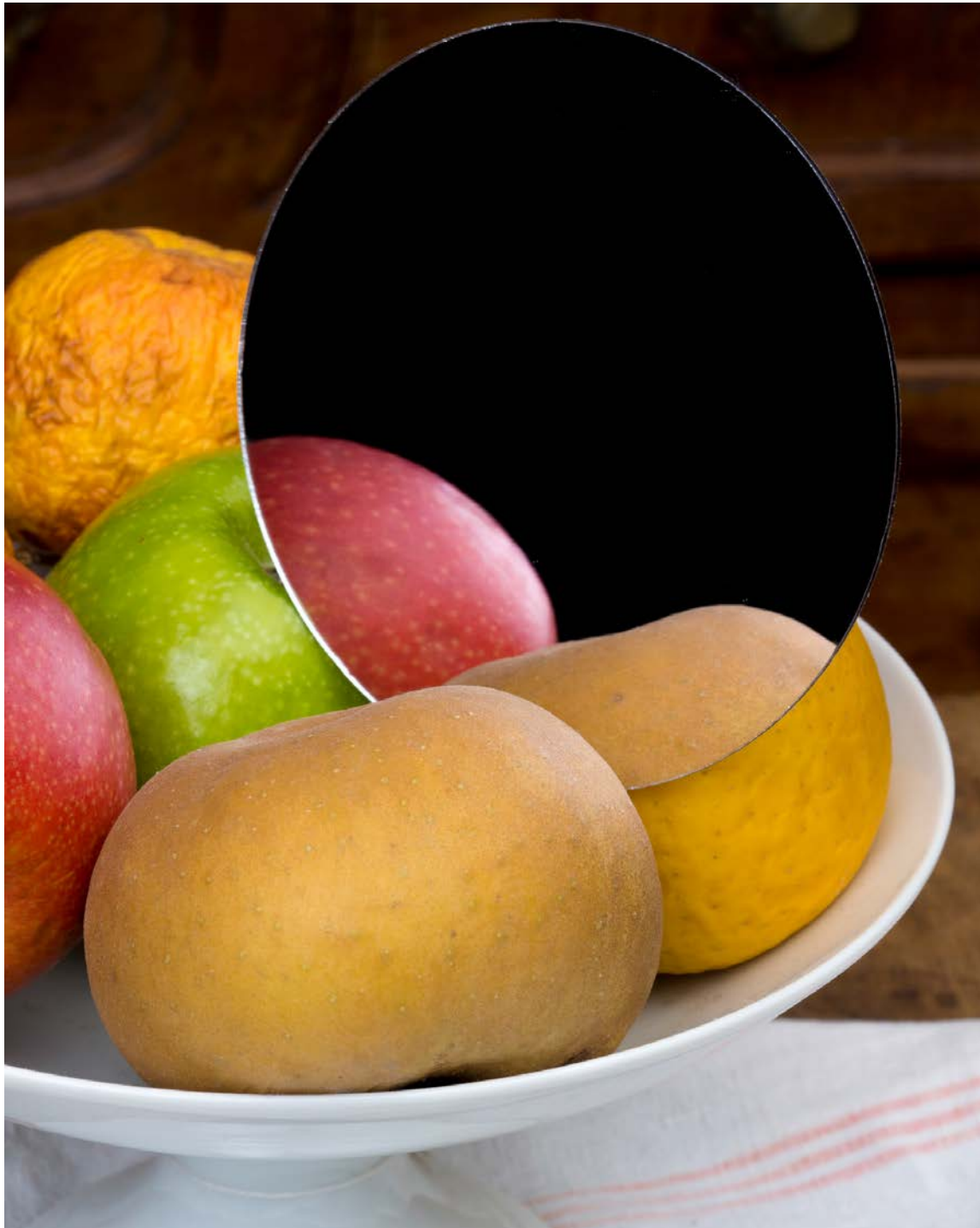
In a very traditional sense Cezanne has become the genius loci, the kind of tutelary figure who guards and keeps the sense of place, protects the land, gives grace and charm, wards against malign influences.

Even in the age of digital fabrication and 3D printing, the importance to artists of a studio and an atelier is, or has not been, really diminished. It is well established that Cezanne's primary reason for having the atelier built was a need for greater solitude. His hermetical temperament was intensified by his physical condition exacerbated from diabetes, further one may mention his devout Catholicism, and what was effectively a compelling need for distance from his immediate family. The need for a returning home haunts his last great search through the motif of the mountain. It is also a search to find the inner emotional state commensurate with the greatest distance, which is given in the flat surface of the patchwork of colour and through the optical illusion that creates a sense of depth. It is still always inwardness, in the weave and warp of surface in colour and the sense to which no measure could be commensurate, it is the in of being in love, not of being in a contained space: it is the overpowering, thus the sublime, as experienced from the top of Mont Ventoux, on which Petrarch was the first to report (1336). So Cezanne finds the unlimited intimacy of his own emotions in the repetition of his motif and the distances which are the product of human desire as much as any metric; the longing for home is the last journey.

In the atelier today there remains some books, of which a volume of Virgil is a potent reminder of the elegiac mood so central to the development of the pastoral genre, to which Cezanne was especially sensitive, as the fugitive evanescence of his motifs, their disappearing through the transparency in many of his watercolours indicates an evocation to the imagination as the fleeting, disappearance of the world at the day's end when shepherds wearily wend their way homewards with their bleating, sated flocks. Rather than mourning the lost object, the object as slipping away, and the evacuation of solid forms, gives one a necessary assurance that 'all things shall pass'. It is tragic wisdom and at the same time an affirmation of the beauty and fragility of human life, as place, as history, as constantly lingering and leaving.

It became of enormous interest to Hoffmann not only to discover Aix and the 'other side' of the Mediterranean but to discover the intense research and ferocious ambition which animated Cezanne's life, captured in the pithy formula 'to re-do Poussin after nature', nature which for him was his native place, Aix and surroundings, that inspired his deepest feelings.

There is in his attachment a solitary devotion and a sense of a search for the divine, to keep saying what is not sayable, to keep seeing what is not visible, until spoken, until seen. There is much evidence to show how engaged he was with the study of optical phenomena. It involved radical choices, and the kind of abrasion of the tradition which ultimately is needed to renew it. Cezanne challenged the tradition of viewing the object via the system of perspective, or a single view point. In learning of his work, one must also learn about his perception and the various forms of opposition his art ineluctably followed.



Pomme des Cézanne, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2017

As a young man he had been advised to abandon his 'provincialism' and go to Paris; in old age he would delight to think he 'could astonish Paris with an apple'. Humility and high resolve of ambition met constantly in his character.

Recent research has focused on Cézanne's awareness of binocular vision and his interest in stereoscopy, and there is still challenging scientific debate about such phenomena, the question remaining as to what metric is relevant for visual sensation.

There is also the impact of reading: Cézanne's awareness of Berkeley's theory of vision deserves much fuller study. The encounter of man and machine can be tracked, via Leeuwenhoek, to Robert Hooke's published microscopical plates, *Micrographia* (1665). William Molyneux visited Leeuwenhoek in Delft, to obtain some of his small microscopes and find out more about the manufacturing process. Molyneux's work on vision in the *Philosophical Transactions* during the first years of the eighteenth century, inspired directly the thinking of Berkeley, in his reflections on vision and its properties, as revolutionary as Benjamin's example of photography.



Pommes et Miroir, C-print, 70 x 56 cm and 140 x 112 cm, 2018



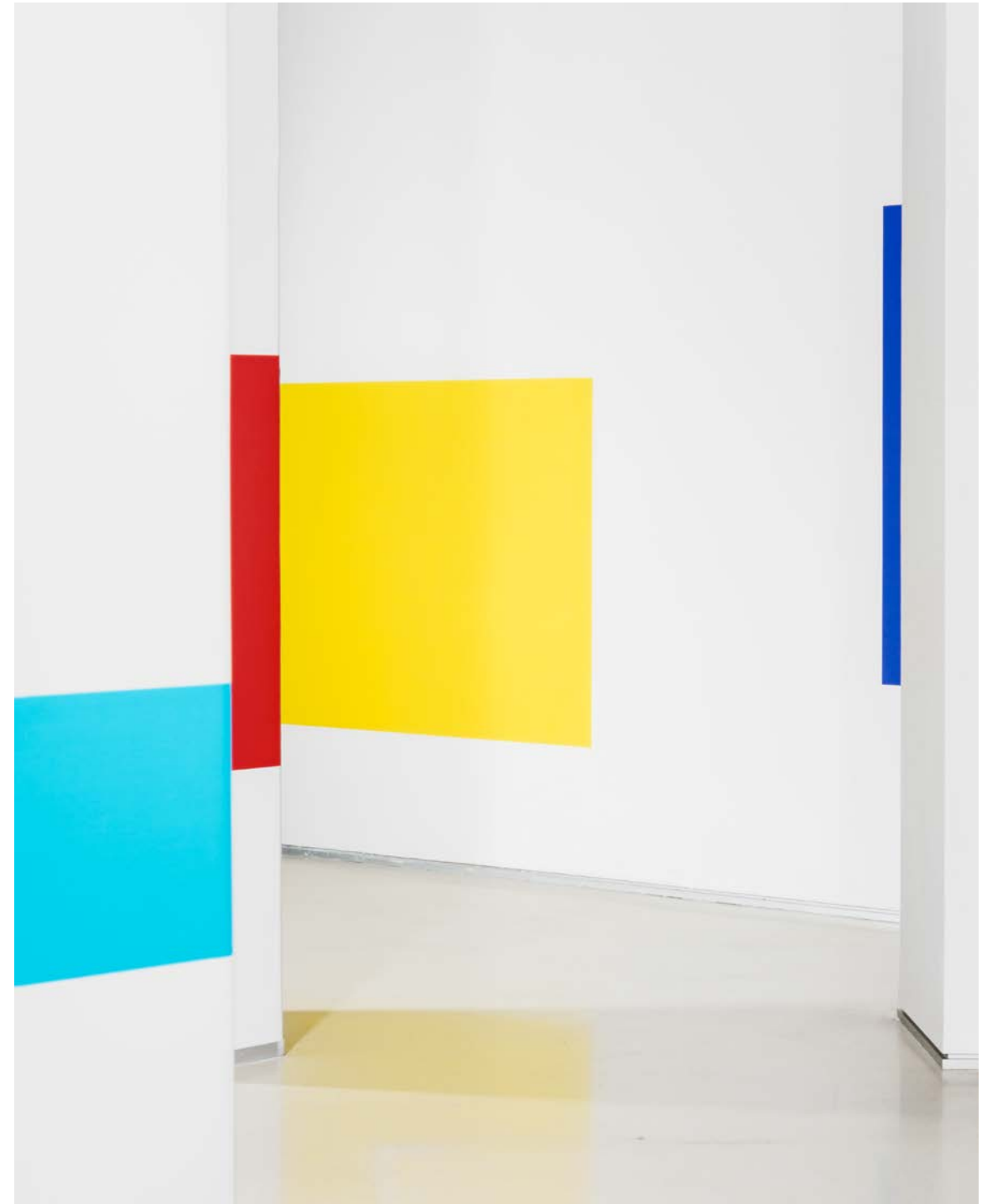
Cezanne's studio, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2017

Allowing for this it is still remarkable to chart Cezanne's insistence on simplification, seeing objects and the landscape, human figures in 'geometric terms', and how he achieves the illusion of depth by his way of working with colours. Max Raphael, in his work *Von Monet zu Picasso* (1913), was the first to suggest that in the interplay of touch and sight the artist created a 'quasi-corpus', both real and unreal simultaneously. One could point to his fascination with stereoscopy, and the use of binocular vision to lay before the viewer the clarity of 3D vision away from the 'embrangement' of the senses that Berkeley mentions, geometric rigour and simplicity, subtle optical organisation that enhanced the way each eye can find a clear focus and horizon for an image, escape from linear perspective, all creating a new possibility of seeing.

In an 1895 still life with curtain by Cezanne, one sees how the forms are pressed and slightly squashed, like gravitational tidal forces, and that the 'natural geometry' of vision leads to further conflicts and a harmony which has to be thought of as a 'dynamic resolution', where forces are held in check, and have their suggestive maximum existence in the surface. One need only compare this with *La table de la cuisine*, 1888-90, where the placement of the chair in the background shows a kind of holographic presence, with all space folding and unfolding, half natural half morphed, with the heavily foreshortened pear on the napkin in the frontal view pivoted like the fulcrum of a sea saw, or the slide on which a child delights: the jouissance of gravity and the sympathy of things.

The spheres of oranges and their warm texture are pitched and angled in such a way as to prevent what would otherwise incite vertigo. Everything has singular irradiation within the composition whole, and there is something pulsating which gives the sense of being alive, alive because of the beautiful torsion in the harmonics. Unlike abstract expressionists the push and pull is not based on colour contrast or complementaries. From both Courbet and Delacroix, Cezanne had learned of the emotion, thickness, thinness and expressive energy of colour; it always creates difference, in hue, saturation etcetera, and the artist has for the most part no control over the subsequent ways of lighting or viewing, and thus must hold the density and weight of colour in the mind and the brush stroke simultaneously, to prevents skimming on the surface. The universal of light is always in tension with the singularity of the local.

Paint is also a body, and light and colour can be shaped and twisted, moulded and felt as in the most haptic rendering of a clay sculpture. In Cezanne one sees the radicalism of a conservative revolutionary: the tension between the simplification in terms of the geometrical, and the creation of more complex forms from the study of colour and light. In his work sensation, touches of colour are modulated towards forms. In one of his last essays, John Berger pointed again to the 'black box' of Cezanne, where he sees much of the later emergence of the complex achievements of the artist intent on creating new optical truth and pictorial space.



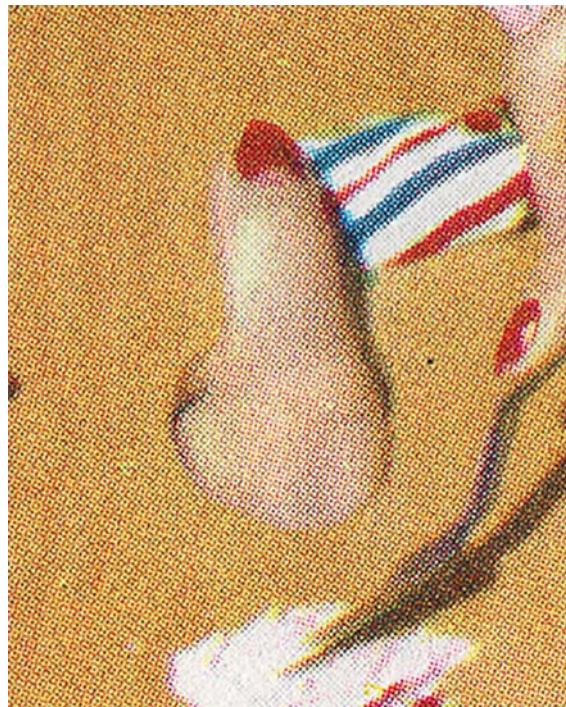
Incidental Scene, C-print, 125 x 100 cm, 2015

The mythos of Cezanne developed in his life-time, as stubborn, eccentric, bohemian, provincial, belies the reality of his intellectual commitments and the scale of his research. His lifelong wish to find a satisfying formula needs to be emphasised. It was Carl Einstein who saw in Cezanne a revolutionary because he was conservative. Indeed, it is Einstein's book *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* that seals the tradition of modernity along its main axes, and had the extraordinary fate of being used as a road map for the destruction of art in Germany during the 1930s, and after the war being used again to create a major exhibition of German art. The book opens with a long analysis of Cezanne.

Cezanne in his watercolours could dissolve his motifs as much as any impressionist, but he found forces that resisted the new technical and analytic treatment of sensation and explored the structure of the motif, and in doing so acquired a strange primitivism joined to a complex pictorial technique. It was a new attempt at classicism in changed historical conditions. The watercolours allowed the disappearance of the motif until the fundamental elements were found. Einstein argues that before Cezanne no other French artist had pushed painting towards primitivism, and the dualism one finds in him, between simple structure and pictorial sensitivity is indeed very complex. It is a dualism one finds in Poussin and Corot; a phenomenon Einstein names 'double style'. One sees the tension between the tectonic and an extreme sensitivity to colour, His technical deployment of atoms of colour, which he called 'la petite sensation', was used to arrive at a classical composition – he sought a stability and holiness in the play of impressionist technique and construction.

Having said all that, one notes the pathos of distance in Cezanne, who could view the human figure in the same way as a still life, just as a motif, the occasion of colour sensation. The jostling between sensation and structure remains essential to his double style. For Cezanne colours were modulated, not unlike the chromaticism of musical composition where tones are blended towards and away from each other, creating a tightly woven tissue of sounds, that become – and one has to mix metaphors – a becoming texture, all of which is intricately inter related and yet autonomous. Again motif and modulation is as much musical as visual.

If it was an education and surprise to meet Cezanne. literally in the 'flesh of things', one can also imagine Hoffmann's delight, coming to the artist directly for the first time, through the intricate traces of the atelier, and finding his own earlier obsessions with the perceptual, objects in their seriatim variability, even when looking like ornamental repetition. The pyramid of skulls, the plate of apples and fruit, the way the very surface of the apples acts like a crazy mirror, leads to an hallucinative carousel as the eye find its constant lights and shadows literally skating on the skin of the surface, highlights and shimmer, reflections and warm/cold tones, for all of this the artist deployed from the 1880s to almost the time of his death in 1906 a palette of 19 colours, many of them the recent product of chemical inventions.



The showing of the palette in a self-portrait of Cezanne was of direct interest to Hoffmann, as he had made the palette and the thumb through the hold an object of photographic enquiry some years earlier. This interest in the palette was further enhanced when he encountered at the Musée Granet, last December, Maurice Denis's 1906 work *La Visite à Cezanne, dit aussi Monsieur Cezanne sur le motif*. We see the artist at work, pointing or gesturing with his right hand towards the palette, in the centre of the picture an easel laden with weights to keep it stable, and in the distance the mountain. Also visitors are depicted, one behind a tree to the right with blue leaves, and on the easel a canvas with the motif clearly discernible. It is a picture of a picture being made, and a pointing to the productive secrets of the paint box and palette – the box is visible towards the top left corner. The artist Denis is also included, making his preparatory sketch of the painting, and the colour tones of the foreground echo the slight, delicate flesh tones of the mountain which juts up above the horizon line, and one contour of which is 'touched' by the edge of the canvas. The painting on the easel seems in its placement in the composition an 'equivalence' to the motif; the motif is here as much the act of painting as what is painted. All the figures in the work keep their hats on whilst conversing, looking, drawing, or expounding.

Irrespective of how materials in the atelier have been replaced, or restored, the disposition of the space can be seen from earlier photographs, and we are fortunate to have an account of a visit to the atelier in the latter days of Cezanne's life. It is the place of his final struggles, and in the report of the painters Rivière and Schnerb, who visited him in 1905, and whose account was published a year after his death in *La Grande Revue* of 25 December 1907, we have a precious confirmation of the painter's own self-understanding, expressed as they say in his melodic provincial accent, and with the elliptic and obscure utterance of a solitary man for whom all concourse is a kind of interruption. They note his sayings on drawing, colour, composition, and jumble the observations together: his horror of Beaux-Arts emphasis on drawing with a kind of anatomical exactness; correcting a bottle in one of his watercolours with his finger nail, which was defective in terms of its vertical slant, and declaring: 'Je suis un primitif...'



Installation view Apophenia as Metaphor, wood, MDF, acrylic paint, 238 x 100 x 100 cm, 2014

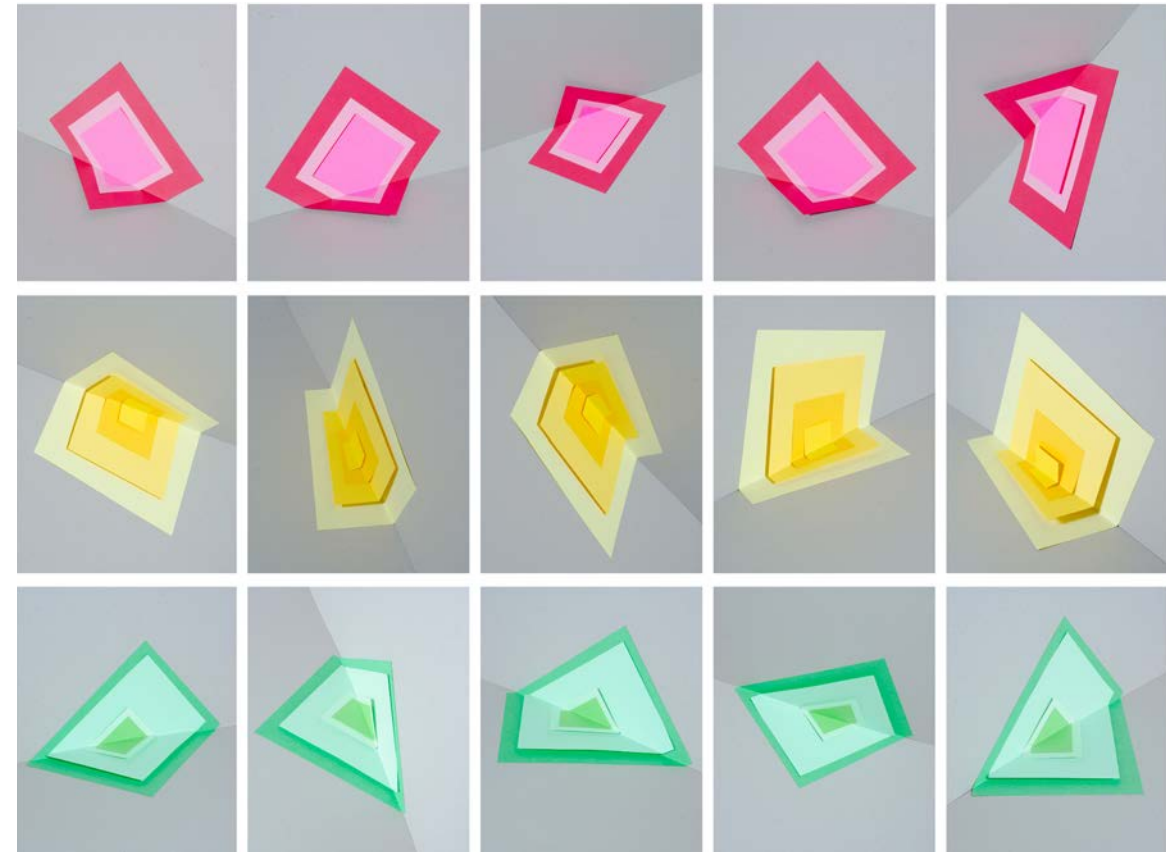


Inflection Point; Fabula, C-print, 100 x 80 cm, 2014

In a very real sense Hoffmann availed of the atelier to work with its original purpose. He responded in similar fashion to the material of the Fondation Vasarely. Here he entered a world that was already familiar to him from Albers. It was also familiar to him from the city of Tel Aviv itself, which only a few years before his first residence there, in 2004, had been declared a world heritage site, due to its 4000 Bauhaus style buildings, which were effectively contemporary with the expansion of actual building by Bauhaus teachers from the late 1920s in Weimar and Berlin. The life and work of Vasarely was also a search for a visual language directly flowing from optical and colour research, and as scholarship has shown has a direct link to both the Bauhaus and the work of Kandinsky. The clash between non-political and refined functionality would occur in all the various avatars of the early constructivist and Bauhaus concerns. The importance of photographic work can be seen in Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy.

Constructivism was developed with different directions but in its earliest, most organised forms, emerging from discussion in Moscow in the early 1920s, it rejected the ideological and religious tendencies in Kandinsky's teaching and opted for a manifesto of 'realism' in which a communist architecture and design would emerge. Moshe Ginsburg would write the key intellectual manifesto, and there is a long and resonant impact of these ideas to the contemporary scene, for example in the works of architects Hadid and Koolhaas.

It can also be noted that the annual publication of the Flechtheim Gallery, *Der Querschnitt*, was carrying Léger's manifesto on machine art, and the issue of utility as a primary concern, as well as the highly abstract work of Picabia in the stage decoration for the ballet *Relâche* – at the same date (1923 and onwards) – he exhibited his 'Optophone'; all works that are essential to the development of spectacular optical events.



A study of Josef Albers, colour photographs, 2013



From the *material archive of Victor Vasarely*, colour photograph, 2018



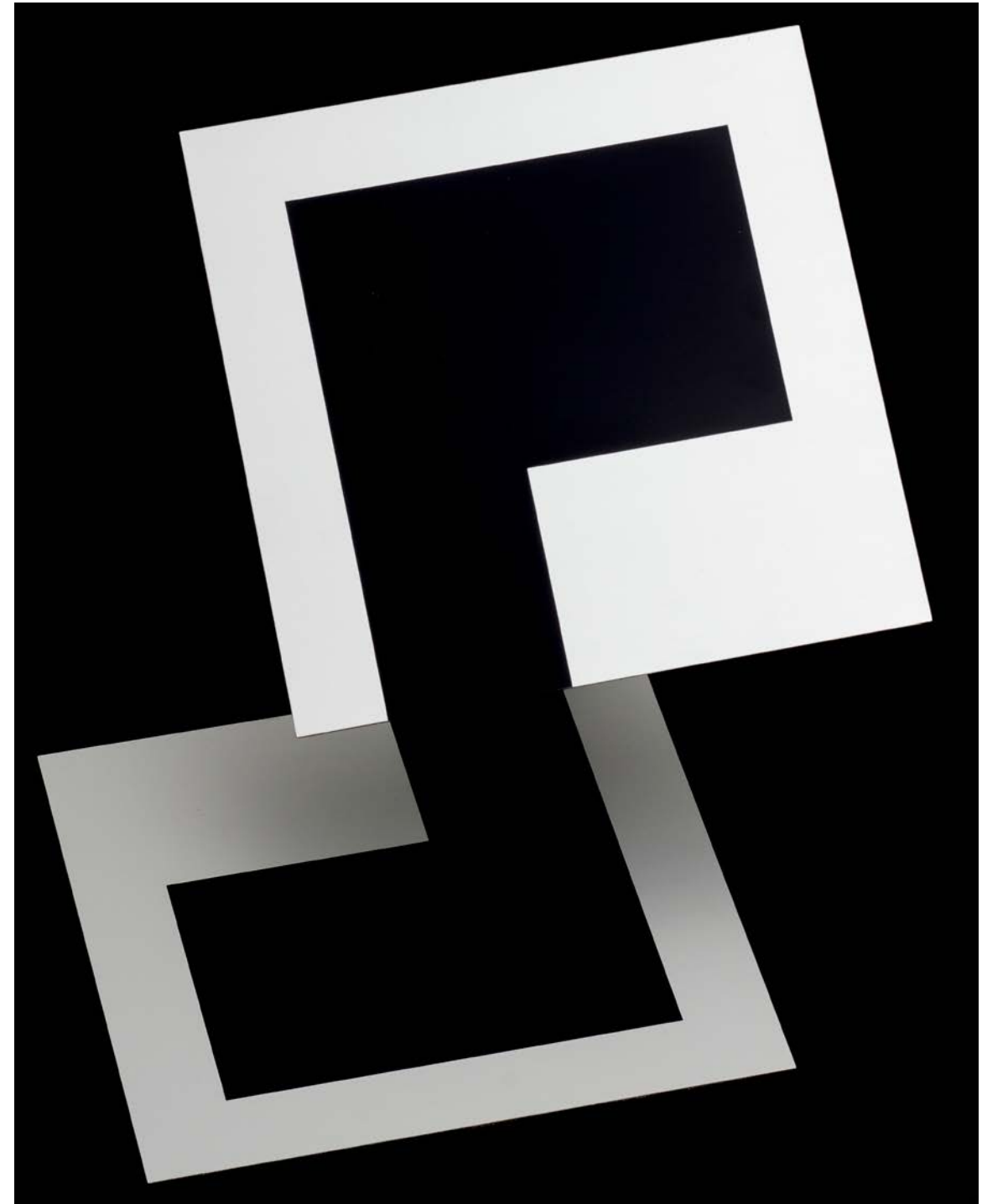
From the *material archive of Victor Vasarely*, colour photograph, 2018

When Moholy-Nagy took over as a teacher in the Bauhaus, the theory of a Neues Sehen was developed and with Albers the direction of the school in its search for integration of design teaching was expanded.

In terms of photography, and this view was first advanced by Gisèle Freund, the most significant Bauhaus teacher was Moholy-Nagy. His influence extended to painting, book binding, typography, all of which was on show at the Guggenheim Retrospective in 2016, which allowed one see the prolific extent and influence of his work.

In the publication of Bauhausbücher no.8, one has the compact theoretical and illustrated practise of Moholy-Nagy, and there is also a generous inclusion of many contemporary photographers. It is a key work in the movement to using light as a new artistic material and creating a photography without a camera, which can be seen in the 'photograms', where light sensitive paper has objects placed on it and they leave an image. The key argument in his text is the need for photography to fully grasp the materiality of light and to explore this beyond the very range of human vision. It was also in this publication that the concept of the 'kinematic' was advanced.

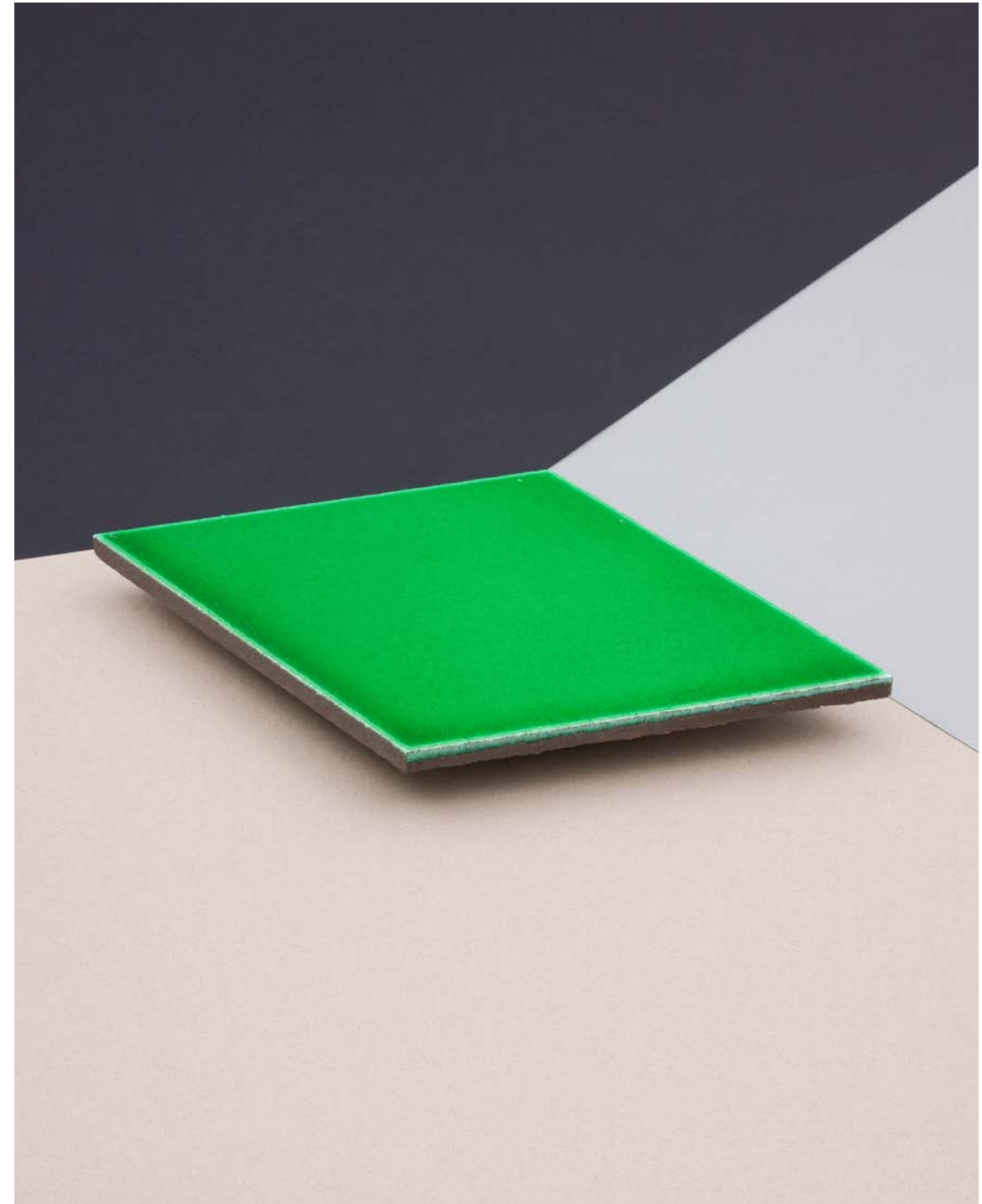
What can further be noted is that the development of Gestalt psychology was taking place in Berlin also in 1923, the year that Albers and Moholy-Nagy began their teaching, taking over the role of Itten, which marks the end of the 'Expressionist' dominance. A key publication of Wertheimer's in 1923 was 'Untersuchungen zur Lehre von der Gestalt', known to the students as the 'dot' paper, as it studied abstract patterns made of dots.



From the material archive of Victor Vasarely, colour photograph, 2018

Vasarely had studied in what was a Bauhaus inspired private art school in Budapest, which in translation called itself 'The Workshop'. Much of his working life was dedicated to studying the effect of light and pattern, supplying from his analysis of optical illusion new objects which he made available in large constructed works of various coloured tiles, and via other media. His 1930 work *Zebra* is often taken as the source image for later 'op-art'. The subject of zebras was found in the Moholy-Nagy publication and Vasarely would return several times in his life to these fundamental sources, which stretched all the way back to the earliest Constructivist work, including the work of artists such as Tatlin, Malevich, etc.

In his response to Vasarely, Hoffmann makes two moves which are as startling and as unusual as one might expect. He has literally taken the 'materials' within the Vasarely archive and used them to create new works. At the same time he has indexed the material archive, in order to show how the elements of Vasarely's work were chosen and prepared. The work of the artist is remarkably ambitious, both aiding in the future restoration of the works, for which the material archive had been intended, and at the same time creating a visual record of what he has unearthed from, in many cases, a kind of living archaeological site. He has further explored the problem of Gestalt and the optical illusion in order to suggest other directions for work, and as with his *Interventions* show delivered sculptural works. He literally washed individual tiles by hand over several intense months of daily work, and set to photographing the colour papers, which photographs he then uses to create new colour fields and minimalist work which create the kind of modulation so crucial in Cezanne's practise.



From the *material archive of Victor Vasarely*, colour photograph, 2018



Exhibition view *Simulations et Illusions*, Fondation Vasarely, 2018

The question that somehow lies hidden in all of this engagement is the wider one of how the legacy of Vasarely can achieve even those ambitions he had not fully realised. Could the Fondation act as a fulcrum point to re-engage the study of fundamentals of visual illusion, new discoveries in neurological science and environmental or ecological perception as advanced by James Gibson, could it also be as much workshop as museum and engage again in new production? One can easily imagine the Fondation as a research laboratory and studio site for students of architecture, who are increasingly interested in studies of the relation, for example, of colour in architecture. Could the Fondation expand its own presence by a simple spatial move, return itself from the space-tense hexagon and open back to the Mont Sainte-Victoire – with a viewing platform on its roof, or a zen garden in its surround, and a removal of the small hedge row which blocks the view to the mountain? Somehow between Mont Sainte-Victoire and Mont Ventoux, the disparate foundations and cultural historical sites can be the great open air 'atelier' of a renewal of research and innovation of pedagogic and academic life for artists which could create a new living environment for learning, the exciting developments of Château Lacoste would again point in such a direction.

Hoffmann has supplied some remarks on this, and on his series which are seen in Aix for the first time. He has provided a document written like a set of notes in the third person to explicate the main elements of this third part of his triptych in action, and the summary of another response to Cézanne which came from his encounters of material on display at the Musée Granet. I give the document here with some editorial emendations:



Sur le motif: Loth et ses filles, C-print, 70 x 56 cm, 2013

'An optional title for the show was Transposition of Transmission.

Oran Hoffmann: a series produced in 2013 will be put on view for the first time – Hoffmann puts to use a typological approach to revisit a scene he manages to construct. Salty sand stone rocks, the sky, the spaghetti-like hanging of the electrical lines and the affixed orange red hazard balls form together the elements at play. He cooperates the notion of the recurrence of those elements that are at his disposal. There is an imperative to position the balls in strategic locations. With his back towards the mirror-like surface of the Dead Sea he moves between electrical poles to try and control the geometry. The relationship of points, a hanging mechanism where the point of view creates an almost flat surface, built from the stones reaching the sky. Lines hold the balls hovering over the landscape as they scratch the surface of the mountain view that hold the biblical history and with that a possibility for the art historical reference to reappear.

In Cezanne's 'Lot and his daughters' rendition the dance of limbs is evident. He shows them as if they originate from the same source of life. Connected beyond the physical act, inter-layered and contrasted only by the difference in skin tone of man and woman. One

daughter watches patiently while the other seduces her father. There are many opposing factors within this painting. Between the daughters, the limbs spread out as a spider's body, the vase positioned on the table. Is this the wife as a pillar watching the scene, the mother, the urn. Cezanne's figuration is used to form concepts of representation, beyond the psychological. This is seen more often in these early Cezanne paintings. The abduction as sometimes called the rape is an even more suggestive motif. Struggling to be both mythological as well as painterly practice. It is elevated by being a study in itself. As often works of art are and should be.

Hoffmann as an artist never related much to figuration but is drawn to the art historical theme in a more abstract way. Configuring the landscape to his own hand, he tries to observe objects in space and position them through the view of the camera, designating the meaning beyond their own appearance.

The crossing of borders, the connecting of lines, the photographic view as organizational to comprehend the aesthetics.'

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