

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST / PAUL PAGK  
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In an introduction to one of his seminars, Jacques Lacan defined "Euclidean geometry", the "straight line", and the "rational" as phantasms. The phantasm is something that is both near and far, an ambiguous desire that one reaches towards yet rejects; it is a double of oneself in a space and a situation reconfigured by one's own desire. Working with ideas of perception, spatial construction, solid and void, presence and absence, rational and irrational, Paul Pagk ceaselessly interrogates this notion of "rational" by means of repeated duplications, not only through motifs, formats and seriality in painting, but also through daily re-engagement with gesture and line in his drawings. The artist's thinking is best revealed to the viewer when his works are juxtaposed, the links between them becoming apparent when they are displayed in a way that underscores the persistence of his more-than-30-year-long search. It is a two-way search, involving going back and forth, engaging both body and mind, and which never fails to move the viewer.

For Paul Pagk, drawings should be considered as an experience that deserves to be revisited since they do not lend themselves to a single interpretation nor to a single viewing. Each drawing is a new, daily, date-stamped imprint of a yet-undetermined state. In all likelihood, we are simultaneously perceiving unity and distinctions since all drawings share a vocabulary, shapes, gestures and situations that are in conversation with each other. Since 2012, using extra-large sheets that he cuts into quadrants, the artist has been expressing the impossibility of fixing a form, while making visible the serial nature of his drawings. These drawings are "specific objects", to quote Donald Judd; they are multiple and versatile, independent, lined up on a wall, instantly matching and setting themselves in motion, engaging all our sensibilities.

["Although there is some repetition of the process, I want each drawing to be unique, a specific representation of this moment when it was executed. A temporality that must be felt in the drawing. "](#)

Each drawing is a fleeting memory that retains the physical presence of its creator. The work itself is a body, a kind of double created in his own image, complete with an epidermis and a skeleton. In some drawings, the artist starts by tracing lines, "a framework carved into the paper", on which he then places a graphite skin "which reveals the framework in negative": a work "built on memory." He works on the floor, the full weight of his body marking the sheet as he moves over it. This becomes "a site of incision" - and thus of revelation. By dating each drawing, the artist intentionally reveals both the evolution of the work itself and the process of its execution, and emphasizes the struggle to capture, in visual language, this relentless engagement between man and paper, this sedimentary thought.

Paul Pagk is determined to keep this love of drawing from failing, and he is ingenious at accomplishing this with the most minimal means. At times, he must correct his own actions, the unforeseen events, when out of frustration or fury he splashes water on a color drawing. Like all men, he engages in what Sartre called "work of destruction", because creation is not possible

without destruction. A love that cannot thrive in a temperate climate but that, like our moods, feeds on the momentary, on the struggles and the fantasies that arise when the spirit seeks to occupy the forbidden body. The relationship to drawing is necessarily physical, it brings into play the notions of scale, of rhythm, of presence. "The drawing must be forced to stay within its frame," the artist told us. To that end, he ties it up and buries it in the pictorial matter, mixing into its chemistry dry pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, graphite, gouache, ink, watercolor, ballpoint pen... One such drawing, inspired by *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, evokes illuminated manuscripts and the time of elixirs and enchantments so dear to Chrétien de Troyes.

Yet there is no way to control how the work will "behave" in the space that surrounds it. It has a virus-like ability to spread, to overflow its container, to surpass the viewer's scale. The drawing, despite all of the artist's precautions, breaks out of its frame and approaches the viewer, conveying this torment through its concealment of the artist's intense psychic and physical involvement, his agitation. To the point that Paul Pagk admits, "I do not understand how one can find this drawing soothing". At the same time, the work is as much of a welcoming space, hospitable to otherness, as it is an activator of the space that lies between itself and the viewer; it is determined to seek him out, to seduce him even. Hence the absence that must be re-filled and that attests to this moment of "co-existence" with the viewer. During the performance of *Children of The Revolution Cosmic Sex Poem* (2009) with DDD, tracings of Paul Pagk covered the walls and floors, the lines accompanying the painter's gesture were extended by his voice, transformed into writing, symbols, clamor even, when the artist used a bullhorn.

Although the relationship to space is completely different in his paintings, they do not always appear serene: while they may seem more rational and amenable to analysis, to the extent that their relationship to forms can be described as "elementary geometry" (Sol LeWitt), the ambiguity of duplicated motifs is insistent. Curves and straight lines methodically split the space, creating structures composed of layered, repeating and overlapping patterns. They form a self-contained, welded unit designed to "invite the light", "burrow into space and stretch time". Yet there remains something unexplained that prevents us from experiencing them complacently. The doubling, the vertical and horizontal inversions, all these permutations become an enigma that is in the process of being solved. Seriality asserts itself as a comparative tool, calling into evidence the variations including the loop and the diagonal in a kind of system that is somewhat subversive. There is a sense of a mystical allusion to the impossibility of containing all the forms, holding all the keys, even though they are inscribed in the geometry of our body and in the mechanics of our mind.

["I create paintings that catch the eye. In a way, instead of the gaze going towards the painting, I want the painting to go towards the gaze, to fill that void. "](#)

The white expanse over a large area seen in some canvases creates the feeling that the main object is absent, and the principal consequence of this is that by not being painted, the background itself becomes an object. Thanks to the powerful presence of the void, the work is just as much a void as it is a solid, and it is perceived as an "initial space" that requires constant reinvestment. By not giving us this focal point, an anchor in the center of the work and at eye level, the artist immediately raises the question of perception, of what is seen, is yet to be seen,

and what will, essentially, forever elude us because, through the processes of erasure and re-covering, our reading will remain forever incomplete.

The gestures in drawing become motifs in painting, even signs that should be perceived in spatiality. Drawings and paintings are inseparable, the sketched line accompanies the painted line or the same blank expanse that nurtures it with its light, even though the artist states that "my drawings are made very impulsively, unlike the canvases that evolve much more slowly. I'm into other kinds of decisions." One could say "other kinds of breathing". If drawings can be compared to "flashes" that have the effect of "leaving the memory of an event in the eye", painting makes us "feel its scale", its amplitude, full-lung breathing. The expansion seems to attain its peak, to reach the viewer himself. Paul Pagk is interested in how "the viewer approaches the painting", and how he experiences that breath. In order to do this, he asks himself, while painting, how to "bring thoughts out of the painting" and to reach the viewer so as to "slow down his gaze in such a fast world".

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["Drawing is a love that can constantly fail. "](#)