Manfred Naescher
Still

Book Launch
6/29/14

Distance Over Time is pleased to announce *Still*, a new book of watercolors by Manfred Naescher.

Still is a handmade limited edition of 50, published on June 29th, 2014 in conjunction with Manfred Naescher's solo exhibition **Still und Laut** at Galerie Hollabolla in Eschen, Liechtenstein, May 18th to July 13th, 2014.

Still contains the ten watercolors of the series of the same name by Manfed Naescher. The watercolors are created in the traditon of the allegorical still life. They depict flowers and house plants rendered in vibrant primary colors in pots and vases in earth tones. The still lifes are not created through direct observation of inanimate objects, but instead sourced from action movies: **Terminator** (James Cameron, 1984), **Die Hard** (John McTiernan, 1988), **Enter the Dragon** (Robert Clouse, 1973) and **The Curse of the Golden Flower** (Zhang Yimou, 2006). The plants are mute witnesses of the violent scenes performed in front of them. Merely decorative elements, often only seen for split seconds, they remain irrelevant to the plot of the movie and fleeting in their visual presence. By isolating these insignificant, inconsequential background elements from their context and positioning them center stage, their fleeting nature is inverted: **Action becomes still life.** With color as an abstract allegorical means, elements of the action genre like suspense, explosions, blood, chaos and noise become overlaid with and reflected by the still life.

The titles of the drawings are in reference to On Kawara's date paintings. Each picture is named after the point of time in the film at which its source image occurs, plus the year of the film's release, e.g., **12.31, 1988** for an image derived from the movie **Die Hard**.
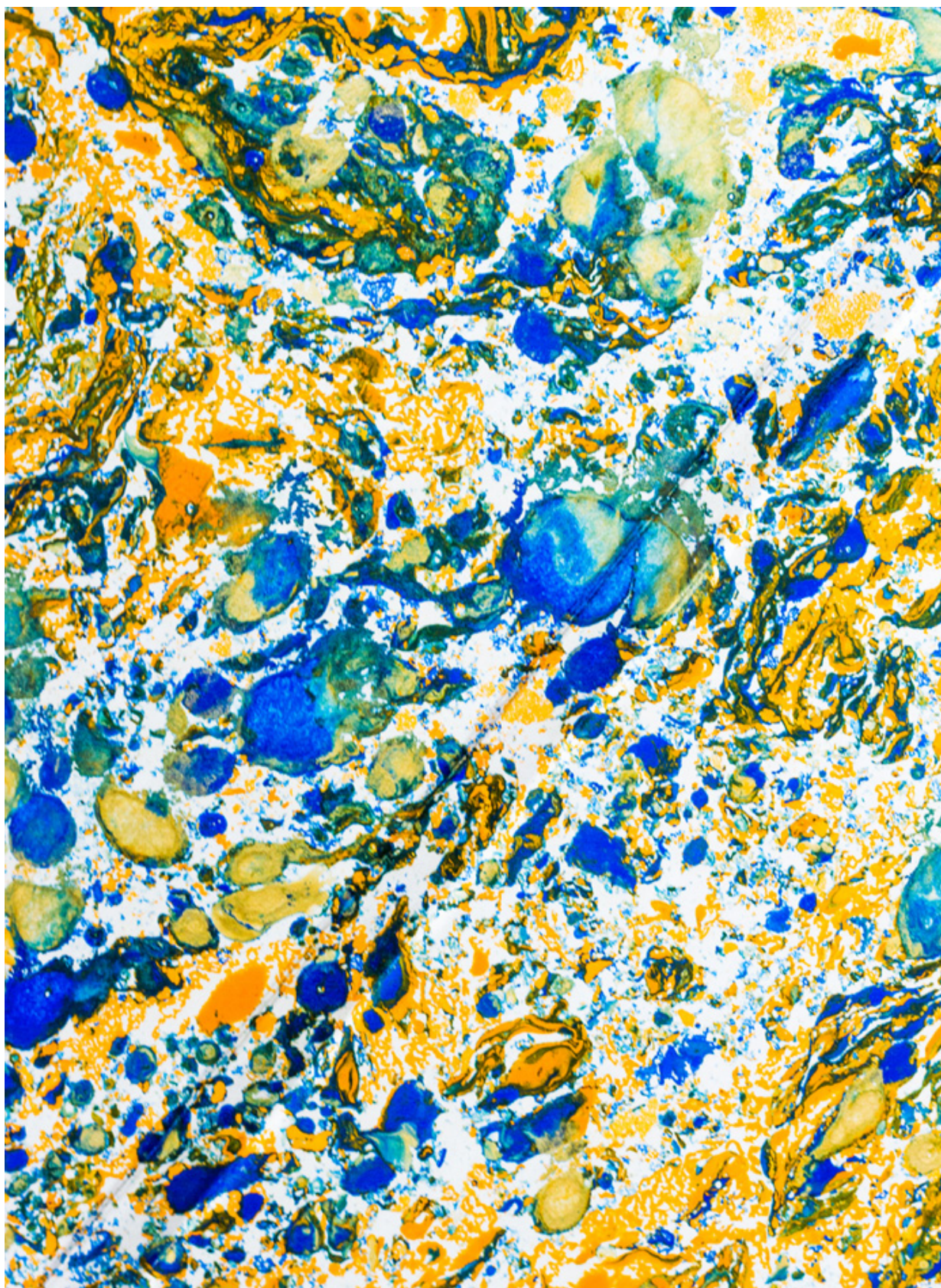
Photos by James Mckinnon

Manfred Naescher (1973, Liechtenstein) studied at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada, and at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, USA. He has participated in group exhibitions internationally (among others in *Salon für Kunstbuch* at Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany, 2010; *This Is My Education* at Art in General Gallery, New York, 2010; *Publicity* at Shibaura House, Tokyo, 2012). He has self-published numerous artist books that were distributed internationally. The artist book *Still* is published in conjunction with *Still und Laut*, his first solo exhibition in Liechtenstein (May 18-July 13, 2014).

Manfred Naescher lives and works in Berlin.

June 2014, Berlin

Introducing Distance Over Time
The Communication of Ideas
Through Various Formats

A conversation between the artist Manfred Naescher
and the publisher James Mckinnon on Mckinnon's
new publishing venture Distance Over Time.

**MN - Your background is in graphic design.
          What is it that attracted you to publishing?**

JM - Five years ago I was at a Dieter Roth exhibition in Hamburg. On a dimly lit table
at the end of the show was a collection of his artist books in various sizes and
shapes, small editions of beautifully printed books, each with its own style
of binding and subject matter, numbered from 1 to 20. I felt a magnetic attraction
to each artist book, I wanted to hold them, smell them and flip through every
page. Each book was an experience; a bit like an array of small chocolates in
a box. To me, the fact that they were books created in small editions by the artist
pushed them into a realm between original artwork and duplication. I felt as if
it was a creative language I understood, something that I was intimately familiar
with through my own earlier experiences in publication design.

With art being distributed as a book, a lot of people can own it and in a way nobody owns it.

As time went by, I began to seek out more artist books meant for distribution.
Yoko Ono published Grapefruit, a book of instructions that guided its readers
to experience conceptual art through movement and the creation of objects.

In these works by Dieter Roth and Yoko Ono, I found a place that was not only
about the creation of art, but also about a certain kind of interaction. Art seems

pure and disconnected from money for a moment as it hangs in a gallery or exhibition space. With art being distributed as a book, a lot of people can own it and in a way nobody owns it. It's an economical way to have art as part of the everyday.

MN - **I can see from the book you made with me that you are interested in this convergence of art and book. Is this book indicative of the direction you will be taking as a publisher? In other words: What kinds of books are you planning to publish**

JM - I would like Distance Over Time to be a catalyst for the convergence of book making, art objects, emotional design and conceptual approaches. In a sense I would like to publish many kinds of things that can be labeled as a book. For Still, I really wanted to not only create a catalogue for a gallery exhibition, I wanted to create an art object that could be distributed like a book. With the folded pages of Still, when they are standing upright with the marbled paper as a floor, they evoke a gallery space in which each plate is showcased in a curated order - kind of like an exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, marbled floors and hanging art. The watercolor images converge with the form of the book and its three dimensional behavior to create a certain experience. The coming projects will similarly take on varied forms that bring together content and book structure.

I wanted to create an art object that could be distributed like a book.

I would really like to try to push the boundaries of what a publishing company can do a bit further. I would like to extend working relationships with artists to develop a series of works in an attempt to extend and enrich the collaborative relationship between the designer/publisher and artist, with the goal of distributing ideas and creative work in an affordable way.

One project I am currently working on is a drawing machine. This project will be a three way collaboration between the publisher, an artist and a hardware programmer: An experimental working model of publishing ideas that bring together technology and art, and, as in this case, that take on the form of conceptual, interactive, handmade pieces.

My goal is to set certain parameters where creativity can thrive and be distributed: Can the publisher have an active role in shaping creative content? Aside from books what can be made? Can my publishing become an art practice?

MN - Content-wise, what are the themes or ideas you are interested in for the books you are publishing?

JM - I'm interested in distribution as a practice through which art can move from one point to another: Ideas or art that can be shared in a sort of unownable sense..

For the first 3 books, my work was focused on interesting content and creativity to produce unique, affordable, small editions of books. As I move forward I would like to extend this practice. My aim will be to push the relationship between the publisher and the artist in a fluid collaborative model where both roles become interchangeable. Where publishing and distribution become creative art forms. I would like to move beyond the idea of a publisher publishing books, to publish objects that are unique, affordable and in small editions. As a book is an object, so is a robotic arm that makes art. My goal will be to create objects of conceptual meaning, objects that ask to be shared, and ultimately, to allow the distribution of ideas.

As I write this, I'm thinking about Thelonious Monk. It was said that he could never play the same song exactly the same way as he played it before. I find this really poetic. In life we have routines and things we do in the same way every day. But what if you could never do your routines in the same way? Things would become impossible. My goal with Distance Over Time is to play out the same methods each time an object is created, but to never do it the same way. To create a system, but to not repeat the vocabulary in the system.

Obviously, my main objective would be to build upon what I do and grow, but to do it in a way where I'm constantly learning. New techniques, writing styles, methodologies, ways of seeing and failure. A process that evolves not from fear of dying out or growing old, but from curiosity.

MN - In the last few years you have worked mainly on online projects, in the digital realm. I'm wondering about this switch. Why Books? Why not a web portal for art and photography, or e-books? If accessibility is a key concern then the web seems like the more logical platform, with books your audience is automatically limited. How do you reconcile this?

JM - I've worked in the digital industry for 10 years. I feel as though our current culture heavily relies on digital media. But what is happening is that we are forgetting how to feel while we are surrounded by so much ephemeral information.

It's a culture that makes us miss the value of holding things in our hands. We have forgotten the value in seeing and feeling something in its physical form. Instead of a photocopied zine, we have tumblr. Instead of a flea market, we have ebay. Authenticity has been homogenized in our culture. In the digital world, we don't even call people "people", we call them users. That's weird. I think it's pretty sick. Touch screens remove us from texture and keyboards create sloppy handwriting. In a way we are more invested in ephemeral devices and digital platforms than we are in physical human relationships.

It's about the accessibility of our own feelings and thoughts.

A book can be held, it can be smelled, the paper can be felt, and no matter how fast you flip through the pages, there is always something new to see. My goal isn't to change the world, or put a book in the hand of every smartphone user. The accessibility I write about isn't about getting more people to pick up my products. It's about the accessibility of our feelings and thoughts.

In our current culture, we have documented more of our daily lives than ever before. Almost every object you can buy - from a phone to a watch, a car to a refrigerator - has a camera in or on it. We see everything. Most of it is digitally, stored on a hard drive. I've never felt that this is an example of living photography.

We demand better and higher resolution screens, faster memory and expanded hard drives. A better faster stronger digital product that draws us further away from reality to a simulated reality. As this happens there is a kind of emotional decapitation, between our minds and our bodies. Our bodies become heavy, we lose empathy.

I'm interested in publishing as a creative practice with the focus of communicating ideas through various formats.

Photography has a great need for printed existence. We are surrounded by digital images every day. We see so many pictures on small screens and on big screens, but never think about them again. Sure, we can save them to our computers, but this isn't an existence for a photograph, when it can't be physically handled, flipped through in a book, hung on a wall. Physical existence is enriching. Digital photo galleries are great, but have you ever traveled to another city to see that actual photo?

Digital distribution brings artificial engagement. I want the few people who engage with my work to connect to it and feel something. Maybe the fact that it's something so limited reinforces how special it is. When something is rare, people tend to covet it, but also they tend to share it as well, in a way that proves its existence and rarity. With a digital platform, anyone - any "user" - can have it for free, it ultimately loses meaning.

MN - **In an earlier conversation you mentioned John Baldessari and his influence on your thinking about books and distribution. You've touched on this in your replies above, but could you elaborate a bit on this idea of accessibility? What are concrete steps you will take as a publisher towards this?**

JM - Through his career, John Baldessari created a wide variety of artist books. His main goal with the creation of these books was to find an alternative way to distribute the artist's work and ideas in a cheap way. He believed in the idea that books are owned by no one, because books can be shared, distributed, sold and given away. If an idea

is contained in a book it has much more influence and power than art in a gallery space. He also used books as a way to control how a viewer sees and understands his art and he also made the viewer an active participant in this exchange.

John Baldessari believes that if an artist calls something art, it is art. This gives the artist the freedom to do what he chooses, because we live in such a subjective world. In the way I publish, I want to be subjective as well. A publisher that publishes books can just be a salesman. I'm interested in publishing as a creative practice with the focus of communicating ideas through various formats. Whatever that may be labeled as. Concretely, I will be publishing in various approaches because ideas can be distributed as small edition books, but also as, say, drawing machines.

Intermedia, a term created by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, is used to describe an art-form without any boundaries between art and life, therefore no boundaries between art forms. The idea behind intermedia is that our current culture calls for artforms that can pull from several roots of media to create hybrids. Like art that is made of of 10% music, 25% architecture, 12% drawing, 18% shoemaking, 30% painting and 5% smell.

How would publishing with an intermediate approach work? How would the objects/ideas/books function?

BALDESSARI SINGS LEWITT (1972)

"Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words (written or spoken) to physical reality, equally."

Sol Lewitt (1969)

Distance Over Time

Fraenkelufer 48
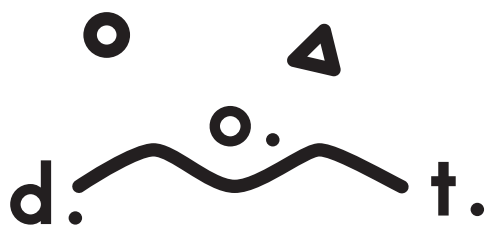D-10999 Berlin
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