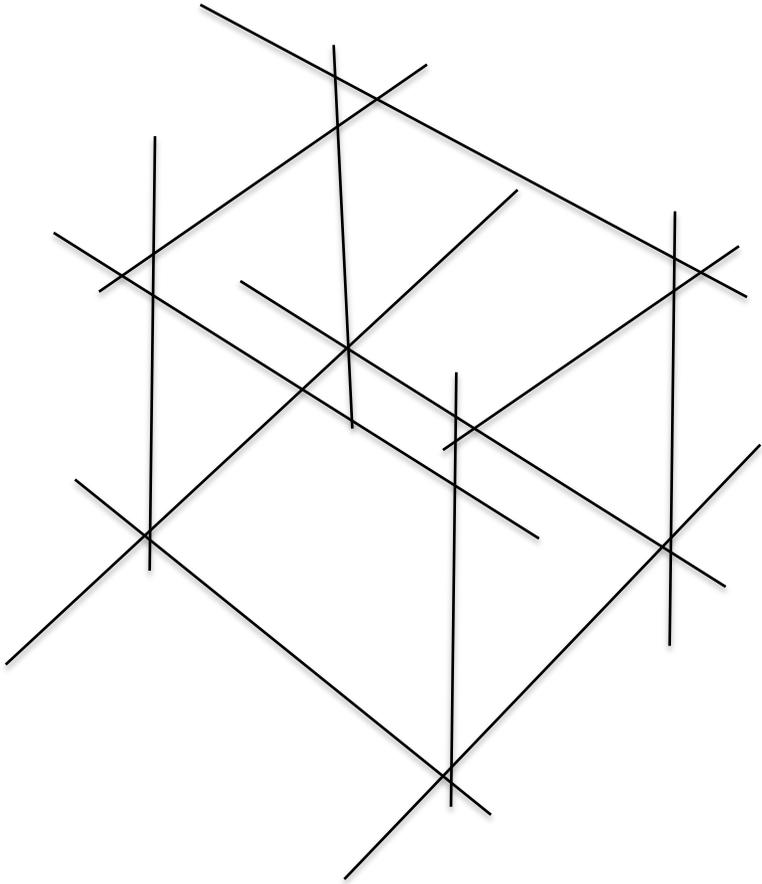


# PARASCHEMATIC



### Paraschematic

*adj. Of or pertaining to a change from the right form, as in the formation of a word from another by a change of termination, gender, etc.*

*Is it possible to eradicate or at least renegotiate art's dichotomous understanding and use of the 'signifier' and the 'signified' in a sculptural or painterly plane? Since the 60s, this has been an on-going debate in art theory. The decrypting of such codes, created as a system of direct and straightforward causality for a hegemonic worldview, quickly falls short in today's increasingly networked and cross-referencing condition of culture. However, such insufficiency in our critical vocabulary opens up a space of autonomous abstraction – where objects exist and become vessels for both simpler and more complex messages, and sometimes (to leave the logic of Western linguistics), none at all. In that sense, we are not at all done with abstraction, and not at all with abstract objects: we have only just begun. Art, despite its curbed institutional definition, can still prove as an access point to unexplored fields of perception and being.*

*Kristian Kragelund concerns himself with the objecthood of painting and the historical resonance of sculptural materiality. Through a weave of formalist and conceptual painting, the utilization of oxidization techniques and by appropriation of new and recycled industrial materials, he poses critical questions regarding the social and discursive histories of Western modernity. Working reductively, his meditative wall-based works possesses a striking synergy of traces of personal pasts and projections into collective futures, reminiscent, inversely, of early Minimalist art. Yet from this ambivalent glare between socioeconomic industrialism and personal spirituality, Kragelund's work perpetually attempts to renegotiate the value of the physical object and to engage the established systems and structures defining art and contemporary culture – and as such, the discourses embedded in his works are the most contemporary.*

- Jeppe Ugelvig, 2016

Jepp Ugelvig is a curator and critic based in London. Jepp contributes regularly to publications such as Flash Art International, i-D, LEAP, Sleek Magazine and Kopenhagen Art Institute, and have given lectures at places such as Overgaden Institut for Samtidskunst (Copenhagen), SouvenirBY (Berlin), and Asia House (London). Forthcoming curated exhibitions include A Reservoir of Trust at the Goethe Institute in Ramallah, Palestine, and the Crit Lounge during the Central Saint Martins degree show 2016.

The following conversation is from an on-going e-mail correspondence between Jepp Ugelvig and Kristian Kragelund, regarding the exhibition *Paraschematic*, May 2016, as well as general thoughts on art, culture and critical theory.

**Hi Kristian.**

**The first topic I'd like to discuss with you is your understanding or definition of medium. Your practice seems to organically move from three-dimensional objects existing in space to wall-based works with their own internal logic – not to say that these are necessarily ontologically different in your view. How do you approach these mediums or formats?**

Hi Jeppe,

Hereby my thoughts.

I see the notion of 'the medium' as a translator of sorts: a conveyer of information, which merely functions as a bridge between the broadcaster and the recipient, a specific null-point that allows a translation or decryption of the psyche of the artist. In the case of painting, this is expressed through colours and shapes. For the term to have any relevance, it is often taken for granted that there is an urgent message or opinion that needs to be communicated from one individual to another – and this is where I think the medium as a classification or even as a definition, falls short.

Greenberg argued for a medium-specificity in painting, in the hope that by drawing attention to its own materiality, art would be able to liberate itself and exist in its own right, uncontaminated by the impurities imposed by falling victim to fetishized capitalist urges of ownership – which is all a rather noble argument, and arguably relevant at a certain historical epoch, yet nevertheless more damaging than divine when it comes to contemporary culture and art.

I will propose that I, as an artist, and through my 'artworks', am medium-less in the broadest sense possible. If we presume

that the purpose of the historically canonized medium of painting – pigment in whichever form or shape applied to a support structure – was ‘mediating’ information of either the exterior or interior world of the artist, then we automatically assume that the artist has authentic information to convey. This, I do not think, is the case.

In all our critical (and practical) endeavours of mapping the structures that defines our existence, such as language, state, gender etc., we somehow rather tragically still rely on the artist and the writer to relay all these important post-structural ideas, through discourses defined by the very structures and systems we’re trying to defy. In my work I try very much to eradicate the agency of history, and bypass the semantic relevance of the paradigms of signifiers in favour of a ‘pure’ denoted object - call it painting, sculpture or whatever, it does not matter. In this way I believe we are able to address issues and emotions otherwise constrained from expression, and thus liberate art from the shackles of medium and ourselves from those of structural bounds. At least it is worth a try.

**In her writing on the post-medium condition, Rosalind Krauss similarly defies the purity of 'medium', but still argues for the pursuit for the 'essence' of art. I really like your idea of 'authentic information' having been mythicized to be present in the artist and their medium while this is obviously rarely the case. However, what is the artist capable of doing, then, in this time? What information does s/he possess, or is it more about how it is communicated ('the medium is the message', as McLuhan once expressed?)**

Rosalind Krauss' writing on the medium as a recursive structure and a possible measure of institutional critique has been very much essential to the way I work, especially in my most recent body of work, Constitutional Paintings, which has approached the idea and influence of the medium. If we, for the sake of argument, assume that the medium of painting has become somewhat obsolete through its own plurality, exposure, and self-insistence (from zombie-formalism, to the ever-exploding art market to Instagram), then we must be approaching an essence of art, must we not? Well, if the essence, whatever that might mean, is something worth excavating in the first place, then we automatically acknowledge art as a singularity that directly manifest itself through the hand of the artist, and the greater the artist: the purer the art. Indeed an odd, homogeneous and even elitist perspective that, in my opinion, sanctions a limitation of expression. As I said, I see the medium 'merely' as a relay of sorts and in my exalted claim of me and my work being non-medial (that is to say without medium), I knowingly dismiss its significance less than I accept and proclaim the relevance of its quality as a historical agent - yet more importantly, as a means of addressing and reconfiguring this very agency.

To answer your question regarding what the artist is capable of, we first need to establish what art is capable of, at least the art of the relevant context. I firmly believe that art retains the capability to express what lies beyond syntax and systemically defined language, to formulate that which transcends logical comprehension and epistemological consensus; to create something which best can be described as hope. Hope is that which cannot be explained, just like the sensation of love, but truly does exist even though it does not conform to the narratives or boundaries of a post-Freudian, post-capitalist society where the value of the individual is measured against its value to society. As such, the role of the artist is not to explain, nor to emphasize the expression of whichever form or shape their work might take, inasmuch to purely parade the bare existence of the work, the existence of a potential authentic existence, experience or sensation. By this thesis, Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life*, for example, becomes all at once a voyeur, a reflection and a medium of modern life, more so than a recorder of social conditions and passing trends.

David Joselit is arguably the theorist who most successfully breaks with the notion the medium, as he, replacing it with the concepts of formats, changes the emphasis from art's production (and its premises) to art's circulation as image within heterogeneous networks. This, in a way, supports your argument of 'bare existence' – free flow of data in the system. His immediate motivation for doing this, it seems, is to disrupt the "privileging of discreet objects"<sup>1</sup> in a time of much image-based or virtual art-production. How does this correspond or clash with your investigation into the 'pure' object? How do you feel when you are working on individual objects?

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<sup>1</sup> David Joselit, *After Art*, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Doctrine of the Similar* (1933), in *New German Critique*,

I feel that the increased use and accessibility of augmented and virtual reality in art production and presentation in the last few years is a very strong indicator of a general shift towards a medium- or even format-less art. A person wearing an Oculus Rift is never not aware that she is exposed to a mimetic reality, yet she acts and interacts on equal terms within the confines of the perception as she would within the ‘real’, and this, I find, is where it gets interesting – especially in relation to the concept of (re)production of art and the subsequent circulation of such. In the case of augmented reality, expression is projected directly onto objects, allowing an illusion of an alternate structure of the world surrounding, which is experienced sensually and physically (to the extent the current technology allows it) as real and relevant as anything - except you are aware that what you are experiencing is nothing more than a slightly obscured imitation. A clear echo of pre-modernist painting, wouldn't you say? Mimesis once again, after having been discarded for ages, becomes a relevant and valid term in discussing and critiquing art, though with a slightly different connotation this time around.

*“Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there are none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.”*

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– Walter Benjamin, 1933

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Doctrine of the Similar* (1933), in *New German Critique*, 1979

The mimetic faculty of man has loomed throughout modernity, and in Benjamin's writing above, its purpose is to 'become and behave like something else', not in an existential manner of transgressing your own identity, but in a manner of projecting or expressing a subjective reality onto an already established structure, be it man or canvas. Now, however, where I find it comparable to my own work - and a lot of other contemporary practice - is in the possible omission of the established support- and medium-specify (man/canvas) of a given artistic endeavour. The pure/denoted object that I strive to achieve does not exist, but the illusion or mimesis of it does, and in accepting that, I think that it is possible to create a physical equivalent of the sensation that the integration of digital information with live video is providing the user; something that transcends the reality we know. In other words, we experience the given art as being medium- and structure-less, though we are still very much aware that it is intrinsically reliant on the very medium and structure it stubbornly insists on defying. Following this logic, I think it would be fair to claim that I do not make individual objects - if anything I attempt to make objects seem individual, though their connectivity and shared narrative is essential to the way they are created and ultimately received. There would be no medium-less artwork if there were not first a medium-specific artwork to supersede.

**This strategy of “making objects seem individual” plays, like other elements in your and many other contemporary art practices, with the constituting elements of modernity – medium, myth, narrative, mimesis, and the prioritization of the individual. Myth-making can, of course, be a highly deconstructive and subversive strategy as a tool that continuously confront and lure the viewer into their own normative tendencies of perception and individual viewership – and as a direct form of critique. Was there ever a desire to directly embody critique in your work?**

No, I would not call it a desire, more like a recognition and acceptance that any attempt of avoiding such thing would be not only futile but also somewhat self-contradictory. Since collapsing the great narratives, and dissolving mythological and moral rigidity, I think it's a sign of health that we, the postmodern 'subject', strive to unravel the mystery of the thing presented to us – the catholic priest, the banker, the policeman etc. – where all figures of exalted trust and dominance are understood as mythological creatures, guards for the safe-havens they represented. When we no longer can rely on old moral maps and coordinates for existential guidance and salvation: when faced with a relativity of values dependent on the movements of invisible hands and geopolitical climates, questioning everything we face is essential. It's a survival instinct.

So when you ask if I directly embody critique in my work, then yes, I guess I do, but not on a conscious level, more as a wild animal's instinctual response to an unknown environment.

Another remark that could be made about mythmaking, especially in regards to contemporary art, would be in relations to the sense of nostalgia, or a kind of meta-nostalgia that I feel has become poignant in especially some post-internet practices.

Visual negotiations where the yearn for bygone days and faded memories are no longer dependent on the utopian and heart-warming sepia-tinted looking glass of nostalgia which we are normally spoon-fed, but in a reverse sense where we glance back only to confirm that we moved forward and exceeded our own privy limitations. In this way, the otherwise deconstructive nature of mythmaking becomes liberating and a potential vessel for critique and dialogue.

**From the relays/mediums through which you operate, and in relation to what art, beyond artistic intention, is capable of, I would like to discuss some of the social narratives that are embedded in your work. I sense that these take a quite personal shape – the almost subconscious and instinctual prevalence of particular materials and shapes like chalk and metal – while they simultaneously exist as a sociopolitical narrative, like with your recycling of materials with particular spatial, architectural and socioeconomic histories written in them. Does your work exist in the socius? How can art engage with these narratives through a materiality?**

I think it is time that we bin the mantra that all ‘All Art is Political’, and start thinking in a manner where ‘All Art is Social’, since, in my opinion, the political beings we are (or they tell us we are) are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Not by that saying that the importance of being political has diminished, but noting that the way in which we are so, has changed, or has got to change – democracy does, after all, not bend to the will of the people, and any change required therefore has to happen outside of established governmental structures, outside the roads paved by the modernist and avant-garde movements, outside the political.

I am very aware of certain social aspects in my work, especially in my sculptural pieces, where I utilise and appropriate materials with a deep social context, yet I strive not to sentimentalise or politicise the embedded history of the objects. An example is my installation *Empire*, where approximately 600 roof tiles from demolished London homes has been mounted on boards and presented at a stage somewhere in between a reconstructed slice of actual roof and a conventional painting/sculpture. It is a piece with numerous socioeconomic and architectural connotations, that quite easily could be lock up in an equally numerous amount hegemonic ideological box, though without any clear indication on which particular box to use.

By making the object truly alien, I find that it has the potential to become truly social – in the sense that it is by our encounters with alienation and displacements that small pockets of reflection and resistance can be formed, and authentic experience arise. So, the social aspects is vital in the sense that it lures (much like mythmaking) the viewer into a previously acquired political and cultural stance, only to subvert and collapse the established sense of order through a dislocation and alienation of the disclosed material, hence forcing the individual to replace herself within the power structures at play.

**Do you recognise a form of yearning or nostalgia in your own work? Both on a structural and aesthetic level, I find your work to reactivate a process or discourse from a long-gone era (namely, minimalism).**

Not so much yearning, as an acknowledgement. I believe that by moving further and further towards an ahistorical existence, we tend to become products of the super-present, spurred on by constant connectivity and a desperate reliance on instant peer-to-peer recognition, causing, in my opinion, a destructive detachment to our own history and moral education. I suppose that a term like super-presence is something that could have been (and probably have) used in a critical capacity towards the minimalism you mention – an abject constellation of materiality with no past and no future, immune to the concept of time and origin, purely existing in an occupational capacity. This Heideggerian notion of ‘beings being beings towards death’ is, of course, a rather bold and generalising parallel to draw between the minimal art of the 1960s and the influence of social media and the internet on contemporary life, yet both things happened as a response to what had come before – and I think this is something we have to acknowledge, though not necessarily yearn for. I really don’t think that what we had was better than what we will have.

**An aspect of this that I find in your practice is obviously the grid. Grid structures, however temporary, feature frequently in your wall-based works, but I also found your earlier piece Formation #2 (2014) to be a meditation on grids in sculptural planes. As Rosalind Krauss and several others have argued, the grid was the ultimate marker for modernism in art. Using the grid today is very interesting, as it possesses a kind of pluralism: a tool for mapping, a critique of history, or a way to access deeper structural or structuralizing impulses in nature, and particularly, the human brain. Why are you fond of the grid? What use does it have in your practice?**

The graphic representation of the grid is the ultimate graphic representation of the conscious being, and therefore the point of departure for any physical manifestation of expression. That might ring hollow on the bells of post-structural theory – the very ones we’ve been banging for the duration of this interview – however, whether we seek to colonise or decolonise the human condition, the (abstract) notion of the grid will be somewhat involved in our endeavours. That being said, I think that the significance of the grid now is different from the one Rosalind Krauss relates to high-modernism, for the simple reason that the complexities and rhizomatic nature of society have become increasingly transparent and apparent. The grid, in Greenbergian terms, constituted a mapping of the plane:of the object, as a sort of key for the human mind to be able to engage visually with a way of painting that had the potential to expand beyond the restriction of its own support in order for it to become an autonomous being. We see it clearly in Jackson Pollock’s drip paintings where, despite the all-over approach, the edges of the canvas has been clearly taken into consideration when applying the enamel. In this manner, the painting recognizes its own limitation yet at the same time

appreciate that objects of equal value exist beyond the picture plane. Matisse did it as well, most notably with his red series, where furniture and architectural attributes of the rooms represented rest on the very edge of the frame, again implying the sense that there are autonomous objects exterior to the painting, and that the work of art no longer serve the function of depiction (a window to the world etc.), but are things in their own right.

I don't think the grid no longer serves this purpose. The grid now has become analogues to sense and order, something, however, infinite its possibility for expansion are, which will supply a set of coordinates and ultimately lead us home. The grid is the urban space, the habitat of man, it's the division of countries and states, it is the emblematic division of the rich and the poor, the West and the East, us and them. The grid is safety.

Now, say that the grid dissolves, it does not disappear, it is reconfigured like a seismic shift, no longer representative of the logical human brain, but becomes a product of the untameable force of nature and instinct. How will we respond? Will it be like the sailor Donald Crowhurst in Tacita Dean's seminal piece *Disappearance at Sea* (1996): deliriously drifting lost at sea, only to ultimately jumping overboard and drown, bringing the ships log-book and clock with him to the button as a final gesture of surrender? Or will it simply be repositioning ourselves and adapt within the new set of references and coordinates provided by capitalism and mass-communication? I really don't know, and that is exactly why I find it to be central to my practice – both as an entrance point for the viewer to engage with my work, but just as much as a mean for myself to understand and locate my place in history as an individual being.

**I like this idea of dislocation and alienation through appropriation, as a kind of force that challenges the power-structures of viewership. In this process, the notion of 'art' must obviously be challenged as well – as an institution of aesthetic experience positioned at the top of a hierarchy of other forms of expression. What drive continues you to work within the format of 'art'? Is it the only cultural expression that allows for the spiritual abstraction that you are looking for?**

When I look at the progress my practice has experienced over the last years, it is clear to me that there is a strong tendency of reduction at work: an urge to simplify and clarify. Though my work is often planned out very concisely before execution, I often still find that I am unable to explain the specific characteristic of the given piece until long after completion. For example, for the exhibition 'Paraschematic', I made a series of 5 paintings with sporadic chalk scribbles on tar-coated plaster - I know they are a response to the issues we discussed in the previous section regarding the grid, yet I find four of them to be successful and one to be almost completely lacking content – even though they would appear to almost completely identical. I have yet to realize why this is, though I think it may be that by dealing with these issues through a visual system of codes and signs, you tend to omit the very, very specific history that is embedded in the history of producing and experiencing painting. I guess this is why I keep insisting on referring to them as objects and sculptures, though deep down I know there might be a conflict of interest in the sense that even visual language is deeply dependent on semantics and therefore part of the super-structures and systems I am so eager to defy. Then, on the other hand, it is through communication we become... well, whatever it is we are.

Art, as we talked about previously, is really just communication. It's a language that has a potential that other languages do not, yet is worth nothing if we just treat it as we treat conventional linguistics with all its logical implications and dialectical concerns. Art is not bound by sonic, visual or spatial proportions, and perhaps eventually my work will have reached a reductive state where the visual stimulant is no longer required, and the relay of an immaterial thought will suffice. Until then, I'll continue my attempt to navigate the trajectories and power structures embedded in the history of visual art.