

>> a real sense of the absolute  
+  
the means which are proper to pictorial art  
=  
a world that is created out of art  
=  
a kind of protest <<

A. Tim Hilton on John Walker:

"What we saw in Birmingham may have come near to that very rare thing in modern painting which, since Pollock, has haunted artists of deep imagination in the tradition to which Walker belongs: a real sense of the absolute communicated solely by the means which are proper to pictorial art."

B. Joesph Beuys on Blinky Palermo:

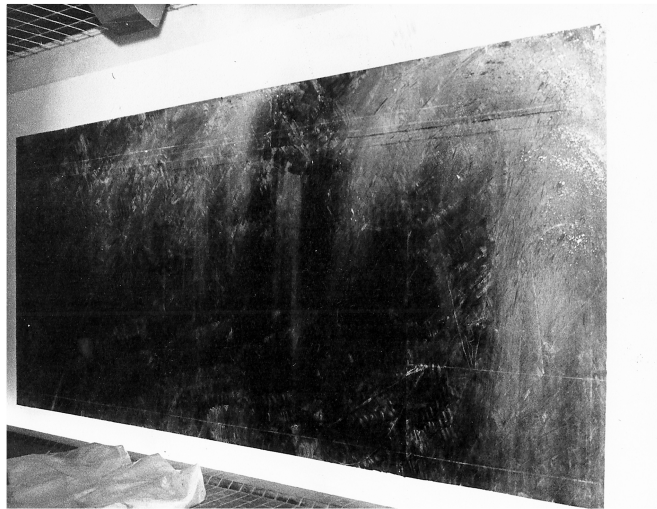
"Palermo wanted to create order in an area reaching as far as he could manage. Usually only in his own home — or in some environment, say, a museum, where he moved something on a wall, for instance, with color. . . . You see a few structures and levels or order, which he put in some kind of a spatial concept to make something palpable: the way he imagined the order of a world that is created out of art. . . . It was certainly a message. It was definitely a kind of protest."

## JOHN WALKER AT THE IKON GALLERY



At the IKON GALLERY, Birmingham, last month Walker developed the relationship between his drawing and painting in an unexpected and ambitious manner, by enlarging the drawings to the full size of his paintings and by doing them directly onto the walls of the gallery, in chalk, on areas of the walls which had been prepared as blackboard. The drawings were beginning to be damaged a day after they were finished, were looking like as wrecked as yesterday's buttonhole after a week, and were then painted out to make way for the next show. It was a unique occasion, not merely because of the short life span of the works, but because of their evident high quality and quite noble assumption of a status normally accorded only to painting. It seemed that the peculiar nature of the support and the medium, together with the question of the scale of the work, and its proximity to oblivion, dramatized matters of a purely formal and of a generally expressive type which are essential to Walker's art. The scene in Birmingham (Walker's home town) was not a performance, but it was an impermanent personal display of much significance.

What we saw in Birmingham may have come near to that very rare thing in modern painting which, since Pollock, has haunted artists of deep imagination in the tradition to which Walker belong: a real sense of the absolute communicated solely by means which are proper to pictorial art. This may sound an impossibly romantic ambition nowadays, but some very good paintings have made it quite evidently substantive. The fact that such art not [sic] seldom dramatizes the means by which it is made is relevant to the work in Birmingham. For there was a sense in which it was quite transparently about its facture – and also about the working activity of being an artist. The close relationship of Walker's drawing to his painting (and the practice of using a blackboard in the studio) indicate this. But so



too, much more, does the sheer artistic mileage between New St Blackboard and Deirdre. The former is a beautiful work which is perhaps too much like the transcript of a painting that had already been made. The next drawing to be completed, Sometime, was a fine and utterly convincing resolution of things to do with shape, surface, and interior space which have been present in the paintings – not necessarily as problems, things to be resolved – but had never been declared to this extent. And Deirdre was exceptional. The size of a very large painting, it revealed itself as having that kind of presence and expansive seriousness, and yet there was no way at all in which one could imagine it as a painting. Its extremist individuality well accorded with the fact that it was the least material of the works, and the first to go, falling and drifting from the wall as dust; so did the boldness of the fact that most of its passages were obviously dabbed on by one of those extended oval blackboard rubbers, whose repeated outline, in fanned-out flurries, formed separate areas of activity which were only minimally bound together by the sort of copious streaming that, in Summertime, allowed attention to nuanced effect to be borne along by the whole movement of the work.

– Tim Hilton: 'UK commentary: notes on three exhibitions | John Walker at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham', *Studio International*, December 1972, pp 238-240

1. a real sense of the absolute

"...a great variety of surface effects, from the most delicate washes and powdery coatings to thickly-built up layers and craggy passages..."

"to fix or define the limits...as in 'boundary line, border, borderline, delimitation, mete"

No ordinary seeing but absolute seeing in which there was neither seer nor seen.

– Ad Reinhardt: *[Imageless Icons]*, undated

2. the means which are proper to pictorial art

"Under the testing of modernism more and more of the conventions of the art of painting have shown themselves to be dispensable, unessential. By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture; thus a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture – though not necessarily as a successful one."

– Clement Greenberg: 'After Abstract Expressionism', *Art International*, Vol VI, No. 8, October 25, 1962, p.30

3. a world that is created out of art

[Palermo's] ...a vehicle for ephemeral experience. ...Palermo's expansion of painting's form included experience and interaction.

– David Serisier: 'Readymade Digital Colour, An Expanding Subject for Painting', 2013

4. a kind of protest

Palermo wanted to create order in an area reaching as far as he could manage. Usually only in his own home – or in some environment, say, a museum, where he moved something on a wall, for instance, with color. ... You see a few structures and levels or order, which he put in some kind of a spatial concept to make something palpable: the way he imagined the order of a world that is created out of art. ... It was certainly a message. It was definitely a kind of protest.

– Joseph Beuys in Laszlo Glozer: 'On Blinky Palermo: A Conversation with Joseph Beuys', trans. Joachim Neugroschel, in *Arts Magazine* 64, 1990

The Beuys Affair:

Calendar of events / Lynda Morris / 266

Not just a few are called, but everyone / Joseph Beuys / 266

The Beuys example / Georg Jappe / 228.

– *Studio International*, December 1972

Ad Reinhardt: Refuse

"to create order in an area"

+

"painting of quality is a challenge to disorder and insensitivity everywhere"

"a kind of protest"

+

"challenge"

"a world that is created out of art"

+

"as intelligently and as beautifully as the spaces have been in some paintings"

Anxiety of the wall

Back to the wall

Wall drawing

Claiming the wall

Performance of authorship

– Ian Wallace on Blinky Palermo, *Artists on Artists Lecture*, Dia Art Foundation, 2014

In Palermo's work the painting as a self-contained unit had become obsolete long before his first Wall Drawings and Paintings were produced. In distributing shapes across a surface, the artist subverted traditional compositional formulas in such a manner that the sheet of paper, the canvas, or the wall seemed to represent an arbitrary segment of a broader context, which could theoretically be continued indefinitely. His paintings imply the possibility of ceaseless transformation of the constellation of their elements and permanent motion.

...

A central theme of Palermo's work is edges, which should be regarded not as boundaries but rather as transitions, as the example of his wall outlines has shown. With the window motif, Palermo went a step further, dealing with the boundaries and thresholds of the space itself. The window shape acted as a "window pointing inward" and deflected the viewer's attention back to the real window and thus toward the actual room in which he or she stood. The dark paint on the wall is not a self-contained painting but is related to the white background as positive to negative.

...

Palermo's concept of the artwork and his notion of the relationship between viewer, painting, and space were centrally important topics not confined to a single discipline. Similar concerns were shared with Robert Smithson, for example, who – in an interview with Bruce Kurtz in 1972 – ascribed "a kind of space control" to the traditional notion of a painting:

"I've always been interested in different sites and different kinds of relationships, like the relationship in a white room as opposed to a quarry. I mean there's obviously a difference of intention there, and the whiteness of the room looks like a little neutral cell in heaven and the painting hanging on the wall – you're supposed to not even think of the wall that the painting is hanging on. You're supposed to just respond metaphysically to the painting in terms of color, line, structure, you know, and talk about the framing support, but forget about where you're standing, where you are, and the ambience of the entire space."

– Susanne Kuper: *'About Space and Time: Blinky Palermo's Wall Drawings and Paintings'*, in Lynne Cooke et al (ed): *'Blinky Palermo Retrospective 1964-1977'*, Dia Art Foundation, New York, 2010, pp 69, 74 & 75



Günther Förg: *Wandmalerei*, MMK Frankfurt, 1991 12.3m x 7.2m  
Photo: Axel Schneider