Markus Saile

The works of Markus Saile suggest a change of medium with regard to painting. The line has become a trace. Paint has become turpentine. Painting has become unstable because turpentine, used to thin oil paint, has separated it from its undercoat, allowing it to slide, slip, fly across the smooth surface. The effect penetrates the eye and could have its counterpart there: fluff on retina. Moments of seeing which have nothing real and nothing unreal before them, but rather an indescribably fleeting, material something which appears to be very close. The formats vary, are frequently small, often eye images, with only the larger ones as body images. Sometimes they act contrary to the idea of good picture proportions in painting, with shapes that are almost square or nearly DIN format.

There is a chalk ground which creates a perpetually slippery surface. And at the same time this smooth surface produces a background radiance.

Markus Saile, Untitled 2022,

oil on wood, 38x50 cm

Euro 3500

Markus Saile, Untitled 2022,

oil on wood, 63x52 cm

Euro 4500

Markus Saile, Untitled 2022,
oil on wood, 62x50 cm
Euro 4500

Markus Saile, Untitled 2022,

oil on wood, 123x98 cm

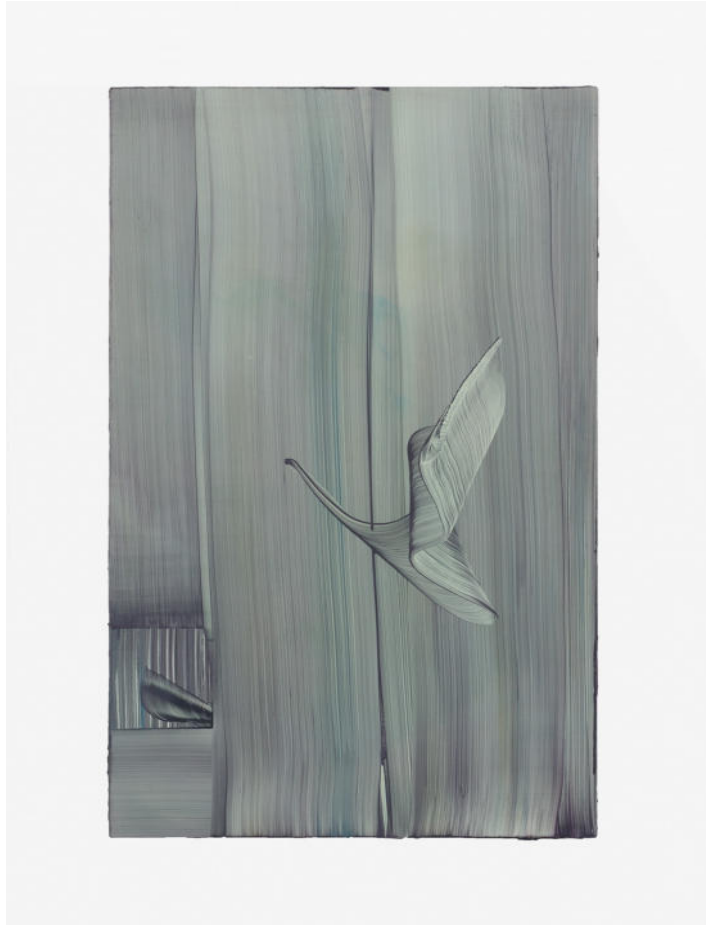Euro 8600

Markus Saile, Pipe #31 2022,

oil on wood, 145x13 cm

Euro 5900

Markus Saile, Untitled 2022,

oil on wood, 47x44 cm

Euro 3800

Markus Saile, Untitled, 2022,
oil on wood, 72x41 cm

Markus Saile, Untitled, 2022

oil on wood, 107x69 cm

Euro 7000

Markus Saile, Untitled, 2022

oil on wood, 85x92 cm

Euro 7200

Markus Saile, Untitled, 2022

oil on wood, 120x150 cm

Euro 10800

Markus Saile, scala, A+B Gallery, Brescia, 2022

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Markus Saile, scala, A+B Gallery, Brescia, 2022

Markus Saile, scala, A+B Gallery, Brescia, 2022

Markus Saile, Suspension of (dis)belief, Markus Lü ttgen Galerie, Zurich, 2021

Markus Saile, Suspension of (dis)belief, Markus Lü ttgen Galerie, Zurich, 2021

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Markus Saile, Suspension of (dis)belief, Markus Lü ttgen Galerie, Zurich, 2021

Markus Saile, Suspension of (dis)belief, Markus Lü ttgen Galerie, Zurich, 2021

Markus Saile, separate | related (TWODO Collection), NAK, Aachen, 2020

Markus Saile, separate | related (TWODO Collection), NAK, Aachen, 2020

Markus Saile, separate | related (TWODO Collection), NAK, Aachen, 2020

Markus Saile, separate | related (TWODO Collection), NAK, Aachen, 2020

Markus Saile, separate | related (TWODO Collection), NAK, Aachen, 2020

Markus Saile, Magnetic Fields, Strabag, Kunstforum, Vienna, 2020

Markus Saile, Magnetic Fields, Strabag, Kunstforum, Vienna, 2020

Markus Saile, Magnetic Fields, Strabag, Kunstforum, Vienna, 2020

Markus Saile, Magnetic Fields, Strabag, Kunstforum, Vienna, 2020

Markus Saile, Magnetic Fields, Strabag, Kunstforum, Vienna, 2020

Markus Saile, FINALI SONO INIZI, A+B Gallery, Brescia, 2019

Markus Saile, FINALI SONO INIZI, A+B Gallery, Brescia, 2019

Markus Saile, FINALI SONO INIZI, A+B Gallery, Brescia, 2019

Markus Saile, FINALI SONO INIZI, A+B Gallery, Brescia, 2019

Markus Saile, Jetzt! Junge Malerei in Deutschland, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, 2020

Markus Saile, Jetzt! Junge Malerei in Deutschland, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, 2020

Markus Saile, *Van exhibition,* Köln, 2020

Markus Saile, *Van exhibition,* Köln, 2020

MARKUS SAILE

"when the norms of painting are put to the test, what is arbitrary will have the last word."[1]

    The exhibition *separate|related* consists of intimate, abstract studies in translucent oil paint layered on plywood panels prepared with an ultra-smooth chalk ground.[2] Their palette is reduced, each painting consisting of one to three moody colors: muted tertiaries like coral,

teal, olive, russet, and violet, or somber grays rimed with ice. Though the compositions are straightforward, the colors are built out of many layers of thin glazes as indicated by the buildup of excess paint on the exposed sides. An apparent simplicity of form and color is therefore revealed to be laboriously constructed through subtle corrections and adjustments. The liquid paint, thinned with an abundance of turpentine, glides over itself, sometimes washing away parts of still-wet brushstrokes or pooling as the panel's edge scrapes paint from the brush's bristles. The brushstrokes are broad, either coating the surface evenly or folding over themselves in gentle gestural curves. This is not the

passionate paint-flinging of the Abstract Expressionists, but a methodical process of doing and undoing. Neither is it a Minimalist exercise in delimiting material constraints, but a deconstruction of the material's expressive potential. The primary feature of these paintings, the site of their structuralist exploration, is the translucent brushstroke.

    Markus Saile—the artist responsible for these enigmatic paintings—is of course not the first to foreground the translucent brushstroke. His work is in dialogue with artists such as David Reed (1946-), Bernard Frize (1949-), James Nares (1953-), and Robert Janitz (1962-). Contrasting them with Saile helps to indicate the

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1 Yve-Alain Bois, "Ryman's Tact" in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 226.
2 *separate|related* was exhibited at the NAK–Neue Aachener Kunstverein from October 11–November 29, 2020. It was part of the Kunstverein's annual TWODO Collection exhibition series.

specificity of his practice. Notably, all these artists work at a scale far in excess of Saile's modest panels. Distinguishing features can also be identified among their handling of the medium and their arrangement of figure and ground. Reed's first post-minimalist canvases, striped with fat horizontal brushstrokes in sloppy black or red paint, soon evolved into experiments with translucent paint applied in serpentine squiggles with brush or knife onto neo-geo color fields. But whereas Reed's crisp rectangular fields and convoluted brushstrokes take on the multiplied appearance of collage, for Saile the orthogonal and the sinuous emerge from the same field. Like Saile, Bernard Frize explores effects produced by loading the

brush with multiple colors. Frize's occasional soft curtains or cascades of paint resemble Saile's gentle compositions, but he more often pushes his brushwork into agate-like striations, rigid lattices, or basket-weave patterns antithetical to Saile's subtly modulated surfaces. James Nares' practice revolves around the gestural deployment of a single ribbon-like brushstroke whose translucency, as in work by Saile, often creates a volumetric illusion. But the triumphant scale at which she paints and her individualistic gusto contrast absolutely with Saile's intimate and anonymous panels. Janitz comes closest to Saile in the way his translucent brushstrokes create a screen through which a variegated color field can be

glimpsed. But he layers his brushwork over smooth gradients, creating a stark contrast between the gestural and the mechanical. Saile differs from all these artists in that the tensions internal to his work emerge not from discrete elements but from a heterogeneity of handling. The same brushstrokes create figure and ground, the same layering creates color and shape. Exploiting the versatility of the translucent brushstroke, Saile treats paint as a self-differing medium.

In *separate/related*, this self-differentiation functions as an organizing principle emblematized by a series of tall, narrow panels called "pipes" by the artist. As the exhibition text reveals, the shape of these paintings has been modeled on a typographic mark—the

same that appears in the show's title. This vertical bar has many names. The term "pipe," though now in more general usage, originally stemmed from computer science, where it was used in programming to chain a set of processes together into a "pipeline." The output of one process is redirected and becomes the input of another process instead of being displayed on the monitor. The pipeline thus hides the inter-process communication, and if no record is made, it is described as an "anonymous pipe." Treating the pipe more or less as a slash (after all, both are descended from the medieval *virgule*), Saile describes it as simultaneously connecting and separating two terms. This calls to mind the process of signification, in which signifier and signified are at once separate and related: a word is evidently different from the thing it refers to, but they are related by the conventions of language. The innovation of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, founder of semiotics, was the acknowledgement that a signifier is not only separate from and related to its signified, but also to all other signifiers. Therefore, there is no origin of signification but rather a chain of differences that proceeds, like inter-process communication, largely hidden from consciousness.

That Saile has named certain paintings after pipes is not as simple as it may seem at first. The pipe paintings are not just pipe-shaped paintings.

When looking at one of these paintings, one of course thinks, "this is not a pipe," but nor is it a painting of a pipe, as Magritte would have it. Nor is it a painted pipe, as if the wooden panel were a pipe before it was painted. No, the painting itself has been given the function of a pipe, which is to create a hidden inter-process. The pipe therefore concretizes a characteristic immanent to Saile's work even beyond this exhibition: his attempt to reflect the very procedure by which painting signifies. This is why I describe his work as structuralist. It is fitting that he should choose a typographic mark to emblematize this characteristic, for it is a structuralism of the mark, that is, of the brushstroke.

This is the quality that connects

Saile's work with Robert Ryman's, work which Yve-Alain Bois described as deconstructing the brushstroke. Bois rejects the interpretation of Ryman's practice as an investigation of "process." The recourse to "process" as a way of explaining such paintings is a reaction to their intransigence, an attempt to locate meaning elsewhere. Bois writes, "the narrative of process establishes a primary meaning, an ultimate, originating referent that cuts off the interpretive chain. That is, an aesthetic of causality is reintroduced, a positivist monologue that we thought modern art was supposed to have gotten rid of."[3] Against this narrative, Bois sees Ryman as embracing arbitrariness rather than

3 Bois, "Ryman's Tact," 216.

causality. His wiggly white brushstrokes do not emphasize the flatness of the painted surface but the quotient of arbitrariness that remains after the painting has been reduced to flatness. Saile furthers the deconstruction of the brushstroke that Yve-Alain Bois so admired in Robert Ryman's work. But whereas the latter was a master of opacity, Saile's investigation focuses on translucency. Ryman explored figure and ground through the brute fact of application, not just of paint on substrate but also of substrate on wall (hence his fascination with fastening). For Saile, on the other hand, application becomes indeterminate: the paint is thinned to such a degree that the act of applying it serves as well to remove it. A new stroke

is often carved into the surface as much as applied to it.

This thinness and translucency introduce an accidental illusionism, a dimension of arbitrariness never explored in Ryman's work. As the bristles deposit the translucent medium unevenly on the surface, the brushstrokes take on the guise of fronds, feathers, sheets of rain, ribbons, veils, locks of hair, or seashells. The effect of these folded and flattened strokes is a sense of potentiality rather than of determinacy. Look closer at the almost-square, graphite gray painting. It is sectioned into three vertical swathes delicately lined like leeks with two curving brushstrokes flanking the central section, one seeming to thrust boldly

into the viewer's space while the other retreats shyly behind the dominant vertical. Despite its morbid color, the painting has all the organic vigor of a vegetal stalk, symmetrically framed like a Blossfeldt close-up. The translucent brushstroke is especially suited to giving this sense of fleshiness, growth, and movement, imbuing the paint with liveliness. The critical point is that this liveliness seems a property of the medium rather than the artist who manipulates it.

This description may recall recent writing on painting, especially David Joselit's network theory of painting and Isabelle Graw's description of a vitalist economy of painting.[4] However, both

4 See David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself" *October* 130 (Fall 2009), 125-134; Isabelle

Joselit and Graw situate the agency or vitality of the artwork in a relation between the object and something beyond it, rather than an internal or immanent relation, as I have identified in Saile's work. For Joselit, painting visualizes its position in a network by becoming a "personage" *vis à vis* the artist or the viewer. The limitation of this argument is encapsulated by the implicit assumption that a painting can only be visualized as an object in a network if it stands in for a human agent. Graw also describes the painting as standing in for a human agent, specifically the artist. Drawing on Marxist value theory, she

Graw, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), and "Notes on the exhibition *The Vitalist Economy of Painting*" which accompanied the exhibition she curated at Galerie Neu, Berlin (September 15 – November 11, 2018).

argues that painting nourishes a fantasy of unalienated labor, as if it were a natural extension of its creator. In both Joselit and Graw's cases, the vitality of painting is borrowed from humans who are the proper agents. In my reading of Saile's paintings, their vitality is also borrowed, but not from people. Rather, their sense of vitality is borrowed from the sign system. Because this inhuman animacy is uncanny, it is tempting to try to reinscribe Saile's paintings within a human frame of reference. For example, in his essay "Time Batteries," Baptist Ohrtmann reads the horizontal and vertical in Saile's paintings as evocations of landscape and body respectively. But this reference to a universalized, given figure/ground relation rooted in

anthropocentric perspective cannot be found in *separate/related*. The attenuated verticality of the pipe is not a humanist portrait format but an antihumanist cipher: it shows that the subject is animated by language rather than the other way around.

There is a mystery in this process of animation, made tangible in the illusion of life conveyed by Saile's translucent brushstroke. While illusionism necessitates a sense of space, Saile's work does not take on the optical spatiality of post-Renaissance painting—which coheres around a stable subject position—but the oneiric, decentered spatiality of Surrealism. It is an illusionism that seems to spring from the material itself, like the fantastical forms produced by automatic techniques such as decalcomania, fumage, or grattage. Rather than locating the meaning of the work in the process of its making, such processes unveil a meaning whose origin is indeterminate and alien. The Surrealists often amplified the uncanny aspects of such automatic techniques by detailing the resultant shapes with illusionistic features such as faces or shadows, turning them into landscapes or ruins or monstrous bodies. Saile shows how unnecessary these modifications are. With his transparent brushstrokes, he demonstrates that the painterly gesture itself can maintain the tension between automaticity and illusionism. And he does so without the Jungian claptrap of the Abstract Expressionists, for it is not his own unconscious that speaks through the medium of paint, but the medium's unconscious, an unconscious structured like a language. The only indication of its subterranean operation is slurry in an anonymous pipe.

CURRICULUM VITAE

EXHIBITION

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Upcoming , June 2022
Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich (CH)

2021

Suspension of (dis)belief , Markus
Lüttgen, Düsseldorf

2020
separate | related (cat.), NAK Neuer
Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen
Magnetic Fields, Strabag
Kunstforum, Vienna
Where We Are (with Marcel Hiller), in
and on a van, fair grounds, Cologne

2019
FINALI SONO INIZI, A+B Gallery,
Brescia, Italy
Das und gleicht dem Chamäleon,
Galerie Markus Lüttgen, Düsseldorf

2017
time is the longest distance (with
Talisa Lallai), Galerie Nathalie
Halgand, Vienna

2014
Magere Zeiten, RECEPTION, Berlin

2013
Crystal Clear & Cloudy (with Dani
Jakob), RECEPTION, Berlin
Ein leichtes Rascheln (with
Samantha Bohatsch), PiK, Cologne

Markus Saile was born in Stuttgart
(1981).
He lives and works in Cologne and is
the co-founder and curator at PiK
Deutz in Cologne (2014-2018).

non-travail, Kunstverein
Springhornhof

2012
Schichtwechsel, RECEPTION, Berlin
Markus Saile, Ringstube, Mainz

2011
Cliffhanger, RECEPTION, Berlin

2010
every so often (with Anna Virnich),
DREI Raum, Cologne

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

2020
small is beautiful, Mai 36, Zurich

Slow And Everywhere Like Breath,
Markus Lüttgen, Düsseldorf
Jetzt! Junge Malerei in Deutschland,
Deichtorhallen, Hamburg
Netzwerke, Galerie Crone, Vienna

2019
Jahresgaben, Bielefelder
Kunstverein, Bielefeld
Jetzt! Junge Malerei in Deutschland,
Kunstmuseum Bonn
Jetzt! Junge Malerei in Deutschland,
Museum Wiesbaden
Jetzt! Junge Malerei in Deutschland,
Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz -
Museum Gunzenhauser
Zwei Alter: Jung, Crone Side, Berlin
Box 4, Melange, Cologne
STRABAG Artaward, STRABAG

Kunstforum, Vienna
Köln um halb acht, Temporary
Gallery, Cologne

2018
Benefit Auction Exhibition, NAK
Neuer Aachener Kunstverein,
Aachen
I CAUGHT A RAT, WE CAUGHT SOME
AIR, group show in a book by
MÉLANGE, Art Düsseldorf, Markus
Lüttgen, Booth G09
ShotSpotter 2- Blurry Boundaries,
Kosmetiksalon Babette, Berlin
face my boost by your ShotSpotter,
Hardspace, Basel

2017
BOILER ROOM, Basis projectspace,
Frankfurt

Your Figure In The Carpet, Zero Fold,
Cologne
CREATING SPACE, BMW Stiftung,
Berlin

2016
Benefit Auction Exhibition, NAK
Neuer Aachener Kunstverein,
Aachen
micro celebrities (commissioned by
Marcel Hiller), Fiebach Minninger,
Cologne

2015
o.T. (ohne Titel), Thermen am
Viehmarkt, Trier
o.T. (ohne Titel), Arp Museum,
Rolandseck
CORRAXOMA (with Thomas
Musehold) curated by Arne Reimann,

Koal, Berlin

2014
Cologne at half past seven,
Temporary Gallery, Cologne
Benefit Auction Exhibition, NAK
Neuer Aachener Kunstverein,
Aachen
Printing Matters, Graphik Kabinett,
Galerie der Stadt Backnang
Cristallo, RECEPTION, Berlin

2013
Kunst jetzt: Ida Gerhardi Preis 2013,
Städtische Galerie, Lüdenscheid
Corridor Plateau III, Galerie DREI,
Cologne

2012
la lucidezza, RECEPTION, Berlin

Benefit Auction Exhibition, NAK
Neuer Aachener Kunstverein,
Aachen

2011
Jahresgaben, Kunstverein
Braunschweig
Schützenfest Meisterschüler,
Raumlabor, Braunschweig
Nomadische Unschärfen, Temporary
Gallery, Cologne

2010
walls feel the love, Raum Kalk,
Cologne

2008
Our gift to the world, Kunstklub
Berlin

2007
Dross, Galerie der HBK, Braunschweig

2005
Plattform #2, Kunstverein Hannover

AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

2020
Stiftung Kunstfonds

2019
STRABAG Artaward International (award of recognition)

2018
CCA Andratx

2014
Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral

2013
Kunststiftung NRW, Junge Szene

2007–2011
Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

2019
Now! Painting in Germany today, exh.-cat., Kunstmuseum Bonn, Museum Wisebaden, Museum Gunzenhauser Chemnitz, Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Text:

Susanne Titz (germ. / engl.), ed. by Stephan Berg, Alexander Klar, Frédéric Bußmann, Munich: Hirmer

2019
Markus Saile:Time Batteries, Text: Baptist Ohrtmann, ed. by Markus Saile, Cologne: Strzlecki Books 2019

2015
o.T. (ohne Titel), Text: Arne Reimann (germ.), ed. by Oliver Kornhoff, Arp Museum Rolandseck, Cologne: Salonverlag 2015

2013
Markus Saile: non travail , Text: Christoph Schreier (germ./engl.), ed. by Kunstverein Sprinhornhof und RECEPTION, Berlin, Berlin: Distanz

Verlag 2013

Corridor Plateau III, ed. by Galerie
DREI, Köln , Cologne: DREI 2013

2011
Markus Saile: Cliffhanger , Text: Ilka
Becker (germ./engl.), ed. by
Hubertus von Amelunxen

2010
every so often (Markus Saile, Anna
Virnich, Text: Dennis Hochköppeler
(germ.) , ed. by DREI Raum für
Gegenwartskunst, Cologne

PUBLISHING

2018
Field of Codes, Texte: Ilka Becker,
Hans-Christian Dany, Sarah Kolb,

Fiona McGovern, Markus Saile,
Kerstin Stakemeier, Marcus Steinweg
(germ.), ed. by Markus Saile, Ilka
Becker, Marcel Hiller, Katrin Mayer,
Cologne: PiK 2018