

DUBINSKYFINEARTS

The Art of Series

The series is an alluring hybrid combining a clear system with persistent mystery – though sequential by nature, the precise form of its continuation is often difficult to foresee and its end remains open to conjecture. This infinite quality distinguishes it from the cycle where every beginning presupposes a corresponding conclusion. To the artist, the series affords the rare opportunity to visualise processes and subtle mutations using the comparatively static means of painting or sculpture. At the same time, however, the decision to employ such sequences signals the rejection of the finished piece, or perhaps affinity with the fragment, that has become such a central issue of modern art. For this, the series provides a highly suitable means of expression.

When Claude Monet - famous pioneer of the series in painting – was investigating the colour values associated with natural light depending on time of day, season, and weather, he sorted these nuances using extensive sequences showing a single motif, e.g. the façade of Rouen Cathedral. Rather than the religious monument itself, his primary focus was the visualisation of the infinite variety of physical phenomena occurring on this intricately sculpted, animated surface. By then, a similar system of sequential images was already being promoted by the recent invention of photography. One only has to recall Muybridge's arrested motion pictures of a galloping horse which for the first time established that at least one of the animal's four legs is in contact with the ground at all times – contrary to what everybody thought and to the way Degas has painted it.

Based on its demonstrable experimental as well as conceptual potential, the series provides an excellent means of reflecting, and reflecting on, a present no longer tied to the holistic ideal. For as our knowledge of the world becomes more profound we also face an increasing number of unresolved issues. Similarly, the proliferation of media images only accentuates the absence of those that are not shown while the speed and momentum of the information flow creates a more pronounced awareness of the simultaneous nature of events.

The art of Djawid C. Borower is firmly established in the here and now: revolving around God and Mammon, Time and Death, language and image, it addresses the forces that make the world go round. In the serial form, Borower has discovered an ideal method to lend a visual expression to the virulence and ubiquity of his chosen themes. The series is an key element of his artistic concept and easily as important to his painting as the other two fundamental precepts of his work, the inclusion of lettering and numbers and the skimming of the still wet canvas. Nonetheless, each of the paintings in one of his suits is able to exist on its own, carries its own weight of expression, and as such does not necessarily require the viewer to be familiar with other paintings in the series. One might compare their situation to that of an individual who, though occupying a clearly defined position in a variety of social contexts, never ceases to exist as an autonomous entity.

Whereas most artist who use the series limit themselves to one of its many permutations, Borower thoroughly explores its possibilities and systematically expands his serial repertoire and only occasionally returns to previously employed rule sets. The single exception is what one might call the "series within the series", where individual motifs of the main theme are repeated. "Pictures of Wine", for example, portray greatly enlarged wine labels, including *Chateau Petrus*, *Screaming Eagle*, *Gaja*, and many others – a fine range of vintages for the wall rather than the wine cellar. Like the cellar, however, the studio has also tended to produce more than one of each kind. This does not in actual fact diminish each painting's essential uniqueness. By its nature the handpainted can never be identical. More importantly difference emphasizes the uniqueness and non reproducibility of painting.

In Borower's work to date, the series in its most reduced, almost minimalist form only employs variations in colouration (and the degree of skimming): the dark majuscules of the word "God" will trigger an entirely different set of responses if clearly outlined on a cerulean background than when seeming to fade into a cool yellow background. When one considers the development of Borower's serial programme as a whole, it can be seen to be directed at steadily increasing the wealth of facets available on the level of text and image. "Pictures of Film", for instance, transpose the potential of film, of the moving image, into painting by showing a single scene from various perspectives and by alternating between extreme close-ups and long shots in a manner that illustrates every subject's multi-faceted aspect. Elsewhere, the image of a face is sec-

tioned and then made to appear on separate canvases in layered, intersecting, and superimposed form. While interpretable as a fracturing and refracting of identity, these 'shortcuts' refuse to fulfil our expectation to encounter a transparent whole.

Originally, Borower availed himself of 'pre-arranged' images already combining, language, or rather lettering and numbers, with a subject that carried certain painterly connotations, banknotes, for example. Subsequently, however, he began to unlock the immense potential of his serial systems by combining images and texts from different sources, as when he superimposes a poem on a sequenced portrait. Each portrait is inscribed with a different text fragment lending it a unique meaning but also radically changing its character. A similar process is at work when he combines a single film sequence with several different quotations.

Its theoretically infinite quality, as well as its ability to express time-related concepts such as motion, repetition, change or development, means that the series offers an excellent way of visualising time. As far as Djawid Borower's painting is concerned, this implies that we are dealing with a form of art that constantly seeks to resist stagnation, is always searching for ways to capture the current of existence, of consciousness, and to comprehend the course of the world. The use of written text as a superordinate constant applied to modular systems – that in turn suggest a continuation along the horizontal as well as the vertical axis – significantly accelerated this form of painting's progress towards what one might term the 'fourth dimension', towards Borower's "Pictures of Time", a themed series in many instalments. At one of the series' culminating points, in a suite with the title "Death",

number sequences not unlike those on a digital clock act as signifiers. Clearly outlined at first, they become increasingly vague, then ornamental, until they blur into grey noise and finally disappear entirely, leaving the canvas empty – in the pristine state of a new beginning. This attempt to manifest the profoundly existential process of dying via shifts in consciousness affects us like a furious fast forward sequence taking place on several levels of reality and awareness – as well as, quite incidentally, offering an authoritative instruction in the forms of modern art. The most recent series, "In and Out of Time", seems to take up a similar theme. Here a monochrome surface is followed by the appearance of the number zero, the number one, and then progresses through various ornamental states towards lettering and portraits while these sub-series continue to permute into ever new constellation. It is no coincidence that these 'tapestry' series resemble Far Eastern mandalas for, like them, they may serve as an aid in meditating on issues relating to God and the world – and on art.

Brita Sachs