

Model of an anarenist's incremental ideological discipline, 2012, wood, reinforced plaster, paint, stainless steel split pins, 152 x 226 x 160 cm

IMAGES OF FLOW

Immersed in a process that is both conceptual and material, Ariel Hassan has at the core of his work a simple procedure – a small quantity of different coloured paints are poured and allowed to run together on small panes of glass. In a vivid demonstration of the beauty of fluid mechanics, the different colours remain intact to a certain degree, and swirl around each other creating unpredictable patterns on both the macroscopic and microscopic level. Hassan later scans selected areas of these abstract images and manipulates the colour and composition in a computer. A print is produced which he painstakingly copies onto a large canvas with paint and brush. This hand-made painting is a crucial stage since it not only results in unexpected details and divergences from the print but also adds a human texture and an aura of authenticity, even mystery.

These paintings of Hassan are compelling images of flow, yet of a flow that did not literally take place on the surface of the canvas. Despite appearances, these works are representations of the images of flow. As well as their sheer beauty, it was this paradox that prompted me to write about them.

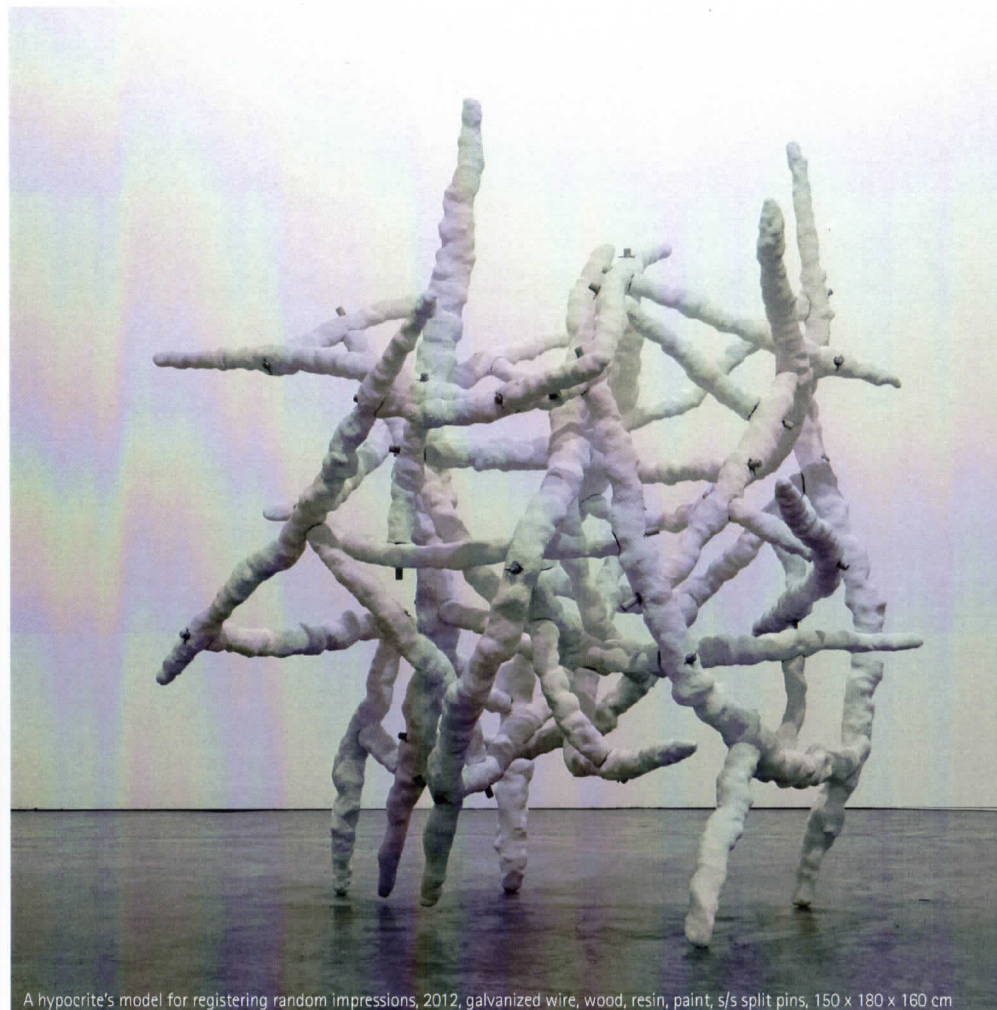
The suggestion that painting abstractions needs nothing more to say beyond the painting itself, not decided by title or explanation, is not a sentiment Hassan shares. Firstly he has titles; often obscure and elaborate. Moreover, his paintings are not content to rest on the wall; they can warp and twist into 3-dimensional space. In some instances, they literally sprout feet and step off the wall altogether to inhabit the viewer's space – this is both macabre and humorous. They can morph into tessellated patterns on the floor that one walks on, or form wallpaper on some adjacent wall. The patterned floor can become a surface on which to place sculptures (modular, complex and intriguing in their own right); meteor-like objects can rain down from above in some installations and in others mirrored light boxes can appear on the walls. Thus, in Hassan's exhibitions, the paintings themselves can become almost incidental to the total installation, yet painting itself remains at its core. I am reminded of the poet Novalis who once declared: "Every individual is the centre of a system of emanation".

Critical theory, research, and reading are important to Hassan. In a recent discussion he mentioned the writings of Deleuze and Guattari's celebrated book 'A Thousand Plateaus', which pursues the philosophy of difference; the 'nomad line of thought',

A cannibal's mo
steel split pins,



A hypocrite's model for registering random impressions, 2012, wood, reinforced plaster, paint, stainless steel
130 x 106 cm



A hypocrite's model for registering random impressions, 2012, galvanized wire, wood, resin, paint, s/s split pins, 150 x 180 x 160 cm

the 'anti-hierarchical'. 'A Thousand Plateaus' was one of the foundation stones for the emergence of post-modernism. While no longer an 'issue' or a 'hot topic' in the visual arts, I believe that its influence was profound, was widely absorbed and internalised, such that it underpins much of contemporary art practice today. Brian Massumi, the translator of 'A Thousand Plateaus' writes in his introduction that Deleuze and Guattari were keen to contrast their "nomadic thought" to the representational thinking characteristic of western metaphysics since Plato, which they refer to in a derogatory tone as "state philosophy". He writes: "Nomad thought does not immerse itself in the edifice of an ordered interiority: it moves freely in an element of exteriority. It does not repose on identity: it rides difference. It does not respect the artificial division between the three domains of representation: subject, concept and being; it replaces restrictive analogy with a conductivity that knows no bounds".

Despite occasional intrusions of figuration, it nevertheless seems apt to characterize Hassan's work as 'abstract'. Thus he is perhaps part of that strand of contemporary painting which Tony Godfrey, the author of the 2009 publication 'Painting Today', calls "ambiguous abstraction". Interestingly, Godfrey points out that no other area

in painting has developed such a complex and theoretical literature as abstraction. He points out that many looked to the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, "for whom the key metaphor was the rhizome, a plant that grows not from a seed but from elements of itself, constantly spreading across the ground and re-rooting themselves". Furthermore, he explains that "in a world where the hierarchy descending from God has disappeared, such a network, with its almost infinite numbers of routes, is another way of explaining how the world and the human neural system works".

When we talk about the 'human neural system' we are simultaneously talking about the structure, which produces consciousness. As Douglas Hofstadter asks in his book 'I am a strange Loop': "can a self, a soul, a consciousness, an 'I' arise out of mere matter? If it cannot, then how can you or I be here? If it can, then how can we understand this baffling emergence?". These are still existential questions today, questions that I feel Hassan, on the evidence of his work, might also find compelling. Art can be a means of exploring self and also the mind. The making of art is an evolving process: I am 'I' who is becoming 'I' who is not I.

Imants Tillers, August 2011