

GALERIE ANDREA CARATSCH

PRESS RELEASE

JOHN M ARMLEDER – *Olivier Mosset New Paintings*

March 7 – March 28, 2009

"I believe the work that is considered to be mine is someone else's... anybody's... the whole world. My work is a cultural event, an inevitable event. If all artists were to disappear, art would be produced by others with a different understanding, different means and different materials. As an individual, an artist simply fills a void. He is the means to an end, so that this arrangement, this accumulation of events can be organized."
–John Armleder, "Une sorte de salade russe sans oublier la mayonnaise", a conversation with Christian Bernard and Françoise Ninghetto, *Semaine no. 01*.

On January 15, 2009, the Galerie Andrea Caratsch in Zurich opened an exhibition showing new works of Olivier Mosset. When it closes on March 7, 2009, John Armleder will open an exhibition with the title *Olivier Mosset New Paintings* on the same day and in the same place.

This exhibition will consist entirely of the preceding one: while the paintings of Olivier Mosset were created by him and while the display in the gallery is exactly the same as the show that closes on March 7, the new exhibition is that of another artist. Although nothing will change, it is nevertheless something entirely different.

With *Again* (2008), the Galerie Andrea Caratsch already presented an example of a similar aspect of Armleder's work: an exact replica of the frieze in the large room of the adjacent Kronenhalle restaurant – which leads me to believe that *Again* (aka *Kronenhalle*) is the most recent example of a radical strategy of relocation, delegation and sabotage of the legitimacy of authorship – of which *Olivier Mosset New Paintings* is yet an even more extreme expression.

Both projects address the questions of the *ready-made*, of the artist's hand, of the exhibition space (and even of the subject of the exhibition itself), of the identity of the object exhibited, of the de- or re-contextualization, of theft and appropriation, as well as the question of *déjà vu*.¹ Since the late 1960s, John Armleder has produced a number of projects – some were realized and some were not – without any physical intervention of the author, which involved the borrowing, without any modification, of a site, a situation, or an event, as the object of an exhibition.²

This type of practice seems to be of the *Zeigeist*, and many artists today are guided by similar concerns. Among Armleder's works, it is worth mentioning the exhibition as artwork, without any other intervention, of a gallery wall³, and the display of a painting by another artist⁴. Other less "passive" interventions partook of the same spirit: for example, repainting a (white) gallery white, while the work of another artist was on exhibit⁵; displacing a piece of furniture inside a museum (or elsewhere), or his more well-known works from the period between 1960 and 1970 (such as the ones where he served tea to the visitors, or where he invites museum guards to display works of their own choice in their cafeteria, those where he kept the light on after the gallery closed, or where he showed the period between two exhibitions in a gallery.) At the 1976 Biennale de Paris, he displayed toys in his assigned space and

instructed the guards to let the children take all of them. As a result, his room was empty one day after the opening and it remained bare for the duration of the exhibition... More recently, a part of *Don't Do It* at the Mamco in Geneva (1997) consisted of a number of films shown in real time on monitors and displaying a canvas mounted in a frame elsewhere in the museum, without the slightest intervention of the artist (who neither personally made the films, nor select the canvases to be filmed). Some of these works were initiated by his collaboration with the Ecart group or other artists with whom the group maintained ties (in 1969 the Ecart group showed, without touching it, a field of snow in the Jura Mountains, and a part of Lake Geneva).

The same spirit lives in several of the artist's publications, such as *Steal These Books (2 Times)* from One Star Press (2003) where he asked that a facsimile of the publisher's current catalogue be published as an art book. A more recent association with the new show at Andrea Caratsch in Zurich is John Armleder's exhibition at Le Parvis in Tarbes in 2008. It involved an exact reproduction of the one he had presented in the same space in 1997, *Peintures Murales 1967-1997*. He does not consider this to be a re-actualization, but rather "a new exhibition, simply consisting of identical works, in this case murals – where the exhibition itself is to be viewed as a work of art"⁶.

Olivier Mosset New Paintings is the first realization of a project pertaining to this series of works. It follows a simple principle: showing the preceding exhibition as a work of art in itself, and in this case, the exhibition of another artist. Armleder appears to have done this at Gallery Marika Malacorda in the 1970s already, although with one of his own exhibitions – a sort of prolongation in the eyes of the visitor, a new creation in the eyes of the artist. Here in Zurich, some will also view the Mosset display as a prolongation, others will see nothing at all... or the latest deception of a lazy artist. Armleder considers himself to be at least honest and lazy – and he is exceptionally prolific.

Appropriation, from Marcel Duchamp to Maurizio Cattelan, and via Elaine Sturtevant, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman or Mike Bidlo is an old battle horse of modern art. While Cattelan, for example, presents it playfully, even farcically, in a specific context, one could assume without a doubt that Sherrie Levine takes quite a different, more radical stance. Armleder, while acting formally, shows no conceptual, political or partisan approach in this kind of work. In fact, he utilizes cooptation like any other tool he may have available in his studio... And he uses it almost coincidentally. There is no intent or purpose. These add-ons develop out of their own volition. They are, in the artist's mind, "outlets", and sometimes they are even therapeutic.

Armleder believes that the issue of authorship is hackneyed. He goes as far as saying that there is no author. And yet, this exhibition, which grew out of somebody else's, is his own only by virtue of his custodial signature. It is therefore only his quality as an author, even by appropriating a show as *ready-made*, which permits John Armleder to show an exhibition that has nothing to do with him. And Armleder's work *Olivier Mosset New Paintings* is the logical conclusion of this. One needs to know, however anecdotal this may be, that there was no premeditation of this project. It was, knowingly or unknowingly, not planned at the time the exhibition of Olivier Mosset opened. Any other show at Caratsch could have served the same purpose: Andy Warhol, Giorgio de Chirico, George Condo or Jiri Dokoupil, for example. Would it have produced the same effect? Armleder would maintain that it certainly would; personally, I am not quite as sure... If we assume that the concept is similar, that the means itself is the end, we would tend to agree with the artist; however (to his great displeasure), all his paintings which follow the same principle (*Pour Paintings, Puddle Paintings, Dot Paintings*, and even his *Furniture Sculptures*) are not equivalent or even

similar. Finally, we detect a hint of ambiguity in the selection of Olivier Mosset: Armleder and Mosset have often exhibited together. Several times in the past, they have been mentioned together by critics, and a certain degree of complicity has occasionally been attributed to them. The choice, with respect to Mosset's œuvre, also does not appear to be entirely innocent: It is well known that Mosset painted exactly the same painting about two hundred times between 1966 and 1967, and in 1994, unless we are mistaken, Olivier Mosset gave John Armleder a number of aquatints he considered to be inadequate (thinking that Armleder would doubtlessly use these for packaging materials or something of this nature), and then Armleder published them under the title *Olivier's Rejects*⁷...

Armleder's project *Olivier Mosset New Paintings* was presented to Olivier Mosset almost as a fait accompli, without a doubt because he was not expected to be annoyed, in spite of a practice certainly more relentless, radical, and in Armleder's opinion, more "authentic".

We still need to understand what we are actually looking at. Let's think for a moment of the long admired works of great masters, which were suddenly found to be those of other, less renowned artists. Such a painting thus changes, because it was created by somebody else. Nevertheless, the original remains intact. It is not Armleder's intent to take over Mosset's paintings. They will remain recent works of Olivier Mosset, as the title suggests. At the most, he appropriates the exhibition of Mosset by prolonging it, and thus making it a new creation, possibly his own. If we go to a shop, mustn't we at least know what must be weighed? For example, a dealer could sell Armleder's piece on one side and offer Mosset's paintings on another. If one goes by the status quo, he would be better off finding one single collector for the whole lot! One must know that Armleder's conceptual creations of this kind follow the formula of the music score. The piece therefore has a current title, *Olivier Mosset New Paintings*, but the composition (the reprise of an earlier exhibition) would effectively allow the use of Rembrandt, l'oeuvre tardive or *Le mécénat dans les musées de province*. In the context of music, an interest often observed in Armleder, one would add the aspect of time. This piece, once it has been realized, is assumed to last a minimum period of time. The artist does not elaborate on these facts, but he appears to prefer a length of time similar to the preceding exhibition. He told me that the prolongation of the earlier exhibition by one single minute would produce a different outcome, as would the remake of another's artist exhibition at a different point in time (meaning not right on after it) – versions which, incidentally, he considers realizing one day...

In an earlier conversation, John Armleder said that he dreamed of one day going to an exhibition and seeing a painting he did not identify and then, reading the label, to find out that it was actually his own. He would therefore have created a work sufficiently removed from his own personality for him to ignore it. Today, in a sort of back flip, a work which is not his own is attributed to him at his own discretion... although he always runs the risk, when visiting his exhibition, of paying more attention to another's work than his own.

The repertoire of the artist (John Armleder) is a work in its own right and allows anybody exposed to it to understand each individual detail separately, his paintings or sculptures, for example, or at least to assess them under a presumably coherent perspective. This is the goal that the Galerie Andrea Caratsch pursues by undertaking to showcase the production of such a versatile artist, avatar after avatar, through a series of quasi-thematic presentations. However, John Armleder has good reasons to play more than one card. He only needs these to shuffle them, from porridge to flan, to pudding and aspic. His affinities with Zen also tell him to turn the gaze inwards as often as possible. And to see nothing.

Willy Parker, Aspen 2009

- 1 For other examples of the artist's work involving other strategies addressing this problem, see the document published by the gallery on the occasion of *Again*.
- 2 Some of these pieces were neither announced nor published anywhere.
- 3 Galerie Marika Malacorda, Geneva, undated work.
- 4 such as the painting by Jean Fautrier during the Teu-Gum Show at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva in 1981.
- 5 Armleder realized this project several times without prior announcement. In 1978, when he had the keys to Gallery Marika Malacorda in Geneva where he occasionally worked, he took down an exhibit one night, repainted the walls, replaced the exhibit with a new one and did not announce it until several weeks later.
- 6 Artist Michel Aubry is currently launching a second part to his exhibition.
- 7 He followed a similar strategy in La Decima Ora which consisted only of the rolls of carpeting used to display the work of Maurizio Cattelan La Nona Ora.



The gallery is open from Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
and on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.