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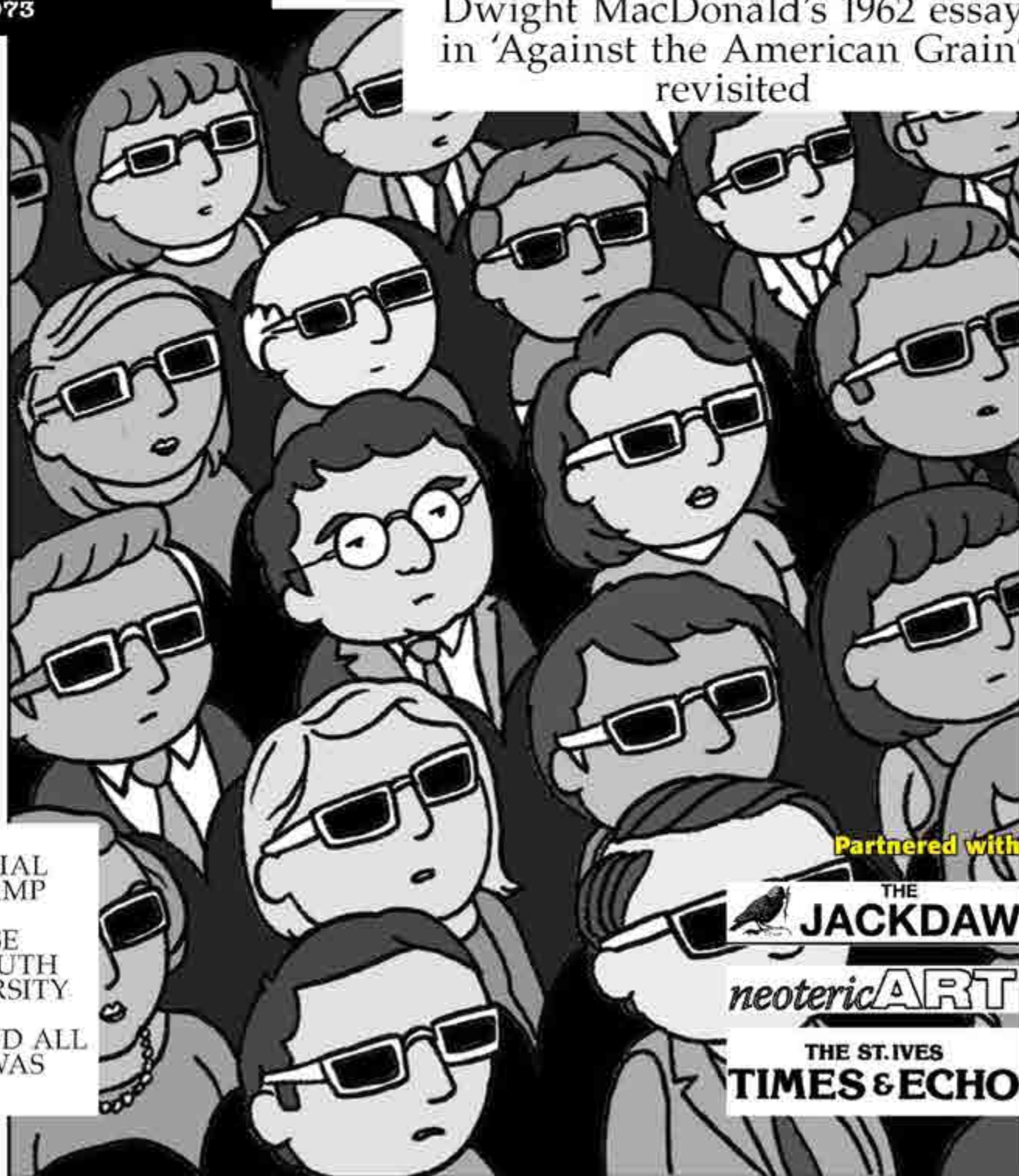
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CHICAGO WASHINGTON TORONTO LONDON MADRID CORNWALL

MASS MIDCULT

Dwight MacDonal's 1962 essay
in 'Against the American Grain'
revisited



THE
ESSENTIAL
DUCHAMP

J'ACCUSE
FALMOUTH
UNIVERSITY

1937 AND ALL
THAT WAS
PARIS

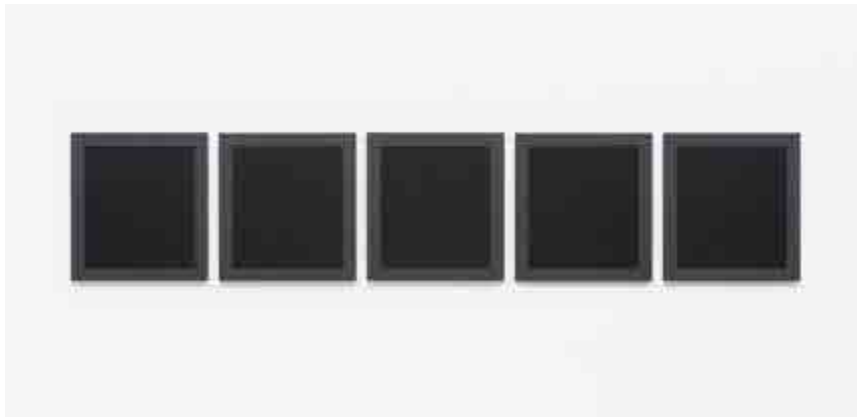
Partnered with

THE
JACKDAW

neotericART

THE ST. IVES
TIMES & ECHO

Pittsburgh



Thread painting 2015-5

light to middle gray whereas up close one can see that these shapes are actually created from individual lines in grid patterns.

Another approach to material includes the use of acrylic on acrylic tile shaped pieces. Once again he relies on systematic repetition of parts in a grid format. Wall Piece 2016-3b, Acrylic paint on Acrylic and rare earth magnets 15.25" x 29.75" x 0.25" consists of 5 rows and 6 columns of black rectangles stacked in pairs. When viewed from the side we see a cobalt blue edge to the tiles the only non-gray scale color in the exhibition.

Tabatabai's work carries on the threads of his modernist forbearers from the 50's, 60's, and 70's. The color field painters such as Ad Reinhardt and his black paintings, perhaps a bit of Mark Rothko's Chapel paintings, through Frank Stella's pinstriped minimalist Black Paintings, the hard edge paintings of John McLaughlin and perhaps most closely tied to the pencil grid work of Agnes Martin. However, Tabatabai's work is much more refined and for the most part on a smaller scale so the pieces feel more intimate, delicate, precious, and jewel like than those mentioned. There is a certain elegance to these pieces which makes the work of the aforementioned feel heavy handed. But they are positioned within the same general conceptual



The solo exhibition Hadi Tabatabai: Transitional Spaces is co-presented by the wats:ON? Festival and curated by Spike Wolff. The festival, an annual event, celebrates and honors the life and work of Jill Watson, a CMU alumna. Watson, who was killed in a plane crash in 1996, was a well-known Pittsburgh architect and was recognized for her interdisciplinary philosophy as an artist. The exhibition at the Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University runs from September 23 – November 12, 2017.

Tabatabai works with a limited set of variables including: the use of grids, parallel lines, modularity and a predominantly neutral monochromatic grayscale palette.

Within the larger central space of the third floor gallery many of the pieces feature the use of painted thread stretched tautly from top to bottom, evenly spaced at 1/8" intervals in near machine-like fashion, although actually made by the hand of the artist. When viewed from afar this approach creates fields of black, white, and various shades of gray, but when seen up-close registers as line. As mentioned, he often works with modular iterations of 3,4,5,6 and 7 repeating the same scaled rectangular supports which are very close to squares with repetitive spacing equal to the borders of his pieces. All

of the work has a very thin profile and he uses acrylic and Dibond panels for his supports which are white, gray or black. Because the supports are recessed this influences how we perceive the thread which is stretched around the aluminum outer frame.

In Thread Painting 2015-5, 2015 Thread, acrylic paint, and ABS on Dibond panel, 17"x 16" x 1" (each panel) which is prominently displayed on the back wall of the central space and acts as the anchor for the exhibition, we see five identical panels pieces in a row, all with a centrally placed floating black rectangle surrounded by a dark gray border. The dark gray border is actually the evenly spaced white thread against a black background and the floating black rectangle is a result of that shape being painted on said white thread.

In the smaller space to the right of this central area the work shifts to middle gray supports and the others a white backing. Tabatabai continues to engage with many of the same variables but in slightly different ways. For instance, he uses drawn line as opposed to thread in many of these pieces and creates grids as opposed to just vertical lines. However, he still continues to explore the interplay of shape and line based on the positioning of the viewer. A greater distance produces geometric shapes in various shades of

frameworks: breakdown of the figure ground relationship, contemplative, truth in materials, non-representational, stripping down to get to the essential The work seems like the next logical step in this progression and I'm sure if Clement Greenberg was still around he would be championing this work. The clock like precision in which these pieces have been crafted is in large part responsible for transporting the viewer to a serene space where one enters into a trancelike state of total calm, peace and stillness.

All that being said, to see the work through this Western Art Historical lens would only partially contextualize the work. Hadi Tabatabai was born in Mashhad, Iran and spent the first thirteen years of his life living there. He moved to the states with his parents and settled in California. He received a BS in industrial technology from California State University Fresno and ten years later a BFA in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute in

1995. Since my knowledge of Iranian art is limited it would be difficult for me to speculate how much influence his time in Iran and his connection to Iranian culture has influenced his work. What I can identify in this work is the use of thread, tile like pieces and non-representational imagery. Weaving rugs, creating textiles, mosaic tiles and the use of geometric patterns have all been part of the rich history of Iranian art making. So from my blunted Western perspective these are the elements of his work that reveal a link to his Iranian heritage and perhaps this interplay of Western and Eastern influences help shape the work that is part of Transitional Spaces.

By all accounts this exhibition exemplifies the term art for art's sake. One could enter this exhibition in any decade over the last 50 years or so and have no idea, based on the work what is going on in the world outside the confines of the art world. Once again reinforcing the earlier reference to the

Minimalist Movement, one which operated during a controversial war, political assassinations, amidst divisive race relations, the feminist movement and anti-government protests ... sounds familiar doesn't it? Most would agree that this work qualifies as nonpolitical. Can art made during this time frame really disassociate itself from the political? Maybe if more people could see and actually appreciate this exhibition or better yet make work that required developing the sensitivity, skill and discipline to create this type of contemplative art we would all live in a more peaceful, harmonious world. So perhaps during these turbulent times Tabatabai's private act of looking inside to create this quiet meditative work is really the subversive embodiment of the political.

■

Scott Turri

The Nail In the Coffin

"Codswallop" is a performance piece created by the Cornish veteran artist Ken Turner, inspired by the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes. At the St Ives Festival in September 2017 he placed a large, fresh cod onto a trolley and pulled the vehicle through the streets of St Ives challenging people to discuss their lack of sensibility to art. He visited the Penwith Gallery and Tate St Ives, which was closed, talking to people in the street and the cod, asking them all what they thought of the art on display. The resulting film by Huw Wahl, from which these images are taken, is available to view on [youtube](#).

The challenge, which highlighted the corruption in conception and execution of the contemporary art scene was well reported by the official festival reporter. The St Ives Time & Echo promised to carry a full report on what happened but failed to do so. The Penwith Gallery complained that he did not have permission to enter their gallery and have so far ignored his request to screen *To Hell With Culture*, a film about Herbert Read by Huw Wahl, presumably because it shows a vibrant, literary mind engaging with artists. Something the Penwith Gallery is loathe to do today. The Newlyn Society have also failed to engage with Turner's

Cornwall

