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*An Intimate Look Into The Worst That New York City Has To Offer...*  
**NY ART AND LEISURE**  
*with AL MILLER*

**Wednesday, September 23, 2009**  
**Olivier Mosset & Jon Pestoni**

The other week I met someone who was going off on a show that I casually mentioned a couple posts ago, Jon Pestoni and Zak Prekop at Lisa Cooley gallery. This acquaintance couldn't get past the fact that next door Miguel Abreu had decided to hang Olivier Mosset as part of a sequential group exhibition, and kept insisting that Mosset was the "godfather" of Pestoni's and Prekop's "limp" (not my word...) practices. Now a statement such as that is the sort of bullshit that's so easy to spot when someone says it but so hard to let go of its clutching vices a week or so after first hearing it--well at least for me.

Given painting's once heterosex/macho historical traditions, being a godfather to "limp" painting seems a curious badge to wear; yet as such traditions recede into the discursive twilight (as it has been for some time now...), "limpness" in macho-painting is to be praised and admired (think of Krebber as an example). Yet within Mosset's hog-riding oeuvre it is a little harder to detect "limpness."

Mosset first exhibited, to my knowledge, in Daniel Buren's '66-67 version of the Dziga Vertov Group, BMPT. Mosset and his collaborators--Buren, Niele Toroni and Michel Parmentier--typified the mid-century exposure of painting to its zero degree and the subsequent opening of such nil-quantities to the political aggressiveness of Lettrist and Situationist tactics. Yet as BHD Buchloh wonders in his retrospective [take](#) on the group the group's politicization of this aesthetic void, Buren's especially, such artistic horizons do not come problem-free:

Had we arrived at the point where artistic practice has to mimic the mass-cultural forms of advertising if it is to remain at all visible in whatever residual (or mythical) public spaces are left to us? At what precise historical moment will artistic practice have declined to such an extent as to fully fuse with the very mechanisms of ideological suture that it supposedly critiques? That decline was at first hesitantly, and then enthusiastically, embraced by Buren in his transition from conceiving spatial structures as analytical and phenomenological situations for the viewer's self-determination to thinking instead of spatial experience as an art consumer's celebratory disco design.

While Mosset is only briefly mentioned in the article, one can glean from this problematic exposure of painting to its politicized public the

origins of Mosset's later work; its "limp" retreat into the private studio and back onto canvas from Buren's cynically affirmative macronarratives of painting's political use-value. It is as if Mosset's glimpse into BMPT's aesthetic void only made him self-consciously realize the subsequent abandonment of painterly traditions/myths necessitated by the exposure of painting, thus forcing him to cynically cling to the specters of painterly romance in order to please the individuated needs of his painterly libido--his born-to-be-wild cameo in *Downtown 81*, an airy studio in New Mexico, his ZZ Top moustache, corporate lobby-scaled works and, most notably, his godfatherly reverence by jaded ingenues. The apparent limpness of Mosset's political retreat is countered by Mosset's neocon expansion of the monochrome to include these inapparent signs of masculinity; it's as if he slaps a "no-fat-chicks" sticker on the zero degree--which may begin to explain the work of many of his macho, young admirers.

Comparing Buren's post-BMPT development and subsequent influence on present-day artists with Mosset's becomes a shell game of choosing the lesser of two ills; where of course Mosset's "limp" cynicism is a more desirable option to Buren's "aggressive" cynicism in the same sense that, given his Mosset-derived "authentic" mystique, Steve Parrino is more desirable than Takashi Murakami--even though they both show at Gagosian.

Within the same text, Buchloh offers a eulogized solution of sorts to such painterly conundrums by focusing on the "idiocy" of Niele Toroni's ongoing, in-situ practice, which in truth seems closer to the ineffectual limpness so evident in good macho painting today:

Toroni, by contrast, remained obstinately, almost idiotically loyal to modernist pictorial mark making. And the self-reflexive positivist signal of a merely iterative facture acquired, in contrast to Buren's ever-expanding empire of decoration, a strangely resistant dimension. As though the very materialist trace of the serialized and regularized deposit of pigment, in its seeming inanity was more impervious to fetishization and spectacularization, and as if its anonymous intimacy granted its viewers a last gasp of what painting might have had to offer.

Toroni's resistant idiocy, or political "limpness" when compared to Buren's expansive politicality, does seem particularly relevant today, specifically for a necrophilic economy like contemporary painting--a necrophilia Mosset gleefully milks. Considering Buchloh's testimony, Toroni--with his idiotic obstinacy, his "limp" yet limpid artistic horizons--is much more of a godfather to a pair of painters like Pestoni and Prekop than the cynical posturing of Mosset with his designer children.

With Pestoni's paintings in particular the viewer is treated to work that looks as if it's incongruously caught half way between the authorless facture of Toroni and the inadvertent tomfoolery of someone like Ralph Humphrey or some New Image painter, two seemingly oppositional tracks of post-minimal painting brought together in uneasy yet inventive tension within Pestoni's seemingly "limp" paintings. Like many other artists today, Pestoni is all too aware of painting's rote, neurotic "can't go on,

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must go on" economic zombiism and, in subsequent obstinacy, makes paintings like Howard Hawks (or John Carpenter) made genre films. Simply read Pestoni's abstractions along the lines of Manny Farber's discussion of Hawks' termite art:

Buglike immersion in a small area without point or aim, and, over all, concentration on nailing down one moment without glamorizing it, but forgetting this accomplishment as soon as it has been passed; the feeling that all is expendable, that it can be chopped up and flung down in a different arrangement without ruin.

These termite horizons seem to best approximate the share contemporary art has rationed to legit painting these days and Pestoni, like Hawks, makes the best of it. While it's easy to consign one's self to the mystique of contemporary painting's mortuary lust, Pestoni's harebrain'd exploration of the conceptual and emotional forms as they are subjected to the economy of aesthetic desires is, however, a most noteworthy feat this side of Rio Bravo.

Posted by Al Miller at 11:27 AM [0 comments](#)

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