

Liberated, Rendered Alien

In Matt Sheridan's painting-in-motion piece, *Trips*, a pair of sturdy black and white brushstrokes—characterized by qualities of broad, animated strokes—jaunt to and fro in a sort of agonizing jig that simultaneously recalls the adjectival Irish (jig) and the typological bait (jig) that is jerked up and down through the water in attempt to lure fish. Both jigs are typified by movements that are designed to tempt and entice their audiences. Yet the way in which *Trips* jigs is neither tempting nor enticing, exactly. Rather, the looped video piece moves with equal parts grace and menace, joy and near-bumbling folly, landing each time with an electric splash of digitized paint. The brushstrokes form a pair of uncanny legs, torso-and-foot-less, marching akimbo with a measured, self-aware precision propelling this kinetic painting toward an abstraction that, when projected onto a surface, reclaims its texture, becoming as materially rich as layers of paint on a canvas.

As the legs march, occasionally triangulating or committing to an aerobic flip, the paint strokes perform the anxiety of painting, à la Philip Guston. “A certain anxiety persists in the paintings of Piero della Francesca,” Guston wrote about the 15th-century Italian painter. “What we see is a wonder of what it is that is being seen. Perhaps it is a certain anxiety of painting itself.” In *Trips*, traces remain as each stroke continues its trajectory, leaving behind a shifting palimpsest as the eye registers every fast and expressive line of light and shadow. As Guston's anxiety was contemplative and productive, engendering awareness, it provided him a space to liberate himself of that

which he already knew. The search for freedom within a work of art is embodied in *Trips*, which animates the exploration and reconsideration of the subjective in painting. In Sheridan's painting-in-motion, multiple viewpoints present themselves at once: the digitized, the painterly, and the animate—alongside the comic (dancing, amputated legs), the somber (a soundless procession), the destructive (each painted line erases itself immediately upon completion), and the generative (a line gives birth to itself).

Harkening Lichtenstein's Brushstrokes series, which depicted the gestural expressions of the brushstrokes themselves, the characterization of the brushstrokes in Sheridan's *Trips* are exuberantly emancipated. In isolating the brushstroke, it becomes its own subject. Through a process of making physical paint marks, digitizing the marks, collaging the digitization, animating the collage, and projecting the animation onto a surface (both the white wall of a gallery and the outside of buildings have been utilized), the painting is thus liberated from the canvas and rendered alien. Is it still a painting, and why? The answer is yes, and resoundingly so. In this age of screen culture, Sheridan's painting-in-motion is an undead reprisal of the form, hybrid in nature, both a painting and a video. In the spirit of Gerhard Richter and Wade Guyton, whose concerns involving the physical activity of painting have long preoccupied their practices, Sheridan reduces painting to its most essential symbol—at once legible and unrecognizable—while maintaining the presence of all its meanings in layers like geologic sediment.

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