

Bernard Frize in Paris.

CIMBER AIR Year 06/07

# Fat painting

The French painter Bernard Frize is considered one of the most interesting contemporary painters at the moment. His work has been exhibited worldwide and is included in several major international collections but has never previously been shown in Denmark. Despite this fact, many of the younger Danish artists have been influenced by his ideas and methods which have added new dimensions to painting

Text Lene Burkard

The paint on Bernard Frize's canvases sweeps in multiple trails across the surface, running, moving in waves, writhing and interweaving, organizing itself in organic patterns and geometrical grids. This rarely happens as an isolated occurrence, for the artist likes to work in series in which the same motif is repeated, incorporating the eventualities that arise in the course of the painting process as well as variations in colour and brushwork.

#### From impasto to transparent

Frize's practice of working in series ties the works together and emphasizes the technical process. The paintings become an experimental project, and as observers we are invited to follow its course and the changes occurring along the way. The weight is on the actual physical work of painting and

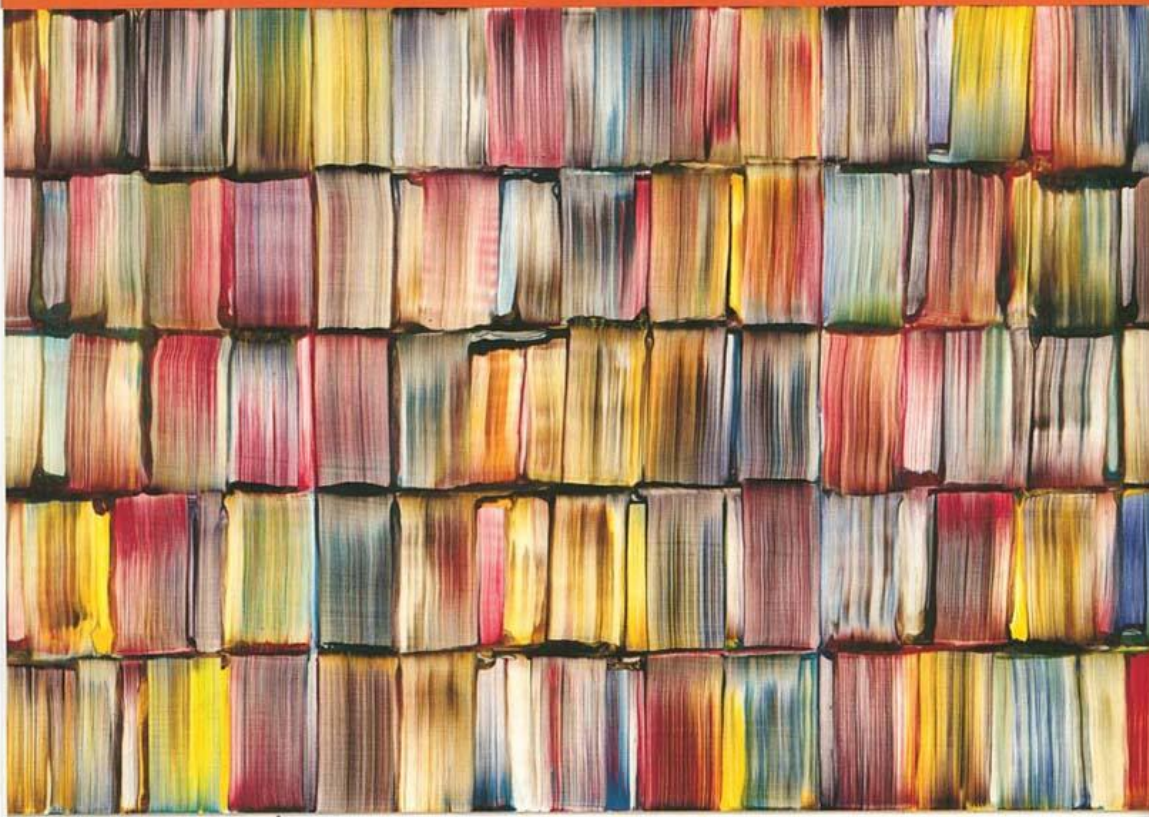
the methods employed. The motifs of the series favoured by Frize are relatively simple figures and patterns. The paint is applied in thicknesses varying from impasto to transparent, with brush sizes ranging from the finest sable hair to the width of a broom. Frize's oeuvre includes works that are almost monochrome, while others unfold in every conceivable colour. Although his figures often appear very simple, they are nevertheless extremely complicated to trace back to their genesis.

#### Thoroughly nonhierarchical

Some of the series were produced with the aid of several assistants working on the same picture, for instance by having each person start in a separate corner and continue painting until the process is completed. The results are thoroughly nonhierarchical; no

element takes precedence over another, there is no distinction between up and down, and the choice of colour differs from the traditional use of contrasting or complementary hues or harmonies. Frize uses random colours as part of his endeavours to avoid personal preference. Much has been written about Frize's methods, his process-oriented painting, the influence from automatic painting and from American abstract art of the 1960s. The latter unquestionably comes closest to serving as a point of departure and source of inspiration for his work. In the late stages of modernist avant-garde art, the stated goal was to continue the attempts - initiated by early avant-garde artists such as Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian - to rid painting of all forms of representation. Frank Stella's often cited statement, "What you see is what you see", seemed to leave few traces

ARTICLE IN ENGLISH – CIMBER AIR INFLIGHT MAGASIN



**FACTS**

**Brandts, Odense**

More exhibitions open every year at the exhibitions complex Brandts than at any other venue in Denmark. Brandts presents about 25 changing exhibitions of Danish and international visual art, photo and media annually. With changing exhibitions, permanent collections and a Knowledge as well as Educational Centre, Brandts occupies a total floor space of 5000 square metres.

**Opening hours:**

Open Tuesday through Sunday 10am – 5pm, except Thursday 12pm – 9pm. Weeks 7,8 and 42 (Danish Winter- and Autumn School Holidays) additionally Monday 10am – 5pm. Closed on 24 – 26, 31 December and 1 January.

of metaphysical or subjective reference. It is this abstract tradition Frize has continued, while many other visual artists have turned to figurative practices such as the neo-expressionism of the 1980s, or more recently, the fantasy genre.

**Complex considerations**

Another significant aspect of Frize's practice is that he wants the works to "express clarity and straightforwardness, to be very simple, something that anyone could do".<sup>4</sup> This inevitably calls to mind the Danish visual artist Poul Gernes (1925-1996), currently in the public eye at Documenta XII in Kassel with his targets and flags in colours chosen at random from a paintshop chart. Gernes' intention with these works, painted in simple patterns, was to create a democratic art – a popular art for all. In 1967, at Charlottenborg in Copenhagen, he created a series of six-meter-high paintings that completely enveloped viewers in a panorama of patterns composed of dots, lines and squares, distributed across a number of walls. There are obviously many differences between these two artists, but

what is interesting in this connection is their attempt to create a democratic, simple and down-to-earth visual art. Neither Bernard Frize nor Poul Gernes can be called naïve, for aside from aesthetics, the simplicity both strive for encompasses complex philosophical, political and social considerations. ☼

Notes:  
1. Jens Jørgen Thorsen: *Modernismen i Danmark*

