



ARTslant

INTERVIEW WITH MARC GANZGLASS

Artslant New York Editor Trong Gia Nguyen chats with artist Marc Ganzglass about meteorites, UFO engines, and Edward Hopper. The Brooklyn-based artist is currently in South Beach taking in Art Basel Miami week.

Trong Gia Nguyen: There is a Hopperesque banality to some of your works, such as *Castro's*, with its kitchen light, formal vantage point, and simple everyday actions, though in video form. Do you relate your work to painting at all?

Marc Ganzglass: Not directly to painting, I relate to photography as far as procedure goes, so maybe Hopper is a good example. In a photograph you have an interval separated from the timeline and a lot of my work tends to function like that, a quotient separated from the rest of the equation. With *Castro's*, I was struck by how all the formal elements were implicit in the situation at the bodega, the lighting and the way the screen is split into quadrants by the deli counter. Because of these strong formal elements the event of the guy making tortas became separated from its context very easily. The video I shot in *China Liu Thinks Jade Dragon Snow Mountain is Innocent* is like that also, it's a tunnel, that looks straight out of *Battlestar Galactica*, but in the end there is this guy with a rickshaw, the two archetypes are in confrontation and that's unsettling, but because the situation was found and not fabricated it is also familiar.

TGN: Your most recent work, *The Flight of Orgueil*, is a film produced using an electron microscope at the Laboratory for the Study of Extraterrestrial Material in Paris, but transforms this scientific experience into something even more basic, sort of like a photogram in relation to photography, the elementary writing of light. Is part of your work about romanticizing science?

MG: Science as a pursuit is definitely romantic, in a way that's what allows it to be picked up and used as an analogue in art. They share the same impulses, but in science I think it's easier to establish a baseline, to figure out where you are at a given time. In material sciences you have this ability to calibrate your observations, and measurement is the first step in both construction and description. In art you are left to find different tools and that's where structural tactics like the photogram come in to play. *Vol D'Orgueil* is about this condition of measurement, and understanding what you are looking at.

Nguyen, Trong Gia. 'Interview With Marc Ganzglass'. *Artslant*, December 1, 2008.

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On the one hand the film is a throwback to structural filmmaking and defers a lot of the aesthetic decisions to the mechanical limits of the microscope. On the other hand, as a subject it uses a material with a significant social and chemical history. The meteorite that we used in the film, (the Orgueil) is chemically analogous to the sun and has been central to the debate about the birth of the solar system. Working on that microscope, we had the ability to go deep into the structure of the meteorite, down to 10 microns, but I kept it at very low magnification and wanted to maintain that inability to penetrate through.

TGN: You did a residency at the Kohler manufacturing facility in Wisconsin, where you produced a series of drinking fountains that combine iron from earth and iron from another meteorite found in Siberia. You also work often with alloys and the shaping of these manufactured materials. Is chemistry one and the same as concept and philosophy within your work?

MG: I don't look to the language of chemistry or engineering to describe a philosophical stance metaphorically. Alloys made here on earth are social materials and are engineered to fulfill desires that are often expressed through metaphor. So a study of alloys allows me to flip back and forth between something empirical and something subjective - how the physical state of a material is articulated in culture, and this points back to that problem of measurement - what's the distance between the observed thing and its mediated image, and how is this distance described? This is why meteorites are interesting, because they carry both signatures. They are alloys from space, which is outside our history, but they embody narratives of real importance to us once their structures are read in a social context and the chemistry examined in terms of our needs. The study of meteoritic iron led to the discovery of steel as an alloy, before that people believed that iron meteorites were important as celestial objects and there was an understanding that the material performed in useful ways but it wasn't until after the discovery of steel that the meteorite embodied both the technical and the celestial.

TGN: Have you ever seen a UFO?

MG: Have we talked about this before? Because I have a good story. I was living in Northampton Mass, in a house with about five other people. My friend Dylan would occasionally go out to California and buy a classic car or hot rod in decent shape, drive it back east and sell it. At the time he had a very cool black 1970 Dodge Charger that he was trying to sell. He had parked it in front of our house in the gravel driveway and had a sign on it. One day this guy drives up in a really beat up 1971 Charger painted metallic blue. I remember seeing garden hoses hanging out of the grill when he pulls up next to Dylan's 1970. The guy gets out and he looks alright, overweight and long hair.

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We go over and he's already under the car looking for rust. Pretty soon both the hoods are open and we are all standing around the cars, Dylan's had a 440 Magnum, which is a great motor and should be interesting to this guy. The first thing you see under this guy's hood are two coke cans all cut up and screwed to the top of the carburetor, he says he has made some modifications and the car is getting thirty something miles to the gallon. We could get about eight. So anyway the guy is asking about the condition of the car, what the frame is like and all that, and Dylan is going off on the motor. This guy says he doesn't care about the motor, that he is going to put something else in it, so we ask what. *A UFO motor.* He says that his dad worked at Andover AFB and had reversed engineered a UFO engine and that they had one built and he was just looking for the right model Charger to drop it in and he liked the 1971. He then proceeded to draw a diagram in the sand explaining how the motor works. It's got three poles that can be either neutral, positive or negatively charged. When one pole is negative the one adjacent to it is neutral having just been positive, the negative pole is attracted to the after image of the one that was just positive. Once the thing gets going the cylinders oscillate back and forth, always attracted to each other's previous charge. It's a perpetual motion machine. The guy then goes on to tell us about photographing lightning with a guy who had been struck so many times he could tell where lightning would hit. It was very far out, but the guy came back later and bought the car for 4 grand. I was working at a welding shop called Elmer's Welding in Amherst at the time and the next day at work I asked this guy Jim Loomis if he'd ever seen a UFO. I didn't mention the guy and the Charger. And Jim tells me this story. When he was a kid growing up in South Hadley (next town over) he used to go driving down in the cornfields. We all did this. So he was driving in the cornfields one night and was parked up on a low rise when he saw another car coming through the field. Jim said he could tell it was a Chrysler Imperial because of the bullet shaped taillights on the high fins. This must have been the late 1960's, Jim was about 50 when I knew him. He said the car was going pretty fast and looked like it was caught in a rut. It leaned over on its side and he thought it was rolling into a ditch, but then the car rose up, still on its side, and took off. He said it lifted off the ground and took off into the sky.

TGN: There is this subtle melancholy that seems to creep into your works. Newsworthy but quickly forgotten histories come into play in certain pieces, such as the sinking of the Tricolor carrier. Even though you revitalize these events in your art, do you feel that ultimately art is underpinned by the same sense of fate?

MG: There is something tragic in a few of the works, though I'm not sure if it's because the subject has receded from view. I think the melancholy, and the banality you spoke of in the first question is more a symptom of how some events aren't easily reconciled with the structures we have built around them, and this situation definitely has a corollary in art. I

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forget the name of the theorem but there is one that suggests that in a solvable equation there can be contained an un-solvable subset, that something will always be inconclusive. I'm particularly interested in situations like this that take place within the structures you find in manufacturing, science and engineering, the slip is pronounced and comedic. In *Tricolor/BothSidesNow* you have the story of a shipwreck that takes place in the middle of the English Channel, the Tricolor sinks with 3000 new cars on board. The ship was a key player in an intricate system of exchanges that involved international trade and logistics and complex economic structures. At the time of the wreck these relations become suspended and present an opportunity for assessment and renegotiation, and I think that you find very similar situations in art. I think what we see as comic/tragic is the recurring desire to reframe.

TGN: In *Bridge of Gold*, you reshoot a famous chase scene from the James Bond *Goldfinger* novel by Ian Fleming. Tell us a little bit about this re-enactment.

MG: This project retraces a car chase in which Bond pursues Goldfinger across France to a refinery outside of Geneva. He uses a homing device to track Goldfinger's movements, and Bond never really sees the gold Rolls Royce, so it's not a car chase so much as a slow pursuit. Most people know the sequence from the movie, where there is some action and gunplay. In the book it is different, it takes two days for them to reach Goldfinger's refinery. Using only this homing device, Bond speculates on Goldfinger's destination, he makes wrong turns, gets frustrated and has to retrace his steps. Eventually they end up at the refinery where Goldfinger melts down his car in a very cool gesture of unmaking a thing. In the book Fleming describes the chase sequence in great detail, giving all the place names and roads taken. It's a very technical description. What I found exciting was that contained in the text are real directions to a place we know is fictional. There is no refinery and no Goldfinger but we have a viable set of instructions. And there was the correlation to the film and the entire Bond narrative as well, so there was the potential to move within these different schemes, between the technical and the metaphorical. So myself and a cinematographer rented a car and camera and filmed for four days in the Jura mountains, using just the Ian Fleming book and a map from 1954. The text lent us access to film making without a script, screenplay or location scouting. Back in New York I edited the film for continuity, focusing on color and movement, trying to re-establish it formally and then did a dissonant soundtrack with two musicians from the band the Obits. The finished product isn't really a film it's more of an artifact of what happens when decisions that are normally central to production are deferred. This goes back to that desire to measure, make something different and compare it to what came before it.