

MORGAN FISHER

Translations

October 23, 2011 – February 5, 2012

The Museum Abteiberg takes pleasure in presenting “Translations,” the first museum exhibition to emphasize the work of Morgan Fisher in painting, the field in which he has been most active since the late 1990s. The exhibition includes a work that specifically expresses Fisher’s admiration for Blinky Palermo (1943-1977). “Translations” includes two more works that Morgan Fisher made specifically for this exhibition. Besides its familiar meaning, translation also means moving something from one place to another. This principle is a foundation of these three works, two of which are painting installations with a strong architectural aspect. The exhibition also includes an earlier work related to installation and two early moving image works, both shown for the first time in Europe.

The American artist Morgan Fisher (born in 1942, lives and works in Los Angeles) emerged as an international figure in experimental filmmaking in the early 1970s. His work in film also included film installations. In the late 1990s Fisher began showing paintings and then painting installations. These have been exhibited in the United States and in Europe, for example at the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein in 2002 and at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 2010. His show at Portikus in Frankfurt in 2009 extended the ideas that underlie his films and paintings to an architectural installation.

Fisher studied art history at Harvard from 1960 to 1964, then studied film in Los Angeles. He worked briefly in Hollywood, principally as an editor, an experience reflected in some of his films. He has made more than a dozen films, many of which have been shown at leading international festivals, including Berlin and Oberhausen. Fisher’s films call attention to the origins that gave them their form and also bring into view aspects of film that ordinarily remain hidden. His work in painting is based on comparable principles. The paintings declare the origins of their size and shape, and also make evident and hence question conventions that govern how paintings are displayed and viewed.

The foundation of Fisher’s work in painting is the monochrome, which more than other kinds of modernist painting calls attention to its size and shape. Fisher made the size and shape of his monochromes a part of how they signified, directing attention to the totality of the painting as an object and its relation to the wall. He made and showed his paintings in groups, enabling the viewer to compare all of one painting with all of another. One source for the paintings was architecture, which determined not just their size and shape but also where they were hung. More recent paintings determined by architecture were in multiple parts that could not be seen from a single vantage point, questioning the assumption that all of a painting is visible all at once.

Fisher’s exhibition at Museum Abteiberg has a double origin. One is the context of the Mönchengladbach Collection, in which Fisher’s work finds a uniquely striking historical background. The other is the recent recovery of a wall painting made by Blinky Palermo in 1970 in Mönchengladbach, where he then had his studio. The entrepreneur Rolf Hoffman commissioned this work in what was then his office, but a later occupant painted over it, making it one of 27 wall works by Palermo that have been lost. As a part of their renovations, the new owners of this former factory building are bringing the traces of this lost work by Palermo back into view, and for a short while during the renovations this historic room will open to the public.

Fisher stated his admiration for Palermo in his essay “Object Lessons: Morgan Fisher on Blinky Palermo” in the March 2011 issue of *Artforum*, in which he said that Palermo expanded the terms of modernist painting, opening the way for new possibilities within it. The coincidence of Fisher’s show at the Museum Abteiberg with the recovery of this lost work by Palermo led the museum to invite him to develop a work specifically in relation to Palermo.

Sixteen Walls (2011) consists of two freestanding walls facing each other. One is an exact copy of a part of a wall in the room where Palermo made his work. This wall is not flat, but is divided into recesses. The facing wall is a copy of this wall in reverse: the recesses in the first wall are in relief on the second wall. The architecture determined the location and extent of all of the surfaces; eight are painted with one of four

colors, which Palermo's wall painting determined. Like some of Fisher's other painting installations, this work cannot be seen from a single vantage point. The viewer moves from one place to another and while looking from one vantage point remembers what he has already seen from others.

The painting installation *New Pendant Pair Paintings / New Alien Pendant Pair Paintings* (2011), given its arrangement by the exhibition space called the *Wechselaustellung*, combines new versions of two groups of monochrome paintings that were each made for separate shows, at *Galerie Daniel Buchholz* in Cologne in 2007 and at *China Art Objects Galleries* in Los Angeles in 2008. The paintings in these two shows were Fisher's first to use color. While preserving the relations that the paintings had among themselves in their original installations, the work creates new relations between the paintings in each group. Like *Sixteen Walls*, the installation cannot be seen from a single vantage point.

Three new works, each titled *Stairs* (2011), express in a new way Fisher's relation to architecture. They are casts of stairs in the museum and are sculptures as such, the first Fisher has made. Lying on the floor as functionless shell-like shapes, these works have a literal relation to the architecture that made them, extending ideas that Fisher explored in his installation for *Portikus, Portikus Looks at Itself* (2009).

The *Aspect Ratio Pieces* (2004) are a group of transitional works that draw on Fisher's background in film. They are mirrors that have the proportions of standard film aspect ratios, such as *Cinemascope* and *Panavision*. Each viewer sees a different image, which is true of no film, and further, the image that the viewer sees is not fixed but changes as the viewer moves. The mirrors give the viewer the freedom, within limits, to frame the scene, which no film allows, and this freedom lets the viewer see the edges of the frame, which almost all films try to conceal.

The exhibition will include *Protective Coloration*, a video from 1979, and *Red Boxing Gloves / Orange Kitchen Gloves*, a two-screen work shot in 1980 on *Polavision*, a now obsolete film format. Both works demonstrate Morgan Fisher's early interest in working with color. *Red Boxing Gloves / Orange Kitchen Gloves*, transferred to DVD, was shown publicly for the first time earlier this year. This work used systematic color and multiple parts, elements that appeared in Fisher's paintings years later.

A program of lectures, films and four viewing dates for the mural by Blinky Palermo in the former *Van Laack Building* will follow in November. The precise dates will be announced in a separate press release and on our website.

The project was realized in close collaboration with the *Generali Foundation* in Vienna, which will present the work of Morgan Fisher in another major exhibition in spring 2012. A major, comprehensive publication on the work of Morgan Fisher is being prepared. Visitors to the exhibition in *Mönchengladbach* will receive a booklet with texts by the artist on all exhibited works. Supported by the *Hans Fries-Stiftung*, *Kunststiftung NRW*, *Museumsverein Mönchengladbach*, *W. Paschertz Grundstücks GmbH*, *Kalthöfer GmbH* and several further regional supporters.