Jan Kenneth Weckman, pigment prints from the series

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<tr><td>Hard Facts /</td><td>Galerie Toolbox, Berlin Germany 23.3.-20.4. 2013</td><td>Hard Facts, a Closer Look</td></tr>
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The title of the series of pigment prints in three exhibitions in 2013 is on loan from Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914). This is not to say that I am in any way an expert on Peirce's philosophical thought. He has, however, achieved much in a multitude of scientific fields. I have acquainted myself with his semiotics and pragmatist thinking, a line of philosophy Peirce established during the latter part of 19th Century in the United States. For those interested in furthering their knowledge of Peirce, I suggest embarking on a rewarding voyage into his life and work. His philosophy has gained an ever growing repute in the last decades.

Peirce makes a distinction between *facts and fancy* by separating two ways of experiencing reality: either as something that has a material existence or is in another way real to us. Peirce's own thinking switches during his philosophical career between nominalism and realism. Realism - and reality - is tested by experiencing the world as resistance and as a reality that demands exertion and the use of power. We have to define knowing and meaning according to the kind of consequences things have and not justify definitions on a level of idealist theory. Hard facts exist regardless of what we think about them. They are also real and require that we experience the world often in other ways than what we expect in our anticipations of them. Our habits and conventions are complemented with how we adjust to surprising situations and to everything we cannot change into our liking. An example of a hard fact could be a steep, uphill road, a sudden rainstorm, a physical ailment or even bumping into a street pole. Our surprises do not necessarily turn into instant discoveries that would help us in a similar event in the future. Nevertheless, our experiences accumulate and some are bound to require force and stress us.

Hard facts influence our precognition, our dreams and feelings. We do not always know what hit us, and for example a snake in our fancy may turn out to be a stick in the forest. It still releases adrenalin into our whole body. We are fear-stricken of the menacing unknown, anything surprising and new to us, but easily relax in front of something well known to us. That is, until hard facts bring us again back to the ground.

Art is often thought to be a kind of professional practice of imagination or, as some kind of visual thinking and is compared to important forms of analysis, like philosophy or mathematics. Artists bring their fantasies together and then we have to explain them. A second option, that art can not be understood, only experienced, takes us closer to pure fancy and the world of impulses like dream or, more professionally, closer to domains of freedom and fiction. Visual thinking is a pair of words that defies logic. There is no certainty that visual or any other sensory experience relates to thinking. And furthermore, how should this topic be dealt with in philosophy?

Modifying the concept of experience as thinking, feeling and imagination onwards to experiencing of hard facts, Peirce ponders the relation between human experience, thinking and reality, on the difference and sameness between senses and the conceptual realities. The pragmatist philosophy of meaning combined with Peirce's phenomenological ideas challenge Husserlian phenomenological tradition especially pertaining to the Cartesian division between the mind and the body. Peirce positions habits and action as general experiences along with thinking and consciousness. The general class is not only of abstract notions.

When the philosophical motive is connected to how everything - that is, philosophy itself - could be discussed and written - which is philosophy in its entirety, as well as how anything can be displayed and used at all as tools in our discussion, we soon end up asking questions about the nature of art. An artistic ethos, recently titled as the educational turn, within contemporary art offers a framework for this. Art has served notions of beauty, truth and politics or faith, so art in the service of philosophy is not necessarily that strange. The history of aesthetics has pondered art philosophically for a long time. Why can art not ponder aesthetics? Shortly put, the formalism of modernism could be treated as a historical case of an exception when art ponders itself. It is here that I return to pre-modernist ways of thinking, of the possibility to link up visual forms to model philosophical statements, distinctions, even contexts as in allegorical baroque art long ago. I am admittedly kicking some half-open doors somewhat wider here. In such a moment, placing texts besides images on the level of text seems natural.

It is in my opinion comfortable to think of art as an expanded field of rhetoric and communication. My shortest label would be that art is indirect speech. I do not assume, however, that art will be responded to by speaking and writing. Neither is art itself in the visual register of speaking and writing. This much said one should add that neither is contemporary art altogether visual. And, referring to the significative response, for the commercially minded (artist or purchaser) expectations might refer to acquisition. Having an exhibition might mean an expectancy of a good feedback. In a more cynical vein I believe I am only partaking in a continuation of a habit. I keep the tradition of art

alive one more stretch with my contribution. The tradition I am upholding could well disappear. So much has changed even during the short period of my career as an artist. If art is language, the system contains arbitrariness, rules change and new expressions and signs are born while others are cast into oblivion.

Thematics and context of the series: Hard Facts

The point of origin of these works is a set of works with a collective title, *Hard Facts*, from a larger installation of prints, *Tabletop Shortline - we all want to see our railroad go somewhere,* in 2010*.* The new works were developed as an imaginative map, an allegory and a fantasy landscape to be viewed from a high vantage point. Fictitious cameras orbiting a certain moon are looking for biological and cultural signs of life.

My prints are based on a number of interests. One of them is my background as a maker of drawings and paintings. Another comes from the idea of image as illusion, but also as a starting point for discursive thinking or a propositional sentence. I am following in the footsteps of Charles Sanders Peirce, the developer of a triadic sign theory based on the icon, the index and the symbol. Images that may be interpreted in many ways, base their ambiguity on parallels that spectators notice. I am inspired by images that function like maps and landscapes, set in symbolic frameworks but also serve as icons. We cannot manage without sign-processes. Political as well as cultural power needs signs - as do we all. When working with these drawings, I used to wonder how it is even possible to try to hold on to different associations that stem not only from looking at the images but especially when drawing them. Drawing is a certain kind of action that draws its motive from imitating another action in the artist's imagination. The act of imagining in itself does not, however, substantially differ from, for example, the thought of going to fetch the morning paper from the mailbox.

Forgetting things is part and parcel of consciousness. The way, in which these lost things leave traces, scars, and delicate details, and how this change takes places as if right under our noses, is the other possible context (out of endless other possibilities) for this series. I can maintain several contexts, both one at a time and simultaneously, since they are not in the artefact. The sources of my interpretations are in any case the change taking place in the drawing, the new traces and the effect of the older traces upon the new ones. The interplay of these new and old traces is, byte by byte, mathematically, which is present as a hard fact of the artefact. Certainly layers gradually change into others. The question if there is something else there besides is the visible - say a memory of the past - is left unanswered. There are actually two alternatives: one, the memory is saved into a calculated

string that can be retrieved in case the marker is found, in which case, the space of bytes saved remembers the differences in my work and second, it seems, is that things are possibly lost forever. Such a result also belongs to the nature of hard facts, even if I were compelled to state that the elements probably still exist, but in some other, unidentifiable form.

It is easy to imagine all manner of things, for example, the imagery I mentioned as a landscape of irretrievable changes of time and place. Nothing stays invisible. Everything is visible and the only thing missing from the artefact is its meaning. That is the image we see. When the image claims ownership over these possibilities and simultaneously while real to us does not exist like hard facts do, how do images then connect to hard facts? As a hard fact, my digital file can vanish as a result of an electrical failure. Blobs on the paper eventually fade away. The paper burns and turns into ashes. The astonishing thing to me is that which connects hard facts and images. It is likeness, an order of semblance that makes an icon possible. The iconic order perceived and interpreted is restored as image in the interpretation of the observer.

Hard facts establish a field of conditions for knowing, feeling and thinking. The way in which the context as image should be displayed is a particular problem. How to make a hard fact into an image is, itself, a hard fact. Impossible. I "solve" this problem through two ideas. The first one is that I imagine a situation, where an unknown world is subjected to surveillance taking place far and high above the possible atmosphere. This requires a method of surveillance, specific viewing angles, distance, and possibility of taking samples from the surface. A method of taking samples should be developed, for hard facts are impossible to show in representation, like indexes without symbols. We need a sample, the thing itself, but also research on the qualities of the sample, hence of its meaning. Pictorial work relies on representation in need of icons. Icons, however, do not prove anything. We have to collect samples at some stage for additional knowledge.

My plan for the work is to thematically embed that foreign world under surveillance, the retrievals of samples, and regularly obtained "photographs" into the representation of work and image. These images show the scenery slowly changing. Is there life? Of this, there seems to be no evidence.

As the series advances, a doubling of metaphor is created. In the first one, I am still in the clutches of a fantasy landscape. I am looking at this world from above. Ascending pillars of smoke tell of geological or biological phenomena taking place. Strangely, parts of this phenomena position themselves frontally vis-à-vis the spectator ("tree", "smoke"). Warm steam, it seems, arises, forming clouds. The planet has some kind of an atmosphere. Next, it is about to become more complicated.

As for the second, that other world perhaps does not exist at all, but reflects my (own) mind as it is constructing itself, or its events, memories, layers, its lapses of memory or blocking off of things from its consciousness, smoothly or by force. The world that is being observed is the observant himself.

I could as well add a completely different interpretation, just as fictitious: the vision is about anyone, for example of myself. Removing bits and pieces of the surface, border areas change as I fabricate new, regenerative mesh and scar tissue. It is a matter of time, of the abrasion of layers, of their removal. I play the creator of a world, but not just of an alien moon or a planet, but of my own consciousness and memories the metaphor of which drawing and its making is able to represent.

The fact that I draw with an eraser is far from insignificant. Its trace resembles a mesh made by knitting or crocheting. In fact nothing is repaired, only black color is removed. A web of light full of tears fills the pictorial space. The series of works presents the "repairs" as changes from one work to the next. Now I am writing my notes, but can add my comments directly into the images. The first mesh, an alien world, is complemented by a descriptive layer. In this interpretative version, the description creates an illusion of surveillance and its corresponding signs.

A unsought for tought arises as to how much we must consider, contrary to what semiotic contexts want to avoid, a psychological treat in introducing the metaphor of the self communication (observing) one self. The thematic/metaphor of consciousness as for example in the idea of a "mental landscape" or "inner landscape" is a well known way of interpreting artworks in general. We might even claim, that this is the only way to go in the "hermeneutics" of an literary and poetic text, or work of art for that matter. A phenomenological reduction, however, must here be made, as what we are dealing with, actually, is the artefact and its purported relation to a textual interpretation. Both artefact and text, considered an expanded version of it in artworks, are objects of societal settings. That we settle for an idea of the work of art as a communicative piece embedded in habits and practices of cultural objects does not rely on the ontology of the "inner" or of "consciousness". The artefact and text do not rely on mental states, on the contrary. Albeit an interesting relation that seems to hinge the artwork and experiencer together in a common mental space, what matters here, is the way the experiencer articulates his/her experience in textual form that will be considered in relation to the artwork, side by side in the public, not private space.