

The Seductiveness of Endless Possibilities Jean Wainwright in Conversation with Robin Rhode



Jean Wainwright *Your new colour works are both a departure and a progression from your previous art and performances?*

Robin Rhode *My modus operandi* has been very particular. Over the last five years, I have almost developed two personae with two very different creative dynamics. My European studio in Berlin is my conceptual space to think and develop ideas, but my physical output flourishes in Johannesburg, where it is immense, physically and emotionally intensive and extremely productive so that I am able to produce two to three large pieces a week. I have gradually developed a group of young assistants who I affectionately refer to as my crew, starting with a 3-man team in 2011 to a now 18-man 'army' aged between nineteen to twenty-three years old. They consist of former ex-gang members or delinquents, most of whom have floated in and out of jail. They have limited education since most are drug-users, or have started using drugs at an early age. Their social condition remains tragic, but their heart, commitment, desire in supporting my work is beyond my expectations. I believe that, if given adequate encouragement and opportunities, these young men could excel and be empowered. They possess a sincerity and kindness, and a longing to escape their social condition. They see my art process as a means to escape their reality and as something constructive and self-fulfilling. I believe that my young crew possess enormous potential. When I am working on site it is my duty to channel that potential, that energy. My 'studio' in Johannesburg is on a street corner in one of the city's most dangerous areas and my working canvas is on an old bakery wall that now houses a 'squat' that is suffering with deep social issues, crime, unemployment, drug abuse, physical abuse and violence. The art that I am producing on this wall, coupled with the performance actions, is creating a narrative that is so precise, so detailed, that it becomes an escape to the community that confronts the wall itself. This is the reality of my creative output in that location compared to the privileged and safe study environment of Berlin.

JW *Tell me more about the wall that you work on.*

RR While still a student I made the decision to

shift away from the studio environment to the exterior wall as a political gesture. Leaving the confines of a studio space to work in the public realm would allow an audience that was navigating its daily life in the city the possibility to access the work in process. Accessibility is massively important because most non-white South Africans didn't have access to museums and galleries and contemporary art. Moving my practice into the streets was a political gesture to reach a dominantly black, economically deprived audience that couldn't access but could now engage with my contemporary art ideas. So that was a really strong, very conscious decision to make a political choice with regards to the location of artistic production. Currently I am creating my colour works in a very particular socio-political space that I consider radical because the geometrical abstract wall pieces are *rejecting* the reality of the space in which they are made.

So I work differently now in Johannesburg. Instead of being a street artist, which is all about territory and moving around a city to find different places, I've worked on the same wall for seven years. I am no longer interested in 'hitting' different walls or even engaging with a piece of architecture that has an interesting façade and neither a wall surface that has a particular architectural element to it. The wall I now use has in the past caused me to have some run-ins with graffiti crews, but my output has been so immense over the last five years that basically I've become the sole owner of the wall, and graffiti crews have allowed me, or granted me permission, to access this wall *exclusively* because of my extensive output. They also know that if I return I would *bomb out* their pieces anyway, so it doesn't make sense their blocking the wall. I've become very territorial of it.

JW *Can you talk a little more about the process of your colour works?*

RR My wall painting process has become very much like a Sol LeWitt instructional painting. I am able to control scale and bodily movements and translate them to a team of a dozen painters that cover surface area much faster. So the conditions in Johannesburg have caused my practice to evolve



from the early crude, very energetic mark-making to something more instructional. I am in a situation wherein socially, politically and physically I have to empower my labour force who consist of young individuals, and through the process of art I have to shift the creative responsibility from myself to others requiring a progressive change to my working process. I still remain the dictator of the line: the line has changed into something that is now team-orientated and inclusive. I am trying to investigate drawing methodology through the channels of drawing expression: from mastering speed and activated line to very organic marks, as well as making more stencilled, more graphically abstract marks. In *Under the Sun* (2017), which is a large artwork (36 panels), it is as if I am trying to capture the sun rising and setting through a range of colours. In this piece I am exploring a palette of yellow tones with dark and light variations, as if each tone is a piece of mosaic glass. It took two full days and sixteen people to realise the artwork and I was looking at minimalism and colour theory and the paintings of Joseph Albers as inspiration. Then in works such as *Inverted Cycle* (2016) or *Paradise* (2016), there is an exploration of colour theory, geometry, and the spirituality of colour.

I have also reached a point in the art-making process where, in terms of making drawing, my work could only reach a very specific physical

height or length that is limited by my own body. My art crew can reach wall heights that are triple my height. I am therefore able to explore labour intensity, scale, time and speed differently with this method. Whereas everyone once knew me for my organic, speedy mark-making using chalk or charcoal (which are very ephemeral media), my work is now about geometry and colour theory using acrylic paint. This new body of work embodies an architectonic nature in its realisation.

I always speak about narratives and sonographies, so there is this abiding idea of the interior and the exterior, revealing and concealing, that has always been very much part of my practice. It is also about embracing street culture. The body language, the use of signs and symbols to establish identities, of appropriating dominant cultures into forms of subculture. As a youth growing up in Johannesburg, I remember seeing a little bit of graffiti art, but mostly it was mural art done by community focus groups that communicated religious and social motifs. Similarly, when you look at the history of wall painting in South Africa, politically oriented ideas such as anti-apartheid slogans dominated wall art. These community mural artworks were very raw and simple, created in a very crude manner using basic paint material to communicate particular social messages to the society. If you look at the economic position of these community art projects,



spray paint was only accessible to a particular class. We couldn't access it all the time because spray paint was quite expensive, even cans were not always accessible or affordable to young students or to people living in the 'townships'. So spray painting was not such an important medium and we rather used affordable and accessible house paint.

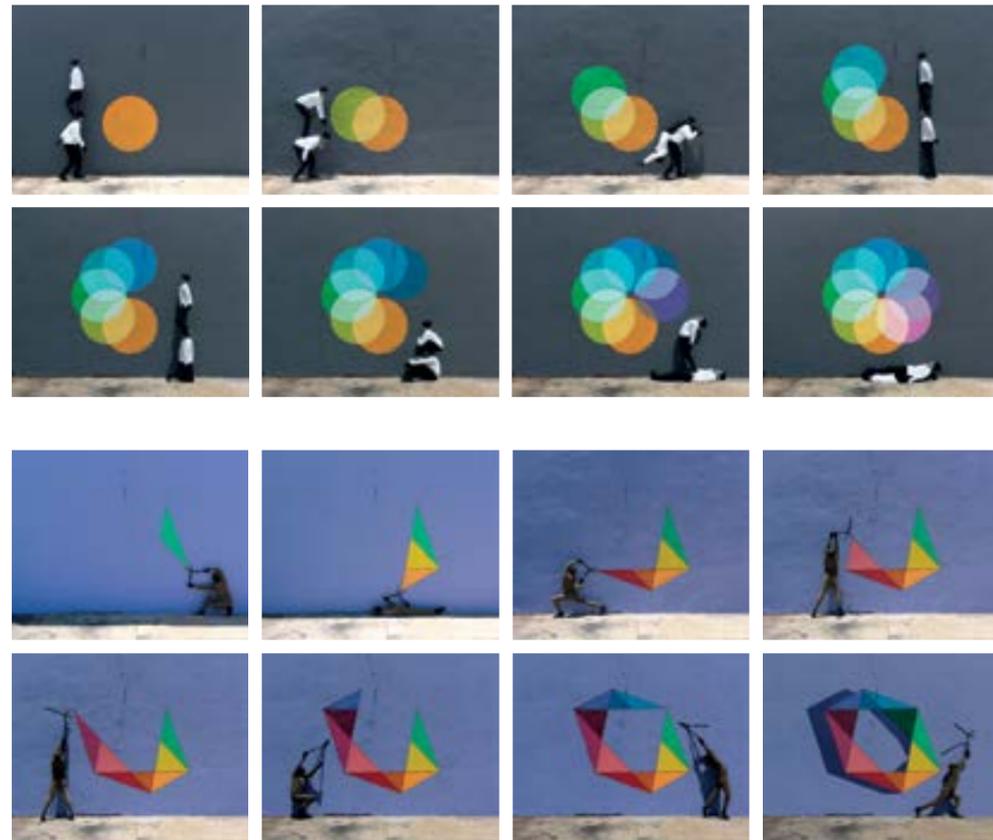
JW Over the years, you have developed a very strong intuition about negotiating space, whether internationally in galleries with your performances or of course with your work on the wall in Johannesburg.

RR I believe in exercising my intuitive muscle constantly. There is always the element of risk in my work, including my gallery performances. There is speed and quick movement as I am trying to inject a high energy that can allow for a particular line or mark to be generated onto the wall surface. But when I started creating this Colour Theory related body of work at my current wall, the drawings I

began making *rejected* the surrounding chaos of this high-risk zone for something more universally pure. I imagined placing a Donald Judd sculpture into a *favela* to see and feel the reaction, searching as I am for a kind of visual and spiritual peace through wall drawing and by using colour spectrums within a high-risk zone plagued by social ills. I am attempting to bring a type of chaos that merges with the formalist structures of the gallery space. Previously, I activated the gallery space differently, getting the audience to participate rather than being passive recipients in the creation and activation of wall drawings.

JW How have you found your crew to execute your work?

RR Some of the young men have been watching me from afar for the last two or three years. They now have the confidence to approach me for employment since I have included one of their friends in my creative team, or art crew, which now dress in military fatigues and operate similarly to a gang in terms of hierarchy and rank. However, in terms of production and support I also remain open to influences outside of my art crew. Especially open towards people with experience and knowledge of painting and who can contribute to the effectiveness of the work. There was this instance once where I was doing a labour-intensive piece and a sign writer who was walking by with his young son saw us and approached me, asked if he could please help us paint. He was surrounded by a dozen members of my team who watched him as he fluently painted circles and oval shapes with multiple paint brushes and colours. He spoke in Afrikaans and instructed us how to water down the paint consistency in order to paint line edges more effectively and with greater detail. We refer to this painting process as a form of 'cutting', of 'cutting' an edge. So now I have three crew members who are designated cutters. There are others in my crew who use specific rulers and black markers. It is very systematic and very technical. I've now found a way to give certain individuals in my crew who have a particular skill and ability a certain responsibility in the working process. I try to motivate and encour-



age them and I feel that even if they fail, if they make a mistake, the work is never compromised. The only thing that fails from time to time is the natural daylight we need in order to take the photographs... other than that I am completely confident in the work and in my crew.

Some of the young boys who are working with me live in squats, sleep on the streets, sometimes they even sleep in front of my wall. For them the art-making process becomes a means to earn money and to escape the hardships they are confronted with. In a way, this particular working condition is escapism for me too: I am trying to escape my own realities, the economic and artistic pressures that surround me. The world vanishes when I am working at my wall. My only desire at that moment in time is to execute the piece, and I will do anything to allow my vision to be realised, nothing can compromise it.

I see the wall piece as an ephemeral entity that will last or have a lifespan of a maximum of forty-eight hours. After I have created the painting, I paint it out either directly, or a day or two after. But if I do not have time to do that, my crew will protect the wall until I return, to the extent that some sleep in front of it in case someone throws an empty bottle against the wall or tries to piss on it. When I paint out the wall piece, I always reassure my crew that something better is coming: there is always a new narrative and a new story that will follow.

JW *But you know your wall now. You know how light strikes the edge of the cracks and you know how the surface reacts.*

RR That's probably why the wall is like a magnet, why I'm drawn to it. The cracks and surface of the wall become a metaphor. I'm afraid that the

harder I press against the surface of the wall, the more the crack will widen. What do I do then? A crack means that something is broken or weakened, or unstable. I am attempting to expose a fragility, with the paint running into it and over it, this crack.

JW *Were you looking for particular surfaces when you first started using walls or was it the location that attracted you?*

RR There were so many different factors. First of all, the wall surface is very important as it dictates what medium I use. So if it has a rough texture, I'll maybe use broader brushes with an acrylic paint. Also, the visibility of the wall is massively important. Visibility to the public and away from the police is a major concern.

JW *Do you see this work as having a dual purpose? It is both an artwork produced as photographs that hang framed on the gallery wall but it is also therapeutic.*

RR I do see this working methodology as a kind of a rehabilitation for a lot of my crew. And of course, I see the work as a form of conceptual photography.

JW *If you think about photography as a medium, that is what it does: it focuses and frames and allows one to pay attention to a certain area and therefore provide meaning.*

RR My photographs allow the viewer a moment to zoom in and visually capture something that is completely ephemeral. There is also a layer of obscurity in the photographs in relation to place, area, or context as I never provide details to the exact location of where the work is taking place.

JW *I think this is really interesting that you are doing it for your community. People see the actual work, the original on the street and the gallery contains the work, the photograph.*

RR Yes, and the passers-by would engage with the original and see the work in process. And the final piece, the framed photograph, would then be

exhibited in another space, in another part of the world.

JW *Can we talk about CMYK and how you executed and photographed the work?*

RR The angles in this work were really important. We took around a dozen photographs just to establish the diagonals... you had to shoot and reshoot to find the perfect lines. There is also the mixing of the colours, the tones in the painting and the belief that whatever creative decision is made right there and then, it will succeed. The paint colours were tested beforehand, I also worked with a specific colour chart. The surface is so important in relation to the crack in the wall. But I can't control the light so it's about judging time in order to take the photographs. The entire working method and concept just seems to be really organic and it translates very well onto the wall. It's a matter of time before it just... appears. My intention was to investigate digital spectrums of colour, especially CMYK which relates to digital colour codes and printing. Here, I created the code of CMYK as an analogue piece on a wall surface. And of course, the wall painting exists as a printed photograph, so the work attempts to interrogate all of these processes and our understanding of it.

JW *With whom do you work with in terms of the performance and the photography?*

RR I work with my brother Wesley and one of his childhood friends, Kevin Narain. Kevin has taken on the role of my doppelgänger or shadow-self over the last six years. He trained at the film school in acting and production design. My brother Wesley majored in cinematography. They have both developed and grown considerably as practitioners over the last years. I believe that the best ideas come about when you empower people, when you support individuals. That is the hardest thing to do. Making art is easy compared to having to support individuals, I'm embedded so deeply with the people, the crew who work with me, and sometimes I'm not sure how to balance that. I'm unable to turn my back on them if they were to ever need something. I feel that I have to show loyalty to them as much



as they show loyalty to me, especially to my art-work. Even though they might only carry a bucket of water or paint, that's still loyalty and trust, and I have to always give that back to them... I believe... that I'm still going to grow and develop as an artist and person and I hope that these individuals, my crew, are able to grow and develop along with me. Every person deserves an opportunity. It is about allowing individuals to feel a sense of self-worth. I'm trying to instil the belief that art is a mechanism to generate this self-belief.

JW *Why do you work mainly with young male youths in your colour works?*

RR First of all, the male character is somehow a depiction of myself, so my doppelgänger character represents this male identity. Even though I make use of a doppelgänger, I still appear in the works from time to time, but the male figure is always an extension of myself. I've also been having this conversation with my crew - to allow young women to work in my team, but at this moment it presents a problem because the community that I operate in has somewhat marginalised women. In this society women have been relegated to the domestic space, even though they play a more important role as a responsible figure, even a father figure, to a lot of the boys that I work with. I have always had these young male characters floating around the vicinity place where I work, and over time they started asking me for employment. These random individuals are then absorbed into my work circle. It's something that is not always a conscious decision, to work with strictly male youths, I wish this to change in the near future. I have of course worked with female performers in

other works, such as with Carole Sidney Louis [*Arnold Schönberg's Erwartung - A Performance by Robin Rhode, 2015*] and Maxime Scheepers [*The Fate of Destiny, 2017*].

JW *With your palette, how do you decide on the shapes and the colours of the composition and the materials? Is it instinctive?*

RR This is completely intuitive. I first try to find an interesting visual reference, something that could be drawn efficiently and that speaks to me and certain ideas in a very clear comprehensive way. I then try and find a colour palette that best fits the composition and that best complements whatever costume or prop I am using. There has to be this sense of harmony between the colour, the costume, the wall drawing. My work is not random, it is highly considered and planned in detail, but I am also trying to work through the spectrum of possibility. I feel as if I am being tested all the time, by the space, by the social conditions, and especially by the issues that pervade this particular community. All of this is what governs my aesthetic decisions in the end. When my work goes into the gallery as a body of photography, I want the vibrations of colour to *resonate*: every piece has to appear unique, almost distinctive, as well as adaptive, and that is what informs my final aesthetic decisions. There is seductiveness in endless possibilities... I am really interested in the idea of an infinity, the attempt to discover a new universality.

JW *If we think of Kandinsky or synaesthesia, colours have a force - they vibrate against the eye. They affect us.*

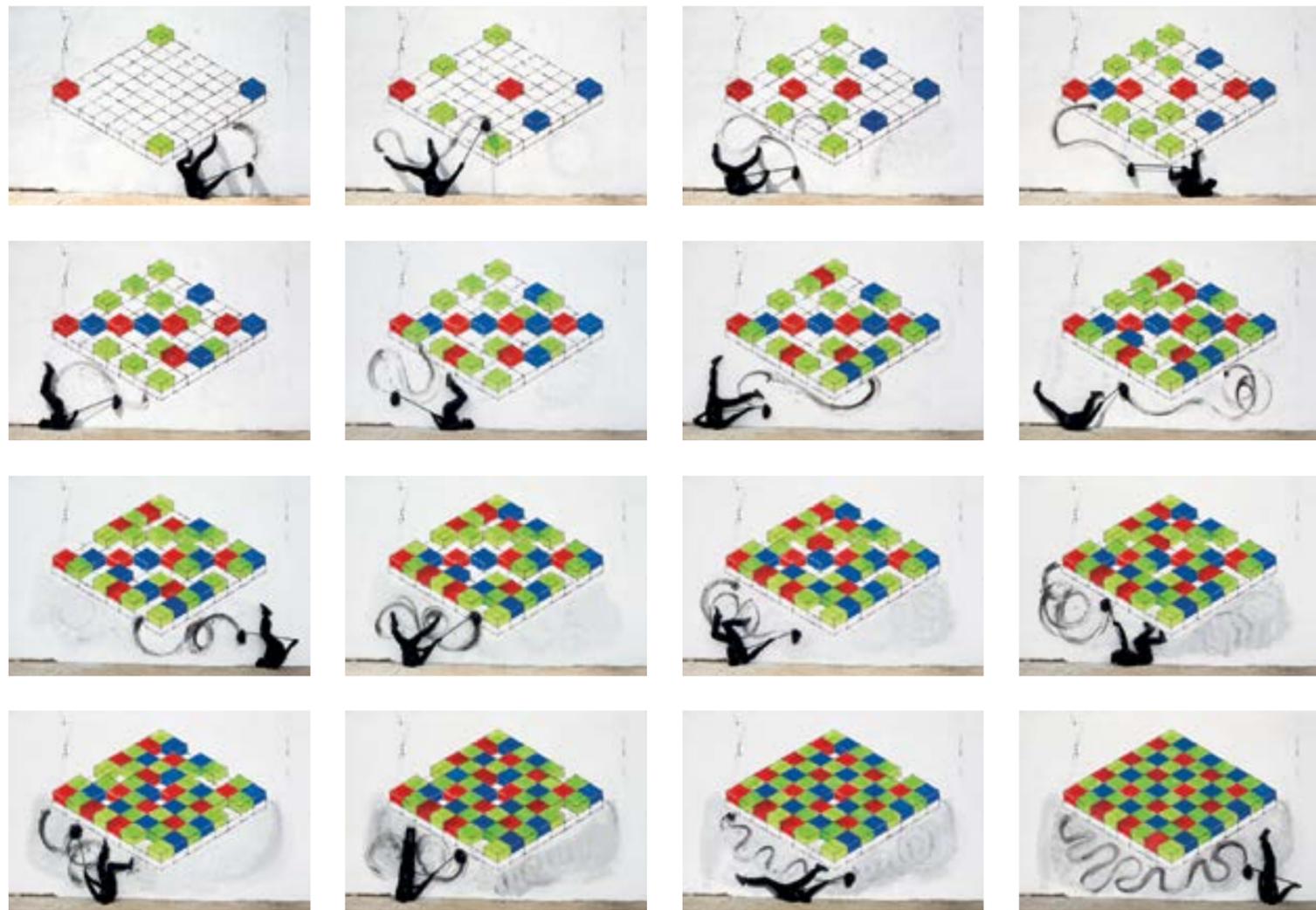
RR Yes, colour vibration is a type of visual animation on the retina of the eye. In a work such as *RGB* (Red Green Blue), 2015, I started out with looking at these colours that are related to a type of digitisation but, having to create them by hand, the process then becomes analogue. I love this clash of ideals, forms, language. My wall process leads to the conflict of not seeing the hand or touch: versus the digital or mechanized aesthetic that I am attempting to depict. The work *RGBG* (Red Green Blue Green), 2015, is one of my favourite pieces due to its clear use of a digitised pixilation reference inside television sets, but created through the medium of acrylic paint. In the painting process I start to generate a more painterly opacity, which then allows the work to develop a three-dimensionality. I love how the people walking on the street can stumble upon an obscure and abstract wall painting.

In one of my more recent works titled *Evergreen* (2017), we are also able to see the way in which my work has developed. I was imagining the grass form of a football pitch and how the varying degrees of a lawnmower blade creates different shapes. The grass on the pitch changes, catches the light dif-

ferently, and I wanted to see if I could recreate that effect. There are various tonalities of green, but I think it was also the prop that triggered the concept. I remember that the shirt and the trousers I used in the work were originally powder blue, but I had put them in the washing machine at home and must have mixed them with another colour by accident and they came out this pale pastel green. So I thought: let me keep this and use it for a piece. I took it to South Africa thinking, 'Okay, this will only fit me, which means I will have to perform,' so that triggered the thought that it would be great to do a piece in green. And then, 'Ha, I'm doing a green piece and I'm just going to focus on cutting the lawn.' We also spray-painted the lawnmower matt black and treated it as if it were an actual sculpture. So what starts to happen is that there's a double shadow: the body, my body, becomes unidentifiable and I'm trying to hide all aspects of identity. It becomes an anonymous body through which viewers are able to project themselves into the work of art.

JW *This removal of identity is interesting because I'm sure people might see that as a political*





RGBG, 2015

act in terms of your background and the politics of South Africa.

RR Very much so. Having grown up in a society where identity is integral to daily life, or even to living, my artistic position in this latest body of work was to reduce and reject all notions of it. My intention is to place the body into a colour field. To re-position the body politic into an abstract world that is somewhat undefined. By doing this hopefully I am able to redefine the parameters of identity politics. The work becomes a democratic idealisation for 'everyman' and 'everywoman' to play with and reinvent their identity. Therefore the removal of identity becomes a political gesture, subtle in its realisation, without shouting it, only whispering it.

JW *I also wanted to talk about ancient geometry and the idea of a plan, the idea of a geometric plan of life. Can you talk about that from your perspective of making your colour work?*

RR It's quite simple: geometry and nature are interlocked. The geometry of the infinitive is tied to nature and evolution. Nature is the seed of life. I find life in geometry, it is also something very mechanical and I'm saying to myself that I'm going to project a spirit into that mechanism, to make it alive. That's the huge test: to allow the mechanical body to become something that's spiritual, humane. So that's the idea. I'm using geometry as a template onto which I'm projecting this human spirit. As if it's alive. We bring something dead and then giving it life.

JW *Which is very much at the core of your work. It aims to animate something, to convince, to make real...*

RR Yes. Projecting a life into a dead form or into a dead object relates to the very nature of my work. The beginning of drawing an object and interacting with it. You project a spirit into this object, therefore this object will react back to you in a specific way. It will develop a persona, a character that becomes a reflection of you too.

JW *Yes, also it's a very ancient art, if you think of ancient bricks in low reliefs or mosaics, which were*

about convincing, often in geometrical shapes, to believe in another world...

RR It's basically the core of all of civilisation. I'm working with antiquity. The human body is geometry. So I'm adhering to the core value of the visual experience of life.

JW *You also plot your work out in graph form?*

RR I used to do a lot of graph sketches in 2015, working with an assistant in Berlin, a graphic designer to help me scale and compose the early geometric abstract works. Over the last one and a half years, I've been producing this new body of work with a new assistant who is doing the graphic sketches for me. It's my dad. My father has been an engineer and professional draughtsman for over thirty-five years. He has an elegance in drawing graphs and an amazing mathematical brain in rendering angles and equations. He is able to scale anything and everything for me onto graph paper. He sits at home and draws constantly. He challenges me in making his drawings on graph paper become alive on a wall outside in the street.

JW *Can we talk about the photographs and how you take them?*

RR Well, I originally used a very basic photographic set-up. I started out using the most simple of digital cameras, and from there to an easy-to-use point and shoot analogue 35mm film camera. Over the years I upgraded to an analogue Hasselblad 6 x 6 camera before switching to a Hasselblad digital camera. Upgrading our technical output allows us to get more information, more data into the photograph. This has allowed for the work to become much more considered, the tones and colours of a jacket, the cut and fabric... textures on the wall surface and elsewhere. Originally, I embraced a low-fidelity process, simple tech and equipment etc. as a means to execute high-definitive ideas. Originally there wasn't a really huge emphasis on the camera until years and years of exercise and production. Currently I am working with colour values and in each photograph you are able to see the changes in the natural light, how it falls on the surface of the wall and the different ways the colours refract.

JW The photograph that shows everything yet also removes the danger, but the danger is embedded.

RR The photograph is a medium capturing and mapping human behaviour and physical traits. It's about the heart, the soul, the spirit, existence, humanity... this is how I always get back to existentialism. It's about existing and questioning our place in the world. How do we navigate the world? How do we co-exist with the objects in the world and the signs and the symbols around us? I'm inspired by a text by W. E. B. Du Bois, *Double Consciousness*, wherein he claims that your identity is divided into multiple parts.

JW How did you decide that you would present sequences of photographs framed together?

RR The concept of the sequential narrative developed while I studied film briefly, especially while I was working as a production design student. I was responsible for the storyboard designs, the frames for the student directors, and that's how I began developing the sequential narrative, because I realised that I could break my performative action into sequences as frames. The history and processes of film has been a major influence on my work. Not only through storyboarding but also through stage elements, cinematographic references, as well as

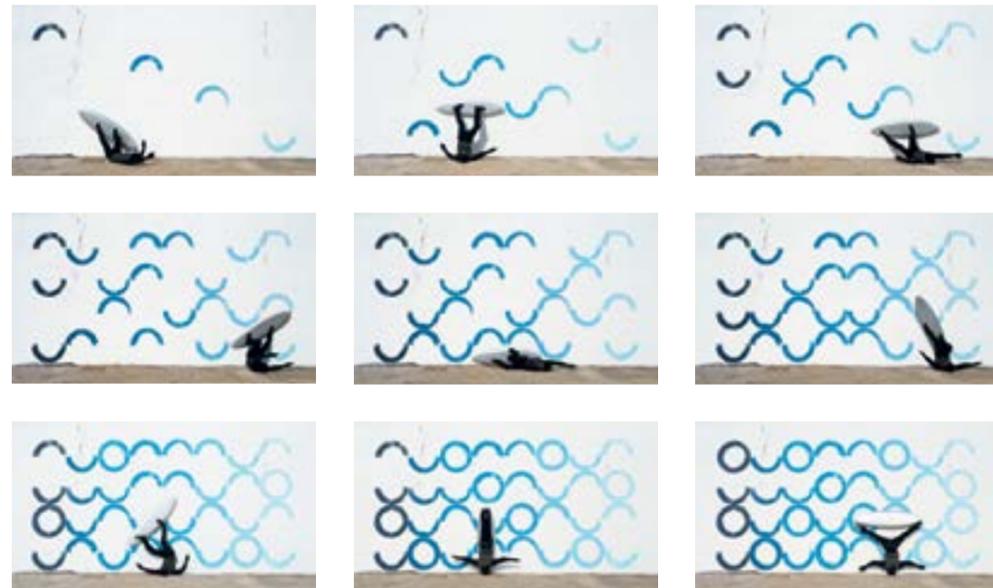
early silent film performances. Earlier photographic and animation pieces had an indirect link to Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin. The element of the comedic too in cinema had a deep impression on me as a child and remains a dominant theme in my work till today.

An example of utilising both prop/stage element and physical performance is the work *Black Friday* (2016). In this work I make use of a shopping trolley. I am looking at how to challenge the body with this particular prop, its weight and form taken into consideration. It is a highly considered piece of physical choreography too. The trolley is spray-painted black matt and almost becomes a flat plane, it also becomes an extension of the human form in some way. It looks unreal, like it is cut out. I have a rule on my set: you do not expose any skin on the body, it has to be completely covered with fabric. The body becomes a shadow form rather than an identifiable person. The body acts as a shadow in these works. The positioning of the body inside the prop, the shopping trolley, is also really funny and subversive. The viewer begins to question whether the body is real or not. Especially in the final frame where the character here is positioned at the end point of the trolley suggesting that it could tip over at any point. There is a physical tension there that is almost invisible, yet possesses a tangibility, a visual tangibility.



Color Chart, 2004-07





JW This is interesting in terms of how the shadow appeared in early photography and also the reference to the cut-out space. I am reminded of paintings such as Giorgio de Chirico's *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914)*.

RR Yes, I remember as a teenager that I used to walk down my street at night. The street light would cast a shadow and, while you were walking, your shadow moved and the shadow of the street light moved with you. There are no artificial post-production elements in my work. I try and capture the bare essentials of the wall painting and performance.

JW What happens when you make your work?

RR I arrive in the morning with breakfast, usually sandwiches with drinks. We unload the van, ladders and painting materials etc. and I give a brief. I try to convince my crew of the importance of their contribution to the art process. It's about convincing them to 'come with me on this journey of artistic realisation, it's a whole experience we're going to have from now, until we finish the last photograph'. And that's how we work. Day one, we paint the wall the colour to be used in the photographic work. We then measure the dimensions

of the wall piece and make a pencil sketch of it to scale. Then I'll select my team of wall painters. Each painter is given a particular colour palette. For example, if we have four colours, I will call 'stand by colour one... colour two stand by, colour three...'. So, I'm almost like a director, it's almost like a theatrical situation. I also have two assistants that support my doppelgänger... just looking after him. I have somebody that just carries the prop, for example the door or trolley that will be used. We also listen to a lot of music during the process of these works, but when it's time to take photographs or time to choreograph the movement for the piece, the music is switched off immediately and there is *complete* silence on set - no one is allowed to say a word. You can hear the camera click. And then the music is back on and we start moving again, developing the wall painting again. So it's photograph, paint, photograph, add more paint... it's a long haul and we might have a round of tequilas at the end of the day, or beers, or maybe even both.

I usually have a recovery day between works, sometimes two days... but that's about it. You have to be very quick to view the work on a wall and my team and I know that each piece is ephemeral, the

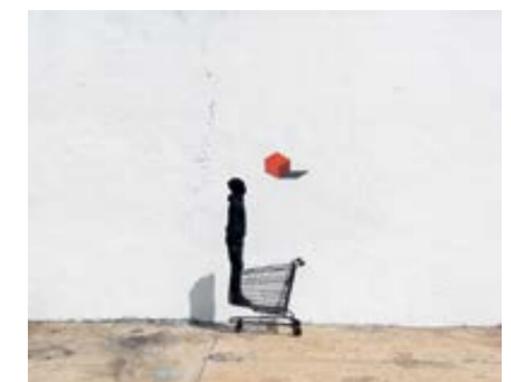
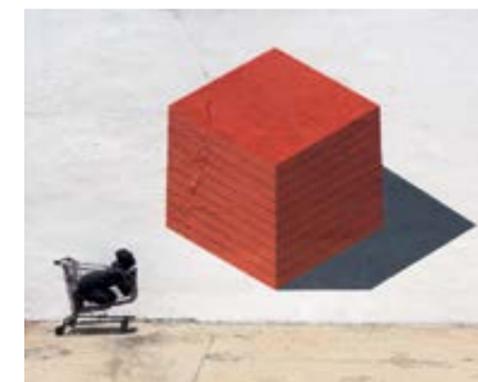
piece could disappear very soon. I always assure the community that the next piece is going to be even better than the one we've just seen. There's an anticipation amongst the people that keeps me very challenged and focused. To want to aspire to being better than before.

JW What are the most colour-related artworks you have produced in one visit to your Johannesburg wall?

RR I could produce two artworks per week. I also cannot always occupy my particular location for a long period of time. I need to disappear from the location so that people don't monitor my movements for too long. I have to adopt a guerrilla attitude; you have to think like a thief as well, because thieves or robbers monitor people's movement and orientation. I have produced over a dozen pieces without any protection because my guys are protecting me. But for the last four

pieces that I've made, I had private security for protection. Risk factors have increased recently because of drug wars in the local community. Some of my crew members are drug addicts themselves and have actually been imprisoned for armed robbery amongst other crimes. But I cannot judge them. They are sincere young people who have had limited opportunities and who remain trapped in the apartheid legacy. They represent a marginalised youth, their position caused by economic and social circumstances that are beyond their control. Their surroundings become the negative influence. It's almost as if they were trapped in a downward spiral without having a possibility to escape. These are very talented, expressive youth, with enormous potential. Having to work with such young people allows me to tap only into a microcosm of their potential. I hope and pray that there could be an exit strategy. If not, it is up to me to start to devise one.

Black Friday, 2016



JW The way you work, the geometrics and so on is planned, everything has its place. If something is out of kilter, it throws the whole process out. In a way, that's the same with your crew members. Were you ever in a gang?

RR No.

JW How did you manage to not be involved in crime yourself and yet understand criminal dynamics and have such empathy for the people with whom you're working?

RR Maybe it's because I've been embedded so long in this specific community and that I grew up in a city with a high crime rate. As a young person growing up in such a society you have to develop a high level of vigilance.

JW Yes, so they need someone without a faction. You also understand the principle of discipline because that is their modus operandi.

RR You have to understand the codes otherwise they won't trust you. So, I'm saying that 'OK, I will trust you, and if you believe in my vision you will be rewarded'. You have to reward people for their efforts no matter what. I'm always willing to reward somebody who shows me a level of trust.

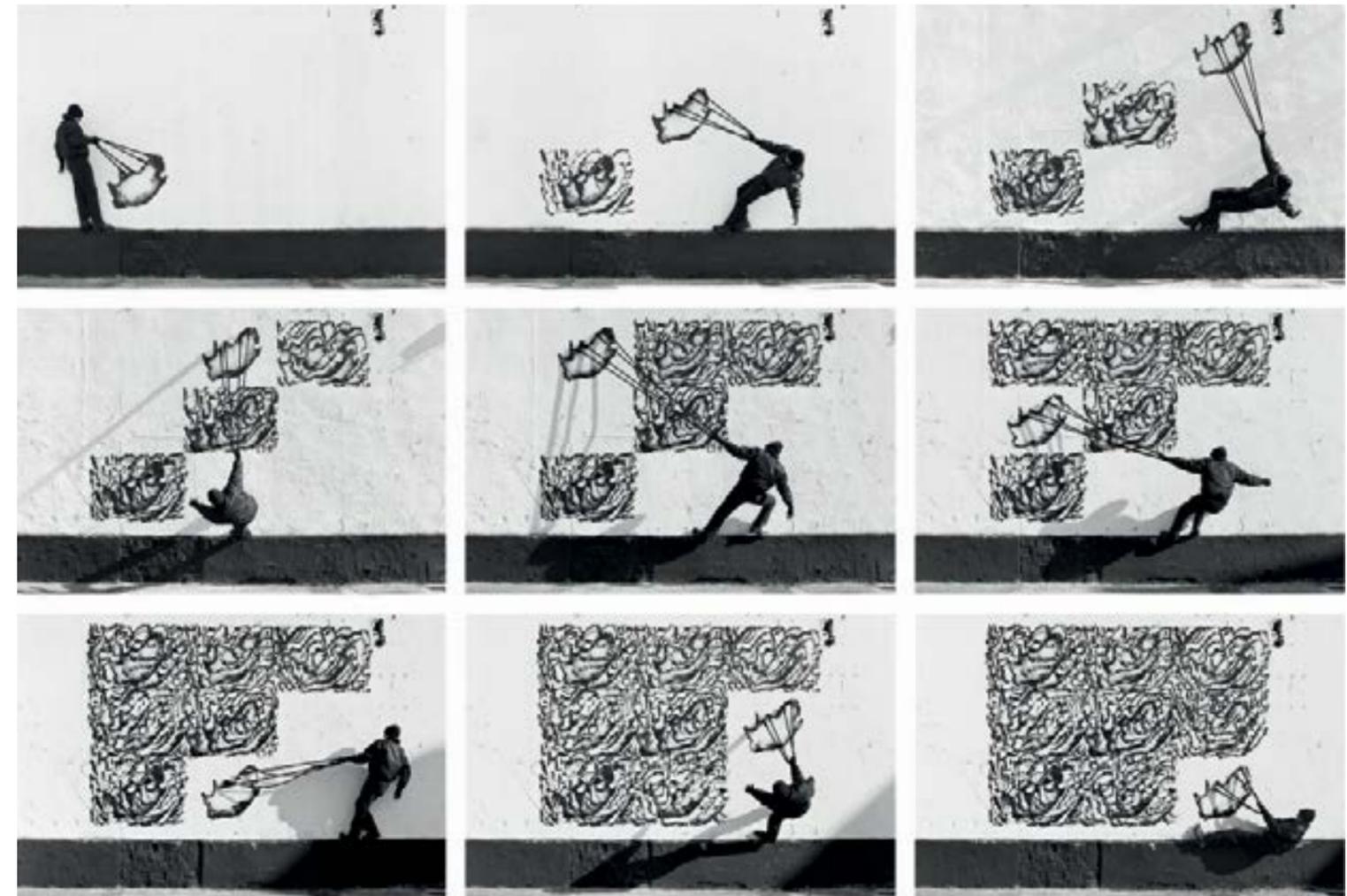
What I have noticed in South Africa is that systems are not always sustainable. I also believe that

the greatest works of art exist on the edge of life and death. So I always try to walk on that fine line where there's this sense of collapse... collapsing of life, collapsing towards death.

I was having nightmares that I was attacked from behind with a knife. So I look over my shoulder constantly when I'm working. I'm never in one place for too long. I move around all the time, I tell my lieutenants before every piece, 'You are my eyes, you are my ears.' But I also have to check their body language, and if I notice something is astray, I'll tell them, 'I am your brother first before I'm your enemy' before I give them a hint of a gap or where I'm vulnerable. I tell them, 'I'm on you already, come here, talk to me.' So I feel, feel, feel. When I arrive and when I'm there, I make sure I arrive with a high energy and anticipation.

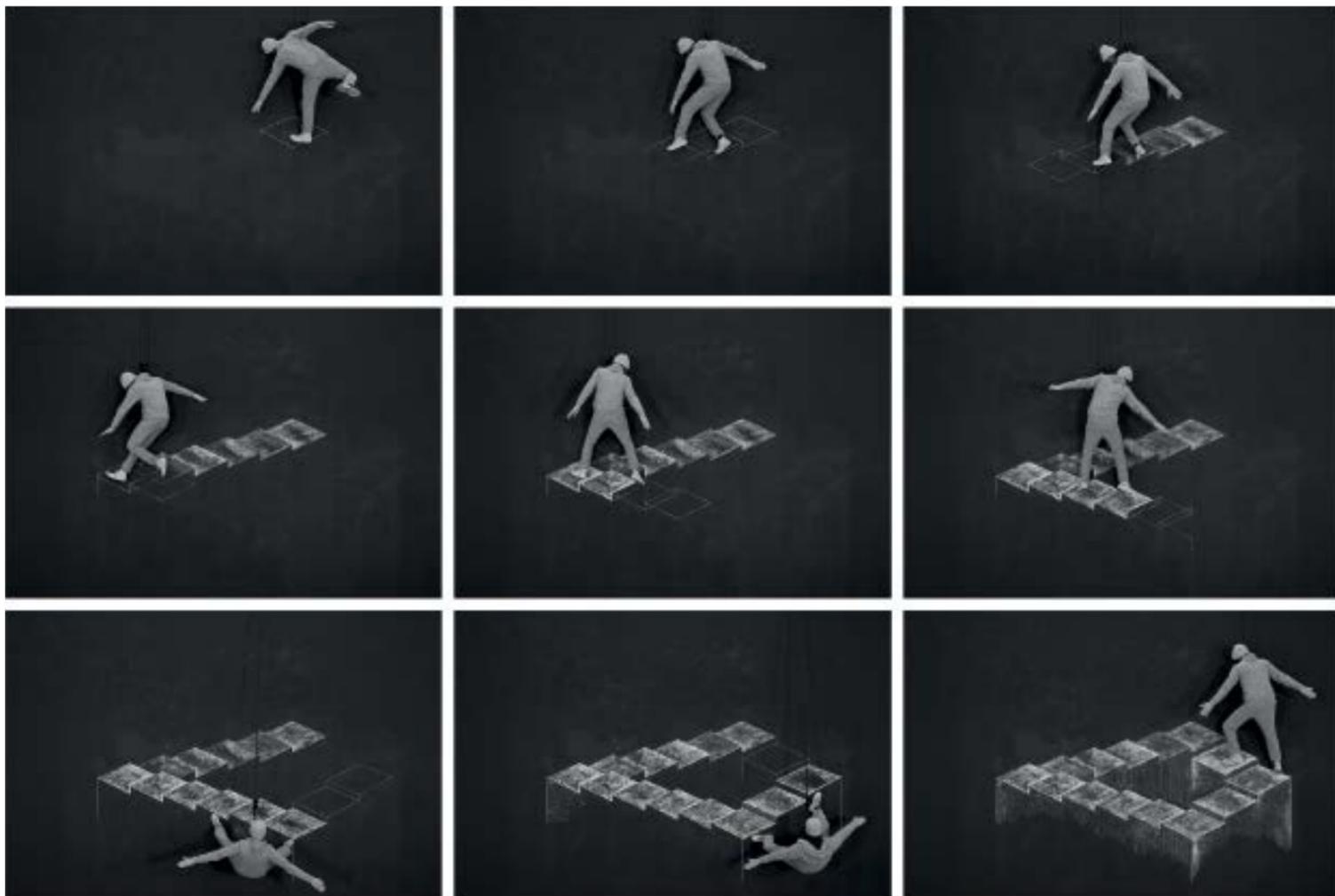
JW So your sense of time, your sense of anticipation is heightened.

RR I need fear. Fear is an element that begins to enter into the work itself. However, I'm also searching for an aesthetic harmony and order. Something almost infinitive. I'm disguising a lot, especially the given reality. The space in front of the Broken Wall never becomes the subject itself. The Geometry of Colour is an attempt to reject and deny the reality for a more infinitive, almost spiritual aesthetic that



Carry-on, 2013





Impossible Staircase, 2016

could function as an escape route, a fleeting moment of freedom, from where we are, who we are.

I'm working in this area that is plagued by drug abuse, with young people that are abusers too and that exist on the periphery of society. In many ways I am an addict too. I am hooked to my wall. I am unable to stop. Somehow the Broken Wall and broken society represents a part of me, a part of me that is also broken.

JW You have talked in the past about the concept of the cave and being interested in cave drawings.

RR Yes, I have spoken about cave paintings and the influence it has had on my practice. Bushmen cave paintings are the most historical in the world and are of paramount importance to not only our ancestral identity but also to art. These cave paintings represented aspects of daily life. Especially ritualistic and shamanistic life, of dreams and spiritual beliefs. These painted works were also very figurative. The human figures were sometimes represented by characters wearing masks as a disguise.

JW Of course, there has been a lot of literature written about the labyrinth and about the Minotaur...

RR And Plato's Allegory of the Cave where we begin to question the idea of a true form of reality

rather than a manufactured reality. Can we break our own shackles to go and discover the sun?

JW Great art is actually about shifting something, but also a shift is a dangerous territory because you don't know what the shift will do. You've got to build up all those instincts about that place.

RR If I find a new cave, will that new cave inhibit a weakness? A weakness in a sense that it is unfamiliar territory. Will this new cave pose a danger in one not knowing the true conditions of that space? I'm familiar with the danger of my current cave, that I can master the cave and control its variables. It's having your guard up that makes you navigate that space more efficiently. Every neighbour, every voice and every individual that's floating around that area knows it and I do too.

The site has given me so much joy. It's given me a lot of grey hair too but it's taught me about the fragility of human existence. I believe that it's the voices from the periphery, when shifted towards the dominant centre, that will make the greater contributions to the broader cultural discourse. My investigation into colour theory reflects a past history but it's also offering a voice from the periphery, from beyond the crack in the wall.

This conversation took place over three days in Berlin in June 2017.