

Structures en dérive - Unraveling structures

What could painting say to the iPhone? That is one of the questions curator Olga Osadtschy poses in this exhibition by including two works of Basel-based Dutch painter Mariejon de Jong-Buijs: two sections from the artist's ongoing photo diary *iExist*, covering the years 2016-2017 and 2018-2019, and her five-panel painting Hopewell Woods (2020-2021).

iExist is a daily documentation/social media posting pursued over two continents and almost ten years, conceived as a collaboration between an artist whose usual medium is paint, and her smartphone. Every morning on waking de Jong-Buijs snaps the view through her window, capturing the world outside at a specific date and time, and posts this view, a selfie without the self, on Instagram. Her iPhone, now an 11Pro, is at once counsellor, notepad and visual diary, and her regimen has antecedents in Cézanne's daily practice of drawing from an *écorché* based on a sculpture by Michelangelo as well as sculptor Anne Truitt's habit of morning writing. In her Daybook Truitt described this as a way of rendering herself whole, of finding and sustaining a connection between her artistic practice and her other responsibilities, her work and everything else. And de Jong-Buijs' daily posting, too, recalls On Kawara, who sent almost 900 telegrams to friends stating, "I am still alive." Echoing these precursors' work, she renews the attentive gaze these artists fixed on dailiness

Beginning in Basel, Switzerland, *iExist* shifted to New Jersey, USA, when the artist and her family relocated, and returned to Basel in 2020 during the global pandemic. Covid lockdowns accelerated the contemporary world's ongoing shift from analog to digital experience, refashioning our perception of time and prompting the question: do we now perceive time as a continuum or as a span between events?

iExist is iterative and experiential. It marks time and registers presence, paradoxically by evacuating the subject from the image. Aggregating those daily transmissions, now printed in a gridded arrangement, *iExist* claims for its viewers specific modes of attention and looking. The project mines the tropes of similarity and difference, difference and repetition: every day the same/every day something different, but beyond this, it registers a kind of persistence, a tic or a beat, a persistence that belongs to the artist as well as beholders of the massed work. The gridded arrangement of images, like Muybridge's nineteenth century analyses of locomotion but on a massive scale, invites analysis. Muybridge sequenced photographs in order to see how bodies moved. In *iExist*, stasis and stasis repeated become the means by which duration is analysed.

Images in physical space—and physical images in particular—force us to look. Online, we can scroll, pass over with a tiny downward swipe or move our thumb and forefinger apart to enlarge the image. In real life we have to move ourselves. The kind of looking demanded by what the artist calls these 'boring' pictures— scanning and comparing in order to register small differences between and across series—she says, "is also in my paintings."

These are made by various means, all predicated on an attention to process as an unfolding in time. What de Jong-Buijs writes of Repetition 9, a series completed around the same time as Hopewell Woods, applies to all her work: “My intention is to let the viewer wonder what they’re looking at and what remains hidden.”

De Jong-Buijs describes Hopewell Woods in terms of time, a week during the early days of the pandemic, during which she worked on a 15-meter length of unbleached cotton stretched between three trees. Each day she used a different tool, color, and gesture; working with various sprayers, brushes, and a sweeping broom de Jong-Buijs moved across the cloth, marking her presence. Each day’s outcome was happenstance, the result of working with the cloth’s billowing and bowing in springtime gustiness. Her process here was less about making paintings in new ways—in 2015 she’d used a tractor to make *Accumulated Experiences*-- than marking time and her presence during lockdown. As photographed by Grant Peterson we see the work as a screen, a wall of diary entries, a view she’s made. Returned to Basel, the artist had the canvas segmented and stretched, five “shots” or slices of that time in the New Jersey woods.

Look closely at the 730 images here, all screenshots from an iPhone 7 or 8 and printed on A5 paper, and you will notice they are not as crisp as contemporary screenshots. While assembling this iteration of *iExist* for ‘Unraveling structures’ de Jong-Buijs had the option of upgrading these older images, but decided against it. In a few years’ time, her more recent *iExist* photos will likely look similarly dated, their degree of detail superseded by an improved device. This supersession will not affect the older images’ claim to truth, neither will it weaken any spectatorial belief in that veracity: as viewers, as consumers, we have learned to expect this. The paintings, which stake their claim to truth by other means, will look the same.

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New Jersey, 2025