

SCOTT LYALL

Bruno Latour tells us that when almost all the parts of an artifact are digitized, it's as if the object is composed of "writings all the way down." This phrase makes me remember Mark Rothko's technique of tinting gesso so his paintings would be color all the way down. While Rothko might have understood these paintings by their surfaces, not as compositional schemes but as color released from line (a pair of categories that were traditionally opposed until Matisse), my shift to a vector that goes "all the way down" invokes images of vertical depth and of definition in sharp detail. Depth, which only appears when it is paired with given surfaces, points attention toward a chiasma of formless color and screen design.

Against the vertigo of history, painting's engagement with "edges"—and therefore the lateral axis—could be taken as an achievement. For Barnett Newman, edges did not just delimit a painting's surface; they conveyed a shape that was real, a near ideograph of thought. Newman wrote that for primitive artists "a shape was a living thing, a vehicle for an abstract thought-complex . . . before the terror of the unknowable." Perhaps these primitive artists could see the twentieth century coming and made their shapes speak of clefts between phenomena and things themselves.

In my own work I have invoked chiasmic depth as thin relief. A plastic substrate receives an allover application on both sides—ink on one and liquid adhesive on the other—allowing sprays of abstract color to be modeled by the walls. The thin relief captures disparate layers of all-the-way-downs to form a poster that announces its own penumbral, sunless light. A deeply compacted matrix of form, figure, and color becomes a subtle graphic economy of sapient imagery yet to come. Depths of line and color announce a plastic choreality. (Plato's *chora*: the nonexistence of every surface you ever saw.) □

SCOTT LYALL IS AN ARTIST BASED IN TORONTO AND NEW YORK.



View of "Scott Lyall: Early Video," 2010, Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto. From left: [Eve 02112010_15201745], 2010; untitled, 2010.

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