**Mihael Puntarić, *Paintings in space***

“What the painting is, is exactly what (you) see: the paint on the corrugated and the color of the corrugated and the way it’s done and the way it feels. That’s what’s there.”

Robert Ryman[[1]](#footnote-1)

In his most recent work of art, Mihael Puntarić has broken entirely free from all content, context, and even expression. In the true sense of minimal art, the author strives towards the affirmation of paintings as art objects by consciously aligning with the work of authors such as Malevič, Reinhardt or the artists gathered within *New Tendencies*,and their comprehension of art. In this case, Mihael Puntarić practices a highly material manner of painting, i.e. constructing an art object – one that rules out symbolic and referential dimensions of painting. With his paintings/objects, he has established that a painting necessarily consists of framework, canvas and a layer of paint, and departing from the application of the essential constituents alone, he has derived to non-illusionistic painting with simplified form and devoid off subject content. As put into an equation by Yve-Alain Bois: “A (paintbrush) + B (paint) + C (support) + D (the manner in which these are combined) = E (painting).”[[2]](#footnote-2)

In his deliberation of art, Mihael Puntarić is greatly inspired by natural and technical sciences grounded in factual truths and binary value systems, which dictate that two plus two always equals four and a circle is necessarily the set of all points in a plane that are at a given distance from the center. No human invention or action would have the capacity to eliminate said truths and at the same time, their fundamental importance is manifested in their universal acceptance, not only across all cultures and languages, but planted deeply in the very foundations of human knowledge and cognition. Free from all agenda, science seeks to raise questions and generate answers that establish factual truths. With his *Paintings in Space*, Mihael Puntarić seeks for the manner of delivery that holds the potential of stating the factual truths of art. In his painting, he has found the said manner by perceiving a painting as an art object consisting of framework, tightly stretched canvas and a layer of paint. Consistent in implementing his reduction of delivery, Puntarić consciously opts for a sturdy metal framework constructed in the shape of a square, which he holds to be not only a basic shape, but also a neutral and balanced one. The framework carries the tightly stretched raw, unprocessed canvas, and in the final act of applying paint, the monochrome is attained by applying the color white, which even when seen as devoid of all symbolism, calls forth the visual simplicity and factuality in the eye of the observer.

The deliberation of reductionism present in the work of Puntarić has enabled him to deconstruct the painting as an art object, thereby generating an extension of the established approach to displaying art. His *Paintings in Space* invite us to stop before the said paintings/objects while bringing into question the two dimensions of a painting and the three dimensions of a sculpture exhibited in the gallery space. Having opted for basic materials and having rejected all context and content, Puntarić has brought into question the basic planar quality of painting. By hanging the three identical canvases spaced at equal distance on the wall, the canvases enter into the gallery space both separately and as a whole, i.e. a single painting. Accordingly, the three-dimensionality has been attained on two different levels as well – by applying paint to all surfaces covered with the two-dimensional canvas and by conceiving a monumental block, the three-dimensional cube. Persistent in materializing his paintings in space, Puntarić perceives the attained three-dimensionality as an effort to emphasize the presence of factual truths in painting, an art form he no longer defines as planar. On an entirely different, emotional level, one that is kept aloof from the author’s decisions and painting processes in a disciplined manner, we are able to sense his nostalgia and the respect he holds towards the abstract artists of the 20th century. As interpreted by Puntarić, art is materialized through conscious and consistent reduction to its fundamental constituents. All the while, his distancing from emotion and from the risk of entrapment by pathos, aims to accomplish the exact opposite – the author’s attainment of the essential conclusions reached by his predecessors in order to explore the possibility, like the ones before him, to raise new questions in art about art.

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1. Quoted after Zvonko Maković, *Tabula rasa. Primarno i analitčko u hrvatskoj umjetnosti*, exhibition catalogue, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb, 2014, pp 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, pp 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)