

# ***COLOURS, FORMS AND WORDS ACCORDING TO JONATHAN MONK***

A text by Jesús Palomino

## ***I. INTRODUCTION***

The basis of Jonathan's Monk's artistic practice lies in inventing or in trying to invent. By experimenting with texts, drawings, objects, photographic images, videos, 16mm films, slide projections, etc., he undertakes a convincing aesthetic project that makes use of *appropriation*, *reproduction* and *textuality*, which he deploys in order to articulate his work from the starting point of references encountered in the History of art, memories of his family and personal life, the books that he most likes and the social sphere of art. All this pre-existing material, which Monk appropriates, imitates, duplicates, repeatedly reproduces or simply alters in an idiosyncratic manner, forms the basis of his artistic practice. This practice is one characterised by an unfiltered process of selection and re-reading, transformation and contraction, symbolic and formal stretching out, to which Monk subjects his *appropriated materials*. Despite all this, the result retains an air of individuality, freshness, lightness and humour.

Jonathan Monk does not seem to be interested in the issue of the original, of authorship or of style; rather, his investigations seem to be committed to a constant movement of *opening up* and to a ceaseless shift of meaning, which allows him to offer an experience based on communication and encounter through the work. Avoiding formal rigidity and conceptual dryness as far as possible, Monk looks for the *human touch* in the reception of his works and tries to invent something different through the introduction of a calculated *cognitive dissonance* that expands conventional interpretative processes and encourages the viewer's potential for different thinking.

In his early work of the early 1990s, Monk focused his interest on references to popular English culture and the culture of bars, approaching them via photographic documentation, performance, painting and the calculated use of titles as a signifying textual element. From the starting point of an apparently insignificant *referentialism* that focused on seemingly banal details of scant *symbolic capital*, Monk formulated a *dialectically ironic* discourse that dramatised the encounter between "high and low

*culture*”, combining calculated doses of hooliganism and methods and procedures characteristic of contemporary art practices. *The performativeness* of some of these early works spontaneously reproduced attitudes and elements that Monk used to attack artistic practice with a de-mystifying, sociological gaze aimed at achieving *action* and social participation. These performances, conceived as simple exercises of *strategic essentialism*,<sup>1</sup> allowed Monk to achieve the desired inversion: on the one hand, treating History on an everyday level, and on the other, incorporating the banality of the day to day into the discourse of art. These *dramatisations of the social* of a *relational* type,<sup>2</sup> which were often resolved through the rapid device of humour, were not devoid of a certain degree of friction and imbalance.

Dating from that period, characterised by the consumption of large amounts of beer, is *My name written in my piss* (1994), a sequence of two photographs that depict the moment when the artist, standing on the beach, has to urinate, taking advantage of this to leave a record of his name, “Jonathan”, written with his own urine. A comparable series are the two black and white photographs entitled *Yard of Ale (Get Shirty)* of 1994-95, which document a bar ritual. The first image shows the start of the *action*, with the artist holding a large glass of beer, while the second shows Monk having drunk the entire glass. The series, which omits the temporal progression of the *action* and thus leaves us to imagine the effect of accelerated drunkenness, suggests a demonstration of manliness, determination and resistance to alcohol. Another revealing documented action is *Me up a tree similar to one painted by Piet Mondriaan in about 1915* (1995), in which Monk is seen up a tree that does in fact recall those represented in Mondriaan’s early paintings. The action is explained by the title. In a similar manner, in *Climbing Sol LeWitt* of 1992 he documents climbing up a public sculpture, while also comparable are his performances in the arrival lounges of airports, in which Monk, holding up signs in his hand, histrionically greeted the arrival of Marcel Duchamp, Woody Allen and the Queen of England in his series *Waiting for Famous People* of 1995-97.

Towards the end of the 1990s Monk’s work took a new direction, making notably free use of quotations, *appropriation* and *referentiality* through its use of existing works by acknowledged artists (as they say, “to cite is to resuscitate”). He initially focused his

interest on the creative methods of post-conceptual artists of the New York scene in the 1980s such as Jeff Koons, Ashley Bickerton, Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, then moved on to find his references in the conceptual and minimalist art of the 1960s and 1970s through works by Sol LeWitt, Carl André, Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth, Douglas Huebler and others. The intention behind these *appropriationist* procedures was to access new possibilities of visual enunciation through the breaking down of closed positions, the rejection of rigid decisions, the refutation of clear definition and the criticism of any confinement to a single, specific place. In his games involving *referentiality*, undertaken with a high degree of spontaneity and procedural lucidity, Monk conveyed both knowledge and respectful admiration, seemingly to be opening saying: “Given that I admire all these creative figures profoundly, why can I not base my investigations on their work, ideas and methods.”

## ***II. KNOW-HOW***

Given that works *appropriated* in different ways in the manner of formal or conceptual quotations constitute the basis of his artistic practice, I would now like to analyse the specific nature of this process in Monk’s work. One example could be *Untitled (me naked in the kitchen)* of 2004, a 100 x 140 cm sheet of aluminium weighing 75 kilos that rests on the ground. With a Minimalist appearance, it could easily bring to mind the work of Donald Judd or Carl André. Clearly, an aluminium sheet such as this lacks any realist or mimetic references to the human body, which the title states to be that of the artist, naked, in the kitchen. The only reference that could suggest that the sheet is related to the artist’s body is its weight. The artist and the plate weigh exactly the same: 75 kilos. Monk thus introduces the notion of presence into the work through the textual and imaginative play of the title, but also through a dimension, in this case a measurement of weight. Monk weighs 75 kilos, as does the aluminium sheet. This, then, is the way in which he incorporates the *figural*<sup>3</sup> element of the naked body in this piece of metal with its coldly industrial appearance. In other words, what we have is; a) the formal presence of the aluminium plate that we can perceive as it is, in its physical materiality of 100 x 140 cm, 75 kilos in weight and its cold, polished surface; b) the referential level that brings to mind historical echoes of minimalism and its precise orthodoxy; and c) the cognitive shift brought about by the title, which facilitates the

incorporation of the *figural* into the object. To sum up, in *Untitled (me naked in the kitchen)*, the perceptual experience, historical reference and meta-linguistic game of the title create an idiosyncratic aesthetic *dispositif* through a mystifying operation that combines formal purism, imaginative humour and the subjective accumulation of the artist's procedure. The result of Monk's multi-faceted process ultimately means that breaks appear between form, reference and title, which the spectator must overcome on a mental level, using his or her imaginative and interpretative powers. It is these interruptions that create the humour, so that an industrially produced sheet of aluminium ends up by suggesting the "self-portrait" of the naked artist.

*Untitled (rolled up)* of 2003 offers another good example of Monk's particular method, which he explains in a simple manner as "My height turned into a minimal, circular sculpture". The work takes the form of a tubular ring of aluminium with a circumference that is exactly the same as the artist's height: 177.5cm. Monk uses this dimension, which he identifies with himself (Height = Me), to undertake his abstract synthesis by means of a *synecdoche*,<sup>4</sup> and to create a series of sculptures using his particular method.

This series ultimately grew to become a group of works of marked personality despite their formal slightness. Again using aluminium tubing, Monk created another elegant, austere circular sculpture. This time his approach consisted in introducing his height, 177.5 cm, into the diameter of a tubular ring, entitled *I See Through You See Through Me* of 2003. He then went on to create a series of sculptures with outlines in the form of a triangle, square and pentagon, all the sides of which measure 177.5 cm, i.e., his own height. These sculptures, which are minimal in formal terms, possess *figural* resonance and involve a multi-faceted textual game in their titles, introduce us into a web of readings and connections that do not end with the simple identification of the conceptual process of the work's production. Given that they are objects produced to be experienced visually, what I have stated above can be better understood from images of them.<sup>5</sup>

This general introduction to Jonathan Monk's work and methods would be incomplete without reference to *Un metro cubo d'infinito, reversed* of 2005 and the interesting

story associated with it. The work is a transformation of its chosen reference, *Metro cubico d'infinito* of 1966 by the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto. It consists of a cube of 1 cubic metre constructed from 6 mirrors that reflect the interior. Monk introduced a simple but crucial variation when he constructed his own, *appropriationist* version, merely altering the placement of the mirrors so that they reflect outwards. I am not aware if there is a relationship of cause and effect in the fact that just a few months ago, Pistoletto presented a performance in the Musée du Louvre in which the principal action consisted of destroying his original work, *Un metro cubico d'infinito*.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from whether Pistoletto was irritated by what happened, it would be difficult to offer a brief summary of Jonathan Monk's career given the wide variety of his strategies, which change over time and are open to new directions in the future, although all of them seemingly derive from "the pleasure that everyone can feel saying simple things in his own name, speaking about emotions, intensity, experiences and experiments."<sup>7</sup> It is possibly this versatility and intent to achieve "openness", expressed in a work characterised by its formal lightness, that gives Monk's work its conceptual interest and assertiveness as experience.

### ***III. PERFORMATIVE HAPPY HOUR***

*"The body is in the social realm but the social realm is in the body"*

*Readings and reader.* Pierre Bourdieu<sup>8</sup>

In Jonathan Monk's early work a body dances in front of a Richter, or climbs up a tree or a public sculpture by Sol LeWitt; a body meets a famous person, takes part in a drinking contest, writes its own name in urine on the sand or on a sculpture by Richard Serra, and so on. All this documented, *performative* activity falls within the artist's earliest output, in which he used his own body or persona as the *relational*, demystifying vehicle. If Jonathan Monk had been an artist in 1969 he might have been included in the exhibition *When Attitude becomes Form*,<sup>9</sup> curated by Harald Szeeman at the Bern Kunsthalle. The exhibition focused on the innovative gestures and behaviour of *post-conceptual* American artists, who were at that time rethinking the

strategies and discourses of art. Last year, almost 43 years later, *When Attitudes Became Form* *Become Attitudes* offered a revision of those same ideas, curated by Jeff Hoffman at the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco. Jonathan Monk's work was included in that exhibition.

I would like to analyse here the shared characteristics of Jonathan Monk's performances and why he focused on gestures, attitudes and events of a markedly social nature. Critically, these actions related to the use of the social and artistic *field*<sup>10</sup> (*appropriationism*), the *performativeness* of a temporary social identity (*strategic essentialism*) and the application of the methodology of language (*lingualization*)<sup>11</sup> characteristic of the practices of contemporary art. Ultimately, all these operations were oriented in a humorous manner towards an irreverent, aesthetic iconoclasm (*hooliganism*). All this inevitably implies a mystification of the *field* and a collision of different *capitals*. Given that the best way to understand what an object is, is to know how it has been made, I would explain this in the following way: in 1994 Monk invited his friends to spend the afternoon with him in a bar in which the tables were covered with canvases. They spent the afternoon drinking, smoking, chatting and probably also dancing, laughing and joking: in fact, all the normal things in a get-together of this type. *Making Work* of 1994 is a performance on the reality of that social event and the resulting fun. I am unaware if there are documentary images of it. What I do know is that the canvases that covered the tables were subsequently exhibited, showing the inevitable marks and stains of the beer, food and cigarette ash. These canvases were entitled: *Waiting with Cain*, *Waiting with Tuborg* and *Waiting with Guinness*. Cain, Tuborg and Guinness, all famous and popular beers, were "waiting". It would seem that at that gathering no one was waiting for Godot.<sup>12</sup> This festive performance created from pragmatic, everyday elements (beer, people having a good time, the marks of that experience left on the canvases, etc) and arising from the artist's personal situation, gave a collective authorship to the final results. At the end of the day, the canvases were made by all of the people present at the event, and as with Daniel Spoerri's tables, the remains of the party demonstrated (at least for those who were there that night) the real possibility of artistic practice as a way to make our experience of the world dynamic. "We had a party while the paintings were being

painted, or we painted while we partied; or perhaps better said, we did the two things at the same time and called the situation *Making Work*", might be what Monk and his guests thought of the whole thing.

These performances involved a certain dystopia and *cognitive scratching*,<sup>13</sup> given that a collision occurs in the "field" of art between its status as elevated *scholarly, symbolic and cultural capital*<sup>14</sup> and the field of popular middle- and working-class British culture, with its well established references and practices (bars, beer, football, holidays in the south of Europe, etc) that Monk deliberately made use of. This is because in reality the recording of these events, either in a documentary or pictorial way, constituted the work by the artist, the final destination of which was a museum or gallery space, depending on the particular case in question. The interest of these actions lies in the shift of *field* and the exchange of *capital* that they involved; a *mundaneness* of banal capital that is culturally, symbolically and financially re-capitalised by being incorporated into the value circuit of galleries and museums, which are places of display and exchange in which art works unfold their visibility in order to tell their stories and manifest their emotions and intensity.

#### ***IV. 4 FEBRUARY 1969***

*"The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world."*

*The Human Condition.* Hannah Arendt<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting that the idea of birth occupies such an important place in Jonathan Monk's work, as do the ideas of beginning, action, unexpected twist and difference. A good way to learn about a creative figure's motivations is to listen to what they have to say about their interests and concerns. There is a marvellous video on Vimeo in which the artist talks in a simple, relaxed way about his work.<sup>16</sup> Monk is in his studio and we can gain an idea of its atmosphere and of the objects that surround him on a daily basis. Behind him a bright pink mural painting frames the conversation next to a

drum kit, a huge poster of The Smiths, a number of his works propped against the wall and scattered about, a bicycle and books, large numbers of them, and catalogues. This is undoubtedly a working space.

Among the works Monk discusses in the video is *Birthday Party* of 2011,<sup>17</sup> which consists of two lines of simple, pink and greenish neon tube to be displayed every year on his birthday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of February. Thus every year on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February this work is installed and then taken down 24 hours later. Monk explains that gradually, year after year, by showing this work, viewers are able to establish a relationship with its appearance and its *raison d'être*, which is the artist's birthday and hence the anniversary of his birth. With the passing of time celebrations becomes routines, and thus *Birthday Party* works on the basis of the artist's express desire to restrict its presentation and visibility to a single annual date, the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, with the result that it is a work devised to achieve an understanding of time over a lengthy period.

The video also reveals Monk's interest in the illusion of time, memory and in *stories of personal life*. It is in fact normal in his work to encounter references to pre-existing works of art, combined with photographic images of, for example, his childhood or teenage years. In the video Monk shows us his carefully chosen collection of books, catalogues and invitations, taking time to explain a couple of works that are displayed on a sideboard. These are two small photographic works in the form of photo-collages: the first is a black and white image of Dan Graham talking to a friend, dating from 1970; below it, Monk has stuck a colour photograph of himself aged one with his sister, taken the same year. They seem to be in the living room of their house having tea. It is at this moment that the works reveals its keys and its meaning, pointing to a revealing temporal parallelism between him, his sister and Dan Graham. Both images were taken in 1970, albeit in different places. In a very accessible way they seem to present the tremendous collision that results from bringing personal memory in contact with historical record. Monk shows us another work that involves a similar process, consisting of an original invitation to an exhibition of the work of the artist Bruce Nauman with a printed text that reads *The Consummate Mask of Rock*. Over it, Monk has added a photograph of his parents and siblings in which they have their faces made up like clowns, including red noses. All of them are posing on what seems



to have been a day of family fun way back in 1977, the same date that appears on the invitation to the exhibition of the work of the American artist Bruce Nauman, thus revealing the intention to establish a secret but obvious connection, referring to the mask: the mask of the exhibition's title and the enjoyable family experience of putting on makeup together in the form of clowns' faces or masks. In a simple but sophisticated manner, Monk thus designs the reading of his works with the tension of the historical documentalist and the proximity of the collector of family memories. Once again, the resulting work repeats the parallelism: same time, different space. Same Year, 1977: different places depending on the personal circumstances of the figures in the images – Bruce Nauman and the Monk family. These two works are good examples of Monk's distinctive and idiosyncratic approach to the practice of art and his eloquent way of confronting the time of history with personal time. In a warm, human manner both levels, history and individual, are overtly conjured up in what we might call a domestic interpretation of time, memory and representation.

Having seen the enlightening explanation of his works in the video, it occurred to me to Google "4 February 1969". The following ephemera emerged: 1. Founding of the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat with the aim of representing the Palestinian people in their path towards national and territorial self-determination; 2. Birth of the Canadian hockey player Dallas James Drake, who played for the Detroit Red Wings in the Canadian professional league; 3. Birth of the actress and model Brandy Lee Ledford, also known as Jisel, who played the role of Doyle in the tv science fiction series *Andromeda* and who was named "Pet of the Year" 1992 in the American edition of *Penthouse*.

It is also true that when looking for images relating to that date the first that came up was Jonathan Monk's *A Work in Progress (to be completed when time comes) 1969 - (White)* of 2005. In it, the name and date of the artist's birth are carved on a white marble slab. The result is a clearly humorous statement on the importance of the birth and appearance of something new in the world.

## V. AMBIENT TEXTUALITY

One of the most important achievements of conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s was its capacity to take *visual textuality* to its maximum degree of self-sufficiency, both in terms of form and meaning. Jonathan Monk appropriates works, revives methods, uses references and expands strategies inherited from conceptual art,<sup>18</sup> updating the possibilities of *textuality* in a unique and tremendously effective manner. His use of texts takes the form of letters, words and phrases made from neon, laser projections, the aestheticised function of the titles of his works, and texts on canvases, on paper or on the wall, etc. It would be difficult to sum up the lengthy list of works and it is no exaggeration to say that the exuberant variety of his textual operations will quite possibly expand and change in the future.

The present exhibition at the CAC Málaga includes good examples of the above in the form of *The Two O's in Jeff Koons Used as Eyes (red)* of 2009, in which Monk applies a striking formal treatment to Koons's surname, selecting only the two "o's" and rejecting the rest. These two juxtaposed, round forms, which clearly suggest eyes, are reproduced here in red neon, while the title itself explains the process. Monk reveals his approach in a transparent manner, concealing nothing, and with this formally simple, minimal object arising from the transformation of the word Koons into a pair of eyes, he adds the possibility of seeing the world through them to his aesthetic procedure: a new, red gaze. He also makes these eyes in green, blue and yellow neon. They certainly could be described as beautiful. Another striking example is the text in neon letters that reads *Do Not Pay More Than \$80,000* of 2009, which is a warning to collectors. While it would be interesting to know the real price of the work in order to reach a definite conclusion, this piece makes use of the *authority of the text* in the world, in this case the art world, giving rise to a long list of questions: can the artist use a literal text to put a limit on the price of his own work? Does the text speak in the name of the artist? If it is Monk himself who is authorising the text, is he doing so to avoid speculation with his work? Is he laughing at collectors or is this rather an ironic gaze on gallery practices? Ultimately, we cannot know for certain what is happening with this message, and it is precisely the multi-faceted *polysemy* and use of *multiple voices* that are the subject of this work, which aesthetically updates the friction that

links the world, text and the creator of the work. In *A Short Story Translated by My Mother and Milk (Barbecue)* of 2008 the elements remain closed and distant but are still visually eloquent. The inverted text in red neon and the painting of a glass of milk come together as a secret, only ambiguously clarified by the title, which tells us how Monk's mother translated a story that is here accompanied by a painted glass of milk. Barbecue & Milk? What sort of a story would that be? Only humour and imagination can answer the question.

As we progress with our attempt to understand the work of Jonathan Monk, his natural mastery of form in relation to *inter-textuality* and meta-language becomes obvious. Another example in the present exhibition at the CAC Málaga is *DISAPPEAR* of 2007, made of light bulbs of the type used for illuminated advertising signs in the past. The deployment of technologically outdated lighting elements gives the work a slightly nostalgic air. *DISAPPEAR* seems like a luminous street sign of a now defunct showiness. The triggering of meaning perhaps comes about in front of an illuminated word containing a message referring to disappearance, while this message is transmitted through the presence of a visual sign produced to last. This friction between seeing and narrating becomes tangled up in an endless loop of meanings, the final effect of which is to reveal the potential of language and images to manifest time and memory in a narrative manner. This work reminds me of John Cage's paradoxical phrase, "I have nothing to say and I am saying it."

Monk's experimentation with textuality and light in his work are part of a premeditated and perceptible rhetorical technique (*techné*) for detecting the multiple levels – visible and invisible – of meaning and for provoking new interconnections based on an all-enveloping visual and ambient experience and one that is, in my opinion, intensely sensual on occasions. The artist designs his objects and illuminated texts from light and carefully installs them in spaces with specific lighting conditions in which he shows 16mm films, laser installations, neons and slide projections. These environments, which are intentionally created with the idea of bringing about the necessary concentration of attention and perception, possess the capacity to add silence or accumulate it in virtue of their semi-darkness, their black painted walls and/or their specific conditions. In this way the experience of these installations as

environments becomes intensely effective for the type of stories that interest the artist, some of them notably domestic and personal in tone. A profoundly intense work that is sadly not included in the present exhibition is *Replica Ib* of 2002, an installation in which two slide projectors show two carrousel of 80 images each. In this case the artist has chosen a colour photograph of his mother. The image has been reproduced by making a copy of the copy, repeating this action of copying until the original image disappears completely. The reiterated duplication ultimately makes the figure unrecognisable, and the familiar face of the artist's mother gradually disappears due to the progressive accumulation of stains on the image and its increasing loss of focus and quality. This simple operation of *reproduction, repetition* and *memory* present an analogy, a startling metaphorical parallelism between the work and the biological existence of human beings. The disappearance of the mother's image, repeatedly reproduced until it deteriorates and disappears completely, reminds us of the similar process of biological ageing that happens in human lives. Monk presents this inevitable reality of the human condition in a neutral, distant and silent manner.

#### ***VI. CAC MÁLAGA, 13 SEPTEMBER 2013, 8 pm***

A group of works created since 1984 have been selected for display at the CAC Málaga. Lacking a defined theme and relatively open in its interpretation, the exhibition's choice of works offers a good representation of the wide range of procedures recently deployed by the artist and the breadth of Monk's *style without style*.<sup>19</sup> It starts with *Deflated Sculpture no. 1* of 2009, which makes use of Jeff Koons's sculptural references by presenting a deflated version of that artist's ultra-polished metal sculptures of the 1990s. It continues with the austere, laconic tubular sculpture *Corner Piece (for Pistoletto)* of 2006, which is a homage to the Italian artist, and concludes with *Levitating Reclining Nude* of 2009, a bronze sculpture with a green patina that represents a towel resting on various tins of soup. Located on the gallery floor, the title refers precisely to what is not present in the sculpture, a reclining nude that is apparently levitating. All these works function in the manner of quotations characterised by their formal strength and *referential* humour.

Adopting a slightly different approach is *The World in Stars and Stripes* of 2011 in which Monk takes his starting point from two tapestries made by Alighiero e Boetti in Kabul, Afghanistan, in the 1970s. Created from embroidered patchwork cloth, they depicted maps of the world in which each country and national territory was represented by the colours of its flag. The result was a colourful and variegated *mapamundi*. Monk has undertaken his own, personal transformation of the US flag. Now, and in a seeming reference to the status quo, the map of the world is not embroidered in all its colourful, motley variety, but rather each of the territories is occupied either by the motifs of “stripes” or “stars”. The result is an image of the world from the perspective of the global spread of the US flag and American culture. *Around the World (compact version)* of 2010 is a good example of Monk as a careful documentary artist who collects references and creatively modifies them to heighten their *visual narrativity*. The work generates a new account, a new story that has been re-composed from elements appropriated from the film *Around the World in 80 Days*, based on the novel by Jules Verne, in which the game of mirror and the original reference come together to articulate a fiction within another fiction. Monk takes an image of the actor David Niven who played Phileas Fogg, the novel’s main character, in the film version. The found photographic image shows Niven dressed as Fogg on a bicycle, probably during a break in the filming. Over his face Monk has stuck a small, square mirror. On seeing themselves reflected in it, viewers will become Phileas Fogg himself, taking on his identity through a simple game of reflection, identification and projection of the fantasy, which aims to imaginatively include the viewer in the story being recounted. *Around the World (compact version)* can be associated with a larger project (not included in this exhibition) entitled *Model for a Giant Mirrored Balloon and Proposal* of 2000-08. Functioning in a similar way to produce documentary connections and referential twists is *Rew-Shay Hood Project XX* of 2008-09, which is part of a series on car bonnets painted with the airbrush technique and depicting places in and around Los Angeles taken from the photographic work of Ed Ruscha. Another comparable example is *Near Death Experience (after Jack Goldstein after Chris Burden after)* of 2006, an oil painting that recreates Chris Burden’s performance *Doorway to Heaven*. Here Monk appropriates this iconic image, which was the front cover of the American edition of *Artforum* in 1973.

Different in kind are the works that focus on immediate perceptual data, which are filtered through the artist's activity as he works, combining an analysis of memory and emotions through the visual. Examples include *Trying to imagine the colour of my brain whilst painting*'*trying to imagine the colour of my brain* of 2000, which uses a pointless tautology in the title to describe the artist imagining what colour his brain will acquire while he uses different colours at the moment of actually creating the work. Closely comparable is *All the possible combinations of five colours* of 2002, in which a photograph from 1977 of the Monk family (Jonathan is the blonde boy in the foreground next to his father) includes combinations of all the possible variations of these five colours, located above the figures' heads, in a clear reference to images of this type by John Baldessari. Another work in this group is *Using my daughter's coloured pencils to find the colour of my mother's hair* of 2005, in which the title offers a simple explanation of a process of searching for precise memory data, with the final work acquiring the appearance of an empirical, mnemotechnical test. *What colour were my mother's lips? Will my daughter have inherited the same lip colour?* might seem to be the questions that interest Monk in this work.

Finally, we have the series *Incomplete Open Paperclip I, II, IV, V* of 2006, which presents different versions of a simple and banal manual gesture through four sculptures made of metal tubing in blue, red, white and yellow. How many times have all of us picked up a paper clip and absent-mindedly opened it out, thus producing a new form with this simple action? We then frequently pause to observe the new 3-dimensionality arising from this often unconscious act that we have performed while talking on the phone. This is exactly what Monk presents in this new series of low-key, physically slight sculptures. The gesture has been transformed into a sculpture and the clip moves from being a small item of stationery to a blown-up, 3-dimensional form that is open and incomplete, as the titles convey.

It is difficult to bring this text to a conclusion, given the nature of Jonathan Monk's work, which is still ongoing and which is characterised by its lightness and its nature as an expanding conceptual process that cannot easily be summed up in critical terms. Gilles Deleuze said that "in created works there is a multiplication of emotion, a liberation of emotion", an idea that can be applied to the work now on display at the

CAC Málaga. I would not only say that these works liberate emotion: they also liberate intuition, refined aesthetic education, fun and a considerable amount of artistic reflection. Monk's work involves a lucid, free and de-mystifying gaze on History, language and imaginative participation; it is a body of work that should be approached without preconceptions or prejudices and which uses the pleasure of discovering the new as its means to bring about new possibilities and invent new formulations. It is, overall, an investigative endeavour that manifests itself as a worldly, human and visual adventure constructed from colours, forms and words and ordered according to the artist's particular version of the world. Enjoy this experience, which is one based on emotions, freedom and also on the proliferation of stories and resonances that expand and grow as their creator moves in time towards his future.

*JESUS PALOMINO*

*August 2013*

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1. The term *strategic essentialism* was formulated by the intellectual Gayatri Spivak. It refers to the strategy used by some nationalities, ethnic groups and minorities to present themselves in a more obvious, simplified manner in social terms. The idea behind this temporary, collective alignment is that of *social action*. For these groups it can on occasions be advantageous to acquire a temporary, essentialised identity that helps them to promote certain positions or claims. Source: Wikipedia.

2. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presse Du Reel, 1998 ed. In his essay the author states that: "If we observe contemporary artistic practices, rather than 'forms' we should speak of 'formations', which is the opposite of an object closed in on itself by a style or signature. Art being created today demonstrates that there is only form in the encounter, in the dynamic relationship that an artistic proposal establishes with other formations, artistic or otherwise."
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation*, University of Minnesota Press, ed. 2005, p.2. According to Deleuze: "Painting has neither a model to represent nor a story to narrate. It thus has two possible ways of escaping the figurative: towards pure form, through abstraction; or towards the purely figural, through extraction or isolation. If the painter keeps to the Figure, if he or she opts for the second path, it will be to oppose the 'figural' to the figurative."
4. Synecdoche is a trope or rhetorical device in which a part of something is used to represent the whole. Translated from Greek, it means "simultaneous comprehension". It is one of the most common ways of characterising a fictitious character who is often described by a single element or characteristic of the body, such as the eyes, which come to represent that person. Source: Wikipedia. Works by Jonathan Monk at the Yvon Lambert gallery. See [http://www.yvon-lambert.com/2012/?page\\_id=246](http://www.yvon-lambert.com/2012/?page_id=246)
5. *Distruzione del Metro Cubo d'infinito*, performance by Michelangelo Pistoletto presented in the exhibition *Année I – Le Paradis sur Terre* at the Musée du Louvre, Paris, April 2013. The video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4BhCrzVcs4>
6. Gilles Deleuze, *Conversations. Pre-texts*. 1995. "Letter to a harsh critic".
7. Pierre Bourdieu, "Leçon sur la leçon", 1982. Inaugural lecture for the Chair of Sociology, given at the Collège de France, 23 April 1982.
8. The ground-breaking exhibition by Harald Szeemann entitled *When Attitudes Become Form* was shown in 1969 at the Bern Kunsthalle. Including work by American and European artists, it was enormously successful and marked the emergence of Post-minimalist American artists on the international art scene. The exhibition focused on behaviour and gestures and on notably open, free and participative processes of investigation and methodology. The exhibition arose from this type of approach and was undertaken without any prior curatorial plan. [http://www.elcultural.es/version\\_papel/ARTE/26005/When Attitudes Become Form de Harald Szeemann](http://www.elcultural.es/version_papel/ARTE/26005/When_Attitudes_Become_Form_de_Harald_Szeemann)



9. Field (*champs* in French), a concept proposed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is the space in which agents and social positions act. The position of each agent is the result of the interaction between the specific norms of the *field*, the *habitus* of the agents and their *social, economic and cultural capital*. The different fields interact with each other hierarchically in response to relations of power and/or social class.
10. Wolfgang Iser, the German art critic, analysed the phenomenon of mutual interaction between art and literature, distinguishing three forms of it: 1. The inclusion of language in the work of art; 2. The use of language as a medium in the visual arts; 3. Its use next to the work. This phenomenon is known as *lingualization*.
11. *Waiting for Godot*, a tragi-comedy in three acts written by Samuel Beckett in 1953, centres on a pair of vagrant men and their efforts to divert themselves while waiting, on a vague pretence, for the arrival of a man named Godot, whom they only know by reputation. To occupy the time they philosophise, sleep, argue, sing, exercise, swap hats, and consider suicide – anything "to hold the terrible silence at bay". Source: Wikipedia.
12. Scratching. A percussive effect obtained by moving a record manually while it is playing. Commonly used by djs to obtain sound effects while playing a record, it is characteristic of rap music.
13. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Routledge, London, 2010 ed.
14. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp.177-78.
15. Video on Jonathan Monk's work made by Michel Balagué for the Kadist Foundation in Paris. For the video, see <http://vimeo.com/40547496>
16. Text of the contract for *Birthday Party*, 2011, with instructions and conditions for display: "Details. An abstract neon sign. This neon can only be installed for one day each year. On February 4<sup>th</sup> 2012 (and on subsequent February 4ths) until an unspecified date in the future a specifically designed neon sign should temporarily be installed in the window of Kadist Foundation, Paris. The piece represents some kind of small celebration not clear or obvious to passers-by. Very slowly the yearly presentation of the sign will become routine. Jonathan Monk [...]"
17. *Six Years. The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*. Edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard. University of California Press, 1997, p.VII: "Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/ or "dematerialized [...]"

18. "Style belongs to those who have no style." *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*. For the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wT241uCyojk>. This is a film made by Pierre-André Boutang in collaboration with Claire Parnet in 1966 in which the French philosopher offered a review in alphabetical order of the most important concepts he had formulated over the course of his career. When he arrived at the letter "S", Deleuze defined the world style: "In the first place, the great stylist subjects the language to an extraordinary process, it has to be said. For this reason, the great stylist is not a preserver of syntax. He is a creator of syntax. I am not going any further here than Proust's wonderful definition: 'Masterpieces are always written in a sort of foreign language.' This is true with Céline and with Péguy. This, then, is how one recognises a stylist. Secondly, alongside the first issue, which he uses to subject syntax to a process of distortion and contortion, albeit a necessary one, and which constitutes something like a foreign language within the language in which one writes, he simultaneously uses this second aspect to push the entire language towards a type of limit, a limit that [...] lies on the frontier that separates it from music. The result is a sort of music. Thus, if we achieve these two things and if there is a need to do so [...] the result is a style. In other words, excavating a foreign language from one's own language and taking the entire language to a sort of musical limit [...]."