Patricia Treib
Nordenhake, Mexico
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The paintings on paper collected in *Oscillations* circulate exemplary objects for the *act* of painting to confront. These include cameras, clocks, and clothing. But as paintings they depict the process of painting and repainting far more than they delineate objects in an external reality. What's more, all of the paintings in this collection of works are named "variations," referring to the fact that their compositions return to, or even pre-date, larger canvases Treib has shown. The word variation—a positive description of artistic elaboration on a theme—is here haunted by the word repetition, a word for the kind of image that the camera produces, with its ability to reproduce endlessly what merely exists, and a word for the type of mechanical actions that make clothing, and nearly all other aspects of our modern décor, designed according to pattern, fabricated according to a ruthless division of labor. What fascinates about Treib's paintings is the way they interact with the products of this labor. And therefore, one should not mistake "repetition" as the referent of these works, confusing the paintings for the serially produced products their names evoke. Rather the works in *Oscillations* insist upon the intervals between the physical objects they name, and the acts of depiction that render them visible. These works expand the gap between observation and representation to the point where both lose the definition circumscribed by habit.

Camera

Take for example *Straps Variation*, which is compositionally related to three paintings Treib first showed in New York in 2013, entitled *Device*, *Devices*, and *Camera II*. The general form of this composition, of which there are seven additional instances in *Oscillations,* deals with the photographic apparatus in variations of a shape that, tightly and, more often, loosely, corresponds to the noun "camera." Thinking of this word and approaching the paintings that have been made around the thing it purports to name, a sound-image plays in our mind. We can make out a single-lens reflex camera with jutting telephoto lens, and two smaller point-and-shoots protected by their leather cases. Yet to call what one sees in this composition "a camera"–simply, and finally–would be a mistake. The calligraphic lines that would represent the camera's neck-straps, for instance, unfurl according to their own physics, dividing the space into planes of nearly flat color, painted with a nimble hand that playfully intimates the lines of the straps that border them. Following the direction of the liquid brushstrokes, the viewer's eye moves to the upper left corner of the painting where attention has been drawn to its material condition as suspended pigment. At this point it becomes quite difficult to maintain that we look at anything but a painting; its sensorial actuality bears no relation to an accurate repeating mechanism or any apparatus of electronic recording. To make this point even stronger the painting invites us into an extremely ambiguous space around the extended lens of the camera in the top left side of the painting. By doing so, this shape appears simultaneously as "negative" space falling behind the camera lens, and as a kind of cut-out rising to the very top of the painted surface. But volumes receding in space, rendered by easy default in the light-tight chambers of photographic devices, become impossible here. Does this shape mark tight curves of a focus ring on the outer edge of the photographic lens? If so, why would this photographic lens denoted in the painting (and perhaps still the most recognizable object in any of Treib's works to date), confront the viewer

with such damaged symmetry? The optical elements of this lens would prove themselves utterly incapable of focusing light to a sharp point to create a clear image. *Straps Variation* is the only painting titled in explicit reference to the body of the device as such, (and here as a strap, only as an accessory, even) yet it is one of several paintings in *Oscillations* that revisits the camera composition first shown in New York, over a decade ago. If we look at *Blue Asturian Variation*, for example, we can see that it re-introduces the shape of the camera by way of a calligraphic line that itself recalls the camera strap from the former iterations; *Blue Proximity Variation*, as its name suggests, foregrounds the blue center of the painting, which forces the "camera" shape—given in tinted secondary-color seafoam green—to recede and fall into two-dimensionality; *Intermezzo Variation*, by contrast, articulates the camera in a black line that approaches a written character no longer suggestive of the original strap shape; *Pivot Variation* and *Red Asturian Variation* announce the camera, still in black, with all the beauty of a now illegible script; *Grotesquerie Variation* nearly disarticulates the camera shape entirely, leaving blank paper where color once lay; *Interval Variation* renders the camera in a bodily color, elongating its shape, which is accommodated by the center of the composition, now brown, into which it pushes as an organic curve.

By this proliferation of a composition based on the camera, Treib invites us to consider matters of difference and affinity, rather than reproductions of reality. And yet these matters of difference and affinity are recorded precisely in relation to the body of the prized mechanism of monocular vision: the single-lens-reflex. These paintings, based as they are within the limits of the camera as a product of industrial design, nevertheless reject the logic of camera vision, and the sequentiality of images as numbered frames recorded in linear time. Instead, they manifest painting's ability to generate variations of itself, with each instance dissolving the representational contours of the object yet further. Despite the difference of these paintings to technical images and the devices that record them, they insist on a camera-composition, focusing our attention squarely on the matter of time, and how it comes to leave its traces on the two-dimensional plane. These paintings show us how time pools up on the surfaces at which we look over years and even decades, and how we can profoundly transform things—often without knowing it—by looking alone.

Clock

The simultaneity of multiple instances of the same composition in *Oscillations* suggests that we seek an understanding of time at odds with the sequence traced in the repeated circles of the clock's hands. For this reason, the presence of a clock in a preponderance of the variations in this show proves so compelling: without its hands, it cannot strike the hour—and yet, even bereft of numerals, this clock still *tells* time.

Interlude Variation still hints at the dial, evidenced by the complimentary gold traces floating within the ultramarine of the clock's body. Just below it, a moment of greater contrast and sudden alternation of warm and cool shows a pendulum, which stands straightly vertical implying total cessation of the gears that might drive it. *Flourish Variation* lessens the contrast of values and the complementarity of colors to show us an object, scarcely recognizable as an artefact of horology, in which the only residue of the twelve hours of the day shows as wet-on-wet turnings of the brush within a greater plane of the same pigment. By the time we see *Interpose Variation,* the golden vestiges of the hour markings have taken over the entire object, which has become a single entity, devoid of both marking and movement. *Pendulum Variation*, alludes not so much to

the variation of the pendulum, which remains unchanged, but the blue fading from the dial of the clock, and to the displacement of perspective over time, which now centers the clock in the composition, as the artist paints it face-to-face. *Patina Variation*, as its name suggests, is rendered in the color of verdigris on brass oxidized over years. Here we find the secret of how Treib's works "tell time." It emerges as an almost imperceptible accretion that comes from contact of the objects they depict with the conditions in which they are situated, making the hours and years visible on their surface. Here an atmosphere that weathers things combines with a duration that inscribes itself on their surface—*le temps*.

The paintings of the clock carry out a similar task to the paintings confronting the camera as a contra-photographic vision of ambiguous intervals and collapsed spaces. The clock calls upon the figure *par excellence* of the model of temporality these paintings question most: chronometric time.

Garment

The skirting of standardized models of temporality, embodied by the camera compositions and the sly derangement of the clock's face, provides a context in which to understand Treib's longstanding fascination with fashionable adornment. Fashion offers a *tigersprung*, or tiger-leap into the past, Walter Benjamin, once wrote. Through fashion past-time reemerges in an instant. In fact, its incessant claims to being "so now" turn to dust without an exact citation of a color or silhouette from past eras. A blouse, for instance, from the era of our parents' youth, like all clothes, carries with its color even the smell of the person who might once have worn it. This has as much to do with the intimate contact clothing makes with the body of individuals as it does the manufacture of clothing in colors and patterns that are continuous with the mass-produced décor of an era.
The last example, that of the radiance of past-time through details of clothing, stands out as the best template for the alternate model of temporality promised by Treib's paintings.

While it was a thrill for admirers of Treib's work to see her collaboration with the fashion house Valentino last year, the true satisfaction came from seeing the latent relationship to fashion become manifest in her work. In this group of paintings, garmented arms and shoulders, sleeves, and the fabric gathered around them, abound. Their flounces, undulations, and folds are akin to the gestures that make them appear on the paper. *Flounce Variation*, for instance, is a composition that was initially based on a Vogue pattern from the 1940s, on which is illustrated several examples of the fashionable sleeves of the season. These illustrations are a combination of line and colored wash, photo-mechanically reproduced. Treib has taken the general rule provided by fashion for the arm of this era—a solid shoulder giving over to an ever more slender wrist—and dancingly approximated it with a single line that widens and narrows in keeping with the pose of the models in the illustration. It is the profile contoured by these suggestive lines themselves, and not a citation of a specific line of clothing, that conjures the past-time of a former fashion that will, no doubt, become contemporary once again. Profile, but also color: the colors of the original illustration find themselves cited elsewhere in *Oscillations*, as in *Arm Measures Variation*, for instance. But they also alternate between the elements of different paintings, as is evident when we look at *Blue Sleeve Variation*, which exchanges the teal of *Arm Measures Variation*, for powder blue, it's bright yellow for faded pink—implying the availability of a single garment in multiple colors.

Along with the cream ground of the paper—which, consciously or not, refers back to the aging paper of the pattern designed for the 1940s—this assortment of colors orients us towards the past. Such an orientation, in Treib's work, constitutes a significantly more rigorous endeavor than the pursuit of bygone *chic*. For, as Benjamin elaborates, "the confrontation with the fashions of previous generations is a matter of far greater importance than we ordinarily suppose. … Beyond the theater, the question of costume reaches deep into the life of art and poetry, where fashion is at once preserved and overcome."[1] In Treib's work, starting with its own compositions, fashion's ability to evoke a definite past is preserved, while its claim to specific currency is suspended. Like the clothing from previous eras the artist takes to by preference, the surfaces of her paintings become organa of remembrance.

Patricia

As a record of looking, registered on scattered paper over a long period of time, these works are intimate. The small dimensions of the paintings, which draw you closer as a viewer, add to this sense. The fact that each of the paintings in *Oscillations* constitute "variations" makes their small differences—the disintegration and reconfiguration of their elements—the dominant experience of the show. The result is an exhibition that centers around the persistence of a gaze in which the viewer is invited, however fleetingly, to share.

To look at something with Patricia—a new camera, an inherited clock, a forgotten piece of clothing—is one of the great pleasures in life. Under her eyes the smallest details—and even the space between those details—become charged as zones of undiscovered possibility. As she voices what she sees, in a museum just as readily as in the pages of a magazine, one cannot help but to discover a lesson in what it would mean to unsee what conditioning and commerce have so far obscured. I say "lesson" not because Patricia's paintings are the least bit didactic, but because one comes to see through her eyes even when she is not there to voice what she sees. I first noticed this happening when, in distant cities, I would see paintings Patricia had once described, and suddenly they would become *hers*.

We became friends 20 years ago while reading Proust for the first time. For this reason it is difficult not to think of the definitive novel about the passage of time when I look at Patricia's work. Moreover, there are at least two phenomena described in the *Recherches* that attend to this "lesson" I am trying to describe. One is the contagion of perception between people who are connected by something profound; it's the obverse of the pain of not always having them present. This explains not only why we see each new room we enter as if with the eyes of the beloved, but why also we would prefer to keep our proximity to people from whom we have become painfully estranged. "When Swann had said to me, in Paris one day when I felt particularly unwell: "You ought to go off to one of those glorious islands in the Pacific; you'd never come back again if you did." I should have liked to answer: "But then I shall not see your daughter anymore; I shall be living among people and things she has never seen.""

The second phenomenon is more well known. It treats the work of art as perpetually incomplete—even one elevated to the status of fame—constantly awaiting the viewer who will

one day transfigure it, if only by looking. "Ce qu'on appelle la postérité, c'est la postérité de l'oeuvre" ("What one calls posterity is the posterity of the work.") Many hours of the early days of our friendship were spent pondering such questions as why Adorno thought this line would be better translated "What one calls posterity is the afterlife of the work." This, we ultimately concluded, was because, when it comes to the work of art, all that matters is what will become of it before future eyes. It was only this past summer that I experienced the full weight of this "afterlife," which has the power to make a painting on which the dust has already settled seem as though, in the eyes of a late-arriving visitor, it had only been painted this year. I was at the Ashmolean Museum, in Oxford, with a friend that Patricia and I share in common. We were excited to discover one of Patricia's larger oil paintings, in which I immediately recognized many of the unmistakable elements of the works I have described above. While clearly one of Patricia's, this composition was entirely new to me. Here the central object, a large vase made to hold plants, stood devoid of paint—its blue lines bounding a volume of blank canvas. From this central, and, so to speak, empty volume emerged fronds that, where they registered the green strokes of a brush, looked like organic growth. Above them in complementary colors, and therefore leaping well into the foreground in front of the vessel that should have contained them, pink flowers, perhaps the *lauriers roses* that grow in great abundance in France, hovered as unmodulated daubs of paint. On the right-hand side of the canvas, the beginning of a chair interrupted the organic qualities previously described, alternating in a deep aqua one sees often in Patricia's paintings, its precise curvature—the handiwork of a capable *meublier*. We were disappointed not to have known of its presence in advance, and, with the museum closing in15 minutes, to have almost no time remaining to luxuriate in its details. We had wondered why our friend, who is indeed delightfully modest, had not told us about the recent museum acquisition. And as we walked up to the didactic placard next to the painting on the wall burst out laughing as we read:

Édouard Manet
Vase de Jardin (Garden Urn)
1878