

Nathalie Regard

250.000 Rothkos

Artist Book/ 2006

32 x 34 cm, 712 pages

500 samples

By way of introduction > **Purpose of the project**

This project originally begun with a large size painting, named "Void". Made from a digital picture, it reproduces, in small squares fixed on a grid, the equivalent of the small coloured units that make the picture up: the pixels. The pixel is the smallest unit read by a scanner and displayed on the screen. The approach consisted in starting from this tiny visual datum to entirely reconstruct an identifiable space with its perspective and volumes.

I have felt that the scale breaks that successively led me from taking a photo of a huge industrial space to reproducing it on a monumental painting (of 480 x 800 cm) brought up basic questions about the very nature of a digital picture, the way it is structured by an infinite number of coloured data. The other essential purpose of this painting was to give a try to a perceptive experience based on the abstract colour data from which the vision gets constructed.

This pictorial reproduction work of a digital picture took more than one year, during which I realized that this sensorial experience was, after all, just as interesting as the finished object. This observation gave me the idea to reproduce the entire full size painting in a 350 pages book of 32 x 34 cm.

After having explained in more details the specific pictorial approach of the making of "Void"

Creative process of the painting > sections 1.1 and 1.2

I will explain how this book:

1 -sums up the pictorial approach and the sensorial experience based on the abstract data of the colour

Conceptual aspect of the project > sections 2.1 and 2.2

2 -Invents a relation between the viewers and the work in which the viewers are no longer passive contemplators but also take part in the dynamics of the work's creation and distribution.

Didactic and interactive aspect of the project > section 3

3 -allows the work to circulate outside the institutional networks by making it movable (distribution and reception by the public)

About the conditions of the work's reception > section 3.1

The fourth part will be dedicated to **the work's technical description.**

1 -VOID

– oil painting, 480 X 800 cm (in 10 canvasses of 240 X 160 cm), 2005

It all began with a monumental painting I made in 2004-2005, named Void. It has been made from a digital photograph I have found and showing a disused industrial space. With a metal grid put on the canvas, I have organized the surface according to a principle similar to the pixels, peculiar to the digital picture I used as a model. The idea was to keep in the pictorial transposition of the photograph "what the artist's eyes saw during the painting's creation", to reproduce in painting the coloured data that the pixels are.

Choosing to divide the huge surface into 10 different canvasses was the first answer to the practical problem of its transportation. I will add that this problem is probably partly linked to the fact that I have myself been travelling a lot for many years in various countries.

This work represents an industrial space which perspective placed at the centre of the painting divides the space into four parts that are more or less symmetrical. It offers the viewers an immersion experience, all the more intense since there is no human presence in this huge and empty space.

1.1 Organizing space with colour

The pixel is the smallest unit read by a scanner and displayed on a screen. Starting from this tiny visual datum, I have reconstructed an identifiable space, with its perspective and its volumes.

In order to organize this pictorial equivalent of a digital expression, I have combined the five primary colours trying to create right values, to bring the simultaneous contrasts into play so that all the elements would work together. This visual experience is close to the one given by the an exhaustive colour chart used to measure the differences between two colours.

One colour taken separately is abstract. One colour is always seen against another one. And precisely, I was interested in studying this ever-changing nature of colour, its infinitely relative experience. Going back to the smallest colour unit which digital photographs are made of, I wanted to go against a perception that is already organized to go back to this dynamic moment when all the colours set up, when the visual data get constructed.

1.2 An approach that is both instinctive and conceptual

This creation process is both instinctive and rational, and it takes an extremely long time; so that this creation is a sensorial experience I finally found as interesting as the finished object.

This observation led me to think it would be interesting to insist on the experimental nature of this creation, based on a scale break: starting from the pixel I reconstructed the entire picture. In the small studio in which it has been painted, it was impossible to see this huge space I was reconstructing day after day. No way I could step back and I never saw the entire picture before the painting was hanged at the Tramway in Glasgow. During the making of the painting, I never looked beyond the pixel. One may say that this work has been painted blindly.

2 –Conceptual aspect of the book

2.1 The book, the reconstruction of a perceptive experience based on colours

Making this book, the printed version of the painting in 250,000 coloured squares, I enhance the interest I find in this playful conception of painting through the perception of colours, and I offer an approach of the work in the form of a perceptible experience.

The making of this book would precisely allow this experience of vision to be transmitted to the viewers, the experience being this painting's main stake. The book reveals an additional dimension of the picture to the viewers. Both playful and didactic, it sums up a pictorial research based on the materialisation of colour spaces, the pictorial equivalents of the pixel, and shows these abstract units that compose the overview.

2.2 A book conceived as an atlas

Once printed in the book, the painting will be made of coloured plans containing tiles in various shades. In order for the viewers to find their way inside this fragmentation, several principles will be set up.

A- The painting will be split up according to the usual reading line, starting from the painting's top left to go through it down to its bottom right.

B-One letter and one number written on the back and top of the pages will allow the viewers to refer to the picture's overall architecture which will be printed at the end of the book.

The viewers will be able to easily find their way in the different parts of the picture. As in an atlas, marks will allow them to efficiently navigate between the whole and the parts. In this sense, the book may be a kind of atlas of the painting. It allows a new way of circulating among the coloured and abstract data that make it.

3 –Didactic and interactive aspect of the book

This book aims at offering an alternative to traditional reproduction processes such as exhibitions' catalogues or paintings' posters. The difference lies in the fact that the viewers extend their encounter with the painting in a contemplating and also active fashion.

Once reorganized in 350 sections of 32 x 34 cm each, the work's surface breaks and the relation between the canvas and the pattern becomes chaotic. This breaking up puts the viewers in the interpenetration of simple coloured patches, and the picture gets a critical quality or powers of fascination.

The book's pages will be precut so that the owners may easily remove them and

reconstruct the picture where they wish: at home, in their garden or in the street. By giving the book's owners the opportunity to reconstruct the picture and display it wherever they wish, I'm putting forward this dynamic conception of perception through which each individual may take over the construction of a space. This reconstruction of the painting the book's owners is invited to take part in makes the immersion experience even stronger. Once reconstructed, the painting offers its viewers a huge and empty architecture which deep perspective helps conveying an almost physical perception of the space. This immersion experience is created first by the canvas's dimensions, but also by the fact that it shows no human presence.

3.1 A work that travels with the viewers

This book, that is also a work of art, allows to organize short-lived events. Since it is both monumental and architectural, it would be interesting to see it displayed in places big enough for viewers to step back and for the trompe-l'œil to take effect. Seen from far away, the painting may be mistaken for a photograph, and coming near it, one realizes it is in fact painted. This ambiguity is one of the work's aspect I'm interested in. Ideally, I would wish to display my works in places such as airports or railway stations, with the energy and euphoria that are specific to that kind of places; people strolling around would create an atmosphere favourable to the perception of my paintings' energy.

Having a monumental painting fit in a book also corresponds to my striving for the work to circulate easily. The idea is to reverse the classical process where people go to a museum to see the work. In this case, the work comes to them by being displayed in spaces where they circulate, at the heart of the city, on fences or in railway stations. Reproducing it in a book makes it easy to be transported. The reproduction is adapted to a roaming in the city, one may take some time to wander around the city with the book, looking for a place for its content to be displayed. With a work which may be easily carried around, it is easier to invent new opportunities, new conditions for it to be seen. And finally, the painting takes advantage of its owner's roaming and ideas. Thus, its appearances may grow in number in the city and interact in various ways in its environment. Reproducing this work in a book also aims at inventing a dynamic life for it, a life outside museums and places dedicated to art.

4 – Technical description of the project

The project raises an interesting problem concerning photography and the reproduction of a very large format work.

Technically, there are two important steps: photographing the work and mounting it for printing. As for the photograph, it is necessary to take into account the picture's distortions due to the perspective. It is impossible to take a single photograph of the work without tremendous distortions (with a wide-angle shot for example). Though correcting these distortions is technically possible, the picture's quality deteriorates as you move away from the picture's centre. The decision made was to photograph the work piece by piece. Each piece shot with a 80mm lens and thus the distortions is significantly reduced.

A grid determined beforehand to make sure that each piece is photographed

at the same distance and the same angle. Prior to that, it was necessary to evaluate how many squares the grid must have to get a good rendering of the work, taking every image in the same conditions of distance and lightening. The reproduction of the work is the addition of all these photographs in one single picture reconstructed by computer.

After the pictures have been organized (if they are not already), a script was made to blow all these pictures up in their right size. Making up for the distortions was also done by a half systematic process. The picture was then divided again to the size of the book and converted in PDF. Designers did the book's lay-out on the basis of this semi-automatic processing.

To conclude:

This book represents a decisive step in the researches I have been carrying out for several years. The monumental size, always present in my paintings, aims at enhancing the painting's impact on the viewers, physically relating them. Their size allows me to appeal not only to their eyes but to their entire body.

Yet the paintings' monumentality is a strength as much as a weakness. Showing them arouses many constraints: they are difficult to handle and need large spaces to fully exist.

This book, that also is a work of art, aims at freeing the painting by getting around the large-format's heaviness while preserving its powerful impact.

It is not actually a reproduction but rather a re-presentation or a re-reading.

The painting in the shape of a book once more physically involves the viewers by letting them directly sense it.

In this sense, this representation doesn't in any way detract from the painting; on the contrary it is its affirmation. The material's minutely work is visible.

Obviously this project is impossible without a loss when the photographs are printed. The challenge consists in minimising this loss by employing a team of skillful image professionals. The automatic reproduction of the picture isn't enough and needs additional touching up. Being both conceptual and

experimental, this project requires being conducted in the best possible working conditions to be equal to its purposes. This ambitious project therefore needs an

important financial support. Printing the book is of course only possible after

having made a satisfactory prototype and that's precisely why I wish to appeal to you. As for the printing of the book, conversations with private companies

have got off to a good start. But all this is impossible without having first made a satisfactory prototype. This step requires an entire work process that is

technically thorough.