

WIDEWALLS

About the Ambiguity of Forms - Terry Haggerty in an Interview

By Brent Hallard | 3 April 2019

What's interesting about Terry Haggerty's work, whether it be in mural form, sculptural, or saddled up close to painting, is that he uses technology as an assistant, while being very much at the helm of things – the idea, the process and how it all turns out. The final 'thing' is clear, upfront and intriguing.

However, my take is there is a lot of mystery being unraveled. And I wanted to find out what that was, operating behind the scenes.

Terry Haggerty In The Studio

Brent Hallard: I remember you telling me, and it was probably over a beer, that you loved getting into the studio and making work. What does your studio look like and how does it work?

Terry Haggerty: It most probably was over a beer as I can't remember that conversation, but I take your word for it. It's not always productive, but then, just being able to go somewhere where you have the possibility to put something together is pretty cool.

The studio is on the first floor in a back courtyard of a listed industrial building in Kreuzberg, Berlin and is 160sqm. There's an area of about 35sqm that is a wood shop with all the tools and a cnc machine for cutting out wood panels, and a kitchen/office area that's 20sqm. The larger space is where I have the spray booth, storage rack, plotting machine for cutting stencils, a wall of shelving for paints, etc. There's several moveable tables and a new additional moveable rack (to makes some space) for the paintings to dry on. Ultimately, it's pretty jammed when we're in full flow. I could do with more space as usually I work on several paintings at a time which need to be set on tables so it gets very congested.

The studio is set up to make shaped wood panels that are primed, painted, and then varnished. I usually start the process on the computer where I work on several ideas using Illustrator. When I have a work to be made it then travels to the CNC machine where my assistant sets up the machine to cut the outline of the shape in two parts that are then bonded together to form a shallow wood panel that's 24mm thick. From there, the panel



Terry Haggerty, Exhibition view at Von Bartha Basel, 2018

heads over to the spray booth to be primed with several coats of white. Then on to a table where the stencil is applied for the image to be painted with the chosen color. The painting is then cleaned up and any necessary repairs are made. The final stage is to varnish with several layers of gloss and then a final layer of matt. This is the typical process at the moment in the studio.

For the relief objects, they're fabricated off campus at a metal workshop.

About The Art

BH: For your show at Von Bartha in Basel last September, all the work was acrylic on wooden panel, correct?

TH: Yes, all the works are acrylic, painted on wood panels.

BH: And despite the illusion that things are 'in the round' the color, or the forms, sit on a flat surface, right?

TH: Yes, the image is painted on a flat surface. What you are looking at is an image of a dimensional form painted on a flat surface with the outline cut out so that the form is somewhere between the different spaces.

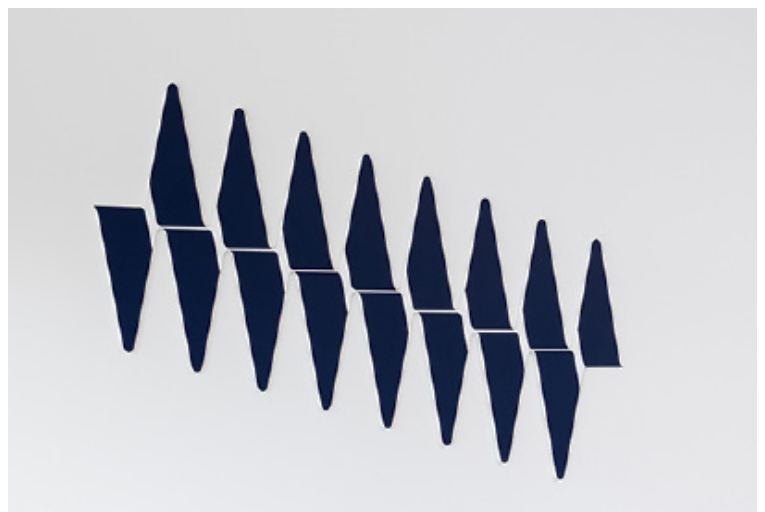
BH: Look Out, 2018, is singular, pure, pristine and even 'almost' specific. However, where the work sits is slightly to the side of each of those labels. The truth is not in the materials, but the material is what you use to spin the yarn, and the experience is not a label, instead [it is] organized through attention to the sum total of detail. And, of course, there is the Möbius strip.

TH: The work is singular to some extent in that we are looking at a single form, it's pristine in that it's in a graphic style. The image is rendered so that both the dark and light color appear to exist on the same plane due to the copious amount of varnish that are applied to level out the surface. As a result, there is no record of how the paint was applied or what material the support is made of. They are constructed this way to allow for a clear reading of the image. The surface is also super matt, there are no reflections to place the work in the space it's shown in, or in front of the viewer. All of this adds another layer of mystery to the work, but ultimately the material process is in the background and the real focus is on the image.

Where it's interesting for me is the stripping down of the language to show multiple angles of view on the same plane without having to move. It's as if the information needed to build a picture of this dimensional structure is laid out on one plane, or at least some of it. You get to look up and down into it, from two different views from the sides and straight on.

Just what this form is or what it does is the vehicle for making the work. The overwhelming pull of the image leads us to a sculptural space, while still flickering between the flat reality of the painting. This has been an area of concern for a long time now and I think this particular work reveals those aspects in a clear way.

BH: Trouser Press does that, it sits very flat and appears not to conform to the 3-dimensional space that we tend to call our own. There is also a touch of humor embedded into the title. These loops have a scientific background, particularly with quantum physics. Do the sciences play a part in your thinking, and if so, what



Vice Grip, 2018, Acrylic on wood panel, 269 x 177 cm

impact does that have on your visioning? I guess what I'm wanting to know, with such an eye for detail, which puts these pieces in front of the viewer without distraction of surrounding environment, are you wanting to cut through the space of things to open up a different experience of specificity?

TH: The sciences are present in the work to some extent, usually more in title form than any deliberate reference to science and quantum mechanics. The modern idea of biological and physical phenomena is mind-blowing and there's an abstraction within the reading of these scientific formulas that I like a lot. Ultimately, the paintings are conceived with a curiosity for shape and form. There is an ambiguity to the forms I make, and I like to mash up different visual spaces. I don't think of these works as specifically about any one thing. I tend to think in terms of being reminded of the simple pleasures of just looking at a form and trying to understand what it is and what it does; how much it weighs, and if it is sharp.

Trouser Press has some distinct contradictions in its coding, and because of the high contrast of black and white, it has a very sculptural presence despite the lack of highlights or shadow. You know, you can get away with quite a lot with a painting!

BH: I see *Stagger Stack* as a playful reference to Judd, while *Sideways Down* is what it is: two perspectives not often seen together in the same space at the same time. Though, *Porcelain/Plastic*, while I'm intrigued with the form(s), and understand you are probably drawing out the difference in material, possibly at the molecule level, I'm interested how the titles help supply the viewer with a reading?

TH: Each title for the work potentially leads the viewer into a dialogue, some are more direct than others. *Stagger Stack* is clearly a reference to the stacked wall works that Judd made, but unlike the orderly spacing of those boxes, *stagger stack* is a randomly spaced assemblage of boxes that appears to be swaying from side to side edging slowly to a fall—we are catching the structure just before it collapses, perhaps. I see the form as elastic and not as rigidly fixed as the boxes of Judd are.

Sideways Down has a more physical direction that relates more to an action of passage, but as a description it leads the viewer sidelong into the painting, indirectly ascending/descending the spiraling walls of this angular structure. I see the left side like a mountain for climbers who climb without rope and the right side like a protected staircase to the top.

Porcelain/Plastic is about a material paradox. Porcelain being a classy refined artisan material and plastic being a throwaway industrial product. The material finish of the painting reflects a contradiction in that you're not quite sure what it's made of: is it plastic that looks like porcelain or vice versa? Ultimately, the image is doing something else and the question of materiality has you forming this structure in a physical/tactile way.



Look Out, 2018, Acrylic on wood panel, 278 x 48 cm