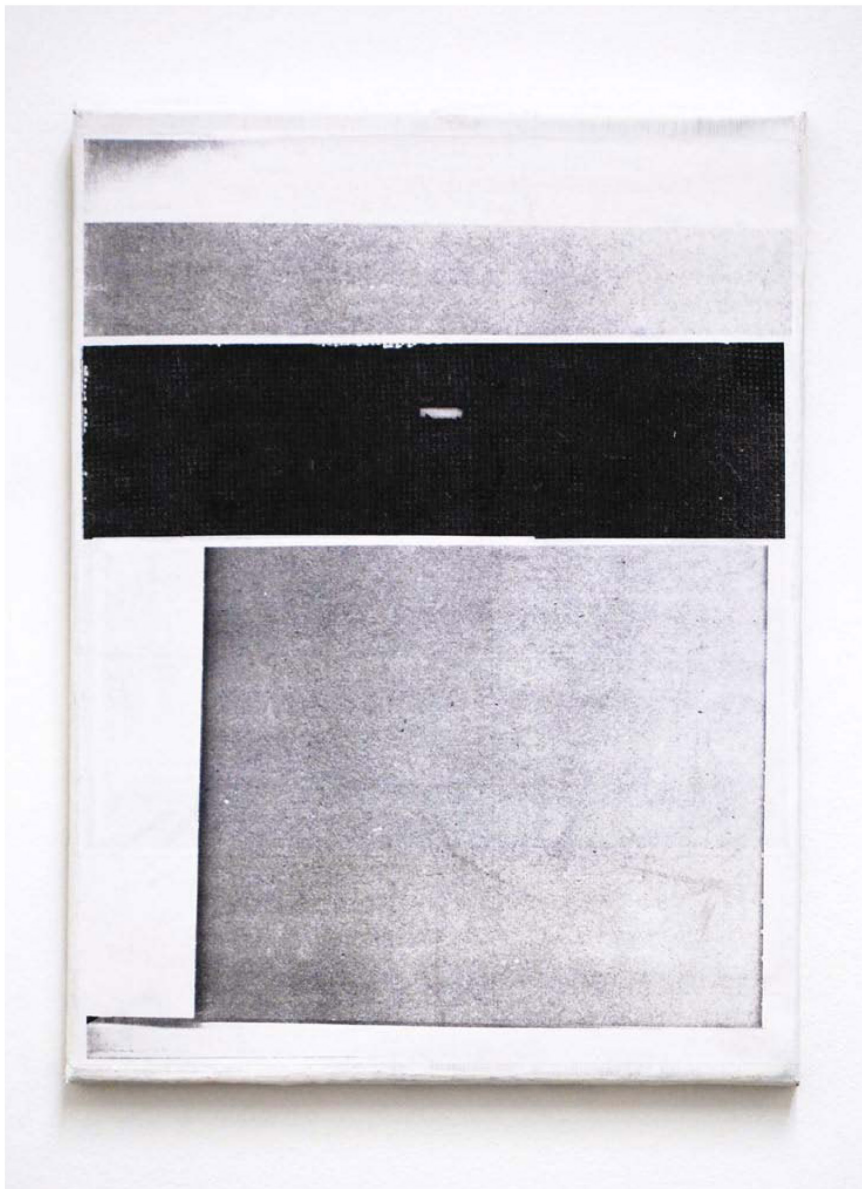


● ON VIEW

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

In Marieta Chirulescu's abstract admixtures of media, painting seems simultaneously alive and dead

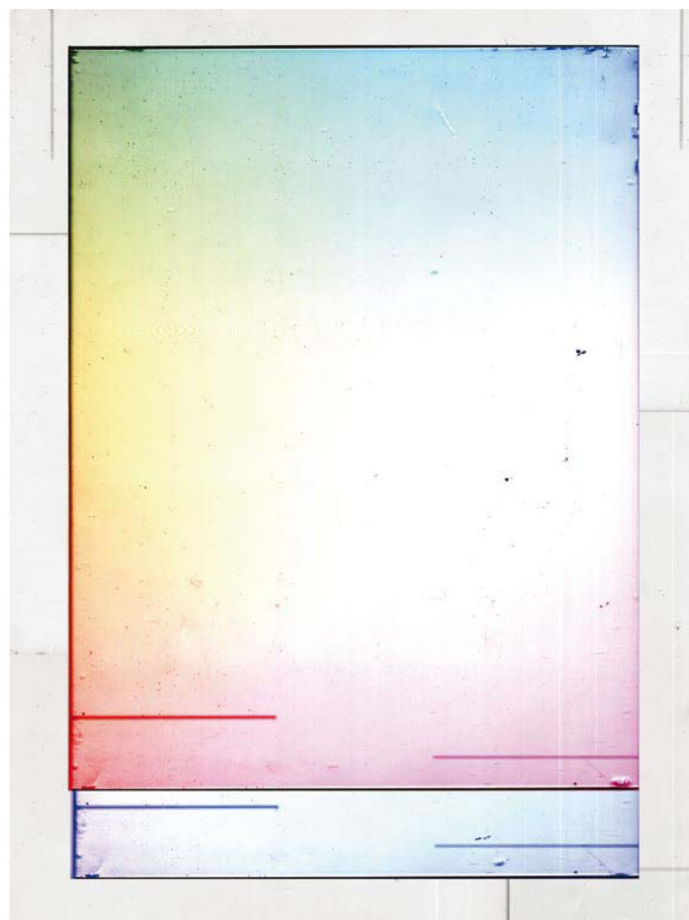
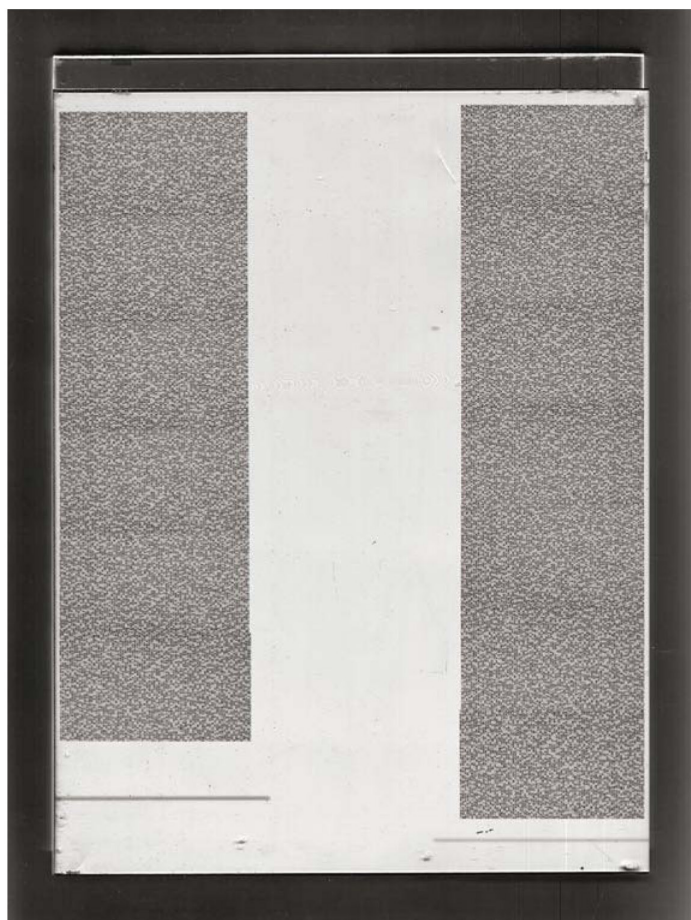


THIS JANUARY, towards the end of my meeting with Marieta Chirulescu, we discovered a kindred fascination with borders. Not the kind that wars are fought to alter; rather the kind that bound paintings and images off from the rest of the world. For the Romanian Chirulescu, who emigrated with her family to Germany in 1992 and moved to Berlin after graduating from school in Nuremberg in 2008, the interest in borders went back to the Eastern European art and architecture books of her childhood, in which images, due to poor printing quality and techniques, were often badly reproduced, skewed and misaligned, such that a border became apparent. For me it was more a fetishisation of the secular abstraction of Robert Ryman and, say, the early chromatic panels of Brice Marden. Yet in both cases, our fascination was (and is) indirectly linked to questions of materiality, process and illusion – all of which essentially inform Chirulescu's pictorial practice.

A painter, photographer and printmaker (for lack of a better term) all rolled into one, Chirulescu gracefully blurs the distinctions that generally keep these media apart. Indeed, even when pressed, it can be hard to categorise Chirulescu's works, and recourse must often be made to an exhibition list in order to clarify any doubts, although such clarification hardly accounts for process. Perhaps it would be more accurate to list the techniques Chirulescu is known to use: painting, photography, Photoshop

and photocopying, in no particular order. The artist, however, doesn't seem to be interested in mere *trompe l'oeil* or technological legerdemain, nor does she seem to be taken by technology for the sake of technology, even if a Wade Guyton-esque appreciation of its misuse and consequent errors is apparent in her work. Rather, her indiscriminate marrying of media seems to come from a more organic and integrated place, in which said techniques are made to conspire dynamically to the ends of her unorthodox palette. Nevertheless, as already suggested, Chirulescu's spare, quasi-administrative abstractions, which generate atmospheres ranging from a kind of tenebrous elegance to a luminous and candid sophistication, are still very much engaged in questions of materiality, process and even illusion.

Take, for instance, the business with borders, a motif, so to speak, that dominated the artist's recent solo show at Galerie Micky Schubert, in Berlin. There, works such as *Off: Block* and *Bandit* (all 2010) played with the graduating grey negative space of the photocopier (usually the byproduct of accidentally copying too large or off-kilter), shifting that void from the



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margins towards the middle, thereby creating a marginal centre. Meanwhile other pieces stayed within a more traditional understanding of pictorial borders, going on to frame themselves in a variety of ways. *Mixed Gradients 1.5* (2010), for example, a mounted c-print whose bright and airy interior resembled a citrus-hued Photoshop colouring palette, was contained by a thin black border, itself bounded by a fat white margin, while *Jeans* (2010), a small oil on canvas, consisted of a thin wash of denim-blue, full of subtle blue cross-hatchings hovering on a black ground with soft black margins.

Each work, and the media fluidly enlisted in the cause of its composition, is made very much on a unique and individual basis. And yet for all their particularity, these works all display a propensity both to show and dissimulate the hand of the artist: now you see it, now you don't. Even then, though, this effect is more a byproduct of Chirulescu's working method and sensibility than it is an end in itself. Because one thing that sets her manipulation of technology apart from that of her like-minded peers (including the aforementioned Guyton, Kelley Walker and Das Institut), is the

weirdly organic edge she brings to it, generated in large part by her ability to invest each work with a spectral sense of process, or even the spectral *tout court*. (Another way to read the border is as simply demarcating an absence, functional as a penumbral index of missing content.) Indeed, painted or not, there is something haunting about these works, as if they themselves were 'paintings' haunted by painting, full of a rarefied and morbid beauty, like some kind of symbolist abstraction.

Incidentally, Yve-Alain Bois ends his famous essay 'Painting: The Task of Mourning' (1986) by quoting the Austrian writer Robert Musil: 'If some painting is still to come, if painters are still to come, they will not come from where we expect them to.' Paradoxically, Chirulescu's work both fulfils and disproves this prophecy, in that where it comes from – Photoshop, the camera, the photocopier, etc – is both unexpected (by virtue of not being paint) and expected (less and less paint is being enlisted in the cause of postpainterly abstraction), at this point. But it is in using these normally removed, nonhuman media that she manages to enact a *mise en abyme* of the death of painting, bringing it very much to life. •

this page, from left: *Bandit*, 2010, photocopy and oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm; *Block*, 2010, c-print, 40 x 31 cm. Both courtesy the artist and Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin

facing page: *Mixed Gradients 1.5.*, 2010, c-print on alu-dibond, 69 x 53 cm, edition of 3 + ZAP. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin