

John Wallbank.

We exist in a world of binaries, from the software programming of zeros and ones to the concept of good and evil and the emotions we experience every day. The efficacy or potency of these phenomena are measured not by their singularity, but by the comparison with their opposite. We as viewers are bound by these habits of comparing and contrasting, constantly using memory and experience to assess and validate our present situation. John Wallbank's keen awareness of this is ingrained in his practice, and is evident in the way that he skilfully - and often wilfully - manipulates the historically sacred boundary between painting and sculpture.

As we look at Wallbank's new paintings, the eye settles on a detail - perhaps the hand mixed pigment of the mottled painted surface, or the frayed edge of scrim emerging from between layers of paper or foam. We appreciate the function of the engineered bracket or tab, and we begin to assume that these details are what will lead us to an understanding the work. Yet no sooner has one quality made itself known than another leaps forward and demands to be considered. We are never sure whether we should take comfort in the objective presence of sculptural form, or begin to interpret the illusion of the painted surface. This pulling between sculpture and painting continues like the force of two opposing magnets, but instead of causing a frustrating deadlock the information accumulates and becomes richer with each oscillation.

Wallbank talks of enhancing aspects of his sculptures - making them more sculptural than sculpture. The irony of how he does so through painting is both thought-provoking and mischievous, using the painted surface quality of the object in conjunction with its actual volume in order to create a type of hybrid tromp-l'oeil, less a visual experience than a cognitive one. For example, we understand that what we are looking at on the wall is *not* a great heavy chunk of forged steel (or wood or stone for that matter), yet Wallbank borrows the descriptive language we use to understand these materials with their characteristics of mass and volume and reinterprets it as surface. Wallbank has avoided a superficial exposition on the differences between painting and sculpture by exploring more subtle and pertinent questions: Instead of understanding a sculpture to be heavy because it is clearly made of steel, we are asked by Wallbank to consider *why* we think it's heavy. What are the visual triggers that conjure weight

and volume, and why are we so willing to believe them? With these new works Wallbank has succeeded in setting the fundamentals of visual and spacial understanding against each other, crucially bypassing any deconstructive temptations caused by historical pretences to create a body of work that is somehow neither painting nor sculpture, but is simultaneously more than both.

*Hywel Livingstone, November 2014.*