



Michael Raedecker

Camden Arts Centre / May—June 2009

File Note #40 **Michael Raedecker:** *line-up*

John Hutchinson

Michael Raedecker

There aren't usually many surprises in paintings by Michael Raedecker. The washed-out greys and exhausted colours, the embroidered surfaces, the borrowed images, and the general air of melancholia have remained constant ever since the artist came to prominence in the late 1990's. But his work continues to be oddly engaging.

I've tried to figure out why I still enjoy Raedecker's paintings. It occurs to me, first of all, that when you like something you are usually content to let it be, without expecting dramatic changes or development. This may be the case here. I'm comfortable with the depressive mood of fading beauty in Raedecker's paintings, so this may be one of the main reasons why I still appreciate them. And I take pleasure in the slightly unhinged carefulness of his embroidery, which carries a powerful charge of nostalgia as well as a touch of real eccentricity. His work sounds a pleasingly jarring note in the current art world: for all its self-awareness, Raedecker's art is neither cool nor ironic.

There are, perhaps, elements in the work that I find mildly irritating, but these probably help to sustain my interest. I'm disconcerted by the more provocative titles that undermine the restrained mood of the paintings, and from time to time the deliberate tastelessness and the art-historical references seem to get in the way of a more direct relationship with the images and their surfaces. Raedecker seems to feel the need to justify the viability of painting in a post-modern age, and he frequently does this by showing his awareness that the meaning of a cultural object is relative and constructed. He also ensures that conventional forms of beauty do not go unchallenged. From my own point of view this self-consciousness isn't really necessary, but it certainly grates with the paintings' aestheticism, so it adds a layer of complexity to the mix.

penetration 2005 / Acrylic and thread on canvas
98 X 62cm / Collection Ann and Steven Ames, New York



Yet none of this is at the core of things. I suspect that at the heart of Raedecker's current practice is a deep concern with what might be called the *feminine*. For example, in the new body of work shown in this exhibition there are references to flowers, washing, cakes, table-cloths, sheets, lace, food, and houses — many of which are conventionally associated with femininity. There is even a knowing nod of affectionate recognition in the direction of Agnes Martin. And besides the obvious connotations of sewing and embroidery, Raedecker's fascination with the stuff of textiles, both as a ground for painting and as something beautiful in its own right, adds to this underlying tone.

But what exactly this fascination amounts to remains unclear to me, particularly as Raedecker does much to ensure that the viewer's attention doesn't settle too easily on the main issue. His distancing strategies are very efficient. I'm reminded, in that regard, of the exquisitely produced compilation records that Raedecker puts together once a year and sends out to friends. This year's CD, for instance, focuses on a group of gentle and introspective songs by such performers as Joanna Newsom, Karen Dalton, and Bon Iver, but their central role is carefully and determinedly undercut. The rest of the music, no less fastidiously chosen, is a peculiar mix that could have been put together from an arbitrary bundle of records found in a box in a charity shop. Despite its disingenuous air of chance, however, the CD never loses its direction. Raedecker knows precisely what he is doing.

Similarly, you always have the feeling that Raedecker is in complete control of his paintings and that nothing is accidental. Indeed, even chance itself — as represented in the embroidered splashes of paint — is subject to his manipulation. He subtly attracts the eye's attention, pulling it towards the detail of the embroidery, and then encourages it to drift away into the soft distance. He shows us the artificiality of his methods and tropes. But these are sleights of hand, diverting our gaze from what is really going on, which is the expression of what appears to be a weary longing for comfort and intimacy — perhaps the desire for a tender embrace or a mother's touch. The possibility of realizing that aspiration, however, seems far away and out of reach.

I suspect that it is the ebb and flow between intimacy and distance that explains why Raedecker's work is so strangely addictive; I am convinced that it is his skill in representing those psychological transitions in pictorial form that makes him such an intriguing artist.

John Hutchinson is Director of The Douglas Hyde Gallery in Dublin.



nameless 2007 / Acrylic & thread on canvas / 285 × 240 cm
Two parts: each 285 × 120 cm / Private Collection, The Netherlands



superficial 2009 / Acrylic and thread on canvas / 102 X 121 cm
Collection G + W, The Netherlands

Michael Raedecker was born in Amsterdam in 1963 and currently lives and works in London. He first studied for a BA in Fashion Design at Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam (1985–90) before enrolling on a Fine Art degree at Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (1993–94) and then an MA at Goldsmiths College, University of London (1996–97). He has had a number of solo exhibitions both in the UK and internationally. Recent solo shows include *fix*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York (2009); *Hauser & Wirth*, London (2007); *up*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York (2006); *show*, The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2005); *Hauser & Wirth*, Zürich (2005); *forevernevermore*, Salzburger Kunstverien, Salzburg (2004) and Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville (2004).

He has also exhibited in numerous group shows, including *200 years Prix de Rome*, Kunsthal Rotterdam (2009); *State of Mind*, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin (2009); *Faces*, Eleni Koroneou Gallery, Athens (2008); *Paintings: 1936–2008*, The Approach W1, London (2008); *Always There. Part 2*, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin; Busan Biennale, Busan, Korea (2008); *Effigies*, Stuart Shave Modern Art, London (2007); *Very Abstract and Hyper Figurative*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London (2007); *Painting Now! Back to Figuration*, Kunsthal Rotterdam (2007) and *Old School*, Hauser & Wirth, London (2007). Raedecker won the John Moores Painting Prize in 1999 and was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2000.

Reading List

- Gerard Reve *De Avonden (The Evenings)*, De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam (1947)
- Milan Kundera *Immortality*, Faber & Faber, London (1991)
- Michel Houellebecq *Atomised*, Heinemann, London (2001)
- Aldous Huxley *Brave New World*, Chatto & Windus, London (1932)
- Arnon Grunberg *Phantom Pain*, Secker & Warburg, London (2003)
- Peter Guralnick *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley*, Little Brown, London, (1999)
- Midas Dekkers *The Way Of All Flesh*, Harvill, London (2000)

Listening List

- Jan Jelinek *Loop-Finding-Jazz-Records*, Scape CD
- Spandau Ballet *Journeys To Glory*, Reissued EMI Gold CD
- Ricardo Villalobos *Thé au Harem d'Archimède*, Perlon CD
- Ricardo Villalobos *Live @ Tenax*
- Luomo 'Class', from *Vocalcity*, Huume Recordings CD
- Panda Bear 'Good Girl/Carrots', from *Person Pitch*, Paw Tracks CD
- Queen *Queen II*, Reissued Parlophone CD
- A Tribe Called Quest *Midnight Marauders*, Jive CD
- Devendra Banhart 'The Body Breaks', from *Rejoicing in the Hands XI* CD
- Ace Frehley 'Snowblind', from *Ace Frehley*, reissued Mercury CD

Viewing List

- Werner Herzog *Land Of Silence And Darkness* (1971)
- Thomas Vinterberg *Festen* (1998)
- Michelangelo Antonioni *Zabriskie Point* (1970)
- Walter Hill *The Warriors* (1979)
- Federico Fellini *Amarcord* (1973)
- Michael Haneke *The Piano Teacher* (2001)
- Alfred Hitchcock *North By Northwest* (1959)
- Terence Malick *The Thin Red Line* (1998)

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Sid Vicious meeting Freddie Mercury
in 1977:

‘Ah, Freddie Mercury, still bringing
ballet to the masses are you?’

‘Oh yes, Mr. Ferocious, dear, we’re
doing our best!’



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Cover: *show* 2008 / Acrylic and thread on canvas / 255 X 244cm
Two parts; each 255 X 122cm / Courtesy the artist and Andrea
Rosen Gallery, New York