

Toby Upson

Toby Upson; curator, project manager, and artist.

Sculptural yet flat?

André Hemer: *The Cobra Effect*, 2018. Kristin Hjellegjerde London

I was coaxed south of the river, on one of the hottest days of the year, by the name of André Hemer's latest exhibition, *The Cobra Effect* at Kristin Hjellegjerde gallery (I am slightly obsessed with avant-garde art movements). The show presents a number of paintings by the New Zealand born, Vienna based artist, completed in his signature style.

Shifting between realms, Hemer creates his vigorous compositions by layering manipulated digital images, scanned blobs of paint, with exuberant physical interjections, yet more blobs and selective areas of varnish. The process clashes micro against macro, exploiting multiple sources of light also. Instead of overwhelming the viewer, Hemer's layering has a luminous effect which creates deeply sensual forms on the otherwise flat surface. Moving through the gallery's space, Hemer's compositions become richer, his layering has a three-dimensional quality which draws you into the vigorous complexity of the work. In paintings like *Cobra Effect #6 2018*, remanence the digital transformations, raw process colours (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) cut through the added blobs blurring the line between the physical surface and the digital effect.

Hemer's digital blurring climaxes in *Sky Sculptures Series, 2018*, a film where one of these monumental blobs has been rendered in bronze and cast against a picturesque landscape of soft blues and lilacs – think picturesque holiday sunset. The reference to the digital interjection is still alive in the background however, a soft cloud of process colours drifts into the frame – spoiling the photo, or capturing something more human? When presented with a monumental sculpture my default is to move around its form. Somehow the act of viewing a three-dimensional work from all angles affirms its presence. Hemer makes life easy for me, in *Sky Sculptures Series* his bronze slowly rotates on the screen, allowing me to appreciate its sheer 'wow' without having to do any work. In doing this Hemer has eroded the distinction between the flat and the sculptural: moving beyond the visual differences which separate these dimensions.

When I think about *CoBrA*, the short lived post-war art movement, I think of raw spontaneous paintings and avant-garde artists working against American Abstract Expressionism – which seemed to turn a blind eye to society at large. The artists associated with *CoBrA*, set their sights on social reinvention, using art as a vessel for their political concerns.

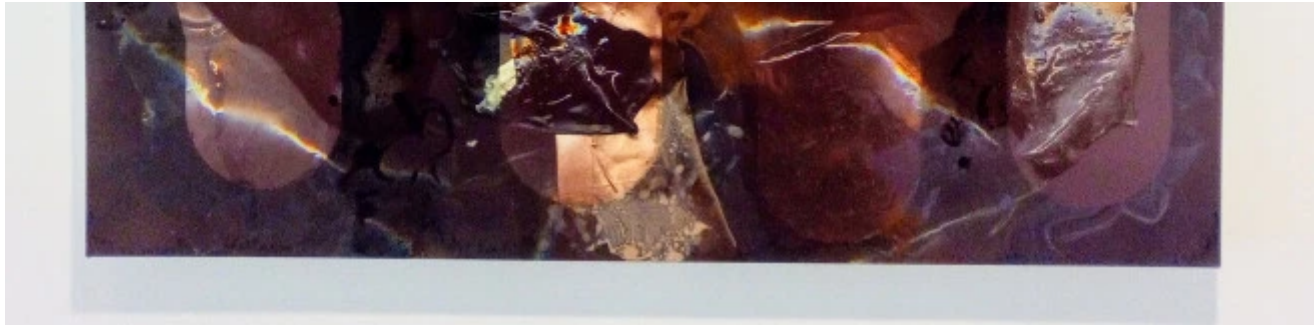
By titling this show *The Cobra Effect* Hemer takes up the Movements mantle: his use of vigorous gestural marks follows with *CoBrA's* visual language. The Movements narrative can also be seen in Hemer's process: a blurring of boundaries which leaves me questioning 'dimensionality' itself; what is flat, what is sculptural, what is digital and what is physical.

This conflict is articulated beautifully in *Sky Sculptures Series*. By affirming the sculptures presence for me, Hemer provokes questions about sculptural experience, 'three-dimensionality' and even the basic definition sculpture.

This blurring speaks to me on a social-cultural level: our world is changing: global shifts are happening in ecology, economics, politics; in the definition of public space and indeed work – where everything now needs to be more complex to hold a value. To quote Gregory Sholette[1]; "*Capitalist innovation excels at breaking down barriers to allow for the unfettered exchange of goods and information, even when that exchange challenges a given state, party or religion*"(I would add dimension to this list).

These changes have altered how we live our lives, with both positive and negative effects. By articulating the conflicts bound up in our social-cultural blurring, Hermer has made tangible (visual) a sense of tension and an anxiety felt the world over.





The Cobra Effect #6, 2018
Acrylic and pigment on canvas
47 1/5 × 33 1/2 in; 120 × 85 cm

[1] Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture

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