“An overwhelming encounter”
(Some writing in pieces, in anticipation of The Shudder)

By Andrew Renton





... or a moment resisting interpretation. The shudder alludes to an instability, even if it can't do much about it. That is, you stand before the object, you sense the object is within your sights, but for that moment it becomes unseeable, unknowable.

At a moment of letting go... You can hardly see it happening and perhaps you don't even realise that it has taken shape until it's gone. It has something to do with a yielding up of the self at the moment of perception. Letting go; a gift of sorts.

[...]

It's no accident (there are no accidents) that Adorno cannot contain his concept of the shudder within one term. Erschütterung and Schauer might imply difference of interpretation only by degrees or intensity, or an encounter from another perspective. But perhaps you are defaulting to a perspective of something that comes to us always already translated.

Always untranslatable, by the way. Levinas' French term is frisson. It's not the same; a whole other shudder. And perhaps even a false friend in English.

(More than many versions of itself.)

Witnessing constructs its subject, but might have to pay a price. Somewhere on the way to Adorno's disembodied suspension of the self.

[...]

JB: The shudder has no moral compass, no formed identity, no logical intention. It may occur spontaneously at any moment without warning or reason. Perhaps it can be conjured?

[...]

Something to do with the moment of the encounter, revisited in a belated reconstruction. A delay at the crucial moment, because it's too much to perceive, too much to take in, take on. What we might call description, as a way of managing the encounter, comes late. An act of faith in the object or image, after the fact, where witnessing and memory combine.

[...]

SB: Some nights she would halt, as one frozen by some shudder of the mind, and stand stark still till she could move again.

Unseeable for an instant. It's as if the work moves out of focus, for a lost moment for which you cannot account. You only know this as simultaneous recognition and whatever you might term its opposite. Something to do with being already forgotten?
A moment when you are aware of perception becoming unstable. At that moment, at the moment of the shudder, you are aware of what this is not, rather than being able to articulate or describe it. Articulation comes later.

[...]

Sometimes, for example, there's a figure which emerges from within the surface of the paint. It's on its way to representing. On its way, because it proposes an interrupted iteration. You never lose sight of the paintedness. A type of outlining, mapping, where what is marked frames an absence. Nevertheless, it's a thorough encounter, with its own vocabulary of representations. Art history is full of these forms. But here there's a resistance. Something on its way. You somehow know what is there, or what is becoming, but there's no point of focus, except at the material level of paint itself. Both resembling, and defying resemblance, the harder you look.

The painting is always marked by an edge or series of edges. But this isn't the right word, because it implies a site that's quantifiable. But as you look closer any kind of construction falls apart. The edge is, by definition, a non-place between places. Between the canvas and its hosting wall, or within the canvas itself. No place at all, in the sense that it designates and separates pictorial planes. Non-pictorial surfaces. Or surfaces that bear witness to their surfacing. An act or process rather than an object or place.

Perhaps, on a quiet day, you could read for the ideology of surfacing in the history of painting. Territory hard won. The narrative is in the process. What if, for example, that process were black on black on black until it achieves its own edge? And accompanying it, as a consequence, a marked absence. A space defined by its not being acted upon.

After all, in the absence of representation, surfacing is another potential narrative of making. (And you might even believe that you can see beneath the surface, in search of an earlier surface.)

You're always tempted to read for representation, however disrupted. A horizontal becomes a horizon. But it's a trope too far and you learn to resist this. Nevertheless, the eye defaults to reading in this way. In painterly terms, the line that emerges from this process barely materialises. As you look you struggle to focus and define that line. Which is not a line at all. (A line has no width, as such. Impossible non-width of a non-line.)

And another type of line. A vertical, perhaps where elements come together, side by side. Gently forced, forced gently, into some temporary resolution. What is it that holds these things together? A hypothetical scenario, only for as long as you look, while appearing to be on the verge falling apart. Can you perceive it as a whole? Suspended belief in relation to its materials, which you would imagine should not be mixed, joined or connected.

[...]

Or similar proposal, where one object is placed or stacked beside or upon another. It's hardly a gesture, even, and only a temporary form of order that shouldn't be over-interpreted. But at this moment, the configuration becomes something autonomous.

Without origin, in the sense that it becomes more than the sum of its parts. The object is less to do with its constituent materials than the act of their being brought together. It's almost a transfer of ownership (or title, in the legal sense), where other claims are made for the material. The whole thing could be dismantled at any time and only a memory of the combination would remain. But there's always the possibility of bringing the elements back together again.

In the region of the readymade, without making claims of definitive transformation.

[...]

Or the lost object, in whole or part, that you only begin to be aware of through a palpable absence. The space it set out for itself, or by the marks left behind where it was once secured.

[...]

An object forgotten which reappears in the fullness of time. After so long a lapse that you cannot imagine what purpose the object might have served. You recognise it, but for the life of you, you cannot remember why...

Or a fragment where the body presents itself in part and you intuitively know what to do. The absent part is not simply a lack, but is marked, marks itself. You don't need the missing component to understand what and where it might have been. The fragment offers itself for completion.

[...]

EL: "...like the shudder of incarnation through which giving takes on meaning...

[...]

Somewhere in your story, the emergence of a face. Or equally the absence of one. The emergence at the moment of recognition, which resists a complete imaging. But you can do the work. Not to complete it, but to set an image on its way.

[...]

Andrew Renton
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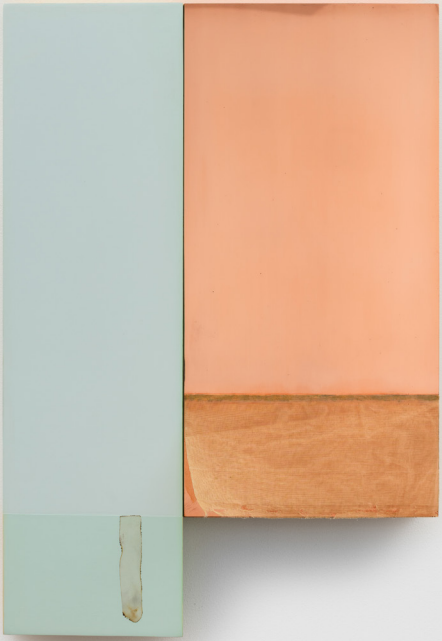

Interval



The Shudder

Jane Bustin
Lewis Brander
Edwina Leapman
Gal Schindler
Richard Serra

Curated by Jane Bustin.

24th September to 19th December 2026

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