

Marks of Play, Re-marks on Being Torben Ulrich

Opening: Friday 4 October 2018, 5-8pm

Duration: 5 October – 27 October 2018

On his 90th birthday, Torben Ulrich opens the exhibition *Marks of Play, Re-marks on Being*, featuring his new works at Galleri Tom Christoffersen! Presenting new collages collectively entitled *B(w)alligraphies*, the exhibition also features a new series of rice-paper paintings created by the artist last year. They continue his practice from the past forty years of using skipping ropes and tennis balls, now introducing a new element into the pictorial field: an imprint of the net as the setting around which the game unfolds. The pictorial balancing act is now performed by the black traces left by the skipping rope and the red seal-of-play imprints made by the tennis ball in the grey web of the net.

Torben Ulrich's pictorial work is closely linked to his background as an athlete, chiefly a tennis player, but also incorporating subjects of interest such as philosophy, music, poetry, and the visual arts. Following sporadic experiments in the 1970s, Torben Ulrich created his first series of paintings, entitled *Imprints of Practice*, in 1981. These works were essentially an exploration of the patterns emerging when a tennis ball soaked in colour is played against a vertical plane – a direct analogy to the solo practice performed by a tennis player against a wall. In 1982-83, different versions of *Imprints of Practice* were shown in Newport Beach, Houston, and Kansas City. After this, Torben Ulrich's paintings have been shown in numerous locations around the world; in Denmark, for the first time, in an exhibition entitled *Murbrokker Boldmærker* (Brick Fragments Ball Marks) at Galerie Birch, Copenhagen, in 1985.

For many years, Ulrich's preferred materials have been ink and rice paper, with his preferred tools mainly being tennis racquets, tennis balls, and skipping ropes. The work is done in two planes, a horizontal and a vertical one. With a skipping rope soaked in colour, marks are made on a piece of rice paper lying flat on the ground – the intrinsic touchstone for the body, for jumping. Afterwards, the picture is hung on a wall and 'sealed', so to speak, with a tennis ball similarly soaked in colour. It involves a degree of chance, of course. But at the same time, the positioning of the elements is guided by a specific intention, a body, a glance, a set of remedies, everything immanent in the situation: when the ball comes ...

Torben Ulrich's images trigger many associations: Abstract expressionism. Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. Oriental pictorial art inspired by anything from calligraphy to Zen Buddhism. The tradition of Western pictorial art emerging in the wake of the exposure of Asian art in the 1950s, from Mark Tobey onward. However, Torben Ulrich himself asserts that his main intention with the rice papers is not to create pictorial art, but rather to visually explore situations, phenomena, and ideas that he also addresses in other media, and which are essentially rooted in his practice as a ball player.

Torben Ulrich Born in 1928, Torben Ulrich's activities span several fields and have done so for the most part of a generation: tennis (and other sports), jazz (both as a practising musician and an educational writer), pictorial art, film, literature/poetry, philosophy, Buddhism, etc. All of it pursued in depth at an almost scientific level yet still maintaining a singularly playful approach where experience and self-investment at their most sublime have formed a synthesis with generally accepted expert premises. Further, and even more remarkable, always with a unique eye for connections across the various disciplines and fields. As if Torben Ulrich had decided, in his lifelong studies, to simply use the sum total of his persona as a laboratory, a tool for experiments and realisation.