

# **Matt and glossy black rectangles**

**Enrico Gaido**

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## Matt and glossy black rectangles

As the title states, this work consists of two MDF boards varnished a matt and glossy black, suspended using ropes, pulleys and suction cups. A shorter description would be: the suspension of two black rectangles.

I'm referring to this piece as 'work' but the author, Enrico Gaido, actually conceived it as a performance, one based on the most 'immaterial' element you can imagine: vacuum. It is a force working out of sight to keep the board suspended, in constant struggle with another natural phenomenon: gravity. Vacuum and gravity are just two of the invisible forces that were the subjects of Enrico's study of Building Engineering. To obtain his degree he had to analyse the physical laws to which every physical reality (including our bodies) undergo. Hardness, resistance, endurance, traction, strain, stamina and load are all invisible things which are tragically made visible when something goes wrong. The accident is something that interrupts the stability and dormancy of matter, putting our stability, safety and certainty in crisis.

In old Greek, the verb *krino* - the root of the word 'crisis'- means 'to separate'. It is an act that generates a crack, a thin (or thick), superficial (or deep) line that visibly marks the distinction between before and after, left and right, right and wrong, stable and unstable. Through his practice, Enrico draws these lines (1) and generates crisis in a physical and structural way, that implies other metaphorical layers.

In the past few years he has worked extensively with explosives (2) and cracking powders (3). In his studio he froze these 'accidents' using gelatine, rubber bands and videos that materially (and visually) dampened the explosions and captured the instants of fractionating and collapsing. The public was invited to be present only after the action was completed (although at the Palais De Tokyo his performance 502,65 cm<sup>2</sup> started 'exploding' accidentally-but harmlessly during the opening) (4).

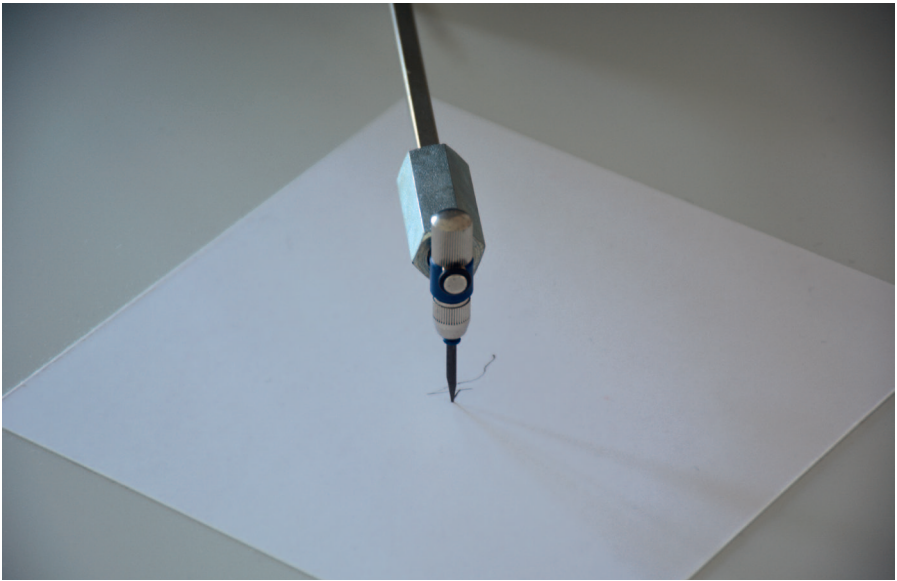
More recently, he began his suspension series (5), in which he plays a subtler game. We don't see the final result of the destruction, instead witnessing the process of a possible one. This possibility occurs right in front of us (or right above our heads)<sup>1</sup>. Of course, everything is made to be safe and stable, but the suction cups still have a grip that is limited by time; if they were left uncontrolled, they would release the board which would fall to the ground. Therefore, the audience is present at a potentially dangerous situation it has not yet happened, but it could.<sup>2</sup>

The way Enrico applies (and defies) the laws of the physics to create control, recalls Paul Virilio. The French philosopher believes that technology cannot exist without the potential for accidents. In *The Original Accident* he writes: "To invent the sailing ship or the steamer is to invent the shipwreck. To invent the train is to invent the rail accident of derailment. To invent the family automobile is to produce the pile-up on the highway" (Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007). It is fair to assume that accidents are something we would like to avoid. They are anomalies that disturb our ideals of rightness, justice and faith, but every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress. What is more, accidents provoke a reversal of values that, if viewed positively, reveals important aspects we would not otherwise know how to perceive.

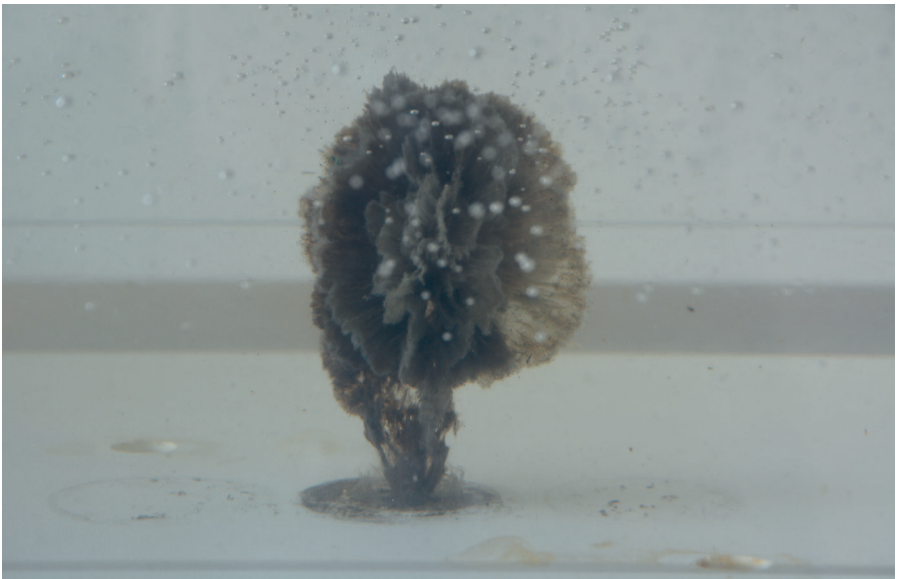
*Matt and glossy black rectangles* reflects on matter and vacuum, which inevitably try to separate and rely upon us, it unveils our fragility and challenges our almost infinite faith in the infallibility of technology and progress. It also points out the potential dangers around us, forcing us to reflect upon risk and safety.

1. The word 'accident' comes from the Latin *ac-cidere*, meaning 'to fall from above'.

2. We will avoid any possible hazardous situation by checking the suction cups regularly; they are equipped with a safety system consisting of a red mark on the piston of the pump, which becomes visible only when the suction cup starts to lose adherence.



1



2



3



4



5

## The black rectangles

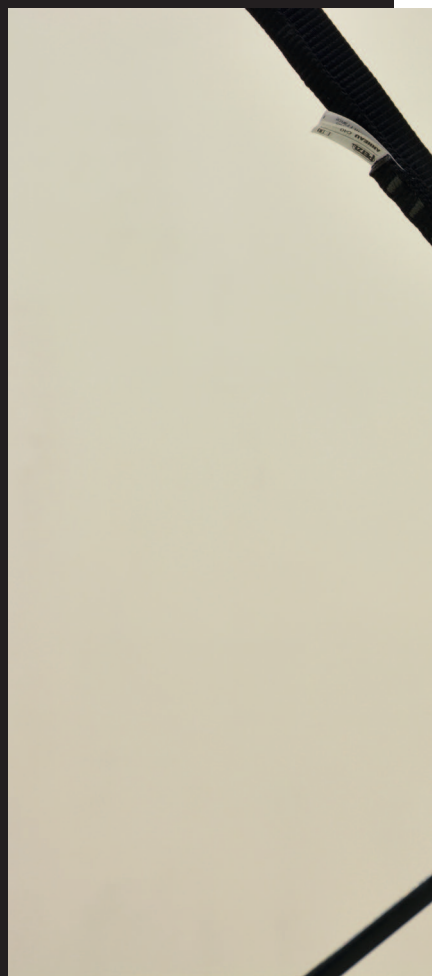
Geometric shapes are items that rarely generate huge debate. I've never heard anybody on a train, in a pub or in a queue at the supermarket talking about a triangle, square or rectangle. This happens because geometry is at the complete disposal of architecture, art or design. That is to say, if a ceramic vase falls down from a balcony and smashes into the windshield of a parked car, you don't say it was a truncated cone made of clay that broke the glass. Do you get the point? Geometry is all around us but, almost always, it remains incognito. Besides, it hardly generates any discussion because it follows laws that are unchangeable. If I draw a triangle and I tell you that it's a square, you'd just say that I'm wrong and that's it. End of the story.

There is no wrong in geometry because it is not an issue that considers subjectivity, the only thing that makes it personal is our perception of it. This is what we want to do here. The black rectangle is the demise of graphic representation. It is its end, but it can also be its starting point (do you remember the black monolith in Stanley Kubrick's *Space Odyssey*?), a contribution towards defining new icons that help to combine form and function without revisiting old memories.

Monochromes are duty free spaces for interpretation. They are not something determined, they are just what you want them to be. Mark Rothko said about his *Black on Maroon*: "After I had been at work for some time I realised that I was much influenced subconsciously by Michelangelo's walls in the staircase room of the Medicean Library in Florence. He achieved just the kind of feeling I'm after" (James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, University Chicago Press, 1998). This is the point, a black rectangle is a blank space for feelings. You can see Michelangelo in it or you can see just nothing.

Enrico Gaido (b. 1971, Italy) is a performance and installation artist currently based in Brussels. He graduated from the Faculty of Building Engineering at the Turin Politecnico in 1998. Alongside Alessandra Lappano he co-founded of the collaborative art project Portage in 2004. His performances and installations were shown in various museums, foundations, galleries and fairs such as: Istituto Italiano di Cultura with Freek Wambacq (2016); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); Art Rotterdam 2015; The Others, Turin (2015 and 2013); Laure Genillard Gallery, London (2013); Fondazione Merz, Torino (2012); MACRO/La Pelanda, Roma (2010); Galleria Giorgio Persano, Torino (2007) and Fondazione Pistoletto Cittadellarte, Biella (2005). His videos have been screened at: *the 7a\*11d*/International Performance Art Festival, Toronto (2008) and *Interferencia/III* Muestra de Intervenciones Artísticas en Espacios Públicos, Barcelona (2006). A long collaboration with the Teatro Stabile of Turin lead to the production of the performances *Paradoxa* (2014), *And the stupid was moved to tears* (2011), *Adamo's Home* (2009) and *Dogs* (2007). His work has been included in many theatre festivals such as ShortTheatre, Roma (2014, 2010); Prospettiva150, Torino (2011); Legàmi/InTeatro Festival, Polverigi (Ancona, 2010); Santarcangelo40, Rimini (2010); Alveare/Contemporanea Festival, Prato (2010); Prospettiva09, Torino (2009) and Amorph!06/International Performance Art Festival, Helsinki (2006). The project *// Tetto* awarded the prize Focus on art and science in the performing arts by the European Contemporary Production (2010); the video *New Orleans* won the first price at Video.it 8, Torino (2007) and the work *Phone Center (Dogs project)* was selected for the Celeste Prize in 2009.

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