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**EYELINER (2011-)**  
**KNUT HENRIK HENRIKSEN**

#### Some background notes

In a bad-tempered review of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1855, Charles Baudelaire noted ‘the barbaric invasion of the straight line; against this tragic and systematic line whose ravages are already immense in painting and sculpture.’<sup>1</sup> The line that Baudelaire sees as ravaging art is the neo-classical line, the line that he considered inert and static; the line of control, versus a romantic line, a line responsive to nature and to modern times that he identifies in his favoured work in the salon, by Eugène Delacroix. Any discussion around the line in art is polymorphous by its being. The line has many contrapositions and metaphorical uses, for it is literal as well as an evocation. It can, for example, be thought about on its way to the ‘limit’ presented by Hegel in his system of aesthetics (*Lectures on Aesthetics*, 1835), and the visceral response to these lectures that has followed in almost two-hundred years since, which endlessly discuss the nature of this end, or limitation. There is an academic or critical notion that posits Hegel’s limit as fundamental to the possibilities of art (art cannot reach a higher realm, as this realm would then become philosophical; the final stage is godly, the highest attainment possible for humanity). During my post-graduate aesthetics reading, we learned that Conceptual artists from the 1960s onwards (or post-Duchamp), were the first group of artists to attend university and study the theoretical canon of aesthetics. Arriving at this idea of the limit then would invoke the question, what is beyond, and if nothing, are we in the realm of life and material? Thus, the argument may proceed that the phenomena of this beyond counters the imposed limit (the line) and morphs everything into a messy place of lived experience (politics) and art as one larger conflation. This may then be the modernist space we arguably inhabit if we think that ‘post-modernism’ is only an extension of modernism and thus paradigmatically a subset, not able to fully overcome the ‘parent’ modernistic rendering of thought.

#### Into the present

In 2025, *Eyelinier* (2011-) is executed in Green 29, a colour chosen by young people as a contemporary shade of eyeliner. This places this line within the specific register of fashion and youth culture. But it could already feel nostalgic; the Brat summer of 2024 was one of hope - its colour was green. While Charlie XCX performed, Trump prepared to return to The White House. The promise of this green, then, is wilting, frayed by the pressure of a political failure of the social democratic denominator, and compounded in and for itself by the unstable, irrefutable fragility of the systems of the centre-left (in the USA and elsewhere). Whilst the world flounders in response, the machine of commerce rolls on. The culture industry with its deft seduction and guise of radicality or appropriation of the collective spirit has already relocated its capital and is now focused on other trends: the marketing and targeting machine onto other youth cultures to infiltrate with episodic meaning until the context is rinsed of its financial possibility and the consumer moves on.

The burden of the metaphoric green line is weighty, bowing the abstraction of a line to the cultural specificity of colour can become a sour side-note in a world pushed to its extremes. As socially constructed readers, we grasp references from an ever-widening pool of sources, and we wear this density whether in a perceived act of solidarity (aligning ourselves with a set of beliefs) or simply as information that front-loads our visual memory; it’s hard to disconnect from information once associations are formed, experienced or made public. It didn’t take long then to come to these facts: The Green Line is also the name of several serious demarcations. The 1949 Armistice border is a line set out between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Its name comes from the green ink used to draw the line on the map during the talks. Other examples of territorial delineations similar to The Green Line include a UN-controlled buffer zone in Cyprus that divides the island between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, as well as The Green Line which demarcated East and West Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990).

According to Henriksen’s own premise and interests, the work or site is never one of exclusive positivity, but rather an inherent tension exists with the notion of failure and fragility. We return again to ‘doubts’. In Adorno we see a discussion of the inner conflict of the work, an unpacking of the qualities of its interpretations, and a reading of its internal workings, its modes of production: contextual and responsive logic is a site of this production. Adorno carries a pessimism, one that unfolds via the dialectic he pursues that is levied at a world in movement. He states:

If in keeping with Hegel’s insight all feeling related to an aesthetic object has an accidental aspect, usually that of psychological projection, then what the work demands from its beholder is knowledge, and indeed, knowledge that does justice to it: The work wants its truth and untruth to be grasped.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités Esthétiques* (Paris: Garnier, 1962) 198.

## Previously

*Eyeliner* (2011-) is a drawing and an installation. It was initially realised, fully cognisant of and due to its content provoking context: at an art fair. There is some biography to its appearance, the artist wishing to adorn and make transparent the space of the booth, while highlighting or monumentalising the inferred fragility of this area. Henriksen was also making a drawing for the gallery, for a space that would be inhabited for 5 days and then 'made good'. He took his colour inspiration from eyeliner, a substance that finds its echo in the colour palettes of thicker, art-making pastels.

It was the walls that caught Henriksen's attention; they happened to be stepped and uneven along their top edge, due to the irregular wall partitions inherent to the sloping floor of a tent erected at speed in Regent's Park. It could not in those days, without an extraordinary effort, be evened out, and despite the protestations of the exhibitors, this unevenness was a feature of the fair for its first decade or so. This aspect of the walls excited Henriksen, an interest developed from his practice's baseline pivot of 'architectural doubt'. This line, blue in its first appearance, harnessed the specificity of the uneven wall using a colour associated with makeup. A metaphor too then, of the wall and the eye, opening or closing, adorned by highlighting its explicit limit. This site-responsiveness is characteristic of Henriksen, whose practice has delved into the specificities of line through investigating its dissectional qualities, whether articulated through material means or as conceptual vectors that are used to determine the angle or subject matter of a work.

Returning to the first iteration of *Eyeliner* at an art fair, with the limit and exigencies of the context, the 'eye' and the act of looking is naturally at the centre of the event, but held too within the limitations of time and speed, both individual and collective. The crude denotation of the line through the fleeting fancy of makeup - it too a durational facilitator of façade - enables a feasible reading of the mechanics of artifice via the artwork and its paradoxical status as both commodifiable object and soon-demolished gesture. More broadly, the seminal construct of the white wall within the contextual field of Art History as the de facto choice for presenting artwork in a 'neutral' setting, situates the piece within another contradiction: it exists perfectly suitably for admiration, but equally within a portent of imminent doom.

In 2015 *Eyeliner* was once again deployed, this time as a drawing around the edges of the space at Hollybush Gardens. Its pink pastel substance brought attention to the gallery walls, themselves a built structure placed at a distance from the actual fabric of the building, an insert into the otherwise 'found environment' (architectural reading of the building), which was originally some sort of industrial space or workshop with rigs and cranes, some of which are still in place. Another set of circumstances and conditions for viewing artworks unfolded through this action. In this instance, the content of the wall-based works shown below the pink line become inadvertently drawn into the narrativising of the building itself, as well as the use of the space, a sort of meta attention-drawing, a world within worlds. A line is a stage upon which to traverse. A line can be both material and conceptual, presenting both limits and non-limits, spatial and non-spatial. Lines can also be meeting points of both the finite and the infinite. All of this affects the status of the phenomenological presence of the line and its employed use and appearance. A line can be simultaneously present and absent, affirmed and negated, and this is seen in drawing and other art forms where the line is abstracted or moved-beyond in dance and even music (holding a note or bowing, for example).

A line is therefore an infinite set of characterisations. In the work of Piet Mondrian for example, the line is not a boundary but a border; lines become mutable porous entities that propose themselves while in flux. He says:

...these boundaries are not really closed; the straight lines in rectangular opposition constantly intersect, so that their rhythm continues throughout the whole work. In the same way, in the international order of the future, the different countries, while being mutually equivalent, will have their unique and different value. There will be just frontiers, proportionate to the value of each country in relationship to the whole federation. These frontiers will be clearly defined but not 'closed'.<sup>2</sup>

## Relations

In the end, then, we are left with not only a work, an installation, but a proposition with a set of instructions. These instructions may be read as a score, one with possibilities that announce themselves beyond the context of their making, becoming legible through varied and cacophonous sets of reactions. The physical act itself is something still to be addressed, and yet. What exists is a framing device, for what is shown underneath *Eyeliner* (2025) is an empty space. But empty, how? Harnessing the legacies of the logic of the white cube, we already come to this loaded with information, context, and content. This brush with the edge allows us to enter into the artwork, to engage with its set of relations, to think about nothing at all, to witness a proposition, which in this instance is naked and bare. The line offers itself as an algorithm of holding and containment, a proposal made kinetic by its audience, who empty and fill with their own human temperature onto the page-come-wall.

Lisa Panting, July 2025

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<sup>2</sup> Piet Mondrian, *The New Art - The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, trans. by H. Holtzman and M.S. James (Boston: G.K.Hall and Co., 1986)