

# Artist Statement

## Excerpt from a conversation with Wilhelm Warning (Coast to Coast, 2002)

### Harrington:

... There is a nostalgia for painting that is made with brushes, but I don't want the signature of the brush to be part of the final sum of the significance of the painting. Once the paint is put on the canvas the brush retires and the paint is dragged across the surface with grooved and combed instruments. And it is the autograph of these instruments that is the primary characteristic of the painting. If one looked at my paintings of today in the light of paintings from only two years ago or going back to the mid-nineties, one would witness a big contrast in the character of the linear structure which formerly was very dense, with literally hundreds perhaps even thousands of slender lines going on. Now the lines might be countable on the fingers of two hands, one hand.

### Warning:

- or even disappear.

### Harrington:

The emphasis now is upon an openness of space and the line is there as a counterpoint to its absence. It is there and it's not there. I think the paintings invite that consideration now. Of course, the linear structures are horizontal rather than vertical. They would be very different paintings if those structures were vertical. But whereas the linear structure is horizontal, in many of the most recent paintings the overall format is a vertical rectangle, and this polarity between those two factors - the horizontality of the impression of space and the architecture of format - is a tension that I'm concerned to pursue.

It is not so easy to slip into the space of these paintings but there is a possibility to come in, because they are completely abstract. But in this abstraction there is a kind of dialectic. These abstractions give you the feeling of a deeper meaning behind the surface: - there is a surface which tells you „I am an abstract painting“ but there is a depth, a space, which is something else, which means something to you.

They are non-objective paintings so they are abstract in the classic sense that we tend to use that word. But of course the word itself is an error. The term itself is in error in relation to paintings of this kind because it is not an abstraction from something else. It is an isolated physical reality of its own which has no associations but they do become accessible to associations, that the spectator may discover. And I as the artist do have some associations that I pin upon them, although to the spectator my associations may be entirely arbitrary. I think it's part of the strategy of these paintings that that should be so.

**Warning:**

One of the mysteries in these paintings is the accident.

**Harrington:**

It is not evident that the paintings are made with a brush but the paintings are made with an evidence of handwork. You know, I say that because there are some traditions in non objective painting where a very clear effort is made to eradicate any evidence of the hand and my paintings are quite distinctly not in that camp. They follow another tradition. It's just that they are unconventional in terms of the tools that are used to make them. So they are a revelation of handwork and accident is an anticipated and de sired facet of their process, in the sense that al though I have an idea of actions that I'm going to take, the outcomes of those actions will not in all cases be specifically known until the action has occurred. There is an anticipated chance event. It's actually sought after but it's controlled as well, because otherwise it would overwhelm the strategy of the painting. In fact, it would hijack the painting. I harness the power of the accident so that it doesn't hijack my intentions. I am not trying to make paintings that are perfect. I am concerned to work in collaboration with the materials that I have chosen, so that there are evidences of their disobedience to my strategies. I think that if the paintings worked perfectly they would be dead. It is those disobediences and the constant threat of disobedience that give each painting its chance to live. Rhythm is a component of these paintings, that is the design. It is reflected not only in the grooved field but also in the obvious character of the paintings as diptych structures. One encounters the fact that there are two panels in close physical association which are nearly alike and that there are lines of a similar quality and

nature, and yet they are disconnected from one another in the sense that they are not perfectly continuous from one panel to the other. There is a break. Consequently, the drama of the paintings is about the resulting sense of volumetric space and the tension between the flatness of the painting as a physical reality and the impact of its optical vitality on our nervous system, as Francis Bacon might have said. With regard to music, I cannot set out to make a painting that is about music, though I am delighted to hear that someone may feel that the paintings have an affinity to music. It is part of my working environment in that if I am not listening to music I am almost certainly thinking of it as I work. It may be that music is an intuitively invested component of the paintings. As it is within me, somehow it may emerge within the paintings.

„In their format, color and textural horizontality my paintings focus on space and light. No narrative. No symbolism. No reference. No representation. They may be analogous to aspects of the world and our experience, but are not evocative of conditions outside themselves. However, I want them to mean and to arouse a sense of resolve and upliftedness.“

**Mark Harrington**