WALL PAINTINGS, 1968–1973
ABSTRACTION AND DECORATION
During December 1968 and March 1973, Palermo made nearly thirty wall drawings and paintings. In the estimation of many of his friends, these wall works stand “among the most important works by Palermo.” Yet they are also his most elusive body of work because not a single original survives and because at first sight the pieces appear strikingly different from one another and from his other work. Nevertheless, they too partake in the historical resonance of abstract forms and colors that is central to Palermo’s work. When Palermo drew lines on walls or painted walls in monochrome fields of color, when he highlighted spatial characteristics of rooms or added decorative forms, some critics dismissed him as a “mere” wall painter while others praised him for providing an “intensive experience of space.”

These opposing accounts are representative of the reception of Palermo’s wall paintings and are important for understanding the ways in which they exemplify the mobilization of decoration in service of abstract art that is historically meaningful in terms of both abstract painting in general and the contexts of the German economic miracle and of debates about the social and political role of art.

Palermo’s first wall drawing exhibition opened at Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Munich on 12 December 1968, just as wall works were emerging as a signature medium of what came to be known as conceptual art. In October of that year, Sol LeWitt had exhibited his first wall drawing at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, and Hanne Darboven had exhibited his first wall drawing at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, and Hanne Darboven had exhibited his first wall drawing at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, and Hanne Darboven had exhibited his first wall drawing at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York. Because at first sight the pieces appear strikingly different from one another and from his other work, they too partake in the historical resonance of abstract forms and colors that is central to Palermo’s work. When Palermo drew lines on walls or painted walls in monochrome fields of color, when he highlighted spatial characteristics of rooms or added decorative forms, some critics dismissed him as a “mere” wall painter while others praised him for providing an “intensive experience of space.”

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Regardless of whether this story is accurate, two conclusions can be drawn from it that bear on the work’s status as conceptual art. First, a visitor to the exhibition could not intuit Dahlem’s or any other mathematical equation that might have inspired Palermo’s configurations. Although a print featuring numbers from zero to nine was used as the exhibition poster and although 5 has—mistakenly, I believe—become the accepted title for the work, variations on a highly abstracted configuration of two stacked open squares, a stylized number five, are the only related forms to appear on the walls.

Second, Palermo did not include a swastika, although it was a legitimate variation in keeping with the series of open and closed squares, probably because of its historical associations. Like LeWitt, Palermo continuously altered a given parameter by opening and closing it; LeWitt chose a cube, Palermo a square. Yet Palermo’s variations were at best playful, and they lacked the precise, absurdly exhaustive system that underlay LeWitt’s work.

Did Palermo not understand LeWitt? Or did he, like so many of his European contemporaries, mock the older American artist in an act of defiance at what many perceived as the onslaught of American art in Germany?

 Shortly after Palermo’s death, the critic Kenneth Baker noted that it is “difficult to decide whether Palermo’s work is an episode of painting or of Conceptual activity.” The wall paintings especially have often been associated with conceptual art. At the 1972 Documenta 5 exhibition, Palermo’s entry was a wall painting located in a staircase that took visitors to the work of the Art & Language group and to that of John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Jan Dibbets, and LeWitt, among others (see fig. 92). The wall paintings especially have often been associated with conceptual art. At the 1972 Documenta 5 exhibition, Palermo’s entry was a wall painting located in a staircase that took visitors to the work of the Art & Language group and to that of John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Jan Dibbets, and LeWitt, among others (see fig. 92). The wall paintings especially have often been associated with conceptual art. At the 1972 Documenta 5 exhibition, Palermo’s entry was a wall painting located in a staircase that took visitors to the work of the Art & Language group and to that of John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Jan Dibbets, and LeWitt, among others (see fig. 92).

Some form of documentation, although probably not the documentation as we know it today, was exhibited in January 1971 as a work in progress at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Cologne under the title Palermo Projekte 68/70 (Palermo Projects, 1968–70; fig. 72). The panels were exhibited again posthumously as a coherent body of work at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in April 1978 and at the galerie art in progress in Düsseldorf in 1980, treated as quasi-artworks and physically disconnected from their original sites.

Now in the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bonn and included in the catalogue raisonné, this documentation inevitably forms the basis for discussions of the wall paintings and drawings, none of which was ever exhibited as an independent work. Instead, they were exhibited as a coherent body of work at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in April 1978 and at the galerie art in progress in 1980, treated as quasi-artworks and physically disconnected from their original sites.
of which has survived.\(^\text{22}\) The similarity to idea-based conceptual art is apparent, especially to LeWitt's written instructions and ink drawings for his wall drawings, but also to photo-based creations of largely immaterial works by artists like Robert Barry.\(^\text{23}\)

Yet any classification of this body of work as conceptual art is superficial and misguided. Differences between it and LeWitt's wall drawings, in particular, abound. Compared to LeWitt's detailed directions, Palermo's documentation appears insufficient: the photographs are too small and often unclear, the texts too brief and imprecise. For the American artist, idea and execution are equally important; based on his plans, anybody could produce the wall drawings and even transfer and adapt them to other spaces.\(^\text{24}\) By contrast, Palermo meticulously executed all his wall paintings and drawings himself (although he sometimes helped by others).\(^\text{25}\) Palermo's works were site specific in nature, and with the exception of his first wall drawing, responded to the particular characteristics of a given space—lines that follow the outlines of walls around door frames and heating systems, replicates of preexisting shapes such as window frames. Palermo sometimes completely overturned his idea for a wall painting after seeing the exhibition space.\(^\text{26}\) The final formats and, in addition, the various reconstructions of these wall paintings, which were centered on an experience that can no longer be had.\(^\text{27}\)

The only way to come to terms with this dilemma is to reconstruct, as much as possible, what it was like “to stand inside” Palermo’s wall paintings. To do so, I have drawn on three sources: Palermo’s own documentation, contemporary reviews, and reconstructions. Palermo’s documents include numerous sketches, photographs, and collages in addition to the ones featured on the panels he assembled; they also include the artist’s letters to curators and interview fragments. In addition, abundant contemporary exhibition reviews were published in art magazines and, especially, local newspapers, frequently including descriptions by “someone who actually stood inside.” Finally, several wall paintings, wall drawings, and related projects have been reconstructed or remade as homages. These are, in chronological order:

1984 A follow-up to a collaboration between Palermo and Gerhard Richter, originally at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Cologne, at the Lentbachhaus in Munich, where Richter had the walls surrounding a recently acquired version of the sculptures from this collaboration painted “in memory of and as an homage to Palermo and therefore most suitable to the sculptures”; it was not, as Richter clarifies, intended “to reconstruct Palermo (because I was not authorized to do so nor would it have been possible in a completely different room with completely different proportions).” The follow-up version was entitled Zwei Skulpturen für einen Raum von Palermo (Two Sculptures for a Room by Palermo); the original exhibition was entitled Wandmaleerei und Skulptur (Wall Painting and Sculpture).\(^\text{28}\)

1986 A reconstruction by Ibi Knoebel of a collaboration between Palermo and Knoebel at the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden in the original space but with slight alterations.\(^\text{29}\)

1991 A remake of Palermo’s 1970 wall painting at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in and by the gallery of Marie-Puck Broeders, based on a drawing in her collection.\(^\text{30}\)

1993 A controversial combined uncovering and reconstruction of a wall painting at the Kunsthalle Hamburg preceding the building’s destruction.\(^\text{31}\)

1999 An in situ reconstruction of Palermo’s wall painting for the Kunsthalle in Frankfurt that remains on view.

2000 A temporary reconstruction of a wall painting, originally installed at the Galerie Konrad Fischer, at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, for the group exhibition The Object Sculpture.\(^\text{32}\)

2002 Refabrication in Barcelona of a wall installation first realized at the 1976 Venice Biennale, based on photographs and a model made by Palermo.\(^\text{33}\)

2005 A reconstruction of Palermo’s wall painting at the Edinburgh College of Art by the college’s “Palermo Restore Project.”

In most cases, some aspects of these reconstructions were problematic: the restoration attempt in Hamburg failed because the paint layer could not be restored to its original even surface; the spaces in Brussels and Leeds differed significantly from the original locations; and the colors were usually based solely on visual approximations of the original paint. Nevertheless, these reconstructions have allowed viewers to approximate the original experience, giving us, as one young artist recently put it, a “taste” of the original work.\(^\text{34}\) Unlike new instantiations of most conceptual wall works, however; none of these reconstructions can be considered Palermo’s work per se; none of them was strictly speaking a restoration of a work to its original constitution. Only various extant versions of the blue triangle multiple (see fig. 60) can be considered original wall paintings; they were made by others but as instructed and authorized by the artist and thus have a status identical to that of LeWitt’s wall drawings.

Palermo’s first wall drawing could thus be considered a false start. Configurations from the Munich wall painting appeared only once more, a few months later, in a wall drawing for the exhibition Düsseldorfer Szene at the Kunstmuseum Luzern (Luzern).\(^\text{35}\) By and large, however, an interest in the experience of spatial relations and a phenomenological approach to space replaced the artist’s initial pursuit of the principle of permutation, which became central to Palermo again only much later, in the metal pictures made in New York. There is no definitive answer to the question of whether Palermo failed to understand LeWitt or whether he was mocking him. Regardless, it seems Palermo did understand that LeWitt’s concepts amounted to a dead end for a young German artist. Indeed, Gerhard Richter recalls the “hard, bad times” when he and Palermo felt they had been “written off” as conceptual art and took hold. Palermo’s conceptual art was over before it had really begun.\(^\text{36}\)

**WITHIN THE WALL PAINTINGS**
Palermo made two versions of his second wall drawing in the winter and spring of 1969. The first appeared at the Kabinett für Aktuelle Kunst, off the beaten track in Bremerhaven, an important, then barely two-year-old independent exhibition space for contemporary, especially conceptual, art. The second version followed at the Galerie René Block in Berlin, which had developed strong ties to Joseph Beuys and other Düsseldorf artists since its founding in 1964 (figs. 73, 74). In both Palermo responded to the galleries’ idiosyncratic sequences of walls. In the Berlin gallery the walls were joined at varying angles, unfolding like an accordion around the circumference of the room. Wherever walls met, Palermo drew two thin lines with red-brown oil crayon (Pastellkreide) extending from floor to ceiling on either side of the joint. As photographs and a film made by the local television station Sender Freies Berlin show, this alteration enhanced the awkward, strange qualities of the space. The lines mimicked the vertical edges of the walls, but, though drawn thinly and lightly, they were more easily visible than the actual joints. In effect, each corner appeared to be flattened out and virtually disappeared, rendering the exact demarcations of the space uncertain. The rhythm of lines compelled the viewer to walk along the walls—Palermo referred to the piece as an Abwicklung, “unfolding”—repeating this illusion over and over. Palermo reportedly talked about the earlier, Bremerhaven version of this work as an Aktivierung des Raums, “activation of space.” The vertical lines in both locations created a heightened, activated sense of space through the defamiliarization of the space by means of the optical illusions that enhanced viewers’ spatial, perceptual, and bodily consciousness. Sensitivity to and reflection on their surroundings replaced the obliviousness with which viewers usually regarded the space in which they stood. In the Berlin version, that defamiliarization was framed within a historical context. Palermo’s work was the second in a yearlong exhibition series featuring rooms by, in chronological order, Joseph Beuys, Palermo, K. H. Hödicke, Panamarenko, Bernd...
Wall Paintings, 1968–1973

The title of the series, Blockade, triggered memories of the yearlong Berlin blockade twenty years earlier during the Cold War, when from mid-1948 to mid-1949 the Soviet Union had cut off all land and sea access to West Berlin, forcing the Allied powers to supply the population with food and all other necessities by air. Most subsequent exhibitions in the series followed up on the ideas presented in Palermo’s work and created works with a historically resonant but always abstract spatial uncertainty that alluded to spatial separation, inaccessibility, or transition—Hödicke’s Drühlkreuz, or “turnstiles”; Panamarenko’s One-Stop Project, suggesting an airplane; Lohaus’s blocked entrance; and Ruthenbeck’s crowded installation consisting of configurations of three lengths of lumber tied together in star shapes.

This defamiliarizing effect, though not the explicit historical reference, is central to Palermo’s wall paintings and drawings: by destabilizing the viewer’s perceptual and bodily orientation, they encouraged reflection about our dependence on space and its relevance to our understanding of the surrounding world. The wall paintings are phenomenological: they posit experience as our means of knowing the world and ourselves. As noted by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “spatial existence is inseparable and equal partners in a dynamic relationship that brings both into being. A stable, secure space is not an empty container disconnected from the subject, nor is it a condition that allows the subject’s experience. Rather, space and subject are inseparable and equal partners in a dynamic relationship that brings both into being. A stable, secure space is not an empty container disconnected from the subject, nor is it a condition that allows the subject’s experience.”

Hence, the sense of stability in the gallery space adjacent to the Hanover exhibition or to enrich the viewers’ perception of instability creates a contrasting sense of stability in the gallery space adjacent to the Hanover exhibition or to enrich the viewers’ perception of stability. The compositional language was influenced by the Bauhaus, with all living perception.

As recorded in the television film, it features a voice repeating the words “hier von und dazu” accompanied by minimal piano chords. Most of these words have multiple meanings: “hier” means “here”; “von” from; “zu” to; “by” or about; and “dazu” can be roughly translated as “for the purpose,” “therefore,” “for this,” “besides,” “in addition,” “together,” or “with.” The rhythm is simple: “hier is a quarter note, von is three eighth notes, and to a quarter note each.”

How did Palermo make this music “concrete”? The composer had already “concretized” language, as it were, stressing its material qualities in a way similar to concrete poetry, by isolating prepositions from nouns that would determine their meaning. The longer one listens, the more meaningless these words become; they are pure sounds arranged in a melodic rhythm. If Palermo’s wall drawing “concretized” Christiansen’s music, it was not by giving meaning to his words. On the contrary, the drawing enforced the uncertainty of the words and suggested multiple meanings: hier could be the “here” of the speaker or the viewer; von is a “from” that is spatially and temporally undetermined; and dazu leaves open what is added to what—viewer to space, space to viewer, lines to space, line to line, viewer to line. These multiple meanings foreground the materiality of the words and thus made the composition concrete. Wall drawing and music worked in tandem to defamiliarize the experience of the exhibition visitors.

That effect became more visual several months later in Tuchverspannung, which can be poorly translated as “cloth bracing,” one of two adjacent room installations for Palermo’s exhibition in 1968. Tuchverspannung and Wandzeichnung (2 Rooms: Cloth Bracing and Wall Drawing) at the Galerie Christian Christensen in Copenhagen. The space was heightened by the use of yellow-orange cotton, probably the same kind as Beuys’s, who collaborated with Christiansen on several performances, including the 1966 Manresa discussed in Chapter 1, and Konstanz, Belgium’s most famous “cloth bracing,” one of two adjacent room installations for Palermo’s exhibition in 1968. The piece used earlier that year for the cloth picture Leiseprecher I, diagonally from wall to floor in one corner of the room and from wall to ceiling in the opposite corner, thus concealing the right angles where the walls met floor and ceiling. A visitor to the exhibition described losing his balance while walking through the space, comparing the experience to being on a slowly tilting ship deck. Another wrote, “The room lost its customary proportions and looked as if it were about to keel over. In this way the viewer’s normal sense of space is dramatically disturbed and the viewer himself is left with a feeling of insecurity.”

That effect, in which the room seemed to keel to the left as one entered, resulted from our usual horizontal anchor of body and vision being supplanted by the diagonal axis spanning the space between the two banks—an axis Palermo marked with an arrow in one of three documentary sketches. The keeling effect was particularly pronounced because the fabric covered a larger segment of the wall than of the ceiling. Even the photograph in Palermo’s documentation, which reproduces the viewpoint of the visitor entering the gallery space, compels us to tilt our head to the left to adjust for a disturbed sense of balance. Suitably, if probably unintentionally, Palermo’s axometric projection of the room as a small box in that documentation tilts ever so slightly to the left, as well. As I shall discuss in Chapter 5, this particular type of spatial disorientation created by occluding spatial parameters was pushed further two years later in a collaborative wall work with Imi Knoebel at the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden entitled Veränderter Raum (Altered Room; see figs. 139 and 140).

Whether to balance the overall installation in the Hanover exhibition or to enrich the viewers’ spatial experiences, Palermo created a contrasting sense of stability in the gallery space adjacent to Tuchverspannung. Although, for unknown reasons, he documented the second wall drawing with only a single drawing, some photographs of it have survived (see fig. 76). A reviewer noted, “The piece is entered from a corner of the room and from wall to ceiling in the opposite corner, thus concealing the right angles where the walls met floor and ceiling. A visitor to the exhibition described losing his balance while walking through the space, comparing the experience to being on a slowly tilting ship deck. Another wrote, “The room lost its customary proportions and looked as if it were about to keel over. In this way the viewer’s normal sense of space is dramatically disturbed and the viewer himself is left with a feeling of insecurity.”

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Fig. 75. Documentation for Tuchverspannung (Cloth Bracing) (Wvz 583), Galerie Ernst, Hanover, 6–29 June 1969. Pencil and felt pen on paper with three photographs, all on cardboard, 90 x 66 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn.

opposite
Fig. 76. 2 Räume, Tuchverspannung und Wandzeichnung (2 Rooms: Cloth Bracing and Wall Drawing), Galerie Ernst, Hanover, 6–29 June 1969. Front room: oil crayon on wall, 450 x 600 cm; back room: cotton over wooden slat construction, 450 x 750 cm.
monochrome plane featured in the Galerie Ernst exhibition became central motifs in Palermo’s wall paintings. They were soon used for unsettling effects in more sophisticated ways, and in his best work the two motifs were collapsed into one.

Palermo never again used cloth in an installation, perhaps because it did not blend in enough with the architecture. But in Tuchverspannung the artist did indulge his passion for color, for the first time in this body of work. Central to his cloth pictures and the later metal pictures, color increasingly appeared in the later years of the wall paintings in the form of colored lines or expansive monochrome fields. For another wall painting at the Kabinett für Aktuelle Kunst, on view from December 1971 to January 1972, Palermo used a “mild gray” paint (as one reviewer described it and as it appears in a related silkscreen) to cover the bottom two-thirds of three walls (the fourth wall was the glassed storefront), reaching a little above the average height of a man (fig. 77). As the walls merged with the similarly colored floor, the gray fields would enclose visitors; from all sides of the perceptual field, the walls would push them back toward the window in a nearly claustrophobic manner. The white space above eye level would have appeared spacious and immaterial by contrast, further enhancing the constraining effect of the gray.

For Documenta 5 in 1972, Palermo painted the tall narrow wall facing a landing in a central stairwell with Bleimennige, a bright orange rust-preventive undercoating, thus in effect taking the wall out of its context and rupturing the unity of the space (fig. 78). Separated from the adjacent white walls by its color, the painted wall formed an isolated plane. As the low viewpoint chosen for the documentation suggests, the shape of the wall also appeared distorted to ascending or descending viewers, and, we can assume, its appearance changed with every step. Because Palermo left some of the original white wall at the top, the orange shape oscillated ambiguously between ground and figure: between being an orange wall and being an orange shape placed on the wall.
The types of paint added a conceptual dimension to this ambiguity. Because both white paint and undercoating are commonly used as grounds rather than as objects in themselves, Palermo effectively put two grounds in irresolvable conflict with each other. These spatial uncertainties would have been intensified by the fact that visitors were inevitably in the process of climbing or descending stairs—even switching directions on the landing immediately in front of the work—when they encountered Palermo’s wall painting.

Staircases, it seems, particularly lent themselves to the heightened spatial experience Palermo pursued because by their nature they stressed the idea of a body moving through space. By the time he painted Wandmalerei mit Bleimennige (Wall Painting with Rust-Preventive Undercoating) the artist had been drawn to staircases as a site for his wall paintings for several years, starting with a work at Galerie Konrad Fischer in April 1970 and continuing that August at the College of Art in Edinburgh and at the Kunstverein in Frankfurt the following year. Each of these works involved a staircase as a motif or location, and in most of them the staircase gradually shifted or abruptly changed direction, thus intensifying their inherent propensity to shift and hence heighten—and sometimes destabilize—the viewer’s perception.

Palermo’s Wandmalerei auf gegenüberliegenden Wänden (Wall Painting on Facing Walls) is commonly referred to as the “positive/negative” wall painting. His fifth exhibition at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Munich, it was on view from February to March 1971, and it embodies in a complex, condensed way what we might call the phenomenological core of the wall paintings (fig. 79). The work formed the culminating piece in a series of wall circumscriptions that Palermo developed into a signature motif and that were clearly central to his thinking on walls. Growing out of the vertical lines drawn along vertical wall joints in Bremerhaven and Berlin and explored in a series of drawings on paper, the circumscription of a complete wall was first realized at the Galerie Ernst in Hanover in the form of a drawn line. Variations on the motif were executed in 1970 and 1971: related linear interventions at the Edinburgh College of Art and the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, a circumscription of the ceiling in another wall drawing for the Galerie Ernst in a collaborative exhibition with Gerhard Richter, and the complete circumscription of one or several walls, probably at the Lisson Gallery in London, in Palermo’s studio in Mönchengladbach, in a private apartment in Darmstadt, in the wall painting on facing walls at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich, and in another collaborative exhibition with Richter at Galerie Heiner Friedrich’s Cologne branch. In the gallery’s Munich space, Palermo painted one wall of the central room ocher; this was framed by a white band running around wall and door of a “hand’s breadth”—in keeping with his phenomenological concerns, Palermo described the breadth of his wall circumscriptions not in abstract metric measurements but in relation to the human body. He then reversed the color scheme on the facing wall. With minimal means Palermo thus created what curator Ludwig Rinn, in one of the few comprehensive essays published on Palermo’s art during the artist’s lifetime, described as an “intensive experience of space.” More specifically, we can hypothesize based on extensive photographic documentation that Palermo destabilized the visitors’ spatial experience. The two facing walls fragmented the space in a way similar to the Documenta work because adjacent walls and ceiling lacked their unifying links. Because they themselves were out of place, they destroyed the sense of place a room customarily generates. The white and ocher fields further created visual effects similar to those of the gray walls in Bremerhaven, perhaps more intensely because the frames roughly coincided with the periphery of the visitors’ vision. The darker, ocher wall appeared to move forward, out of its white frame toward the viewer, while the white wall seemed to open out and pull the viewer in.

UTOPIAN ENVIRONMENTS

Palermo was not the only one to exhibit rooms in...
late 1968, nor was he the only one to foreground a phenomenological understanding of and a heighten ed sensivity to space. With American art still at the center of the postwar art canon, we might think of minimalist explorations of the body and objects in space continuing in the work of the post-minimalists and leading to the critical investigations of space by conceptual artists. After a brief cross-Atlantic delay, this art was exhibited in German cities in the late 1960s: an extensive survey, *Minimal Art*, traveled to Düsseldorf in early 1969; key minimalist objects by Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Robert Morris were prominently featured at Documenta 4 in the summer of 1968 (see fig. 108); and in mid-October, Car in Düsseldorf gallery in October 1967 with Carl Andre’s 5 × 20 Altstadt Rectangle (fig. 80), followed in the next three years by another Andre exhibition (Alloy Squares), a Flavin exhibition (fluorescent objects), a Judd exhibition (woodcuts), two exhibitions of LeWitt (sections of *Serial Project No. 1* and a wall drawing), a Bochner exhibition (the measurement room mentioned earlier), and a Bruce Nauman exhibition (*Acoustic Wall*). Yet the phenomenological subtext central to the thinking of these American artists and their critics completely escaped their Ger man audiences, who were therefore unable to see any kinship between the American works and the pheno menological concerns of Palermo’s wall paintings. Instead, Palermo’s wall paintings were received as part of a European craze for “environments.” Artists produced and curators commissioned work that, in keeping with the etymology of the term, “encircled” their viewers. An important precedent on continental ground had been Yves Klein’s legendary 1958 *Le Vide* (*The Emptiness*) at Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, which was followed in 1965 by Klein’s connection to Zero art and Galerie Schmela. Following Otto Herbert Hajek’s 1963 *Begehbare Plastik* (Walkable Sculpture) exhibited at Documenta 3, the medium played a prominent role at Documenta 4—for example, with Flavin’s signature fluorescent light tubes installed along the edges of the walls of a darkened space and Christo’s *Corridor Store Front*. Complete exhibitions were devoted to the theme: 12 Environments in Bern, *Vier Räume (Four Rooms)* in Munich, *Structures gonflables* (Inflatable Structures) and *Le Décor quotidien de la vie en 1968* (The Everyday Decoration of Life in 1968) in Paris, all in 1968, and *Räume und Environ ments* (Rooms and Environments) in Leverkusen in 1969.31 These included, for example, rooms filled with fog by the Zero painter Gotthard Graubner, or with foam rubber by the Zero sculptor Ferdinand Spindel (fig. 81). In both cases the space’s geometric markers were playfully obscured. Spindel’s folds of foam rubber created surreal, cave-like spaces with no solid ground; viewers would lose their balance, fall softly, and get up again. Graubner’s fog rooms once exhibited with one of Palermo’s wall paintings in a group exhibition of young Düsseldorf artists as *Edinburgh*—made air visible and effectively blinded visitors, forcing them to rely on other senses. As Graubner explained, the “fog, which of course is to be perceived sensually, really demands participation of all senses in a condensed way. Sensibility is thus activated to the highest degree.”32

To be sure, there was an American reference point to European environments, but it was not minimal ism or its use of phenomenology, as one might expect. Rather, European critics adopted the term *environments* from Allan Kaprow, who used it to describe art that filled “entire containing areas, nearly obliterating the ruled definition of the rooms” and that incorporated the spectator as an “important physical component.”33 The latter aspect was central to the way environments were defined in Europe: as “a medium of expression in art taken from reality, a medium that succeeds in activating the viewers’ consciousness through a complex use of their senses”34 and that engaged viewers in various activities such as thinking, moving, arranging, playing, touching, and smelling. Some environments stressed the use of a full-scale room, others the participation of the viewer, but most focused on the interplay of room and viewer to enable a heightened sensual experience of space.

Although rarely included in these discussions, the art of Fritz Erhard Walther, who trained at the Düsseldorf academy a few years before Palermo, presented one of the more sophisticated and earliest approaches to the ideas underlying environment art. Walther’s *1. Werkstatt* (1. Work Set), made between 1963 and 1969, includes fifty-eight components, each consisting of various structures sewn from fabric. The work exists only when the viewer, or, in the artist’s terminology, “actor,” handles it, unfolding, experi encing, or using one of the components. As Walther notes, “What happens in the actual action (*Handlung*) is the constitution of the work.”35 Viewers engage with the various components of 1. Werkstatt by standing, lying, or rolling in them or by walking along them, either by themselves or in a group. In the pro cess of doing so, they experience space and their bodies in an unusual and therefore more conscious way. For example, a group of people might actively construct a space by holding up a piece of cloth, or an individual might experience space reduced to a two-dimensional plane by rolling down a hill with a white wrapped in thick layers of fabric. When in May 1967 Walther and Sigmar Polke performed his *Elfmeterbahn* (Eleven-Meter Penalty Lane), part of 1. Werkstatt and originally made in 1964, at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Palermo was in the front row of the audience (fig. 82). He definitely took an interest in Walther’s work, for it is closely related in concept and experience to the wall paintings: with respect to the cloth pictures, Walther’s work was an important precedent for using fabric as an exclusive artistic material.

Environments and their popularity were fueled by the intense debates taking place in the German art world about the social and political role of art. These debates centered on five main concerns: efforts to democratize art, making as a form of negation, art as agitation, a rejection of artistic practice altogether, and calls for the socialization of art.36 Seeking to democratize art, artists and institutions worked to expand access to a broad population, a trend that gave rise to affordable multiples and art fairs, the
publication boom, and new forms of art education, such as Bazon Brock’s Besuchslehre (Visitors’ School), first enacted at Documenta 4. Negational art sought to overcome stale conventions of art making and provoke its audiences, exemplified by the performances of Fluxus artists and, although he was still little known outside Germany, the young Jörg Immendorff (fig. 83). Agitational art went further, aiming to promote political education and change, using posters (Klaus Staebek) or montaged objects (Hans-Peter Alvermann) to comment critically on specific historical events or social conditions. The rejection of art altogether, as inherently elitist and apolitical, was voiced both from within the art world (Alvermann ceased to make art in 1966) and from without (most prominently in the public demonstrations against Documenta 4 and the critical reviews of it). The socialization of art focused on efforts to make art socially effective, to heighten communal consciousness and sense awareness, and to foster communication and participation. Much utopian jargon evolved, claims that “the incorporation of the reality of the surrounding necessarily and consequentially obliterates the border between art and life” or that “the new ‘artless art’ is on its way to overcoming inflexible forms and to leading to a new creativity of the masses.” Amid these vague generalizations, environments presented concrete examples of art that systematically pursued this socialization.

These positions within the German art world developed within the broader context of world events during 1968. Like the United States, France, and Italy, West Germany experienced a wave of political protests—demonstrations against capitalist structures, authoritarian thinking, and American imperialism and in favor of a critically engaged consciousness and greater social and political participation. In Germany the protesters became known as the Ausserparlamentarische Opposition (Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, commonly referred to as APO), a term introduced by the German student leader Rudi Dutschke in 1966. The APO had grown out of demonstrations in the late 1950s and early 1960s against nuclear armament and infringements of freedom of the press exemplified by an illegal order to search the offices of the magazine Der Spiegel. It gained increased notoriety with protests against the brutalities of the U.S.-led war in Vietnam, the stale bureaucracies and curricula of the universities, continuities with the National Socialist past in the form of state personnel and popular mindsets, biased press coverage, and other threats to the young democracy.

The most serious of these threats were the move of the Social Democratic Party to the political center and its subsequent coalition with the right-wing Christian Democrats, and the so-called Notstands- gesetze, Emergency Laws, that permitted a temporary suspension of the constitution for internal security reasons (fig. 84).48

The European debates about art and politics were shaped not only by this immediate context but also by art-historical precedents in the early twentieth century. The utopian belief that art could heighten awareness of one’s surroundings provided continuity with designs for rooms and wall paintings found in Russian constructivism, De Stijl, and the Bauhaus. Contemporary curators and critics knew these movements well. The Räume und Environments catalogue cited El Lissitzky and Kurt Schwitters as forefathers, and the Italian environment retrospective Ambiente: Arte dal Futurismi alla body art (Environments: Art from Futurism to Body Art; 1976) showed reconstructions of wall paintings by Vilmos Huszar, Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Schlemmer, and others juxtaposed with contemporary environments by artists such as Daniel Buren, Robert Irwin, and Sol LeWitt.49 Lissitzky’s 1923 Proun Room received wide attention when a reconstruction toured Europe in 1965 as part of the artist’s retrospective. The Proun Room heightened viewers’ perception of space through painted wooden reliefs organized successively, according to the way one would see works during an exhibition visit—a long horizontal wooden stick, for example, emphasized the effect of spatial recession when one entered a room.50
If both pre- and postwar environments were designed to enhance perceptual and spatial awareness in order to build a critical consciousness of the world, their means often differed. While many of the earlier examples were painted, in later works the artists proved themselves inventive in using unexpected materials such as fog and foam rubber. Kaprow had correctly traced the development of environment art to the medium of painting, although he had in mind artists like Pollock rather than Lissitzky. “This idea of a total art has grown from attempts to extend the possibilities of one of the forms of painting, collage, which has led us unknowingly toward rejecting painting in any form, without, however, eliminating the use of paint.”

The postwar climate had grown indifferent, indeed hostile, to painting and its traditional, bourgeois connotations. Palermo’s use of painting did not, however, prevent his wall paintings from being associated with contemporaneous environment practices. The wall paintings were frequently commissioned and executed for exhibitions devoted exclusively to environment art; for example, the exhibition series Blockade and the Ambiente exhibition. Accordingly, critics then and now have referred to Palermo’s wall paintings as “environments” or have stressed aspects central to this category of work, especially its critical potential. Discussing the wall paintings, Max Brüderlin praised Palermo as a proponent of an “esthetic effectiveness beyond a subjective viewpoint into a totality of (collective) space,” and Laszlo Glozer described one work installed in an abandoned Munich underpass as “an instruction for critical perception.” Most important, the utopian nature of the wall paintings was stressed by Joseph Beuys, Palermo’s teacher at the Düsseldorf art academy. “He was extremely political,” Beuys claimed in 1984, several years after Palermo’s death, in terms of “a declaration of a poetic stance.” Palermo, he believed, “wanted to create order in an area reaching as far as he could manage . . . in some environment, say, a museum, where he moved something on a wall, for instance, with color. . . . You see a few structures and levels of order, which he put in some kind of a spatial concept to make something palpable: the way he imagined the order of a world that is created out of art. . . . It was certainly a message. It was definitely a kind of protest.”

Certainly wall paintings by Palermo bear striking similarities to some of Beuys’s installations of the sixties. Palermo’s first wall drawings were made with red-brown oil crayon, whose color is reminiscent of Beuys’s Braunkreuz and whose material recalls Beuys’s use of fat because of its greasy consistency. Beuys probably also mediated Palermo’s early collaborations with Henning Christiansen. The concealment of a right angle in one of the rooms in Palermo’s Tuchverspannung is a strategy found also in the work of Beuys, who filled the corners of a room with fat and felt, respectively, in Luzerner Fettraum (Lucerne Fat Room), made during the same month as Tuchverspannung, in June 1969 (fig. 85), and Filzecke (Felt Corner) (see fig. 68), made as early as 1963. The replacement of the meeting points of three perpendicularly oriented planes with triangular, diagonally oriented planes disoriented the viewers’ relationship to the space by obscuring the corners. As Beuys related, “I frequently destroy the room and negate it. At the moment when I place a human being with all his forces into a room, one has to ask oneself why our rooms are square. It comes from our whole culture. Everything is built on the right angle as a system of coordination.”

Be that as it may, Beuys may have appropriated Palermo’s work for his own causes by arguing for its political impact; as is well known, Beuys was active in seeking reforms leading to greater political participation at the Düsseldorf art academy and in society at large. Palermo had some political awareness, as his second wife, Kristin, described: “In the dramatic times, years around ’68, I cared only about...
myself. Palermo also really only cared about himself and his work. . . . We basically agreed in our political tendencies. That was in the direction of the SPD [Social Democratic Party], which was relatively modern considering the circumstances then. Constraints were to be abolished, one wanted more freedom in life and more social justice. We noticed those things and thought about them. Around that time communes came into being; that was interesting, too, changing one’s way of life. Ulrike Meinhof, who wrote for the newspaper *Konkret*—that was very exciting to us.”

In December 1965, Palermo had signed a declaration against the Vietnam War that was made as a semi-artwork by his then studio mate Immendorff (fig. 86). That probably remained Palermo’s most “activist” gesture, and arguing for a political meaning to the wall paintings would be a stretch. Certainly Immendorff thought so when he created his *Rechenschaftsberichte* (Accountability Reports) in 1973. One depicts Beuys and Palermo under criticism from the working class (fig. 87). Pointing at illustrations of a Beuys Aktion and a fictitious abstract painting by Palermo with his signature triangle, two workers demand polemically: “Stop! For whom do these artists make their work? . . . For the black painting, it requires great effort of art connoisseurs to give meaning to its meaninglessness. This kind of art only helps to veil the oppositions of capitalist society.” The charges are clear: Palermo is an abstract painter, remote from social and political realities.

Immendorff aside, characterizing the wall paintings as activist would be limiting. Beuys’s understanding typified the positive reception of the wall paintings, and we may conclude for now that Palermo’s wall paintings, by heightening the viewer’s perceptual and spatial awareness, related to conceptions of environment art as utopian. Yet phenomenological and historical approaches by no means exhaust the meanings inherent in Palermo’s wall paintings.

**PALERMO’S BANALITIES**

Along with the positive reception of the wall paintings, hostile criticism erupted in the local newspapers, and Palermo was dismissed frequently as a *Wandmaler*, an expression used derogatively in this context to describe a “mere” wall painter—that is, someone who just paints walls. These contemporary reactions, though limited, should be seen as legitimate, meaningful observations because they too were made by “someone who actually stood inside.” The first wall drawing was derided as “impressively boring” (*bestechend langweilig*), the second as noth...
ing but “bleak walls” (kahlé Wände) that “played a trick on its viewers” (Zuschauer fühlen sich veralbert). The hostile reactions, it seems, stemmed from the fact that the wall paintings bordered on artlessness, on the commonplace, and in certain aspects even pushed into the realm of banality.\(^\text{11}\) Their cheap or nonartistic materials reinforced such impressions: ordinary house paint (Herbol facade paint) was used for the positive/negative wall painting, paint chosen from a commercial color chart was used for the gray Bremerhaven wall painting, and regular undercoating was used for the Documenta wall painting.\(^\text{12}\)

Paints were applied freehand—not gesturally, of course, but to show the trace of the hand, a mode that runs counter to the expectation of uniformity in commercial interior paint jobs and left the impression that Palermo lacked skill (fig. 88). Even lines drawn in oil crayon or oil stick were drawn freehand (on top of a sketch made with a level, ruler, or thread), and their porous nature, visible for example in the photograph of the Galerie Ernst circumscription (see fig. 76), unmistakably conveyed the impression that they were applied.\(^\text{13}\) Some of the colors Palermo chose for the wall paintings were trivial—in the sense of something that is self-evident but nevertheless calls attention to itself—for example the blatantly garish orange in the Documenta piece. Other colors were banal—in the sense of something that is so self-evident that it is hardly worth mentioning—for example, the dull gray in the Bremerhaven work.\(^\text{14}\)

Palermo was most banal when following “banal schemes,” as one critic noted.\(^\text{15}\) His habit of tracing edges and filling in spaces must have seemed uninspired and simplistic to the point of childishness. Simple replication was one of the schemes in Palermo’s repertoire of banalities. For a wall painting exhibited at the Galerie Konrad Fischer in April 1970, Palermo transferred the dado running along the stairs of his apartment building, primarily meant to make scuff marks less visible, onto the gallery wall at full scale (fig. 89). Palermo stressed the everyday origin of this work. \(^\text{16}\) If one climbs up to the fifth

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**Fig. 88** Palermo painting a wall at Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Cologne, April 1971

**Fig. 89** Documentation for Treppenhaus (Staircase) (Wvz 555), shown at Galerie Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf, 7 April–2 May 1970. Collage on cardboard, c. 90 x 70 cm. Kunstmuseum Bonn.
floor every day like I do, one can beautifully see this perspective.” The invitation to the exhibition included a photograph of the staircase, although the shape was readily recognizable and visitors hardly needed the pointer. More commonly, Palermo replicated shapes found in situ, most typically in his wall circumscriptions, starting at the Galerie Ernst and culminating in the positive/negative wall painting. The white and ochre bands in the latter simply copied, as it were, the outlines of the walls and roughly corresponded in width to the door and window frames. The motif of the rectangular frame also picked up on the fluorescent lights, which formed two nested rectangles running parallel to the ceiling’s perimeter. For his second wall painting at the Kabinett für Aktuelle Kunst, shown from December 1970 to January 1971, Palermo simply transferred the shape of its dark gray storefront window frame, reduced by 15 percent, onto the adjacent interior wall (fig. 90). One could hardly miss that it was a copy. When he did the same thing with a 20 percent reduction the following month at the Kunstforum, an independent exhibition space located in a pedestrian underpass in downtown Munich, he compared his painting to a “stamp.” It was a stamp indeed: the actual painting was a replica of the existing window frame, and the concept was a replica of what he had just done. Palermo liked commonplace spaces like the underpass in downtown Munich. It is notable that two of the galleries that became sites for his wall paintings, Galerie Ernst in Hanover and Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Munich, were located in former apartment buildings, and their architecture—their scale, layout, and features such as radiators, doors, and windows—often betrayed their original residential function. And several of his wall paintings were made for semi-private spaces—the artist’s studio, the outside of a house, a conference room—or for exclusively private apartments. The banality of Palermo’s wall paintings was particularly prominent in the context of the home, when juxtaposed with furniture or with other paintings, which Palermo made no effort to remove. The documentation of his 1971 wall drawing in the apartment of Franz Dahlem in Darmstadt—a blue line wall circumscription—shows a cabinet and a hanging lamp in the background, which the artist could easily have moved or avoided for the photograph (fig. 91). An installation made during the same year with Gerhard Richter for the apartment of Six Friedrich (see fig. 152) made the point even more clearly. Here Palermo partially framed a window with a gray right angle of about a hand’s breadth. The shape reproduced half the outline of the window, running parallel to its right and bottom edges, and it filled in some of the plain area adjacent to the window, which was more spacious on the right than on the left side, thus rectify-
ing the off-center location of the window.\textsuperscript{44} Two paintings by Richter were hung to the left of the window: Vorhang (Curtain, 1964) on top and Klorolle (Toilet-Paper Roll, 1965; see fig. 153) below, both painted in his signature blurred, photo-realist style. It might have seemed challenging to match the banality of Richter’s subject matter, a toilet-paper roll and a curtain placed next to an actual window. But the gray angle succeeded by blending in with the interior. Palermo’s contribution, unlike Richter’s, was not even a painting. It was merely paint on the wall. We shall see that Palermo was neither sloppy nor inconsistent in his combination of banality with a heightened sensitivity to space and perception, and to historical and contemporary debates about the relation of art to politics. Banality was Palermo’s ingenuity.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{BANALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE}

What was the purpose and context of Palermo’s banalities? On the most basic level, his banal additions to commercial galleries and art museums would have reminded visitors that these seemingly privileged spaces were simply rooms. Especially for group exhibitions, Palermo sought out ordinary places, in three instances choosing staircases—at Documenta, in Edinburgh, and in Frankfurt—over standard display areas. If the wall paintings cannot be considered as an active part of the exhibition, as some claim, they operate as an active part of the history of museums, galleries, collectors, and art fairs that shape not only the production and distribution of works of art but also our knowledge, experience, and judgment of them.\textsuperscript{46} Take Michael Asher’s 1973 wall painting for the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Cologne (fig. 93). Having painted the ceilings of the entire gallery space in a dark gray that matched the floor, the artist described the effect of his intervention as follows: “Each and every part of the gallery was linked by the newly painted ceiling, establishing an actual visual continuity and therefore integrating the exhibition areas with those areas normally not on view. By visually unifying the various areas, their functional interdependence was revealed to the viewer who, in order to perceive the work in its totality, had to have access to all of the gallery areas. The normal procedures and functions of the gallery became integrated into the exhibit as the work focused upon them as the content of the exhibit."\textsuperscript{47} The commercial and curatorial functions of the commercial art gallery were once conceived as a gesture of negation and resistance to the proliferating German art market. Do they subvert the idea of a circulation of art commodities? In what sense can Palermo’s wall paintings be said to analyze the conditions of art exhibition spaces? Reviewing a 1973 exhibition of Palermo’s prints based on his first wall drawing at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich, the critic Reent Schwarz objected to the marketability of the new medium, which the original site-specific work had supposedly evaded. “In 1968,” he wrote, Palermo “drew lines with brown oil crayon on all large wall white areas. Where pictures used to hang, now simple drawn squares were to be seen. Of course neither the idea nor the wall could be sold. Now Palermo executed it once again as a silkscreen for sale and printed the same brown lines on white paper. But as such, in conforming to the necessities of the art market, the brown lines, which were once conceived as a gesture of negation and resistance, have been deprived of their former meaning.”\textsuperscript{48} Discussing Wandmalerei und Skulptur, a collaboration by Richter and Palermo, Glozer also emphasized the idea that it reflected on the conditions of art presentation and promotion. This was a “situation-specific installation,” specific to the space of a commercial art gallery. “A unique and consistently conceived exhibition work has replaced the supply with accumulated production (Richter’s paintings, Palermo’s cloth pictures and drawings could definitely fill exhibitions). In other words: business card has replaced commodity.”\textsuperscript{49} Palermo’s last wall painting at the Kunstverein Hamburg was received similarly. On the occasion of its temporary reconstruction in 1992, Christoph Blase described the piece as engaging a walk “through an architecture which was once conceived as an institutional critique. The controversy surrounding the original exhibition in 1973 noted, “A sensational exhibition of the Kunstverein: it exhibits its own walls.”\textsuperscript{50} The controversy surrounding the original exhibition in the popular press demonstrated the implications of Palermo’s exhibition of an exhibition space. By questioning whether his wall painting was in fact art or simply a resistance to the proliferating German art market? Do they subvert the idea of a circulation of art commodities? In what sense can Palermo’s wall paintings be said to analyze the conditions of art exhibition spaces? 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Wandstreich (a Streich is a silly trick that fools its audience), one could argue, this heated debate underlined the work’s nature as institutional critique. It generated widespread discussion about the definition of art, in particular the role of skill and effort in producing art, and about the significance of the value and quality of materials used.95 These lines of argument apply to almost any wall painting by Palermo, or, for that matter, to any wall work by any other artist. Yet such generalities are precisely what successful institutional critique, as an analysis of the materialist conditions of art, must defy and move beyond. A compelling case can be made for viewing two Palermo works as institutional critiques, however. Between 1970 and 1971, Palermo made the only wall work he ever did for his own studio, drawing a graphite line parallel to the outlines of one of the walls in his Mönchengladbach studio, one inside and one outside (fig. 94).96 Never visible at the same time, the two lines nevertheless always referred to each other. They thus established a mental continuity between inside and outside, between the artist’s semi-private space and a public space outside it. Yet viewers, and above all Palermo himself, always experienced the lines as separate, a fact that created a dramatic rupture between conceptual knowledge and actual experience, demonstrating a classic philosophical problem. Moreover, much like Daniel Buren’s call for making art outside the studio, Palermo’s wall drawing can thus be read as visualizing the desire or need to unite artistic activity with public life. Unlike Buren, however, Palermo renders this desire as perpetually unfulfilled.97 Even more convincing in its play with the founding constituents of art is the blue triangle multiple edition, which Palermo himself probably considered part of his wall paintings.98
Yet the blue triangle wall paintings from the kit edition and the Mönchengladbach studio drawing clearly represent exceptions. While we may find elements of institutional critique in Palermo’s other wall paintings, none of them visually or conceptually articulates a critical attitude toward the institution of art beyond the simple, general fact that they are applied to gallery or museum walls. One should also note that while Palermo exhibited most of his wall paintings in galleries and museums, a number of them were made or proposed for other settings, both private and public, indoors and outdoors. Three proposals for school buildings, for example, remained unexecuted: one for a night school in Mönchengladbach mentioned earlier, and one for the university library in Freiburg.  

**GERMAN POP INTERIORS**

Palermo’s particular brand of banality brings to mind other canonical, primarily American postwar art, such as Ellsworth Kelly’s noncompositional paintings in France and Jasper Johns’s *Flag*. There is, however, a more historically and geographically immediate context that is more specifically relevant in its focus on interiors and decoration. Richter, Polke, and Konrad Lueg (the name under which Konrad Fischer, Palermo’s dealer and friend, produced) were part of a loose group whose art came to be known as capitalist realism. When Palermo began painting walls five years after their first group exhibition in an abandoned shop in Düsseldorf, he was in part responding to the legacy of his older friends, who had placed the banality of home decor and living environments at the core of their art and its success. As with Palermo, banality, in their words “means a little bit more than unimportant.”

On the evening of 11 October 1963, Richter and Lueg organized *Leben mit Pop.* a *Demonstration für den kapitalistischen Realismus (Living with Pop: A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism)* in the Düsseldorf furniture store Möbelhaus Berges (fig. 95). The performance consisted of three parts. Visitors were greeted by life-size sculptures of the dealer Alfred Schmela and President Kennedy, gathered in a waiting room decorated with antlers, then were called in groups to enter an “average living room,” where the two artists lounged on furniture placed on pedestals. A television was running next to a table set for a meal, flowers and the magazine *Schöner Wohnen* were placed on a tea cart, and the odor of a pine-scented air freshener filled the room. Accompanied by dance music that was periodically interrupted by ads for furniture, the duo took visitors on tours through, in their own words, “the entire department store on display without alterations.” Eight of their paintings were added to a “comprehensive furniture exhibition of all current styles on four floors.”

Three years later, Lueg followed up *Leben mit Pop* with the little-known exhibition event *Kaffee und Kuchen (Coffee and Cake)* at Galerie Schmela (fig. 96). The gallery was turned into a dining room that displayed on flower-patterned wallpaper a selection of Lueg’s paintings of decorative patterns taken from washcloths, wallpaper, and the like, as well as Richter’s portrait of Alfred Schmela. Invited friends came for coffee and cake, and were seated at a long table set with pretty china, napkins, and tableware. Richter, meanwhile, continued to feature curtains and toilet rolls, chairs and chandeliers, pillows and pianos in his blur paintings, although his iconography of banality was never limited to the home and included mass media imagery ranging from German Shepherds and fashion models to pyramids and portraits.

The “average living room” also became a central theme for Polke, who began to incorporate into his paintings actual fragments of decorative fabric. K. H. Hölzdicke had used patterned fabric as a background for his 1962 painting *Chirina* (see fig. 67), but it was Polke who first made this type of material a main feature of a painting, in his 1964 *Das Palmen Bild* (see fig. 66). He used fabric increasingly during 1965 in paintings like *Böhrnen (Beans)* and continued to do so throughout the 1960s. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, in his 1976 essay on Polke, describes the cloth as “elloquent decorative fabrics of cheap origin, Klein- kariertes [an untranslatable term meaning both small checked patterns and narrow-mindedness] from the domestic sphere or carnival silks with colors and ornaments far beyond good and bad taste, moon and stars, skulls and pirate bones, chimney stacks made of artificial silk.” Nevertheless, Lueg’s adapted patterns paradoxically appear less transformed and more banal (as opposed to trivial) than Polke’s found fabrics. While Polke’s painting tends to work against the found grounds in his signature bad-taste style, Lueg’s patterns remain the exclusive motif, and any additions to the patterns blend right into the fabric in such and as borders, misprints, and trompe l’oeil effects of folded or superimposed paper.

Like the fabric and colors of Palermo’s cloth pictures, the banality so central to German pop and to Palermo’s wall paintings must be seen in the context of the economic miracle. In an era of increasing availability of goods and rising standards of living, there had been much argument among artists and critics about German pop. Was it ironic or indifferent, funny or resigned? Did these artists criticize the self-satisfied consumerism of the economic miracle, the petit-bourgeois lifestyle with its so-called volkstümlich (popular-traditionalist) taste, or did they embrace its iconography and materials precisely to renounce the critical potential of art? “Lueg’s homage to washcloth and towel is a celebration of modern life. One will search in vain for a biting social critique;” the dealer Hans Strelow warned in his essay for Lueg’s 1966 exhibition at Galerie René Block; “Let’s learn to enjoy our environment.”

The dealer Block himself on the other hand argued that, inspired by “more banal and more narrow-minded patterns than American pop art, these artists rendered ironic the behavior of the German petite bourgeoisie [des deutschen Spießertum], which came through the war unbroken,” and the writer Heinz Offh insisted that the capitalist realists “took the banal and surmounted it.” In a world full of banalities,

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he continued, these artists “took back what commerce had taken from them: the image.” Later scholars have tended to stress the critical aspects. Buchloh, a contemporary of Polke’s but writing on his 1960s work from the perspective of the mid-seventies, firmly situated the artist’s use of fabrics in the context of the “homely hangings and fashionable costumes of the subcultural proletariat of the 1950s in the West German Republic.” Polke’s early work, in Buchloh’s estimation, was an ironic negation of the bourgeois demand for a subjective art, while Richter’s was a working through of the possibility of realist painting and a resistance to the culture industry.

Palermo and the capitalist realists focused on banality as it was located in the everyday lived environment and as they witnessed it during the years of the economic miracle. Yet Palermo’s wall paintings lacked the ambivalent attitude toward banality that was at the core of German pop art. His banality resided in the forms, in the making, and in the materials and was therefore less overt, more genuine and generic, and was never class or group specific. Palermo’s wall paintings repositioned the capitalist realist theme of the banal interior by placing it in juxtaposition to contemporary environments and by stressing its decorative aspects.

DEcoration

The phenomenological concerns of the wall paintings, within the utopian framework of European environments, and their banal qualities, related to German pop, are tendencies that coexist in each of Palermo’s wall paintings as tendencies that coexist at the time of the wall paintings. Indeed, Palermo exaggerates and extends the decorative aspects of all kinds operate in the wall paintings, most obviously in the positive/negative painting. The critic Günter Pfeiffer called the work “spatial design,” elaborating that Palermo “practices a mimicry of classicism, which sometimes leads us to speculate that he has joined the coffered ceiling painters of the eighteenth century.” The linear painted frames were reminiscent of molding, and basic decorative strategies such as reversed symmetry and the balance of line and plane were used. Palermo also characterized two types of ornament, Zierathen (ornament) and Parure (paragen). For the former effect to be the traditional purview of art and the latter that of nonart, we can see that decoration in Palermo’s wall paintings can be strategies. In his deconstruction of Immanuel Kant’s Critik der Urteilskraft (Critique of Judgment), Derrida’s Parergon essay—a chapter of his 1978 La Vérité en peinture (The Truth in Painting)—examines the German Enlightenment thinker’s distinction between two types of ornament, Zierathen (ornament) and Parure (paragen), on the one hand, and Schmuck (adornment) and Parure on the other. Following Kant, the parergon, although not an intrinsic part of the beautiful object, formally enhances its beautiful qualities and thus provides disinterested pleasure; Schmuck, by contrast, takes away from them and provides mere enjoyment.

Derrida reveals and insists on the uncertainty of these distinctions. A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the ergon, the work done, the fact, the work,” he writes, “but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board. It is first of all the bota[b]order.”

Derrida specifically deconstructs the three examples Kant gives of Parerga—garments on statues, columns in architecture, and frames for paintings, noting, “[The] frame is problematical. I do not know what is essential and what is accessory, neither proper nor improper, and that Kant calls parergon, for example the frame. Where does the frame take place? Does it take place where it begins? Where does it end? What is its internal limit. Its external limit. And its surface between the two limits.”

Not surprisingly, the frame features prominently in the circumscriptions, the motif that occupied Palermo the most while working on walls. The frame collapses the strong impact and the barely there; the painting intervened at the time of the banal. But decorative aspects of all kinds operate in the wall paintings, most obviously in the positive/negative painting. The critic Günter Pfeiffer called the work “spatial design,” elaborating that Palermo “practices a mimicry of classicism, which sometimes leads us to speculate that he has joined the coffered ceiling painters of the eighteenth century.” The linear painted frames were reminiscent of molding, and basic decorative strategies such as reversed symmetry and the balancing of line and plane were used. Palermo exaggerated this decorative feel in a second version, a collaboration with Richter, in which he painted all four walls ocher framed by a white stripe.

Many other wall paintings carried ornamental connotations. A reviewer of the two wall paintings at the Galerie Ernst exhibition wondered whether Palermo was “going for ingenious decoration in impressive rooms.” The stretched cloth and linear wall circumscription did, in fact, recall historical decorative schemes, such as the ornamental coverings or highlighting of corners and edges in baroque and rococo interiors or the use of textiles to decorate walls.

The decorative effect was enhanced by the fabric’s placement parallel to the truck lighting and the line’s placement parallel to the outlines of the walls. We also know that for the latter, Palermo snapped a chalk line to create straight lines, thus making use of a traditional technique common among architects and interior designers. Palermo also liked decorative dados, not only transferred (as in the Fischer exhibition) but also in situ. In the staircase of the Frankfurter Kunstverein he simply painted and filled in the wall segment beneath the banister, as visible today in its reconstruction. We may recall in this context Palermo’s blue triangle edition and other triangles, placed above doors and reminiscent of pediments. Palermo’s wall painting for the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, with its continuous line of blue triangles around the room, appears particularly decorative because it echoes the traditional location of stucco decoration. Sometimes, Palermo intervened directly in a preexisting decorative feature such as stucco. At the Kunsthalle Münster and the Ernst exhibition series entitled 14 x 14 (fig. 97), the artist painted a narrow blue line beneath the frieze of the large, open exhibition space, thereby expanding on the preexisting ornament. Indeed, Palermo referred to it as ausschmücken, “decoration.” Next to the old stucco, the blue line seemed cheap and false, bordering on kitsch, as one critic stated. But other photographs show yet one can infer from other critics’ reports that despite its banality the line also caused viewers to feel estranged in the vast, empty space by underlining the large scale of the room.

Similarly, for the 1970 exhibition STRATEGIE: GET ARTS at Edinburgh’s College of Art (figs. 98, 99), Palermo painted a line in the center of the white
Fig. 97. Untitled wall painting in the large salon, Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, for exhibition '14 x 14 36–28 June 1970'. Plakafarbe on wall, room: 1203 x 1204 x 585 cm.

Fig. 98. Blu/Gelb/Wei/Re (Blue/Yellow/White/Red) (detail), at the STRATEGY: GET ARTS exhibition, Edinburgh College of Art, 23 August–12 September 1970, 2005 reconstruction. Acrylic paint on wall, dimensions unknown.

Fig. 99. Blu/Gelb/Wei/Re (Blue/Yellow/White/Red) (detail), at the STRATEGY: GET ARTS exhibition, Edinburgh College of Art, 23 August–12 September 1970, 2005 reconstruction. Acrylic paint on wall, dimensions unknown.
architrave on each of the four off-white walls surrounding the grand entrance stairwell of the building: one red, one blue, one yellow, and one white. Palermo had chosen this space early on before seeing it in person; in fact, notes from a conversation that included Palermo and other participating artists indicate that they agreed to “use the main entrance with its columns” and “to challenge rather than hide the frieze architecture.”

To this day the space remains unchanged, complete with replicas of Parthenon sculptures on the landing and at the top of the stairs, which the “Palermo Restore Project” in 2005 took as an opportunity to reconstruct Palermo’s wall painting based on an optical match of color samples. Decoration here too opens up phenomenological and banal aspects in intricate ways comparable perhaps only to the positive/negative wall painting. An experience of the Edinburgh work was and is disorienting, even precarious (as was the installation process, as testified by photographs showing the artist on an extremely tall freestanding ladder; fig. 100). By painting the stripes in different colors, Palermo disrupted the unified neoclassical wall designs and reinforced the latently disorienting effect of the Imperial-style stairway, in which a straight flight of stairs comes to a landing, then turns 180 degrees and becomes two parallel flights. In either climbing or descending the stairs the viewer switches directions two times and thus faces a different-colored stripe three times. This causes the viewer to turn and look back repeatedly in an effort to see the work as a whole and unravel its underlying system. Gazing upward, a viewer pays less attention to his or her movement than might be advisable for a person moving up or down stairs. Although it is impossible ever to see the whole work at once, viewers can slowly begin to understand Palermo’s rationale, especially if they watch the light flooding through the skylight change over the course of a day: the dark blue stripe is located on the north side, the yellow on the east, the bright white on the south, and the red on the west. Yet understanding the color system does surprisingly little to ameliorate the disturbing experience of the space, which is the same over and over again. Palermo returned to the idea of playing with a suggestion of systems that remain irresolvable in the context of the times of day in his later work.

As in so many group exhibitions that provided an occasion for Palermo to make a new wall painting, his environmental and phenomenological premise was echoed in other works on view at STRATEGIES: GET ARTS. The exhibition, whose title is based on a palindrome by André Thomkins, was dedicated to contemporary art from Düsseldorf and organized for the Edinburgh Festival of Art by the local dealer Richard Demarco in collaboration with Karl Ruhrberg of the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and the Zero artist Günther Uecker. In reviewing the show, Guy Brett, like other critics, posited that the best works “challenge the feeling of musty antiquity given by the art school building.” He cited as examples a “mechanism repeatedly banging the time-worn door of a life-classroom in the basement” by Uecker, whose other contribution to the exhibition was even more physically threatening: a narrow corridor with knives pushed through the walls facing the visitors on both sides. Brett also remarked upon Klaus Rinke’s “coiled water cannon which sends a jet through the front door that you have to squeeze past,” which by its location effectively framed Palermo’s piece. Stefan Wewerka’s installation was even closer in both location and spirit: his smashed chairs littered the stairs to the second floor—making it even harder for visitors to navigate Palermo’s wall painting (fig. 101). Other environments included Graubner’s Nebelraum (Fog Room), discussed above, words projected on walls by Ferdinand Krivot, and a reflective light sculpture by Adolf Luther.

Paired with this intense engagement of the viewer, which included the experience of color, was an almost flippant attitude, toward color in particular. Generally speaking, Palermo’s choice of primary colors seems uninspired half a century after prewar avant-gardists like Piet Mondrian and other DeStijl members turned them into an icon of purity. More
specifically, the colors were banal not only because they were found but also because they were emblematic, even heraldic. Blue, red, yellow, and white stripes were the insignia of the Edinburgh College of Art, displayed on scarves worn by students at the time and on view in a vitrine set in the entryway during the exhibition. That Palermo probably knew about this emblematic aspect of the colors is suggested by his initial plans to include some form of flag in his installation. In placing the colors on the ceremonial entrance staircase, Palermo tied his wall painting to the medium’s popular, heraldic heritage.

The colors Palermo chose for his wall paintings were often appropriated from the realms of design and decoration and thus echoed his interest in found colors in the cloth pictures. The orange color of the Documenta 5 wall painting corresponds to the signature color that the curator and designers had chosen for the exhibition: the ring-binder catalogue was a striking orange, and the locations for the thematic subdivisions were indicated in the catalogue by orange areas in the ground plans. Dahlem speculates that Palermo’s blue line for the Baden-Baden wall painting was borrowed from the architect Michael Gottlieb Bindesbøll’s Thorvaldsen Museum (1839–48) in Copenhagen, since the Danish neoclassical sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen had been important to Palermo and since, as art historian Susanne Küper noted, Palermo probably visited the museum on the occasion of an exhibition in Copenhagen three years earlier (fig. 102). The reddish-brown color in Palermo’s last wall painting in Hamburg was reportedly inspired by a color the artist had seen in a brewery and bar on the Rhine in Düsseldorf. And Richter and Fred Jahn, a partner in the Galerie Heiner Friedrich for a while, recalled that Palermo’s choice of ocher for a collaboration with Richter (and thus probably also for the positive/negative wall painting) was inspired by what Palermo referred to as Bayerischer (or Münchener) Ocker (Bavarian or Munich Ocher). Jahn recalls that Palermo “had expressed his wish to choose a color for the wall painting that related to Munich.”
He described going with Palermo to visit Munich’s Ludwigskirche, which was built between 1829 and 1844 by Friedrich Gärtner and decorated with frescoes by Peter von Cornelius. That unusual church’s interior polychrome decoration, especially its blue ceiling with a regular pattern of small golden stars, is structured by means of golden frames; the frescoes are dominated by ochre tones. Ocher more generally dominates the neoclassical architecture of Munich, including the seventeenth-century landmark Theatinerkirche and the facades of the Ludwigstrasse and the Maximilianstrasse, where the Galerie Heiner Friedrich was located (fig. 103).127 While Bavarians were unlikely to miss the local connotations of the positive/negative wall painting in Munich, the reference may have escaped the Rhineland audience for the follow-up work with Richter in Cologne. That risk may explain why Palermo chose to exaggerate by other means the decorative dimension in the collaborative work, that is, by painting all four walls instead of merely the two facing ones.

As with his interest in the phenomenological and the banal, Palermo’s pursuit of the decorative had a historical context. Ornament and decoration had emerged as a major theme in German painting during the 1960s. The 1965 exhibition Ornament? Ohne Ornament (Ornament? Without Ornament) in Zurich and Munich had introduced the topic, which was given extensive public attention three years later in another exhibition, Ornamentale Tendenzen in der zeitgenössischen Malerei (Ornamental Tendencies in Contemporary Painting) in Berlin and Leverkusen. So-called New Ornamental Painting was the focus of articles and talks by the writer Klaus Hoffmann, whose work culminated in a comprehensive study in 1970.128 Artists associated with this trend were members of the SYN group and included Klaus Jürgen-Fischer, Rolf Gunter Dienst, Jürgen Claus, Werner Schrieb, and Otmar Alt (fig. 104). Pop and op art, color-field painting, and signal art were also part of these discussions. All this new painting, it was believed, shared an ornamental vocabulary of contour and line, repetition, symmetry, and stylized representation. Unlike Palermo’s three-dimensional use of these elements, however, the New Ornamentalists focused exclusively on ornament as it applied to the plane of the canvas. In fact, much effort was spent on distinguishing the quasi-autonomous ornament in painting from “superficial, light-hearted ornamental art, simplistic applied art, flat wall decoration, [and] wallpaper art.”129

The Derridean parergon—exemplified by the border, decoration, and ornament—problematises distinctions between what is internal and what is external to a work of art: “Are psychological, economic, political, and technical motives always extrinsic?” Derrida asked.130 In the tradition of the Austrian art historians Alois Riegl and Ernst Gombrich, who argued for the social, psychological, and historical meanings of ornament, many critics during the 1960s claimed that ornamental painting was historically and socially resonant. The theorist Hans Heinz Holz compared ornaments to hieroglyphs, arguing that their forms carried coded meanings. The ornament, he wrote, has “emblematic character, which potentially makes it akin to heraldry and totems. The social may thus play into it at least indirectly.” Hoffmann and Jürgen Claus also understood ornament as a “means of man’s self-representation,” as part of a human process to understand the world: its laws, its totality, its details.131 How these abstract shapes encoded “the world” and, above all, what exactly they signified, remained unexplained.

Here lies the first crux of Palermo’s wall paintings: they do use decoration to open up meanings about “the world.” By playfully exploring different avenues available to him at the time—environments, banality, and decoration—Palermo stumbled onto something rarely pursued: historically resonant abstract painting. The wall paintings are firmly tied to their times on several levels. Decorative forms are used, on the one hand, to participate in environment efforts to heighten viewers’ perceptual consciousness, one of several positions in the art and politics debates, and, on the other, to develop the German pop art.
theme of the banal interior, which was related to the economic miracle. In effect, decoration operates ambivalently: its phenomenological use depends on hyperawareness of the unfamiliar, its banal use on a familiarity that goes almost unnoticed; one use refers to a climax of criticality, the other to the epitome of complacency. Decoration in the wall paintings thus creates an interplay between these poles, which essentially coexist yet also alternate by questioning each other. (Because of this alternation, Palermo’s wall paintings are not ironic, for that would imply a hierarchy between the phenomenological and the banal, with one being the overt meaning and the other the implied one.) Palermo’s wall paintings do not simply support or reject art’s potential to improve our perception, our criticality, and our world. They are more nuanced. Amid the utopian debates about art and politics, and the revival of the prewar avant-garde’s vision, the wall paintings project through their banal qualities caution and skepticism about the success of critical art, especially in a nation enthralled with its “economic miracle.” Yet in the aftermath of that consumerist utopia come true, the phenomenological qualities of the wall paintings push toward critical reflection.

 Appropriately so, for these were times that called for skepticism toward both a knee-jerk criticality and a blissful lack of criticality. When Palermo began to exhibit his wall paintings at the end of 1968, much of what that year had stood for was starting to disintegrate, especially in Germany. Students there had far less popular support than their French peers, and they were unable to disrupt state authority to the same extent. Following 1968 the united front of Leninist or Maoist Communist K-Groups to violent incursions from subcultural living communes to numerous Leninist or Maoist Communist K-Groups to violent organizations like the RAF (Red Army Faction). In the wake of these developments Palermo was one of the few artists who questioned the social and political effectiveness of their artistic practice. In turn, following the aversion of a threatened recession, many Germans were trying hard to hold on to their newfound standards of living and acted as if nothing had ever happened. 

**ABSTRACTION AND DECORATION**

Palermo’s wall paintings resonate historically not only with contemporary debates on art and politics and the aftermath of the German economic miracle, but also more broadly with the tradition of abstract painting. Palermo persisted in painting at a time when the medium, with the exception of New Or-mental Painting, had largely fallen out of favor—environment artists chose new experimental media over traditional ones, and German pop artists mocked both painting and abstraction. This may be the reason why today Palermo is widely considered a painter’s painter and an artist’s artist. In his subtle solutions, he always optimistically chose open-ended possibilities over foreclosure. Palermo’s wall paintings cleared a meaningful space for painting amid the seemingly irreconcilable poles of phenomenological effects and banal qualities. In the course of doing so, they confronted head-on the ambiva-

lent role decoration had assumed with respect to abstraction. By venturing into decoration, Palermo engaged abstract painting’s own history, its foundations

and fears.

A comprehensive treatment of the complex relation between the development of abstract painting and decoration remains to be written. What Palermo’s technique differentiates his wall paintings from classicizing room decorations, not so much the second, we do not know whether he did so to loosen up the straight line, as she claims, or only to hide the irreg-

ularities created by the masking tape. KÜper grants that Palermo “played with the sharp division between art and everyday as much as with the one between spatial decoration and the visual arts.” In the end, however, she believes that the wall paintings show “how close Palermo moved toward the border of wall decoration,” a claim that still implies an op-

position between abstraction and decoration rather than the complicated, at times daunting, negotiation of these terms that I propose for them. The wall paintings operate within two gray zones: the area between the phenomenological and the banal and the space between abstraction and decora-

tion. What is that point at which acceptable deco-

rative qualities become a threat? How banal, how obviously found, and how much part of the everyday environment can abstract painting be and still be noticed, still have a perceptual impact, and still pass as art? Some early oil paintings by Palermo, dating from 1965, addressed these questions through the lens of decoration. Flipper (fig. 105), for example, is a grid of red and white squares delimited by blue lines, an essentially modular grid that appears to be cut off on the left. The cropping (exaggerated even further in a 1970 print of the same motif) visually betrays its found, transferred nature, if not necessarily its origin: the side of a pinball machine, called Flipper in German, in Palermo’s favorite bar. Here we have the decorative virtues of dazzling and flickering colors, and of flat and all-over surfaces, but we also have the decorative threat that this is simply a commonplace, pretty pattern. 

Yet Gottschaller recently proposed a correction of the painting’s title based on the inscription “R./H.” found both on the stretcher bar and on the reverse of the canvas, a reference to Ratinger Hof, the name of the bar where the pinball machine stood. Given that the image reappears in drawing and print form in 1970 under the title Flipper, Gottschaller speculates that Palermo may have had in mind to refer to the painting as Flipper because the “R./H.” was too cumbersome. Almost two years into the pro-
duction of his wall paintings, however, the artist may have been additionally motivated to use the alternate title in order to make accessible to viewers the visual connotations and conceptual apparatus of its decorative basis. 

First Abstract Watercolor, Wassily Kandinsky noted, “A terrifying abyss of all kinds of questions, a wealth of responsibilities stretched before me. And most important of all: What is to replace the missing object? The danger of ornament revealed itself clearly to me; the dead semblance of stylized forms I found merely repugnant.” Clement Greenberg eloquently summed up the simultaneous reliance on and fear of decoration in abstract painting. “Decoration is the specter that haunts modernist painting, and part of the latter’s formal mission is to find ways of using the decorative against itself.” Late impressionism and fauvism, for Greenberg, “stapen the problem by increasing the tension between decorative means and non-decorative ends.”

Decoration was long felt by artists to be threaten-

ing because of its nonart connotations. For Derrida, “This additive . . . is threatening. Its use is critical. It involves a risk.” Many writers on Palermo have thus ignored or actively refuted the decorative aspects that I believe are central to his wall paintings. Based on a more narrow view of decorative wall painting, Bernhart Schwenk wrote, “In contrast to conventional wall painting, Palermo did not employ the sign on the wall in the sense of decoration or an ornament. . . . Palermo’s painting was supposed neither to cover or hide the wall nor to negate the architecture, which was the goal of illusionistic painting and decoration remains to be written. What Palermo’s technique differentiates his wall paintings from class-

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duction of his wall paintings, however, the artist may have been additionally motivated to use the alternate title in order to make accessible to viewers the visual connotations and conceptual apparatus of its decorative basis.
To see how this ambivalent view of decoration vis-à-vis abstraction enters the wall paintings, let us turn one last time to the positive/negative wall painting. The ochre wall places the viewer at a contemplative distance, for it reads as a monochrome picture, on a white wall or in a white frame, thus embodying many of the virtues of the decorative in abstract painting: nonobjectivity, planarity, and color intensity. The white wall, on the other hand, is part of the viewer’s space in that it reads as a white wall framed by ochre ornament, thus making the modernist nightmare of the decorative come true: it is barely noticed, blending in with the architecture and immersed in our actual environment. Palermo dramatically juxtaposed the banality of decoration with the decorative as large-scale abstract painting. In this installation, the space between the two is decisively open. It is a space for the viewer both to occupy and to contemplate.

Palermo painted his last wall painting proper in 1973 at the Kunsthalle in Hamburg (fig. 106). The Hamburg exhibition area consisted of a large room featuring a central formation of six freestanding walls, which Palermo painted an even reddish brown. A suitable ending to Palermo’s career as a wall painter, this work overstated the case made above all in the positive/negative wall painting: the simultaneous existence of merely painted walls and an imposing gigantic monochrome that was now a sculptural object.