

Luke Ben, 'Kees Goudzwaard - Assembling the right model is as intensive as the painting process that follows it. If necessary I take months or years of pondering', Art World, nr.10, April / May 2009, p.72-75.

Kees Goudzwaard

"Assembling the right model is as intensive as the painting process that follows it. If necessary I take months or years of pondering"

KEES GOUDZWAARD makes works which at first sight appear to be minimal colour studies constructed from rectangles of paper and masking tape. But seen close up, the works are revealed as painstakingly created trompe l'oeil paintings. Goudzwaard initially makes a model using papers and tape arranged over a coloured ground, often taking long periods to arrive at a final composition, before he makes a painted illusion of them to exact scale. The works range from those featuring several overlapping planes of rectangles in varying degrees of transparency and opacity to apparent blizzards of masking tape over fields of brightly hued colour. Goudzwaard fuses art separated by three centuries – playfully precise 17th-century Dutch still life paintings, and pre- and postwar abstraction in Europe and America – making his works both immediately arresting and enduringly captivating. INTERVIEW: Ben Luke

Does your surname have a meaning?

It does. In English, it's Goldsword.

Your work brings together two well-known traditions – still-life painting and grid-based abstraction. How do you reconcile these?

The connection was inevitable once I had decided to render the paper model in paint. I attempt to find the right place, space and time for each part of the image, just like the still life painters did, I suppose. While making up my mind about a model I assemble and arrange fragile materials that embody a sense of temporality, of "fleeting existence", like in the vanitas images. When painting the model, each movement of adjusting material to the surface is fixed. It's a frozen moment. Like in the pin boards made by Van Hoogstraaten and Gijsbrechts in the 17th century, the image coincides with the picture plane of the canvas – the composition can be freely spread out over the surface and the illusory depth is reduced to just half an inch or less. Grid paintings also show an all-over approach to the surface. But the scale of their imaginary elements is more ambiguous because of their purely abstract motives. I want to activate both those approaches to scale at the same time in the same image.

Are your paintings exact references to the models that prompt them, or does improvisation take over at a certain point in the process?

Actually they are rather exact. I want to build up a painting like I build up the paper model, layer by layer. The paint layer is akin to the thin paper and foil that I use in the model, so it's more or less like making a substitute in paint for each piece of paper and transparent material. Assembling the right model is just as intensive as the painting process that follows it. If necessary I take months or even years of pondering to decide

whether or not it will work out right, so I'm usually ready for it when I start the actual painting. But yes, there are moments when I decide some aspects have to be adapted to get the image I want. Then I get back to the model, change whatever is needed there and then start rebuilding the painting in the same way.

Is the scale of the model always the same as the final painting, or do you ever expand or reduce the paintings?

The scale of the depicted model is always 1:1. When there is more to be done to establish the relationship between the character of an image and the size of the canvas, I build a new model to work that out again in another painting.

In using illusionistic devices, do you intend to subvert the purity of Modernist abstraction?

Not at all. I belong to a generation that doesn't have to struggle to define and set, in a formal sense, the outer borders of painting any more. But I do feel I have to establish some of that purity on my own terms. To move it further a little bit. And I am interested in the euphoria that was felt when these basic abstract discoveries were made between the two wars in Europe and, later on, in the 60s and 70s, in the US.

Because of your nationality, it's easy to assume that Mondrian is an important reference. Is he any more so than any other artist?

I consider Mondrian to be an outstanding artist who was part of a very stimulating period in art. We could label his work as "Dutch". But from that perspective, I also think it hard to imagine that Robert Rymann really isn't a Dutch artist. I like their clarity, which I can fortunately find in many different times and places.

Does the tape ever refer to things in the world? Some works seem to reflect snow or ticker tape, for instance.

The tape is mostly used in the models as a device to literally hold everything together. It also blends illusion with abstraction. In some monochrome paintings the tape is only shown as line fragments rearranged in ways that have to do with the organisation of things in daily life, with structures in general and with the way things are brought together and displayed in different ways. The way snow falls is a nice example. In these paintings the structure, the movement and the space around it are most important. These images are more closely connected to drawing.

Are the swatches of tape in some way a metaphor for brushmarks?

They do act in a similar way when I assemble the models. Like I said before, they show the direct movement and the moment of attaching it to the surface.

How does each work begin?

It starts with colour space. This usually has to do with all kinds of memory impulses that need to be condensed. So actually it starts with memory of colour. Each step, each layer in the painting should remain visible in some way and play an active role in the image. The first layer is very important; it's the key of the painting.

Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?

I would have "River View", painted by Salomon van Ruysdael in 1645. It's the only picture I know of that comes close to the memory that I have of the light and the landscape where I lived when I was a child. Strangely enough the image suits my memory better than the actual area itself when I visit it from time to time.



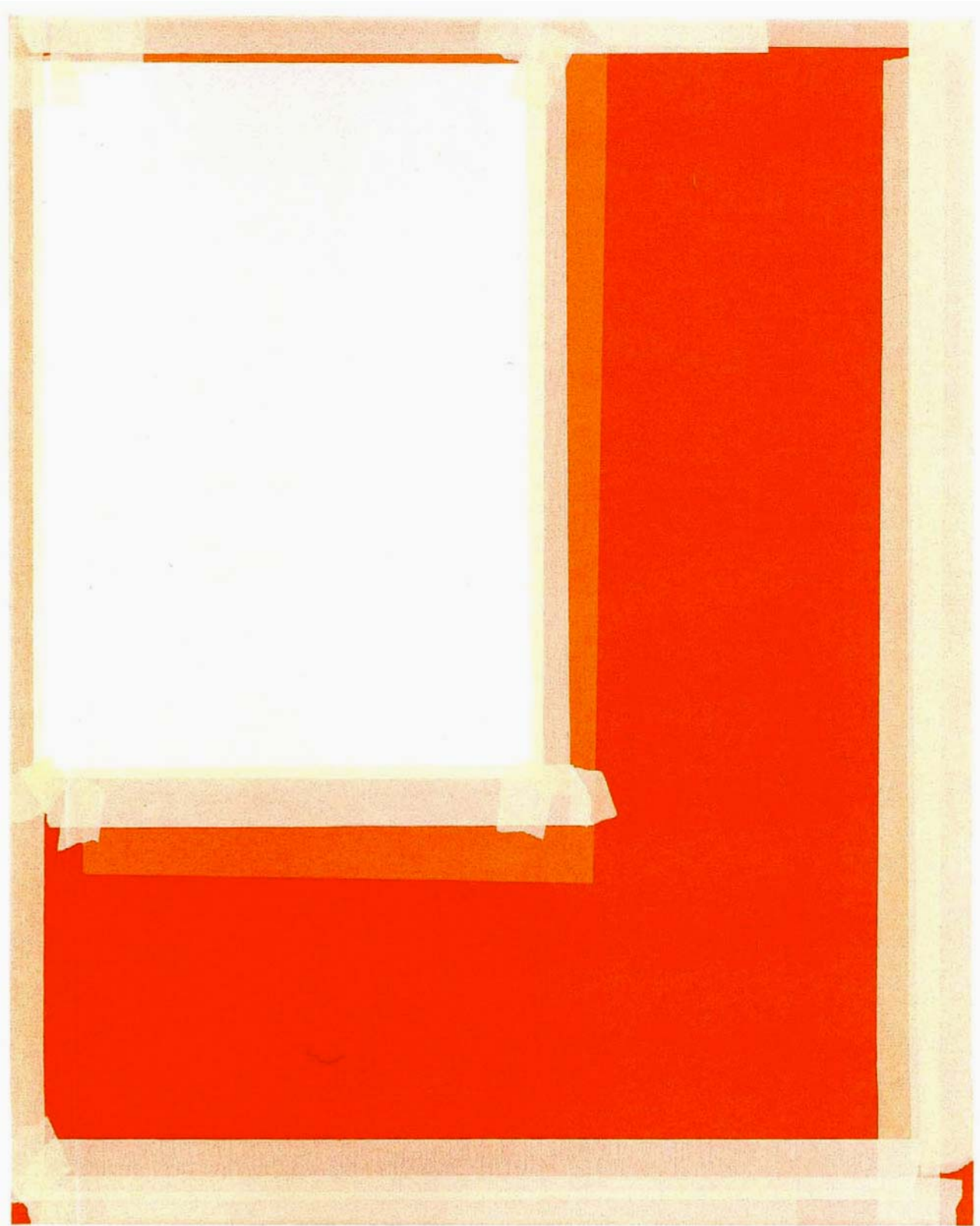
Born: 1958, Utrecht, The Netherlands Studied: Academy of Visual Arts, Arnhem, The Netherlands Lives and works: Arnhem Represented: Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium



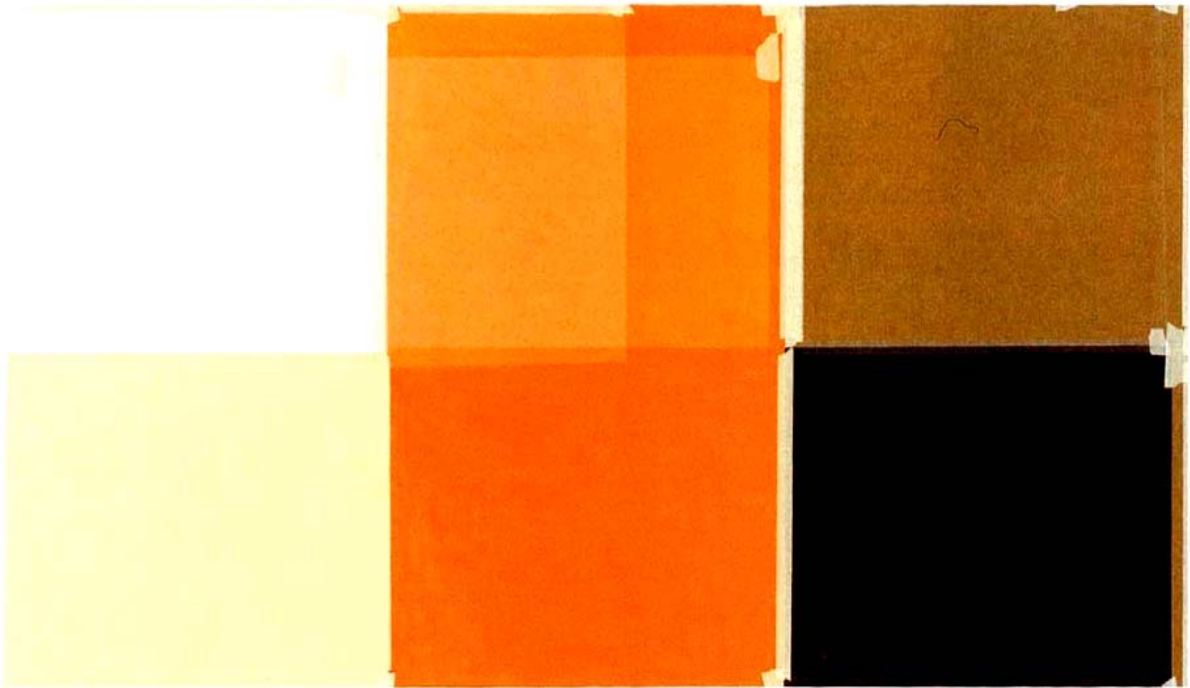
1 **Brief Note** (2006)
oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm

2 **Filter** (2007)
oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm

3 **Provisory Space** (2009)
oil on canvas, 100 x 75cm



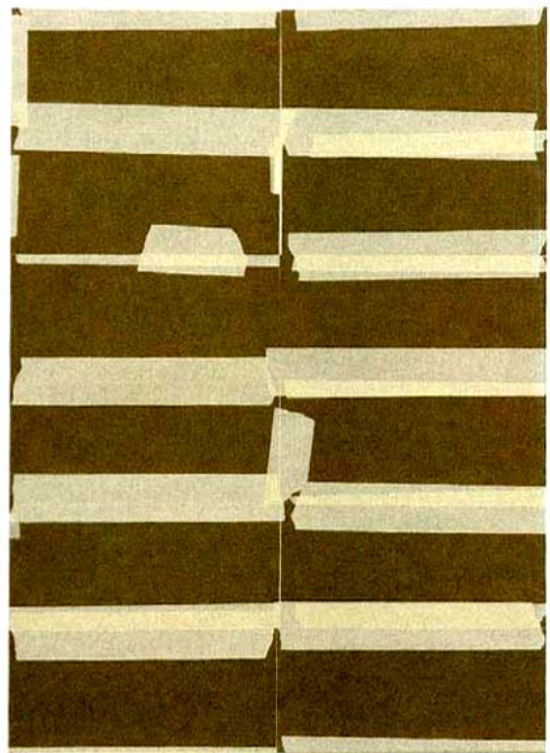
Angular (2008), oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm



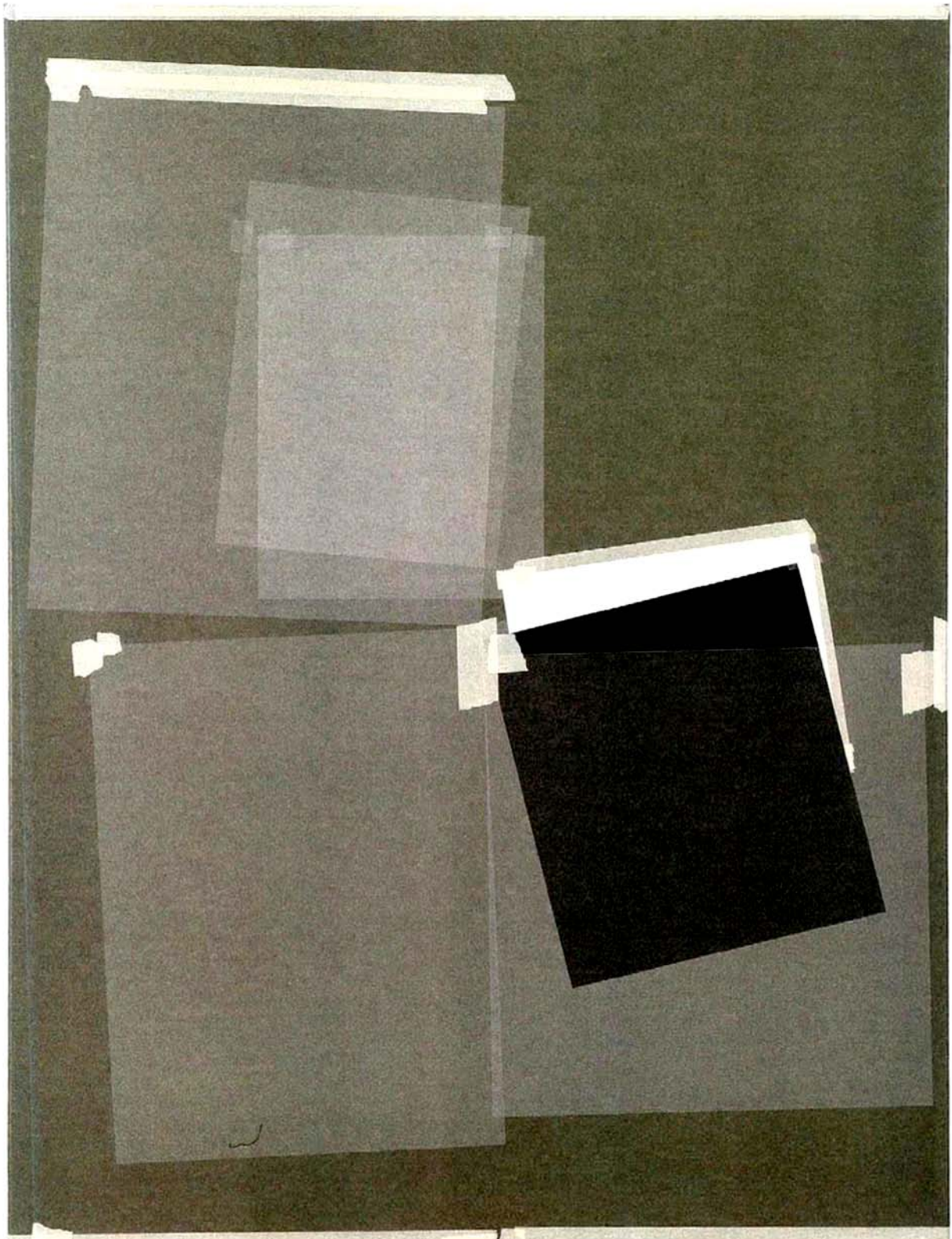
Sixfold (2008), oil on canvas, 100 x 200cm



Fragments and gaps (2008), oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm



Rib (2008), oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm



Transit (2009), oil on canvas, 120 x 90cm