

**Nestor Kruger**  
**First the wall and then the tower, 2014**

The Title:

"First the wall and then the tower," is a line taken from the short story "The Great Wall of China" by Franz Kafka where the narrator, part way through a description of the building of the wall, reflects on a book written by a scholar during the construction that provided, in addition to the theory that the Tower of Babel "failed to reach its goal", because of a weak foundation, with the proposition that the Great Wall of China would provide, for the first time in history, a secure foundation for a new Tower of Babel.

The Paintings:

In alternating colours of black and white are two narratives. In the white paintings is a parable taken from the section "Rotation of Crops" in the book "Either/Or" by Søren Kierkegaard in which the character 'A' describes how boredom entered the world.

"The Gods were bored, and so they created man. Adam was bored because he was alone, and so Eve was created. [From that moment on] boredom entered the world, and increased in proportion to the increase of population. Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored en famille; then the population of the world increased, and the peoples were bored en masse. To divert themselves they conceived the idea of constructing a tower high enough to reach the heavens. This idea is itself as boring as the tower was high...."

Boredom, according to 'A' (the aesthete) is a negative force that provokes action.

In the black paintings is embedded a hymn written around 1880 by Josiah Kelly Alwood, a preacher from the American Midwest, transcribed from a performance by the Staple Singers from 1956.

Oh they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise  
Oh they tell me of a home far away so far away  
Oh they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise  
Oh Oh they tell me of an uncloudy day

Well, well, well

*Yes oh yes they tell me,*

Lord they tell I got a home got a home beyond the skies

*Yes oh yes they tell me, Yes oh yes they tell me*

Well, well, Oh

*Oh, Yes oh yes they tell me, Yes oh yes they tell me*

Well they tell me about a home far, far away

*Yes oh yes they tell me, Yes oh yes they tell me, Yes oh yes they tell me*

Well Oh yeah

*Oh, Yes oh yes they tell me*

Lord they tell me well well where no storm where no storm clouds rise

*Yes oh yes they tell me, Yes oh yes they tell me, Oh, yes oh yes they tell me  
Oh well Oh Oh they tell me of an of an uncloudy day  
Oh, Oh they tell me of an uncloudy day*

In the original lyrics and arguably more subdued in the version by the Staple Singers is a more affirmative description of this place, a place of unbounded beauty and free from suffering (storm clouds) and a place towards which the united citizens of Babylon are building their tower. It is a place, that is, without weather, without change and perhaps stranded in a state of historical suspension.

The paintings are organized in this manner to evoke the work song that accompanies hard and tedious manual labour, particularly the rhythmic alternation between song and blows of the hammer.

The formal appearance of the paintings makes an additional reference to a series of paintings by Jasper Johns titled flagstone. In these paintings is a pattern evoking both the stone floor and/or wall, or more generally, between the vertical and the horizontal and consequently the relationship of the viewer to the picture. The pattern for the paintings in the exhibition at SPAM is derived through a series of steps involving a custom font, and a set of algorithms: a Delaunay triangulation and a Voronoi diagram. The result is a picture that "gets close" in appearance to the Jasper Johns paintings while also encoding a text into a stone pattern.

My interest in producing this work is a combination of a desire to reproduce the formal puzzle of the Jasper Johns painting and to literally encode into this work/(re)production the literary device of the parable, a highly abbreviated story in which the common didactic function of the parable is further attenuated through the various steps and connections in the work including the concept of "building," a term that is both an object, action and force in history.