

**Robin Grant Sperling**





Pusztai Studio, HUNGARY

Photograph, Ernesto Concha S

## Robin Grant Sperling



Robin Sperling's artworks have long balanced differences. Many are not quite paintings, yet not quite sculptures. He mainly uses natural materials like clay, wood, wax, raw pigment powder – yet traces of the manufactured world find their way in: a scattering of electronic components or precision screws might pepper a field of dark wax like rare seeds. Even the colours balance: mostly the palette is organic colours like sandy ochres, olive greens, rich, muddy browns, but smaller doses of artificial, synthetic colours enter the mix. A field of black wax or varnished wood might be delicately pierced by lines of acid blue or a slim dribble of metallic paint. Two of the works in this show are voluptuous brown blooms where crude oil has soaked and spread through the paper like growing moulds. He obtained the untreated liquid while working as a resident artist in a Serbian village where oil is being pumped out of the ground. So was it an industrial material or a natural one?

Most of his recent works are wooden cases packed with a shallow layer of mud allowed to dry and crack. This is classic Sperling: he admires conceptual earth artists like Richard Long, Robert Smithson, Andy Goldsworthy, but Sperling never aims to blend into the landscape. Unlike them, his pieces don't aim to crumble, disappear, modestly announce their own fragility and temporariness. Rather the other way round. Sperling loves the natural world, but sees it all as raw material for art – literally. He paints pictures, some figurative, mostly abstract, but in between these paintings (usually on wood) he is constantly stopping even earlier in the creative process to enjoy the raw materials themselves, the wood, the clay, the metal, as something that could be worked with in dozens of ways as yet unthought of. Simply finding how resin sets, how it holds colour, how river silt dries, how it cracks, how wax sets, how oil stains spread. These processes become the activity and the inspiration. He wants to celebrate the landscape by partly working with it but also partly by learning how it wants to work with itself. Most of his works are experiments with raw materials where he loves what the material does so much, he takes the role of junior partner to the matter itself.

text by Mark Griffith

“ The initial inspiration was the sense of my upright standing position being a vertical line in relationship with the horizon thus producing a ‘crossing’ or an overlapping effect. This space formed by the dynamic in question, became a main force for creativity; as I felt I had unlocked the key to abstract painting and landscape. And thus have spent the last seven years investigating this Time/Space phenomena.”

London, 2000



APEIRON, 2008

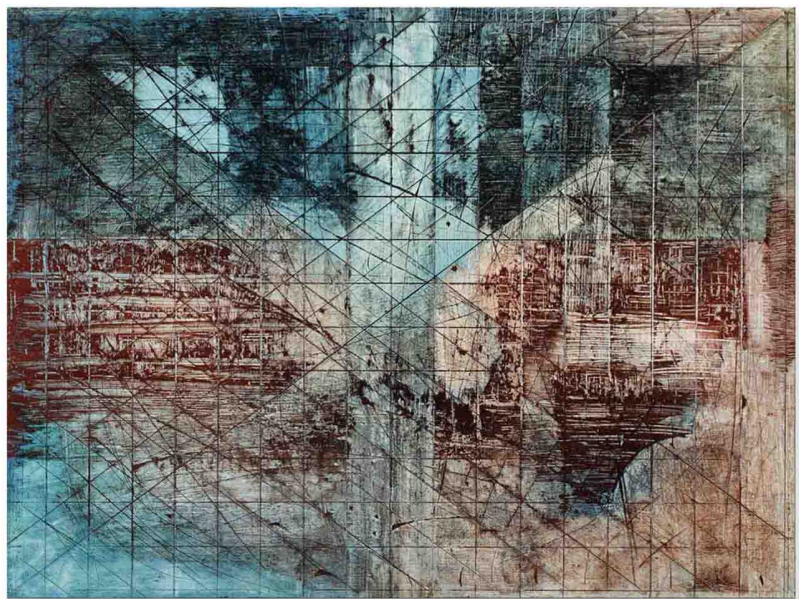
Gouache on vinyl paper, 30 x 42 cm





VIRTUOUS CYCLE, 2009

Oil and pigment on board, 60 x 50 x 3 cm



LANDSCAPE COMPOSITION, 2008

Oil and pigment on scored board, 55 x 45 x 3 cm

Four of these cracking-clay pieces are in cross-shaped frames. Perhaps they symbolise the four points of the compass. The cross is a recurrent symbol for Sperling, not as the Christian emblem but as a divider that marks off the vertical tree against the horizon, the right angle between north and east, or the balance of along against down.

The dried-earth works are not a simple-minded warning of a drying, warming world. Sperling moved to Hungary's Great Plain largely because he loved the yellows and browns of the landscape, and the place is dry most of the year anyway. The huge perspectives of the flat horizon inspire him, as do the physical materials the land is made of, the earth, the local plants and seeds, the wood of the region. In a distinctive way, the landscape of Hungary's emptiest quarter, the beginning of the great Eurasian steppes to the East, holds a curious, archaic message for Sperling. Something religious, magical even, keeps him in Hungary searching in the very physical stuff of the landscape for the traces of old gods, old tribes, old relationships with the stars understood by the nomadic peoples whose "kingdom was the horse". Their descendants still live in villages around him.

Most of his works have a strange reticence, a muted restraint to them. One is a large square board bristling with seed fluff – another is a smoothed surface of dried brown wax embedded with small fragments of brass turnings from a metal workshop. Few contemporary artists better embody the Larkin phrase about "something almost being said". Yet there are sometimes odd eruptions from beneath these almost impassive celebrations of stuff. In one extraordinary piece, dried, cracked mud painted in three stripes, mid-brown, dirty green, and mid-brown again has had the edges of the grooves separating the green and brown regions marked with a fine pen line of gilt paint. Reminiscent of some obscure livery or uniform, the gold tracks are also, Sperling says, traces of the sun chariot's wheels. Somehow the sky gods' golden vehicle left glittering trails in the silt of the river plain.

Mark Griffith



SPIRALLING TO EARTH, 2010

Resin, pigment and bullrush seeds on board,67 x 60 cm



DARK TERRAIN, 2008

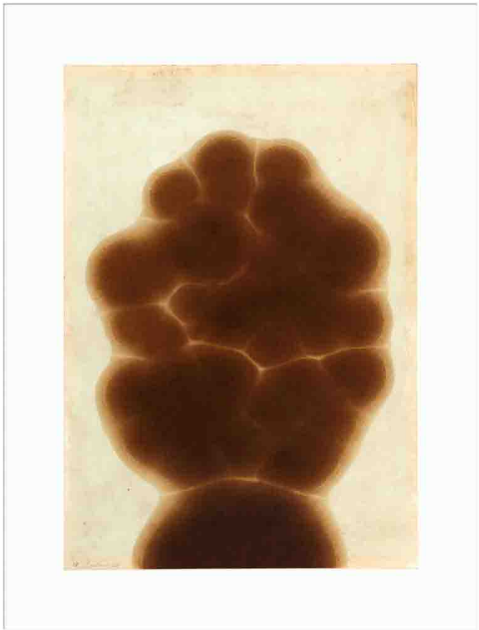
Wax, pigment, iron filings on wood, 20 x 15 x 3 cm



PROLIFERATION, 2008

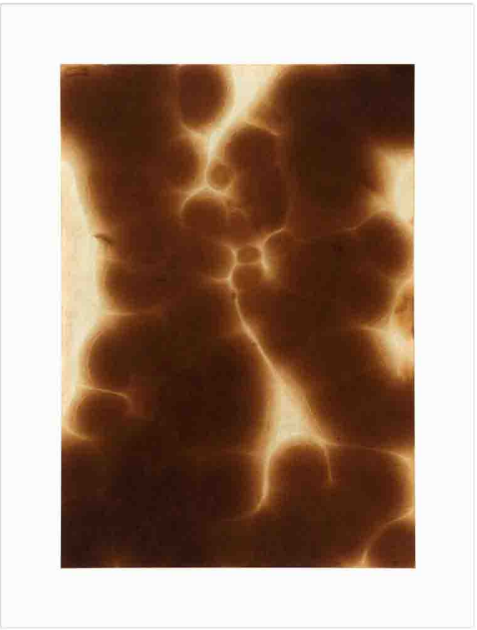
varnish on veneered wood, 30 x 20 cm





NAFTA IV, 2010

Mineral oil on graph paper, 52 x 40 cm



NAFTA VI, 2010

Mineral oil on graph paper, 52 x 40 cm



WE REAP WHAT WE SOW IV , 2010

Discarded wood, pigment and hemp, 150 x 50 x 2,5 cm

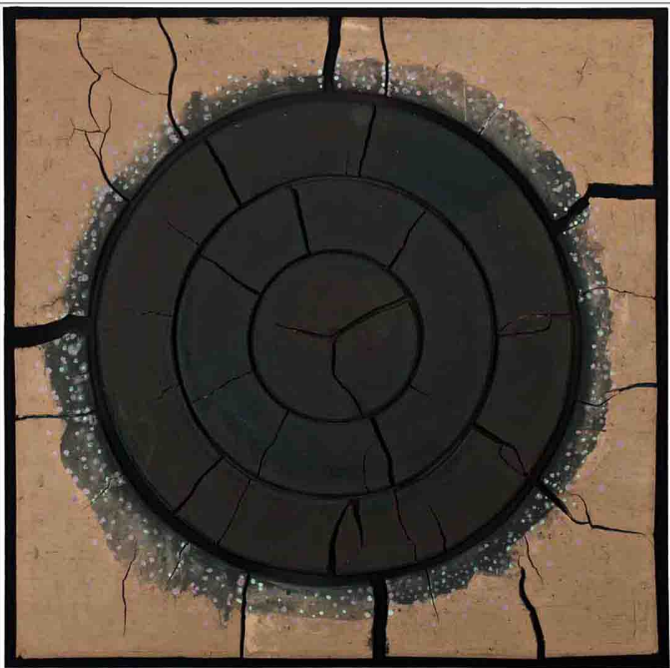


WE REAP WHAT WE SOW III , 2010

Discarded wood, pigment and hemp, 150 x 60 x 2,5 cm



CLAY RELIEFS



CRACKING HUB, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 62 x 62 x 3 cm



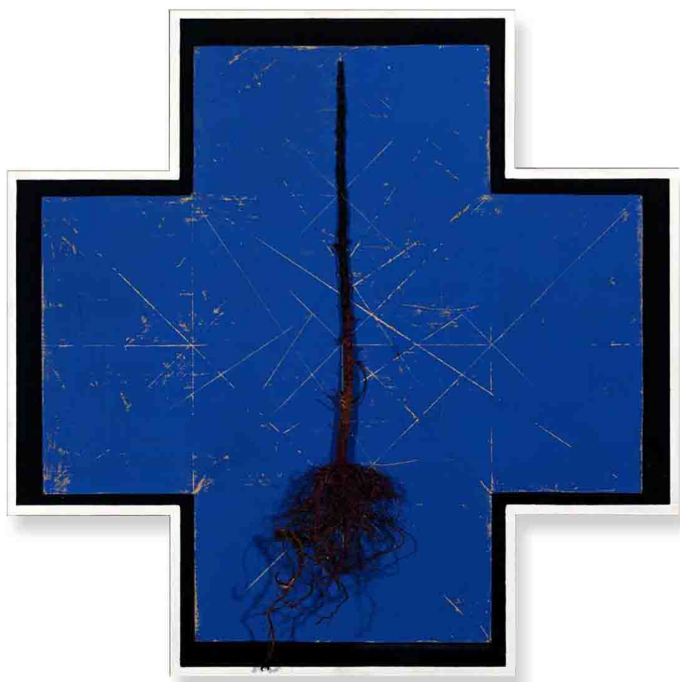
SOUTH, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 62 x 62 x 3 cm



EAST, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 62 x 62 x 3 cm



WEST, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 62 x 62 x 3 cm



NORTH, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 62 x 62 x 3 cm





NIGHT, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 33 x 31 x 3 cm



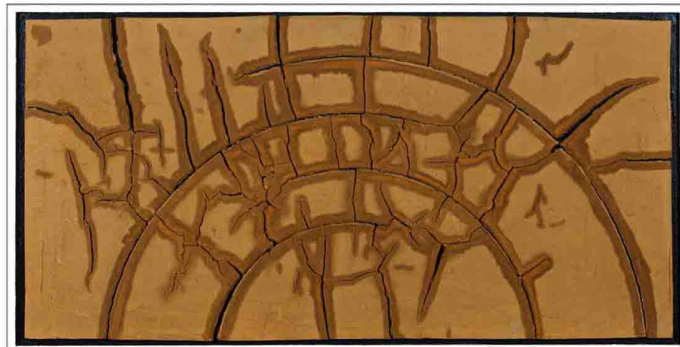
DAY, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 33 x 31 x 3 cm



ROTATOR I, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



ROTATOR II, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



BULL and MATADOR, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



BLUE COMPOSITION, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm





TRACES of THE SUN CHARIOT I, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



TRACES of THE SUN CHARIOT II, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



LOW TIDE, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



OCHER COMPOSITION, 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



SEEDS of the DEPORTED 2010

Clay, pigment and seeds on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm



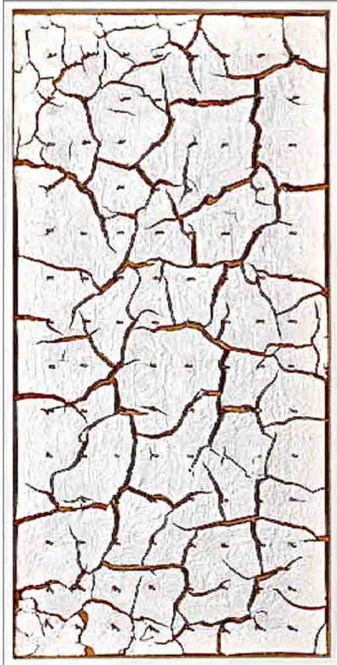
GREEN VERTICAL 2010

clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm





POLARIS, 2010



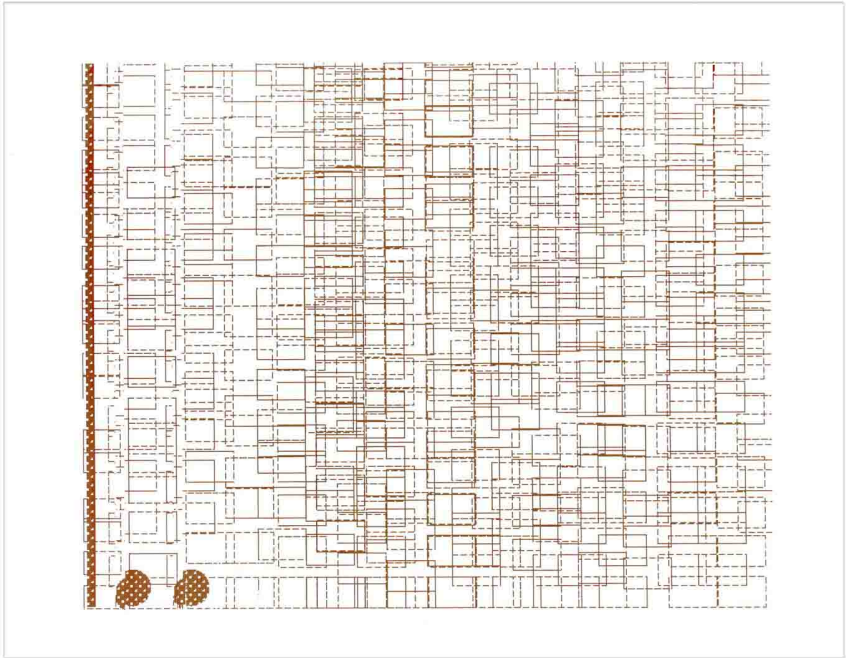
PINNED GRID, 2010



AURORA, 2010

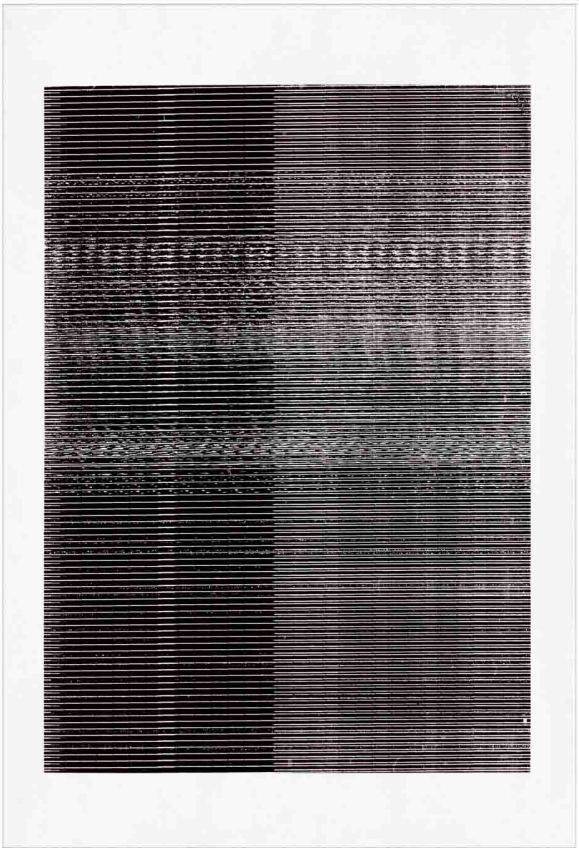
clay and pigment on wood, 32 x 62 x 3 cm

PRINTS



UNTITLED, 2010

Photographic Silk Screen, 70 x 100 cm



UNTITLED, 2010

Photographic Silk Screen, 70 x 100 cm



UNTITLED, 2010

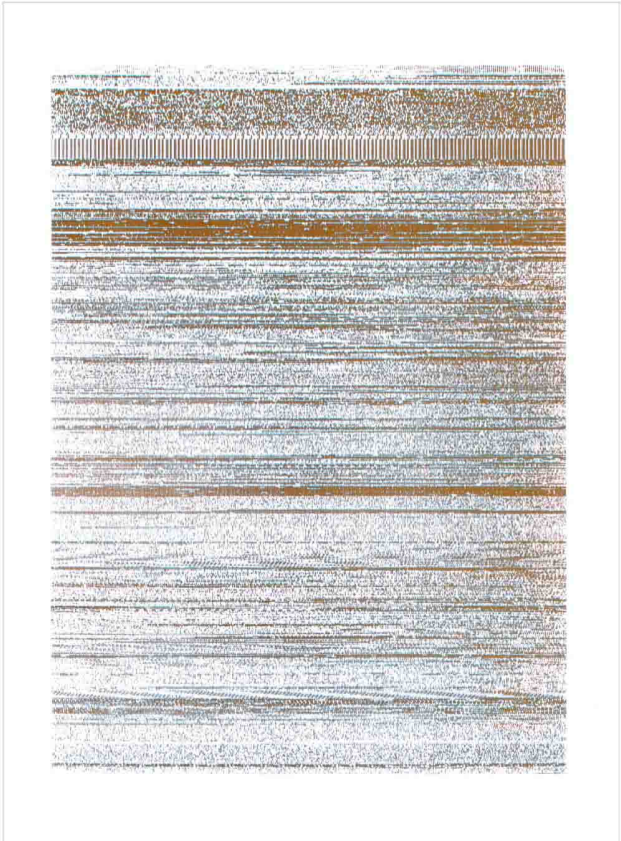
Photographic Silk Screen, 70 x 100 cm





UNTITLED, 2010

Photographic Silk Screen, 70 x 100 cm

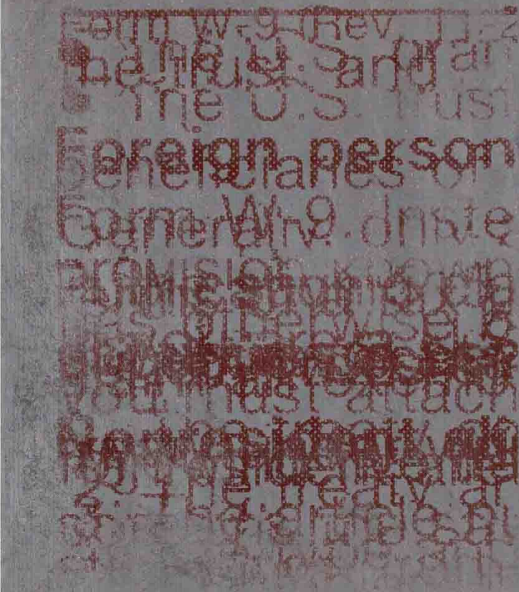


UNTITLED, 2010

Photographic Silk Screen, 70 x 100 cm

The idea of the photographic silk screen prints was inspired by the errors which photocopiers can produce .It was this accidental interpretation that I have recreated. Most surfaces have been worked on before the printing starts, in order to add more depth and meaning to the idea. The beauty of silk screen is the facility to have surfaces relieved and textured with a variety of materials and compositions before the print is layed down on top.

I was also interested in taking photographic silk screen away from its 'Pop Art' image and experimenting further with the process itself.



Born London, UK, 12. 09. 1963. Lived in Kenya, South Africa, England, Germany, France. Moves to Hungary in 2000. Lives and works in the Great Plain.

Education:  
1977-1981 Fettes College, Edinburgh

1981-1985 St Martin's School of Art, London. First Class Honours BA

Major exhibitions:

1985 "Number Six" (oil, assemblage on canvas), Paton Gallery, London. With Mark Francis and Dexter Dallwood

1986 "Blue Line" (installation, site specific objects), Eis Fabrik, Hannover, Germany. With Christian Wontroba, Michael Rhodes and Barry Hyman (cat)

1987 "Griff Serie" (installation of car seat sculptures), Shloss Pesch, Krefeld, Germany. With Paul Hart, Ingrid Kerma and Monori (cat)

1988 "Geistlinie" (installations), Galerie Springfield, Berlin. With Barry Hyman.  
1989 Invited artist, CNAC, Villa Arson, Nice, France

1989 "Pour avancer je tourne sur moi-meme, Cyclone par l'immobile habité" (Installation, wax, aluminium, velvet, telescope), CNAC, Villa Arson, Nice, France

1993 "Hortobágy Series" (tissue paper, glass and wood), Wittgenstein House, Vienna. With Barry Hyman, Gerhard Baldasti and Birgit Baldasti (cat)

1995 "Sparrows whisper in the ears of Kings" (works on paper, wood and velvet), Century Gallery, London

1997 "Axis mundi" (sycamore seeds, velvet, thread and box), permanent exhibit, Museum of Installation, London

1998 "Apocatharsis" (pigment, wax, wood and paper), Space 8, London

2000 "Longitudinal Lines of Chaos" (charcoal, wax, intaglio, tissues, glass and wood), Hungarian Cultural Centre, London

2006 "Six paintings" (oil, varnish on wood), Sahleg, New York.

2007, "Honvagy" (oil and photographic silkscreen on wood), Budapest Gallery. With Kicsiny Balázs, Sugár János, Siflis András

2010 "Earth, Wind and Fire", G13 Art Gallery, Budapest

2011 "Order of Return" and photography by Piera Constantini di Scala, Amadeo Clavarino Space, London



Photography , Piera Constantini di Scala