



## Frieze/Frame

Setting up a new gallery in a recession can be a daunting prospect. Ric Bower spoke to Johan Berggren at Frieze London about some of the realities a 21st-century gallerist must face and about his commissioning of Ryan Siegan-Smith's presentation for Frame.

Frame is a sub-section of Frieze London dedicated to young galleries and is selected on the basis of a proposed solo presentation. It offers an opportunity to discover artists who may not previously have benefitted from an international platform to show their work. Ryan Siegan-Smith, (at Johan Berggren Gallery, Malmö, for Frieze Frame), used mnemonic techniques to recall a sequence of random numbers. In this process numbers are encoded into a series of images and then back again for the purpose of recall. The artist's working process generates a glut of visual evidence which, in turn, forms the material for the physical gallery presentation. CCQ began by asking Berggren what prompted him to go it alone with his own gallery.

“...all good art sells because it enhances our understanding of what it means to be alive”

**Johan Berggren:** I was working in another gallery in 2009 when the financial crisis hit and I was immediately out the door. One of the artists I had been working with said to me, ‘we just have to go on, don’t we?’ I wound up

selling my apartment to renovate the new gallery. There was no public support, no grants, no backers and no trust fund. From day one, we have had to be a commercial concern; it had to be a self-sustaining venture. Working in a commercial environment forces us to work in a particular way -some artists are cut out for it and some, simply are not.

**Ric Bower:** So, a commercial and a non-commercial approach are quite different careers in your mind then?

**JB:** In a way. A gallerist who was a mentor to me said “...All good art sells because it enhances our understanding of what it means to be alive”. That is what we believe, and, in the end, it is why I work with certain artists and not others.

**RB:** How did you get involved in Frame?

**JB:** I had a platform for a number of years at the Basel Art Fair and it worked for us; so when the opportunity arose for us to have a platform here at Frieze too, I simply jumped at it.

**RB:** To what extent were you directly involved in the commissioning and curating of this particular project with Ryan?

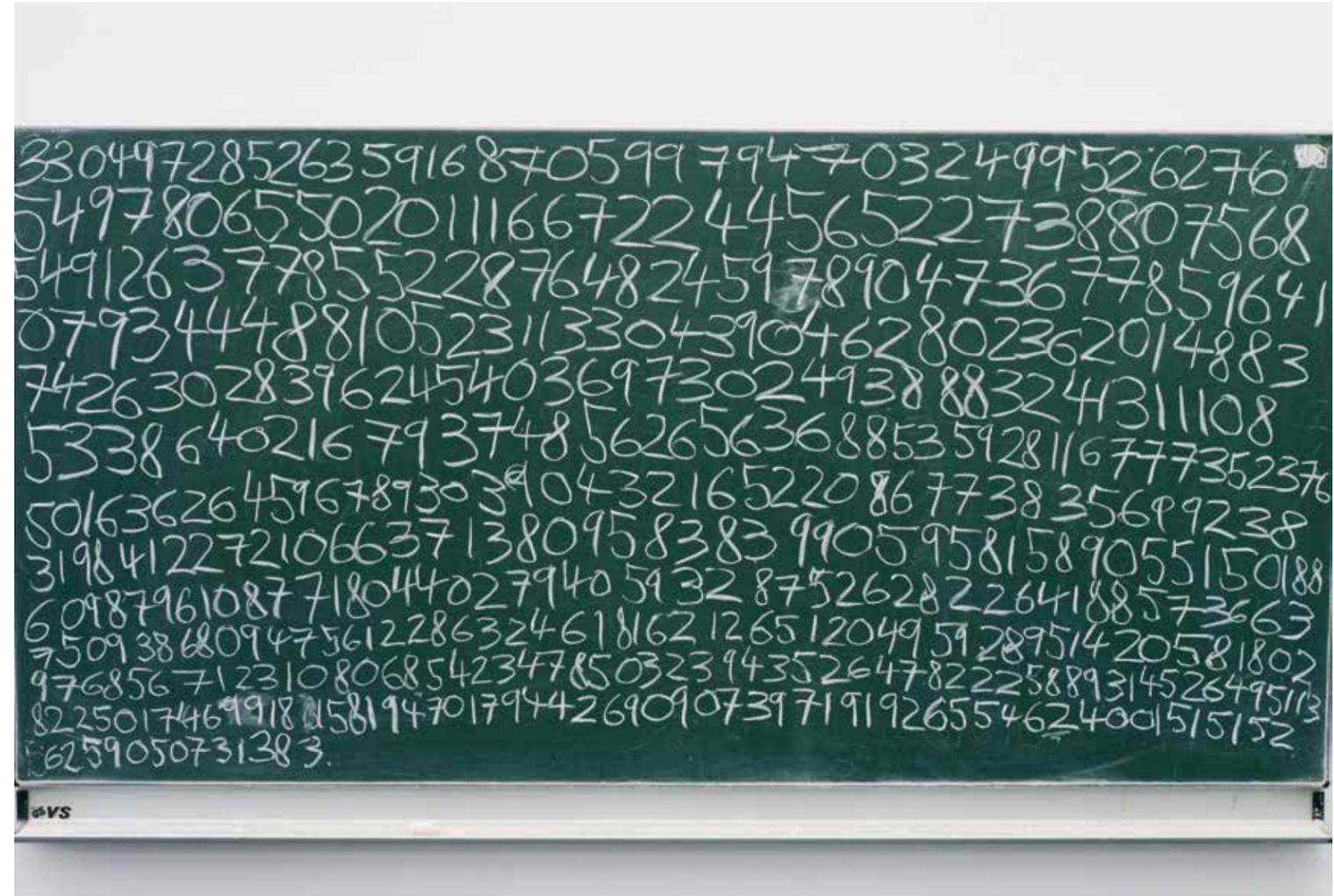
**JB:** With Frame you apply with a specific project proposal. We therefore have a very close working relationship.

**RB:** It is so refreshing to see a piece of work, like Ryan's at Frieze, which will so clearly not fit on a living room wall...

**JB:** Commissioning something that is not obviously commercial is sometimes what is expected of you as a gallery. This is a cynical world we live and function in -sometimes you just have to work in a certain way to get on and to gain acceptance in the art world.

**RB:** How does a project like Ryan's which is not obviously saleable, fit in with the work that you do sell?

**JB:** You can sell a project like Ryan has done for Frame, but there are maybe not that many buyers



for it. It does, however, broaden the spectrum of your gallery programme and it brings you a degree of respect. A lot of people come to see what we are up to.

**RB:** What I really like about Ryan's work is that the visual detritus, the evidence that the performance happened, that which remains in the gallery space now, is so integrally tied in to the performance itself when it happened.

**JB:** That tie in is very much at the heart of the work; Ryan creates a conceptual framework and then uses it as the foundation for his particular area of research. It is not just about the artist performing, as such.

**RB:** Ryan has an interest in the mechanism of memory that extends beyond this individual project, then?

**JB:** Totally. If you go to these memory competitions, there are established techniques as to how to remember long sequences, and they are by no means new; they have been around for thousands of years. That's possibly one of the

things Ryan is interested in, that slippage between structural language and a material art practice.

**RB:** I am incredibly impressed by the sheer scale of the feat. Does Ryan have a personal record he seeks to break?

**JB:** He was lousy when he started. What you see on the blackboard is the longest sequence of numbers he can currently remember, and on the video screen are the numbers transformed into another medium after he has recalled them. Broadly speaking, he has started, in a very open ended fashion, to construct a language. It is a conversation that begins in the public arena, travels to a private place, and, then, back into the public arena again.—CCQ

*Johan Berggren Gallery will open in a new permanent space at Monbijougatan in Malmö in January 2014 [www.johanberggren.com](http://www.johanberggren.com)*

*Frieze Art Fair 2014 [www.friezelondon.com](http://www.friezelondon.com)*

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26259050731383, Ryan Siegan-Smith at Johan Berggren, Frieze Frame,  
London (2013): installation photographs, Ric Bower