

Press release

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paradoxical structures_system_mode

sébastien de ganay

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max goelitz presents the first solo exhibition by French artist Sébastien de Ganay, currently residing in Austria. In *paradoxical structures_system_mode* de Ganay combines abstract, representational and functional elements to one, activating sensory perception and questioning the boundaries between genres, traditions, categories and classifications. He deliberately locates his work between artistic genres, thus creating works of art that defy a clear categorization into images, reliefs, objects or furniture. The works from six different groups presented in the exhibition illustrate the diversity of de Ganay's oeuvre, whereby an intercorrelation between the pieces through common structures, systems and modes, utilized by the artist, become clear. Paradox plays a central role in de Ganay's innovative and experimental work, unifying seemingly contradictory aspects.

In the context of Sébastien de Ganay's 2017 solo exhibition, Andreas Hofer, curator of the Kunsthalle Krems, precisely summarized the overlying themes apparent in all his works, as presented in *paradoxical structures_systems_mode*: "Each object de Ganay has designed is a testament to the examination of time, material, and matter, of the abstract and the mundane, of the line between art and life - and even its suspension, which is bound to irritate the beholder."

In the *Museum Grids* series created out of reinforced steel, the artist transfers the architectural floor plans or blueprints of well-known museums into his own spatial, grid-like design language. While de Ganay refers to the formal structures of Minimal Art from the 1960s and 1970s in his earlier Grid series, the new *Museum Grids* additionally illustrate political structures. These reductions give the buildings a new characteristic, also allowing the museum's location to appear as an expression of cultural and sometimes questionable power, based on the existing structures. In *Grid Louvre* (2021), the two-dimensional floor plan grows over the latticework like a room drawing into the gallery space, while the various floors of the museum are superimposed in different colors: blue, chrome and warning black and yellow stripes. By using warning colorations the grids challenge the viewer to reflect on what a museum stands for, what it represents, which artists are shown, how it has grown historically or where the works of art come from.

The series of works *Folded Flats* is congruent with the research de Ganay's has been conducting since the early 1990s into folding techniques. Inspired by everyday post-its, he examines the many folding possibilities of the square in various shapes and formats. In serial production, de Ganay creates abstract wall sculptures with minimalist gestures of aluminum, which gain a painterly quality thanks to their pure colors and the play of light and shadow between the convolutions. The exhibition presents *XL Folded Flat Yellow 01* (2018) and *White & Red Folded Flat Sequence 01* (2021), which make de Ganay's intensive preoccupation with the folding process itself and its possible variations within the series palpable. The geometric shapes continuously refer to the reduced formal language of Minimal Art. De Ganay, however, broadens this strict understanding of shape and material („What you see is what you see“ – Frank Stella). Due to the recognitional value of post-its, the works open a space for the imagination of the viewer to run parallel to the artistic process, encouraging them to think further about additional variations or to leading them to reconstruct the forms back into a square.

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De Ganays *Pavillon Naked* (2021), a walk-in sculpture, calls for active participation on yet another level: The hollow steel-tube structure represents both a spatial drawing and an intervention in the space, creating new correlations between his works. De Ganay constructs a space within a space without any actual volume. The shape of the pavilion is made up of individual open modules, all together forming a referential system to his previous works. Citing existing structures serves the artist as a formal link between his series of works. Thus, the *Seascapes* are connected to the *OPSD Stools* via merging circular shapes and at the same time reference both the *Dot Paintings* and *Art on Demand*.

In the series of works *Seascapes*, begun in 2011, de Ganay explores the surface as a free, variable form as well as a reference to the "shaped canvases" of Minimal Art. He places excerpts from sea view photographs by photography pioneer Gustave Le Gray from the early days of the genre in the middle 19th century onto copper plates. The different modes of appropriation are both visible and alienated by the new shape and the materiality of the reflective copper. De Ganay deliberately places his work in between various artistic genres, with the *Seascapes* alternating between object, painting and photograph. The same principle also occurs in his modular *OPSD Stools*, which use "Open System Discs" to show variations of circular modules in spatial arrangements, thereby evading categorization into sculpture, object, table or stool and revealing a potential function only through the title itself.

In the *Ceramics* group of works, de Ganay also plays with the juxtaposition and the initially paradoxical connection between foreignness and familiarity: "I try to introduce an unexpected presence, seemingly familiar, yet without the signs of a manufacturer's hand. A presence as if by accident. A recognizable object, with a feeling of 'déjà vu' but without a link to any personal story. A presence easily acceptable and obvious yet nevertheless captivating with silent, enigmatic familiarity."

As illustrated, de Ganay classifies his *Ceramics* as "familiar objects", in contrast to the term "Specific objects", coined in 1965 by the artist and critic Donald Judd. „Specific objects“ are specific because the artist carefully coordinates their shape, their scale, their proportions and materiality. Contrary to this, the *Ceramics* are both puzzling and familiar, as if they were created by chance, yet naturally. The artist uses this ambivalent effect in the *Ceramics* as well as the *Seascapes* as a play of emancipating things from their being and as a way of making things look like something other than what they really are.

About the artist

Sébastien de Ganay (*1962, Boulogne-Billancourt, FR) deliberately locates his art in the intersections of artistic genres, thus creating works that defy any clear categorization as image, relief, object or furniture, thereby blurring the boundaries between the genres. As an innovative representative of experimental painting and sculpture, de Ganay combines abstract, representational and functional elements in order to activate sensory perception by means of irritation and to question conformist perspectives. The geometric shapes of his works are reminiscent of the cool aesthetics and reduced formal language of Minimal Art. De Ganay extends this understanding, as his works open a space of imagination for the viewer beyond formal and material levels, running parallel to the artistic process.

De Ganay studied political science and film at Columbia University in New York and is co-founder of the art book publisher onestar press. In addition to participating in numerous exhibitions, including the Center Pompidou in Paris and the Landesmuseum Niederösterreich in St. Pölten, the Institut Français in Vienna presented an extensive solo exhibition by the artist in 2014. In 2017, de Ganay realized a highly acclaimed installation for the Kunsthalle Krems in a former Dominican church, which was accompanied by an overview catalog of his work.

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