

Benoît Maire

*Without*

13. 05. – 18. 06. 2022

Benoît Maire's *Without* explores the relation between what is hidden and what is observed. A "without", or "the absence of" is constantly at play and can be perceived through paintings, sculptures and furniture completed during his current residency at the Villa Medici in Rome.

His series of *Cloud Paintings* (2012 –) is devoted to a classical motive often revisited throughout art history. As a repository of memory, information and imagination – and in its most contemporary meaning as the accumulation of data – the cloud is rich in symbolism. Rather than naming objects, Maire uses philosophical ideas to define what painting is, in context with the language of indexing. Thin spray paint and voluminous impasto shapes allow the viewer's gaze to remain in motion across the canvas, like clouds in the sky.

Maire's series of so-called *Logical Paintings* acts as a counterpart to his *Cloud Paintings*. Purporting to disclose what is hidden by clouds (as historically observed by French philosopher and art critic Hubert Damisch in *Théorie du nuage*, 1972), they are a reflection on rational thinking and mathematics. By employing the hand as a surrogate for the notion of deixis, he acknowledges the work of Renaissance painters.

The figure of Sigismondo Malatesta, an Italian nobleman, chief of war, and 15th century arts patron, holds an allegorical function in a sculpture made by a series of t-shirts hung on a clothes rack. Freely inspired by French poststructuralist Jean-François Lyotard's *Le Différend* (1983), the sculpture explores the "aesthetic of disagreements" through the conflict and irresolution brought about by the juxtaposition of disparate elements. Maire exploits tropes of fashion to present a sculpture using collage to suggest insects as armored vehicles and tags as ways of branding.

Rounding out the exhibition is furniture made in collaboration with Ker-Xavier, and lamps that echo 20th century designs encountered at the Villa Medici by contemporaries Balthus and Richard Peduzzi. Their forms draw on the silhouette of the main edifice and include the family crest of the lion. The rudimentary outlines and dim lighting evoke drama, yet also reiterate the battle between the objects on display.

– Cara Lerchl

