

19 January - 17 February 2024

Carrer del Roser 99
08004 Barcelona

Eight attempts, for six works and a little more.

6 Painted Objects

A series of six matte black paintings, in an identical format (20.5x40.5cm), each bearing a number 8, akin yet distinct. The series of paintings presented by Jordan Derrien at Colette Mariana relies on a differentiated repetition. To produce this series, Derrien painted doors reduced to the canvas space¹, to which he has added an address number, applying a domestic treatment to the painting². The painting treated as an object, the signal framing is enough to act as a threshold. The domestic materiality achieved by the deliberately worn black lacquered textures lures the door patinas. The function and connotation of the materials serve as a principle of back-and-forth between the domestic space and the pictorial space, between the material and the medium of the work. The doors, scale and format change, « a door the size of a painting », a displaced thing into another, a function for a fiction, in the same process, the painting is shown as an object itself.

If 8 is infinity, the space of the canvas is closed. Non-accessible.

RAF-IDCC-RHB-RPM

The title of the exhibition is encoded. Meanwhile, the 8 might be a self-portrait set in a “locked and mute pictorial space”. The title, like the numbers 8, embrace a simulacrum of the enigma, without demanding resolution.

Berhart Schwenk, in an essay entitled ‘Similes of the Enigmatic On the Painting of Blinky Palermo’, distinguishes several levels of vision : “Pictures of reality, as they were actually experienced, irrevocably belong to the past ; the image of the experience may no longer be reviewed or reconstructed, let alone repeated. What remains before our eyes will always be an inauthentic image in our memory ».³

6 surfaces where there is nothing to see

In these enclosed spaces, in these “closures”, there is nothing to see, or what is there to see is “a space that potentially hides something”. The painting, looked at as a window throughout art history, opens up, at the same time as it frames and structures, a projection space for reality, whether that reality is the one we find ourselves in, or an alternative one, or an emotionally constructed one. What if the window were closed? It might be a door. A liminal space towards what we have not yet seen. An opaque separation bouncing off the outside and the inside. Surfaces that conceal and protect. The surfaces in Derrien’s work also propose a liminal position, containing more than they reveal. The more visible the door, the more opaque it becomes⁴. The choice of a matte black painting is an attempt to tell the eye that there is nothing to see and yet we are being exposed to it. Be it surfaces where there is nothing to see or literally black paintings, a mirror effects unfolds.

South Molton Lane

South Molton Lane is a street located in the centre of London that has the odd characteristic of having windows through which nothing is visible. At Colette Mariana, the series of 8 is augmented by photographs in which South Molton Lane has been scanned. Presented in the form of collages containing only fragments of information, they resemble a visual investigative board, an enigma - once again - to solve or not. Can we be persuaded that there is nothing to see? In its fortunate position at the heart of the city and uncompromising business, a paradox settles in the unoccupied window space, where the surfaces of this street somehow do not interact as they usually do. Perhaps it only informs fiction. Albeit, everything is real: nothing can really be seen, everything is really closed. By becoming surfaces, they return to being a pictorial space with different textures.

The visible, the invisible and the hidden

What if there was nothing to see? The obsession with what is seen and what has not been seen haunts the main character in Michelangelo Antonioni's movie *Blow up* (1966) - likewise set in London. The camera chases the impossible character of Thomas, convinced after blowing up his photographs of Maryon Park that he has unintentionally documented a murder. The more he blows up the photograph, the less there is to see, the more he chases an elusive truth. Reality is only altered by the image. It flashes a belief system, what is seen and unseen, visible and hidden, an event and a non-event, what must be seen and what slips away, thereby laying the notion of authenticity and the relativity of reality, always and already distorted. The mirror, that of the camera, reveals and hides the medium of film, denying direct contact with reality; the medium loses transparency⁵. "What's hidden is only ever potentially visible"⁶.

Doubling

The 8 is a closed space, as it contains a world. There are as many possible worlds as there are number 8. The door doubles, the play of mirrors and the non-reflecting mirages, the black paintings with patinated 8's convey the transformation of the same form. The matte surface is subtly altered, each painting contains its thickening and marks, while remaining absorbent, opening the way to a world with no interior. Locked in an 8 that still looks the same yet not identical. The surfaces are the same differently.

6 hallucinated pools

An allusive occurrence: everything is possibly connected by a number, places, variations, and the ambiguity of these paintings lies in their construction looped by repetition ; nothing is identical while marking a withdrawal from the world, a subtraction in which to perceive something else. To return to levels of vision and reality tinged with psychedelism is like diving from one swimming pool to another in which the infinity sign is the contour of a swirl in which you have to let yourself be carried along. In Frank Perry's movie *The Swimmer* (1968), the character of Net Merrill swims home from pool to pool, surfaces transports, from a pictorial space to mental spaces, flowing in a confused temporal direction, from past to future and future to past, or maybe trapped in the loop of another 8. Derrien's black paintings are floating doors, hallucinated black pools, where 8 is the swirl of a an infinite dark loop.

Magic 8 Ball

By summoning the number 8 on black surfaces, I end up thinking of those magical billiard balls that were so popular in my teens, distributed by Mattel. The Magic 8 ball adopts the design of the number 8 billiard ball, enlarged, made of plastic. "The original Magic 8 Ball novelty toy has all the answers to your deepest questions! After "asking the ball" a yes or no question, turn the toy upside-down and wait for your answer to be revealed through the window. Answers range from positive ("It is certain") to negative ("Don't count on it") to neutral ("Ask again later"). It's the fastest way to seek advice!"⁷ The answer appears in a window where a twenty-sided white die floats in dark blue-tinted alcohol. Relying on the number 8 as a principle of revelation of what is confined in Derrien's paintings, it can be compelling to realise the obsessional effect upon the mind when there is nothing to see.

Fiona Vilmer, January 2024

¹ In his previous works, the canvas is replaced by wood.

² In previous series from 2021, drawer handles were added.

³ Berhart Schwenk, 'Simples of the Enigmatic On the Painting of Blinky Palermo', in PALERMO, Published by Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, Frankfurt, 1990, p.31

⁴ Gérard Wajcman, Fenêtre: Chronique du regard et de l'intime. Original sentence : The world is becoming opaque. Paradoxically, as it becomes more visible, it becomes more opaque. p.260

⁵ Marco Salucci, « L'intermédialité opaque : Deleuze, Antonioni et l'espace insistant de Blow-Up », Essais, 3 | 2013, p.191-203

⁶ Gérard Wajcman, Fenêtre: Chronique du regard et de l'intime, p.345

⁷ Description borrowed on Mattel's website.

