Going to a Bernard Piffaretti exhibition first of all involves addressing a series of what the artist calls "painterly situations". These, as the viewer will have no trouble in recognising, represent the modernist abstraction whose codes and components have been gradually defined in the course of the last century: a set of motifs and structures – grids, interweavings, checkerboards, repetitive patterns, all-overs, scatterings of marks or little bits and pieces – which assert the intrinsic flatness and isomorphism of the picture supports, qualities matched by the prevailing use of areas of flat colour.

Any explanation of a Piffaretti painting necessarily involves outlining a method, one that consists in dividing the blank canvas in two with a vertical line and marking one half with a set of signs, signals and traces which are then duplicated on the other half: a process that makes Piffaretti part of the long history of those "split images" and pictures within a picture which all speak of painting as a reflexive tool for making the work of painting visible. So every Piffaretti picture is a meta-picture, a mirror-device in which one part, as a consecutive, adjacent recreation, reflects the production scenario of the image to be found in the other part.

The group of paintings from 2011 being shown at the Galerie Frank Elbaz departs from neither these visual characteristics nor the method. But the title the painter has chosen for them, bande-annonce ("trailer"), invites us to consider the project in the light of a different kind of narrative – which is often what Piffaretti's use of language is all about. At the beginning of this joint venture with his artistic/commercial partner – the gallerist – the artist stated his position and – as in those brief promotional opuses the movie industry puts out for each new production, farragoes of the most eye-catching scenes and snappiest dialogues – ran through a sample of his inventions. Sticking to the Piffaretti timeline, things run as follows: the picture in its most frequent form, the layout in two identical halves just described; the unfinished picture, with one half left blank; the picture structured solely by the architecture of a letter or a word; the "drawing after a picture", executed a posteriori from an already finished work; the "stencil", a black and white print of pixellated details of pictures; and the most recent of the Piffaretti variations, the "negative" picture, a tondo-shaped canvas presented as a detail from a picture which in fact does not exist.

In the artist's metapictorial register the "trailer" is also – of course – that central, generative marking of the canvas, the preludial strip heralding the painting to come. In the case of the picture deliberately left unfinished because of the impossibility of any ordered reprise of the originative gestures beneath the successive strata of paint, it is up to the viewer to project onto the screen – the blank canvas, that is – the film of the events that would have led to completion. Similarly, in the case of the negative pictures, the viewer will tend to fill the gap via virtual closure of the motifs and structures and by hunting for the axis of symmetry capable of reorganising an understanding of the

work. In both instances the strategy chosen is a way of rendering the creative process implicitly visible and revealing the fundamental operation required by the Piffaretti system for the establishing of the picture as two equivalent halves: "half/half" the letter picture says, in a bipartite, symmetrically pristine statement that enriches a small group of works in which language is given the job of thematising the reduplication procedure.

Taking the cinema metaphor a little further could have the unintended consequence of making the Piffaretti picture look like the result not only of a replication, but also of a montage – but a montage that goes nowhere and is the instrument of no temporal advance. Just like what happens – or doesn't happen – in the Piffaretti oeuvre since methodological repetition supplanted evolution and the painter broke the hold of chronology: maybe Piffaretti has already painted his last pictures, while the first ones are still pending. But being asynchronous does not mean the oeuvre has no history or that historicity has no dominion. On the contrary, let us not forget that in the mid-1980s, with his adoption of the duplication procedure, Piffaretti perfected one of the most decisive methods of keeping gesture and expression at bay – one of those methods that grant their inventor a crucial place in history.

Arnauld Pierre / Trad. John Tittensor