

Patricia Low Contemporary is pleased to present “The Bewildered Image: American Painters From The 1980s”, featuring Donald Baechler, Mike Bidlo, Ross Bleckner, Peter Halley, Jonathan Lasker, Philip Taaffe, Sue Williams, and Christopher Wool.

Titled after Achille Bonito-Olivia’s seminal 1980 essay “The Bewildered Image”, this exhibition reinvestigates works by leading figures of the International Transavantgarde as a means of indentifying models of practice that set precedent for addressing today’s shifting contextual framework. Though the making processes and aesthetics of these artists are individually unique, collectively their works are historically lionised for their reconciliation of traditional painterly values with the 1980s radical new ideas of popular culture and mass media. Three decades on, this era represents a paragon for the current cultural climate of post-internet and globalistic flux. Featuring new works alongside iconic paintings of the 80s, “The Bewildered Image” re-evaluates their approaches to the pictorial (including its most abstracted conceptions) as a locus of astute and proactive criticality.

One of the fundamental paradoxes of these American painters is that, in its strictest sense, their image is not ‘image’: it is a platform for artistic negotiation and exploration, a departure point from the familiar to visual, emotive, and intellectual extremity. Their very concept of image is a constantly elusive fascination. In Baechler’s works on paper – all from his most recent flowers series – this notion manifests through his intense process of pictorial aggregation and obliteration: his collaged surfaces – built up from found material, some original, some adulterated through rigorous drawing and re-drawing – form fragmented planes, pre-charged with overloaded information and meanings. These networks of interconnectedness (of everything and nothing) function akin to visual white noise, their constant background hum a stark reminder of the technological anxiety that belies the primal imperative of his mark making and central motifs; a duplicity made totemic through his accompanying sculptural silhouettes.

Halley’s high-impact canvases hyper-intellectualise pictorial grammar: their hard-edged compositions like flat-pack architectures, condensing systematic power. In “The Bewildered Image”, Halley’s practice is represented by canvases spanning 1991 to 2010, tracing the progression of his image-diagrams from the redressed concerns of modernism and early pomo (with their battleground ideologies) to more closed circuit configurations, aggressive with their totalitarian pop; their clinical geometry a perfect image of the contemporary ‘real’, articulated in interchangeable units. Hovering between pictorial cognition, instinctive response, and dislocated memory, the image for Bleckner is no less intangible. His canvases from 1992 and 2010, both floral arrangements, speak with rarefied poignancy of the human condition. Used as classical metaphors for temporality

and the cyclical, Bleckner's ephemeral motifs dissolve as phantasmal impressions, giving way to liquid-slippery veneers of paint, its raw malleability and allusive command, to truths too excessive for language.

For each of the artists in "The Bewildered Image" the pictorial might be considered the result more of cause than effect: image has become the standard of alter-modern communication, the currency by which all transactions are governed. Image extends far beyond representation, becoming the very superstructure for thought, the politicised site of progress and revolution. In the 80s these artists were the first to navigate this evolving terrain; today their influence is beyond measure, their works more future-thrust and relevant than ever.

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