

Sensory Spaces is a series of commissioned solo projects presented in the Willem van der Vorm Gallery, located in the freely accessible exhibition space in the museum's entrance hall. For each edition an artist is invited to develop a work that emphasises or alters the visitor's experience of this particular space.

The oeuvre of Elad Lassry (1977, Tel Aviv, lives and works in Los Angeles) focuses on the workings of the photographic image, both on a two-dimensional plane and in three-dimensional space. He is fascinated by how images are both a representation of and an abstraction of reality. 'Pictures,' says Lassry, 'are so very like what we see, and so very unlike what we see.' The ambiguity of perception is central to his work, in which he plays an ingenious game with recognition and alienation.

Lassry's oeuvre can be categorised in different ways. He makes use of diverse media, including photography, film, sculpture and performance. Iconographically, his two-dimensional and spatial work includes portraits of people and animals, still lifes and landscapes. In formal terms, he employs both figurative motifs and abstract, geometric elements. His use of colour is remarkable and he employs a standard format: each frame is 11 x 14 inches (28 x 35.5 cm). But these classifications do not provide sufficient information to penetrate Lassry's work.

An important part of his work consists of objects that initially appear to be framed colour photographs. He takes some of the photographs himself; others are 5 vintage photographs or commercial images from magazines. Lassry is not concerned with authorship: he only resorts to taking photos himself when he cannot find what he wants among existing images. He does not consider himself a photographer but an artist who works with images.

In his work, Lassry questions the idea that photography is a truthful and unequivocal reflection of reality. He does this by playing with the elements that make up each image, such as focus and depth, transparency and reflection, texture and scale, contrasting colours and indeed colours that are very similar. The photos he takes himself are obviously staged. He often places objects in a monochrome setting. By keeping the entire background a single colour, he creates a curious affect: the objects have no context except colour. In some images, this suggests an absence of gravity: the elements seem to float in space. He plays with notions of 'real' and 'fake'. For example, the apparently lifelike toadstools in the work 'Mushrooms' (2011) are in fact made from wood.

Many of Lassry's photographs also contain geometric elements. In addition to geometric apertures (through which, for example, a head appears), he includes rectangular elements that resemble

plinths. Some images are partially obscured by geometric strips. In some cases, he adds so-called 'negative' visual elements by, for example, cutting circles from the negative before printing the photograph. Recently Lassry has covered part of the frame with brightly coloured silk 'covers', which partially obscures the image. Some of these covers have geometric patterns, while others are a single colour with carefully sewn pleats. The geometric sculptures in Lassry's installations and performances serve the same function as the frames, strips and covers: they form an abstract frame 'around' the performers.

This play with abstracting the image extends to their presentation. His photographs are framed in wooden frames, often painted with brightly coloured gloss paint that corresponds to the main colour in the photograph. The frame adds an abstract element - horizontal, vertical - to the work. The accompanying label describes the materials of these framed photographs as follows: gelatin silver print, painted frame. In this way Lassry makes the frame an explicit part of the artwork, thus transforming the framed photographs into spatial objects consisting of a photograph and a frame. The geometric strips and covers reinforce the notion that these are not simply framed photographs or collages, but three-dimensional objects.

Furthermore, the images Lassry uses refer to visual elements from the history of art and photography, advertising, illustration and film. They are often recognisable images for which we automatically attempt to find a place within our own mental image bank. It is not the intention to decipher all his references, but it is interesting to discuss a few, some of which have already been highlighted in reviews and interviews with the artist. For example, his three-dimensional 'cabinets' are a conscious reference to the work of Donald Judd (1928-1994) and Richard Artschwager (1923-2013). His frames might be a reference to Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) for whom narrow, receding frames in the same colour that dominates his abstract compositions played an active role in his paintings. Like the work of Christopher Williams (b. 1956) Lassry's pictures call to mind product photos; they also have a relationship to the abstracted visual idiom of Jack Goldstein (1945-2003). These references function as an additional layer of abstraction in Lassry's oeuvre.

Lassry's performances are characterised by a similar game with references and abstraction. The hired professional dancers play a crucial role in this respect. Their performances, such as 'Untitled (Presence)' (2012), which took place at The Kitchen in New York, look suspiciously like a dance. Indeed certain passages are borrowed from the choreography of George Balanchine (1904-1983). We think we are watching a dance, but this is misleading: we are watching a performance. Lassry is not concerned merely with the believability of the dancers' movements, but also with the fact that these dancers automatically refer to their own professional background. You are witness to a double

bluff: you are watching a performance that resembles a dance and you think you see dancers but they are, in fact, performers.

Viewing Lassry's oeuvre as a whole, it becomes apparent that he is playing a game with the various disciplines in which he works. Framed photographs become three-dimensional objects. Dance choreography is actually a performance. His freestanding three-dimensional objects consist, on the one hand, of sculptures that resemble pieces of furniture and, on the other hand, of decorated modules that function as room dividers. He uses these objects and modules to create a carefully staged space. He makes the exhibition space itself accessible by creating openings in the walls. The public is led through the exhibition space just as the movements of the dancers are dictated by the choreography.

Lassry speaks of 'nervous pictures' when he talks about his work. He is referring to the instability of his images - both in two and three dimensions. He strips the photographic image down and plays with the individual elements so that we begin to question the meanings we routinely give to particular images. In this process of stripping, deconstruction and abstraction a space is created for new images and connections. The perception of the viewer plays an important role in this process. This is dependent upon several factors: the act of looking is determined not only by the workings of the human eye but also by accumulated knowledge, visual traditions and existing systems. Lassry's work implicitly poses the question: what is depicted here?

How people look at pictures is also central to Lassry's installation for Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. The materials and form of the elongated wooden sculpture in the installation refers to a door, which could open up or block the entrance to the exhibition space. The three freestanding sculptures are both barriers to perception and 'viewing stations' and are both decorative and functional objects. They influence the way the other works are perceived: the photographic objects on the walls can be viewed through the openings in the sculptures, or without an intervention. As you move through the space, sometimes the objects appear flat. This questions the three-dimensionality of the entire installation and transforms three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional images, and vice versa.

There is yet another tension between the photographic objects on the wall and the freestanding sculptures, namely the tension between mechanical reproduction and the handmade. The images refer to artificially staged studio photography, while the sculptures suggest a dedication to craft and applied arts. Lassry has stated that these sculptures are inspired by Viennese modernism around 1900: as stylistic marriage of figuration and abstraction with stylized forms and ornamentation. The

artists of this period sought a connection between their objects and mankind. The constant tension between recognition and alienation in Lassry's work interrupts the relationships between his work, the space and the viewer.

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