

Ten Thousand Ugly Inkblots

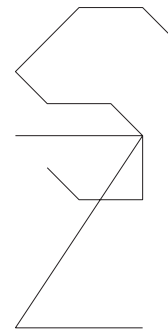
Part 1/3 with Nick Bastis, Whitney Claffin, Gilles Jacot, Behrang Karimi, Kitty Kraus, Alan Michael
November 21 – December 21, 2024



Shi Tao's *Ten Thousand Ugly Inkblots* (1685) marks a significant departure from the strictly composed, serene landscapes cultivated by the Qing dynasty painting tradition. Fluttering leaves disintegrate into impulsive, gestural splatters, to the extent that the rural landscape hinted at on the left side of the parchment almost entirely dissolves on the right. The title itself suggests an abandonment of illusion and instead refers to the medium in a way that could only be taken as an admission of failure if the pursuit of illusion were the painterly goal. Instead, Shi Tao's apperceptive humor engages with the materiality of image making beyond mimetic practice.

Parallel in Europe, Vermeer and Rembrandt obsessively studied light and shadow, equating man to god in the creation of worlds and masters of deception, arguably climaxing in the trompe-l'œil still lifes of Cornelis Gijsbrechts. In contrast, Shi Tao's work seems remarkably idiosyncratic, raising questions that are often prescribed as belonging to a discernibly modern disposition. Foreshadowing the expressive spontaneity of artists like Pollock, the disintegration of representation into abstraction in *Ten Thousand Ugly Inkblots* introduces issues of flatness versus depth, artistic subjectivity, and viewer engagement issues that would come to dominate Western discourse in the 20th century.

I doubt that Shi Tao really thought of his inkblots as “ugly,” but against the wistful, immaculate brushwork of the tradition in which he was educated, perhaps the chaotic splatters had a rather nauseating effect on contemporaries. Today, however, they seem quite beautiful – one might even be inclined to say poetic – as we have learned to appreciate the gestural expressivity of the so called avant-garde and developed a vocabulary for it. This goes to show how ideas of beauty and originality continuously change depending on context, and how, as the cyclical nature of rebellion and its subsumption churns, novelty and cliché are merely a matter of timing.



Ten thousand ugly inkblots, Part 1/3

Nick Bastis, Whitney Claffin, Gilles Jacot, Behrang Karimi, Kitty Kraus, Alan Michael
November 21 – December 22, 2024

List of Works

Room 1

clockwise

Nick Bastis, *Real Traps*, 2021
found consumer divider, aluminium tubes,
aggregate filling
38 × 4 × 2.5 cm

Nick Bastis, *Real Traps*, 2021
found consumer divider, aluminium tubes,
aggregate filling
31 × 4 × 4 cm

Nick Bastis, *Real Traps*, 2021
found consumer divider, aluminium tubes,
aggregate filling
35 × 4 × 4 cm

Gilles Jacot, *Sorted*, 2024
cardboard, mdf, tarpaulin cloth
34,5 × 14 × 26 cm

Kitty Kraus, *Untitled*, 2024
polyester
29 × 18 × 4cm

Gilles Jacot, *Sorted*, 2023
cardboard, mdf, insulation boards, industrial paint
31 × 17 × 23 cm

Behrang Karimi, *Ballade de Fleur*, 2023
oil on canvas
50 × 60 cm

Room 2

Behrang Karimi, *Kompass*, 2019
oil on canvas
60 × 40 cm

Whitney Claffin, *Untitled*, 2022
magazine clippings and enamel on lava lamps
dimensions variable

Gilles Jacot, *Sorted*, 2023
mdf board, tape, marker, screws, plastic, varnish
32 × 17 × 16 cm

Whitney Claffin, *Bells*, 2024
oil and acrylic on linen
120 × 80 cm

Nick Bastis, *Real Traps*, 2021
found consumer divider, aluminium tubes,
aggregate filling
41 × 3 × 3 cm

Nick Bastis, *Real Traps*, 2021
found consumer divider, aluminium tubes,
aggregate filling
35 × 4 × 4 cm

Gilles Jacot, *Sorted* 2024
plastic, model boards, offset plates, screw
40 × 4.5 × 4.5 cm

Nick Bastis, *Real Traps*, 2021
found consumer divider, aluminium tubes,
aggregate filling
34 × 2 × 4 cm

Alan Michael, *Sound on for the voices and stories*,
2016
oil on canvas
105 × 75 cm

Nick Bastis, *Real Traps*, 2021
found consumer divider, aluminium tubes,
aggregate filling
34 × 2 × 4 cm

Gilles Jacot, *Sorted*, 2024
mdf board, tape, marker, screws, sheet metal,
plastic, industrial paint, varnish
33 × 25 × 15 cm