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John Nixon

Eggshell Paintings 1986 - 1988

30 November 2024 - 15 February 2025

With the simplest of means, John Nixon conjures the mystery and magnitude of the night sky in these paintings. Scattered across an expanse of black paint, tiny flecks of white eggshell subtly evoke distant stars suspended in infinite space. The spare physical facts of the paintings — gloss enamel on hardwood, eggshell adhered to the surface while the paint was still wet — remain undisguised yet are lyrically transformed. The boundless realm of non-objective abstraction is imbued with cosmic inference.

These paintings proceed from modernism's 'ground zero' — the black monochrome — with echoes of Malevich's utopian visions. Nixon's poetic use of humble and natural materials also aligns these 'starry night' works—and other paintings incorporating seeds, rice or wheat— with the ethos of Arte Povera. (The Constructivists and Suprematists were the first Arte Povera artists, he used to say.) The shell of an egg carefully cracked and eaten at breakfast would be set aside for the purpose of making these works. Nothing goes to waste. Who would have thought that broken eggshell and black paint could evoke such a universe?

Sue Cramer