

Press release

Under the title 'Deep Down Inside', Nicolas Delprat's third solo exhibition at Michèle Schoonjans Gallery in Brussels is a selection of eight previously never shown paintings from the artist's three most recent series of the last years, from 3rd September until 21st October 2023.

Deep Down Inside***or the paradoxical depths of Nicolas Delprat's painting***

Nicolas Delprat's recent work is rooted in a twofold founding event in which art, the work and the experience of seeing are at stake: the first concerns a visit to an exhibition of fluorescent tube sculptures by New York artist Dan Flavin, the second that of luminous environments by Californian artist James Turrell. While these American artists have a spatial, physical and sensory relationship with light, one is concerned with the line, while the other is concerned with the space. In other words: either a two- or three-dimensional space from which light emanates and diffuses around its place of enunciation - Flavin - or overflows within and beyond it - Turrell. Whatever the case, for the artist they are a dual matrix from which each painting springs and to which each title refers.

Once this protocol has been established, Nicolas Delprat never stops questioning painting, the space of the canvas, the nature of his subjects, and the conditions under which forms, signs, light and colour appear. This new exhibition by Nicolas Delprat at the Michèle Schoonjans Gallery in Brussels bears witness to this. Entitled 'Deep Down Inside', it brings together eight previously unseen paintings from the artist's last three series, which are particularly iconic in terms of his current pictorial research. Beyond the composition and surface of the painting, it is paradoxically all a question of depth and interiority, even if this is not the first impression that seizes us. In fact, the absence of a vanishing point or perspective in the traditional sense means that we are confronted with a new type of representation: the painting refers only to the painting, to its materiality, and the materials themselves, to its objectivity, as well as to its prior objectives.

What does the painting reveal? What space does it open up? How does it focus the viewer? On what threshold item does the viewer's gaze rest? How does it engage the viewer? Faced with this series of influential questions, Nicolas Delprat makes visible and sensitive the way in which each work is developed, produced and manufactured. The first example is the "James, put back evolution" series. In "n°1" of this series, the artist has, as usual, used a spray gun to create light against a black background. However, on this occasion, he gradually intensified the light on the right-hand side, and on the left-hand side he used an inverted gradation of grey from dark to medium, the dividing line being nothing more than a material and visual vibration. Then, with the help of masking tape protecting the central space of the painting, a strip of black paint systematically bordered the whole - the 'put back' of the title? Except that the perfect geometry of this frame within the frame is disrupted by the antiquated imprint of the four scotch tapes that once held the stencil in place, and which have not been touched up. As a result, the eye is diverted - or thwarted - from any illusionist temptation or imaginative possibility. If, by any chance, it were to wish to escape into the composition, it would inevitably stumble on these four points of roughness, if not resistance. What's more, a gestural, almost organic spray of black paint further challenges the near-perfect uniqueness of the previous composition. Here again, the painting pragmatically designates itself as painting, hiding nothing of its nature, including its urgencies, accidents, and drips. The succession of these different layers/actions thus informs us about the pictorial process as a whole, and this in turn becomes the painting's true subject and motif. What is there is there. In the paintings in the "James évolution" and "Dan évolution" series exhibited here, this process is further simplified, and subtlety added. In

'No. 7', the projection of black paint, brushed on energetically, crosses the painting horizontally, obliterating the vertical line of light from right to left. In "n°6", one of the projections of black paint underlies the line of light and the other overlies it, revealing at least four gradual stages in the making of the painting, which at once agree and disagree, unify and contrast, merge and stand out. The more the strata of the painting's development multiply, the more we paradoxically slip into its spatial depths, 'Deep Down Inside'.

For Nicolas Delprat, the work of art is a veritable theatre of operations, in which each pictorial event both disturbs and illuminates the preceding and following ones. Each montage, each sequencing, each shift, each superimposition, each encounter, each friction or breach simultaneously blurs and intensifies perception. For all that, it is neither a conceptual or abstract zone, nor a place of pure contemplation, nor even poetic or narrative territory. There is no image, narrative or fiction here, because everything is as tangible as painting itself and all its materials, instruments and/or possibilities. For example, in the 'Minimal light' series, a pattern of perforated canvas and shades of green dominate. The former is a direct reminder of urbanity, construction sites and protective barriers. But what we have before our eyes is not the image of a grid, but the grid itself, used as a stencil. The latter appear as the forms, neither truly natural nor truly artificial, of landscapes lit by the sizzling lights of night-time street lamps or industrial greenhouses. So day competes with night, light with darkness, banality with strangeness, attraction with confusion, fascination with **perdition** and the photographic with the pictorial.

In his famous book "La Chambre Claire", Roland Barthes wrote: "For me, photographs of landscapes (urban or rural) must be inhabitable, not visitable. This desire to inhabit, if I observe it well in myself, is neither dreamlike [...] nor empirical [...], it is fable like, a kind of clairvoyance that seems to carry me forward, towards an utopian time, or to carry me backwards, I don't know where in myself [...]. In front of these favourite landscapes, everything happens as if I were sure I had been there or had to go there. Nicolas Delprat's painting is like that. It inhabits the painting as a place of fantastical predilection in the sense of Roland Barthes: a landscape of clairvoyance - if not of vision - that carries the viewer forward, towards an utopian pictorial time, or sends him or her backwards, towards an original territory of all places and all things. It's the expression of an 'I-don't-know-what' or an 'I-don't-know-where' that we can either be sure we've been to before, even if we can't really pinpoint where it is in the course of time and space, or we can be sure we'll have to go there by chance or fate, or both. And that experience is astonishing.

Marc Donnadieu

USEFUL INFORMATIONS**Nicolas DELPRAT - Deep Down Inside****Curator :****Marc Donnadieu****EXHIBITION DATES**

03.09 au 21.10.2023

ADDRESSRivoli Building • Chaussée de Waterloo 690 / 25 • 1180 Brussels • (><Inno
Bascule)**Opening days**

Open Thursday to Saturday from 12 noon to 6pm &/or by appointment

CONTACTinfo@msgallery.be • Mob/+32 478 716 296 • www.micheleschoonjansgallery.be