

Bernard FRIZE

The Brooklyn Rail,

Bernard Frize

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BERNARD FRIZE

BY DAVID RHODES

Come to Me Again
Perrotin, New York
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The second exhibition at Perrotin's Orchard Street gallery of the French artist Bernard Frize—the first was in 2019—who lives and works in both Berlin and Paris, comprises 20 paintings presented over two floors. The more recent paintings, from 2021, are situated on the ground floor and would constitute an impressive solo show in themselves; as it is—and this is not unusual for Frize—earlier paintings are also included, in this case from 2016 through 2020. The elliptical, parabolic nature of Frize's approach to painting means that the strict chronology of production is not linear or predictable. Rather, previous methods or series of paintings return, thus requiring us to check their dates. We see quickly that a series of paintings may not be exhausted and abandoned simply because it is followed immediately by a very different series, and can in fact be the source of reactivated, ongoing exploration. This complicates ideas of one directional temporality, refuting the notion that the

present is a concise replacement of the past—as in life the two are in a constant intertwining of appearing and disappearing. In some ways, our experience of time is recuperated in a disjunctive continuum.

For Frize, generation and corruption are core principles in his paintings. In his process, the “determinate changes into the indeterminate” and “chaos becomes form.” Matter, or here specifically paint, “is the foundation that serves as the basis for all change.” Seriality is Frize's way of continuing, without being sidetracked or mired in subjectivity. Protocols for each particular group of paintings are organized ahead of starting the paintings. This can be a sequence or set of directions, as well as the size of brush used for each painting. However, once the painting begins—it is positioned flat, and not against a wall—the interactions of fluid paint multiply chance occurrences; paint pigment, mediums, and water flow, spread, and mix, collecting color from previous passes of the brush, the points of overlapping or moments for redirection indicated by a grid drawn first and still often visible under the paint of many of the paintings. The Oulipo group of French writers and mathematicians (founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and Francois le Lionaise) used writing techniques based on particular constraints. Frize was aware of them when first working with using the idea of constraints in his work, and it is

worth thinking of them in relation to this work, whilst remembering that these are intuitive rather than analytic paintings in their making. Take the paintings here, *Long*, *Gnoi*, *Ingo*, and *Nigo*, all from 2020, and all formed from the crossings of wide brushes that interweave vertically and horizontally. Yet all the paintings remain individual. Compositionally, spatially, coloristically: they are of very different impact for the viewer.

Okan, *Fracht*, and *Lape* (all 2021) are paintings featuring the repeated application of a wide brush loaded with color passing vertically across the canvas. The color is applied into wet resin, and in each painting another liquid, water, or more medium (and color perhaps), is pooled, forming an irregular, parabolic center that bleeds outward in a pale ghosting or refracted colored glass-like aureole. The color is luminous, the surface smooth, as the strokes and pooling of paint into that wet, initial coat of resin absorb and eventually dry evenly to a surface that recalls an analog photographic emulsion—no contrasts of thick to thin paint, or redactions or additions at a later stage. The anomaly that we encounter is one of a collision of the dissimilar involving just two ostensibly simple, even banal actions: the parallel brushstrokes dragged over the poured area of resin. Disjunction is surrounding us in life here, it is present as painting. The largest painting here is

from last year, *Ourte* (2021), at just over 88 by 255 inches. Wide brushes have rhythmically moved vertically and diagonally cross each other from one side of the painting to the other, the field interrupted by paint flowing back from both the painting's upper and lower edges (remember the painting was made flat). The loosely geometric, the limning of the brush, and freely organic returning flood of excess paint at the edges coincide. The viewer can seek to ascertain the temporal order of the painting: though the sequence does not eliminate chance, the process of the painting is not arbitrary

The second-floor paintings from 2016 to 2020 display methodologies—some shared with the paintings on the first floor, resulting in equally distinct, challenging, and highly sensual paintings. Our understanding of this work, and its trajectory of constant change—including the numerous and surprising returns to further explore specific techniques, are provocatively and thrillingly revealed. It is rare to find painting as challenging, and sexy, as this—these are the qualities that painter Gunther Förg concluded painting should always have.

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JOSEPH E. YOAKUM

BY LYLE REXER

What I Saw
Museum of Modern Art, New York
November 21, 2021–March 19, 2022

Around 400 AD, the Chinese artist and theorist Zong Bing wrote, “Landscapes have a material existence, and yet also reach into the spiritual domain.” He might have been describing the work of Joseph Yoakum (1890–1972). In the tradition-bound milieu of Chinese landscape painting, deeply attentive to cosmological principles, I believe we can find the

most illuminating lens for considering the unique drawings of the self-taught Yoakum.

Yoakum's landscapes have been well-known in the world of folk and outsider art for four decades, but their enfranchisement by the larger art world has taken longer, even though the work of this Chicago artist was recognized and collected by a group of trained artists in the same city almost as soon as it appeared in the 1960s. Many of the works in this astonishing exhibition, organized jointly by the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Menil Collection of Houston, come from the private collections of several of those artists.

There were exceptions to institutional marginalizing, most notably inclusion of

some drawings in a group show at MoMA and Marcia Tucker's bold curation of a one-person exhibition at the Whitney the year Yoakum died. Otherwise, the lead time was long. Naming highlights the problem. “Self-taught,” “outsider,” “folk,” and even the more specific “art brut” are all words used to designate apparently sui generis work that originates outside familiar art-world boundaries. This is how Yoakum's art was labelled. But these are often racist terms, which effectively deny the works, especially by African Americans, content, complexity, and communicative authority. In the case of Yoakum, who was Black and possibly also Native American, another blanketing term has been “visionary.” Its apparently positive valence also sets the work beyond

serious consideration of form, iconography, and style, to say nothing of social and political context.

But if the past furnished few and limiting terms for appreciating the drawings, the present (which arguably began with the 2001 publication of Darrel Depasse's *Traveling the Rainbow: The Life and Art of Joseph E. Yoakum*) has furnished many. These include Yoakum's connection to the circus and the railroad, both of which he worked for in his eventful life; formal analogies with Native American art, especially from the Northwest coast; African American rural imagery; Christian Science; and last but certainly not least, a “tradition” of idiosyncratic American landscape painting that includes such iconic names as Thomas Cole, Charles