

PRESSBOOK

Bernard FRIZE

Artforum

September 2019

"Belly room" was marvelously obscene, a masturbator's paradise. Even the checklist, with its suggestive references to "handblown" glass, "Italian" or "Argentine" marble, and assorted "hardware," began to read like a coded brothel menu, a sensation not impeded by the gallery's soft-porn double-entendre name, Soft Opening, stamped teasingly at the top. The London-born, Los Angeles-based Mahmoud has described her delight in working with labor-intensive materials and achieving her hyper-glossy finishes through "repeated touching and sanding and stroking." So only the maker gets to fondle this provocative art! This show was like an orgy for one: the artist. The rest of us were left to our own frustrations, imagining the physical sensation of surfaces so alive they seemed to lightly perspire. I could imagine a collector buying one just for the perverse pleasure of stroking it whenever she pleases.

Mahmoud cites Louise Bourgeois as an influence, and the connection with the late French-American sculptor's polished, disembodied body parts is evident. Bourgeois's *Sleep II*, 1967, is a giant carved marble phallus set on two massive rough timbers, like a bone-dry penis tower attempting to raise itself off the floor, symbolic of deflated patriarchy. In contrast, Mahmoud's seemingly drenched, life-size sculptures were not going for symbolism. Each braless wall tit was realistically meaty, about the size and color of a roast—a pink slab of ham on the left, a bloodred cut of beef on the right. Other works appeared subjected to gravity, from the drooping silky bulges of *bust (phantom Li)* to the glass apparently seeping out of *bottom tear* to the toppled *carved slide*. Mahmoud's living sculptures create unexpectedly intimate encounters, like accidentally brushing against a stranger's sweaty skin in a club, complete with the unspoken anonymous frisson. Sometimes a peach is just a peach, but not here.

—Gilda Williams

PARIS

Bernard Frize

GALERIE PERROTIN

Rules can set you free. This credo has defined Bernard Frize's practice for more than forty years, leading him to design various systems, protocols, and restraints intended to rid his paintings of self-expression. To this end, Frize has, for previous bodies of work, engaged assistants in an intimate choreography whereby six hands worked together, used multiple brushes to map out all the possible moves for a knight on a chessboard, and stretched up dried "skin" harvested from a large basin filled with gallons of house paint. The results of such techniques—mostly large, colorful abstractions—were recently on view in the Centre Pompidou, Paris, retrospective "*Bernard Frize: Sans repentir*" (Without Remorse). And while the survey duly celebrated Frize's unconventional practice and the diversity of his oeuvre, it failed to delve into the artist's characteristic serial approach, in many instances showing only one result of a painterly experiment the artist repeated numerous times. Fortunately, Perrotin provided a concurrent showcase, "Now or Never," for Frize's recent series. As seen here together, works produced under more or less the same set of conditions found distinction from one another mainly via the painterly accidents—drips, bleeding, or splatter—that sometimes also result in unintentional pictoriality and illusionism. While these chance and subjective effects disrupt Frize's highly regimented practice, they serve as further proof of the artist's having ceded creative control.

Produced between 2016 and 2019, the eighteen paintings in the Perrotin show were made with a blend of acrylic and resin, a concoction that Frize has been using since the mid-1980s. Dragging transparent jewel tones across the canvas with a thick brush, the artist creates

colorful and luminous linear patterns that range from simple vertical bands (*Deuz*, 2018) to an intricate basket weave of brushstrokes (*Bork*, 2018.) A particularly indicative installation in an upstairs room featured five identical square canvases that had each been divided into thirty-six squares with red or green pencil prior to being painted. Slight variations in the paint application from one painting to the next resulted in a series of patchwork-style compositions that ranged from one constituted of tidy pastel cubes (*Epa*, 2018) to a bright, drippy madras (*Buc*, 2018.) While adhering to a modernist grid, Frize lets the paint do what it will. The ensuing imperfections—stunning dark bands of overlapping colors, swirling watery seepages, and delicate monochrome dribbles—beautifully illustrate the tension between order and disorder that is at the heart of Frize's practice.

Three of Frize's most recent works, *Nami*, *Bem*, and *Gol*, all 2019, were the by-products of a new protocol involving distinct layers of paint. Frize forms the backgrounds of these paintings with strokes of color that subtly shift from blue to purple to orange to yellow and back again as they run from the top to the bottom of the canvas. Over these vertical striated bands, Frize has added splashes of blue-green paint, which unexpectedly bring a sense of realism to the ostensibly abstract compositions. The new paintings' surfaces remain characteristically smooth and flat, but the splotches create illusions of texture and distance. To this viewer, these works alternately look like planks of acid-eaten anodized titanium and leaves fluttering over a blurred, light-streaked highway. Indeed, interpretation is the final variable in Frize's experiments—and it gives the artist one more chance to distance himself from his paintings.

—Mara Hoberman

Behjat Sadr

BALICE HERTLING

In *Le temps suspendu* (Time Suspended), Mitra Farahani's 2006 documentary on the Iranian painter Behjat Sadr, the artist explains that "in painting, you suspend time." Sadr passed away ten years ago at the age of eighty-five, but in this exhibition, her decades-long practice crystallized in nine oil paintings (one supported by steel struts running from floor to ceiling), seven collages, and four photographs. Her canvases often read as abstractions, but they are squarely grounded in the real: in the materiality of the varied surfaces and the viscosity of oil paint.

As an art student in Italy in the late 1950s, Sadr took European art informal as a reference point. Here, two paintings dated ca. 1957, around the time the artist exhibited at Rome's Galerie Il Pincio with the support of her teacher Roberto Melli, bore witness to the influence of that movement. Both *Untitled*, like all of the works on view, these two vertically formatted canvases feature wide strokes of black oil paint and muted flickers of red and green. But Sadr did not adhere to the tenets of European modernism; instead, she created a practice that was



Bernard Frize, *Nami*, 2019, acrylic and resin on canvas, 39 7/8 × 31 7/8".