

PRESSBOOK

John HENDERSON

frieze

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ITALY

JOHN HENDERSON Peep-Hole, Milan

John Henderson's exhibition is simply titled 'John', a reflection of his impulse to strip everything down to basics. By making unique metal casts of paintings that he then destroys ('Casts') or by covering paintings with a thick metallic coating ('Recasts', both 2013), Henderson makes visible his process of construction. At the same time, he turns his invisible 'originals' into phantom limbs, whose absence he also makes clear.

Duality and reiteration form the parameters of this show: original/copy, single/multiple, past/present, as well as the recurrent pairing of certain materials (two alloys, for instance, in the series 'Hybrid', 2013). However, whatever medium he employs, Henderson's pivot is abstract painting: he plays with the formal legacy of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism to probe our mediated ways of looking at art.

Accessed via touchscreens, images of handmade objects are now often 'hand-seen', as it were. Henderson focuses on the tactile appeal of painted surfaces, brushstrokes and gestures as if to test their persistence across migrations from one form, support or dimension to another. He says that he feeds the initial gestural element of his work 'through another element that has a flattening effect'. Nonetheless, the outcome is a reproduction (or a 'documentation', as the artist puts it), whose physicality isn't erased, but rather enhanced. Or



even inflated: the 'Casts' are so heavy that they're impossible to lift. Henderson's duplications imply a direct contact with the 'real thing', be it through an archaic technique, such as lost-wax casting, or a contemporary one, such as direct digital scanning of the painting – a method that he has adopted for the photographic series 'Flowers' (2013).

The only video in the show, *Not Yet Titled* (2013), was installed on the floor at the gallery entrance, against a white plinth, which lent it a sculptural presence. Shot in black and white in Henderson's cavernous studio in Chicago, *No Title* shows the artist breaking casts in two with a sledgehammer. This ritualized, iterated gesture of division – which echoes an earlier black and white video by Henderson, *Cleanings* (2010), in which he mops the floor with Jackson Pollock-esque moves – has ironic undertones: it caricatures artists' chronic dissatisfaction towards their creations, and comes across as an entirely Sisyphean task, since it's the mould, not the cast, which has to be broken to halt the endless cycle of production and consumption. On the adjoining walls, four 'Casts' and four 'Hybrids' were displayed both horizontally and vertically. These large works are made of aluminium, brass or bronze or combinations of both, symmetrically joined along a middle line. The same painting is often 'repeated' with different materials (and thus colours), while others operate as variations on the compositional theme. When bathed in natural light, they glow with reflections and shades, thus bringing back to life the bygone impasto.

Henderson's fascination with metal printing also works as a tongue-in-cheek celebration of Peep-Hole's relocation on the premises of Fonderia Battaglia, one of Milan's busiest art foundries: on the opening day, visitors were greeted by the enormous bronze casts of trees by Giuseppe Penone being produced on site and temporarily stocked in the courtyard, in preparation for their grand relocation to Versailles. Mimesis and doppelgänger, over and over again.

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