

Pieter VERMEERSCH

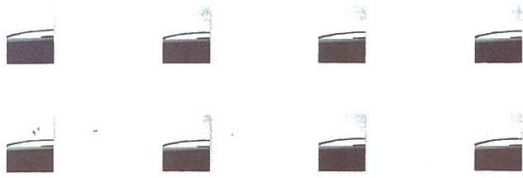
Pieter Vermeersch, M-Museum

November 2019

LEUVEN, BELGIUM

Pieter Vermeersch
M-MUSEUM

The clearest and most unequivocal feeling that viewers gleaned from this show of Pieter Vermeersch's work—conceived by the artist specifically for the spaces of M-Museum in Leuven and curated by Eva Wittocx—was one of complete immersion, space after space, in what we might call the essence of painting: thought distilled into color. Vermeersch provided this potent sensory experience in part via the installation of five monumental painted walls, or what he calls “gradient murals.” He achieved the murals' monochrome fading via innumerable tonal variations—yet the effect felt physically real, as if some organic and photosensitive process were taking place right before one's eyes.



Pieter Vermeersch,
8 Paintings I, 1999,
eight oil-on-canvas
paintings, each
16½ × 13¼".

In fact, many of the artist's images have a photographic origin. Each component of *8 Paintings I*, 1999, for example, takes the same photograph as a point of departure: a detail of a windshield and a windshield wiper. Vermeersch created a new grouping especially for this show, derived from photos of himself, often on the phone. Isolated and transposed pictorially, these banal images become a sort of statement of intent, emblematic of the artist's desire to conjoin representation and abstraction in an evocative, fleeting—yet physically present—dimension of reality. The pulsation of reality effected here also occurs in Vermeersch's 2012 photographic works that he marked up with oil paint.

As one moved through the show's galleries, the chromatic path traced by large murals took on additional dimensions, defining new trajectories of perception and movement amid the museum's architecture: The route was not simply visual, but spatial and temporal as well. Further architectural manipulations enriched the tactility of this experience: inserts of two mirrors and several nearly freestanding brick walls. The sound piece *Spasm, Sonderweg*, 2005, also caused sensory immersion, as did Vermeersch's “scratch paintings,” which the artist makes by scraping part of the painting's still-damp surface in a single controlled gesture, removing painterly illusion and affirming the work's here-and-now physicality. Wonderful, extremely refined marble works made between 2014 and 2019 were persuasive. Vermeersch masterfully uses stone as a canvas, activating the material's latent temporality through a combination of geological and pictorial stratifications. The artist's deliberately un-museum-like installation of architectural fragments from the institution's collection proposed a dialogue among different time periods. His combinations of color, space, and time—not

to mention his varied supports, which ranged from canvas and marble to photos and architecture itself—yielded a hyperrealistic abstraction that evoked rare physical power.

—Francesca Pola

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

AMSTERDAM

Steffani Jemison and Samson Young
LOOIERSGRACHT 60

Organized by Amsterdam's De Appel contemporary arts center, Steffani Jemison and Samson Young's double bill “Decoders-Recorders” took as its starting point the violence inherent to and resulting from the systematization and standardization of communication. Mobilizing artistic strategies—such as intuitive mark-making, erasure, nonsyntactic repetition, and layering—as tools of negation and transgression, the show expanded its critical gaze onto the tyranny of all bounded and binding systems.

The exhibition opened with the series “To Fanon,” 2016–, Young's rejoinder to the optimization of information (and therefore the loss of its excess) in the Western musical notation system. Held together by metal paper clips, each framed A3-size collage consists of an original score from one of Young's own compositions made between 2005 and 2015, “vandalized” with abstract marks and silk-screened and photocopied images, on top of which a sheet of tracing paper features a word lettered in gold. The imagery obscuring the musical notation features military trumpeters—often serially reproduced—from different eras, and may, in turn, be blocked out or highlighted by frenetic scribbles in white or gray pastel. Young thus endows his act of self-erasure with orchestral depth through a permutation of inscriptions that are in and of themselves musically inconsequential. The (mostly Italian) words hovering on top, among them *cantabile* (in a singing manner) and *doloroso* (sorrowful), are musical directions anchoring nuances that might be lost by a dependence on notation alone; here they metonymically stand in for a microcosm of affect bolstered by the artist's own visual interventions.

Young's more spacious and lighthearted series “Ancillary Motion,” 2018–, was presented nearby inside a wood-paneled booth. In this series, the artist reverses his strategy and pushes fragments of musical notation (such as empty measures with the G clef or a free-floating fermata mark, and stems of notes without “heads”) out of conventional musical circulation, alienating them from their original context. Connected in a diagrammatic fashion with dashed or jittery lines to



Samson Young,
*To Fanon (Resonance
Studies I) 02 Doloroso*,
2016, mixed media,
11¼ × 16½".
From the series
“To Fanon,” 2016–.