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Venue

[Simon Lee Gallery, London](#)

Date

2018.05.17 Thu - 2018.06.30 Sat

Opening Exhibition

17/05/2018

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Opening Hours

Monday – Saturday

10 am – 6 pm

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BERNARD FRIZE
Blackout in the Grid
Simon Lee Gallery, London

[Press Release]

Simon Lee Gallery is proud to present an exhibition of paintings by Bernard Frize, the fourth to be held in the London gallery. This exhibition brings together paintings from Frize's most recent series with works made in the decade from 1999 to 2008. As the Centre Pompidou prepares for its first major survey exhibition of the artist's work, to be held in 2019, the juxtaposition of these works reveals both the consistency of Frize's project, and his constant innovation.

Throughout his career, Frize has revisited and revised his own works from earlier series. The loops and switchbacks of the trajectory of his career seem to echo those interweaving marks which structure many of the paintings themselves. He has spoken of these structures as devices for the removal of compositional decisions. The paintings proceed in series; the series are determined by the rules which govern them. He continues until the variations, and the possibility to produce new results, are exhausted. Frize's project is, simply stated, one of reducing painting to its most fundamental elements, of using structure and system to govern and regulate the compositional process and thus absolve the artist from the decision making process, so that there is nothing more to the work than its physical, even technological, method of production.

Given this premise, it should come as no surprise that one of the formal devices which reappears in Frize's work with the greatest regularity is the grid. From the play of horizontal and vertical brushstrokes in *Tonka* or *Rala* (both 2017), the simplicity of whose structure underlies a complex weave of anteriority and posteriority, to the herringbone weave of *Session*, the earliest work in the show (1999), or the branch-like structure of *Decalque* (2002); whether as armature, as motif or as incidental reference, a grid underlies each of the works in this exhibition.



The grids in Frize's paintings engage the essential contradiction that Rosalind Krauss summarised in her 1979 essay on the subject: "The bottom line of the grid is a naked and determined materialism. But ... that is not the way that artists have ever discussed it Mondrian and Malevich are not discussing canvas or pigment or graphite or another form of matter. They are talking about Being or Mind or Spirit" Just as one might make a case, against Krauss, that Mondrian and Malevich were indeed concerned both with the material and with the symbolic, so Frize's engagement with the device also embraces this contradiction. On the one hand, the grid extends to its limit the artist's abrogation of the decision-making process. The paint, the mark, the blur, the contamination of one pigment as it passes through another, the behaviour of wet on wet, the bleed; it is this "naked and determined materialism" that makes the painting. And yet, Frize's grids have something of the fake about them. The brush marks of which they are constructed are logically impossible, weaves that the mind cannot unpick. In place of flatness, they suggest illusionistic depth. They are concerned more with presence than with image, and yet the marks themselves, screened beneath layers of clear acrylic read more as image than as trace.

This holding in balance of contradictory forces lies at the heart of Frize's work. There is nothing disingenuous about his assertion that he is not interested in the search for beauty. And yet the beauty in these paintings is inescapable.

This exhibition, by bringing together works from a range of different series and a time span of close to 20 years, allows an examination of these contradictions. The systematic rigour of his painting process separates all the more clearly the act of making and the act of viewing. By denying his agency Frize restores ours. As much as system determines the making of the painting, it also gives us a path when looking. We follow the brush marks to try to trace back the making process, to analyse the sequence of colours and lines, but it is when we move away from this analytic way of looking to one that is more intuitive and start to enjoy the play of light and colour, transparency and opacity that we become conscious of where the power of Frize's painting lies. It is in the works ability to pause our perception at that moment of transition between analytic and intuitive, between system and image, between the materiality of making and the pleasure of perception.