

## Review Exhibitions

# Bernard Frize: Long Lines (Often Closed)

Simon Lee Gallery, London, 10 Oct–17 Nov 2007  
Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris, 18 Oct–8 Dec 2007

Bernard Frize's abstracts combine process, chance and beauty. And he is still finding new ways to walk the line

INTERVIEW: Paul Carey-Kent

For over two decades now, Paris- and Berlin-based Bernard Frize (b. 1949) has been setting up rigorous procedures which determine his work's final look – or, as he says, “the brush paints”. His procedures are remarkably varied and have included taking the skin from paint allowed to stand in a basin; using a wallpaper roller; fixing several brushes together; and having several painters working simultaneously on the same painting. Frize's most recent show was split between London and Paris, and wittily titled *Longues Lignes (Souvent Fermées)* – in English, *Long Lines (Often Closed)*. Both exhibitions contained works from four recent series, shown below; and all demonstrated Frize's continuing ability to devise interesting ways of making paintings. But though the processes are explicit, the aesthetic charge which results remains a mystery.

Your name conjures up thoughts of the YBA Freeze show and the Frieze Art Fair. Does it have such resonance in France?

To take an example very dear to the British people, my name sounds like an architectural term that refers to the decoration of a temple like the Parthenon. I gladly leave the business of drawing conclusions about the relevance of this detail to my own career or to the art scene in general entirely up to you.

Your work typically starts with a specific structure and then sees what chance does to it. What appeals to you about this?

One has to give oneself good reasons to do something. This may be the melancholic part of the work. You have to begin somewhere. The beginning happens on the grid. I am very suspicious of art that claims to express artistic genius. To me, painting still offers the possibility of making a work which conveys its concept inside its process of making. This is the reason why process and movement are very similar from my point of view.

Presumably the structure is necessary in order to make the best of chance? Absolutely, a structure is a necessity.

Without it, the human world would be a chaos. Systems and logic often result in a best form of outcome governed by chance. Take Alice in Wonderland as an example. The worst happens when structure is confused with authority and dogmatism. I am working to find ideas which generate the rest of the process. Then any decision, anything happening by chance, will not change the final outcome.

Your work seems to be neither representation nor abstraction, just paintings which show the process of their own making. Is that how you see it?

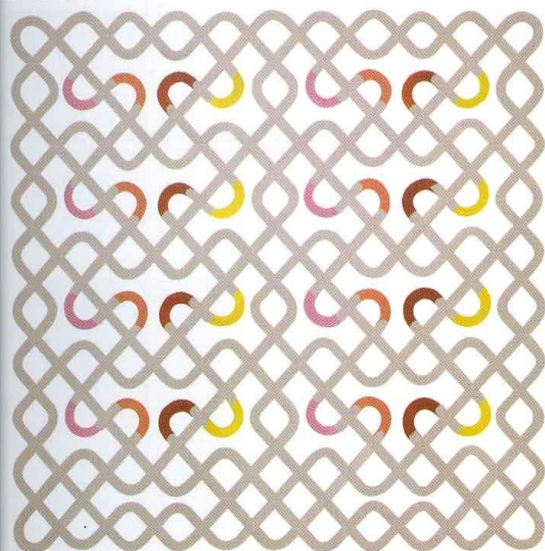
I am trying to find ideas for which the paintings become the manifestation. Engaging a process is almost like building thoughts, whereas an image could never be a way of thinking but a frozen symbol or sign. Process is a perpetual movement. Categories like abstraction or representation are indeed very limited

### BERNARD FRIZE: FOUR RECENT SERIES

#### Suite à Onze [Following Eleven] series

Shown: Suite à Onze No. 19 (2007), acrylic and resin on canvas, 165 x 165cm

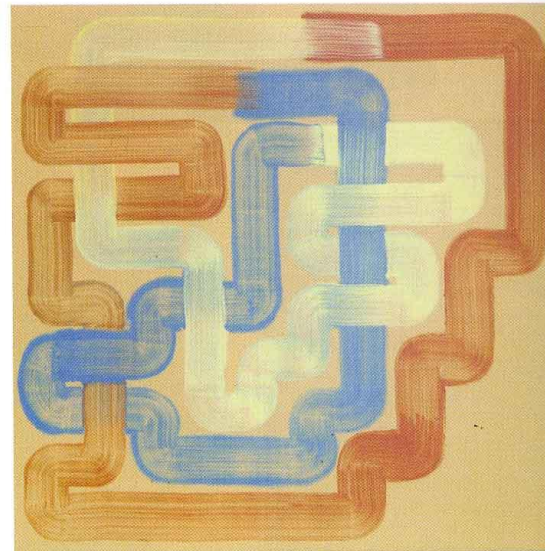
More regular and linear than Frize's previous work, this series appears to derive from a game such as crossing a large number of bridges in a set order. Most use a grey line on white, but they vary considerably in the extent to which extra colour interventions are made.

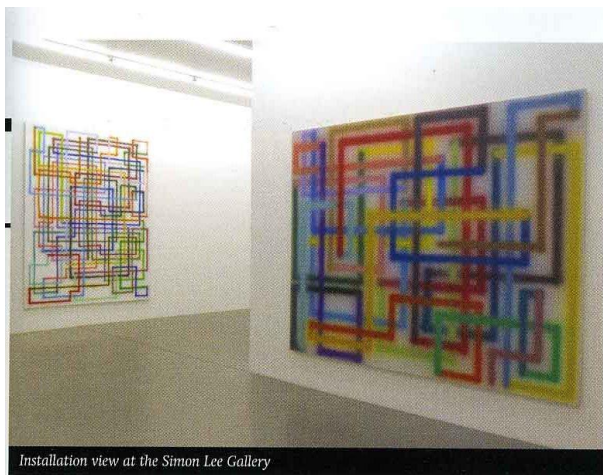


#### Est/Nord [East/North] series

Shown: Est D (2007), acrylic and resin on canvas, 145 x 145cm

Frize says of his recent paintings that what they have in common is “a long line that avoids passing over the same area more than once”. In this case, two other people helped him to “weave” the brushstrokes, resembling pipework in appearance.





Installation view at the Simon Lee Gallery

terms to describe my work. My task is to propose a number of experiences which the first glance will not exhaust.

**Is there any reason for the colours you choose?**

Colour is discriminating. In painting, it is very convenient to use colours to name objects. When one line is painted by one person, and the next by another, the different colours help me show objects that are dissimilar from one another. I try to paint with as many colours as possible. The choice of colour is not important. In any case, most of the time they are mixed up on the canvas during the process in an unpredictable way.

Some days I prepare the colours myself, sometimes someone else does it.

**What advantage do you gain from working in series?**

When I work in series, the onlooker can see the repetitions of my attempts to exhaust the series. Within the series, I am trying to find an economy – sometimes a solution to make fewer decisions, to paint with fewer colours – which confronts my initial idea and leads me to new ways of thinking or even leads to new formulations.

**How many paintings do you discard?**

Each series is different. Some days are

*“Within the series, I am trying to find economy”*

successful, some depressing. I have no statistics. I discard many paintings.

**Despite the distancing effect of following rules and of using other painters, your paintings seem to achieve a very recognisable “Bernard Frize look”. How do you explain this?**  
[Jokingly] That’s a harsh accusation! I know that I have been doing the same thing for more than 30 years, but I am really trying to change!

**The results are beautiful. Do you aim for beauty?**

There is a coherence between the formal aspect of the works and what is brought to our thoughts. The beauty comes from the perception that we are engaging in a visual experience that precipitates our mind.

**You often use more than one painter. Why does group painting appeal to you?**  
I’ve planned drawings which I could not have produced by myself: types of weaving, braids etcetera. When they were finally transferred to the canvas, it was a

progression in my work. Sometimes, I think that I have tried to engage with social concerns in my work.

**It is obvious that your paintings have a method, but it can be a mystery what the method is until it is explained.**  
When you say there might be a mystery, for me the method will always be visible. If you spend time looking at my work, it becomes obvious through the details.

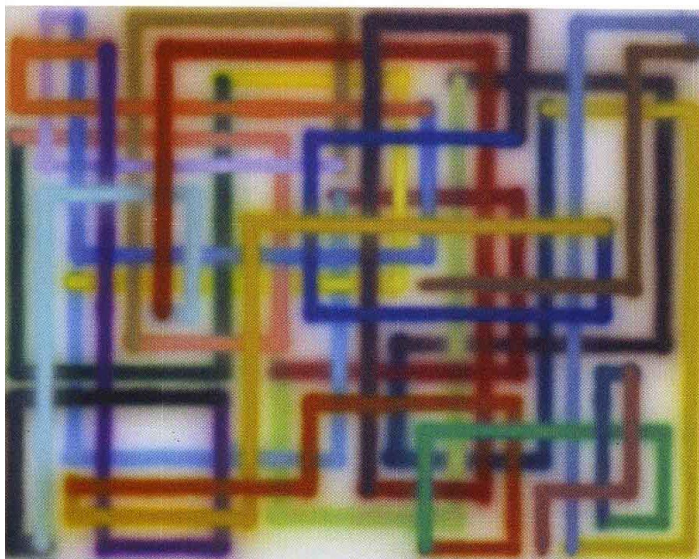
**You’ve just started using a spray gun and your works have become much larger. Are these two things related?**  
The spray gun allows me to keep a certain distance from the canvas, while the brush always has to follow my arm to the middle of the canvas. In other words, paintings made with one or more brushes are proportional to the size of my arm, whereas spray-painted works don’t rely on this proportional restraint.

**How do you choose your titles?**  
Simply by not having any relation with the painting.

**Au Pistolet [With the Gun] series**

Shown: *Ela* (2007), acrylic and resin on canvas, 227 x 290.5cm

Frize’s newest implement is the spray gun, used here to fill a grid to produce a geometric version which applies the “not crossing twice” constraint on a very large scale. They play witty games with scale and focus, and can’t help but evoke both a route map of train lines and the graffiti that adorns them.



**Fixés Sous Verre [Fixed Under Glass] series**

Shown: *Mars 01* (2007), tempera and lacquer under glass, 40 x 35cm

Frize’s recent show included another new development: small-scale versions of the crossing and grid deconstruction game, set inaccessibly under glass, and strangely resembling jewel-like retro video games.

