



Detail of *Flowers (retouched)*, 2023. Colored photograph, frame. 24 × 28 ½ inch. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

JOHN HENDERSON

ENCHAÎNEMENT

January 12 - February 17, 2024

Perrotin is pleased to present *enchaînement*, John Henderson's third exhibition in New York, showcasing new photographs, paintings, and gypsum casts.

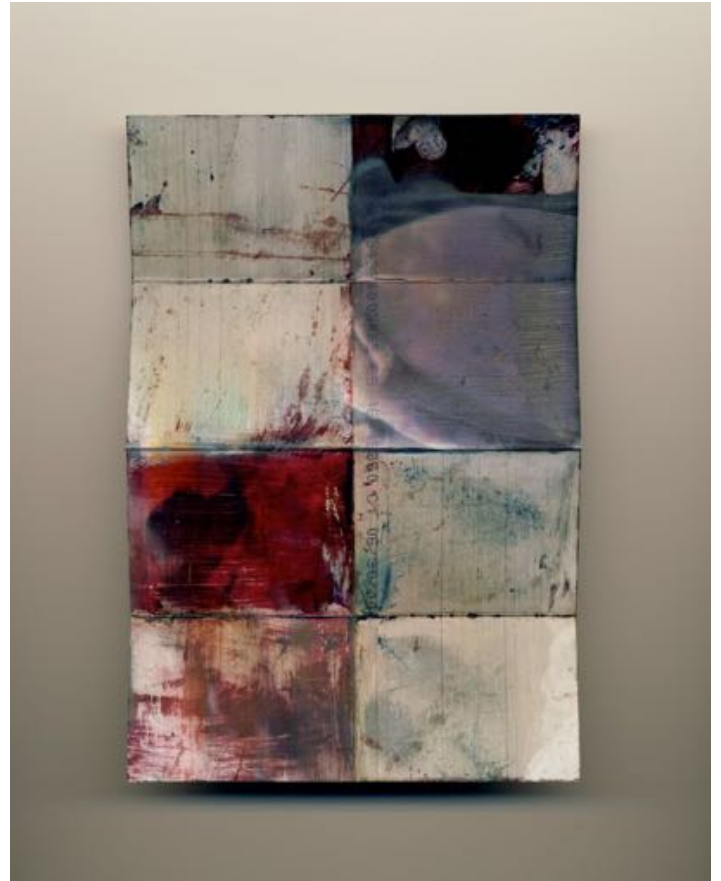
Each of the works presented here begins with a gesture. Whether a photographic snapshot or a stretched canvas, John Henderson subjects his materials to a series of maneuvers, material translations, and technological dislocations that render them anew. In *Flowers*, a body of work that builds from commercially printed photographs, the evidence of such gestures is particularly pronounced, bringing to mind Richard Serra's well-known, 1967 *Verb List*: to fold, to rotate, to flip, to draw, to paint, to paste, to scan, to print, to frame. The final work is the result of a host of manipulative processes, becoming its own form of archive—an accumulation of Henderson's dance of materials. To describe this process, we might use the French word *enchaînement*, literally a "chaining together," a dance term that refers to a linked sequence of steps or gestures. In order to see Henderson's works, it helps to think of them in this way—not as fixed or static conglomerations, but in relation to the mobile and temporal logic of performance. Each work is the result of a *pas de deux* between the artist and materials, rehearsed again and again against the backdrop of Henderson's studio-as-stage.

This practice marks a logical and intriguing elaboration of Serra's cataloguing of disparate actions. For Henderson, canonical operations of the history of abstract painting offer up an array of readymade gestures and motifs—the expressionist brushstroke, the appropriated image, the monochrome, the grid—moves waiting to be reenacted (performed) and reimagined or dislodged through an *enchaînement* of material displacements. In a selection of gypsum casts, exaggeratedly impasto-ed gestural paintings are transformed into cast plaster, producing a ghostly topography of white that becomes the freighted grounds for new painting. The faux *tabula rasa* performs a double dislocation—of Henderson's hand as well as those of his painterly predecessors. As a result, the final works frustrate our ability to locate a point of origin. Here, as in many of Henderson's works, his process follows a looped rather than linear development: works that begin as paintings are transformed into sculpture only to be made paintings once again.

The *Untitled Paintings* pursue a similar series of switchbacks from painting to sculpture and back to painting. To make them, Henderson loads the canvas with layer upon layer of paint, creating an almost theatrically excessive painting. These over-the-top accumulations are so removed from their now entirely invisible support that they become more



Correction, 2021. Cast gypsum, ink. 20 × 16 × 1 ½ inch. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Flowers, 2023. Color photograph, frame. 25 ¼ × 21 ¼ inch. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

sculptural than painterly. From here, Henderson doubles back: he sands the sculptural buildup down until arriving at a flattened surface of palimpsestic images, ghostly traces of paintings past. With their crisply painted edges, these paintings also assert their status as objects, a nod to their quasi-sculptural trajectory.

In *Flowers*, printed photographs are built up into collages only to be flattened back into photographic images. In their incorporation of diverse, overlapping paper materials, and their hybrid status between media, the collages recall the paintings of postwar American artist Robert Rauschenberg. For the art historian Leo Steinberg, Rauschenberg's works were exemplary of a new kind of "flatbed picture" resembling "any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed—whether coherently or in confusion."¹ Like Rauschenberg's early paintings, the *Flowers* collages are characterized by the accumulation of assorted material "data": the back of a photograph, the ink-jet printed image, a scrap of discarded paper. Yet, here and elsewhere Henderson exposes his materials to technological manipulations that render them less literal, more spatially ambiguous. After drawing, pasting, folding, and painting, he scans his scrappy objects—subjecting them to the contradictory spatial effects of yet another "flatbed." On the one hand, the scans render the collages impossibly flat, a two-dimensional image rather than a literal

buildup of stuff. On the other hand, the scanner's play of uneven light and shadow places them in a newly theatrical frame. The collages float mysteriously atop an ambiguous gray gradient, a nowhere space that suggests both flatness and internal depth. The resulting image and its play of shadows evokes the theatrical set-up of the photoshoot, as if the object itself is performing for the camera. This is not quite a flatbed picture plane, nor does it give us Giorgio Vasari's famous view through a window. Here too Henderson gives us ambiguously-staged documents of an ephemeral dance.

By mining the canned corners of abstract art's recent history, Henderson opens them up to the continuous play of potentially infinite operations. The resulting works create unexpectedly poetic containers of the past—disorienting images in which the actions themselves are scrambled together and impossible to trace—scrupulous rehearsals for an unknown future.

— Jenny Harris

[More information about the artist >>>](#)

¹ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 82, 84.