

Benjamin Sabatier

Concrete & Colors

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Press release

Benjamin Sabatier
HW (Purple) (detail), 2025
Reinforced concrete, vinyl paint,
varnish
148 x 92,5 x 44,5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Xippas



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The gesture is the other side of the commodity.
Giorgio Agamben

Xippas is pleased to present *Concrete & Colors*, the first solo show by Benjamin Sabatier within the gallery. The exhibition brings together a series of previously unseen works which occupy the entire space.

As a sculptor, Benjamin Sabatier does not deny the performative dimension of his practice. Exploring the relationship between art and labor, between action and object, through the use of raw or fragile materials (concrete, cardboard or brick) and an abstract vocabulary which references Modernity, the artist critiques the productionist logic of our capital-centric world by making the transformative process of matter visible.

Concrete & Colors, whose title evokes both construction sites and modern painting (Matisse's cut-outs, for example), presents *Home Work*, a series of large flat sculptures in painted reinforced concrete, as well as smaller ones, arranged on a pedestal in a layout reminiscent of a forest. They recall Barbara Hepworth's perforated sculptures, Nancy Holz's monumental installations, but also Joseph Beuys' treatment of materials. Despite often playing with a certain formalism, Benjamin Sabatier's works bear witness to an experience of transformation. The act of making is central to the work, to the extent of evoking self-construction (the kit). The process induces the form: the technique (assembly, moulding, cutting), based on cardboard moulds, enables the paint, which is applied at the end, to reveal the fragility of the piece, whose roughness can be seen on the edges of the sculptures.

The artist explores two scales: the interior and the exterior. This duality is echoed by the presence of a void at the heart of the sculptures, which are essentially *solid*. It is through

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this void that each piece finds its balance. The subtracted disc becomes the base, and the hole becomes a visual tool. But who is looking at whom in front of a work of art? And what are we looking at: the material or the hole? The opening provides a perspective on our social space. The gestural dimension of the shaping process is combined with the relationship between the works and the audience. The philosopher Nelson Goodman explains that “the digging and filling of a hole functions as a work of art, insofar as our attention is directed towards it as an exemplifying symbol.” The hole is a common motif in metaphysics and Western art history. For Sartre, it is a void to be filled in order to unite us with others. The artist therefore approaches the exhibition as a relational space, a phenomenology, conceiving the gaze as an active gesture, viewing the visitor as part of a larger device – a situation.

Benjamin Sabatier sees sculpture as a vector of ecology, making use of discarded materials such as waste and scrap. This *upcycling*, which illustrates the effects of industrialisation – the main cause of climate collapse – lends a “second hand” to these materials, that of the artist, who places his work at the centre of a socio-economic reality. Through a construction site aesthetic, the symbolism of concrete evokes the social and political history of large urban complexes. It also harks back to the history of the working class, built on the alienation of labour and productivity sustained by the liberal world. The series is assembled on a long pedestal, similar to those found in department stores. The base (“socle” in French, from *socolo*, the “shoe” that raises the work) becomes the support for another fundamental asset: the social landscape. The whole, inhabited by the energy of life (the creative act), thereby highlights the performativity and sustainability of neglected and precarious things.

We should interpret the prevalence of this gesture in our world, where movement is a source of concern. *Concrete & Colors* invites us to coexist in transformation, to make membership an ecological tool.

Agnès Violeau

Born in 1977 in Le Mans (France), Benjamin Sabatier lives and works in Paris.

Benjamin Sabatier is a sculptor whose work explores and transforms the forms of modern art and their history in a simple vocabulary. His use of concrete, a constant in both his volume-based compositions and his reflections on abstract painting, draws on the history of this basic material of modern architecture as well as its current use in the history of sculpture since the 1970. The use of cardboard or plastic panels creates an unexpected surface texture that is sometimes reinforced by the addition of paint, at the risk of disturbing the appearance of the materials.

His works are part of important public collections: Artothèque, Villeurbanne, France, Fondazione Ghisa Art Collection, Locarno, Switzerland, FRAC Haute-Normandie, France, Fondation Galila Barzilai-Hollander, Brussels, Collection Société Générale, Paris, France, Collection Raja, Paris, France, Collection FdG Project, Brussels, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.