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**Bernard Frize "On the Side where there is no Handrail"**

**Opening Reception: Thursday 29 August 2013 / 6pm - 8pm**

**Exhibition Dates: 29 August - 28 September 2013 / Tuesday - Saturday, 11am - 8pm**

**Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong**

1. "Sepia" 2013, Acrylic and resin on canvas, 170,5 x 170,5 cm / 67 1/4 x 67 1/4 inches

2. "Polji" 2013, Oil on canvas, 200 x 200 cm / 6.6 x 6.6 feet

3. View of the exhibition "On the Side where there is no Handrail", Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong, 29 August - 28 September 2013

All images : Photo: Claire Dorn

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**Bernard Frize “On the Side where there is no Handrail”  
Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong / 29 August - 28 September 2013**

Bernard Frize “On the Side where there is no Handrail”  
貝浩登 (香港) / 2013年8月29日至9月28日

Interview of Bernard Frize by Léa Chauvel-Lévy in July 2013 :

**Léa Chauvel-Lévy: When you started “Suite Segond” (1980), you used dried skin from the surface of paint pots that had been left open. What were you looking for in this kind of recycling? Was it an act of withdrawal, of self-effacement in relation to painting?**

Bernard Frize: When an artist has to answer questions, it's most often implied that there's some definite motivation behind his ideas. In fact there are sometimes things I do for no apparent reason, and which are justified retrospectively. But to come back to your question, when I made the “Suite Segond” pieces, I was actually working on other paintings. The first of the “Suite Segond” pictures was the outcome of thoughtlessness. When I took the dried film off the surface of the pots and put it on a nearby canvas, I wasn't looking for anything at all. What I found in “Suite Segond” was what I was looking for in those paintings I was actually working on. When they were finished and shown, the critical reception ranged from indifferent to pretty negative. After a while I stopped liking them myself: I found them too close to New Realist accumulations, even though that was a frame of reference I could have made no claim to. At the same time I learned a lot from those paintings, which helped me think about problems of topology and signification that were useful for my work later on. The remark made to me by Marcel Lefranc, who was César's agent back then—“Why stick bits of plastic on a canvas?”—got me thinking about the presentation of paint as substance. I thought his comment was idiotic, but I made something useful out of it. As for an act of withdrawal or self-effacement, I can't answer that. One thing for sure, though: I'm not an Expressionist painter—negotiating with my ideas interests me more than negotiating with my inner self.

**Your early work with a liner brush in 1976 signaled a modest attitude on the painter's part. Have you changed at all in regard to this pessimism about the status of art?**

I don't see it as pessimism. It's very hard to talk about things outside of their context... Everything was so ideological in France at the time. If you were making paintings, you could only make monochromes. With those paintings I returned to an art activity I'd given up eight years before and I was getting back to the basics. The liner is the thinnest brush there is and using it means you're really into activity, into work. To fill your canvas you have to do an enormous amount of painting. Back then painting as an activity was like actually being a worker. The need to express something had become strictly secondary: the work came first. As for the modest attitude, I've no judgment to make. I saw painting as an activity and thought it should be stimulated by thinking about the work process. That way I found the possibility of being politically present in my painting, of bridging the gap between a socio-political line of thought and an artistic practice—or, rather, of resolving the conflict between my political ideas and my artistic activity. But maybe this is pure fiction, just me telling myself stories in search of a kind of harmony.

**You've often said that you're looking for neutrality, that you reject the demiurgic. Why should you want to cultivate a neutrality that goes counter to artistic expressiveness?**

Neutrality is to be understood here as not wanting to create a world. A “Godlike” world. As refusing to get involved in these myths of the artist as the begetter of a world—that doesn't interest me. What I like is the fact that painting addresses my intelligence as much as my sensibility; these two aspects are complementary and mutually supportive. As for the question of the “brand”, the signature: I think there was a time when that interested me, but not anymore. The crucial thing is that people who are interested know what's going on. You're always talking to the people around you.

**So does this mean that for you the biographical side is important?**

No, what I mean is that you only see what you know. I'm very much opposed to the idea of the spectacle, the brand, the signature. I always use Yves Klein as an example here. He made blue monochrome his brand. He had a strategy for being seen and holding onto his market, even if he was painting nudes. I've always wanted to avoid that. As a painter and an intellectual I want to keep clear of that idea; maybe this also had to do with my ideas about democracy. Not standing out... The remarks I made at the time were brief, but I had to start somewhere. And to answer your question about cultivating neutrality as opposed to artistic expressiveness, it's primarily a matter of personal inclination. I don't want to be in the foreground. Maybe it's shyness...

**In the same vein, you've often said that with lots of observation anyone can paint like you. To quote you, it's like “buttering bread.” What's important to you about working with this kind of simplicity?**

It's true, I did say that, but it was probably a little extreme. But whatever, painting doesn't require any particular skill. You can put circles on a canvas without having been to art school. I don't refuse the status of painter, but I don't see painting as one of the crafts either. Generally speaking painting has too much to do with attributes that don't interest me: composition, balance, virtuosity. I try to get rid of all that in the interests of what I like, which is the way ideas get embodied in materials. I belong to a generation for which art school meant classes in two-dimensional decoration, with the professional possibility of designing wrapping paper or wallpaper—everything that involved prettifying flat surfaces. That never interested me, and I wasn't very good at it. Painting is something else. The choice of a medium only makes sense to the extent that it opens up the possibility of proper formulation of ideas. Ideas don't float around in the air, they have to have a body. That's what's interesting about painting—its flesh. Flesh you can make yourself, at home. No need to delegate. I like the idea of the human, domestic aspect of painting. Lots of artists delegate, but I like being involved in every stage of the creation of a painting. I think the process of making and the process of thinking run on parallel trajectories.

**Can you explain why it's so essential for you to function within a framework, a predetermined structure?**

I think that every operation carried out calls for fixed points in which there is agreement between words and things. Between people and speaker. Between the painting and the spectator. Between the paint objects and me, the person putting the paint on. It's a matter of determining the field of action. To be specific, when I was talking about Marcel Lefranc's sniping remark, I think that I hadn't sufficiently committed myself to the framework of the "Suite Segond" series. Otherwise the naming issue would never have arisen. I had to find a material solution to the definition of the objects. "Suite Segond" is a series that stimulated me to define a framework for my work—I mention it as an example of the need for structure. Right now I think it's the consistency of the elements of my painting that creates the structure. All the elements you see on the canvas: line, colors, brushmarks—all of that has to be rigorously constructed and defined if I'm to achieve operative dialogue with a medium in which everything has a function. I don't see this position as close to Greenberg's defense of the specificity of the medium. My concerns are with the legibility of the ideas. When I make a painting, I try to eliminate everything superfluous; this isn't done in advance, but in the course of the work. If you could simply state ideas, there would be no need to paint a picture. I don't see how purely "conceptual" art might be free of its media; or else, in freeing itself from the medium, how it could avoid being sucked into advertising, the topical, and jokey spectacle. I don't see it as old-fashioned to consider the relationship between what's inside a substance as historically charged as paint, and to do so after the preceding generations of conceptual artists have provided new tools. But have we looked closely enough at the painters of the past and realized that if painting gets made with a substance that has remained unchanged for years, the ideas it's dealing with vary according to different periods, and endlessly challenge the material they're made of?

**What are you looking for when you work serially: perfection or the exhaustion of an idea?**

If you capture an image of the birth of Aphrodite, you can't know if she's coming out of the water or go into it. I imagine the exhaustion of an idea as the coming of a fresh line of exploration. What interests me is generation and corruption—or, rather, the alteration of an idea when it's contaminated by a new one. The series might look like a commodity, but above all I'm trying to see how my desire works, how I can be free in the course of the process. My attention to what becomes a commodity remains fairly unfocused. The world is made up of contradictions, and I'm no exception. Sometimes I'd like to be passive—strategy-free—regarding my creations. Things happen just as much as I make them happen.



Bernard FRIZE, "Brosilla" 2013, Acrylic and resin on canvas , 170,5 x 170,5 cm / 67 1/4 x 67 1/4 inches



Bernard FRIZE, "Nelio" 2013, Acrylic and resin on canvas, 160 x 140 cm / 63 x 55 1/4 inches



Bernard FRIZE, "Penta" 2013, Acrylic and resin on canvas, 160 x 140,5 cm / 63 x 55 1/4 inches

**Your recent works shown at Galerie Perrotin seem to be of two kinds: those made of lines and those made of areas.**

Yes, and both sorts involve separation and unity. All these canvases ask the same question in different ways. A general, almost existential kind of question. I could sum it up as follows: is there a form of continuity in the world? Technically speaking there's no before and no afterwards: the continuity of the brushmarks is imitated from one colored area to another. People looking at these pictures wonder—I imagine—how one color can become another. I try to formulate answers, but this remains a work in progress. For "Gliale" and "Nelio" I simply chose nine different colors. the brushstrokes running over the canvas change color, but are also seen as crossing the canvas autonomously. You could compare these pictures to two discourses being heard at the same time. If you're able to describe these canvases, my work won't seem strange to you. And anybody could do exactly the same as me. I just went looking for the way the colored areas would stop. In the first pictures in the series I used straight-edged masking tape, but then I opted for a specially made serrated tape.

**Why was that ?**

To put the emphasis on speed. What interests me is the way the eye rushes from one boundary to another, from one area to another. When it's halted by a straight line it focuses less on continuity. With the serrated tape the brush marks are much clearer and more supple. This is a technical improvement aimed at finding the path towards clarity. Finding one's path through an exhibition is also finding one's path through each painting.

**So might this continuity be the guiding strand of your recent canvases ?**

Firstly, I have the impression that I always paint the same picture. That way lots of my earlier pictures are reborn in different forms. There's also continuity in that I return to a earlier motif in these two open-ended series. Then there's also a kinship between these canvases: they look different but they inform each other mutually. Pictures like "Seplia" and "Polji" (and also "Ploria", "Semplioi"), both use the same structure to suggest a cross-section, but the paint material is different. In the one painted in oils you see a meandering gradation that occupies the canvas, but the overall drawing remains the same as in the other one. A number of my recent pictures have this wild-eyed look, and that's probably where my work is at today: finding a direction in the depths of the absence of certainty.

Léa Chauvel-Lévy: 你最近在貝浩登展出的作品似乎屬於兩個類型——由線條塑造及由面積造成。

Bernard Frize: 是，兩類都涉及分離與統一。這些油畫全都以不同的方式問同一個問題，一個普通，幾乎是存在主義的問題。我可以總結為：世上是否存在某些延續性？技術性而言，沒有過去，也沒有以後。筆觸由一個色彩範圍至另一個的延續其實是仿製出來。我想像人們看著這些圖畫時會猜想一種顏色是如何變成另一種。我嘗試制定答案，但這仍然是一項進行中的工作。在Gliale和Nelio，我簡單地選擇了九種不同的顏色。在畫布上略過的筆觸改變了顏色，但亦可視為其自主地越過畫布。你可把這些油畫比作同時聽到的兩段論述。若你能夠形容這些油畫，那麼我的作品對你而言似乎並不為奇。任何人都可做同樣的事情。我只是不斷尋找方法可停止顏色的地方。這個系列最初的幾幅圖畫中，我用了直邊膠帶，但後來則選擇了特製的鋸齒狀膠帶。

原因何在？

要強調速度。我感興趣的是視線如何從一個界限奔向另一個，由一個範圍衝往另一個。當止於一條直線，那便不再如此重視延續性。使用鋸齒狀膠帶後，筆觸會更為清晰和靈活。這是一項技術性改良，目的是要尋找通往清晰一面的路徑。透過展覽尋找路徑同時透過每幅畫尋找路徑。

那麼這種延續性可會主導你新近的創作？

首先，我有一個印象是我經常畫同一幅畫。我有許多較早期的作品便是如此以不同形式再生。那裡亦有一種延續性，我在這兩個開放式系列中返回較早前的一個主題。另外，這些油畫之間亦有一種親屬關係，他們的樣子不同，但卻互相連繫。圖畫如Seplia和Ubaldo (還有"Ploria"、"Semplioi")，兩者皆利用同樣的結構呈現一個橫切面，但顏料卻不同。在使用油彩的一幅，你可見到曲折的層次佔據著畫布，但整幅圖畫仍然跟其他一樣。我有許多幅最近的創作都有這種狂熱的模樣，那可能就是我今天的作品所在：在不明確的深淵中尋找方向。



Bernard FRIZE, "Gliale" 2013, Acrylic and resin on canvas, 160 x 140 cm / 63 x 55 1/4 inches

**SOLO SHOWS (selection)**

- 2013** "Winter Diary" Pace Gallery, New York, USA  
"On the Side where there is no Handrail", Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong
- 2012** Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong
- 2011** "The Fred Thieler Prize", Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, Germany
- 2010** "And How and Where and Who", Morsbroich Museum, Leverkusen, Germany
- 2007** "Fat Paintings", Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense, Denmark
- 2003** "Hands On", Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK  
"Aplat", Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France
- 2002** Haags Gemeentemuseum, La Haye, Netherlands  
S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium
- 2000** Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany
- 1999/2000** Kunstverein St. Gallen Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen, Switzerland
- 1999** Carré d'Art, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Nîmes, France  
Museum Moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, Austria  
Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- 1998-99** De Pont Stichting, Tilburg, Netherlands
- 1997** Centre Culturel, Issoire, France
- 1995** Kunstverein Elster-Park, Leipzig, Germany  
Kunstverein Arnsberg, Arnsberg, Germany
- 1994** "Suite au Rouleau", (cat.), Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK  
Le Capitou, Centre d'art contemporain, Fréjus, France  
Galerie Nächst St. Stephan, Vienna, Austria
- 1993-94** Kunsthalle, Zürich, Switzerland; D.A.A.D. Galerie, Berlin, Germany
- 1991** Musée Départemental d'art Contemporain, Rochechouart, France
- 1989** Grey Art Gallery, New York, USA
- 1988** "De là ces innombrables noms", (cat.), A.R.C. Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France
- 1986** Villa Medici, Rome, Italy  
Maison de la culture et de la communication, Saint-Etienne, France

**GROUP SHOWS (selection)**

- 2013** "Four corners of the world", Hite Collection, Seoul, South Korea
- 2012** "A iminências das poéticas", 30th Sao Paulo Biennial, Brazil  
"Neue Wege der Abstraktion Fine Arts", Düsseldorf, Germany  
"The Indiscipline of Painting", International abstraction from the 1960s to now, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, UK  
"Gegenwarts-Kunst 1945" Heute, Städel Museum, Frankfurt, Germany
- 2011** "Color in Flux", Weserburg, Museum of Modern Art, Germany
- 2010** "Negotiation, Today Art Museum" curated by Huand Du et Jonathan Watkins, Today Art Museum, Beijing  
"Malerei: Prozess und Expansion", Museum Moderner Kunst, Ludwig collection, Vienne, Austria

**Gallery information:**

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**Media Preview Invitation:**

A media preview and talk with the artist will be taking place on Thursday 29 August from 3pm to 4pm  
Opening cocktail on Thursday 29 August 2013 from 6pm to 8pm.

For more information and press enquiries, please contact:

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