

ETIENNE BOSSUT

Exhibition from March 1st to April 5th, 2014
Opening on Saturday, March 1st, 2 – 9 pm



On the occasion of a Project room, Valentin Gallery is pleased to present a selection of works from the 70's and the 80's.

Etienne Bossut's sculptural practice is based on a "photographic" exploration informed by a classic process of three-dimensional image production. This direct imprint technique—the one-piece coloured resin moulding that the artist has invariably been giving many forms for over thirty years—reflects conceptual research on the status of art objects in the context of industrial modernity. It enables objects from standard, everyday life to be re-characterised. Objects singularly without qualities whose use is valued so little it renders them invisible, or common domestic tools, or unique objects without any real distinction or glamour sometimes show marks of repeated manipulation. Such is the case with *Mon Fauteuil* (1976), the artist's first explicitly artistic cast, which reproduces a three-dimensional image of a private object doomed to disintegration; through an ironic effect, the form of the absent body finds itself reinforced in its indicatory presence. From unique objects "without qualities" to serially produced objects, the forms that Etienne Bossut convenes are situated below the threshold of symbolism or sentimental attachment. Usually struggling to exist outside of activation they imply, their transformation actualises them in a field of presence and meaning that sometimes effects a series of inversions that imply a fictional potential. Like those *Bidons*, containers used to store, in a liquid state, the material that will then be used to mould them, this choice of object can be perceived as a response to the abundance of petrol and its paradoxical nature as a fossil substance destined to run out. The association between a classic moulding technique and the use of plastic—a "disgraced material" serving commonness, not rarity—implicitly carries the shimmering spectre of a polymer utopia that opens the possibility (no doubt buried today) of a new democratic relationship with objects. The bright colours, studied and then perfected with particular attention by the artist, endow the sculptures with a pictorial substratum similar to the cheerfulness of Warhol, while their standardising power pushes their referents to the limits of abstraction.

Working in constant dialogue with the history of art, Etienne Bossut plays on the dual nature of gestural engagement. While he subscribes to a mechanics of reproduction, he asserts an artisanal technique of "doing", thus relating the (re)production of objects to a human operation that naturally incorporates imperfection into its process, like the "seams" that are often visible on castings, which betray their art-object character. These nearly perfect "object images", sort of like reluctant readymades, address an ironic comment to an area of art that is just as preoccupied by the desire to preserve its purity and essentiality, as by not getting inversely confused with the civilisation of reflections. This questioning of the autonomy of artworks, and of the possibility of engaging in a dialogue with reality that could go beyond simple reproduction, can be found in the *Monochromes* series, sculptures produced from the mould of a still-life painting that the artist created as a student in a school where the traditional exercise of copying was still practiced. Although he is attacking the quintessential anti-object, that safe haven of subjectivity, this image of a painting preserves—in spite of its reification—a troubling oxymoronic status of "original reproduction", attested to by the presence of a stray paintbrush hair in the material, serving as a signature.

Although reproduction through moulding deprives the (art) object of its fetish aura, of the prestige of its social distinction, and of material weight, it at the same time sheds light on its formal qualities and lack of reducibility. Playing the role of an original in a differential series in which each re-presentation endows the work with its own temporality and produces something new, the cast also virtually internalises its referent, the mould or resulting negative making it possible to produce infinite reprints. By subjecting a mundane object to a technique historically linked to an aristocratic right—that which aimed to preserve a double of the faces and bodies of "great men" for eternity (the death mask practice)—Etienne Bossut is seeking neither to fetishise the object nor conjure its disappearance. His works are situated at that point of coalescence between image and object, original and multiple, between that which disqualifies and that which requalifies, between the irreversible flight of time and the imprint that man can confront it with, at least. By working with traces and direct imprints of reality, the artist succeeds in liberating, in a poetic beat, the infamous gap that separates us from the familiar world of appearances, showing that—to use his own words—"the image is stronger than the object".

Text by Clara Guislain