

“Ride Baby, Ride”: paint as an emblem of a subversive customization

Among its numerous characteristics, the pictorial work of Gavin Perry comprises one that could discredit it immediately, because the term when applied to the field of visual arts seems so systematically to provoke a reaction of repulsion: it is decorative! It is one of the ills of our time, which after having so intellectualised our relationship to the object “paint” tends to distrust what appears at first sight to be only a mere flattery to the eye, without any other form of substance.

Although produced in Miami, this work is closely in line with the Californian obsessions for the “fetish finish”, which as early as in the mid-1960s introduced into the pictorial medium the necessity of absolute formal perfection mixed with the use of industrial materials taken out of their context.

Perry thus summons shining, vivid and gleaming paint, which is almost “addictive” because it is so conducive to contemplation, in that it plays with the temporality of the painting through the visual phenomena that it provokes. His conception made up of common materials – coloured vinyl bands, spray-paint pigments or auto-body paint, resin, etc. – clearly employs retinal effects similar to those of hallucination which seem to have been frozen at a precise moment, as if in an attempt to contain their temporality and to withhold their dynamics, so that it never vanishes.

But Gavin Perry’s art also has a far more social aspect, for it is directly inspired by the practice of automobile customization. This phenomenon has, since the mid-1990s, become particularly popular in Miami, where the proliferation of the quasi-necessity to personalise one’s vehicle in certain communities is such that it has nearly become a new standard!

Through a slow and meticulous process, the artist finally engages in a hybridization of the languages. For while the quest for individualisation which underlies customization necessarily entails an alteration of the finished product designed for the masses in order to make it individual, Perry appropriates this form of “fetichisation” by applying a functional translation of the colour and of the perfection of the surface and through these actions specific to the *objet d’art*, there is a social displacement which occurs.

Besides the fully-assumed decorative sense, Gavin Perry questions the potential porosity of tastes between different social classes and, ultimately, the identity of the objects and of those who own them; he shakes up the social symbol represented by the car just as much as that represented by the paint.

Ride baby, ride...

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