

MATHIEU MERCIER

More Functions in the Options

March 7 – April 18, 2015

mehdi chouakri

Press Release

Mehdi Chouakri is pleased to present Mathieu Mercier's seventh solo show at the gallery. With *More Functions in the Options*, Mercier continues his investigation on the early aesthetic of mass production.

Untitled (work in progress) is an ongoing compilation of everyday objects that represent another item. A bottle of red wine is actually a pepper mill, what seems to be a lipstick is in reality a sex toy, a safe is disguised as a book...The work creates a reverberation between the function and the mimesis, like a camouflage: what you get is not what you see. The items are sorted out by category, just like in a supermarket. However, their real use refers to several taboos, such as sexuality, defense, drugs and paranoia. These uncanny items have absorbed all the distortions brought to the realm of reality by the 20th century avant gardes, and, just like Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29), they reflect on the nature of the object itself.

The examination of modern design is a central theme in Mercier's work. In *Two chairs (third version of a 1998 piece)*, two different chairs materialize the gap between the ideal of modernism and what actually became of it. The first chair was designed by Gerrit Thomas Rietveld in 1934. The original piece of furniture was made of re-used crate wood and sold as a kit, available in several colours. Aiming for simplicity in construction, Rietveld was a member of the De Stijl movement and close to the Bauhaus, and he hoped his designs would eventually be manufactured instead of hand-crafted. The second chair is a typical 1960s injection molded plastic garden chair. Resistant, comfortable, unexpensive, this kind of chair became so popular it can be labelled as the stereotype of a garden chair.

Mercier takes everyday objects as a starting point to create works that either quote or mime their function. Almost like a Rorschach test, their familiar shapes allow a free interpretation. *LASCAUX 983 on background UNIK 027-6A* is a blue monochrome crossed by white stripes on its lower part, this abstract triptych is based on the legacy of minimalism. Still, the reduced colour palette and the geometric pattern remind of household goods. Height, width and also depth vary from one panel to the other, building a hybrid between painting and sculpture: the colours are not only flat on the canvas, they develop in relief as well.

3 axis, 3 spheres is a study, in which the artist plays with the legacy of Constructivism and Formalism. It was built with materials Mercier found in his studio: wood, aluminium and plastic. The shape determines three axes, defining its own space in relation to the architecture of the room. It invites the viewer to reflect on the space surrounding him, just as an armillary sphere makes us aware of the intersidereal void.

Untitled (Candle/color circle by J. Itten) belongs to the *Sublimation* series. This corian pedestal brings together Johannes Itten's 1961 chromatic circle together with a candle. Sublimation is the transition from the solid state to the gas state without passing through the liquid phase. In psychology, sublimation is a defense mechanism where socially unacceptable impulses are consciously transformed into socially acceptable behaviors. For Mercier, sublimation is the transition from figuration to abstraction. The candle can be read through the chromatic circle, which can also be reminded as a real object. Both build together a three-dimensional still life, where image and reality converge.

The tapestry *Untitled* appears as a tautology: it pictures wool threads, which is the material the work is made of. The piece also works as an enlargement, as if a sample of the fabric was seen through a microscope lens. By using only seven different colours in the knitting process, Mercier tricks the eye: from a distance, the picture seems hyperrealistic, but a close examination reveals an abstract geometrical composition, hence building a bridge between figuration and abstraction.

Mathieu Mercier (born 1970) lives and works in Paris. His work has been exhibited in solo presentations at Centre Pompidou, Paris (2003), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2007), Kunsthalle Nürnberg (2008), Kunstmuseum St Gallen (2014) and Villa Merkel, Esslingen (2014), among others.