

Reticle (model 00), 2017. Acrylic painting, gesso, printed ink, MDF panel. 45.7 × 58.4 cm / 18 × 23 in

John Henderson

re-er

Opening Friday September 1, 6-8 pm
September 1 – November 11, 2017

Following exhibitions in Hong Kong, New York, and Paris, Perrotin is delighted to present John Henderson's second solo show in Hong Kong.

John Henderson's oeuvre has long revolved around the problematic of modernism, abstraction, and the painterly gesture. In this sense, he could possibly be situated in the context of a larger wave of process-based abstraction in recent years, one that is marked by the flatness of the picture plane, a preoccupation with process, and improvised gestures indexing the real. As the critic David Geers has argued, this trend is "in equal parts, a generational fatigue with theory; a growing split between hand-made artistic production and social practice; and a legitimate and thrifty attempt to 'keep it real' in the face of an ever-expansive image culture and slick 'commodity art.'"¹

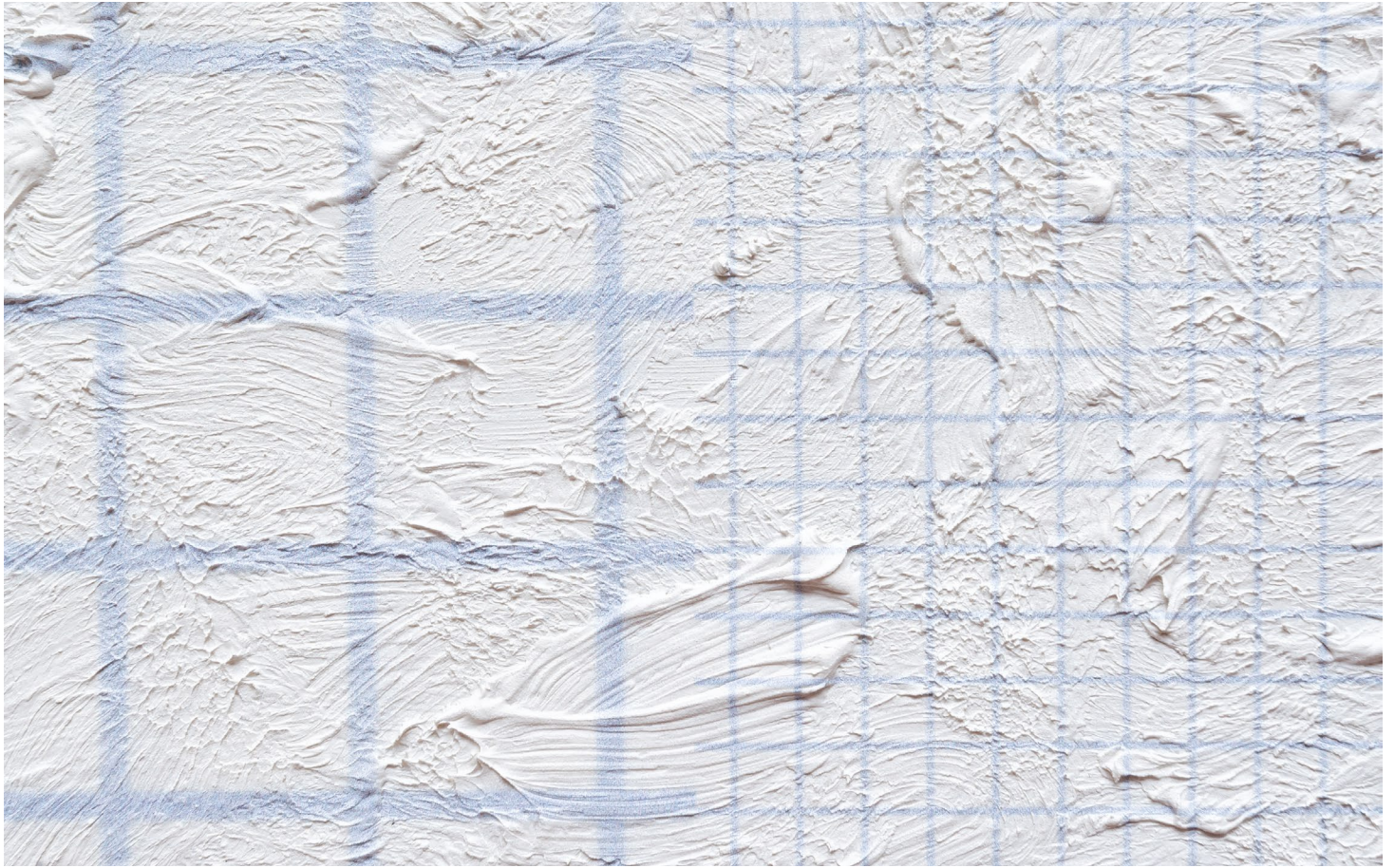
Yet what sets Henderson apart is his reflexive distance to the painterly, putting the romance of the authorial gesture and the assumption of an unproblematic spectatorship into question. On the one hand, the artist admits the performative element to his work, but on the other, he problematizes it by "translations", "documentations", and erasures. Understanding painting as performance is, of course,

開幕酒會：9月1日（週五）晚上6時至8時
2017年9月1日至11月11日

繼香港、紐約和巴黎的展覽後，貝浩登很榮幸為藝術家約翰·亨德森在香港舉辦第二次個展。

亨德森的作品長期圍繞現代主義、抽象藝術和繪畫手法的課題，大致可歸類為近年流行的「著重過程的抽象創作（process-based abstraction）」，此風格之特色是以扁平畫面為主，強調創作過程和即興創作，把真實置於「指示性」的關係。藝評家大衛·吉爾斯認為：這種趨勢「厭倦理論；是手作藝術和社會實踐藝術日益離析的產物；與此同時，面對蓬勃的圖像文化和討巧的『商品藝術』，又想經濟合理地『保留真誠』。」¹

亨德森的獨特之處，在於與繪畫保持一定距離，藉此質疑人們對創作的浪漫想像、觀賞作品的理所當然。他不單在作品裏加入行為元素，更以「翻譯」、「紀錄」和抹擦技巧來突顯之。把繪畫當成行為藝術其實一點也不新鮮，早於1950年代，當抽象表現主義如日方中，藝評家哈羅德·羅森堡便曾斷言，繪畫從此會變為「行動的舞台……畫布上不再是一幅畫，而是一個事件。」²自此以後，繪畫混入行為元素便成為宣示存在的方式。到了今天，在數碼與新媒體衝擊下，這宣示方式更有助加深繪畫的意義。不過，亨德森的創作不止於行為元素，而是要進一步顛覆畫面與真



Reticle (model 00), (detail) 2017. Acrylic painting, gesso, printed ink, MDF panel. 45.7 × 58.4 cm / 18 × 23 in

nothing new. Since the heyday of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, when the critic Harold Rosenberg declared that henceforth paintings would be “an arena in which to act... What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event”², the performative gesture in painting has been a guarantee of *presence*. In the present age, this guarantee of presence also firms up the value of painting in the face of digital and new media incursions. Henderson’s oeuvre, however, problematizes this performative gesture, frustrating a simple relation of the picture plane to the real, or more specifically, the link between the painterly gesture to the biographical real invoked in much process-based abstraction.

His earlier series of works, for instance, involved what the artist called “translation” or “documentation”—basically an extra layer that stymies a simplistic interpretation of the gesture of the artist’s hand (along with whatever the narrative imbued therein). In *Casts* and *Types* (where the artist casts sculptures of his original paintings in various metals) and *Recasts* (a parodic series where such paintings are finished with metallic spray paint), Henderson combines the individualistic expressivity of the brush with the industrial procedures (of the foundry, in some cases)—and thus constitutes a cool-headed, formalist resistance to some of the pitfalls of process-based abstraction. One is also reminded here of the post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida’s notion of “under erasure” (*sous rature*). In relation to writing, this is “to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion,”³ or yet “the mark of the absence of a presence, and always already absent present, of the lack of the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.”⁴ The notion of “under erasure” is the “strategy of using the only available language while not subscribing to its premises.”⁵ Henderson’s approach certainly points to a sophisticated deconstructive doubleness: presence/absence, origin/copy, and so on, which ultimately also opens up questions about the present condition of painting.

The title of the show, “re-er”, is therefore worth elaborating on, with the prefix “re-” indicating repetition (“re-new”) or a backward motion

實的純粹關係，尤其是「著重過程的抽象創作」中，繪畫行為與畫家自傳性真實的關連。

在亨德森之前的作品系列，便有所謂的「翻譯」或「紀錄」技巧——故意多加一層，避免觀者簡單解讀畫家用意（以及背後的敘述）。《Casts》和《Types》系列把原畫作製成不同金屬雕塑，而《Recasts》戲仿藝術家此前創作的系列，以金屬噴漆來處理原畫作。它們全都結合了畫筆之個性與工業生產程序，有時由鑄造廠協助製造，作品冷靜沉實、形態各異，彷彿在回應強調過程的抽象藝術之不足，令人想到後結構主義哲學家雅克·德里達所講「在抹擦之下」（under erasure，法文為*sous rature*）的效果。就書寫而言，這是指「寫了一個字，將它劃掉，然後把字連劃線一併印出」³，為的是要「表示存在的不存在，不存在的也存在，思想和經驗都失去原初所依」。⁴「在抹擦之下」是個「無可奈何的策略，一方面不得不使用語言，同時又不接受其前設」。⁵亨德森的創作，無疑是以解構的二元對立（存在／不存在、原本／複本等），對繪畫現況提出質疑。

值得一提的是展覽名稱《re-er》。「re-」指重複（如「再生」（re-new）或向後退（如「折返」（re-trace）），而「-er」則表示比較（如「更平坦」（flatter））。亨德森將抽象表現主義放「在抹擦之下」，目的是把它複雜化，同時保持距離，從而指出未來發展路向。

抹擦效果在《Untitled Paintings》系列呼之欲出。藝術家逐層塗上顏料，再用鏟、調色刀和塗料輓一一除去，直到出現扁平畫面。除去顏料後，畫作自有揮之不去的空靈感，令人有失落、毀壞和記憶（弗洛伊德的蠟板型記憶？）的聯想，製造印記的巧手消失了，痕跡卻清楚可見。抹擦效果突顯了畫家的存在，同樣，畫面的邊位也在提醒觀者，圖像都是人為建構出來的。

新系列《Reticle (model)》使用中密度纖維板，在厚厚的顏料上，加上不同比例的藍格子。白色背景或會令人想到羅伯特·雷曼的

("re-trace"), and the suffix "-er" indicating a comparative degree ("flatter"). By putting expressive abstraction "under erasure", Henderson complicates it, distances himself from it, and thereby places it in play, generating a thoughtful complexity that gestures at possible future paths.

In a way, we can see this in almost literal terms with *Untitled Paintings*, where Henderson expressively and meticulously applies each layer of paint, before removing the paint with trowels, palette knives, and hard rollers to achieve a flat surface. This additive subtraction renders a rather haunting, ethereal atmospheric picture plane that alludes to loss, ruination, and memory (one could think of Freud's wax tablet model of memory); the original mark-making hand cannot be seen and yet the traces are still visible. While this palimpsestic effect complicates the authorial or painterly presence, the slight bezel on the edges might also highlight the constructed nature of the images.

The new series *Reticle (model)* presents paintings on MDF panels with thick white impasto strokes overlaid by blue grids of different scales. While the white background might for some viewers be redolent of the works of Robert Ryman, or else suggests a modernist "clean slate" that negates prior values, the artist sees it almost as "models of paintings" that he performs according to pre-existent templates and languages. Meanwhile, the blue grids are printed directly onto the painting and—over a caesura—on the "frame" (note that the frame is in fact part of the painting). Certainly, as the critic Rosalind Krauss argued back in 1979, the grid is an "emblem of modernity" in art since the early 20th century—one sees this from Malevich and Mondrian to Ellsworth Kelly and Sol Lewitt, among many others—linking up science and rationality (graphs and maps) all the while declaring the autonomy of the realm of art (turning away from representation and figuration, turning its back on nature).⁶ That the blue grids extend across a break to the edges of the "frame" suggests a "centrifugal" reading of the grid here: the grid extends infinitely outwards, forcing the viewer to reckon with the world beyond the frame. The title "Reticle"—the lines in the eyepiece of optical devices—is also illuminating, for it suggests a particular position for the viewer, as though there were an extra digital layer of the camera interceding between the eyes of the viewer and the painting itself; this reading is also reinforced by the different scales of the grids, alluding to shifting foci of vision (for example, when zooming in or out). Together with a consciousness of the history of painting in the last hundred years, these paintings also evince an awareness of how paintings are viewed—these days, more often than not through the camera of a mobile phone.

In a way, this train of enquiry extends from Henderson's earlier photographic series *Flowers*, (where he had photographs painted over, then digitally scanned, and fictively displayed in a simulated space, and then finally printed as photographs of unique copies). Such a complex overlay of painting and photographic processes direct attention to the possible manipulation of images and serve as notice to viewers to observe closely and pay attention, all the while aligning the aesthetic with the cognitive and the critical. With *Reticle (model)*, juxtaposing the personally expressive strokes and the rationality of the grid generates a tension between spontaneity and construction, while positioning the modernist emblem of the grid in relation to the digital ushers in questions about the importance and condition of painting in the larger, almost overwhelming expanse of visual culture and digital imagery.

Daniel Szehin Ho

More information about the artist >>>

1. David Geers, "Formal Affairs", *Frieze*, March 2015.
2. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters", *Art News*, December 1952.
3. Gayatri Spivak's "Translator's Preface" to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, XIV.
4. *Ibid.*, XVII.
5. *Ibid.*, XVIII.
6. Rosalind Krauss, "Grids", *October*, vol. 9 (summer 1979), pp. 50–64.

作品，或帶出現代主義的「白板」意象，意味否定以往一切，但亨德森卻視之為「繪畫模型」，全按既有樣板和語言來創造。藍格子直接印在畫上，甚至印到畫框上（中間有少許中斷），令畫框也成為畫的一部分。正如藝評家羅莎琳·克勞斯在1979年指出，自20世紀初，格子已成為藝術裏「現代性的象徵」，由馬列維奇、蒙德里安、埃斯沃茲·凱利到索爾·勒維特，例子多的是。格子連結科學與理性（圖表與地圖），同時又代表藝術的獨立自主（反對再現及具象，背棄自然）。藍格子中斷後延伸至邊緣，意味一種「外向」解讀——格子無限外延，使觀者不得不同時關注畫框以外的世界。系列名稱也別具意義，「Reticle」原指相機的標線，寓意為觀者設定位置，就如通過鏡頭看作品，而格子的大小，則代表視點的遠近。亨德森的新作基於對近百年繪畫史的思量，呈現如今繪畫觀賞的視角——我們不再只是佇立於作品前，而更多地是通過手機鏡頭觀看。

亨德森對繪畫的關注，在之前的攝影系列《Flowers》已有跡可尋。這是一次繪畫與攝影的美妙交織：先在相片髹上顏色，然後掃描，再放到一個模擬空間展示，最後印製成相片。作品突出圖像的處理可能，引導觀者細心觀賞，集審美、認知與批判於一身。《Reticle (model)》把畫家充滿個性的筆觸，與代表理性的格子並列，從而產生自然與人為建構的張力。另一方面，格子作為現代主義象徵，在今天的數碼語境，不禁令人想到：面對鋪天蓋地的視覺文化和數碼影像，繪畫是何種狀況，還有何意義。

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更多藝術家相關資訊 >>>

1. David Geers, "Formal Affairs", *Frieze*, March 2015.
2. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters", *Art News*, December 1952
3. 見德里達：《論書寫學》(*Of Grammatology*) 第 XIV 頁斯皮瓦克 (Gayatri Spivak) 的〈譯者序〉。
4. 同上，第 XVII 頁。
5. 同上，第 XVIII 頁。
6. Rosalind Krauss, "Grids", *October*, vol. 9 (summer 1979), pp. 50–64.

PRESS CONTACTS

Loris Lin, Press Officer
loris@perrotin.com +852 3758 2183

Thomas Chabaud, Press Officer
thomaschabaud@perrotin.com +33 1 76 21 07 11

Victoria Cheung, Victoria Communications
victoria@victoriapr.com.hk +852 6086 1672