

Richard van der Aa  
pictures of paintings  
57W57Arts  
03/03/2017-04/14/2017

PICTURES OF PAINTINGS (OF...)



Installation view, left to right: pictures of paintings # 3, 2014, pictures of painting # 9, 2015, pictures of paintings # 5, 2014. All work enamel on Dibond, 11-3/4 x 11-3/4 inches.

The title of Richard van der Aa's current show at 57W57Arts sends the viewer's train of thought on a path which could lead beyond the painting realm into the sculptural. Its humorous self-referentiality suggesting a possible extension of its argument beyond pictorial space towards a formulation such as PICTURES OF PAINTINGS OF SCULPTURES, and perhaps ultimately to something that could be articulated as REFLECTIONS OF ICONS AS BODIES.

The "pictures" in question are painted in Enamel on Dibond - a cardboard thin sandwich of sheets of aluminum and resin - in square formats with softly rounded corners, a shape introduced previously by the artist in a series of sculptures and wall reliefs. The reasons for this choice of support become clear when one considers how the "pictures" are installed on the wall: their lack of thickness and the fact that they are "floating" close to the wall- the space between them and the wall being about equal to the thickness of the Dibond Sheet- reinforces the point that their materiality is not tied to the thickness of the support, as is often the case with paintings whose main argument is centered on their status as objects; an argument which often assumes that the thicker the support, the more object-ness to the painting. In this instance, the materiality of the Dibond sheet both asserts the painting as object and denies it the

sculptural presence a thick stretcher would grant it. Van der Aa seems to be betting on the presence of painting as an object against its absence of volume.

A subdued sense of color, made of mostly blacks, whites and greys of different values keeps the viewer focused on the point being made. The outlining of the border in a contrasting color combined with the relatively thin support is the locus of the action and the point of entry into van der Aa's work. The main action in the painting is not taking place on the central field, but on its border. A reading reinforced by the intentional but uncontrolled bleeding of the border color into the field color (or vice-versa) as the two colors are laid down simultaneously with unpredictable results that may hint to James Bishop's post-minimalist handling of liquid oil paint and his critique of geometry through a sublimated color gesture.

In a previous article on van der Aa, Daniel G. Hill qualified these borders as margins, pointing us in the right direction: This work needs to be approached from the sides not from the front, from the margins rather than from the center. With the artist's earlier wall reliefs in mind, the painting's margins look like memories of the lost sides, shadow lines emphasizing the painting's absence of volume. Instead of confronting the issue of painting's objecthood directly, van der Aa's strategy seems to be a redistribution of the terms of an equation articulated in the seventies by Jo Baer and Cesar Paternosto, on the relationship of a painting's surface to its sides and the balancing in Post-Minimalist painting of contradictory tensions between object-ness and pictorial space.

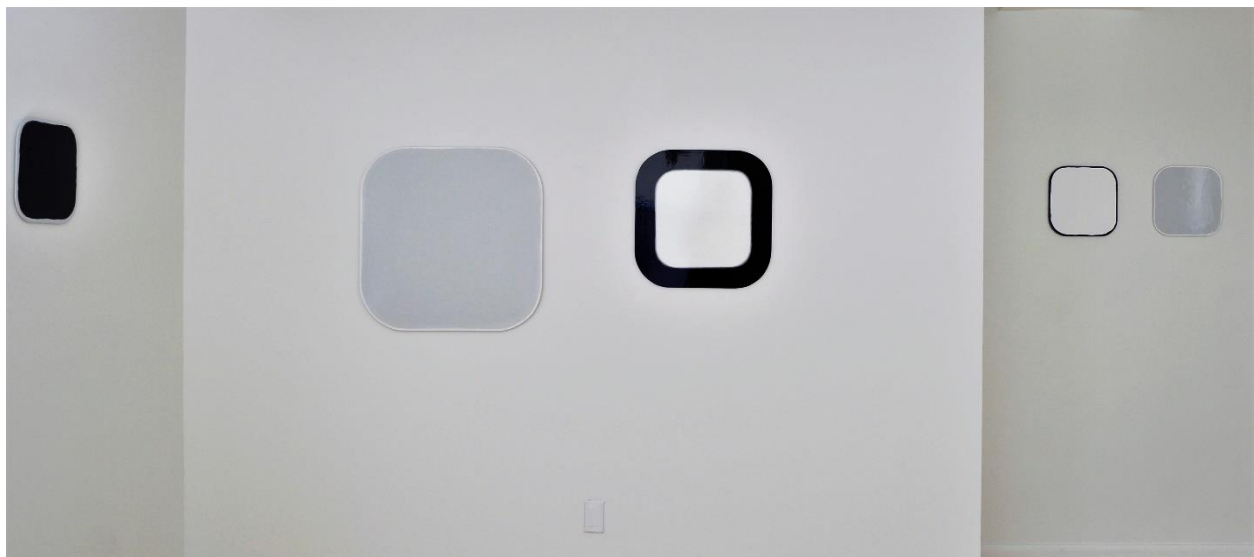


pictures of paintings # 5, 2014, enamel on Dibond, 11-3/4 x 11-3/4 inches

In one sweep, as he establishes painting as an object, van der Aa also criticizes the limits of that position. First by denying the object physical substance via its lack of thickness, and then by displacing and re-inscribing the sides corporeally onto the surface, a critical step, in my view, as it establishes the painting not just as a literal object but also as a symbolic object.

Operating in the no man's land between Painting and Sculpture, Richard van der Aa's work brings a sculptor's approach to painting and a painter's take to wall relief to the ongoing discussion on Objecthood, a discussion that would gain to be reframed as the inscription of the body on a literal space, of a corporeality at work in the making of painting: A point persistently made by Marc Devade, a member of the French group Supports/Surfaces in the seventies, as a critique of Minimalism's unawareness of its subjective grounding. It might not be completely irrelevant to bring this up considering James Bishop's influence on Devade and in view of both Bishop's and van der Aa's lengthy sojourns in France and of their probable exposure to these ideas.

Even though van der Aa considers himself primarily a painter, his detour through sculpture clearly informs his most recent painting output, specifically in this oblique and antithetical approach to the issue of objecthood in painting. His exploration of the porosity between the two mediums allows his work to raise the question of how Post-Minimalist painting can develop by leaving behind the ghosts of sculpture.



Pictures of paintings, Installation view at 57W57 Arts (all images courtesy of the artist)

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