

CLAUDE VIALLAT – JOE FYFE, A MEETING AND AN OEUVRE

Claude Viallat comes back to Saint-Etienne, where he was close to curator and now gallerist Bernard Ceysson. Along with him is New York based artist Joe Fyfe, also part of the Ceysson & Bénétière gallery's roster. They have both realized an exhibition in correspondence.

“Together we have transformed this space into a painting.” Concludes Claude Viallat at the end of the hanging of the exhibition “Joe Fyfe – Claude Viallat, parasols” at the Ceysson & Bénétière gallery. “Come in to the painting and be part of the work with us” he continues. Like Claude Viallat, Joe Fyfe does not consider the piece hanging on the wall to be finished. “Three elements have the same importance in my eye: the artist, the public, and the medium used” he says. “The oeuvre is the exhibition we have painted together” replies Claude Viallat. Playing with exchanges “his pieces and mine tie themselves together, one piece attracting another one. They are not isolated paintings, but the medium of a single composition”. The American Joe Fyfe discovered Viallat at the MoMa, and has since been interested in the Support Surface movement, which the Frenchman best represents. He has defended the French movement in New York, where he works, and has taken part in two group shows with Viallat. The idea to be in a “group show” like that of Ceysson in Saint-Etienne came from their shared use of the parasols as a medium for painting. They have brought their works and have reassembled the space on Creuses road, with a sense of pleasure apparent in their smiles.



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Joe Fyfe and Claude Viallat, friends at Saint-Etienne

“Painting is not an accident”

Inspired by the French abstract expressionism movement, Joe Fyfe works with fabric, rags, pieces of cloth glued to a larger support, often a flag, or a parasol. “Everything is glued together which allows for a swift execution and a gesture akin to that of a painter” the artist tells us, “to make six good pieces, I have to destroy 40, it comes all at once.” Like Viallat, Fyfe has stopped using chassis, canvas and frame, to focus on banal supports, neutral or connoted, all becoming original surfaces. The dif-

ference with Claude Viallat is that the latter still uses the paintbrush. “I am a painter, I have kept color, paste and painting which have become burdensome and which Joe has thrown away” he says, in front of his pieces which express a vocabulary of small shapes, all identical, applied in series with a stencil. “Repetition is the most universal and banal of languages, the most routine like.” It gives the artist a primitive gesture, archaic, at the edge of painting, but without being repetitive. It is about “doing something different all the while doing the same thing” he says. Intent on vulgarizing painting, he does not go for

the easy way out. “The color distorts the cloth and the support modifies it” explains the octogenarian artist, “the support commands”. The colorist’s exploratory work lies in “the way the medium’s supports restore color and light. Painting is not an accident, it is accepting what I had not previously considered. I don’t chose to finish a piece, only when I have learned enough from what I have just done. Not choosing but waiting for it to come, for me to understand what I had not understood.” A dialogue with the medium.

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