



Some perspectives on *painting*

BORGEAUD - FRIZE - VARINI

13 SEP - 16 NOV

INTRODUCTION

Olivier Varenne Art Moderne & Contemporain presents Bernard Borgeaud in a group show with Bernard Frize, and Felice Varini – all of whom have pushed visual and material boundaries in their careers. As summed up by Jean-Hubert Martin: "Single vanishing point perspective dominated painting from the Renaissance until the nineteenth century. The usual response of modernity has consisted of respecting the flatness of the support and not to try to create an illusion of space. These three painters offer new solutions to this question".



FOREWORD

JEAN-HUBERT MARTIN

The rejection of representation is the foundation of modern painting. The invention of perspective and its incredible ability to represent space on the painted surface has become so familiar to us that it passes as a valuable achievement of all forms of art, whereas the opposite is true. The few centuries of history of painting since the Renaissance are an exception in universal art. This form of visual thinking has contributed to establishing both the hegemony of the West over the rest of the world and its mastery of nature. Even the Emperor of China called upon European Jesuits to depict his armies and his battles, to which his painters were not able to give the feeling of reality that the use of perspective provided. This mimetic painting became at the same time the major artistic discipline, the other arts being relegated to the rank of applied arts or crafts. The taxonomy is unfortunately so rooted in our way of seeing that it has hindered the development of a new discourse capable of encompassing the arts of all parts of the world.

By referring to all sorts of examples from other cultures, artists have, for a century, been constantly developing new paradigms to combat the idea that art can be reduced to the image of a view from a window. Two major routes then offered themselves to artists: either free themselves from painting and use other materials and other techniques, or remain faithful to painting and deepen its foundations. This last solution gave birth to abstract painting which itself split into a lyrical, expressionist path, and an analytical path which reflects on its bases and origins.



PIERO DE LA FRANCESCA, *THE FLAGELLATION OF CHRIST*, 1455-60, PALAZZO DUCALE URBINO

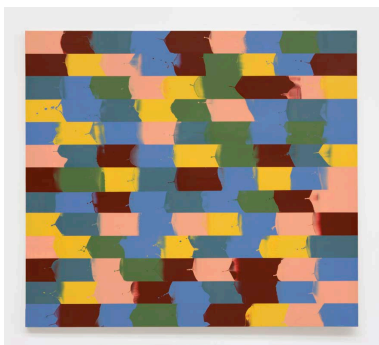
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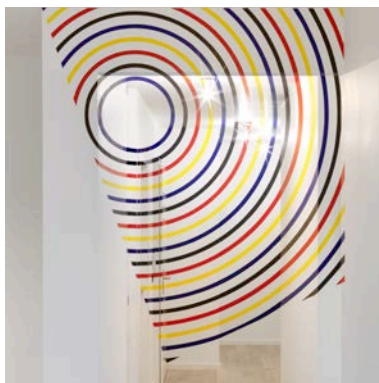
Three examples of the latter direction are shown here by three different artists: Bernard Borgeaud, Bernard Frize and Felice Varini.



BERNARD BORGEAUD, 2020.9



BERNARD FRIZE, MOURDI, 2009



FELICE VARINI, 2019

Bernard Borgeaud reduces his reflection on painting to three fundamental elements: **form, colour and gesture**. He ends with Alberti's window and its inseparable quadrilateral. The canvases are stretched on frames in elaborate shapes according to the desired objective. This creates a dynamic focal concentration, as if the reviled traditional perspective was represented by the direction of the coloured lines converging towards a putative eye. The conventional relationship between the painting and the wall intended to receive it is totally transformed. Instead of being in the middle of the wall, it rests partially on the ground. Colours carefully selected in advance from refined charts and diagrams, are then applied using gestures close to action painting, sometimes on segments determined by stencils. The result allows a close link with the body and its even uncontrollable movements, while the other parameters have been studied and matured at length. **Order and chaos come together for a painting that above all is a testimony of vitality.**

Through constantly renewed series **Bernard Frize** demonstrates the possibility of reducing materials, process and gesture to its simplest expression, without denying the appearance of a space or an image. He became a virtuoso at **interlacing brush strokes** with a single, uninterrupted charge of colour. The crossings and superpositions of these multicoloured lines become so complex and subtle that they raise questions about their technique of production. They have much to compare with the interlacing lettering of Irish manuscripts of the High Middle Ages. The conventions of realisation are the result of long reflections all trying to reduce the number of decisions to a minimum, totally opposite to abstract expressionism. This austerity does not prevent the sensory pleasure of colour and the appearance of images generated by the creative process, and gives way to **phenomena or physical reactions that we qualify as chance.**

Felice Varini makes use of single vanishing point perspective, but instead of using it to give depth to a flat image on canvas, he **deploys it in space**. He applies geometric shapes in and on architecture so that the figure is re-formed only when the eye is precisely at the location of the vanishing point. Reconnecting with the dialectic inherent in the art of order and chaos, Varini presents exploded and disorderly coloured forms that must be navigated and understood to seek the unique location at which the geometric form reconstitutes. His works are not so far removed from the exploration of anamorphosis so popular in the Renaissance. When he first imagined this process, he had no knowledge of it. **Proof, if necessary, that artistic forms can reappear in different contexts, without there being contact and even less be influenced by the academic study of history of art.**

BERNARD BORGEAUD
(b.1949)

2015. 10
huile sur coton

188 x 340 x 7 cm.





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huile sur coton

188 x 340 x 7 cm.

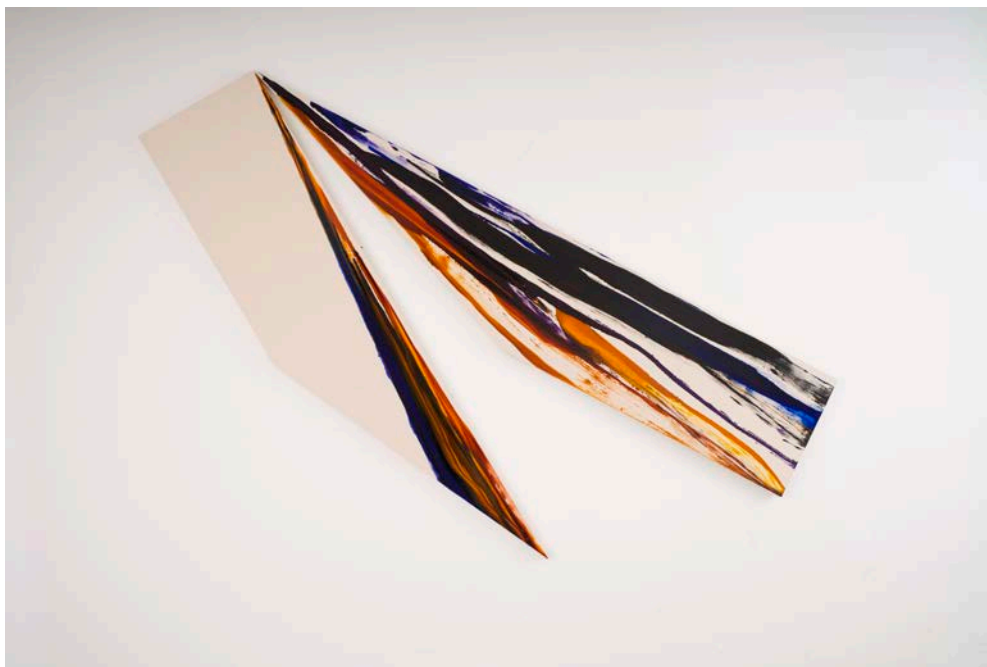




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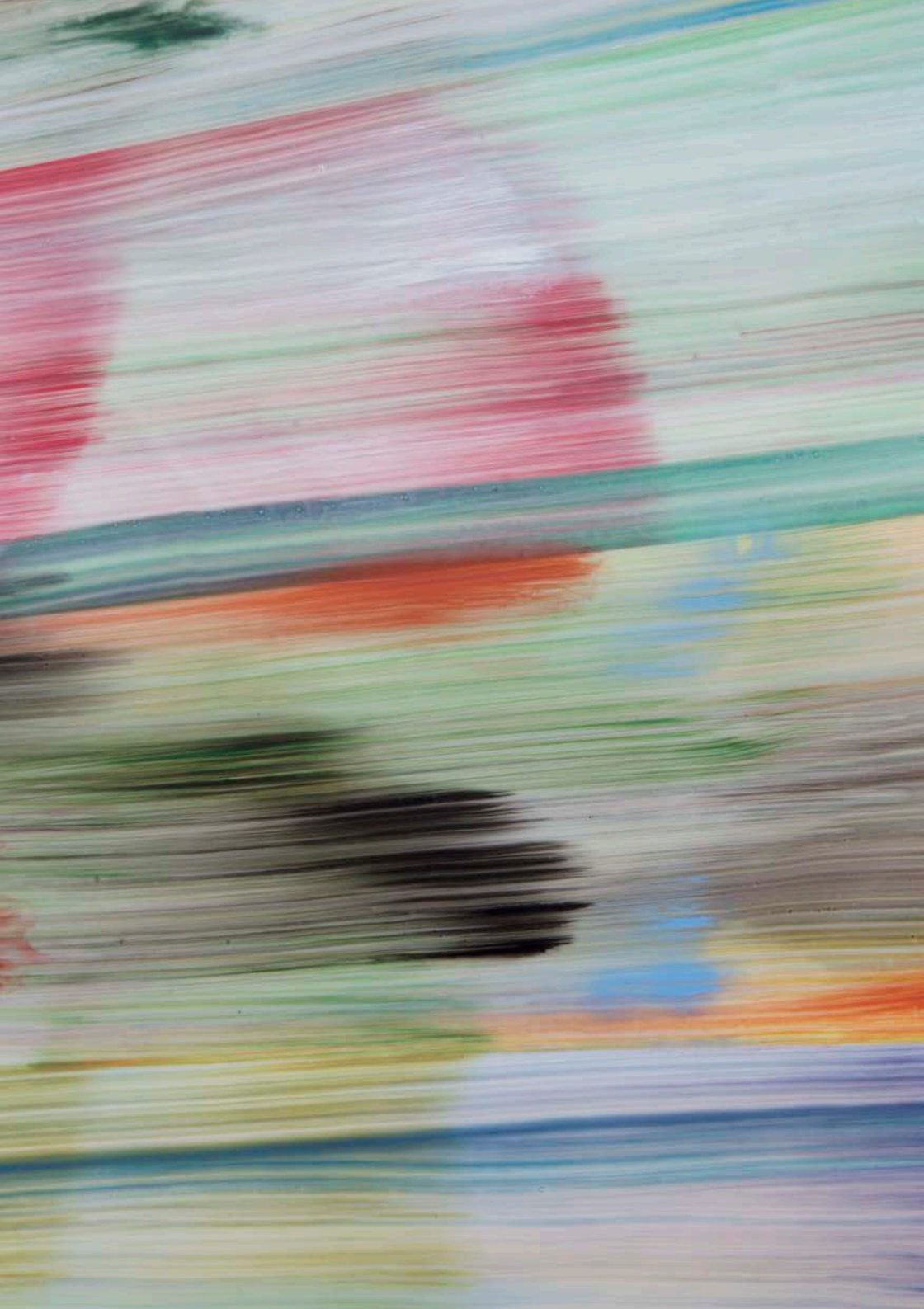


BERNARD FRIZE
(b.1949)

Era
2013
acrylique et résine sur toile

160.5 x 180.5 cm.

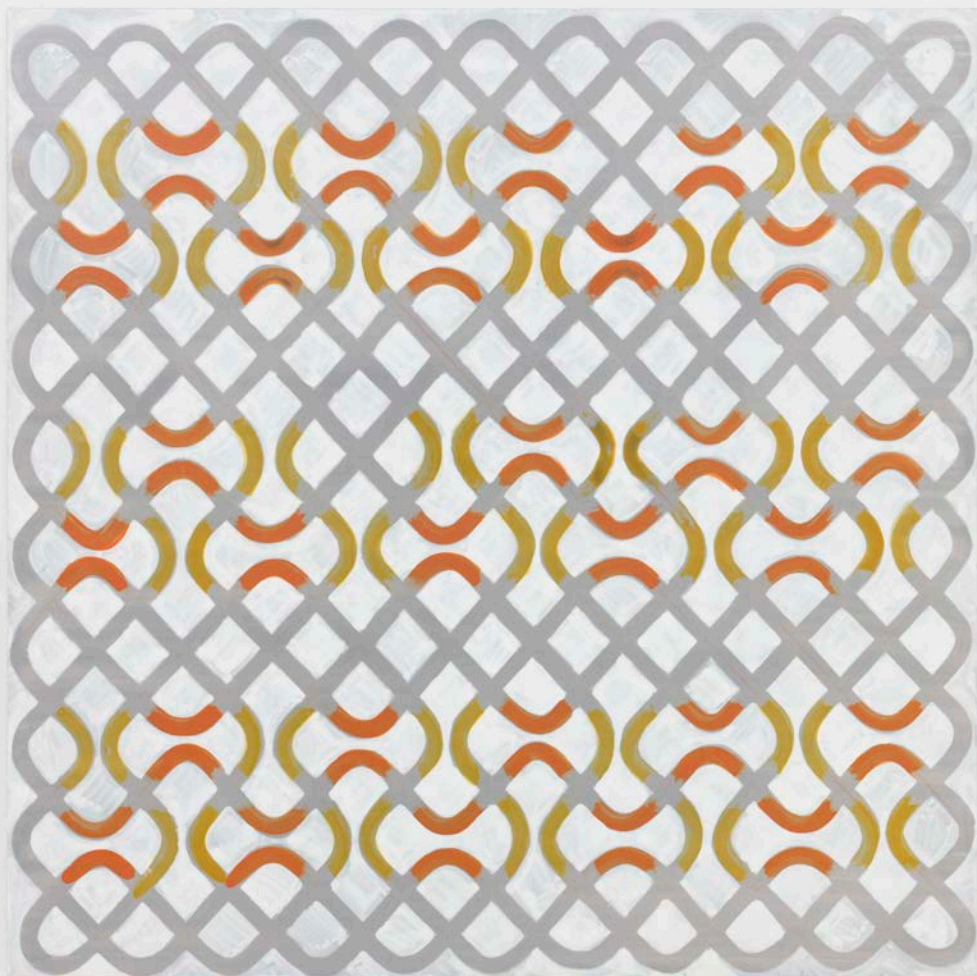


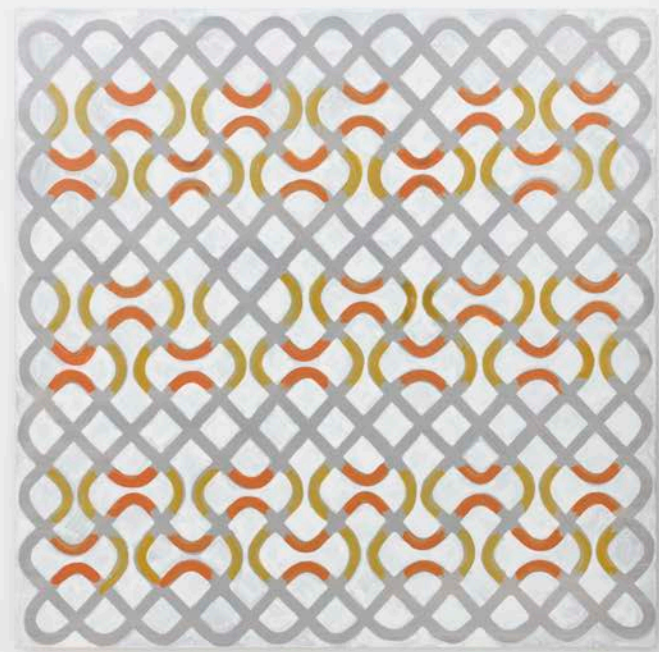


BERNARD FRIZE
(b.1949)

Suite à onze n°20
2006
acrylique et résine sur toile

165 x 165 cm.



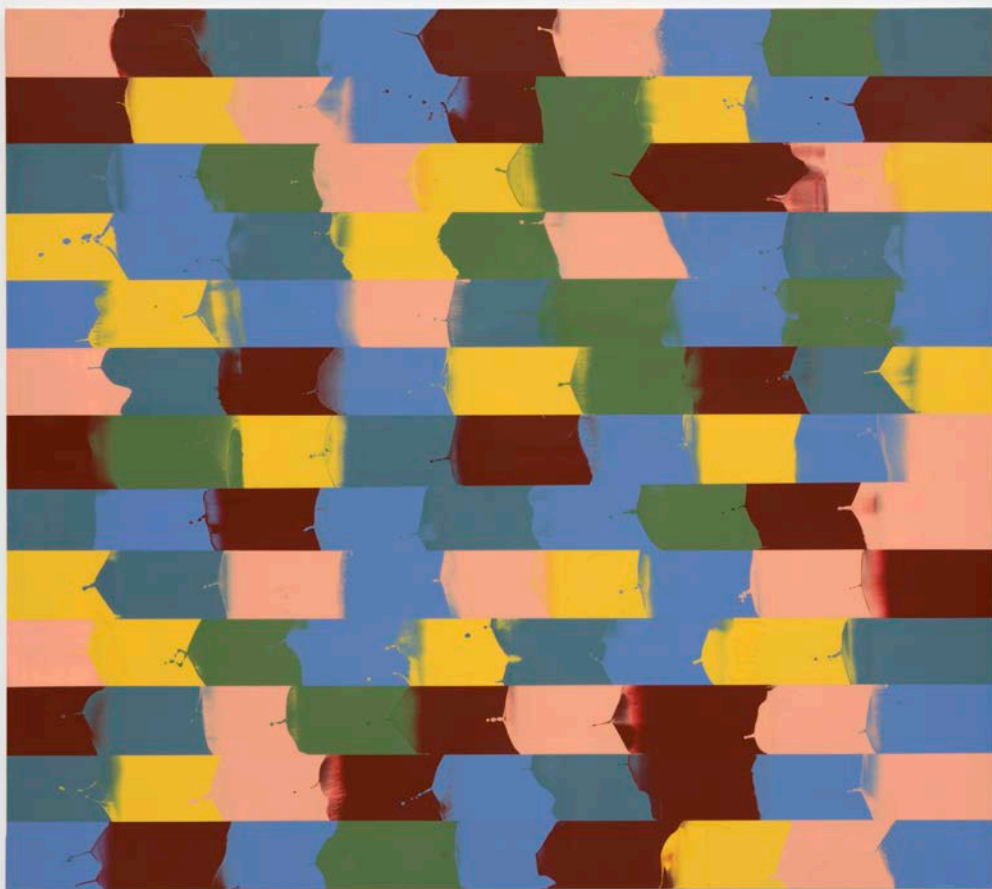




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BERNARD BORGEAUD

(b.1949)

Painter, installation artist, performance artist and photographer Bernard Borgeaud has continually questioned his processes in his quest to create work which is liberated, accessible and dynamic.

Form, perspective, definitions, limitations – were some of the preoccupations of artists of the second half of the twentieth century. Borgeaud is no different, yet, informed by his lifetime's observations and experiences, bolstered by his History of Art studies, and hours spent in the **Louvre** (he was born in Paris where he has remained much of his life), he has synthesized these concerns in a highly individual way, the recent culmination of which is a body of painted works.

Forces of nature and jazz. An experience in his youth marked Borgeaud in a transformative way: *"On a beach, the waves formed rollers a little higher than a man; risking myself there, I was dragged leg over head in a winding of a power that exceeded me so much that, in this abandonment of my body to this force... I experienced a feeling of infinity of a rare intensity... I repeated this experience dozens of times."*

Perhaps as a result of this experience, a theme which runs throughout his career is a desire to reveal the underlying forces at work in the **four elements of nature** - internal movements of the sea, transformations of bodies of water, the concentration and dispersion of light and fire.

As with natural forces, listening to Jazz by musicians including Steve Coleman, Christian Scott, Elena Pinderhughes has provided Borgeaud with a source of inspiration. The rhythmic impulses of the body are comparable to the buffeting by the waves and resulting sense of freedom. It is no surprise therefore that gravity, and the way it effects the movement of the body in space, has also played a role in his recent painted works.

Photography was Borgeaud's first chosen medium – *"a compulsory modern means of making figurative images"*. With his Leica he explored space and depth within ephemeral installations and performances he produced outdoors, and then presented these in the form of image sequences. Two further essential notions emerged at this time which have remained consistent in his practice – scale and the body of the viewer. Furthermore, different viewpoints and absence of any centre in his photographic work allows the viewer to grasp the work in complete freedom - of vital importance for Borgeaud.

His artistic career started with the 1969 exhibition *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst* put on at the Kunsthalle in Bern by legendary Swiss curator Harald Szeemann (1933-2005) et Zdenek Felix. Borgeaud was represented by his documentation for an ephemeral outdoor installation which consisted of shiny plates placed on the sea. An advocate of contemporary movements Szeemann developed a new form of exhibition-making that centred on close collaborative relationships with artists and a sweeping global vision of contemporary visual culture.



FEU IV, 1971



PLAQUES D'ALUMINIUM, 1969,
EPHEMERAL INSTALLATION

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(b.1949)

In 1970 Borgeaud had his first solo exhibition at the pioneering **Ileana Sonnabend** gallery in Paris. At the start of the 1970s, he frequented a small group of artists who gravitated around André Cadere, which included Annette Messager, Christian Boltanski, Jean Le Gac, Daniel Buren, Niele Toroni and Sarkis. From 1976, his work turned towards photographic installations, exploiting the revealing qualities of development liquids, and culminated in the late 1970s with very large works. During this period the **Centre Pompidou** in Paris acquired one of his works, and he was invited to participate in the Sydney Biennale and the Paris Biennale.

Drawing and painting. Having always carried a sketchbook, the 1990s saw Borgeaud switching his focus to drawing on a monumental scale. Exhibitions of these monumental works included a solo exhibition at **Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts**, Paris (1994), and an exhibition with Bernard Burkhard at Centre d'art contemporain - la synagogue de Delme (2000). A trip to Japan also inspired a return to a technique he used in the mid-1980s, N.E.C.O. (Nippon Enlarging Colour Operation), a Japanese process which is a hybrid of painting and photography, and introduced colour to his practice.



IMPRESSIION N°1, 1994, PARTIE DROITE D'UN DIPTYCHE, HUILE SOLIDE SUR VÉLIN D'ARCHES.

Borgeaud moved on to gouache, and finally turned back to painting, feeling he had at last overcome his early categorisation of painting as arid and old-fashioned, and instead seeing it as the flipside of photography. Photography for him deals with the real, whereas painting is a reflection on colour.

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Recent work

Borgeaud notes that his recent works: “are devices. The support for the work is the wall of the exhibition space, where the viewer is. **The painted elements are vectors that carry a dynamic, and are as important as the voids between the elements.** It is the articulation of the whole piece on the wall that is the work. There are no questions about definitions, nor questioning as was the case in the 1960s. It’s just a device put in place with a search for efficiency”.



2015.11, 2015

His paintings continue the exploration of depth and space of his photographic installations of the 1980s and 1990s and build on that dynamism. The balance of parts, worked out through preparatory drawings, and the important relationship of **scale and dimension** to the scale of the viewer are crucial to Borgeaud, as is the impact these elements have on the movement of the viewer’s body and eyes. He is inspired by how his art takes on a form and has an effect and life which induces **a mastery of chance**. Notions of chance, fluidity of form and graphic simplicity are also features Borgeaud has in common with Japanese calligraphy and has learnt from Jazz improvisation.



BARNETT NEWMAN BEFORE HIS SERIES 'THE STAGES OF THE CROSS' AT THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK CITY, 1966.
PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID GAHR / GETTY IMAGES.

In his own words, Borgeaud’s work “stems from an externality. Its development requires the manipulation of processes and forces that must be triggered and led. A work is always a stand-alone object. A good work does not recount; it invests in the space definitively. There is no significance with art, only an object that presents itself to the viewer and opposes their charge.” His interest in a work’s relationship to space draws a thread to an artist he refers to as a model, (in addition to Caravaggio and Tintoretto), Barnett Newman. Newman’s statement that ‘a painter is choreographer of space’ also aptly applies to Borgeaud’s approach.

BORGEAUD SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1970:** Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris
1972: Galerie Yellow Now, Liège
Interventions (with Jean Le Gac), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
Bernard Borgeaud et Paul-Armand Gette, Apeiros, Paris
Cité Internationale de l'Université de Paris
1973: Galerie des Locataires/French Window, Paris
Galerie Yellow Now, Liège (with Paul-Armand Gette)
Les nuages blancs sont d'eux-mêmes des nuages blancs, Pont des Arts, Paris
1974: *2500 diapositives*, La cour des miracles, Paris
1975: Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris
Installations Photographiques, Franklin Roosevelt metro station, Paris
1981: Maison de la Culture, Nevers
Studio 666, Paris
1982: *Exposition radiophonique*, France Culture/Galerie des Locataires, Paris
1983: *Nuits*, ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
1984: *VU*, Kunsthalle, Berne
L'origine des images, La Revue Parlée, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
1985: *Architecture d'oubli*, Maison Internationale, Rennes
1986: *Sorte de surplomb*, Galerie Arlogos, Nantes
1988: Galerie Nikki D. Marquardt, Paris
Galerie Arlogos, Nantes
1989: CREDAC, Ivry-sur-Seine
1990: Ruimte Morguen, Anvers
1991: Maison de la Culture, Bourges
Galerie Nikki D. Marquardt, Paris
1992: Galerie Art Attitude (with Emmanuel Saulnier), Nancy
1994: Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris
Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
1995: Galerie Arnaud Lefèbvre, Paris
1997: Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
1999: Galerie Edouard Manet, Gennevilliers
Parc Saint-Léger, Centre d'art contemporain, Pougues-les-Eaux
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Calais
Hommage à Courbet, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lons-le-Saunier
2000: *Balthasar Burkhard et Bernard Borgeaud*, La Synagogue de Delme, Centre d'art contemporain, Delme Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy; Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
2007: Galerie Philippe Pannetier, Nîmes
2010: *Modèles d'espace, figures du temps*, acb scène nationale, Bar-le-Duc
From Point to Point gallery, Nîmes
2013: Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy
2014: *Peinture à plusieurs mains*, Hôtel de Ville, Nancy
2016: *Point de départ*, Licence III, Perpignan

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2 works)
Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris (5 works)
Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2 works)
Musée Municipal, La Roche-sur-Yon
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy
FRAC Alsace
FRAC Bourgogne
FRAC Bretagne (2 works)
FRAC Centre
FRAC Pays de la Loire
FRAC Lorraine (2 works)
FRAC Haute-Normandie
acb Scène nationale, Bar-le-Duc
Kunstmuseum, Berne

BORGEAUD SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1969:** *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*, Kunsthalle, Berne
1970: Salon international des galeries pilotes (shown by Galerie Ileana Sonnabend)
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
Boltanski, Borgeaud, Cadere, Le Gac, Sarkis, Tysh, American Center, Paris
1973: *Information*, Konsthallen, Soderstalje (Sweden)
1974: *Art vidéo*, ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
1975: *Art vidéo*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles
1979: Sydney Biennale
Accrochage III, Galeries Contemporaines, Centre Pompidou, Paris
1980: *Il nuovo contesto in Europa*, Studio Marconi, Milan
1981: Sélection de la XIe biennale de Paris, Sara Hilden Art Museum, Tampere, Finlande
1982: *L'année littéraire de Marcelin Pleynet*, ARC, Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
1984: *Situation I*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Orléans
1985: *Alles und noch viel mehr*, Kunstmuseum et Kunsthalle, Berne
1986: *Territoire photographique, géographie photographiée*, Musée de Chartres
1987: *Un aspect des collections du FRAC Centre*, Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain, Châteauroux
1988: *Art pour l'Afrique*, Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris
La photographie et le photographique, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
1989: *Fonds National d'Art Contemporain*, acquisitions 1988, CNAF, Paris
1991: *Lato sensu*, travelling exhibition: Copenhagen, Hamburg, Fribourg.
1992: *Hommage à André Caderé*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
1994: *Restauration*, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
1995: *La bataille de Nancy*, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
Oeuvres récentes, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
Kitakanto Museum, Maebashi, Japan
1996: *Another Photography*, Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo
1997: *5 ans d'acquisitions*, FRAC Alsace, FRAC, Sélestat et CEAAC, Strasbourg
2000: *Réalités (Hommage à Courbet)*, Le 19, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Montbéliard
2002: *Réalités (hommage à Courbet)*, Centre d'art Passerelle, Brest
Circstances, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
2004: *Intimes convictions*, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
2006: *Bernard Borgeaud, Arnaud Class, Emmanuel Saulnier*, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
2008: *André Cadere, peinture sans fin*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
2009: *Keep your options open, 1989-2009*, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
2010: *Explorations*, Galerie Art Attitude Hervé Bize, Nancy
2011: *Drawing Now*, Salon du dessin contemporain, Paris
Cabin : codex, from feral to urban, from codex to artists' book, DJCAD, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee
2013: *La fabrique des possibles*, commissaire Pascal Neveux, FRAC Provence, Alpes Côte d'Azur, Marseille
2015: *Vertizontale*, Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy
2016: *Paysages contemporains*, Domaine de Kerguéhennec
2018: *In Side Out*, Galeria Horizon, Colera, Espagne
2020: *L'esprit du lieu*, Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud, Perpignan

WORKS LIST



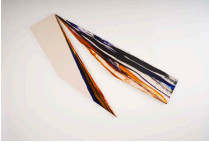
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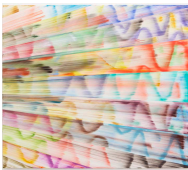
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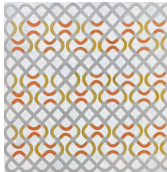
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160 x 180 cm.

An abstract painting featuring horizontal bands of color: light blue at the top, a wide yellow band, a dark red band, and light blue at the bottom. Overlaid on these bands are organic, leaf-like shapes in shades of green and blue, some with small dark spots. The overall style is modern and expressive.

OLIVIER VARENNE
ART MODERNE & CONTEMPORAIN

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