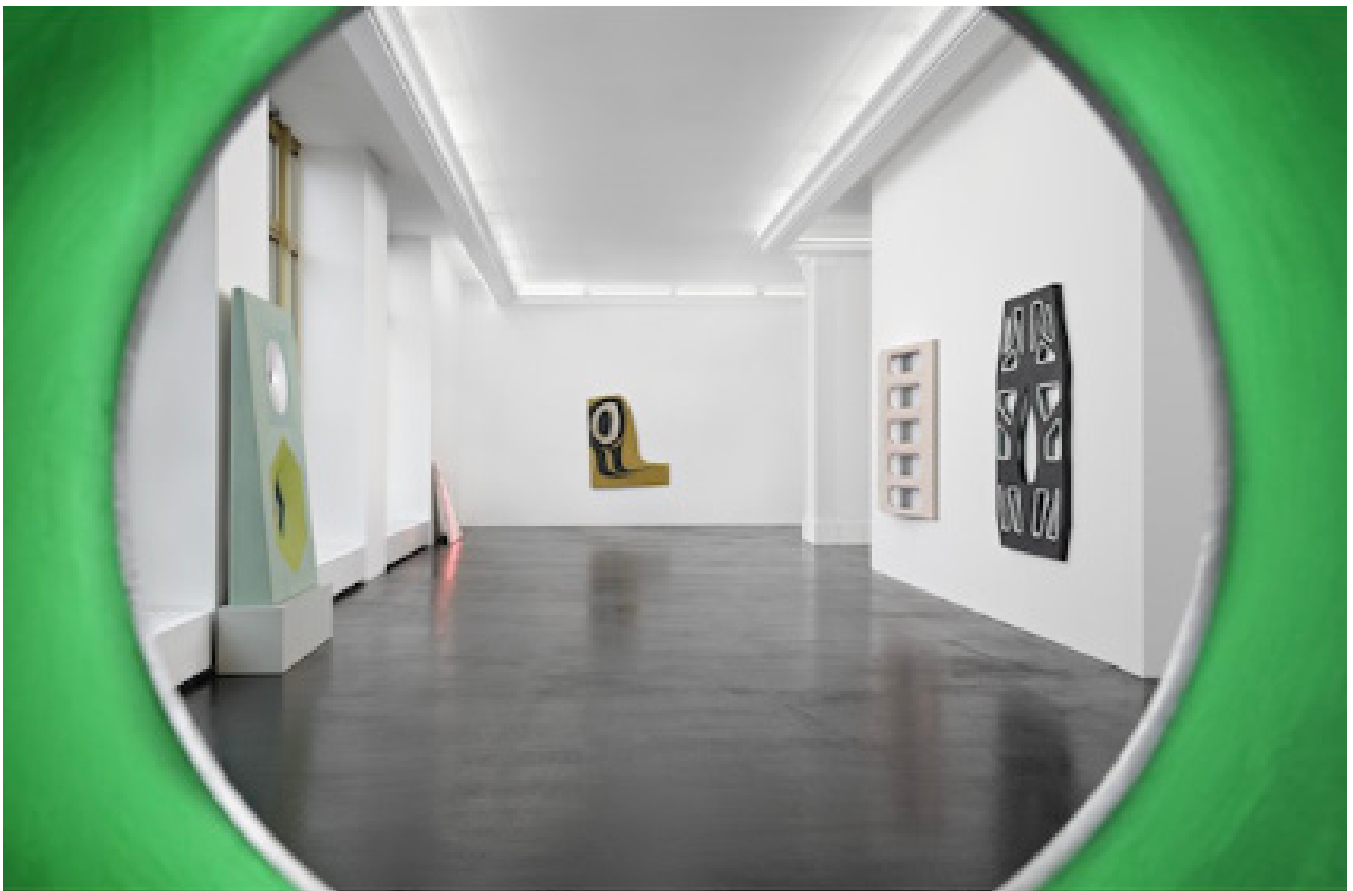


Exhibition // Blair Thurman at Peres Projects

Article by Alice Bardos in Berlin; Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2015

Emerging out of contrast to the backdrop of Berlin's pale November skies and the ominous and impersonal socialist architecture of Karl-Marx-Allee, the warm playful glow of Blair Thurman's art invites passersby to embark on a trip to a place of memory, reflection and connection.



At first impression, the aesthetic features of this American artist's work beckon his audience to let their guard down as they slowly begin to gravitate closer and closer to thoughts of their – and of course his – lived experiences. Blair shares raw sentiments of intimacy and freedom by using abstract, and almost naive forms inspired by cars, and the art of various American cultures, to point to the influences on, and the evolution of, his perception. These references perhaps allude to a former, more youthful way of seeing, in which Thurman could first explore the world boundlessly. In this exhibition, currently exhibited at Peres Projects, Thurman makes it clear that a canvas need not be something solely to be painted on, hung up, and left alone, and that neon lights are not just marketing tools to entice consumers. Rather, these can be a means to authentic self-discovery and development.

Some works highlight and reinterpret the three-dimensionality of various forms of media, such as Blair's canvas. These pieces that were formally perceived as planars are cleverly pierced and contorted into new shapes, thus seemingly questioning the distinction between the intentions of manufacturers and what individual creativity actually is. Forms like these incite a political and personal critique of how much of our lives fall under the prefabricated vision of

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consumer society, versus how much we do that is motivated by our own inner desires.

Yet it seems that Thurman does not resolve the difference between the production of consumer goods, and the idea of unique personhood through anger and polarization. Instead, he aesthetically points to the process. A long piece of canvas lined with painted red stars unimposingly hangs on one wall of the gallery and gradually drops down to the floor where it coils up into an object that looks ready to be put on a store shelf to be sold. However, at its top, the fabric is missing the finishing silver background and white outline – still there is some type of beauty and depth to this section. Perhaps, Thurman wants to suggest that even in making something that needs to meet market standards, there is space enough for some artistry, freedom and, therefore self-exploration.

Additionally, as an artist Thurman skillfully refuses to make the mistakes of the consumerist system that he is critical of, and in doing so avoids alienating viewers with his art. Unlike most everyday objects, many of the features of Thurman's art allow for the freedom of the viewer



to find the meaning in his works from their personal vantage point. I first experienced this when I engaged with a canvas-sculpture form that brought me back to the memory of having explored the dark and hidden away wings of a theatre my mother worked for long ago. Like on the props that I curiously observed in the past, this piece of Thurman's shows details such as broad brush strokes, and frayed canvas edges that artists and set designers traditionally would not intend viewers to experience. In making these features so evident and accessible, Thurman seemingly shows that he is aware of the presence of the observer, and further, that he encourages them to take in the art at any physical or emotional level.

Interestingly, Thurman describes himself as being influenced by the themes of Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of the eternal return. This is the idea that our world is made up of a finite quantity of things cycling through time and space. Within the legacy of this idea, however, Nietzsche seemed to feel desperately trapped, as though events repeating, and objects being reborn cannot bring about new meaning or understanding. However, this solemn mold seems to be broken by Thurman, in that even though objects, images, light patterns and, colours may reoccur in our lives, our ability to express ourselves and personalize these elements shows that new meanings can be found within ourselves.