

# VEDOVI GALLERY

## RUDOLF STINGEL

### Mute Materiality

20/04 – 20/05/2016

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*Rudolf Stingel, Mute Materiality* presents works from several of Stingel's most iconic series: early and later silver enamel paintings, carpet and wallpaper paintings. Spanning 1992 to 2013 these paintings succinctly demonstrate Stingel's evolving concerns in his painting practice with process, materials and content, or lack thereof. Walking through this chronological progression we encounter the development of Stingel's subject matter, which moves from the elusive grids generated by the use of gauze, through to the patterns of carpets and wallpapers, that appear, resolutely present in some paintings, while reticent and tenuous in others. This evolution is anchored by Stingel's consistency with regards to the methodical means by which each painting is arrived at on a material and procedural level, which began early on in Stingel's career.

Stingel arrived in New York in 1987. There he entered a milieu of conceptually minded artists, from Felix Gonzalez-Torres to Christopher Wool. His background was in abstract painting and, responding to the tenor of the times, in which the medium could only be approached in a mediated fashion, through one or another proxy, he quickly reduced his way of working to a tight, programmatic, process-based plan. One which could—theoretically, at least—be executed by any number of people, aligning him with the Warholian conceit of painting as a mechanized expression of a given commercial or industrial technique, and as such equally capable of conveying abstract or representational subject matter, as long as these operated as empty signs that had been drained of their signficatory weight.

Thus Stingel arrived at his silver enamel paintings, whose mute, materialist surfaces are far from empty, but which should rather be seen as in flux. Imagery in a state of cancelation or as about to emerge is equally suggested by the color peaking through and suffusing breaks in these silver fields, as well as by the matrix over it all that is generated by the gauze through which Stingel sprays the silver paint. These paintings reached an early conceptual apogee with the 1989 publication of Stingel's seminal artist's book, *Instructions*, on the occasion of that year's Venice Biennale. This book programmatically outlined, step-by-step, how to produce one of the artist's monochromatic abstractions, revealing both how programmatic they were, but also how important the subjectivity of the individual artist is in determining the specific qualities of the final work.

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Sure, anyone could follow these instructions, but no one else's work would look exactly like Stingel's. This serves to draw our attention to how those seemingly small formal issues, such as facture and intuitive decision-making as paint is brushed or sprayed on are often what gives so-called "reductive" or "minimal" work its power or interest. Without a deft hand the result is often just a banal square of paint. In this way work such as Stingel's, and his conceptual framing of it, is an invitation to refine and develop our taste for the subtleties of picture-making and of perceptual experience. Stingel's silver paintings allow themselves, despite their technical specificity, a large degree of pictorial play and the introduction of complex perceptual effects. These shimmering, variegated silver surfaces catch and reflect light, which means that they are highly respondent to the environment in which they are installed, and accordingly Stingel often hangs them in an expansive, installation-based manner, engulfing the viewer in a sea of iridescence.

Stingel's reduction of painting to a paint-by-numbers monochrome also suggests a radical embrace of the decorative aspects of painting, which is to say the ways that a painting can act as a cipher or sign rather than simply as an autonomous, transcendental entry onto the sublime. This is, for example, how Warhol deployed the monochrome in the case of his "blanks," which were single color panels that Warhol conjoined with certain of his silkscreen paintings as empty, mobile extensions of them. This quality is present as well in Stingel's use of the Persian carpet as a motif. In the early 1990s Stingel began to line exhibition spaces with such carpets, which rendered these spaces pictorial through Stingel's multiplication of this familiar decorative element until it takes over from the architectonics of the space, immersing it in pattern. In some of the paintings Stingel subsequently began to make using the carpet motif it is blown up and fragmented, while in others it seems as if it is becoming submerged and lost in the silver field. In all cases Stingel's use of gauze to generate an "abstract" motif is simply replaced by a different kind of fabric, that of the carpet which is also used as a stencil of sorts.

The balance of content and emptiness inherent in the carpet is akin to that of the monochrome canvas (and of other decorative motifs Stingel has made use of, such as the stripes and floral prints of wallpaper). There is thus a logic to Stingel's introduction of the carpet motif into the process-oriented abstraction of the silver enamel paintings. With their emphasis on procedure, as well as their putative blankness (à la Warhol), the silver enamel paintings thereby become a possible vehicle for any productively "blank" content, such as that of a carpet or wallpaper.

- Alex Bacon