

VEDOVI GALLERY

Press release

CHRISTOPHER WOOL
Untitled

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Text by Alex Turgeon

Christopher Wool's paintings deconstruct the materiality of paint itself. The nine works on exhibit at Vedovi Gallery articulate the artist's process defined by milestones in technique, punctuating his prominent artistic career that has lasted over 30-years. The networks created between gesture and technique illustrate Wool's evolution through complex tactics of abstraction, an evolution to become one of the most influential abstract painters of his generation.

In his early works the artist employed the use of decorative paint rollers, a tool originally designed to transform a fresh coat of paint into faux finish floral designs, and later rubber stamps, as a means of exploring the definition of the painterly mark. Through research into systems of how painting is defined, Wool recycles benign techniques of decoration that have been emptied of their sentimentality to explore the definition of "how to paint it" than "what to paint."¹ The result, as described in the two Untitled works from 1988 included here, operate as pensive reflection of, rather than strict appropriation found in, the kitsch pop imagery of his contemporaries.

After abandoning readymade rollers and stamps, Wool expanded into screen-printing, eventually including his own gesture in the reproductions pushed through his screens onto the surface. Wool's process of layering prints en masse produces a reflective after-image of his source material, including the artist's own mark making. The incorporation of these motifs extracted from the surplus detritus of the studio enables Wool's praxis to reverberate between abstraction and ornamentation, establishing his own gesture as a form of brand for which to be reproduced like a ready-made.

Having gained inspiration from the street art in the early 1980's, the urbanity Wool's city is reflected in his raw synthetic materials where "tags are reiterated over and over again, contaminating urban space with a viral multiplication of the same mark, which is also a vandalistic mode of branding"². Wool's paintings take inspiration from the intersection of industry and urban life, where the language of gesture operates as a material fluidity rather than staunch grammatical purism. Wool incorporates the tactics of layering and removing marks as a form of demarcation and authorship of territory within the city. By rearticulating these actions in the studio, the artist finds content in process rather than depiction.

The most recent work on display, Untitled (2005), is quintessential to the artist's oeuvre in that it combines Wool's processes in questioning how paint exists. Enamel paint is applied to canvas through the use of a paint gun, a tool repurposed within street art to create large throw-ups (paintings) on the sides of buildings, producing tendril like gestures that are then removed, mixed and negated through the indication of being wiped away with solvent drenched rags.

The resulting composition sits within an American art historical canon of erasure, quite famously that of Rauschenberg's iconic Erased de Kooning (1953), as a way of undermining the authoritative principles of an additive authorship of the painterly surface. The final composition likens itself to the stages of removing graffiti from the exterior façade of a building: as the compositions are scrubbed away the solvents create blurred abstraction within the enamel composition.

Through his unique collapsing of technique and process, Christopher Wool has become one of the most innovative artists of his time. Wool's works reject the puritanicalism of classical painting by taming industrial products and techniques into the self-reflexive refinement of the painterly surface, paralleling the perpetual tensions of the claiming aesthetic space within a public sphere of an urban metropolis.

¹ Wool, Christopher qtd in A. Goldstein, "What They're Not: The Paintings of Christopher Wool," ed. A. Goldstein, Christopher Wool, exh. cat., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1998, p. 256

² Kelsey, John. "Painting and its Side Effects." "Christopher Wool", exh. cat., Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, 2012, p. 17

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