

MOUSSE

“ZONE” at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York



“ZONE” at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York, 2024. Courtesy: the artist and Reena Spaulings Fine Art NY/LA. Photo: Joerg Lohse

Time travel is real, we do it all the time: Stephen Willats’s “time tumbler” drawings bring such experiences to mind, using second-order cybernetic concepts to model everyday journeys into increasing complexity. Charting escape routes from linear models of time, from information silos and the guided tours of predictive algorithms, Willats’s diagrammatic works are also a means of conceiving and triggering change within social worlds and other complex systems. For Willats, the diagram is a call for diagrammatic disruption by the people it always already includes. The diagram is us and we still don’t know what “social media” is.

The interconnected wheels of Merlin Carpenter's Steam Engine paintings, meanwhile, are like steam punk diagrams of acceleration frozen in time. Painted on cheap gingham tablecloths, his locomotives look forward to coming social transformations, invoking a retrospective view of our present culture as if seen from a postcapitalist future, perhaps 100 years from now. This future viewer—who could also be us, now—would not see merely a good or bad painting but the situation of viewing itself, a new view of the view, by drifting outside a diagram-in-motion which is actually stuck on its tracks. In such works, we come to understand the diagram as an image to be used and shared, involving viewers in its very construction. Painting may not yet be a portal to a dimension beyond the scene of value production, but it can point us in that direction.

A glow-in-the-dark painting by SoiL Thornton shows a digital text message delivered "Today 8:53 PM," using keyboard symbols to picture the rings of a 5000-year-old tree seen in cross-section. This abbreviated diagram of ancient growth creates a strange tension with the ever-refreshing diagram of the phone's interface, where communication always comes as a timeline. Charline von Heyl's abstract *Datura* (2024), meanwhile, activates the diagram as a means of painting in relation to catastrophe, from which painting must always emerge. This might involve switching out one diagram for another in the making of the work, extreme disorientation as part of the process. As chance would have it, *Datura* seems to recompose its own abstract system with the blue box of Thornton's text bubble, the grid beneath Carpenter's *A New Cultural Studies* and *Trainwreck*, and the patterns of linked dots in Willats's time tumblers. Coumba Samba's striped, color-coded canvases and tubes deploy an abstract system for recoding people, places and identities which might otherwise escape or trap us: own your own abstraction, but disrupt and complicate it!

With The Joint (2017), sculptor John Duff has devised a system for casting the negative spaces between stacked spheres, using steel rings as points of linkage between materialized voids. An angled, chain-like structure extends and unfolds a space perforated by patterns of holes. Here, a sculptural operation becomes a diagrammatic exchange between formal coherence and incoherence, in the eyes and in the mind.

Heji Shin's *BOHICA* (Bend Over, Here It Comes Again, 2020), meanwhile, shows a simulated battlefield situation selected from a series of images shot in Ukraine one year before the actual war began. Reneactment as rehearsal? We can see these photographs as fakes or larps time traveling into future reality, or as accurate documentations of a war without clear beginning or end. Nicolas Ceccaldi's serial variations on a portrait of Mozart sporting modern headphones (*Requiem Remix*, 2024) invoke a recurring, untimely drifter in our midst, always passing through.

Participating artists:

Stephen Willats, SoiL Thornton, Heji Shin, Coumba Samba, Charline von Heyl, John Duff, Nicolas Ceccaldi, Merlin Carpenter.

at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York
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