ALMINE RECH

Alexandre Lenoir
Between dogs and wolves

Sep 6 — Oct 19, 2024 | New York

Almine Rech New York, Tribeca is pleased to present Between dogs and wolves, Alexandre Lenoir's sixth solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from September 6 to October 19, 2024.

In Alexandre Lenoir's solo exhibition at Almine Rech Gallery in New York, the top left corner of one of his canvases contains the enigmatic and alluring phrase "Tape the sky at the beginning." Direct and instructional, yet profound and poetic, this phrase illuminates the crux of Lenoir's distinctive artistic process and its rigorous, conceptual, physical, and metaphysical underpinnings. First and foremost, the phrase refers to Lenoir's signature method of trapping paint beneath masking tape to replicate nature, represent an image, and, as displayed in the works in the exhibition, showcase his continued experimentation with material and color. The lyrical scrawl also offers insight into Lenoir's studio practice, a crucial conceptual element of his work. Indeed, the text was written as a direct "instruction" to a studio assistant. These instructions are part of what the artist calls his "protocol" or "recipe" for a painting.

Lenoir's meticulous protocols appear in the form of charts for studio assistants and speak to his own removal (his own absence) from the process of painting in search of an image steered by chance, one that he himself could not make, or rather decided not to make since he literally stood out. But here is the inherent in this protocol: while standing out, the artists becomes outstanding in his own absence. The artist shines through his own absence. He reveals himself though his own self-removal. Likening the artist to a conductor or architect, Lenoir draws on the formal and conceptual strategies of pioneering avant-garde artistic movements across the art historical canon, ranging from Les Nabis to Fluxus.

The works in the exhibition also conjure the presence of Andy Warhol and Alighiero Boetti in Lenoir's conceptual, or indeed metaphysical, studio practice. Lenoir's practice can be called "metaphysical" in the simple sense of "meta-physics"—meta: after or beyond; physics: nature, presence. Insofar as Lenoir takes his own self, his own presence, away from making the work, his role is indeed meta-physical, or beyond-the-physical. As we loiter at the beginning, let us tape the sky and cross the threshold into Alexandre Lenoir's pictorial world.

The nearly twenty large-scale works on view in Alexandre Lenoir's exhibition, Entre chien et loup, in Almine Rech's Tribeca space reveal an unparalleled degree of experimentation in the Parisian-born artist's practice to date. These pictorial triumphs reflect the intensive layering techniques, underpinning Lenoir's singular vision since he graduated with honors from the legendary Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 2016. To create these works, Lenoir projected black-and-white and sepia-toned photographs, primarily of interior spaces, onto the canvas, following each image with brilliant, meditative, gradual deposits of pigment with his signature material—masking tape.

For the first time in his practice, Lenoir has opted for a different color masking tape in some works, exchanging his trademark painter's blue for yellow and orange. The exhibition also includes the artist's first-ever canvas glued onto aluminum panel, which straddles the spheres of two-dimensional images and installation artworks. In the paintings overall, Lenoir's treatment of paint—a rarely encountered combination of oil and acrylic (which feels like oil and water)—is more luminous and translucent than ever before. Light appears to emanate from within the works from a hidden luminous source—a symptom of his more prolific use of white across these surfaces. While maintaining intense color alchemies, the effect is refined with delicate gradations in hue as well as a mesmerizing, aqueous drift between tones.

Mnemonic Material, Mnemonic Color

Masking tape has proven a very apt and fruitful medium for the artist and his conceptual project, while yielding an astonishing and unsuspected array of visual effects. Who knew that masking tape could hold so many resources? In his application of tape, Lenoir has literally reversed the usual ordinary function of taping up an image on a wall to better remember its subject. Instead, here, Lenoir projects images onto canvas that are then concealed with tape and color. As suggested by his process, adhesive tape is a ripe metaphor for the sticky malleability of memory. Lenoir's use of tape, his application, and later removal of it also intimates the memory of the painting in the studio—the very origin of each painting. In this way, distance, time, and experience coalesce into an image of memory itself.

Lenoir initially replaced his brushstroke with pieces of tape to represent the hypnotic ripples and ever-changing motion of water. In his early experiments, Lenoir covered certain areas with tape so that these masked forms remained untouched by many subsequent layers of color. As the paint dried under the tape, the result produced an uncanny resemblance to sedimentation or glimmering water brought to life. "Natural elements are not made with the hand of man," Lenoir reminds us. "They are made by themselves. I needed to find a way to paint with the least brushstrokes possible." When his process was repeated in over 100 layers, Lenoir discovered multiple color separations and harmonies—a provocation, evocation, (or emulation) of nature (physis) herself. Through his process, the aquatic, flora, and vegetation depicted in the works assume a spiritual dimension (aura) by conjuring, like nature, elements in their own essence. In Lenoir's words, seemingly plucked from Wassily Kandinsky's seminal text Concerning the Spiritual in Art, "The painting has so much potential to be, just to be..."

— A full essay by Joachim Pissarro will be available on site and featured in the upcoming Skira monograph. The essay will also be available upon request.

1 Quoted from a conversation among Joachim Pissarro, Alexandre Lenoir, and Hieromonk Silouan in the Lenoir's New York studio, June 3, 2024.
2 Quoted from a conversation with Alexandre Lenoir in his New York studio, May 23, 2024; Also see Wassily Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual in Art (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), p. 53, which claims, "The work of art is born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way."