ALMINE RECH

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet
Successo Evidente (Hidden Tracks)

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Almine Rech Brussels is pleased to present 'Successo Evidente (Hidden Tracks)' Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's seventh solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from January 16 to March 1, 2025.

How do you define success? The perennial question often associated with cheap self-help books and awkward job interviews looms large in the realm of painting. Indeed, not everyone likes to hear that some paintings 'just happened' like a lucky snapshot. If seamlessness can fascinate by suggesting painstaking work or the triumph of automation, there is something reassuring about visible traces of labour and frustration—people like to know it didn't come easy. In art, satisfaction is nothing unless you're testing how little you can do and how bad you can make it, but these transgressions are short-lived. Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's multifarious approach to painting blurs the line between these contradictory sets of beliefs and attitudes, so much so that in his work, the terms of success can be seen as a subject in its own right.

In his most well-known series, such as *Fugue* or *Vetiver*, the artist uses as little paint as possible and works hard to conceal the labor that goes into achieving the sense of efficacy that often defines his all-over compositions. Even as they result from the accretion of micro events on the surface of the canvas, these paintings tend to follow a criteria by which they shall appear like found compositions akin to paesina stone, tie-dye shirts, weathered photocopies, phosphenes, stains and sunsets. To this effect, he has learnt how to cover his tracks by hand and paint himself out of the canvas.

The painter's fascination with the idea that the work comes to fruition when, after many adjustments, it begins to look like the result of an agreeable happenstance, also implies that what makes the work 'work' is always up for debate. '*Successo Evidente (Hidden Tracks)*' centers the aforementioned question around a group of paintings that acts as a series of arguments and counterarguments. The first half of the exhibition title stems from one of the small sign paintings that regularly punctuate the artist's journey. Scribbled with paint and glitter on a crummy piece of wood, the statement could bring to mind the promise of a trickster or the sincere inquiry of an artist in the studio. As a question, it is earnest and bit snarky at the same time—again, one type of behavior never fully excludes the other.

What may be an accidental spill on a small paint by numbers in *Untitled (A Blessing)* (2011-2024), bears kinship with the color palette and unusually loose brushwork of the much larger *Untitled (Gran Turismo)* (2012-2024). What looks like a one and done thing recurs. A bad print makes a good impression. Successes happen through failures, or by cleaning your brush. Failures happen through hard work. Hard work can be deceptive. Deception is hard work. Hard work can be easy. Everything else is hard.

For Bernadet who believes in the primacy of color, painting is also an act of courtship. In this sensuous game of perception and persuasion, the artist gladly takes on the role of a hustler to keep the heroic tendencies of the medium at bay. In *Untitled (Briefly Gorgeous)* (2014-2024), a series of black and white silkscreened canvases showing different states of the same photograph of a flamboyant peacock sourced from the New York Public Library's Picture Collection, the artist shows a healthy willingness to mess with his own discourse. Here is a suite of mechanically produced works where gaudy colors are summoned through their absence.

If the artist's tendency to frequently undermine his own success is both remarkable and refreshing, it is not a methodology but merely a mechanism that regulates the free-flowing course of his work. In a new series aptly titled *Acqua Alta* (2024), different layers coexist dynamically thereby allowing the fleeting nature of perceptions to materialize through painting's unparalleled liquid intelligence. These paintings evoke the operation of a scanner going over a flat surface flooded by the impressions of a world in motion. Backgrounds and foregrounds hover undecidedly, like translucent screens against which our own impressions are given a chance to reassemble in a certain order.

— Émile Rubino, artist and writer.