ALMINE RECH

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet
Vetiver (Shanghai)

Jan 15 — Mar 7, 2026 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to present 'Vetiver (Shanghai)', Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's eighth solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from January 15 to March 7, 2026.

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's paintings are often discussed through an equivalence with clouds. Like clouds, his all-over compositions sustain an equivocal relationship to abstraction, representation, and interiority. They blend the remnants of late modernism with a tinge of Baroque theatricality while feeding a postmodernist sensibility with the pixelated residues of Impressionism. These aggregates operate a subtle balancing act, resting on unresolved tensions, with every part equal, yet equally distinct.

In 'Vetiver (Shanghai)', his cloud-like formations take on a newly latent form akin to colored fumes. Diffused patches of pyrotechnic yellows burst through the canvas like smoke flowers in the midst of an auspicious firework. Meanwhile, darker shades of blue, purple, orange, and green linger, as if searching for a place to settle. From one canvas to the next, the observer is carried through vaporous movements—successive stages in an endless process of evaporation. What lies behind the painter's artificial sfumato remains unclear. At once phenomenological and allegorical, Bernadet's luminous smoke gets in your eyes—it is the kind of haze that makes lovers go blind.

But what the pictorial smokescreens laid down by the painter primarily conceal is his own labor. It takes hard work for the artist to fade into the background from which he orchestrates his prismatic maneuvers. While painting is often celebrated for its ability to embed value in muddy brushstrokes that signal mediated forms of authenticity, Bernadet's evanescent presence is both confident and unassuming. Indeed, there is something paradoxical about an artist disguising the labor involved in painting while foregrounding the medium's expressivity.

The quasi-photographic bokeh and chromatic vibrations in 'Vetiver (Shanghai)' also conjure the incidental afterimage left in the eyes of the spectators of a firework following the grand finale, or bouquet final. Like these fleeting harmonies of color, Bernadet's loose and radiant arrangements seem to glow from within. Just as they resist a clear form, his paintings avoid the cliché of formlessness typically associated with depictions of smoke. Here, smoke isn't depicted; it is neither symbolic nor realistic. Instead, it arises from the depth of the canvas as an optical experience whose purity flirts gracefully with the decorative pleasures of flatness.

— Emile Rubino