ALMINE RECH

John Armleder: Again, Just Again

Oct 16 — Dec 19, 2021 | Rockbund Art Museum

Rockbund Art Museum is very pleased to present the first major survey exhibition of the renowned Swiss artist John Armleder in China. “Again, Just Again” will be on display from 16 October, 2021 to 19 December, 2021. As the inaugural highly anticipated exhibition after the museum’s major renovation, “Again, Just Again” is a celebration of his influential five decades of work and inspired by the many inter-disciplinary detours in art throughout this journey. The exhibition features an ambitious display of new and existing work such as painting, ready-mades, works created on-site, works on paper, site-specific wall drawings, and archival material. With each floor of the museum, the spaces inside and outside of exhibition halls have been transformed through a unique scenography assembled to guide the audience through a choreography of unexpected encounters and visual experiences.

Taking the spirit of the artist’s embrace of chance, open-endedness, and collective experimentation, the exhibition is also proud to include collaborations between the artist, the museum, and other practitioners to intervene, translate, and ultimately to extend new associations and meanings in response to different elements of Armleder’s wide-ranging oeuvre. Following the artist’s long curiosity into inviting collaborators outside of the world of art to re-appropriate and completely redefine the order and way of seeing his work, the museum is delighted to commission the acclaimed Shanghai-based photographer, Leslie Zhang, to take authorial direction over an entire exhibition hall on the third floor, transforming the space into a contemplative mis-en-scene, whose spatial and aesthetic design will draw on his own personal language and memories in response to a curated selection of Armleder’s works. Elsewhere on the fifth floor, an ambitious and rare display of the artist’s drawings and experimental works on paper, ranging from pen and ink, watercolor, gouache, acrylic oil and collage, will be installed in conjunction with archival material and a unique site-specific wall drawing, a rich and layered ensemble created especially for the exhibition in conversation with the artist.

With Armleder’s multi-sensorial repertoire of different art-making rules and techniques, compositional questions such as improvisation and order serve as an underlying concern in many works, connect to the artist’s longstanding interest in the history of painting and the evolution of its form. Many of his works push, short-circuit, or collapse the specificity of painting through challenging the conventions that connect the paint, canvas, and stretcher. Actions such as pouring, splashing, and chemical reactions loosen or heighten the level of authorial control by the artist. As Larys Frogier, the Director of Rockbund Art Museum elaborates, “John Armleder always cultivates ambiguous visual and conceptual situations where patterns, colors, objects are very much clinically or rigorously organized, composed, installed, repeated, while they are conveying a strong feeling of uncertainty and visual experience that everything is possible as long as we are available to welcome the chance, the accident, the displacement.” His connection to experimental painting is often in dialogue with other mediums and influences outside of the field of art; sometimes they are traces created from a performance, or arranged together like a visual score, allowing works to be repeated using different materials and in circumstances that create further variation, blurring the separation between the before and after.

Rather than isolated objects, his paintings and other series of works are regularly presented with other objects, such as furniture, to highlight or contrast their formal qualities, textures, color, or symbolic function as they collide with other media. Therefore, the emphasis of chance takes on a new dimension as a path to go beyond what is expected or easily predicated, giving the chance to escape an arbitrary limit. This approach defines Armleder's consistent refusal to stay within the margins of one singular style, format, or rule. He joyfully skates between different boundaries of an eclectic range of genres and artistic influences: from Modernism to Constructivism, Op-Art, Pop, Fluxus performances, and abstract or gestural painting. Likewise, the flux between art and everyday life is constantly utilized as a creative energy to cross-fertilize with other influences outside of the field of artworld: from high and low design, avant-garde music, and Hollywood B-movies.

In many ways, art is an imitation of life, and perhaps poetically this influence extends the other way into another potential ecology, where life begins to simulate the beauty of forms created by art. If art can exist anywhere or be activated in any place, the accumulations series by Armleder is perhaps the most playful version of the readymade by the artist. On each exhibition floor, there are different orders of piled objects consisting of flotsam, decorative ornaments, cheap copies and everyday detritus assembled into unexpected spaces in the museum building. Held in a delicate poise, they appear incongruous as a random displacement, or as left-behind objects, soon to be taken away at any noticed. A beauty exists in how disparate materials gravitate towards one another into accidental sculptures, without the prompt to look more carefully, these are the moments in daily life that often pass us by unnoticed.

"We never sought to approach this exhibition as a retrospective, simply because we discovered very quickly that John never stops experimenting with new ideas and methods of creating art. Even with existing works, they transform according to the time and place they are presented, continuously evolving into a unique scenography with each exhibition. It will be fascinating how the audience will interact with the exhibition to continue this process of non-stop experimentation," says Billy Tang, Senior Curator at Rockbund Art Museum

For the duration of "Again, Just Again", Rockbund Art Museum will host a series of public programming and educational events including: guide tours, walk and talk, lectures, conversations, panel discussions, live music, performance, body workshops, adult and family workshops. Highlighting key concepts of chance, repetition, and appropriation, the program looks to further expand on the themes in the exhibition to encourage audiences to probe, experience, and acquire an in-depth look into and behind the exhibition through a fun and inspirational way.