ALMINE RECH

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet and Benoit Platéus Sea Level

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"Sea levels will rise, experts warn, and it's not going to stop."
—LA Times, August 27, 2015

The sea level can be used as a supposedly stable reference to measure altitude, but, in reality, it is a fluctuating point of reference as its value varies with time and space. While sea level fluctuations often hit newspaper headlines, raising alarm of coastal areas being submerged, they remind us above all of the elusive nature of any point of origin. More than just the coast, rising water levels engulf any claim for the 'original'.

The fluidity of shapes and their inevitably temporary nature are central to the new paintings presented by Jean-Baptiste Bernadet, partnered with sculptures by Benoît Platéus. Initiated during a residency in Los Angeles during the spring of 2015, Bernadet's *Black Paintings* reintroduce the artist's earlier use of the color black. While the title of the series refers to Ad Reinhardt's black monochromes, Bernadet's paintings function differently from those of the American artist. Each work is composed of a diluted mix of black paint and another color, which the artist applies on the canvas and then spreads with a sheet of paper. The liquid mixture slides on the support and rapidly dries, thereby revealing variations in the density of the black. Despite requiring great speed in the making process, Bernadet tries to render his gestures unreadable. The resulting image is therefore not expressionist—it does not reveal anything of the subjectivity or the intention of the artist—although it does include random marks that the observer can freely interpret. In opposition to the silent and motionless nature of the American painter's works, the French artist offers paintings whose fluid and mobile surfaces generate an endless game of interpretation. In the interlacing of the paintings, landscapes emerge only to immediately vanish.

Facing the paintings, Benoît Platéus' sculptures also function as carriers of images. Since 2011, the artist has been gathering empty containers that used to hold chemical products needed for photographic printing (fixer, developer, etc.). He pours pigmented resin into these containers and as the resin hardens, the layers of color blend unpredictably, creating abstract effects in the material. Similar to the chemical process of photographic printing where 'something' appears, the jugs seem to contain latent images. Considering the horizontality of the layers of color, the transportable nature of the containers, and their resemblance to gas cans at times, Platéus' hybrid objects—part volume and image, part sculpture and photography—call to mind the same register of landscape as Bernadet's *Black Paintings*. In this respect, the fact that the sculptures presented here were also created in California may be meaningful as the two artists took a trip there together, traveling between the national parks of the American west.

However, beyond this shared thread, it is above all the importance given to incompleteness and potentiality that brings together the work of both Bernadet and Platéus. Their pieces, marked by the gesture for one and by the cast for the other, appear as sensitive surfaces, open to projections, and, in their essence, multiple and elusive.

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet was born in Paris in 1978, and works in Brussels. His work has been shown in many monographic and group exhibitions in such institutions as: WIELS (Brussels), Almine Rech (Paris), Maison Particulière (Brussels), and Palais des Beaux-Arts (Brussels).

Benoît Platéus was born in Chênée (Belgium), and lives and works in Brussels. His work has been shown in many monographic and group exhibitions in such institutions as: WIELS (Brussels), S.M.A.K. (Ghent), La Maison Rouge (Paris), Mu.ZEE (Ostende), Etablissement d'en face (Brussels), and Jeu de Paume (Paris).

– Devrim Bayar