ALMINE RECH

Telephone Paintings
Curated by Nicolas Trembley

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On the occasion of the 43rd edition of Art Basel, Almine Rech Gallery has commissioned Nicolas Trembley to curate its booth on the subject of 'process painting'.

The starting point for this exhibition, and the inspiration for the title, is the seminal *Konstruktion in Emaille* by László Moholy-Nagy. In 1923 the artist, who was then teaching at the Bauhaus, telephoned an enamel plaque factory to commission three pieces composed of abstract lines in primary colors set against a white background: they were collectively called the *Telephone Pictures*.

By delegating the production of his work to someone who is not an artist, by shifting production from the studio to a factory, and thus ultimately entrusting it to machinery, Moholy-Nagy was among the first to challenge the classical and romantic notion of the artist as the unique author of his or her work.

The idea of manufacturing being at the heart of the present exhibition, Almine Rech Gallery, in close collaboration with the Moholy-Nagy Estate, has been able to have the three existing plaques reproduced by one of the last industrial enamel factories still in activity.

The exhibition *Telephone Paintings* gathers 30 works that span a century of artistic creativity and raise questions relating to notions of process, delegation, mechanical reproduction, image circulation, as well as the concept of the original and its reproductions. Of the 30 selected artists, most are represented by Almine Rech Gallery, while others have been invited to take part due to the pertinence of their work in relation to the theme.

Thus, Pablo Picasso, who is featured with a historical monotype depicting two women, echoes a recent silk-screened *Joke Painting* by Richard Prince, who in turn provides an ironic take on a two-headed woman. Kurt Schwitters' collages are flanked by a series of images sourced from the civil rights demonstrations that took place in the United States in the 1960s. Initially published in *Life* magazine or *The New York Times*, these photographs were later pirated by artists such as Andy Warhol for the various formats of his *Race Riot paintings,* or more recently by Kelley Walker for the Black Star Press series.

Once chosen, the works generated their own logic for their hanging on the John Armleder wallpaper, which was commissioned by telephone from a specialized manufacturer. This 'room' of painting is fitted with furniture designed by Franz West that accentuates its domestic nature.

If Moholy-Nagy made the move from studio to factory, we have moved from the gallery to a domestic setting whose inhabitants are present: a surrogate body in the form of a t-shirt by Joe Bradley; a slim silhouette represented by John McCracken's *Plank*; and lastly, a couple in a cognac advertisement appropriated by Jeff Koons for his 1980s *Luxury and Degradation* series. Three ambiances gradually emerged on the three main walls of the exhibition along chromatic lines: morning, afternoon and evening.

But beyond this scripted fiction, *Telephone Paintings* raises one of the key issues in art history, one that keeps returning to the fore: abstraction. How do 'un-painted paintings' composed of neutral forms continue to communicate today, and why do they do so? What do they tell us? How do we qualify them, and how do we define their singularity?

A 150 page catalogue will be published on the occasion of the exhibition. It brings together the works in the exhibition and offers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the production process. Through as yet unseen documentary photographs, the artists reveal how they manufacture, or commission, their works.