



frac île-de-france

The Window Display
frac île-de-france, le plateau, paris

***Quality Street* – Nicolas Chardon**
14.10 – 22.11.15

A conversation between Nicolas Chardon and Gilles Baume

Gilles Baume: Your proposition for the window display is a contextual project, *Quality Street*, which you consider to be a public art piece, in that the window is a hybrid space, between the white, closed, museum wall and the opening onto the street. This project is a follow-up to other works you conceived for the public space, in the street.

Could you tell us more about the conditions in which you've considered this shift towards the space of the street in your artistic practice?

Nicolas Chardon: When it comes to showing paintings in the street, it all started with my piece *68*, which I created at the CAC Brétigny in 2007. At the time, I had a discussion with Pierre Bal-Blanc, who was in charge of the art centre at the time, about the possible relationship between my work and Daniel Buren's early paintings. Then about Buren's transition to the public space. So as an experiment of sorts, just to see, Pierre Bal-Blanc invited me to conceive an exhibition that would be shown outdoors, wherever I wanted, wherever I could, instead of in the exhibition space. So I literally took my painting out onto the street and chose to exhibit sixty-eight 1 x 1 m fibreboard panels, which I painted black and lined up against a concrete wall that separated the CAC car park from the neighbouring apartment block. I think that this simple shift raised quite fundamental – classic, if you will – issues in regards to painting, which still remain very relevant to this day. In a way, those sixty-eight paintings in Brétigny acted as sixty-eight pictorial functions, sometimes pointing out emptiness (the exhibition space), sometimes a limit (the wall, especially the spaces it demarcated), expression and colour (the walls were covered in graffiti), or even time (the exhibition lasted sixty-eight days, and the rather heavy panels were taken out during opening hours).

Ultimately, whether in Brétigny, Rome (*Spazio Pubblico*), Bordeaux (*ECHO*) or Paris (*La peinture au balcon*), the transition of my paintings from indoors to the street merely consists in stretching the paint as if to test its elasticity, and in showing how paint always exceeds its own medium, while also remaining ironically attached to the demonstration of its autonomy.

GB: Does the presence of your art in the city via the various pieces you've developed in the public space – especially the project *Quality Street* – enable you to mark a desire to fit into what's happening here and now, especially when one considers their relationship with surrounding urban visual codes?

NC: When I exhibit a monochrome wooden panel in the street, for instance, I'm not doing so to shift its artistic quality, or even to exploit the artistic quality of the street itself, but rather to make the most of what I believe to be the blank quality of art when it's shown in the street. I think anything is possible in the street, that everything is equal, that a simple wooden board can be seen both as a simple wooden board and as art, more so than in a museum or gallery (where one always suspects there will be art). Still, I won't delude myself into thinking that my works are closer to the 'real' world because they happen to be shown in the street. My main interest is to show painting, and the street enables me to momentarily free it from artistic considerations and focus on other pictorial functions instead.

Beyond the sugary nod, I chose to call the window display piece *Quality Street* because I wanted to underline the quality transfer that's quite clearly happening nowadays, now that radical art melts in the mouth, and the cheapest, most mercantile, and aptly named street art has taken over the sphere of art.





frac île-de-france

GB: Your practice of abstraction refers to modernist language, especially in the way you use grid patterns. It brings up the question of the topicality of this kind of language nowadays. Next to the usual grid pattern that punctuates your work, the installation *Quality Street* also includes its own title, painted onto the window. Could you tell us more about what this title means to you, and perhaps give us a more general description of the relationship you establish between words and images?

NC: The relationship between texts and images is completely intertwined in my painting, and, as you mentioned, both derive from the structure of the grid. In a way, all the shapes that I paint come from language (the terminology of modernist painting, but not only), and my practice then consists in extracting them from it in order to try and make them visible. The same applies to the words 'Peinture Abstraite' (in all languages) or 'ABSTRACT', which I feature in my paintings. ABSTRACT is interesting in this respect, because it goes beyond the tautological effect, also evoking scientific or academic language, in which it designates the summary of a research – which perfectly matches the sort of curious synthesis my painting tends towards. A painting in which each gesture leads to its logical resolution by completely integrating modernist codes, while producing a form that is emancipated from the aesthetic dogma of the 'proper' form.

Therefore, *Quality Street* can be understood as a layering of my painting production, like an ABSTRACT: first a cotton canvas background, then a stretched canvas painted with a grid pattern, then painted shapes – often black and white – structured by the grid. What my paintings reveal – the distortion of the figures caused by the tension that the grid applies to the canvas – is a fertile paradox. The tension softens, rather than constrains. *Quality Street* must also be understood in light of this moral, and we must use the forms to pave a path that'll lead us from the – tensed – space of art to the open, or perhaps freer, street.

Street Cred., some benchmarks :

- 68 – CAC Brétigny, 2007 + 68 (*Reprise*), CAC Brétigny, 2013

<http://www.cacbretigny.com/inhalt/chardon.html>

http://www.nicolaschardon.net/NC_site/context_b3.html

- *Spazio Pubblico*, dans 7 rues de Rome, 2008

http://www.nicolaschardon.net/NC_site/context_d2.html

- *ONZE RUE CLAVEL*, La peinture à la rue, Biennale de Belleville, Paris, 2010

<http://www.labiennaledelleville.fr/2011/10/street-painting/>

http://www.nicolaschardon.net/NC_site/context_e2.html

- *ECHO*, Frac Aquitaine, Bordeaux, 2011

<http://www.frac-aquitaine.net/tout-ce-que-vous-avez-toujours-voulu-savoir-sur-le-blanc>

http://www.nicolaschardon.net/NC_site/context_i1.html

- *Peintures blanches, Rue Bleue*, Paris, 2011

http://www.nicolaschardon.net/NC_site/context_i3.html

- *La peinture au balcon*, Palette Terre, Paris, 2015





frac
île-de-france



68 – CAC Brétigny, 2007



frac
île-de-france



Spazio Pubblico, dans 7 rues de Rome , 2008



frac
île-de-france



ONZE RUE CLAUVEL, La peinture à la rue, Biennale de Belleville, Paris, 2010



frac
île-de-france



ECHO, FRAC Aquitaine, Bordeaux, 2011



frac
île-de-france



Peintures blanches, Rue bleue, Paris, 2011



frac île-de-france



68 (Reprise), CAC Brétigny, 2013





frac
île-de-france



La peinture au balcon, Palette Terre, Paris, 2015