



Francis Baudevin

& John M. Armleder, Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Catherine Ceresole, Helmut Federle, Christian Floquet, Christian Marclay, Francis Morellet, Olivier Mosset, Robert Nickas, Laurence Pittet

**«abstract-contact»
06.11.21 - 15.01.2022**

Since the late nineteenth century, art and music have been closely related to one another. Endeavoring to reproduce the rhythms, structures, and sounds of the musical world in their works, Western artists attempted to fuse painting and music entirely, going beyond the already established symbiosis of both art forms. But with the exception of close references and several daring experiments, this avant-garde undertaking never seemed to attain its goal entirely. In this discursive context, the British literary, essayist, and art critic Walter Pater said in 1877 that music was the only art form where form and content are not only inseparable, but identical. Here, music differs dramatically from painting because the latter, according to Pater, is able to take on a variety of forms. The basic difference between painting and music consists not least in that painting mimetically depicts the physical world, while music can liberate itself from “reality.” Pater concludes accordingly: “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.” That the leitmotif of modernist painting would express itself in marked distance to reality was something that Walter Pater could not anticipate at the time. It wasn’t until the start of the twentieth century that the fine arts increasingly freed themselves from the fetters of image and narration, discovering in music an art form with a certain impact on its listeners, without demanding concrete images, histories, or representations; this paved the winding paths to abstraction.

Today as well, music reverberates in contemporary art as a source of fascination, an inspiration, and a basis for research. In the two exhibition spaces of Galerie Mark Müller, two closely related worlds open up, one of abstraction and one of music. With the exhibition title “abstract-contact,” the artist Francis Baudevin clearly sets the tone: borrowed from the title of a 1987 LP by the American musician Annette Peacock, the title plays with the correlations and the literal “contact” between abstraction and music, a relationship that is quite obvious when it comes to the Swiss artist and his work.

Since the 1980s, Francis Baudevin has been pursuing a distinctive formal language that he brings to his canvases using powerful, opaquely applied acrylic paint to his canvases. The geometric-abstract shapes take recourse to the art where they were already used as such: packaging in an expanded sense, including those for medicines, chocolate, but also the front pages of newspapers or LP covers, which are usually enlarged several times over. The recurring trapezoid of Baudevin’s works exhibited here refers to an older package design of the Swedish candy manufacturer Läkerol, which has been making small, round pastilles in various flavors since 1909. The artist is interested in more than just appropriation and simulation, for the respective original product is not fully reproduced: the texts on the packaging are never part of his works. What remains are specific shapes and colors on a given visual surface, a concentration on the partially associable colors that divest themselves of their advertising content, without losing evocative power. The colors and shapes automatically send the textual message.¹



Francis Baudevin's own contact to music and his musical references resonate, more or less directly, on several layers. This is quite clearly suggested by several work titles: the two new paintings *Pray Like Aretha Franklin* refer not only to the song "I Say A Little Prayer" that was recorded by the world-famous soul singer, but also to a remix of a pop hit ("Wood Beez") by the band Scritti Politti with which they stormed the British charts in the 1980s. Baudevin's affinity to music is also revealed in decisive artistic factors like rhythm, time, space, and color, which play a key role both in the realm of music and in abstraction. According to Baudevin, for both realms similar processes take place, processes that he tries to bring into his teaching and discusses with his students. Beside song titles and texts that often deal with color, the artist uses cover pages and the protective sleeves of vinyl records as starting points for the shapes and colors he uses in his works.

In the framework of the exhibition, Francis Baudevin meets eleven other artists who all deal with similar themes of contemporary abstraction or music and in this way enter into a joint dialogue. With several artists, like Christian Floquet, Olivier Mosset, or Robert Nickas, Baudevin also shares a personal relationship, while with the others it is more a thematic or aesthetic affinity. In the large gallery space, abstract compositions are foregrounded, for example Olivier Mosset's *Diamond Violet* (2020), a small format oil painting by Helmut Federle (*Basics on Composition XXXIV (for Erik Satie)*, 1992) and two canvases by Francis Baudevin filled with color (*Untitled*, 2021 and *Pray like Aretha Franklin*, 2021) next to one another on a wall. But already here, the musical references in the work titles both in Baudevin and Federle are unavoidable and form as it were a thematic bridge to the gallery's smaller space. Here, the music references are explicitly placed before our eyes, thanks to Robert Nickas' records (*From the Nursery*, 2021), John Armleder's much enlarged violin bridge (*Library Globe*, 2020) or the black-glossy dance surface of Pauline Boudry und Renate Lorenz (*Dancefloor Piece (rhythmic modes of belonging III)*, 2020).

The two gallery spaces expose formal and thematic links and let supposedly disparate disciplines enter into contact with one another, just as simply and directly as Francis Baudevin lets them integrate in his own work, for there contemporary abstraction meets equally with design, graphic design, and music. In an essay about Baudevin's works, Olivier Mosset points especially to the artist's reference to advertising, but Mosset's observations seem not least against the backdrop of the current exhibition all too fitting: "There is no mystery there, only a simple evidence: a non-illustrative work that illustrates both a commercial situation and the idea of abstract art."²

Marlene Bürgi

Notes

¹ Barbara Hess, "Voilà Francis Baudevins gemalte Ready-mades," in: *Francis Baudevin. Yeah/Okay*, (Geneva: JRP Editions, 2000), 12.

² "Olivier Mosset, "Some Notes on Francis Baudevin," in: *Francis Baudevin. Yeah/Okay* (Geneva: JRP Editions, 2000), 17.