

Rod Barton

Fugue

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet

31st January - 8th March, 2014

Rod Barton, London is pleased to present Jean-Baptiste Bernadet *Fugue*. Arranged as a continuous line (although actually comprised of eight separate paintings) the work inhabits the entire back wall of the gallery, the wall itself becomes one expansive painting. Running parallel to the gallery's windows, the works can be read even from the sidewalk out front, or to a passerby on the road, thus extending beyond the space itself. Taking its cue and form from music, the apt title of the exhibition *Fugue* connotes a layered, repetitive, multi pitched form of composition. It is in the works best interest then to be shown as one continuous panel, as the form is all encompassing. Teetering between image and colour field, clarity and distortion, stasis and vibration, focus and blur, the paintings continue to evolve upon examination. There is no single perfect position to see, rather one must move with, perhaps like the maker, through time, shifts in distance, and perspective.

Fugue as a musical reference applies here as well when one is engaged in this rhythm of view, the pattern of mark; a dance of sorts. Once up close the formation is revealed, made of multiple, repeated, unique yet somehow mechanical brushstrokes, the myriad of colours blend and push and pull from one another. The viewer is drenched in an echo of buzzing line, amplified by the echo of multiple panels hung side by side. The paintings themselves are variations on a theme, much like Bach's 32 Goldberg variations. In both cases, the works in *Fugue*, and the 32 Goldberg variations provide an understanding of a part of body of work, but they do not provide grounds for an understanding the entirety of each respective practice. *Fugue* serves as a compelling extension of the artist's dynamic, prolific, and diverse practice. Comprised sequentially, the works hung side by side are like a linear cinematographic edit, eight still images, eight frames cataloging motion.

The paintings also conjure a myriad of art historical references, but in each case there seems to be diversion that makes the work more uniquely made by Bernadet, and particularly timely. Through the use of abstract form, layering of colour, a playfulness of gesture and evidence of action, one could definitely reference Abstract Expressionism. Yet Bernadet's work is regimented and streamlined and repeated in such a way that cancels out its function as pure expression. The production of the paintings then relates more conceptually to John Cage and his notions of chance. Again back to music, Cage's compositions on one hand were open ended and playful, yet on the other hand he was adamant about designating a thoughtful and intentional structure for them to rest within, this gave the chance element a platform, the limitations created the locus for meaning. Bernadet's process here provides a similar contemplative space, when painting; he establishes a regime of mark making, a framework for expression, and a designation of freedom. It is tightness in the structure of limitations that allows for the looseness in the work to be registered.

One could also recall an early 20th lineage within the works in *Fugue*, painters such as Whistler, Bonnard, and Vuillard have been influential. Also the multi paneled submersive presentation and atmospheric imagery could allude to Monet, particularly the Lilies. But the vibration of the work is more like Monet badly printed in a book, as if smudged or somehow faded, less direct. The image must be pulled from century and even 19th century painting the past into the present, marked by the limitations of representation and an awareness of paintings constantly morphing position. Bernadet provides a way of seeing. *Fugue* is a diffusion of both imagery and reference making the work urgently contemporary. The

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subtlety and sensation of the works are exclusively experiential, they are nearly impossible to photograph. When viewing one must contradict the alternative french meaning of Fugue as in to run away; in fact they completely consume.

Keeping with the rest of Jean-Baptiste practice the pieces are experienced as collections of glimpses, ways into something, lines that are below, behind, under on top of, or next to, grasping onto something, momentarily, awash with multiple focal points. Like the moment of wilful suspension of disbelief while engulfed completely in the narrative of cinema, Bernadet's paintings offer a similar liminality. Fugue is the site of total perceptual immersion.

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Jean-Baptiste Bernadet was born in Paris in 1978. He has lived and worked in Brussels since 2000, and was artist-in-residence at Triangle Studios in Brooklyn in 2012, APT Studios in Brooklyn in 2011, and Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, in 2010. His recent exhibitions include: Karma, New York NY, Valentin, Paris, Gerhard Hofland, Amsterdam, Super Dakota, Brussels, Ricou Gallery, Brussels, Casado Santapau Gallery, Madrid, Marfa Book Company Gallery, Marfa, Texas, TORRI, Paris, and Galerie Saks, Geneva. Bernadet participated in the YOUNG BELGIAN ART PRIZE, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, Brussels. (All 2013) Forthcoming solo shows in 2014 include: American Contemporary, New York NY (June), NADA NYC with Rod Barton, London (May) and Retrospective Gallery, Hudson, NY (September).

Bernadet is represented by: Rod Barton, London, American Contemporary, New York and Valentin, Paris.