

MISE EN ABYME
(de cajas chinas)

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet
Galeria Casado Santapau, Madrid - June 2013

"For, methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without: which, would they but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them."

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690
Book II, Chapter XI, paragraph 17 "Dark Room".

The exhibition *Mise en abyme* resembles an enclosed landscape, calling to mind John Locke's description of the camera obscura as representative of human understanding. French artist Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's paintings are like so many small openings onto the outside world. Locke says these openings represent the extent to which man can understand the world, and the ideas he forms about it. In a similar fashion, Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's pictorial works suggest a world, but especially express an inability to precisely define and apprehend this world in its totality.

For his first exhibition in Spain at the Casado Santapau gallery, Jean-Baptiste Bernadet shows three groups of paintings, each representing a different punctum (from the Latin punctum: a small distinct point, a sting). Demarcating the field of vision, the punctum extend from the punctum remotum, the farthest visible point, to the punctum proximum, the closest.

The first group of paintings, entitled *Carlsbad*, comprises large format canvases with multiple perspectives. In the absence of a focal point, the eye loses itself in the indefinite space of these contradictory images, as if in a dream or hallucination. This feeling is reinforced through the use of bright colors and shifting perspective. The imprecise scale of these paintings suggests we are dealing with a punctum remotum. Viewed from afar, these canvases evoke a vast landscape, but a multitude of smaller scenes appear upon closer examination, as in New Mexico's Carlsbad cave, where small landscapes are revealed by the colored spotlights inside the cave, itself constituting a vast landscape.

The small format series *Punctum* is a counterpoint, acting in diametric opposition. Symbols rather than figures, each painting represents a fixed, open eye. These canvases, loaded with paint - almost sculpted, are as sharp and pronounced as the *Carlsbad* series is unstable and shifting. Like a mirror, they send the spectator's gaze back out, whereas the *Carlsbad* canvases act as bottomless pits. Here, the spectator experiences the punctum proximum. Viewed up-close, they lose all spatial qualities, becoming pure painting, with no image-subject other than the paint itself.

Finally, there is a third group of medium-sized paintings entitled *What Happens Here Stays Here*. Like blind mirrors, their slippery surfaces are marked by subtle clues reflecting studio practice and suggesting a layer of air of some sort: a sfumato as da Vinci employed it to intensify depth in his

landscapes. Situated at the halfway point between the two other series, the punctum here is intermediary, indefinite. These paintings are in some sense the spatial benchmark of the exhibition, the neutral zone that comparatively pushes the *Carlsbad* series away from us and pulls the *Punctum* series closer.

—

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 solo exhibitions include, among others, Marfa Book Company, Marfa, Texas (2013), Saks in Geneva, Torri in Paris, Renwick in New York (2011), the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, Maes & Matthys in Antwerp, Baronian_Francey Gallery in Brussels (2010), Les Filles du Calvaire in Brussels, Chapelle des Calvairiennes in Mayenne, France, Galerie Xprssns in Hamburg (2008), and Konsortium in Dusseldorf (2007).

Since 2001, he has participated in many group shows, including Toomer Labzda Gallery in New York, Angstrom in Dallas, Texas, Klemm's Gallery in Berlin, Villa Noailles in Hyères (2012), Artorama in Marseille, 8 rue Saint Bon in Paris, White Flags in Saint Louis, Missouri (2011), WIELS in Brussels (2009 and 2010), Galerie Crèvecoeur in Paris (2009), Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing (2005), Galerie Catherine Bastide in Brussels (2004).

Upcoming projects include the Young Belgian Art Prize at Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, and a collaboration with American writer John d'Agata on the book *On Knowing Not*, forthcoming this year and published by Karma in New York City.