

Mathew McWilliams work mixes photography and painting, giving life to constant material transformations. We recently interviewed him in his studio in Paris.

1. **Mathew McWilliams** art (Vancouver, 1973; lives in Paris and Sydney) challenges definitions of both the means and the aesthetic of multiple artistic currents. He uses a distinct formal tone, rigorous but never cold: creating visual compositions dominated by the unsettling sentiment of possibility. Highly concentrated on the transformational capacity of material, one can be exposed to the enormous open spaces of the Canadian landscape that reach out from his childhood memories. This may have determined the amplitude that combines with rarefaction in many of this artist's works. One may be drawn to the serial nature of McWilliams and be reminded, as I am, of another Canadian artist, **Glenn Gould**, known for his mastery in interpreting variations of themes with a detailed attention to the potential subtle creativity of small changes.

What does your research focus on?

I have always tried to develop the latent relationships between the subject and the object of a work of art, starting from their material relations, focusing on states of transition, so to speak, that suspend the ordinary modes of perception. In fact, I think I've been turning around the same issue since the beginning of my professional life as an artist, and now for twenty years, trying to grasp - and then make the viewer do the same - something that we can have in front of us but is not visible in an univocal way, and for this reason it not only looks like, but can become something else.

Can you give us an example?

In one of the first series I exhibited, 'Blackground', I photographed Christmas lights hanging outside the houses of the city where I was born, Vancouver. Because of the pinhole camera I used, the shots of lights in the night became constellations in space. From that moment on I tried more and more to use the photographic medium to do

something else, moving towards sculpture and painting, and at the same time to extract the internal compositional potential from the material that I use.

Which type of materials do you prefer?

I really like canvas, I used it in some of my recent series of work, but for what I intend to accomplish, paper is the ideal material, because it is absolutely the most versatile for imprinting a permanent mark - a fold, colors - or even going over it again during another phase of creating the work. In the case of the 'Paper Works' series, the experiment was explicit: I printed a photographic image of a folded piece of paper on the same piece of paper after unfolding it, "folding" the reproduction quality that is typical of photography, thus producing an original work in which the subject and the object coincide with each other. The series of works titled 'Fabriano', centered on raw sheets of paper that I produced by hand in the Fabriano paper museum in the Marche region of Italy. The location of the first paper makers in Europe. I then dipped these sheets in inkjet colors; I wanted to detect the possible and unexpected relationships between sculpture and painting. Now, in the current series, I'm thinking more in terms of painting.

Tell us about your most recent work.

Up until March 28th I have a solo show at Chalk Horse Gallery in Sydney. The show is focused on a series of works on paper in which the reproduction of a composition on its original material, made with colors for photographic printing, determines variations between color and texture. Photography becomes painting, and vice versa, holding a painted line of color at the base of the composition as a horizon of reference. I think I was able to play with the dimension of time even more than in previous works.

What do you mean by that?

My works can only be made with current technologies - in the case of photographic printing, for example, giclée printing and its liquid pigments, which I also use to paint - but I don't think that an observer can place them in a precise temporal context, both in

material and stylistic terms. This suspension of judgment interests me a lot: in fact, even minimalism, a movement that interests me, is very different in operational terms, from the historical experiences associated with the term.

What then are your most important artistic influences?

My first visual memory, I must have been three or four years old, is of a postcard hanging in my father's studio [the Canadian sculptor Al McWilliams, Editor's note], a reproduction of the famous painting by René Magritte with his feet turning into shoes, 'Le Modèle Rouge', and I think that in an unconscious way it deeply impacted me. In fact, as far away as it may seem from what I do, I have always felt drawn to Magritte: I admire his idea of rupture, more than illusion, of the image. Among the artists who are visually closer to my work, I love Anne Truitt for the subtlety of her color interactions, Roni Horn for her sense of doubling. And I have a boundless admiration for Cy Twombly: I am fascinated by his ability to create works of art that seem to come from other times. I believe that this is also the reason why I have spent so much time in Italy, where I return as soon as I can: like Twombly, as a foreigner, I am interested in combinations that are an organic mix of history, time and space, something very common in Italy. Although, again, I think we are talking about a kind of rupture.

- Luca Arnaudo

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