

## Silicone Dreams

Hung like structurally freed paintings projected into space, Matthias van Arkel's tactile, enigmatic forms beg consideration – for they embody a somewhat premeditated bipolar and confounding set of aesthetics. On the one hand, they call to mind the sumptuous painterliness and adept manipulation of palette in the tradition of Abstract Expressionism or Impressionism – comparable to the intuitive perspicuity of Willem de Kooning or the immutable language of color employed by Matisse. On the other hand, this achievement is complicated by the paradoxical conundrum that paint, in the traditional sense at least, is in fact entirely devoid from the paintings: van Arkel instead uses Platina Silicone Rubber – ironically recontextualizing Minimalism's use of industrial materials – to "paint." In this sense, van Arkel's meta-pictures employ circuitous methods to address the signified – a dialectical stance that uses metaphor to critique logic – not unlike using one language to describe another, or words to describe images. Van Arkel effectively refutes the modernist presupposition that abstraction's anti-iconographic stance was carried to a logical conclusion.

Furthermore, the works' ethereal evocation of "light" (both in the material's opacity and seeming weightlessness) is belied only by their imposing presence—weighing up to 50 kilos, necessitating the forms to be bolted to the wall. Of course, as with all formal elements within his work, functional solutions dually operate as part and parcel of van Arkel's carefully conceived conceptual framework. The bolts are an interesting case in point. Literally moving through the image itself, they call attention to the works' physicality and spatial complexity, reminding the viewer that the paintings, in fact, truly occupy multi-dimensions. This marks a significant strategic departure; while most painters throughout the annals of history achieved depth through planar illusion — for example, Cezanne's manipulation of color and volume to achieve new perspective — here van Arkel does so in an "honest" physical or "literal" fashion, facetiously achieving giant strides by appearing to do so with ease.

Of this deceptively "dogmatic" approach to the works, van Arkel recently noted: "It's like the Shaker movement's approach to the chair, either you can use it, or you can hang it on the wall in all its simplicity — or complexity, if you prefer." Van Arkel's

approach calls to mind the conceptual pranks of Bruce Nauman – or perhaps more aptly, embodies a certain Duchampian gesture. Not dissimilar to painting a mustache on the Mona Lisa, van Arkel's bolts literally degrade or violate the "holy" surface of the canvas and, by extension, re-insert the heavy-handed "spiritualist" dialogue of Abstract Expressionism with a much-needed sense of play.

In unpacking the works, I find it apt that van Arkel describes the paintings as coming into being in the mornings, somewhere between sleep and waking consciousness, a liminal space both rooted in reality and yet fundamentally abstracted from it. Van Arkel's works cohesively unify the ineffable dichotomy between the real and the imagined as described by Baudelaire in his seminal text, "The Painter of Modern Life;" at once seeking "the eternal and the immutable" as well as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent." Van Arkel's "Silicone Dreams" straddle the realms of form and function, immediacy and delay, imagination and possibility, rational thought and spontaneous creation. In a recent conversation with the artist, van Arkel described them eloquently as the "skins" of paintings "hung like

jackets" on gallery walls. Van Arkel's greatest feat, perhaps, is both collapsing and re-constructing pre-existing art-historical tropes. He literally casts off the canon of painting's heavy metaphorical "jacket" – transforming the discipline's rhetoric both in order to subvert it and further entrench it within its own history. His imagined canvases shrug their archaic cloaks of pigment, securely fastened as if to prevent them from disappearing back into the vast ethereal dreamscape from whence they came.

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