



Untitled (detail), 2018. Oil on marble 130 × 100 cm | 51 3/16 × 39 3/8 in. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Pieter Vermeersch

Opening January 12, 2019, 6-8pm
January 12 - February 17, 2019

Perrotin New York presents new and recent work by Turin-based painter and sculptor Pieter Vermeersch (b. 1973, Kortrijk, Belgium). Unfolding across the first floor of Perrotin's Lower East Side space, this marks the artist's fifth solo show with the gallery and his first at the New York location.

Central to the show is a pair of 'L'-shaped birch panels that Vermeersch designed for the exhibition. While Vermeersch has often incorporated free-standing dividers to manipulate interior layouts surrounding his work, this is the first time he has fabricated the makeshift walls in wood rather than brick or stone. At Perrotin, these two barriers cut through the space, revealing an airy passageway that leads from one corner of the room to the other. As an architectural element, it's akin to a mode of transit—its purpose is to connect two otherwise unconnected points rather than existing as a structure unto itself.

For Vermeersch, however, this installation, which he likens to a “gateway,” has more far-reaching symbolism that speaks to the overarching focus of the show as well as his broader preoccupations as an artist: His practice has long explored states of in-between-ness, and likewise his work glides between aesthetic and conceptual opposites—ephemeral and concrete; emptiness and architecture; subjective perception and observable reality.

Consider his gradients, for instance, which, rendered on either mid-size canvases or as sweeping murals, dissolve from pure, saturated colors into sheer white voids. At Perrotin, three examples—one dominated by burnt orange hues; another one by dark lavender shades; and one more in blue—span two opposite walls of the gallery, forming a site-specific triad of receding color. As with previous gradient paintings, Vermeersch sourced the vast swaths of orange and lavender from digitally inverted photographs that he staged to be bereft of spatial references, while the blue painting is purely analytical—yet, in an exhibition context, all the patterns assimilate to the perceptible dimensions of the space.

In this way, Vermeersch enlists architecture as a means of framing his work—simultaneously, his work frames the architecture. Stylistically, this interplay has been apparent in various installations devised by the artist since the mid-aughts. Take for example his 2006 intervention at the Palais im GroBen Garten in Dresden for which he covered three of the 17th-century palace's grandiose baroque windows in pink gouache from the inside; the external grating overlaying the glass outlined a grid of bright pink squares peering out from the grey façade of the edifice.

Though the issue of framing as both a concept and an aesthetic outcome is something that's unavoidable in contemplating Vermeersch's larger-scale artwork, it's equally relevant to the sculptural marble wall hangings that have become a major part of his practice since 2014. Created by painting directly onto polished slabs, each piece has a distinct visual texture resulting from the sensuous contrast of pigment upon a luminous marbled surface.

Included in the show are large, medium, and small marble works produced within the past year. Here, as naturally occurring stone replaces the fabricated cloth canvas, the focus turns to the intrinsic nuances and irregularities of the materials rather than variations in color. Miniature versions serve to adorn the sparse birch panels that constitute the aforementioned passageway, with one gleaming marble item affixed to the center of each plane. Yet another variant pushes the artist's experiments with marble toward an even more sculptural direction, combining two irregularly-shaped wedges to form a standing work. Some "marbles" on view feature a single, thickly-applied brushstroke of multicolored paint, meant to evoke the fleeting nature of the moment each was created; others are partially obscured with evenly-blended geometric shapes of color, which, as with many of his gradient pieces, are derived from deliberately-unrecognizable photographic images.

Given the multifaceted character of the show overall, its essence is best summarized by the artist: "It's about this passage as symbolic architecture," he describes. "When I use architecture in a show, it's in the interest of stripping away its functionality—that being shelter. I use it instead as a fundamental way of constructing: to divide space, manipulate space, and create space."

-Rachel Small

Pieter Vermeersch (born in 1973 in Kortrijk, Belgium) lives and works between Brussels, Belgium and Turin, Italy. This spring, Vermeersch will have a major survey opening at the M Museum in Leuven, Belgium that will also feature an original installation by the artist. Following this, a solo presentation of his work will open at NC-arte in Bogotá, Colombia in July. Other upcoming projects include a collaboration with the Belgian architecture firm OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen for the Brussels design gallery MANIERA.