

Midway Contemporary Art

Nathan Hylden
Nearing On To Do
April 29 – July 1, 2017

Nathan Hylden is a Los Angeles based painter whose work is concerned with the conditions of painting and image making. Similar to previous bodies of work, the paintings in *Nearing On To Do* follow a precise formal logic. Building upon his established strategies of mirroring, repetition, shifting scales and intervening in the physical gallery space, Hylden has brought two differing ideas together in the exhibition. Thirty-two monochromatic canvases are installed in the gallery, each slightly differentiated from the next through subtle tint and tonal shifts. A staggered series of temporary walls interrupts the space, presenting eight aluminum panel paintings that employ shifting scale, mirroring effects, and the image of a magnifying glass, absurdly alluding to closer inspection.

Hylden has a history with monochromes, from an early series of black paintings to works that reference the genre using images of empty studio walls or blank white canvases. This lack of expressiveness has elements of the non-authorial within, and for years, Hylden has not titled his works, emphasizing their sameness. In this new series, he notes that he chose grey because it represents absence, or nothing — a seemingly contradictory notion of a thing that attempts to refer to nothing. “In Photoshop, the grey checkered background is meant to signify transparency or something that isn’t there.”

In contrast to his previous monochromatic works, which were primarily presented alone or in pairs, he has installed these as a series: a metered repetition throughout the space. They are grouped in sets of four panels that show subtle shifts of gradient and color. Each grouping is created using specifically weighed out percentages of black and white paint along with red, yellow, or blue. The canvases are laid on the studio floor next to each other and the paint is applied via industrial spray gun; their rounded edges allow imperfections to occur. On the gallery wall, they are hung with a slight separation. While their barely perceptible hints of red, yellow and blue tints could nod to Rodchenko, their sameness is perhaps closer in affinity to Olivier Mosset’s repeated zero degree paintings, or to a computer’s blank startup screen.

A second series of eight paintings on aluminum interrupt Hylden’s monochromes. In previous aluminum works, Hylden has overlapped paintings onto one another as stencils when applying spray paint, using negative space to create signification. The paintings in this series were more removed from one another during production, yet their connection to each other is evident in how they repeat, mirror, and shift in scale, both in terms of visual motifs and the physical presence of their installation.

The works block each other, never allowing the viewer to see all versions simultaneously. Through a combination of digital and physical means — UV printing and an oversized, adjustable, handmade brush — the aluminum works present the repeating image of a magnifying glass, the surface of a wall, and a few broad brush strokes of metallic paint, inverted and hung back-to-back on white walls that cut through the space in a diagonal formation. This installation creates an optical illusion when viewed from certain angles, causing the paintings in sight to appear similar in size. To determine the

width of the largest panel, Hylden used his own height, then constrained proportions (as you would in Photoshop) as he scaled the works down.

Working with the existing architecture of the space and using the scale of the paintings themselves, Hylden established the size and placement of the temporary walls, which are fixed to existing I-beams in the ceiling. Their sculptural presence in the space has a destabilizing effect, blocking views of some paintings and casting shadows on their surfaces. Works disappear and reappear through the space, leaving the experience of painting always just out of reach.

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Nathan Hylden (b. Fergus Falls, Minnesota) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has had solo exhibitions at the Kunstverein, Hamburg; König Galerie, Berlin; Art: Concept, Paris; and Misako & Rosen, Tokyo. His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions at venues such as the Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; La CENTRALE for Contemporary Art, Brussels; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Gagosian Gallery, New York; Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York; Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris; and Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles. His works are in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; and the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas.