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Thibault Hazelzet

Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris, France

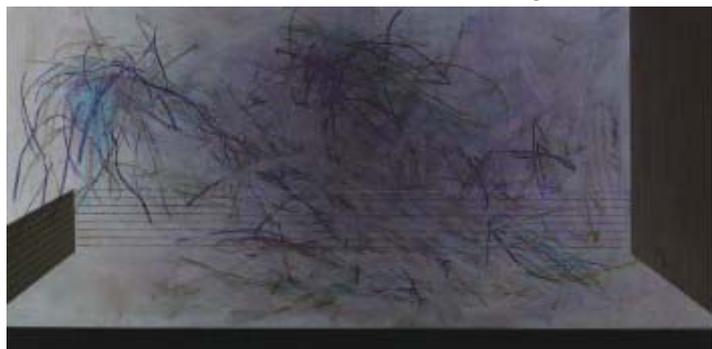


Thibault Hazelzet, *Narcisse #16* (2008)

Thibault Hazelzet's latest works undertake a sophisticated interplay between photography, architectural space and painterly practices – a set of elements that he deftly engineers into lively tension. Flatness and depth, blank planes and calligraphic scribble, literary allusion and unadulterated abstraction: these are the dialectical agents of such tension, from which these photographs derive their striking energy. A kind of shallow, miniature *mise-en-scène* serves as the consistent scaffolding of each work – a *mise-en-scène* that the artist builds up from successive shots of geometric elements, superimposed on the same negative. Integrated into that backdrop, Hazelzet layers occluding panels and transparent planes, onto which he paints directly, before photographing the finished image.

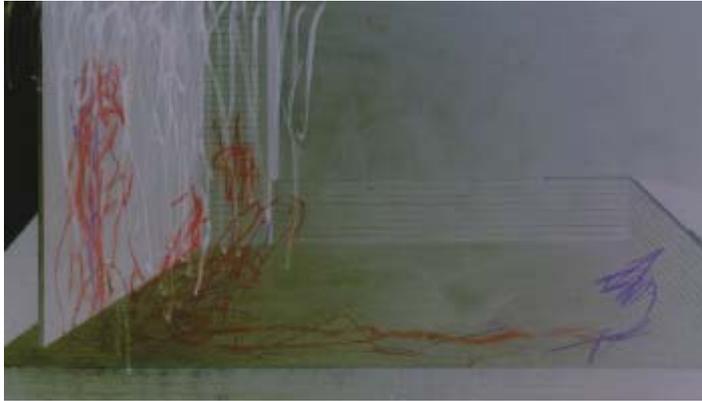
L'orage #20 (2009)

The artist's earlier works, such as the 2005 'Annunciation' series, are more formally severe and spartan, governed by a stripped architectonics of horizontal and vertical lines. The stark arches, stairs and spatial recession of these images (which at times recall the early-20th-century stage designs of E. Gordon Craig) are elegantly composed. But this



elegance is entirely static, aloof – at times even rigid. That these previous works all bore New and Old Testament titles – and that his new series all bear mythical and natural ones – suggests Hazelzet has been reading his Nietzsche. At any rate, the latest series – ‘Narcisse’ (2008), ‘Danaé’ (2008), ‘Icare’ (2008) and ‘L’orage’ (Storm)’ (2009) – all crackle with a more Dionysian liveliness, electrified by the more impromptu lines that traverse their surfaces.

Danaé #21 (2008)



In the ‘Danae’ series, the intersection of coloured and white lines, streaming from the top of the composition downward, evoke the famous impregnation of Danae by Zeus in the form of golden rain. All of the ‘Icare’ images feature an abstract – though seemingly winged – web of dark lines, trailed by wisps of white, suggesting the fall of a body through space. The more chalky, purple scrawls of the ‘L’orage

(Storm)’ images conjure a natural (rather than literary) event. In its use of the photograph as a kind of container for spectral events, Hazelzet’s practice brings to mind the etymology of the word camera (a chamber or room), an effect to which the large dimensions of the works contribute.

Hazelzet’s scribble-like lines (for which he uses a marker), combined with more high-flown mythical references, inevitably conjure up the precedent of Cy Twombly. But Hazelzet has wrested that combination to fresh ends, setting them into vaguely spatial recessions. The abstract improvisations enliven and animate their otherwise dour and rectilinear spaces. To be sure, those geometric elements are merely passive receptacles, or incidental wallpaper; they too contribute to the image’s spatial orientation and effects. The occluding, geometric silhouettes of the ‘Icare’ images are oriented vertically – a shift that subtly but strikingly evokes the kinetics of the Icarus myth, with its fateful downward plunge. The angled, recessive orientation of the black scrim fragments in the ‘L’orage (Storm)’ series imputes them with a more stage-like space. We seem to witness a tempest of shifting colours in a proverbial teapot of unrecognizable dimensions.

The more painterly effects of these new works are underscored by the fact that Hazelzet destroys each work’s original negative after printing one example (even appending the destroyed negative to the recto of the printed version). In contrast to common photographic practice, then, each print is singular – a status that perhaps aspires to an authorial finiteness normally estranged from the seriality of photography. But to whatever he is aspiring, Hazelzet should keep it up. The play between valences – transparency and layered palimpsest, structuring framework and improvised gesture – is maintained with impressive consistency and vigor.

Ara H. Merjian