

Matt Mullican

Five x Five

March 7 – April 11, 2009

The Galerie Nelson-Freeman is pleased to present a new exhibition of the American artist Matt Mullican. Since the 1970s Matt Mullican has worked on symbolic representation formalized by a language based on international signaling symbols and invented signs. Matt Mullican's works have been exhibited on various occasions in Europe and the United States. After a retrospective in the Serralves Museum in Porto, at the Antoni Tapiès Foundation in Barcelona and the Modern Art Museum of Oxford, his works were shown at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne in 2005. Part of his work was shown in 2006 on the occasion of the « Model Architecture » exhibition at the Lentos Kunstmuseum in Linz, and in 2007 he presented a performance under hypnosis at the Tate Modern Gallery in London. In 2008 he participated in the Whitney Biennial, and a major exhibition was devoted to him at the Drawing Center in New York (November 2008 - February 2009).

Entitled « Five x Five », Matt Mullican's third exhibition at the Nelson-Freeman Gallery focuses on the Theory of Five « Worlds », which the artist has developed over the past 35 years. Represented by different colours and a complex system of signs, symbols and diagrams, these worlds refer to five fundamental notions. The « Elemental World » evokes nature and the elements. It is represented by the colour green. The « Unframed World », everyday life and the relationship to the elements of our environment, is represented by the colour blue. The « Framed World », the conscious manifestations of the arts and sciences, is represented by the colour yellow. The « World of Language » - signs, language, and coded meanings - is represented by black and white. Lastly, the « Subjective World » evokes the psychological relationship between the Framed and Unframed Worlds. It is represented by the colour red.

Using this model of five « Worlds » as the structure of the exhibition, Matt Mullican divides the spaces of the gallery into five parts so that each part contains five works each from five different series: « Learning from that person's work (Rubbing) », « Evolving Charts, stained glass », « Untitled (Chart on glass pieces) », « Untitled (Experiment with light) », and « Bulletin Boards ».

When Matt Mullican holds performances under hypnosis, giving free rein to the emotions of his subconscious, he reveals the existence of « That Person ». He thus seeks to approach a new definition of « Reality » and invites us to reflect upon the question of the essence of being. In his process of creation in his studio, the artist puts himself into a trance – a sort of controlled schizophrenia – enabling him to work under the influence of « That Person ». It is in this way that he created a series in 2005 entitled « Learning from that person's work », composed of a combination of images glued onto sheets, in the form of large panels. Each panel contains nine patterns matching the themes in which « That Person » is interested, such as love, beauty, work, or truth. In this exhibition we find five excerpts from this series, presented in the form of rubbings on canvases.

Just as our world is organized according to a multitude of arbitrarily pre-established signs to which we subject ourselves, Matt Mullican deconstructs all this ubiquitous imagery which we are imbued with, and proposes us his own interpretation of the world according to the matrix of his total experience: his own scalable cosmology. Dating from the Middle Ages, the models of cosmology represent another way of organizing reality. In Matt Mullican's systems – they are reproduced here on objects made of glass and on five stained glass windows - we find three levels: the center, representing the world of individuals, their activities and the objects of their environment; the top representing paradise; and the bottom, hell. These levels overlap, combine and evolve according to each work so as to reorganize reality.

Parallel to this interpretation of the world that he proposes to us, through a series created in 2001, « Untitled (experiment with light) », Matt Mullican pursues experiments with light. On these positive films divided into five diptychs on shelves, we find patterns of cosmology, crystals, and cuttings from newspapers.

The series « Bulletin Boards » is made up of drawings for which the artist used a new tool, the « brush pen », as well as notes on travels. Through these sets of figures, letters and sinusoidal lines, we can grasp the development of Matt Mullican's mastery of this tool.

Words and signs follow upon one another, are superimposed, and interpenetrate, leading us toward a world somewhere between reality and the imagination. Pictograms, cartographies, maps, writing, postcards are all occasions to reinterpret the world and its challenges.