

Navid Nuur
PAINTPUSHER

Opening March 16, 18 - 21 h

March 16 – April 21, 2018
Tuesday – Saturday, 12 - 18 h
Potsdamer Strasse 77 - 87, 10785 Berlin

Galeria Plan B is pleased to announce the solo exhibition PAINTPUSHER of Navid Nuur, to open on Friday, the 16th of March 2018.

The presentation reports Nuur's wondrous travels through the world of painting. And the question guiding him on his journeys is 'what makes a painting a painting': a question that he takes wry pleasure in pushing to extremes. With the curiosity of a researcher, the artist seeks to establish what a painting actually *is*. As Nuur once said in an interview: "When I paint, I'd first like to know: where do the bristles in my brush come from? What's in that paint? How do they weave linen? I believe you should always go back to the core, and rebuild the work directly from this core. At which point you decide on steps that may not seem logical in their own right – but they do in my world." Nuur has been giving thought to the 'how and why' of painting for a long time. And the dates of his works often show that the conception of this work goes back many years, even when it was realised only recently.

The entrance to the exhibition takes the shape of a corridor of aircrete blocks, covered with an aluminium coating and topped by a mirrored ceiling. At the end of this corridor, you can find rooms to the left and right that bring together a selection of paintings from different series. Each of these series revolves around a specific problem in the field of painting, which has been resolved by unconventional means.

Take light, for example. There's no painting without light. Still, this essential and indispensable element isn't an integral part of the painting itself. If you were to imagine light as an imaginary layer that covers the work, Nuur suggests, how could you convert this immaterial layer into matter? The human body can synthesise vitamin D, through exposure to sunlight via the skin. In a sense, you could see vitamin D as a form of materialised sunlight. You also find it in food – in oily fish, for example; and eggs to a lesser extent. People with a vitamin D deficiency can take dietary supplements. Navid Nuur collected a range of these pills from different brands, ground them up and mixed the powder with water and transparent acrylic medium in various ratios. These mixtures were then poured or dripped onto the linen canvas. The chemical reactions created a variety of splendid discolorations: rusty brown, olive green, salmon pink. Like a modern-day alchemist, Navid has created conditions under which his Vitamin Paintings could originate almost independently. You might say that the artist has used chance to force an image into being – one that he could never have imagined by himself. An image of materialised light.

Essentially, painting comes down to making a mark; leaving a trace. This action is preceded by one's choice of tool. And that's why Navid Nuur has developed an uncommon interest in the doodles people make when they try out a new pen or marker in the shop. How does the pen sit in your hand; how much force do you need to apply? Nuur has collected scraps of test paper from a range of stationery shops – from The Hague to Tokyo – and discovered that the loops and lines made around the world by scribbling customers have a surprising amount in common. This is remarkable in itself, considering how different Asian and European scripts are. These scribbles served as raw material for the paintings in the series *The Tuners*, a number of which have also been included in this exhibition. Nuur copied the pen strokes to canvas – several times, occasionally – in carefully-balanced compositions. The art world sets great store by an artist's 'signature style', as a hallmark of authenticity. But with *The Tuners*, it seems as if Navid Nuur wants to show us that the rudimentary traces that we make, consciously or unconsciously, with a new writing implement are not so much an expression of our nature as individuals as of mankind as a species. In Nuur's perception, the scribbling of stationery shoppers across our planet is a distant echo of the cave-dweller scraping a stone across a rock surface thousands of years ago. The artist sees this 'calibration' as the archetype of pictorial expression.

How we experience a painting at a given moment depends to a large part on our frame of mind and physical condition. It's important whether we're relaxed and energetic or irritable and tired. In some museums, the layout encourages us to leave our daily worries behind as we enter the building. A tall flight of stairs or a long corridor allows the visitor to gradually pass into the realm of the arts. Marbled paper serves a similar role. For centuries, this paper has been used as a front endpaper for costly editions or as a cover or folder for handwritten poetry, valuable documents and sacred writings. Marbled paper serves as a prelude to reading: it puts the reader in a certain mood before even turning the first page. Navid Nuur has translated this subtle form of tone-setting into painting terms. As a base he chose gesso, the white primer used to prepare linen for painting. The artist proceeded to develop his own marbling technique based on an airy mixture of gesso and shaving foam. This mixture wasn't applied to the canvas with a brush but carefully dabbed on and spread across the surface with a scraper designed especially for the purpose. This ultimately yields an amazing

pattern of lithe, graceful curls and elegant arabesques. While the artist's Vitamin Paintings appear worn or soiled, his Marble paintings are a virginal white and immaculately clean. Looking at these delicate canvases, it's easy to start daydreaming and let your mind wander. Nuur repeated this experiment with drawing materials like graphite and paper, which resulted in dazzling and shimmering wave patterns (*When Meaning Gets Marbled*, 2017).

Nuur's experiments with vitamin pills and shaving foam show his interest in the wide variety of materials that can be used to make a painting. The chemical properties of Ecoline (a type of liquid watercolour) for example are the point of departure for the so-called *Drip Paintings*. Nuur combined the full range of Ecoline inks into a very dark black. After covering an entire canvas with this mixture, he sprayed the surface with water over the course of 24 hours, in a regular and carefully-controlled procedure. This rinsing caused the heavier pigments to drip down, while the lightest ones stayed in place. You could call the *Drip Paintings* a kind of 'colour un-mixings' created by gravity.

And Nuur has tested whether it's even necessary for paint to be spreadable – in paintings that were smoked rather than brushed on. The artist has smoked a new painting on location especially for this exhibition. After setting up a raw canvas in the showcase area outside the gallery, he lit several smoke flares in the enclosure. After filling the space, the smoke collected on the canvas as an oily layer of soot, creating a greasy, sweaty monochrome – without the artist's intervention. You could say the painting was created blind. And like the genie of the lamp, the painter himself has gone up in smoke.

This fascination with the thin line between visibility and invisibility constantly resurfaces in Navid Nuur's pictorial excursions. Since early childhood, the artist has attempted to map out what he sees when he closes his eyes: infinite, softly-glowing expanses of countless dots and stripes, similar to grids of white noise. After reconstructing and processing these grids on a computer, Nuur made them the subject of his series *Eye-Codex of the Monochrome*. As becomes clear from the panoply of home-made markers, woven fabrics, colour tests and other materials, Navid Nuur turns to a wide array of substances to make these paintings – as long as they aren't paint. Some works were made using traditional techniques like enamelling and weaving. Others rely on modern inventions like chroma key: blue and green hues developed for the film industry that can be made transparent – i.e. invisible – in post-production. *99-94 (from the Eye-codex of the Monochrome)* (1984-2017) was made using red emulsion on yellow retroreflective foil, which is generally used for road signs. In the gallery, this painting is exhibited in the glare of lamps set up directly opposite the work, optimising the dazzle of its reflective surface. Every time someone photographs the painting using a flash, you get a different picture. In the topsy-turvy world of Navid Nuur, every reproduction is unique.

In each of the series, the artist can be said to have re-considered, even rediscovered, painting as a discipline. How can light – the *sine qua non* of painting – be made a tangible element of the painting? How can the purifying role of marbling be translated to pictorial terms? Can you paint with colourants that aren't spreadable – without lifting a finger? For each of these series, Nuur has developed specific materials, techniques and tools (down to the boots worn by his assistants). And for each of these series, the artist has completely overhauled his studio in The Hague.

What the works from these different series have in common is the conspicuous absence of the maker. Navid Nuur isn't interested in a 'signature style'; he has no need to see himself reflected in his painting. "Style is a handicap," is how he once put it, "it's simply not done." In his view, a painting should be able to exist in its own right, according to a logic that is independent of subjective preferences. Nuur's studio is a test station where he seeks to answer pictorial questions. The results of his bold experiments are as original as they are unexpected. And Navid Nuur himself is the last person to have foreseen these particular outcomes. *

*The exhibition text titled *More ways of pushing paint (one gone up in smoke)*. On Navid Nuur's pictorial practice was written by Dominic van den Boogerd, art critic and historian based in Amsterdam.

Navid Nuur, born 1976 in Teheran, Iran, lives and works in The Hague, The Netherlands. Previous solo exhibitions include: *FUNNELFLUX*, Be-Part Platform voor actuele kunst, Waregem (2017); *Lube Love*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (2014); *TA-DA*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2013); *Phantom Fuel*, Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London (2013); *HOCUSFOCUS*, Matadero Madrid (2012); *Post Parallelism*, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen (2011); *THE VALUE OF VOID*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum (2009). Previous group exhibitions include: *Eruption from the Surface. The Origami Principle in Art*, Marta Herford Museum, Herford (2018); *Eppur si muove*, MUDAM (Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean), Luxembourg (2016); *Cher(e)s Ami(e)s. New presentation of works from the collection*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016); *When I Give, I Give Myself*, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (2015); *Image into Sculpture*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2013); *Time, Trade and Travel*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2012); *ILLUMInations*, 54. Biennale di Venezia (2011); *Performative Attitudes*, Kunsthaus Glarus (2010); *The History of Art*, David Roberts Art Foundation, London (2010).

For more information, please contact the gallery at contact@plan-b.ro and [+49.30.39805236](tel:+493039805236).