

ALMINE RECH

The Wall: Mark Hagen Transparency, HH0673

Jun 7 — Jul 29, 2023 | Brussels

Los Angeles-based artist Mark Hagen's paintings, sculptures, and installations examine the relationship between systems, self-determination, and self-expression. His interests include the physical, institutional, and discursive parameters of art, processes of production, artist agency and labor, the social space of the artist, and more broadly: repetition, accumulation and the boundaries of human perception among others. Hagen's art often has a geometric order and a minimalistic appearance but also has many references to the body, the artist, and the viewer, which prevents it from being purely formal or abstract and thus isolated from other fields of inquiry.

Built into many of his materially inventive and research-intensive works is also the possibility of expansion, subtraction, enhancement, and rearrangement which he does in a gesture of self-determination, to extend his agency in both space and time, and to confront the expectation for artworks to be singular, autonomous, and fixed. He has described seriality, modularity, and reconfigurability as his means but also the subjects of his work, which aspires to a democratized nomadism. His art is continuously looking for alternatives to our habits of perception, established hierarchies, and well-known narratives.

For "*Transparency, HH0673*", Hagen will present a new suite of acrylic paintings on burlap in the artist's signature anodized titanium frames. This exhibition takes its title from *The Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* - initiated in 1972 by the NGO research institute Union of International Associations based in Brussels - which artfully, ambitiously and systematically attempts to catalog the woes of humanity as well as the means of alleviating them.

Here Hagen's new paintings perform a tension between randomness and careful construction, where inchoate masses of paint are pushed into molds, or raked across surfaces, or dried in sheets and cut into geometric shapes. These paintings then are a continued elaboration and exploration of painting as both image and object.

More specifically for this series, a sprawling, non-hierarchical library of silicone molds has been made from consumer packaging, studio detritus, articles of personal significance (a camping pad for example), and ones chosen for their poetic or symbolic meaning. These molds (or three-dimensional negative images of the intended shape) are then painted in with layer after layer of formless acrylic pastes, which dry into solid casts. The solid paint replicas are pulled out of the molds and cemented into place with more of the same acrylic paint, like mortar with bricks. This use of paint as a casting medium is the sculptural materialization of solid color and a tongue-in-cheek nod to paint itself as a readymade object.

These mold-based paintings are self-reflexive objects whose repetitive casting is mirrored in their repetitious shapes, facets, and patterns. The use of molds, in effect, results in the creation of works that are both gestural yet serialized, discreet yet continuous, linear and cyclic, autonomous yet something apart of a totality that is forever in potential. These paintings are also mimetic portraits of the very act of painting as well as the act of becoming an artist. They can be seen to reflect the tension between determinism and free will, or the exercise of painters wrestling with the degree to which they use prescribed materials and methods, or even the labor of artists butting up against the domesticating and normalizing arena of the "art world", a sometimes paternalistic system that wants to control and infantilize artists.

Finally, Hagen's artist frames are made by soaking titanium in liquid phosphoric acid (inexplicably found in soft drinks and colas) and then applying electricity at varying voltages. This deposits microscopic layers of transparent crystals that break light up into a rainbow of colors without any dyes or pigments. Here Hagen reminds the viewer that their visual perception is limited to the visible spectrum and creates what he calls a memento mori to human limitations and biological presets, and a "frame" of reference.