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Zach Feuer Gallery

548 West 22nd Street

New York, NY 10011

Tel: +1 212 989 7700

info@zachfeuer.com

www.zachfeuer.com

Exhibition dates: March 2 – April 7, 2012

Reception for the Artist: Thursday, March 8, 6-8PM

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10-6

Johannes VanDerBeek

A Head Backwards

The work in the exhibition was prompted by a question someone asked me: 'is it important for an artist to discuss the world around them through their work.' Although my initial response took a wide rhetorical loop in an attempt to arc around the broadness of the word 'world,' the question was open enough to force a more general reflection on what comes to mind when I try to envision the whole world as a singular form. My mind flashed to the city where I live and a phantom pair of glowing hands. I thought about all the bricks that have been laid by those hands in order to make New York City the complex place it is. It became dizzying to consider the collective labor involved in laying every single brick and how that effort unfolds in the larger initiative of mankind to build walls that keep the hypnotics of reality in a more discernable order.

Suddenly the pattern of brick in my eyes became emblematic of our unquenchable compulsion to build the world toward some new undefined reality that is potentially more succinct with our individualized vision. The result is an impression of a world based around the commonalities of our physical and emotional proportions. This compulsion to constantly make the world anew seems to choreograph existence into a ceaseless race that keeps the chaotic face of nature at a distance. But more specifically, it fuels a central drive to create objects that suspend the flow of impermanence. Art inherently involves giving absolute form to fleeting reflections. When I set out to make this new work I wanted to not only reflect upon my most immediate physical surroundings but also show the transformation that occurs when I infuse those surroundings with my psyche. I looked to the most immediate space that constitutes my world - the walls and floor of my studio - as source material. Working with casts of these spaces, I gave the brick wall and the wooden floor new properties that enlivened their formal dynamics. But in doing so, I was confronted by my approach to making forms and how these forms capture an identity. These pieces brought about a genuine confusion on my part as to what they were and what they were portraying, and I found myself looking deeper into shadows for a sense of flimsy contours, trying to find spirited silhouettes. I wanted the shapes to be animated but also very much connected to the flat stillness of a wall that retains a vacancy for subliminal projection. I found that as I got deeper into making them there was a secret I was trying to access in the brick. Each piece signaled the potential for another piece, and I followed the trail until they filled the room and collectively made an entirely new space for themselves.

In the works made from my floor, there is a sense that the flat ground of wooden boards has been pulled up and wrapped around itself. The forms hint toward humanness, but they have an obscured materiality that compounds the figure/ground relationship. The distressed floorboards show the wear of footsteps, and paint smudges double as freckles on a face. But there is an overall feeling that the ground is being contorted into some being, possibly an ancestor that has walked before us.

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The final body of work that stemmed from this mode of thinking is a series of paintings. The paintings appear to be comprised of marks etched into a metallic surface with washes of color accentuating the impressions. The colors in the painting are based on the sky and use the reflective aspect of the metallic surface to mimic its luminosity. The subject of the paintings is mostly the marks and the color overlapping to create varying surface qualities and the precipitation of pictorial dissolve. As someone who mostly makes objects, I found myself approaching these works as strange things on the wall that allude to particular moods through their shifting complexions. Almost like I tried to look at the sky of my mind and then quickly marked down what I saw up there.

The sentiment of searching is infused in all of these works hopefully. At 29, I feel a profound pressure to determine what my world is going to be. This show looks at the basic foundation of space: the ground, the walls, and the sky as a rudimentary perimeter of a world, but it in no way tries to keep up with the cultural diversity of the information age. If anything, it's about how the physicality of the world around us is like an ancient canyon that we keep carving with the tide of our brain waves.

- Johannes VanDerBeek (February 2012)

Johannes VanDerBeek (b. 1982, Baltimore, MD) graduated from Cooper Union in 2004. His work has been featured in *National Projects* at PS1/MoMA (2006), *Amazement Park: Stan, Sara and Johannes VanDerBeek* at the Tang Museum at Skidmore College (2009-2010), *Personal Freedom*, Portugal Arte 10 Biennial (2010) and *Trapdoor*, an exhibition organized by the Public Art Fund at MetroTech (2009-2010). He will be featured in *Paperless*, an exhibition at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, opening in April. VanDerBeek lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.