

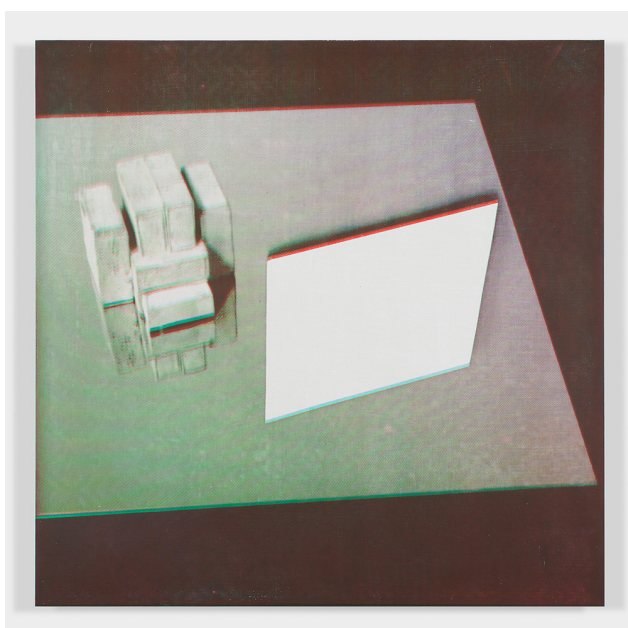


DOCUMENT

UFD0013  Elie Ayache

Point of Gaze

Elie Ayache's response to artist RH Quaytman's 2012 show Point de Gaze, Chapter 23 reflects on line, perspective, and the limits of the gallery space



The work of writing is not derivative; it does not consist in representing what is already there, being dragged along in the wake of the artwork. The latter can present, for the thread of writing, only the occasion of a difficulty—the knot of space itself—and it is this difficulty that must be relayed at the heart of the text or the poem. Thus the various reflective sections in RH Quaytman's paintings, which cut at an angle the perspective before the piled-up matchboxes, are but ciphers for the planes where one will find oneself arrested whilst one observes the very same paintings from the only place and the only knot—from the only reflection, which is that of the gallery.

Here, the work is reflective; it indicates in the first place that first place from which the gaze comes to it: the gallery itself. In its centre, the principle of a geometry is spelled out. The line is its first element.

Or rather its second, if we count the point which, moreover, gives us the title of the whole show—*point de gaze / point of gaze*—in a wordplay where that most fragile fabric, lace (*point de Gaze*, a type of needle-lace specific to Belgium), which the thread and the needle are there to materialise, becomes confused with its English homonym, the point of the gaze, or the primary element of the fabrication and of the work, thus identified with the *point of view*.

The line becomes a thread to be woven under the repeated instruction of the needle

The line becomes a thread to be woven under the repeated instruction of the needle. This first motif simply presents itself in the drawing of the lines of the gallery's parquet floor, in a progressively narrowing sheaf pattern that creates a perspective effect; suggesting that the key to it is the point at which the vanishing points converge—that is to say, the very position of the observer in the gallery.

Then the line is worked into a thread to be woven; the very delicate fabrics which are attached to the walls suggesting the continuation of the progression, namely the passage from line to plane without discontinuation and without cut, as in those pathological mathematical curves that fill the whole plane without lifting the pen.

The passage from plane to space is then considered in turn, obsessively, as can be observed in the multiple paintings where a white plane (that one must guard against confusing immediately with a mirror)

is placed, at a greater or lesser angle, before piles of matchboxes. It is these matchboxes that will be charged, in the last step of the sequence, with containing and relating space.



After the stitch of the parquet, which suggested how to place oneself in relation to the vanishing point, the planes represented in the image indicate the orientations one should take up in order to look at the whole space. And the idea that one must look from an angle, that there exists somewhere in the space a key, a privileged point of view, is induced by the painting hung above the mantelpiece, which reproduces nothing other than the mantelpiece itself, turning it at an angle to reality.

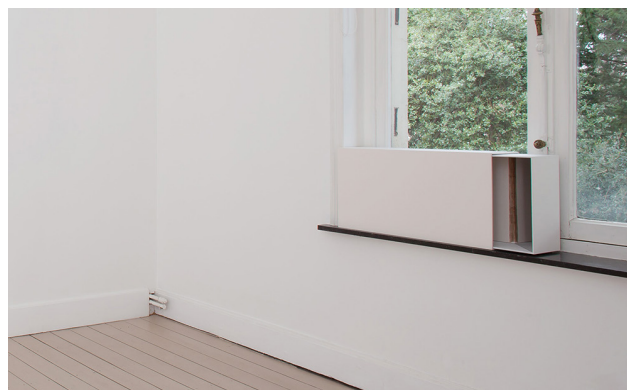


Finally, the sequence is completed when, in the most unexpected corner of the gallery (itself a closed space)—in the window, placed as if momentarily, as

if someone had left it on the windowsill, or like a casing that would normally pass unnoticed in this position, being in all likelihood some kind of air conditioning device, is revealed the presence of an actual matchbox—or, I should say, of a three-dimensional object that represents it in a larger size—placed in the window frame, overlapping it a little, as if it were waiting to be thrown outside; a matchbox that one notices last of all and which for this reason constitutes the key piece in the show, its summary even, since one finds within it once again the slanted mirror, the motif of painted fabric on the walls and the *trompe-l'oeil* effects—in a word, everything that is at play within the space of the gallery.

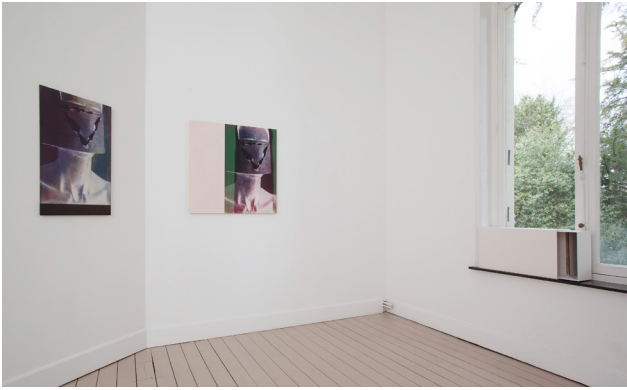
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Doesn't art's highest irony reside in the limitations of the art gallery?



And indeed, doesn't art's highest irony reside in the limitations of the art gallery—the reason why, as I now realise, I have always refused the 'social game' of art? What always bothered me about art was that I had to trouble myself to go and see it—to travel to art galleries, whose space made me apprehensive and which I therefore avoided. It is because I didn't want to submit myself to the play of the gallery space and the convention that demanded that one must go there to find art, that I have for a long time known nothing of the world of art and its arena.

Now here is a body of work that, for the first time, plays on the space of the gallery, mocking it. The final matchbox, placed distractedly against the window (against that which, in the gallery, is not of the gallery but leads to the outside, to the contingent



disorder of the world and the impertinence of its details) suggests, as a first idea, a conduit that extracts from the space of the gallery, according to a functional logic that has nothing to do with art; a device that one suspects, on first impression, of communicating with the exterior like a chimney, a purely superfluous air vent.

At the place where the gaze escapes the gallery—at the moment when one finally admits that one is tired of so much art and that one longs to see, through the window, the free and independent world, the unprogrammed, unlabelled world that no-one has given us to see—right there is placed this matchbox, which one at first does not identify as such. Placed there to extend and encourage the gaze that would escape the gallery, to conduct it to the outside—the height of irony—through a device that is utterly banal, negligible because beside the point, which has no necessity—in the world of art and its gallery—other than that of allowing them to breathe or airing them. The object is all the more unexpected and unremarked in that one at first does not class it among the other art objects that the gallery is meant to exhibit, the reason being that it is the only three-dimensional object in an exhibition of paintings.

The gallery negates its object if it passes into its own collection and becomes a member of its own set

Except that the passage between plane and space, between the art object and its irony, between object-level and meta-level, between art and the irony of the gallery that supposedly presents it and of which one had no idea, and did not want to imagine that it could in turn become an art object, the object

of its own collection or rather a non-object—for the gallery negates its object if it passes into its own collection and becomes a member of its own set, if it itself is represented and thus creates, properly speaking, an event improper to art—this passage has in the meantime been carefully negotiated.



The negotiation begins with the systematic cutting of all the pictures—that is, the thickness of the board upon which they are painted, and which is itself trimmed at an angle in relation to the image plane and to the uninteresting rigor of the frame, and adorns its depth—a thickness that one might judge superfluous and unworthy of commentary—with a striated motif, an alternation of very fine, black and beige bands, that not only give consistency to this trivial dimension (which the board of the painting inevitably possesses) but which now find themselves integrated into the painting itself, not far from its border, in a geometric arrangement that plays on the proximity of the edge by offsetting it a little, so that the spectator, tempted to put the pieces back together and to observe the motif of the real slice and that which represents it in the painting from an angle that would render their unity of composition,



finds himself obliged to place himself, in relation to the painting, at an angle from which the thickness of the board becomes confused with the surface, and the dimensions enter into a play of union and separation. And the passage between the second and third dimension admits of a second degree in Quaytman's show, before the matchbox completes it and precipitates us out of the gallery space: certain hung paintings have affixed to them a sort of ledge, upon which one might expect to find chalk—as if it were a blackboard—but upon which instead, in the gallery, we find placed another painting, superposed onto the first.

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On the basis of a long negotiation with the dimensions of art and the dimensions of the gallery (what the gallery presents and what it represents, its object in both senses of the word, its limit and its limitation), the matchbox ends by conquering the gallery space—the artwork thus inverting its frame and its rule, overthrowing the master who throws it like a die and who, in throwing it, rids himself of it—and by *becoming* the gallery.

For the matchbox is indeed a miniature gallery; gazing into it, one discovers within walls and perspectives and even the summary of the fabric motif, reduced, in this final and decisive manipulation, to the status of a symbol. Except that the gaze thus introduced into the opening of the matchbox is directed precisely to the outside of the gallery, through the window that is, in turn, nothing but a necessary architectural detail with no relation whatsoever to the art object—as if to remind us that the matchbox has conquered the gallery through irony, through a movement contrary to the programme that leads us to gaze elsewhere than the usual places and, in first place, in this materialisation of irony and victory, to look strictly to the exterior of the gallery space, through the window.

The white wall, the escaping perspective and the symbol of the fabric that crown its victory over the space and over gallery convention—all of that was but a reflection

It is at this moment that art returns and artifice is brought once more to our attention. For, looking closer, we realise that our escape through the window is just an illusion owing to the presence, inside the matchbox, of a mirror judiciously placed at a forty-five degree angle so as to reflect towards the outside what is contained, in reality, strictly inside the box itself. The white wall, the escaping perspective and the symbol of the fabric that crown its victory over the space and over gallery convention—all of that was but a reflection, through this mirror contained in the box, of a combination that is even more contained in it, all the more inclusive, in that one does not see it, in that the artifice of a mirror is necessary to present it to the gaze.

Thus the gaze realises that for it, the escape to the outside is just an illusion, and finds itself fallen back towards the interior of the gallery, which thus exacts a double revenge: once through the rectification of perspective and the recovery of a line that, seeming at first to escape from the gallery, in reality only confirms its limits and its enclosedness; and a second time through the reaffirmation of the matchbox as an art object that belongs, in first and last place, to the gallery's collection.

The gallery itself is no 'bigger' or more 'serious' than a matchbox

And even the matchbox, which repeats the art gallery from the now-reclaimed interior of its principle, reproduces its own irony. For the gallery itself is no 'bigger' or more 'serious' than a matchbox—its world is no more important—and, just as the latter has taught us, as centerpiece of the show, the price and the irony of looking (the point of view, the instruction), the gallery only reproduces, on a larger scale, this same play and this same rule.

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It remains, to finish, to come back to the point and the unit of counting. Whereas I saw the needle, which guides the thread and fabricates the surface, represented many times, there was no representation of the unit whose number is supposed to occupy the volume of the matchbox—that is to say, the match itself. Had the latter been purposely withheld

from the collection of objects, in a last instruction to the spectator in the form of a prohibition: *don't play with fire*? Did the artist deliberately withdraw the element that would precipitate the end of the gallery and even of the artwork—the match with which one could set fire to the gallery and everything it contains?

Did the artist deliberately withdraw the element that would precipitate the end of the gallery and even of the artwork?

What a fascinating object is the matchbox, for the artist and for the child alike! Whereas the needle is synonymous with patience in work and with the motif that fills the plane with great finesse, the match is synonymous with an *impatience with space*, an impatience that would fill it with fire and thus subtract from it any object and any work whatsoever that would be, in relation to the eternity of space, fatally transitory. Thus the ultimate guide to space is not the needle but the match: The latter is the centerpiece of the show of geometry. For matter is nothing but energy; only transiently, in advance of the final consumption, will the line of an artwork be fabricated

