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Thomas Fougeirol

PRAZ-DELAVALLE



View of "Thomas Fougeirol," 2016.
 Foreground: *Untitled*, 2016.
 Background, from left:
Untitled (detail), 2016;
Untitled, 2016; *Untitled*,
 2016; *Untitled* (detail), 2016.
 Photo: Rebecca Fanuele.

Thomas Fougeirol is a painter who paints as if he were printing, meaning he uses paint to take imprints of actions and objects rather than using it to represent them. Channeling another French artist, Yves Klein, who famously attached canvas to the roof of his car in order to capture the effects of wind, rain, and dirt, Fougeirol has left paintings out in the elements. Whereas the moonlike cratered surfaces of his "Tableaux de pluie" (Rain Paintings), 2010–, document natural phenomena—rain falling on wet oil paint—the artist's most recent works chart an intimate universe: his own studios in Paris and Brooklyn.

To make the predominantly black-and-white paintings, eight of which (all untitled, 2016) were on view in Fougeirol's exhibition "OP's," the artist coated stretched linen with layer upon layer of white gesso and one heavy coat of oil paint, then scattered dirt and detritus collected from his studio floor across the still-tacky surfaces. The results are high-contrast, low-relief monoprints marked by powdery black sprays and smatterings of debris—shards of glass, insects, torn bits of paper, pieces of string, chips of paint, and whatever else the vacuum sucked up. Energetically launched over each painting, Fougeirol's Dadaesque dust propulsions combine the chance procedures of Jean Arp's collages with the scavenged materials of Kurt Schwitters's *Merz* pictures. Because the dust and debris are dispersed from a fixed position over each painting, the dark material accentuates the texture of the underlying monochromes. Ridges and peaks of white paint are entirely blackened on one side while remaining pristine on the other. Elegant gray wakes that fade gradually across the compositions give a great sense of momentum, showing how the dirt dispersed over, around, and between various superficial obstacles.

Topographical without being representational, the dust paintings initially seem to describe a world either much greater or smaller than our own. At once vertiginously expansive and claustrophobically myopic, they alternately suggest distant galaxies and mold spores. This dizzying back-and-forth between micro and macro is ultimately overcome by the presence of identifiable objects embedded in the painted surfaces. Semi-sunken into the paint and coated with dirt like artifacts awaiting careful extraction and classification, dustpan treasures—including bent staples and a thumbtack—help to establish the paintings' printerly, fossil-like one-to-one scale. Though less useful in terms of establishing a sense of relative proportions, odd bits of colorful matter—a piece of pink tape, shards of green glass, a scrap of blue plastic—interrupt the vaporous dust trails and force abrupt reconciliations between the paintings' atmospheric effects and their tactile crusts.

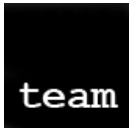
The two largest paintings on view were installed against a floor-to-ceiling backdrop made up of eight enormous sheets of bleached black linen. Made by dipping variously folded and crumpled pieces of fabric into baths of bleach, these emulsive sepia-toned tapestries suggest messier, paintless versions of Simon Hantaï's 1960s "plages" (foldings). Installed as a kind of wallpaper intended to disrupt the white-cube exhibition space, the bleached linen works (all untitled, 2015) pair well with the dust paintings.

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Shown together, the black-on-white and white-on-black compositions corroborated Fougeirol's fascination with forces beyond his control, whether specific chemical processes or the universal laws of nature (gravity, flow patterns), and described a cyclical, pointedly random process of renewal.

—Mara Hoberman

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