

Venice
Vienna
Water Mill



Bernard Frize, *Nami*, 2019, acrylic and resin on canvas, 39 3/8 × 31 7/8".

Bernard Frize

PERROTIN | PARIS

Rules can set you free. This credo has defined Bernard Frize's practice for more than forty years, leading him to design various systems, protocols, and restraints intended to rid his paintings of self-expression. To this end, Frize has, for previous bodies of work, engaged assistants in an intimate choreography whereby six hands worked together, used multiple brushes to map out all the possible moves for a knight on a chessboard, and stretched up dried "skin" harvested from a large basin filled with gallons of house paint. The results of such techniques—mostly large, colorful abstractions—were recently on view in the Centre Pompidou, Paris, retrospective "Bernard Frize: *Sans repentir*" (Without Remorse). And

while the survey duly celebrated Frize's unconventional practice and the diversity of his oeuvre, it failed to delve into the artist's characteristic serial approach, in many instances showing only one result of a painterly experiment the artist repeated numerous times. Fortunately, Perrotin provided a concurrent showcase, "Now or Never," for Frize's recent series. As seen here together, works produced under more or less the same set of conditions found distinction from one another mainly via the painterly accidents—drips, bleeding, or splatter—that sometimes also result in unintentional pictoriality and illusionism. While these chance and subjective effects disrupt Frize's highly regimented practice, they serve as further proof of the artist's having ceded creative control.

Produced between 2016 and 2019, the eighteen paintings in the Perrotin show were made with a blend of acrylic and resin, a concoction that Frize has been using since the mid-1980s. Dragging transparentized jewel tones across the canvas with a thick brush, the artist creates colorful and luminous linear patterns that range from simple vertical bands (*Deuz*, 2018) to an intricate basket weave of brushstrokes (*Bork*, 2018.) A particularly indicative installation in an upstairs room featured five identical square canvases that had each been divided into thirty-six squares with red or green pencil prior to being painted. Slight variations in the paint application from one painting to the next resulted in a series of patchwork—style compositions that ranged from one constituted of tidy pastel cubes (*Epa*, 2018) to a bright, drippy madras (*Buc*, 2018.) While adhering to a modernist grid, Frize lets the paint do what it will. The ensuing imperfections—stunning dark bands of overlapping colors, swirling watery seepages, and delicate monochrome dribbles—beautifully illustrate the tension between order and disorder that is at the heart of Frize's practice.

Three of Frize's most recent works, *Nami*, *Bem*, and *Gol*, all 2019, were the by-products of a new protocol involving distinct layers of paint. Frize forms the backgrounds of these paintings with strokes of color that subtly shift from blue to purple to orange to yellow and back again as they run from the top to the bottom of the canvas. Over these vertical striated bands, Frize has added splashes of blue-green paint, which unexpectedly bring a sense of realism to the ostensibly abstract compositions. The new paintings' surfaces remain characteristically smooth and flat, but the splotches create illusions of texture and distance. To this viewer, these works alternately look like planks of acid-eaten anodized

titanium and leaves fluttering over a blurred, light-streaked highway. Indeed, interpretation is the final variable in Frize's experiments—and it gives the artist one more chance to distance himself from his paintings.

—Mara Hoberman

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