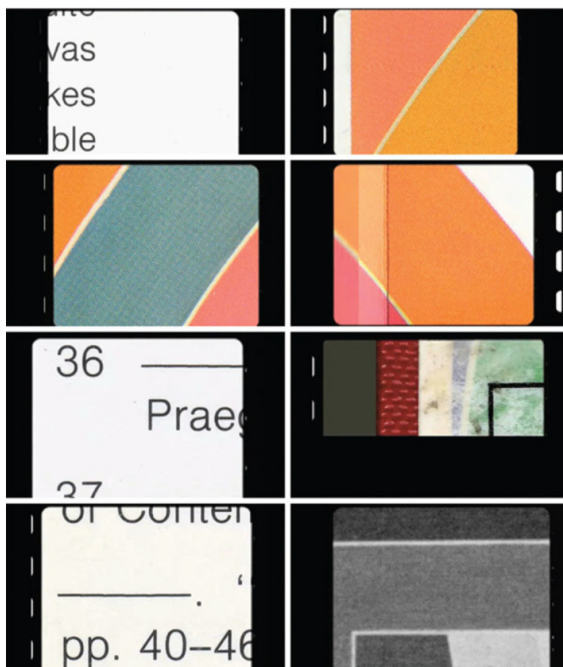


AMSTERDAM



PRINT SEPTEMBER 2011

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Jean-Baptiste Maitre, *Shaped Cinema*, 2010, still from an HD video, 13 minutes.

Jean-Baptiste Maitre

MARTIN VAN ZOMEREN

A young French artist based in Amsterdam, Jean-Baptiste Maitre is engaged in a project that might be described as the deconstruction of the modernist text. *Not Necessarily Words*, 2010, the work that gives his solo show its title, appeared, at first glance, to be a piece of writing in yellow neon, inexplicably turned off; then one realized that it was a skillfully molded ceramic bas-relief. The artist told me that his intention is to compare the manual nature of a traditional artistic process with the industrial techniques that were introduced into art by avant-garde practices in the 1970s.

Another work, *Plywood as Media*, 2008, is composed of several planks resting against the wall—or at least so it seems. Here too, however, there is a mimetic play with materials, in this case slabs of plaster on which the artist has silk-screened an image that suggests the texture of plywood. What you see, in these works, is never what you get; Maitre overturns the very presuppositions on which his art appears to be based, and he inserts himself, as it were, into a genealogy—albeit one that he simultaneously critiques.

Maitre's interest in art of the past pushes him to outright citation, and yet he avails himself of it obliquely, in order to reveal that the object of his interest, more than works, artists, or movements, is instead the ways in which artistic production is contextualized by the media that present, comment on, and disseminate it. His subject, that is to say, is less the ontological status of the work of art than the ideological system that creates and legitimizes it. Maitre does this, as noted above, with deconstructive intentions. One telling example is the film *Shaped Cinema*, 2010, whose subject is a Frank Stella catalogue published in 1970 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In a consciously old-fashioned installation, the film is shown on the wall, using a small movie projector. One needed a bit of time to grasp something familiar in the visual bombardment of shapes, colors, and words—to see typical details of Stella's works, and to understand that these were pages from an art catalogue, the text of which was rendered illegible by the fragmentation and velocity of the film's editing.

Working from these same images, Maitre made a series of contact prints, "Shaped Cinema," 2010. In their deliberately unassuming black-and-white format, these pictures annihilate the chromatic richness that is fundamental to Stella's poetics. Perhaps there is nothing more emblematic than a MoMA retrospective catalogue for concisely expressing the rationalizing, organizing, systematizing, and, if you like, normalizing function of official art history. Maitre has introduced emotional and creative disorder into the catalogue's rational and—perhaps more to the point—institutional order, working on the effects of a historical memory full of spaces and gaps, as ours is ever more dramatically becoming.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

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