

Claude Viallat, “Oeuvres Majeures 1967–2017”

Art, Contemporary art ★★★★★



Though a marriage of Arte Povera abjection and color-field frothiness sounds implausible, it summarizes Supports/Surfaces, a school of artists in France during the 1960s and '70s who embraced the period's radical aesthetic while enlivening it with lyrical abstraction. Ideology played a role in their approach, thanks to the French-Algerian War, in which some Supports/Surfaces members served, and the country's May 1968 uprising.

Supports/Surfaces aimed to liberate painting's compositional surface from its traditional canvas-covered frame. The work of Claude Viallat, one of the movement's founders, provides Exhibit A for its contradictions.

The pieces here have been harvested from beach umbrellas, awnings and tarps. Flattened against the walls, they provide the foundation for painterly veils and bright-colored, paisleylike blobs. Fringes and scalloped edges from the original items have been kept, with some pieces retaining a parasol shape, making them seem to bloom like pansies.

Certain American contemporaries (Sam Gilliam, Alan Shields) took similar tacks, but none of them thought to put the influences of Marx, Mao and Clement Greenberg in a blender and press PUREE. Still, while Viallat's surfaces aren't quite supported by their overdetermined underpinnings, they dazzle in their own way.

BY: HOWARD HALLE
POSTED: WEDNESDAY JULY 5 2017