



PHILIPPE DECRAUZAT

By Kevin Greenberg

"No one can own a striped painting," the artist Philippe Decrauzat remarks, noting that the technical vocabulary that has become his trademark over the past twelve years "is certainly indebted to the history of 20th-century abstraction, but its foundation rests on forms and patterns that are deeply charged with cultural and historic meaning."

At their most effective, the paintings and installations for which Decrauzat is best known engross and beguile the viewer with borderless striations and bottomless vortices that simultaneously call to mind the most hypnotic examples of Op Art and the most esoteric fringes of Minimalism and Constructivism. On both standard rectangular and custom-cut canvases, Decrauzat renders simple linear patterns as well as elegantly baroque parametric forms seemingly indebted to complex mathematics. In their clinical simplicity, Decrauzat's canvases practically leap from the walls, creating an almost queasy dual impression of extreme flatness and limitless depth.

Though many of his works are rendered in a stark palette of black and white, the artist's most seductive pieces showcase a sophisticated understanding of color. A piece like 2009's *Novo*, for example, is rendered more powerful by the

subtlety of the single hue the artist chose for the composition, and the restraint with which it was applied. Though its evenly spaced vertical stripes inevitably recall the work of Daniel Buren, the subtle gradient that lends 2008's *Slow Motion* its rich depth seems like an integral component of an equation, as crisply logical as the sharp, repeated, triangular canvases that comprise the piece.

Ambitious in scale and remarkable for their technical rigor and precision, Decrauzat's works offer much more on closer inspection than the rolling moiré patterns and bold graphic motifs that color a viewer's first impression. Decrauzat's use of these perceptual manipulations is as much at the heart of his project as the grand scale and site-specificity of many of his works. He is interested in time, he says, and motion, in the frailty and fallibility of human perception, the gap between mind and eye. His works are often most effective when they temporarily overwhelm the visual apparatus. By forcing the viewer to grapple with perspective, his work becomes less susceptible to strict formal analysis and engages more explicitly with space and the observer's place within it.

"The idea is that these forms should create a very personal relationship with the viewer.

They should locate the viewer in a very specific situation," Decrauzat explains, almost as a film might. In fact, he notes, the larger pieces are meant to function the way a film or animation does, obscuring the line between time and space, enhancing illusions of depth and movement, and forcing the viewer to engage fully with an image projected into a room at large.

A growing portion of Decrauzat's practice is explicitly concerned with cinema, and in recent years he has begun to experiment with film works. *After Birds*, from 2008, is one such experiment, an elegant 16mm manipulation that reworks footage from the title sequence of Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film into a pulsing near-abstraction reminiscent of the "flicker" films of Ken Jacobs and Peter Kubelka. Experiencing *After Birds*, it's evident that Decrauzat intends to parse the experience of cinema into something like the classic Deleuzian pairing of time-image and movement-image—the better to underscore the subtleties of the medium's spatial component.

Decrauzat notes that forthcoming work will also actively incorporate sound, adding a more substantial sonic treatment of space to his usual visual palette. One thinks of La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's *Dream House*, the longstanding light and sound installation tucked into a Tribeca

walkup, as well as the deep bass pulsations of experimental musicians like Eliane Radigue or Eleh, whose mystical drones possess a near-tangible spatial character.

Decrauzat's concern with intangibles is offset by his use of objects, which often occur as simple, starkly crafted three-dimensional shapes carefully placed within his installations. The resulting figure-ground relationship is an unsettling one, ultimately enhancing the viewer's sense of subjectivity, of being one of several points in a flattened field without limit or edge. A new project promises still a different perspective. For an upcoming exhibition in Geneva, Decrauzat will create a book of condensed stills from his film manipulations that fuse time and image in a way that's different from his paintings, films, or installations. By creating a bound and printed series of compositions from film stills, Decrauzat can capture the essentials of his practice in a pocket-sized object.

After so much time creating works on walls and in spaces, working with images and the nuances of projected light, "I'm looking forward to a return to paper," Decrauzat says. "This is my chance to take all of these elements and to come back to the start," a trajectory not unlike the complex shapes of many of his most intriguing canvases. "It will be a perfect media loop," he laughs.

Above left: Philippe Decrauzat, *Process II*, 2009 (Installation View). Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee. Photography by Tom Powel Imaging Inc.
Above center: Philippe Decrauzat, Exhibition View, *Printemps de Septembre*, Les Abattoirs, 2008. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Praz-Delavallade. Photography by Damien Aspe.
Above right: Philippe Decrauzat, *SEYES*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee.
Below: Philippe Decrauzat, Exhibition View, *Philippe Decrauzat*, Elizabeth Dee, 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee. Photography by Tom Powel Imaging Inc.

