

ARTFORUM

REVIEWS

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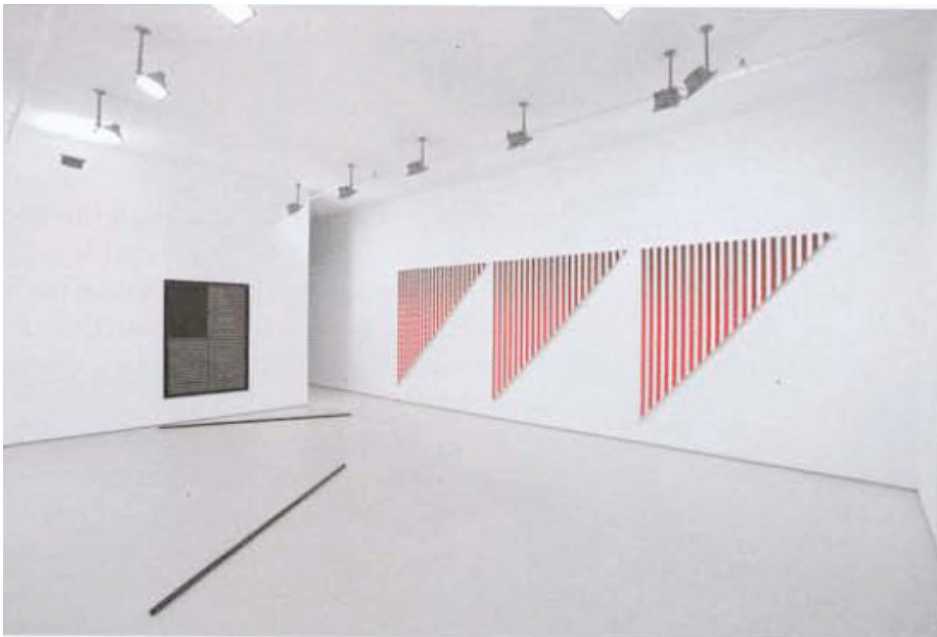
PHILIPPE DECRAUZAT ELIZABETH DEE

The so-called neo-geo artists of the 1980s — New York painters Peter Halley, Ashley Bickerton, Philip Taaffe, and a few others—promoted an ironic distance from the often doctrinaire history of abstract painting, arguing that various art styles and effects be understood as nothing more than a series of ready-mades borrowed and brought together. Seeking to reveal complicity between the maker, viewer, and consumer in appreciating its own clearly simulated results and slick synthetic finish, this work, so the rhetoric went, could maintain its critical stance toward painting as an overt commodity while also managing to take advantage of a flush art market.

Philippe Decrauzat's composite style of reference and reproduction recalls this stance. His paintings, sculptures, installations, films and printed ephemera borrow motifs from Op art, Minimalism, Constructivism, experimental film, and popular culture in "investigating the status of the image," a favored phrase of the artist's that tends to accompany his work, appearing most recently in the press release for his first solo show at Elizabeth Dee. Decrauzat's approach is often associated with a Swiss school of abstraction defined primarily by Olivier Mosset and John Armleder. It closely resembles the latter's use of various inherited styles, devices, and installation effects as outmoded, given the propensity for art to serve, in the end, as décor.

At the start of the show was *Process II, 2009*, a work in which five panels, painted green-black, are arranged in a shape faintly resembling a swastika; modeled on a bench designed by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy to allow views in all directions in a circular room, Decrauzat's work, with its hasty brush marks and drab color choice, makes for a deflated transposition of an artifact of utopian functionalism. To be reminded of Moholy-Nagy's advance of the technological sublime — "To be user of machines is to be of the spirit of this century. It has replaced the transcendental spiritualism of past eras." —was to recognize how removed such avant-garde optimism for an engineered future seems today.

Decrauzat often provides a reference expressly to question the effectiveness or purported intention of its object, and this oblique work proved a fitting emblem for the rest of the show. Eight-foot black "thermolacquered" steel



View of "Philippe Decrauzat,"
2009.

bars propped throughout the gallery offered similarly sportive annulments. Outsize send-ups of the artist-shaman's staff or the fop's ashplant (recalling, for example, Andre Cadere's long poles, or Joseph Beuys' staff in his performance *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974), the bars also brought to mind the parodic gesture of Armleder's *Don't Do It!*, 1997-2000, a work composed of a series of Flavin-like neon tubes scattered like so many pick-up sticks across the gallery floor.

"Slow motion," 2008, is a series of six large triangular red-and-white-striped painting that together suggest three rectangles halved, their respective two parts hung, in this show, opposite each other. The compositions inevitably recall Daniel Buren's signature motif—borrowed from an industrially produced awning pattern—though the allusion is vitiated by a gradual darkening at the edges of the red, as if to imply error in the work's production. After *Birds*, 2008, provided the most compelling example of Decrauzat's seemingly endless quotations, an elegant homage to the "flicker" films of Ken Jacobs, Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, and others. Digitally extracted from the animated title sequence of Hitchcock's classic *The Birds* and printed to 16mm, the footage of blackbirds dipping and swooping in flight is here sped up and crisscrossed to produce a Rorschach-like flickering abstraction that pulses from white on black to black on white. Nevertheless, in its self-satisfied reliance upon one reference after another, Decrauzat's work ultimately exhibits a *laissez-faire* criticality, one that may have lost some of its luster in today's climate of contraction.